

28. A scholarship programme for vulnerable religious minorities in fragile contexts

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Access to education is a challenge for religious minorities

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises that minorities, which include religious minorities, risk being left behind across the world. This risk is particularly high in fragile contexts where discriminatory policies and growing persecution and violence reduce the well-being and security of minorities, including Christian minorities. For example, many Christians are leaving the Middle East because of the general atmosphere of violence and economic malaise, while others worry about persecution (The Economist, January 2, 2016^[1]).

This case study shares Hungary's experience - through its humanitarian and development co-operation policy - in increasing access to higher education for Christian minorities in Hungarian universities. The objective of the Scholarship Programme for Christian Young People (SCYP) is to enable economic, social and inclusive development for scholarship holders and their communities through higher education and building the scholars international networks. The trained professionals and scholars will, in turn, contribute to development and education for youth when they return to their local communities and countries.

Matching demand and supply: a wide choice of courses to build-up medical, economic and engineering skills

The Scholarship Programme for Christian Young People started in 2017 with 265 applicants. Demand is growing fast. In 2018, the number of applicants increased fivefold to more than 1 500 with an increasing number of candidates from students and young people in fragile contexts in the Middle East. The programme prioritises young people living in areas where freedom of religion and belief is under threat or regularly violated. It aims to support, in particular, Christian communities that suffer persecution from extremist military groups such as the so-called Islamic State.

Within the framework of the Scholarship Programme for Christian Young People (SCYP), Hungary offers scholarships to young people as future leaders and professionals in their communities. The aim is to establish a sustainable education programme which capitalises on and transfers expertise and knowledge to scholarship holders and their communities from Hungarian universities and academic institutions.

The programme seeks to understand and respond to the education and professional needs of local communities. Scholarship applicants are thus free to choose the programmes they apply for, according to the labour market value of the different study programmes and the most-needed knowledge and skills to achieve sustainable development in their

communities. According to the current (2018) applications, the most sought-after study programmes (MA, BA, BSc, MSc) are in medicine - medical doctors and nurses - and economic study programmes. Engineering programmes are also in high demand.

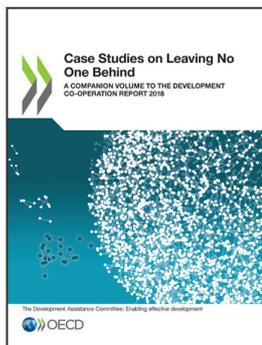
Humanities is another important subject in the SCYP as the communities and students seek to bolster their cultural heritage and preserve the historical memory and traditions of communities that risk being left behind. Consultative meetings are organised between scholarship holders and their communities to sustain close connections and understand the communities' needs.

Evolving to demand from scholarship holders and Hungarian students

In terms of next steps, Hungary is planning to integrate a tutorial system into the SCYP. The objectives are to: i) raise awareness between Hungarian students and scholarship participants about social and development problems affecting religious minorities; ii) build professional and social networks for SCYP participants and Hungarians; iii) help students settle into a new environment; and iv) enable future economic and cultural co-operation between Hungary and the communities of scholarship alumni.

References

The Economist (January 2, 2016), *And then there were none*, [1]
<https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2016/01/02/and-then-there-were-none..>



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