

# STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

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## Student Scholarship Programmes for Refugees

Higher education is particularly important for refugees. It is a tool of empowerment that enables displaced people to pursue productive and meaningful lives, while providing a safe, stable environment during study and into the future. It also serves as a strong incentive for refugee students to continue and complete secondary school. However, access to post-secondary study for young refugees is severely limited, with just [one percent currently enrolled](#) in tertiary education. Confronted with such prospects, refugees in need of a better future may consider desperate measures, including resorting to dangerous journeys through the use of smugglers.

Within the context of a number of protracted refugee situations worldwide, as well as continuing arrivals through the Mediterranean, scholarship opportunities to higher education institutions in the European Union (EU) have the potential to offer a legal pathway for refugees to arrive safely in Europe. Moreover, increased access to such opportunities can offer refugees hope for a better future, enhanced potential for economic self-reliance, and greater participation in civic and public life.

Access to higher education is not only a right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but it also represents an important way in which refugees can establish a secure future for themselves and their families. Many refugees will not have had the opportunity to pursue the path of education they had envisaged, or will have been forced to interrupt their studies because of having to flee their homes. By supporting refugees to engage in or complete study programmes in the EU and gain relevant qualifications, Member States can provide the conditions for refugees to reach their potential and, in turn, facilitate their integration. Moreover, the active engagement of civil society and the university community, including campus and student groups who can play a valuable role in welcoming and supporting refugee students in the integration process, can help to better realise the many benefits of scholarships both for refugees and the receiving society alike.

When designing and implementing student scholarship programmes, it is necessary to take into consideration the specific needs that refugees face, which should be addressed prior to a student's departure to the country of study. Among other vital considerations, it is of crucial importance that higher education initiatives do not jeopardise the legal status, protection or psycho-social well-being of refugees, and that they ensure that students do not find themselves in situations of expired residency, destitution or forced return to their countries of origin as a result of pursuing studies abroad.

Successful programmes take into account the continued participation of refugees in European communities, and contributions that refugees will make to societies during and after studies. However, in some cases, scholarships can also serve to establish the foundations for the reconstruction of post-conflict societies and foster development in the event that refugees choose to return to their home country in the future when it is safe to do so. Student scholarship programmes, alongside other pathways of admission such as resettlement, private sponsorship programmes and targeted humanitarian admission programmes, could also help to alleviate some of the pressure on countries hosting the largest number of refugees.

In full consideration of the opportunities and challenges set out above, the ERN+ identifies higher education scholarship programmes as one of a number of pathways of admission that can support refugees' arrival to the EU in safety and dignity while complementing existing resettlement programmes.





The potential for such complementary admission programmes to provide meaningful solutions for refugees is reflected in the [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#), when European countries joined the international community in pledging to expand safe and legal pathways for refugees to be admitted or resettled to third countries, including through scholarship and student visa opportunities (paragraphs 77-79).

In light of this, and in view of the momentum that has developed through the establishment of various higher education initiatives for Syrian refugees by a number of EU Member States, the ERN+ will seek to build upon these experiences, and the lessons learned, in order to provide a workable model for refugee higher education scholarships in the European Union. On the basis of this model, opportunities can be identified for piloting student scholarship programmes in select Member States in cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.



Co-funded by the European  
Union's Asylum, Migration and  
Integration Fund