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Improving Humanitarian Action – NOHA contribution

Abstract

Das Network On Humanitarian Action (NOHA) ist das erste Netzwerk von Universitäten auf europäischer Ebene, das sich der Verbesserung des Ausbildungsniveaus auf dem Gebiet der humanitären Hilfe verschrieben hat. Ziel des Netzwerkes ist eine Erhöhung der Professionalität und des Leistungsniveaus humanitärer HelferInnen durch Vermittlung theoretischer Grundlagen und die Entwicklung intelligenter Konzepte und Prinzipien, die letztendlich in effizientes, professionelles Handeln umgesetzt werden können. NOHA trägt auch dazu bei, humanitäre Probleme der breiten Öffentlichkeit und politischen Entscheidungsträgern bewusst zu machen. Das NOHA-Netzwerk besteht im Kern aus sieben Universitäten: Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgien), University College Dublin (Irland), Université d'Aix-Marseille III Paul Cézanne (Frankreich), Universität Bochum (Deutschland), Universidad Deusto (Spanien), Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (Niederlande), Uppsala Universiteit (Schweden). Diese bieten gemeinsam das Joint European Master's in International Humanitarian Action (kurz: NOHA Master's) an. Auch andere Universitäten haben sich als außerordentliche Mitglieder dem Netzwerk angeschlossen. Der Master-Studiengang wurde 1993 in enger Zusammenarbeit mit dem Europäischen Amt für Humanitäre Hilfe (ECHO) und der Generaldirektion für Bildung und Kultur der Europäischen Kommission ins Leben gerufen. Bisher gingen aus dem Programm bereits knapp 1500 Absolventen und Absolventinnen hervor, die nun in den Bereichen humanitäre Hilfe und internationale Zusammenarbeit im Einsatz sind. Seit 2004 ist das NOHA Master's Teil des Kooperations- und Mobilitätsprogramms Erasmus Mundus, welches die Europäische Union auf der ganzen Welt als hochwertiges Bildungszentrum auf Hochschulebene auszeichnet.

The Network On Humanitarian Action (NOHA) is the first network of universities dealing with the development of Humanitarian Action Education at a European level. It seeks to provide greater professionalism and quality of service among humanitarian aid personnel through the provision of solid intellectual training and the development of sound concepts and principles that would in turn lead to good practice. It also aims to contribute to greater awareness of humanitarian issues among the broader public and among policy makers.

The NOHA network is made up of seven core European universities (University of Deusto - Spain; Catholic University of Louvain – Belgium; University of Bochum – Germany; University of Aix Marseille III – France; University College Dublin – Ireland; Uppsala University of Uppsala – Sweden; and University of Groningen - The Netherlands) which have been

engaged in joint multidisciplinary and intercultural education, training, and research in the area of Humanitarian Action for the past ten years. These universities run an inter-university Masters degree programme, commonly known as the *Joint European Masters in International Humanitarian Action* or simply as the *NOHA Masters*. This programme provides high quality academic education and professional skills for personnel working or intending to work in the area of Humanitarian Action.

The NOHA network was created in 1993 with the purpose of pioneering postgraduate training and research in the field of Humanitarian Action at a European level. To this end, the founding universities launched the above-mentioned Masters programme in close collaboration with the Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) and Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission. The initiative was a response to pressing needs and demands for efficient and effective ways of addressing complex humanitarian emergencies in the early 1990's.

NOHA Masters Course Profile

The NOHA Masters degree programme is made up of the following modules in all the NOHA universities: Intensive Programme (IP), Core Course, Orientation Period, Research, and Work Placement. All these modules are very similar in orientation, profile, and workload. The IP is the initial module and the strongest element of the NOHA Masters. It consists of a 10-day-course that serves as a special forum at which participants share knowledge and experiences on important issues in the area of humanitarian action. The *intensive programme* (IP) combines activities that are vital for the multicultural and interdisciplinary training of the future humanitarian action professional. It brings together approximately 140 students (an average of 20 per NOHA university), over 40 lecturers and researchers, as well as a significant number of consultants, international experts, policy makers, aid managers, and other guest speakers from non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and international governmental organisations (IGOs).

The *core course* consists of three parts: (i) Building blocks; (ii) Horizontal issues; and (iii) Optional components. The *building blocks* deal with issues of methodology and provide a basic understanding of a discipline. NOHA students at all NOHA universities take this fundamental component, which is similar in structure and content at all the universities offering the Masters programme. The 'NOHA-modules' jointly worked out by the Network Faculty provide a bibliography for the building blocks covering the following themes: (i) *Geopolitics in Humanitarian Action*; (ii) *Anthropology in Humanitarian Action*; (iii) *International Law in Humanitarian Action*; and (iv) *Management in Humanitarian Action*. The *horizontal issues* are interdisciplinary in nature and provide an understanding of how the different blocks make up the overall humanitarian action system. The *optional components* deal with specialisation, enabling students to further their insight into the different modules or additional fields within the framework of humanitarian action.

Upon successful completion of the five core modules at home universities, NOHA students choose optional courses at one of the Network universities during the second semester. The student exchange is done in accordance with the mobility policy which the programme is centred around and also depends on the student's choice from among a variety of options: *Post-conflict Rehabilitation* with emphasis on Public Health and Geopolitics (Catholic University of Louvain - Belgium); *International Institutions in Humanitarian Emergencies*

(University of Bochum - Germany); *Legal and Geopolitical Approach of Humanitarian Action* (University of Aix Marseille III – France); *Societies in Transition* (University College Dublin – Ireland); *Conflict, Disaster, and Peacebuilding* (Uppsala University - Sweden); and *Comprehensive Security, Circumstances of Decline, Disappearance, and Reconstruction* (University of Groningen - The Netherlands). In the final stage of their studies, NOHA students conduct specific research in relation to their Masters thesis and go on a work placement in local and regional organisations working in the area of humanitarian action and in international institutions such as the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Health Organisation (WHO), Oxfam and the Red Cross.

With regards to quality assurance, each NOHA university is subject to quality control according to both internal and national policies. They also adhere to the quality assurance mechanism as set up in the NOHA Charter. The NOHA Masters also adheres to the letter and spirit of the Lisbon Convention.

Achievements and Prospects

Since its creation, the NOHA Network has produced over 1,000 NOHA graduated professionals working in the field of humanitarian relief and international co-operation as managers, administrators, researchers, evaluators, monitors, consultants, and representatives of international organisations and institutions. NOHA universities have gradually integrated the joint training and research programme into their respective curricula, achieving a high degree of co-operation and integration, while preserving their specialities and traditions.

The NOHA Masters is very high on the European Political Agenda and is repeatedly considered a model for new initiatives and developments in the educational area.

In September 2004, it was awarded, the Erasmus Mundus Programme status by the European Commission, along with 18 other joint Masters programmes. The competition involved some 128 applications for Masters courses offered by hundreds of European universities.

The Erasmus Mundus Programme is a co-operation and mobility programme in the field of higher education which promotes the European Union as a centre of excellence in learning around the world. It also provides EU-funded scholarships for non-EU nationals participating in these Masters Courses, as well as scholarships for EU-nationals studying in third countries from 2005/2006. Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses are high quality integrated courses that lead to the award of a recognised double, multiple or joint diploma.

Legal and administrative framework

The NOHA International Association, legally recognised under Belgian law since October 2001, is the main body responsible for the design, implementation, monitoring, and accreditation of both the proposed project and the entire educational and research programme of the Network. The main decision-making bodies of the NOHA Association are its General Assembly and its Administrative Council.

Membership

In addition to the seven core universities who have full membership status, NOHA also has associate university members. Under the Statutes of the NOHA International Association, any higher education institution, irrespective of nationality or location, can be accepted as an

associate member, if it can demonstrate substantial interest in humanitarian association and have is legally recognised. Associate universities take part in various activities of the Network in accordance with the terms and conditions set out in the Partnership Agreement that both parties must sign prior to the university's membership becoming effective. At present, the following universities are associate members: University of Pavia (Italy), University of Brasilia (Brazil), and Columbia University (United States). It is expected that the number of associate universities will substantially increase within the framework of the NOHA worldwide enlargement policy and in light of the many membership applications from universities from around the world.

Conclusion

More than a decade of experience has proven that NOHA is an effective network for quality in the training of humanitarian personnel in charge of international co-operation. It is also an excellent example of European solidarity and a European response to complex emergency situations all around the world. However, NOHA 100 remains aware of the many challenges posed by the persistence of both man-made and natural crises and violent conflicts that claim millions of lives each year and leave many others in total despair. Therefore it will continue to improve its humanitarian programmes and combine its efforts with those who believe in and work for a better world.