

ESWG Support to Higher Education

The UNHCR-led Higher Education Sub Sector of ESWG works to enhance educational access for refugee youth and adults through skills training and higher education support. UNHCR strategically focuses its operational efforts on supporting refugee access to educational opportunities, collaborating closely with the Higher Education Council (YÖK) and the Presidency of Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) within the 3RP framework. Coordination with governmental authorities and NGOs ensures effective alignment and cooperation in activities.

In the 2022-2023 academic year, the number of Syrian youths enrolled in higher education in Türkiye reached 58,213, maintaining a 10 percent enrollment rate among university-aged Syrian youth, which surpasses the global average of 7 percent for refugee higher education enrollment¹. Of these students, 56 percent are male, and 44 percent are female. By providing access to higher education programs, the refugee community can acquire advanced skills essential for their integration into the workforce as professionals and skilled laborers. This endeavor contributes to the development of human and economic capital within refugee populations and their communities, fostering self-reliance and enabling refugees to lead dignified lives.

Various Scholarship Programs and Courses

i. DAFI Scholarship program

UNHCR Türkiye's strategic focus is on facilitating access to educational opportunities for refugee youth and adults, with a strong emphasis on skills training and support for higher education.

The DAFI Program aims to enhance the self-reliance of refugee youth by equipping them with professional qualifications for future employment opportunities. The DAFI scholarship program will provide a comprehensive package based on several criteria, including academic excellence, socio-economic background, applicant age, and the relevance of the chosen field of study. UNHCR Türkiye collaborates with YTB to implement the program for Syrians under temporary protection (TP) as part of YTB's Türkiye Bursları (Türkiye Scholarship) Program. For other nationalities under international protection, UNHCR directly oversees the program's implementation. The DAFI scholarship aims to cover essential university expenses, such as tuition fees and living costs, including accommodation, local transportation, food, and personal expenses.

ii. Higher Education Cash Grant (HECG)

Apart from the comprehensive DAFI scholarship program, UNHCR Türkiye offers semester-based cash grants to refugee youth enrolled in Turkish public universities. Collaboration with YTB facilitates program implementation for Syrians under TP, while UNHCR directly manages the program for other nationalities under international protection. Despite slight variations in student identification processes, the cash assistance amounts remain consistent for both groups. UNHCR directly accepts applications from other nationalities each academic semester, while coordinating with YTB to identify Syrian students under TP annually.

The eligibility criteria for above programs are as follows:

- International protection applicant or status holder
- Enrolled in a state university or higher education institution.
- Studying associate or bachelor's degree
- Minimum 1.5 GPA (Required for ongoing students, new enrolled students are exempt)

The amounts for 2023/24 academic year are as follows:

University degree type	TRY/Per semester
Associate Degree (2-years programme)	3,150
Bachelor's Degree (4-years programmes)	6,050
Bachelor's Degree (5-6-years programmes)	8,750

¹ If the accepted university enrollment age is 18-26

iii. Communication courses focusing on conflict resolution to support social cohesion.

UNHCR, working alongside YTB, offers conflict resolution courses aimed at refugee and host community youth at selected universities. These courses are conducted by skilled service providers. Additionally, trainers who have undergone Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions also teach at their respective universities. These courses are available to all individuals interested in participating.

iv. Support to YTB's online learning platform

UNHCR aids in the enhancement of YTB's online learning platform (<https://akademi.ytb.gov.tr/>) designed to offer informal learning opportunities in self-development areas such as language proficiency, academic skills, and life skills. Presently, the platform features 13 distinct modules spanning a diverse range of subjects, including academic Turkish, communication skills, career planning, volunteerism, entrepreneurship, and other pertinent topics.

v. Support to have academic advisor presence in universities.

UNHCR, in collaboration with YTB, supports 26 Higher Education Advisors in the 24 selected Turkish universities in 22 provinces hosting a large number of Syrian students, in order to increase the retention rates by reviewing and monitoring the academic progress of Syrian students. It is expected that through the individual and group support provided to students, advisors will be able to assist students to adapt to university life, have a greater chance of academic success and be at less risk of drop out.

Challenges

- i. Refugee access to higher education in Turkey faces challenges despite sectoral progress. The removal of the university fee waiver for Syrian nationals poses a major obstacle in the 2021/22 academic year.
- ii. Starting in 2025, Syrian students will switch from the Foreign University Exam (YÖS) to the national university entrance exam (YKS), likely increasing demand for preparatory courses.
- iii. Affordable housing shortages hinder both refugee and host community youths pursuing higher education.

Addressing these issues requires coordinated efforts, including enhancing refugee education access and allocating funding for humanitarian and developmental initiatives.

Advocacy Messages**i. Advocacy for Reinstatement and Extension of Fee Waiver Policy**

UNHCR and Higher Education Stakeholders Call for Reinstatement and Extension of Fee Waiver Policy-UNHCR and stakeholders in higher education will continue their efforts to push for the reinstatement of the fee waiver policy for temporary protection (TP) beneficiaries, while also advocating for its extension to other international protection status holders.

ii. Advocacy for Alternative Payment Policy

Creating Equitable Access: Advocating for Alternative Payment Policy for TP and IP Beneficiaries-Recognizing that reinstating the fee waiver policy may not be feasible, sector stakeholders will also engage in advocacy efforts to establish an alternative payment policy for individuals under TP and IP. The advocacy aims to introduce a payment model that strikes a balance between what the host community and foreign students pay, ensuring affordability for refugees.

iii. Collaboration for Enhanced University Preparation Courses

Empowering Refugees: Collaborative Efforts to Enhance University Preparation Courses-Close collaboration will be maintained with the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and other relevant institutions to enhance opportunities for university preparation courses.

iv. Advocacy for Inclusion in Government-Supported Dormitory Options

Securing Shelter: Advocating for Inclusion of Refugees in Government Dormitory Options-Advocacy initiatives will be undertaken to secure the inclusion of refugees in government-supported dormitory options, such as those provided by the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MoYS) and municipalities.