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REFUGEE RELIEF

In light of the developing refugee situation, we are facing new challenges that cannot be ignored by society and specifically by higher education institutions. A number of activities are taking place now, connected to the response from higher education institutions. The Coimbra Group members take part in those initiatives to help refugees get back into further education after being displaced from their home country.

In view of this, the Coimbra Group wishes to highlight the initiatives and activities undertaken by our academic community to welcome all international students, including refugees, and to remind our governments of the intellectual and universal values in Europe, as our universities have done for centuries.

This is the updated list of initiatives per 4 January 2016. Should you wish to add information about what your institution and country are preparing, please let us know through email: moleiro@coimbra-group.eu.

BELGIUM - The Coimbra Group member **Université Catholique de Louvain** is mobilizing for the refugees. A working group has identified five working areas around which the actions of the university community will be organized: identification of needs through contacts with partner associations and integration centers; inventory of available resources, preparation of tools for the deconstruction of stereotypes and xenophobic discourse, make the scientific expertise of UCL available to the media and analysis of providing access to existing courses.

These actions are presented on the page www.uclouvain.be/soutien-aux-refugies. There is also an online helpdesk available to receive requests and proposals through the email address: soutien-aux-refugies@uclouvain.be.

In the other Belgian CG member, **KU Leuven**, Rector Rik Torfs opened the academic year 2015-2016 with a compelling speech about the university's role in the refugee crisis. Calling for unconditional solidarity, the rector also confronted his audience with uneasy questions about our attitude towards refugees. The rector's convocation address made for a memorable academic ceremony: "This opening speech is about the university. So let's talk about the refugee crisis". (Full speech: <http://www.kuleuven.be/communicatie/congresbureau/evenementen/openingacademiejaar/en/speeches/convocation-address-by-rector-rik-torfs>)

CZECH REPUBLIC - **Charles University** has produced a statement where it commits to offer those refugees who gain asylum and the right of residence in the Czech Republic, remission of tuition fees usually paid in study programs in English.

The condition for admission is the successful completion of the admission procedure, including English exam and meeting other conditions set out in the admissions process. Accommodation of these students will be ensured by Charles University from its own resources at campus.

Charles University assume that this offer will cover approximately 10 students with the status of immigrant / refugee. Faculties which offer their study programs are: Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Humanities, Faculty of Arts, Faculties of Medicine and Faculty of Science. Charles University is still considering other forms of assistance to the refugees. (In English: <http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/charles-university-opens-doors-to-asylum-seekers>)

FINLAND - At **Åbo Akademi University** many initiatives have already been taken by both staff members and students and the university is willing to support by providing for example facilities for example for meetings, seminars and courses, if needed.

The institution cooperates with the local Red Cross in Turku and Vaasa. The Red Cross handles the reception centres and knows the needs.

1) On a more long term basis language courses and other possibilities for the asylum seekers to study are being planned

2) Seminar in Turku: Basics in refugee law. The seminar is arranged together with the Institute for Humans Rights.

3) Donate books to create small libraries in the reception centres

The asylum seekers in the reception centres are mostly waiting with not much to do. The idea is to collect books and create small libraries in the reception centres.

The Rector's executive group calls on the Faculties to discuss ways to assist in the refugee situation, for example in the teaching or training periods. **Åbo Akademi University** and the **University of Turku** have made a deal to cooperate in arranging activities for and together with the asylum seekers. More: <http://www.abo.fi/public/flyktingsituationen>.

The **University of Turku's** educational support for refugees will be conducted in two phases. The first phase - that is to begin soon - helps migrants learn the Finnish language and about Finnish society and customs. University students act as teachers for the language studies, and they are supported by University lecturers. The second phase that will begin next year arranges specialisation education for those refugees whose applications for asylum have been accepted.

The CG member institution is also assisting with the medical care of refugees. The Faculty of Medicine is currently assessing how students can help refugees. Members of the University community will also help refugees with their social adaptation to Finland. The University is collaborating closely with the Finnish Red Cross, the Turku Reception Centre and other authorities on finding and timing the necessary help: these include starting friendship activities, arranging different recreational activities and arranging the Children's University programme for younger refugees.

The university community is being urged to participate and sign up for the previewed activities through a webropol form or by sending an email to refugeehelp@utu.fi.

FRANCE - A communication of 8 September from the French Rectors' Conference (CPU) asked for general support from national Higher Education Institutions to refugees by waving fees and integrating them in the University community (In French:

<http://www.cpu.fr/actualite/les-institutions-universitaires-francaises-sengagent-pour-laccueil-des-refugies/>).

The President of the **University of Poitiers**, host of the next Coimbra Group Annual Meeting, Yves Jean, has urged the academic community to join the local movement supporting hospitality for students who are conflict victims, confirming the intention of the University to support refugee students. The University welcomes already around ten students from Syria and Eritrea.

GERMANY – The **University of Göttingen** welcomes – refugees who want to learn German or wish to continue their academic education. There are special weekly office hours for refugees as well as a central contact person in the Office of Student Affairs, offering advice and information in all matters related to studying at the University of Göttingen. The International Office at the University of Göttingen offers support to those refugees who have earned a university entrance qualification in their home country and are looking to apply for a university place. A number of student initiatives have been created to support refugees when it comes to German language learning and daily life matters/leisure activities. For instance, the ConquerBabel student initiative offers assistance as well as interpreting services for refugees who need to see a doctor or have an official appointment with local authorities. Also, refugees are welcome to join the student group ConnACTION to participate in sport and leisure activities or learn languages.

Furthermore, students in the degree courses "Teaching at Secondary Schools" and "Intercultural German Studies" assist in the preparation and teaching of basic German courses for children and adults as part of their study programme. Supervised by the teaching staff, they provide individual support to refugees and plan small lecture sequences. This improves

students' skills in teaching German as a foreign language and their understanding of the complex psychosocial living circumstances of refugees. In some departments, there are also certain pilot projects, for instance in the MA programme Euroculture where students meet with refugees on a regular basis or in other degree courses offering internships to students seeking to work with refugees.

Last but not least, the Haus der Kulturen (House of Cultures), an extra-university organization, has initiated an interactive socio-cultural project on the university campus in collaboration with the student associations of UNICEF and ConnACTION whereby communication between students and refugees is facilitated. A website has been set up for students who are keen to become involved in helping refugees: <http://www.uni-goettingen.de/en/516082.html>.

Friedrich Schiller University Jena offers free of charge guest access to courses, Info days for refugees and migrants "Ways to study in Jena" and individual counselling and evaluation of documents/certificates. Our member university also offers a special language training (Arabic) for staff and students to learn some basic language in addition to a variety of initiatives of students and staff to support refugees on an individual basis.

The German Rectors' Conference has issued a press release advocating plurality of opinions and exchange: <http://www.hrk.de/press/press-releases/press-release/meldung/universities-for-openness-tolerance-and-against-xenophobia-nationwide-campaign-by-hrk-member-unive/>.

ITALY - The Academic Senate of the **University of Bologna** has accepted an invitation from the European Commission to approve a measure which allows students seeking international protection to enrol and benefit from a total exemption from fees for the academic year 2015/2016.

Under this new provision enrolment in single course units of the Alma Mater is now possible not only for students with a "political asylum" or "humanitarian asylum" residence permit, but also for those students awaiting the granting of a political asylum residence permit or similar, upon presentation of a Degree certificate (or transcript). On this occasion the Academic Senate has also approved the establishment of five scholarships to the value of 8,000 Euros for students who have been granted international or humanitarian protection and who enrol at the University of Bologna in the academic year 2016/2017.

From January, all eleven of the University's schools shall work towards facilitating access for students awaiting the granting of asylum to single learning activities at the University and the International Desk of the International Relations Division shall organise a series of orientation activities. New students shall also have the chance to enrol free of charge at Italian courses held at the University Language Centre.

<http://www.unibo.it/en/notice-board/international-students-who-are-asylum-seekers-can-now-enrol-at-the-alma-mater>

THE NETHERLANDS - Nuffic, the Ministry of Education and COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers), the Dutch Association of Universities and the Dutch Association of Universities of Applied Sciences are taking action together with other Dutch universities such as **Leiden University**.

Activities will focus on the admission of Syrian refugee students, providing language education and providing adult education. Various parties are currently working on a plan to implement this. (In Dutch: <http://www.nieuws.leidenuniv.nl/nieuws-2015/onderwijsinstellingen-in-de-randstad-in-de-bres-voor-vluchtelingen.html>)

POLAND - The **Jagiellonian University in Krakow** decided to accept refugees and waive fees for students from non-EU countries that were forced to flee their countries for political reasons.

Rector Wojciech Nowak has issued an official statement: "The Jagiellonian University declares its readiness to admit refugees forced to flee their countries for political reasons. The Rector of the Jagiellonian University may waive the fees of students from non-EU countries, which he intends to do. The University declares its willingness to cover scholarships and the organisation of Polish language teaching for these students from its own funds." (in Polish:

http://www.uj.edu.pl/wiadomosci/-/journal_content/56_INSTANCE_d82IKZvhit4m/10172/100930477

PORTUGAL – The Portuguese Government has created a working group to define the strategy to host refugees in the country and to coordinate actions. Our member **University of Coimbra** has shown availability to receive refugee students to this committee and created a special channel for students, academics and professionals with refugee status.
(<http://www.uc.pt/en/refugee-help>)

SCOTLAND – The **University of Edinburgh** is to assist students and also staff through their membership of CARA (Council for At Risk Academics). A Refugee Advisory Service advisory service has been set up by the institution to coordinate and case manage all staff and student requests for assistance, committed an initial £100,000 in scholarship and financial assistance, will offer funded scholarships, launched a staff/student/alumni giving programme, English language courses and highlighting our academic work and research in this area including a student led project at Edinburgh on the refugee camps (trailer here: <http://www.livedprojects.org/zaatari-documentary/>) which is being shown in schools across Scotland.

The University of Edinburgh is also working with the Scottish, UK government, City Council and refugee organisations to coordinate support and assistance. They are also preparing their admissions and HR processes as many refugees will not have verifiable documentation relating to previous academic studies or employment.

(<http://www.ed.ac.uk/news/2015/150917-refugeehelp>)

SPAIN - The Spanish Rectors' Conference (CRUE) and its committee on Internationalization and Cooperation have released a document where they commit to facilitate access to refugee university students, to facilitate cooperation with refugees who were university professors in their origin country and to promote volunteer actions among the academic community namely the students. (In Spanish:

<http://www.crue.org/PrensaYComunicacion/Documents/2015%20Comunicados%20y%20Notas%20de%20prensa/Comunicado%20Crue-Internacionalizaci%C3%B3n%20y%20Cooperaci%C3%B3n.pdf>)

They recommends different initiatives to the Spanish universities among which hosting refugees in student housing, facilitate language courses, provide them with legal, psychological and social service support, facilitate scholarships,...

The **University of Barcelona** has set up a refugee support programme that includes some measures to help those fleeing from Syria's brutal civil war. The University estimates that the programme can take in 100 refugees, help them to settle in Catalonia and enable them to continue their studies in Barcelona. The programme is supported by other institutions, like the Barcelona City Council and the Catalan Association for Solidarity and Assistance of Refugees.

(http://www.ub.edu/web/ub/en/menu_eines/noticies/2015/09/028.html)

SWEDEN – One of the initiatives at **Uppsala University** is training at advanced level for teachers and other school officials working with migrant children. The program is targeting teams of professionals who engage with migrant children at schools. The program contains questions of how to include and integrate the newly arrived children, how to provide a positive learning environment, and how to create supporting structures. The program is delivered in cooperation with the Swedish National Agency for Education.

Uppsala University is also working with other universities and university colleges in different projects regarding the creation of structures and approaches to the recognition of prior learning and validation of foreign degrees.

Together with a private consultant, the university is engaged in a large project sponsored by the Swedish Public Employment Agency for newly arrived migrants with an academic background – called “the short track”. The objective of the project is to shorten the time between newly arrived and newly employed. Some of the participants also have the opportunity to get an internship at the Uppsala University.

SWITZERLAND - The **University of Geneva** is a member of Scholars at Risk, a network of higher education institutions acting together to protect threatened scholars and promote academic freedom. In this background, a Syrian scholar has been hosted at the University of Geneva during academic year 2014-15, with funding from the rectorate and a US foundation. A long

term position has now been found for her in a nearby University of Applied Sciences, thanks to the connections the scholar was able to develop during her stay in a research team at UNIGE. This type of experience will hopefully be developed on a larger scale in order to meet the long term challenges of the refugee crisis. Other actions linked to the refugee crisis are now under review and have to be approved by the rectorate.

TURKEY - Syrian refugee crisis is quite challenging for Turkey. From the beginning of the crisis in 2011, the country has hosted about 2 million registered refugees in its territory. Considering there is also a number of unregistered refugees, the total number will definitely exceed this number. For this reason, Turkey has enacted various regulations for the management of the crisis. One of these regulations is directly related to the higher education problem of the Syrian students.

Since 2013, the Turkish Higher Education Council has allowed Syrian students who had all the necessary documents transfer to all Turkish universities as undergraduates. Within this framework, today, there are now 551 Syrian students at **Istanbul University**. They constitute approximately 10% of the total international students.

Education language in the Istanbul University is mainly Turkish. The institution is asking these students for an intermediate level of Turkish language proficiency. If they cannot provide it, they have the opportunity to participate in Turkish language courses at the Language Center. There are also faculties where classes are partly in English where they can take part. Syrian students may benefit from reduced price meals with their student ID card and they may have discount travel card used in public transport as Turkish students.