FORCED DISPLACEMENT & ACADEMIA

OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNIVERSITIES TO PROMOTE KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION ON REFUGEE ISSUES

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

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Forced displacement today is at its largest scale in human history and with increasing significance in international and national policy making. The political, social and economical implications that displacement creates for refugees and host communities result in intensified public debates and policies which touch upon the very basis of nation-state building.

Universities in Bulgaria, as centres of learning, innovation, ideas and activism, have naturally become laboratories for research and provision of in-depth knowledge to students on the various aspects of the phenomenon. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, mandated to protect refugees around the world, has been supportive and actively contributed in developing a more systematic academic awareness and understanding in refugee and humanitarian issues, including through the Academic Refugee Studies Initiative in Bulgaria (2002 - 2005) and the Academic Council on Refugee Issues (2019 – present).

UNHCR stands ready to further enhance the academic exchange and collaboration in refugee studies and support universities in their noble mission to educate young professionals on all aspects of forced displacement.

Herewith, UNHCR outlines several areas for possible cooperation.
1. ACADEMIC NETWORK OF SCHOLARS

Interested scholars can establish a professional academic network, to be supported by UNHCR, with the aim to advance research on asylum and refugee issues, further the academic debate and promote the public and practical relevance of studies related to forced migration.

WHAT WE PROPOSE:

- **Academic Notice Board** – [www.academia.refugee-integration.bg](http://www.academia.refugee-integration.bg) – where relevant information is to be uploaded
- An **email group** exchanging information on relevant publications, new projects, conferences, legislative amendments on asylum issues, etc.
- **Catalogue** of all refugee-related programmes and courses
- **Live calendar** of events
- **Monthly infosheet** with updates which is to be developed jointly by practitioners and academia
- Periodical **coordination meetings** between scholars for exchange of experiences and ideas
2. QUALITATIVE TEACHING PROCESS

Interested universities and professors can join forces with UNHCR for the delivery of university courses and seminars based on updated and objective information, field experiences, and expert analysis.

WHAT WE PROPOSE:

- Regular capacity building activities and information sessions for scholars (by UNHCR, SAR and partners operationally involved in decision-making and delivery of services to refugees)
- Guest lectures by UNHCR Representative or other senior staff

**Topic examples:**
1. Legal and Institutional Framework in the Area of International Protection (international, European, regional, Bulgarian perspectives)
2. Protection of Refugee Children, including Unaccompanied Minors
3. Elements of Local Integration in Bulgaria (access to rights, documentation, housing, education, employment, recognition of diplomas and qualifications, etc.)
4. Role, structure and mandate of UNHCR and other international humanitarian and human rights organizations
5. Myths about Refugees
6. Statelessness and Protection of Stateless Persons (international and Bulgarian perspectives)

4 December 2019, UNWE

UNHCR Representative giving a public lecture ‘Effective policies for protection and integration of refugees: are they possible in Bulgaria?’ as part of the regular seminars of third year bachelors in Economical Sociology in UNWE.

Click for info.
Visits by university students to UNHCR headquarters and introduction of UNHCR's role, mandate and activities

Joint development of specialized courses

Joint organization of summer schools

Joint creation of a list of thesis topics with actual relevance for practitioners

Joint re/establishment of legal clinics on refugee law and social clinics on social work with refugees

In 2018 UNHCR entered into a collaboration agreement with the Academy of the Ministry of Interior for the introduction of a curriculum on asylum and refugee protection.

Provision of training courses and materials

UNHCR translated in Bulgarian and provided to the Academy of the MoI its original training course ‘Foundations of Immigration Detention’, developed for internal staff of UNHCR and partnering organizations.

For accessing the course, click here.

Учебна програма „Основи на имиграционното задържане“
3. **RESEARCH**

Scholars and UNHCR can join forces at various stages in the design and implementation of research projects, including in the dissemination of their results and recommendations.

**WHAT WE PROPOSE:**

- UNHCR to suggest specific research topics with high operational relevance
- Universities to be provided with available information, data, studies conducted by UNHCR or partners, expert analysis

For more info, click on the photos.
In 2019, as part of its support to the MA programme ‘Social Work with Refugees and Migrants’, UNHCR commissioned to Sofia University a mapping of all resources related to social work with asylum-seekers and refugees. The students had to perform desk research and to collect qualitative data through interviews and focus groups with practitioners. They received a small grant for the mapping.

• Opportunities for participation of researchers in focus groups with asylum-seekers and refugees

Every year UNHCR conducts the largest participatory assessment of the needs of asylum-seekers and refugees in Bulgaria. As part of the research in 2019, 36 focus groups took place in all reception and detention facilities with an overall 265 respondents (asylum-seekers and beneficiaries of international protection). The multifunctional teams which conducted the interviews consisted of representatives of 19 organizations, including national and local authorities, NGOs, and academia.

• Facilitation of contacts with national and international experts and practitioners

• Commissioning the conduct of research relevant to UNHCR's work and mandate to academia

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• Joint dissemination of research results and policy recommendations
UNHCR stands ready to support, participate, co-organize and promote various scientific, cultural or other formal or informal initiatives of universities in areas related to asylum and refugees.

WHAT WE PROPOSE:

- Participation and organization of roundtables, conferences and public seminars and debates on asylum and refugees

UNHCR and NBU co-organized a public debate titled ‘Myths and Stereotypes about Refugees’, as part of the events in the Refugee Month (November 2019). The event included a quiz with 20 questions about refugees and prizes for the winners. Among the speakers was a refugee student from Syria.
• Support for and/or co-organization of scientific contests and competitions
• Support for and/or co-organization of relevant movie screenings, exhibitions, cultural events in universities

Sofia University hosts UNHCR’s interactive exhibition ‘Identity’ which sheds light on the personal stories of refugees who live, work and study in Bulgaria.

• Support for and/or co-organization of workshops, cultural events or other forums involving the participation of refugees
• Support with the dissemination of information about university initiatives
• Support with the dissemination of information on existing programs and courses
• Participation of academia in UNHCR’s capacity building activities for national and local authorities
• Creation of media content on good practices

UNHCR created a video about the MA programme ‘Social Work with Refugees and Migrants’ in the year of its establishment with the aim to attract more students willing to enroll in it.

To see the video, click here.
Acquiring practical experience in working for or with refugees plays a crucial role for building students' personal skills, but also analytical and critical thinking. The vast network of UNHCR's partners from the state, non-governmental and the private sector gives opportunities for useful field trainings and internships.

5. STUDENTS' ACTIVISM
WHAT WE PROPOSE:

- Practicum and internship opportunities

  In 2019/2020, eight students in the last year of their BA programme Arabic Studies did their obligatory practice in UNHCR's office. Each of them has a specific working plan, based on personal interest and preferences.
  For a video from the students' visit to a refugee family in Kraishte village, click here.

- Facilitation of internship opportunities in partnering organizations
- Facilitation of access to volunteering projects (teaching to refugee children, mentoring, etc.)
- Facilitation of access to career opportunities
- Facilitation of access to grants (for studying, researching, publishing, etc.)
- Opportunities for participation in projects and field visits in Bulgaria and abroad

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