Expert Brainstorming Meeting:
Note on Outcomes

November 29, 2017

SUNY Global Center
116 East 55th Street, New York City

Background

The purpose of this Note is to succinctly capture the main points exchanged and agreed upon at the Brainstorming Meeting of the University Alliance for Refugees and At-Risk Migrants (UARRM), held on November 29, 2017 at the SUNY Global Center in New York City.

The purpose of the Brainstorming Meeting was to discuss the value of such an alliance, fine-tune its common goals and a collective vision in line with the "New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants."[1] It was also to learn of what is already underway in the US, and to hear about initiatives that exist in other countries.

The value of focusing the alliance's activities on those taking place within the United States (US) was discussed. Its geographic mandate may expand over time in response to other needs and priorities. Its study and mobilization will only deal with higher education and vocational training for refugee and at-risk migrant students, threatened scholars (i.e., scholars fleeing conflict and/or repression), and, when relevant, members of their families. The alliance does not intend to duplicate existing efforts, but rather: gather vested parties across relevant sectors (migrants, refugees, students, the Academy, UN, think tanks, legislators) to map and help bring additional visibility to existing efforts; and when possible, springboard promising initiatives.

42 people from universities, the United Nations, foundations, think tanks, NGOs, and non-profit organizations participated.

Summary

There are 4,352 universities and colleges in the Unites States.[2] Despite the fact that resettlement numbers for refugees are plummeting, the placement of refugees, threatened scholars, and international students is still an important area of activity in the United States, compared to Europe where numbers are increasing but where bureaucratic hurdles make it more slow and cumbersome.

Participants discussed the timeliness of such an alliance, which is to be placed in historical context – from WWII, to the Mexican Revolution, the Hungarian uprising, Tiananmen Square to the crises of the day: Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Venezuela, Yemen, Turkey, Syria and Iraq. Some of these situations are affecting the Academy on a national scale. As shared from the Beirut Declaration issued by the Alliance of Leading Universities on Migration (ALUM), a policy focused network of more than 20 universities in the Middle East, the Americas and Europe, universities have traditionally held a role as social mediators and as leaders in opposition movements on the

---

[1] "New York Declaration." United Nations, United Nations, 2017,
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1
[2] As of 2008. See National Center for Education
Statistics,https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/tables/dt09_005.asp

side of social justice. Therefore, universities have a duty to engage policy makers, multilateral institutions, the private sector, civil society, and the media, and to "…ensure that cutting edge research informs public opinion and policies in line with the Sustainable Development Goals."[3] Given that the US Government, on December 4, 2017, announced its withdrawal from the negotiations of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM),[4] the duty to engage is especially pressing.

While comprehensive data does not exist on the activities of US universities as outlined in the main areas of work for the alliance (see below), an important number of universities is engaged in supporting refugee and migrant students and threatened scholars. Based on the informal survey of its membership, the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA) found that 28 percent of its members have specific policies designed for refugees/at-risk migrants (e.g., tuition waivers). In addition, approximately 40 US universities formed the IIE Syria Consortium to open safe, legal pathways for Syrian students to enter the country and continue their studies by providing scholarships and by relaxing admissions requirements. Furthermore, universities like U. Penn address student needs by offering pro bono legal support and other direct support services. US universities also support refugee and migrant communities at risk more broadly; for example, Guildford College in North Carolina provides housing for refugee families, while No Lost Generation (NLG), a student-led campus advocacy network, raises community awareness about forced migration-related issues. Finally, university leaders have united in opposition to recent policy developments affecting refugee and at-risk migrant populations. According to AIEA, 70 percent of its members are involved in such advocacy (e.g., by signing petitions or by sending joint letters to Congress), while 58 percent are involved in research that has impacted or could impact public perception of migrants and/or refugees (e.g., by demonstrating social or economic contributions of migrants).

Moreover, higher education institutions (HEIs) often support refugees/at-risk migrants in partnership with other institutions. According to AIEA, 38 percent of its members do so in partnerships with other HEIs. Additionally, HEIs partner with foundations (e.g., the Institute of International Education [IIE]; the Clinton Foundation), with state and municipal support, with local entities such as public libraries, and with private partners.

In acknowledging existing gaps in information, the literature review conducted by Rutgers University concluded that many initiatives exist but there is a need for a more comprehensive understanding of what is going on. The alliance should work towards centralizing updated information on what university communities and other interested parties are doing in these areas of work. It was proposed that such information could be housed on a dedicated webpage.

It was expressed that the alliance should draw on what already exists, and assist in removing obstacles to greater participation by the Academy. Based on their informal survey (above), AIEA outlined what some of these challenges are: physical isolation of some of the campuses; lack of leadership support within the University; lack of funds; balancing politics/avoiding politicizing the issue; and balancing needs of at-risk migrant and refugee students with needs of other vulnerable/marginalized students.

---

[3] "Beirut Declaration: Academic Partnership for Human Mobility." November 7, 2017. Alliance of Leading Universities on Migration (ALUM). Beirut, Lebanon.
[4] http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/05/u-s-cities-want-to-join-u-n-migration-talks-that-trump-boycotted/
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/71/1

A multi-sectoral membership, led by Universities, was generally considered a strong formula for the UARRM. It was considered beneficial that the alliance bring together partners from different sectors represented during the meeting: migrant, refugee and student associations, the Academy, local government, education think tanks, and the international community (e.g. UN agencies). It was further suggested that ecumenical education institutions (e.g., Jesuit services) be included given their expansive work in this area.

There was strong feeling that the alliance needed to be action-oriented, and that it should leverage its membership to scale up efforts across different US campuses.

Participants spoke about the need for the overarching messaging of such an alliance; where universities are fertile ground for countering negative backlash against migrants and refugees. Students and student representational bodies are an untapped resource of civic activism and engagement on this front.

It is proposed that in the immediate term (as of January 15, 2018), a small steering committee be established to direct the UARRM's launch.

In the short-term, the UARRM will require financial support to maintain a small administrative secretariat that can manage the website, relay information and coordinate meetings. Funds for this purpose are being sought. In addition, different supplemental funding options to support the Areas of Work of the UARRM will be explored including public-private partnerships (and through other innovative funding arrangements described by the WCUS).

Proposed action areas/areas of work of the UARRM

Participants discussed what areas of work ("action areas") on which the alliance should focus. It is understood that these Action Areas are and should continue to be mutually supportive.

Each Action Area will be taken forward by champions – individuals who represent vested institutional partners. *Champions are encouraged to self-nominate.*

Six Action Areas identified:

1. Offering more legal pathways to the US for study/research/vocational training:

The alliance will encourage university partners to work towards increasing the number of refugee and migrant students at risk, and threatened scholars, who have access to US university campuses for the purposes of study, teaching, research and vocational training.

This will be through a combination of efforts (including special channels, e.g. special categories of humanitarian visas, relaxation of admission requirements, etc.)

The alliance will also partner with organizations that have knowledge, experience, and connections with refugee and at-risk migrant networks (e.g., local refugee resettlement agencies, advocacy groups, international recruitment offices), support private sponsors and welcoming communities (e.g., churches, synagogues, NGOs), and leverage the role of student associations and volunteers (see Canadian and German models).

2. Overcoming barriers to entry into higher education institutions in the US:

The alliance will gather information on and advocate for new and existing HEI initiatives that reduce or alleviate barriers to entry for refugee and migrant students at risk, and threatened scholars.

Such actions include the provision of legal assistance and language training; assistance in accessing university transcripts; the provision of credential services; and opportunities to apply and receive financial aid regardless of immigration status (e.g., see Oberlin University, which counts DACA students as domestic applicants for benefits of eligibility).

Furthermore, the alliance will seek out useful mentoring programs bridging from high school to HEI, such that refugees and at-risk migrants can complete high school and access college education. Such programs often include increasing student familiarity with the admissions process, by providing language training, and by preparing them for entrance exams (e.g., see the IIE Syria Consortium, which provides free online test preparation).

3. Providing on-campus/in-community assistance and empowerment:

The alliance will work to bring into evidence and to support university communities that are venues of assistance and empowerment for refugee and migrant students at risk, and threatened scholars.

In this vein, it will promote work being done across US campuses by different actors/stakeholders to offer: legal assistance, employment opportunities, housing, psychosocial support, tools for migrants and refugees to tell their own stories, and broader opportunities to integrate into the university community.

4. Advocacy and awareness raising (student to President):

The alliance will develop strategies that build off of existing advocacy work and that seek to amplify efforts to influence public policy on behalf of migrant and refugee communities and with regards to the phenomenon of forced migration more generally.

Buy-in at all levels is required, from Presidents (e.g., see Presidents Immigration Alliance) to student-led initiatives (e.g., see Spark 15). Advocacy work will begin within the HEI sector and build out to local and national legislators.   It will also inform international negotiations such as those for the UN Global Compact on Migration that is on-going through 2018.

(Down the line, it was proposed that a model "Welcoming University" Initiative could be established, based upon the "Welcoming America" Initiative, which could generate a generic certification or "seal" for welcoming campuses and competence tools.)

5. Research

The alliance will map and post updated information pertaining to all US-based efforts in the six Action Areas.

In addition, the alliance will design research agendas focusing on the areas above, with the aim of integrating threatened scholars and refugee/at-risk migrant students into research teams (physically and virtually), pushing innovations and policy (e.g., see University of Ottawa's

Refugee Hub), sub-focusing on emerging policy areas (e.g., see Northwestern: "The Politics of Rescue"; IIE: "Education in Emergencies"), and compiling a themed publication in the form of essays or articles into a special journal issue or book.

6. Media and communications

Achieving the goals of UARRM will require a robust media and communications strategy, which will support Action Areas 1-5 by advocating for increasing legal pathways, creating and publicizing training and informational materials, documenting and promoting exemplary stories and best practices, creating advocacy and awareness campaigns, publicizing and disseminating research in multiple media.

Furthermore, the alliance will support and develop curriculum for teaching migration, where migrants and refugees teach and tell stories about their experience, making best use of digital literacy.

Ultimately, this Action Area will activate new and future stakeholders for its work, reshape narratives, improve public understanding, and generate inter-cultural dialogue, with the aim of creating welcoming communities and universities.

Governance/steering committee of the UARRM

There will be a small steering committee whose responsibilities will be to oversee the work of the above actions areas.

Each action area will be represented by an individual who serves on the steering committee. Personal invitations and proposals for steering committee members will be sent out on Wednesday, December 20, 2017.

The steering committee's work will be supported by a small administrative secretariat that will be established in 2018.