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# The right to higher education for refugees and forcibly displaced people

## Briefing note compendium

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# The right to higher education for refugees and forcibly displaced people

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### Disclaimer

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The content and style of the briefing notes have been maintained as per each author's preferences.

# Foreword

The number of refugees and forcibly displaced people around the world has doubled in the last decade. In 2022, UNHCR estimates that 100 million people were forced to flee their homes due to conflict, natural disaster, violence, or threat of persecution. Those who have been displaced are frequently denied their right to education, with higher education remaining a distant aspiration for most: less than 6% of refugees are enrolled in higher education.

Restricted opportunities for refugees and forcibly displaced people to complete primary and secondary education are one factor for the minimal continuation to higher education. Even with school completion in hand, other barriers to accessing higher education arise, whether the need to contribute financially to supporting family or limited capacity for the recognition of credentials or prior learning.

However, the education of refugees and forcibly displaced people is essential for peaceful and sustainable development, as well as for the future prosperity of refugees' home countries. In times of social upheaval, the participation of refugee youth in host systems, especially in higher education, can provide the necessary tools for successful integration at individual and community levels. It can also develop mutual acceptance and tolerance, reducing participation in extremist activities, and aiding in the prevention of terrorism, racial and religious intolerance, genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity.

Further promoting the right to higher education for refugees and forcibly displaced people carries great costs but equally great returns, reinforcing the capacity to diversify student populations, create knowledge, and promote social and economic development in both the host country and the country of origin.

The following briefing note compendium reflects wide-ranging analysis and insights of the various barriers that refugees and forcibly displaced people experience in accessing, progressing, and completing higher education. At the same time, the briefing notes present considerations that States and other higher education stakeholders should take into account to defend and promote the right to higher education for this equity deserving group.

**Francesc Pedró**
Director, UNESCO IESALC

## Introduction

Refugees and forcibly displaced people (FDP) are often exposed to high levels of violence, human rights violations and many other disturbing events. These seriously affect the possibilities for integration into education systems, educational attainment, and progression to higher education. According to UNHCR, in 2020 only 5% of refugee youth were enrolled in higher education[1], and even fewer completed their studies. Considering the rise in the global refugee population, advocating for the right to higher education is a crucial factor when designing policies to protect the right to higher education in the present and the future.

In this context, UNESCO IESALC conducted a thematic consultation held virtually in May 2022. The consultation gathered higher education academics, professionals, policymakers and youth from different regions to learn from their perspectives on the key challenges and opportunities towards achieving the right to higher education for all in the region. This consultation was part of a series of regional and thematic consultations held between April 2022 and January 2023.

## UNESCO and the right to higher education

Guaranteeing the right to education has been a sustained commitment for UNESCO. Following the recognition of education as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Art. 26), UNESCO's 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education sets legally binding provisions for its 109 ratifying States[2].

The Convention is recognized as the cornerstone of the Education 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, which is reflected in the agenda's human rights-based approach. UNESCO's dedicated work on the right to education has aimed at monitoring and advocating for this right, as well as supporting its implementation in the national frameworks of its Member States. Considering merging challenges to secure access to and inclusion in education for all, UNESCO has called for a reframing of the right to education to reflect the realities of our ever-changing societies[3].

As a fundamental part of the right to education and in light of the growing commitment to lifelong learning, UNESCO has enhanced its focus on the right to higher education. UNESCO IESALC in conjunction with UNESCO offices and partially supported by the Open Societies Foundation are working on the right to higher education[4] in order to increase awareness and advocacy on the topic as an imperative of social justice based on equality of opportunities and human rights. This work is a collaborative commitment that includes conceptual and policy papers, a series of national case studies, and regional and thematic consultations. This multi-pronged project aims primarily to introduce a social justice perspective of the right to higher education to the international agenda.

## Aim of this compendium

The thematic consultation on Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Persons (FDP) was held as part of a consultation process involving five regional consultations and four thematic consultations. Overall, the consultation meetings covered:

1 https://www.unhcr.org/education-pathways.html

2 https://www.unesco.org/en/education/right-education/need-know

3 https://www.unesco.org/en/education/right-education/evolving

4 https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/the-right-to-higher-education/

Africa, Arab States, Asia and Pacific, Europe and North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, Disability, Gender, Refugees and Forcibly Displaced People and Rethinking Merit.

As part of the consultation, participants were requested to submit a 2-page briefing note in response to two prompt questions provided in advance of a closed online meeting:

1. What are the challenges to the right to higher education from your perspective/area of expertise (geographic, legal, normative, societal, educational, etc.)?
2. A future aim is to work towards a series of Guiding Principles on the Right to Higher Education. These would be global guidelines that would be used in and adaptable to various contexts. They would reflect existing legally binding instruments (not create new standards). They would provide guidance to States and other higher education stakeholders on how to uphold and advance the right to higher education. What would you consider essential for inclusion in these Guiding Principles?

The briefing notes were shared among participants in advance of the consultation meeting. During the meeting, participants provided a summary of the key aspects presented in the briefing note. Participants had the opportunity to elaborate on their answers to the two initial questions, followed by an open space for discussion among participants.

This compendium presents the briefing notes shared by the ten participants who were part of the thematic consultation on the right to higher education for Refugees and Forcibly Displaced People.

Their details are listed in the following table:

| Refugees and Forcibly Displaced People (FDP) thematic consultation (listed in alphabetical order) | |
|---|---|
| Ehab Badwi | Founder, Changemaker, Syrian Youth Assembly, Tertiary Refugee Student Network (Syria) |
| Carine Borkhoche | Country Manager, Kiron Lebanon (Lebanon) |
| Safia Ibrahimkhel | Youth Consultant and Co-Chair, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Global Youth Advisory Council (Pakistan) |
| Yaşar Kondakçı | Professor, Faculty of Education, Middle East Technical University, Teknik Üniversitesi (Türkiye) |
| Prem Kumar Rajaram | Professor; Lead on Erasmus+ Refugee Education Initiatives; Head of the Open Learning Initiative, Central European University (Austria) |
| Andres Felipe Mora Cortes | Professor, Universidad Nacional de Colombia (Colombia) |
| Norimasa Orii | Representative Director, Pathways Japan (Japan) |
| Cristina Sousa Rodriguez | Associate Education Officer, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Panama) |
| Manal Stulgaitis | Education Officer Section Division of Resilience and Solutions, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (Denmark) |
| Wondwosen Tamrat | Lecturer, St Mary's University (Ethiopia) |

## Key findings

Higher education is a powerful tool for inclusion in countries hosting refugees and forcibly displaced people (FDP) and was widely recognized by participants for its multiple benefits, including contributing to social, economic, and gender equality. Furthermore, it can play a crucial role in helping refugees and FDP overcome emotions of pessimism, depression, and low self-esteem caused by forced displacement. Whether or not refugees or FDP return to their home country or region, serving these populations through higher education acts as a mechanism for constructing sustainable peace and post-conflict rehabilitation. In this regard, it was emphasized that access to education is a right and should be guaranteed regardless of location or status.

Despite the multiple social benefits of including refugees and FDPs, there is still a long way to go to promote actions in the political agenda to ensure the right to higher education for this equity deserving group[5]. One reason for this was noted by one of the participants who pointed out that 86% of refugees are located in low or middle-income countries[6], adding additional pressure on already overburdened higher education systems. This significant barrier is frequently exacerbated by the absence of institutional policies and procedures designed to address the unique needs of refugees and FDPs.

Participants stressed the importance of promoting various forms of financing given that in many cases, migrants are faced with very few possibilities of self-financing their way through higher education. The treatment of refugees as international students in some countries implies that they may incur high tuition fees. This in turn increases indebtedness and further distances the realization of the right to higher education.

Participants also stressed the importance of building bridges between levels of education so that refugees and FDPs can increase their chances of accessing higher education. The prospect of higher education can constitute a substantial incentive to finish secondary education. In this area, participants also stressed the importance of information and the availability of policies on pathways to promote the right to higher education.

Legal obstacles to the right to higher education must be removed. In many cases, participants commented on the difficulties in recognizing refugees' status, but in the case of Internally Displaced People (IDP), conflict resolution usually tends to be so protracted that IDPs end up relinquishing their rights. This includes the right to education, health, and civil rights in their own country. In addition, the absence of documentation such as birth certificates or proof of prior learning when migrants flee is another legal barrier they face when arriving in a new country. Participants highlighted the importance of attending to specific needs related to the recognition of qualifications for this equity deserving group. States should consider recognizing not only qualifications but also credits earned in other higher education systems. This can be a strong incentive for refugees and FDPs to complete higher education and continue their learning paths.

5 Equity deserving groups is a term developed by Wisdom Tettey and adopted by UNESCO IESALC in its social justice framework on the right to higher education. It refers to group of people who have been 'disproportionally impacted by higher education policies and structures that discriminate against them in visible and less visible forms, with lasting consequences in their academic, personal, and professional lives' (https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381750, p.12)

6 UNHCR (2019). Global framework for Refugee Education. UNHCR.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) also have a role in granting access and supporting success for refugees and FDPs. More attention needs to be paid by HEIs to supporting students by providing guidance and counselling services that could help students with their overall performance, incorporating mental health services as well as academic and language support.

Finally, some participants mentioned the importance of stakeholder coordination to improve social inclusion and educational pathways for refugees and FDPs. These initiatives should include multiple actors but refugees and FDPs as groups of interest and main actors must be present.

# The most important educational challenges Syrian students face in countries of asylum and areas of displacement in northern Syria

By **Ehab Badwi** - Founder, Changemaker, Syrian Youth Assembly, Tertiary Refugee Student (Syria)

Syria has been suffering from a civil war for more than 11 years, with disastrous results with millions of refugees, internally displaced persons, and millions of young people and children living in neighboring countries in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and the European Union countries.

With Syria occupies the first place among the countries exporting refugees, with 6.7 million refugees, the vast majority of whom are 85% in neighboring countries, and with the number of internally displaced people reaching 6.1 million people, according to estimates by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and multiple UNESCO reports, The needs of children and youth exceeded the response provided.

## 1. Refugees' access to education

39% of Syrian refugee children in neighboring countries do not receive an education due to a lack of support, despite the efforts of the host countries. With 5.9 million children in need of educational services in Syria, 29% are displaced, and 2.1 million are not in schools.

## 2. Integration with the host countries

Turkey is working to integrate Syrian students into its educational systems with a decrease in the proportion of children enrolled in temporary education centers from 83% in the 2014-2015 school year to 37% in 2017-2018, with plans to integrate all Syrian refugees by 2020.

In Jordan and Lebanon, the two countries adopted the double-shift system to accommodate the number of refugees, with the students of the country of origin attending in the morning and most Syrian refugees in the afternoon, despite this being considered a realistic solution in the short to medium term, and although UNESCO warned against it in the long term because it limits the integration of Syrian students with society.

## 3. Disabling costs

Tuition fees and costs, which may be high for refugees, especially with restrictions on their freedom of movement and work, constitute obstacles to refugee education in neighboring countries.

## 4. Absence of documents

Refugee students often lack documentation, such as birth and school graduation certificates and diplomas, making it challenging to integrate into national education systems. Jordan used to require refugees living outside camps to obtain service cards to enroll in schools. Still, the Ministry of Education began in 2016, allowing public schools to register Children without cards.

### 5. No specialized training

Recognizing and treating children's trauma is complex. While educators can provide solutions for less severe cases through routine teaching practices that promote development and build people's skills, most do not have CPD or training in mental health and psychosocial support. And social. In Syria, 73% of teachers did not receive this type of training.

Inside Syria, a 2018 report stated that 13% of children need specialized psychological and social support in the classroom.

### 6. Adapting content to technology

A survey of 144 non-state actors providing education to Syrian refugees found that 49% of them used technology to teach innovatively but attempts to adapt content were challenged by compatibility with education systems in host countries.

### 7. Curricula without evaluation or coordination

Most local authorities in areas of displacement in Syria offer curricula close to government curricula. Still, assessments are essentially non-existent, and although there is a Syria-wide coordination function, cooperation is limited to political programs and security constraints.

### 8. Recognition of certificates

Widely recognized certificates are only granted in government schools inside Syria. Children in opposition-controlled areas face risks when trying to take exams in regime-controlled areas, including revealing their family names to government authorities, threats to their personal security at checkpoints, and insecurity in areas between control areas.

### 9. School shortage

Almost a third of the schools, most of them in northern Syria, where 60% of the internally displaced live, are unusable due to the war and the use of schools for tasks other than education.

### 10. Covid-19 pandemic

The world has witnessed the most extended interruption in education in history due to the Coronavirus. Syrian refugee children and youth were among the most affected by this pandemic, knowing that they already struggle to access quality education. Although the world has turned to digital means of education to provide educational opportunities without interruption during the pandemic, the vast majority of forcibly displaced students - as well as their host communities - have found themselves behind, due to the digital divide that separates them from their peers and the world.

# The impact of national crises on the right to higher education in the refugee population of Lebanon

By **Carine Borkhoche**, Country Manager & Co-Founder Kiron Lebanon (Lebanon)

Lebanon has suffered multiple crises the past two years, including a massive explosion in Beirut's port, an economic collapse, and the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. The Lebanese Pound has lost 90% of its value and the country's annual rate of inflation is high and out of control affecting the cost of living including food, transportation, fuel, and health costs. The inability to deal with overlapping crises has paralyzed Lebanon. All sectors in the country, especially higher education, are enduring critical problems. A whole generation of young people risks losing life opportunities due to the meltdown of the education system.

In the face of these crises, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) found themselves unable to secure the basic academic and technical needs of their students and a dignified earning scale for their professors. The multiple crises weighed even more deeply on the Lebanese Public University (LU) with 85,000 students including around 1,838 Syrian nationals and more than 5300 teaching staff, all faculties were closed partially or totally because of teachers' strikes.

Refugee youth and young adults in Lebanon are confronted with many barriers to accessing higher education, such as the lack of financial resources, difficulty to secure affordable transportation to higher education institutions, lack of institutional support, and limited access to information about opportunities.

Though these may be general obstacles worldwide, they become more evident in Lebanon as we have been trying to manage an increasing annual inflation rate, which jumped to a new record high of 224.39% in December of 2021[7], according to the monthly Consumer Price Index published by the Central Administration of Statistics. This significant increase directly affects the cost of living and access to education and resources, especially for refugees, specifically in relation to transportation costs which displayed an increase of 522.39 percent, making it hard for students to reach their universities.

One of the most significant challenges that refugees face in Lebanon is perhaps the local laws that refrain refugees from working freely on Lebanese soil. Employers who wish to hire refugees must sponsor them and provide lengthy documentation to the government. This refrains employers from sponsoring refugees, and leaves refugees in a very vulnerable position, causing many to choose to work illegally, without guaranteed labor rights, and very low wages. This leaves many families in need, and youth discouraged from building a future in Lebanon as their host country.

7 Consumer Price Index - Central Administration of Statistics- December 2021

Refugees also face an increased non-diligence in issues related to strict local regulations when it comes to valid residency papers, which many refugees are no longer able to afford to renew therefore creating another obstacle for refugees to register at universities.

Even scholarship stipends in most cases no longer cover the daily necessities to ensure students do not drop out of their tertiary education.

An overwhelming majority of refugee students do not own a laptop or tablet, with some sharing their phones with other family members within their household. This lack of technological means are keeping students from properly following up with recorded online sessions or courses, IF they are provided. Students are also undergoing extensive coursework and projects on their mobile phones, without using neither the technology nor the softwares they need to get integrated into new workplaces.

To conclude, the lack of stability in course attendance due to power outages and political unrest, provision of educational material, and lack of follow-up on student cases, presents refugee students in Lebanon with a disrupted education and an unstable educational environment which discourages students from proceeding with their education.

# Challenges for achieving the right to higher education for vulnerable groups in Pakistan

By **Safia Ibrahimkhel**, Youth Consultant and Cochair United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Global Youth Advisory Council (Pakistan)

## Background

In a future of unparalleled societal shifts, education is crucial to managing the challenges ahead. With more automated, digitized and fluid job markets, today's higher education systems are quickly becoming incompatible with the future we are looking towards. A better education system can enhance the social, scientific, and technological improvement of a country. The human resource development of a country depends upon the quality of education imparted in country. Higher education is recognized today as a capital investment and it's essential for economic and social development of the country. Institutions of higher education have the primary responsibility for equipping individuals with advanced knowledge and skills required for positions of responsibility in government, business, and other professions. Quality higher education is a source of great potential for the socio economic and cultural development of the country. With the passage of time education models need to reflect the demand for lifelong learning to cope with the technological and social changes.

## Objective

1. To advocate for greater access to higher education to achieve and to provide guidance principles to institutions. States and national and local authorities to promote quality academic experiences
2. To Increase awareness of, and access to opportunities such as internships, professional development and employment. Building partnership with private sectors specially universities, emphasising on the importance of their role in higher education

Some of the challenges to the right to higher education:

### 1. Outdated or Low Capacity Teaching Method

Education is one of the most important social systems. However, despite the progress of the international community in terms of teaching and learning of technology. Developing countries are still using traditional and old methods. Lack of standard textbooks leads to a decrease in the efficiency of nurturing education and the quality of the teaching courses. Some textbooks appear very complex. Most of teachers are not particularly professional in camps and remote areas they are not familiar with new teaching method. Language or technology, thus

students face language issues which lead the students to study in old method and have less opportunities to have access to higher education

## 2. Societal approach

Social restriction preventing females' ability to receive a quality education includes traditional attitudes towards gender roles, poverty, geographical isolation, gender-based violence, and early marriage and pregnancy. Throughout the world, there is an estimated that more than 7 million more girls than boys out of school. This "girl's gap" is concentrated in several developing countries. Early marriage affects females' ability to receive an education and socialized gender roles affect females' access to education. For example, children are socialized into their specific gender roles as soon as their parents know their gender. Men are the preferred gender and are encouraged to engage in computer and scientific learning while women learn domestic skills. These gender roles are deep-rooted within the state; however, with the increase of awareness and learning there has been a recent increase in women having the ability to receive an equal education. Afghan socio-cultural barrier hinders female education the lack of female education can be attributed to socio-cultural factors such as early marriages, domestic responsibility and, above all, their socially constructed, conservative belittling of female education compared to male education. However, some of the refugees named the long distance between home and school and thus protection as a basic problem. While others also cite the lack of opportunities for refugee children to obtain secondary and higher education, especially after the 8th grade, this is also one of the reasons why most of the refugee girls hardly pass the 6th grade and continue to study. Likewise, the poor quality of education in refugee villages compared to formal Pakistani schools has significant consequences for the inadequate education of refugee children in Pakistan

## 3. Credentials challenge

One of the main issues that refugees in particular face involves their access to academic and professional documents. Many are unable to take all relevant documents with them when they flee. Perhaps more importantly, they often cannot access documents directly from their home institutions because those institutions are destroyed, closed, or unresponsive, or they refuse to issue documents to the refugee. Additionally, some refugee applicants may be fearful of requesting documents because of the persecution or retribution that they or their families may face. This creates a hardship for applicants applying for higher education, licensure/certification, or professional employment

## 4. Demand of Birth Certificate by Government or Private Schools

Another major challenge for Afghan children in further access to schools is that if Afghan children want to be admitted to state or private schools, the school authorities require a birth certificate or Form B, which they do not have. Therefore, with the help of Pakistani authorities, the Afghan community and international donor organizations, special Afghan schools have been set up in Afghan camps or villages. 6. Resettlement of Afghan Refugees from Rural Areas to Urban Centers: The resettlement of most Afghan refugees from refugee villages in rural areas to urban centers poses a challenge to the education of refugee children. This is because the UNHCR has difficulties in addressing these dispersed refugees especially in remote areas with a lack of basic educational infrastructure.

### 5. Insecurity and Global pandemic

The biggest obstacle toward education is the ongoing war, insecurity, climate change and global pandemic in the world. Wars, violence, insecurity and climate change have left more than 27 million eligible children with no access to education and there is probability of raising the number. As Global pandemic, regime change, violence and Insecurity have not only increased security risk and shut the schools down, but also prevented or lowdown the construction process of new schools.

### 6. Insufficient budget or lack of Fund for education

Budget and fund allocated for education in developing countries have not been used properly and as needed, which has left many schools without any building or half-completed building; and a large number of students receive education under tents or at rented houses with very limited learning materials

### 7. Lack of policy implementation

Despite efforts to strengthen cadre capacity, the executive capability of the education sector at the capital and provincial level is yet to be adequate, mainly because of the lack of skilled personnel. Shortage of professional and proper workplace to facilities and equip the education strategy or policy. Information technology has further complicated the problem and instability or lack of proper management in social institutions have direct impact on decreasing opportunities to have right or access to higher education

## Guiding principles on the right to higher education

In order to optimize the advice on education and other relevant refugee problems, working groups should first be formed at the provincial level, made up of refugee students, competent authorities from NGOs and INGOs, and government representatives from the social and educational sectors. These working groups are intended to complement the coordinative framework of the government-led SDGs at the provincial level, in which refugees are not represented, and will therefore develop a comprehensive mechanism that includes all actors.

Humanitarian and development actors should invest in Tertiary and higher education, Because Education is not foundation of only chasing dreams it's also the foundation of peace, development. Support employment, peaceful coexistence, promotes inclusion and integration. As displaced youth need practical and fast paths to integrate into new societies. This begins with quality education. Education is one of the biggest protective factors preventing Domestic violence, child Labor, and child abuse and child marriages. Humanitarian and development, states, International NGOs, Local stakeholders should support and promote leadership. educational and technical assistance to strengthen the skills, capacity and networking abilities of refugee, internally displaced and host community youth, in all their diversity, and the actors who work with and for them. Through this, young women and young men will empower themselves each other to voice their views, protect each other, celebrate their diversity, and use their skills and abilities to contribute to their communities.

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# Right to higher education: Higher education policies forcibly displaced migrants

By **Yaşar Kondakçı**, Faculty of Education, Middle East Technical University, Türkiye

According to very recent figures, there are 258 million migrants around the world, which indicates that 3.4% of the world population is in a migrant status. Of this population, 82.4 million are forced to leave their homelands because of war or suppressive regimes' persecution. Unfortunately, the number is growing dramatically with the ongoing war and political conflicts. The recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia has pushed more than 3 million people to leave Ukraine and flee to neighboring countries (UNHCR, n.d.).

The growing number of forcibly displaced migrants (FDMs) raises the concern of mitigating the impact of displacement on these people. The immediate reaction of the international community towards FDMs is to ensure that these vulnerable groups get basic humanitarian aid for survival. Providing food and physical protection are basic practices to safeguard the FDMs. However, usually, diplomacy is not very successful to intervene and resolve the conflict so that displaced people go back to their lands and continue their lives. As a result, providing long-term public services such as security, health and education are basic to ensure that the impact of displacement is kept at a minimum level.

Education has always been indicated as one of the most effective tools in mitigating the long-term impact of displacement. Basic education is instrumental in leveling down the psychosocial impact of displacement. However, ensuring long-term adaptation of displaced people is possible by developing universally valid skills to integrate into economic life. Such integration is possible with higher education. Higher education is key to building and implementing a developmental perspective for FDMs (Arar et al., 2022) because higher education is instrumental in (1) eliminating the risk of radicalization and becoming a human resource pool for radical groups, (2) empowering FDMS (especially women) by improving their social options, and (3) cultivating the skills for contributing to home (under the prospect of going back to home country) or the host country (under the prospect of residing in the host country or moving to third countries).

Several challenges associated with irregular migration such as the fluid nature of displaced migration and lack of policy and pathways for FDMs to access higher education make access of FDMs into higher education a challenging task. According to several analyses, different countries follow an incremental policy development approach for providing access to higher education (Arar et al., 2020; Haddad & Demsky, 1994; Jungblut, Vukasovic & Steinhardt, 2018). In other words, higher education policy for FDMs is characterized as a set of responses

to several interrelated and ongoing challenges experienced by SRSs (Arar et al., 2019)

Refugee crises urge the international community to develop a well-informed higher education policy for FDMs (de Wit & Altbach, 2015). The experiences of the major FDMs receiving countries during the recent migration crises have developed a wide capacity and know-how in hosting and providing access to HE for FDMs. The experiences and practices of major receiving countries to open pathways for access to higher education form a set of instructions for developing policies for hosting students in higher education. Particularly the policies and practices of Turkey and Germany have shown the challenges of FDMs in their access to higher education and the responses of the governments to provide access to higher education needs for these people. Besides, the experiences of the traditional destinations of FDMs such as the USA and Canada also suggest certain cursors of higher education policy for FDMs. Major pillars of higher education policy for FDMs have started to elucidate as a result of examining the experiences of major destinations of FDMs, including Canada, Germany, Turkey, and the USA.

According to observations, reports, and analyses, FDM experiences six main challenges, which endanger their access to higher education. The international community needs to recognize these challenges and develop active measures to counter these challenges for providing equitable access to higher education.

**1. Fail to recognize the displaced status**: Both governments and higher education institutions treat FDM students as typical/conventional international students. They tend to apply procedures and practices built for conventional international students when admitting FDMs. However, an equitable opportunity for access to higher education requires positive discrimination for FDMs.

**2. Language Barrier**: FDMs lack the language skills to pursue a higher education study in host countries. Therefore, language courses need to be developed and delivered to students in and out of the university.

**3. Documentation**: FDMs usually cannot find time and opportunity to collect every document (e.g., diplomas and transcripts), which are necessary for their access to higher education programs. Host countries may need to develop alternative measures to test their skills. Besides, for students who can prove their interrupted studies, host countries need to provide a credit transfer opportunity.

**4. System incompatibility**: FDMs had part of their education in a different system. FMDs with the prospect of accessing higher education in a host country need detailed instruction on the education system, the transition to higher education, program structure, credit system, exam system, etc.

**5. Financial support**: Financing higher education studies is a core challenge for FDMs in pursuing a higher education study for FDMs. Broadening scholarships and prioritizing FDMs in scholarships are two basic measures to take for ensuring financial support for FDMs.

**6. Cultural distance**. Cultural distance between FMDs and host country students and host country culture is another challenge, which may harm FDMs in pursuing their higher education studies. Providing guidance and orientation in the host country may help in narrowing down the cultural distance for FDMs.

It is important to note that recognizing and developing effective measures to counter these challenges require a strong political will of host countries, in the first place, to open their

doors to FDMs and develop public services for their inclusion and adaptation. FDMs are majorly hosted by their neighboring countries, which are developing countries (UNHCR, n.d.). However, the limited capacity of these countries leads to public pushback and weakens the political will to host the FDMs. Limited resources, stigmatization, and lack of access to public services cause the risk of marginalizing the FDMs. Therefore, the international community needs to take a wider role in developing and delivering services for FDMs.

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# Challenges to achieve the right to higher education for refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons in (IDPs)Europe

By **Prem Kumar Rajaram**, Professor of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Head, Central European University, Open Learning Initiative (OLIve), Central European University. Austria

## Challenges to the right to higher education

This briefing note will focus on challenges to the right to higher education faced by refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced peoples in Europe, and then will outline some guiding principles that can help enact the right to higher education.

The briefing note reflects (and is limited by) the author's experience and expertise working with opening up higher education degree pathways for this population in Europe through the Open Learning Initiative program at Central European University (https://olive.ceu.edu/) and the multi-university consortium Refugee Education Initiatives (https://www.refugeeeducationinitiatives.org/).

There are any number of challenges faced by refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced peoples in Europe. The author's experience and specific area of expertise leads to an emphasis on three particular obstacles that refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced people have in accessing the right to higher education.

### 1. Recognition of previous qualifications and learning

There are, in Europe, commonly agreed to standards on recognising the previous qualifications and learning of refugees in Europe (the UNESCO facilitated Lisbon Convention has adopted such standards) but these are unevenly applied. Qualifications assessments tend to take European qualifications as the norm against which non-European qualifications are measured, and often doomed to fail to measure up to. At OLIve we have encountered students from Syria, Palestine, Eritrea, Afghanistan and Pakistan whose high school diplomas are not recognised, meaning that students are asked to return to earlier years of schooling. We've documented this occurring in Norway, Germany and Hungary.

Additionally, an emphasis on qualifications gained rather than on actual levels of learning or knowledge can be a barrier to accessing higher education. In a number of European countries, refugee students who have completed some years of BA programs outside Europe, find it impossible to transfer credits. The emphasis on qualifications recognition procedures in Europe is on recognising terminal qualifications, to the detriment of recognising credits gained outside the European education system as well as to the assessment of actual levels of learning and knowledge that students may have. The consequence is that students who have completed most of a BA degree program, for example, find themselves having to re-apply to enter into the first year of a BA degree once in Europe.

There are ways around this, and CEU has distilled best practices in a number of European countries into a qualifications and learning recognition procedure that emphasises the academic assessment of actual levels of learning, details are here. CEU however is a private university and thus able to move more flexibly than large public universities in Europe who are hampered by national policies on recognising qualifications.

## 2. Restrictions on mobility and freedom of choice

In Europe, people with refugee status in one European country are treated as 3rd country nationals if they move to another European country, meaning that they need to get a visa if they move to study or work. However, it is unclear legally if people with refugee status should be treated as 3rd country nationals when it comes to access to discounted tuition fees (for EU residents) or scholarships. This is a grey area in Europe. Given the context of refugee nationals - they have all the rights of EU citizens except the right to be freely mobile and to vote in general elections - there is a case to be made that refugee students should have access to normal rights of mobility, access to scholarships and lower tuition fees (like EU citizens and residents).

Another barrier to mobility are 'integration contracts' that control students' mobility and life choices. Refugee students have to request permission to leave their country of residence (or in some cases like Switzerland or Germany) their region of residence for study purposes. Refugee students who find study opportunities in other countries are often denied permission to travel. OLIve has documented this occurring to people with refugee status in Norway, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland.

In addition to restrictions on mobility, people with refugee status in Europe are often denied permission to study because of an emphasis on entering into the job market. OLIve has documented instances of students not being allowed to study for further degrees because social workers believe that the right decision for these adult learners is to enter into the job market.

## 3. Lack of political willingness to provide pathways to higher education

As noted above, in many European states refugees are sometimes explicitly discouraged from pursuing higher education. Refugees are discouraged or prevented from traveling to access university degree programs or to enter university rather than work. It is worth emphasising that this means the state is involved in personal life choices in an intrusive way. It is not within the scope of this paper to reflect on the reasons why this may be so; it is worth noting however that obstructing access to higher education reflects a lack of political will to create opportunities for displaced individuals to enter into university. Another already noted outcome of a lack of political will is poorly implemented qualification recognition policies and practices.

The lack of political will is evident in more general practices. In many European countries, there is a lack of support for applying to higher education. In countries like Hungary, for example, there are no state-organised attempts to help refugees apply through the complicated applications system or understand the admissions process. Scholarships are also poorly distributed across Europe. In some countries and in some instances, like in Austria and Germany depending on different circumstances, refugees can actually lose access to state benefits (funding) should they enter into higher education degree programs.

## Guiding principles

In considering central principles that should guide how to advance and uphold the right to higher education, the following come to mind:

- States and universities should commit to implementing existing legal guidelines on qualifications recognition. This could be supplemented by exploring practices on how to academically assess and recognise actual levels of learning and knowledge.
- States should consider recognising credits gained in other university systems (and not only qualifications gained). Recognising credits can help displaced students enter into university degree programs at the appropriate stage of their learning. Imaginative implementation of credit recognitions may help displaced students accumulate enough credits - what is known as 'credit stacking' - to receive a degree.
- European states and the European Union should consciously explore the restrictions on mobility for study within Europe. This means consciously avoiding intrusive decision making that obstructs refugees' life choices (such as preventing travel to access degrees, or withdrawing financial support should refugees enter university, and clarifying the legal grey area of whether or not refugees in the European Union are eligible for EU-resident discounted tuition fees.

This briefing note will focus on challenges to the right to higher education faced by refugees, asylum seekers and other displaced peoples in Europe, and then will outline some guiding principles that can help enact the right to higher education.

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The lack of political will is evident in more general practices. In many European countries, there is a lack of support for applying to higher education. In countries like Hungary, for example, there are no state-organised attempts to help refugees apply through the complicated applications system or understand the admissions process. Scholarships are also poorly distributed across Europe. In some countries and in some instances, like in Austria and Germany depending on different circumstances, refugees can actually lose access to state benefits (funding) should they enter into higher education degree programs.

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# Challenges to the realization of the right to higher education in Colombia and guiding Principles to guarantee it

By **Andrés-Felipe Mora**, PhD, Professor, Universidad Nacional de Colombia (Colombia)

## I. What are the challenges to realize the right to higher education in Colombia?

**1. Establish higher education as an enforceable constitutional right**. The Colombian Constitution limits the right to education to one year of preschool and nine years of basic education, which must be free and compulsory. In this sense, the educational cycle begins with pre-school (at least one year of pre-school education is mandatory), continues with basic education (five grades in primary and four in secondary), followed by two years of secondary education (grades ten and eleven, which may be academic or technical). Tertiary or higher education begins after this cycle and it is divided into technical, technological and university degrees. Secondary and higher education are not enforceable as rights in Colombia.

**2. Overcome inequalities and exclusions that are reproduced in the education system in general, and in higher education in particular**. Out of every 100 children starting their first school year in Colombia, only 22 will move on to higher education and only 11 will complete those studies. In this context, those young people without a permanent disability, not belonging to an ethnic minority, having a higher socio-economic status, coming from richer regional contexts and who are educated under Western culture and knowledge precepts are more likely to access, continue and end their higher education. It must also be considered that according to the Colombian National Administrative Department of Statistics, 33% of the youth was not studying or working in 2020 (in the case of females, this percentage increases to 42%; in the case of males, it is 23%). These inequalities disproportionately affect the population that has been forcibly displaced in Colombia. Here are some data: only 8% this population has access to primary, 5% to secondary and 2% to higher education. This situation implies a clear re-victimization and a higher socio-economic vulnerability.

**3. Ensure adequate public funding to guarantee the right to higher education**. Protecting, guaranteeing and respecting the right to education means that the State should establish a fiscal policy aimed at removing Colombia from the list of countries with the highest income inequality in the world (third in Latin America and fifth in the world). Recent studies show the need for the country to increase investment in preschool, secondary and high school education by two points of GDP. Also, investments in education should amount to 1% of GDP (currently 0.39%). A public spending level close to 7% of GDP (currently 4.5%) will improve comprehensive

care for children aged 0 to 5, increase school hours in 90% of the country's public schools, extend coverage in higher education, reduce the historical loss of financing of public universities, expand their coverage and establish free-of-charge access. Public expenditure on education in Colombia is below the Latin American average and that of countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD.

## II. Guiding principles on the right to higher education in the future

**1. Make the right to higher education constitutionally enforceable**. Ensure that the political constitutions of UNESCO's member states explicitly integrate their commitment to higher education as a fundamental right to be guaranteed, respected and protected by the State.

**2. Develop the "4A" system to establish the attributes of the right to higher education**. Availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability are a set of values that can be used to evaluate higher education systems in an alternative way versus standardized rankings and parameters, which are very common today but do not reflect a special interest in monitoring strictly the full realization of the right to higher education.

**3. Openly challenge the "tyranny of merit"**. Access to higher education must be universal (for everyone) and unconditional (just for the fact of being human). This is a key point to transcend access barriers based on citizenship (migrants) or the establishment of meritocratic criteria that reproduce inequalities between the "most intelligent" and the "least trained".

**4. Establish institutional commitments to guarantee a stable and growing budget** that overcomes the prevailing concept of austerity and counteracts the privatizing trend affecting higher education. Universality and free access principles should stand out over the targeting and indebtedness criteria that are widely spread in higher education systems. Rights without budgets are just a statement; rights adjusted to targeting and indebtedness criteria become unfair privileges.

**5. Overcome the tyranny of "profitable knowledge"**. Thinking that higher education only offers qualifications for the work world is contradictory in a society that is committed to guarantee rights and democracy. Higher education systems must be committed to educating active, critical, reflective and empathetic people who are capable of living in community as equal people and exchanging ideas based on respect and understanding in very different backgrounds. Education should go beyond educating people just so they are capable of generating income and have the technical skills that match the countries' productive needs.

# Development and prospect of education pathways in Japan

By **Norimasa Orii**, Pathways Japan (Japan)

## 1. Particularity of Japan and Asia in Refugee Admission and the Role of Higher Education

Japan has signed the Refugee Convention in 1981 and has commenced Resettlement program in 2011. However, the number of refugees admitted to this country is rather limited as around 20,000 including the Indochinese refugees admitted in 1980. Japan is also known for its extremely low rate of refugee status determination as it was 0.29% of total asylum seekers who were determined as refugee in 2019.

When it is seen from a broader perspective of the context of Asian Region, quite limited numbers of States have signed the Convention (Republic of Korea and the Philippines are some of the exceptional countries) and there is no region-wide written agreement on refugees such as in Latin America or Africa, although this region has been hosting largest number of refugees. Therefore, refugee policies including that for higher education depend on each State and generally, seeking asylum is quite difficult in many of the countries. In this context, however, education pathways have shown good practices and are posing huge potentiality. Admission of refugees in education pathways can contribute not only to offering higher education opportunities but also a means to enter a host country and attain longer term legal status. While seeking asylum is not secured in some countries, obtaining student visa, on the contrary, may be rather an easier way to get legal status, and on this point, civil society can play an active role by providing the refugees with the support in the initial phase of life in host countries and capacity building for employment to attain more stable legal status.

In the meanwhile, higher education for refugees already in the country poses a different kind of challenges in Japan. Since the size of refugee communities is rather small and due to the limited public support including that for Japanese language, it is seen survival itself is the main concern of life for many of the refugees, As a result, most of the youth of the second generation stop their education at secondary level. It seems the whole supporting procedures needs to be revised to help refugees and the family to be prepared to complete secondary education and proceed to higher education.

## 2. History of refugee admission to Japan and responses to recent humanitarian crises

Below are the key corner stones for Japan to admit refugees and in recent years, it has expanded admission responding to the humanitarian crises:

**1978**: Admission of Indochinese refugee by Cabinet approval (11,319 refugees by 1990's)

**1981**: Refugee Convention Accession (841 were determined by 2020)

**2010**: Admission of Resettlement by Cabinet approval (194 refugees by 2020)

**2017**: Admission of Syrians as students (95 by GOs / 31 by NGOs by 2020)

**2021** May: Issuance of visa for Myanmarese

**2021** Aug: Admission of Afghan evacuees by Cabinet approval (Around 600 by Mar 2022)

**2022** Mar: Admission of Ukrainian evacuees by Premier's initiative (Around 700 by 23rd Apr 2022)

## 3. Education Pathways Programs in Japan

In responses to humanitarian crisis in Syria in 2015, NGOs and GOs both launched programs to admit Syrians as students. Compared with the number of refugees admitted previously in Resettlement, it can be seen the scale of admission can have a larger impact on society.

**a.** Japanese Government (MEXT) Scholarship: 50 students in 2016-2021 (plan)

**b.** Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA): 150 students with their family in 2016-2021 (plan)

**c.** Japan Association for Refugees / Japan ICU Foundation: 31 students in 2016-2021 (achieved)*

*1. Japan Association for Refugees transferred the program to Pathways Japan on July 2021.

*2. The students were admitted to International Christian University (ICU) in university pathways and five language schools in Sendai, Chiba, Tokyo, Kyoto and Okinawa in language school pathways. Students in language school pathways proceed to higher education or get employment after completion of language education.

## 4. Responses to humanitarian crisis in Ukraine by higher education institutions

On 2nd March, a week after Russian aggression to Ukraine, the Premier announced a policy of admission of Ukrainian "evacuees". Since then, around 1,300 Ukrainians have arrived in Japan as of 24th June. It is a historic event since admission of Indochinese refugees in 1980's and higher education institutions are among those various actors offering support.

- 18 universities joined the University Pathways Program by Pathways Japan and are jointly recruiting over 70 Ukrainian students. 15 have been already admitted to ICU and Sophia University.
- 25 Japanese language schools joined the Language School Pathways Program are jointly recruiting 100 Ukrainian students. Around 50 have been already admitted.
- Around 30 universities gathered in the first meeting of Education Pathways Network initiated by Pathways Japan and the Network is planning to have regular meetings to share good practices and lessons learnt.

It is likely at least a few thousands of Ukrainians are going to be admitted to Japan, and higher education institutions are taking initiatives in admission of the youth. Providing proper language and higher education through sufficient scholarship programs will contribute to the social inclusion of Ukrainian refugees and mainstreaming of refugee higher education in Japan. In addition, it is highly expected that refugees of other origins will be integrated in this new framework formed for Ukrainians.

# Higher education in emergencies: Expanding refugee-inclusive higher education

By **Manal Stulgaitis**, Education Officer, Division of Resilience and Solutions United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Cristina Sousa Rodriguez Associate Education Officer, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Higher education is recognized as a crucial element of the 2030 Agenda, key to achieving international commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals, and a core part of the process to link humanitarian, development and peace responses. Across the world's refugee-hosting countries, however, barriers to higher education prevent thousands of young refugee women and men from accessing higher education and the opportunity to pursue research, develop skills and earn qualifications. Access challenges include but are not limited to: identify documents and regularization, language of instruction, social or cultural limitations, credential recognition, education financing, access to information, distance and movement restrictions.

Today, only 5 per cent of young refugee women and men are enrolled in some form of higher education – whether in university, college, technical and vocational education and training, or online learning. This is in contrast to the average 39 per cent of non-refugee youth who have access to higher education worldwide. With the release of UNHCR's Refugee Education: a strategy for inclusion in 2019 and aligned to the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR and partners set the objective to ensure that 15 per cent of young refugee women and men are enrolled in higher education by the year 2030 (the 15by30 Roadmap).

While the global average enrolment figure for higher education is 39 per cent, stark variations exist between countries at the high end of the spectrum such as Sweden with roughly 72 per cent, Colombia at approximately 55 per cent and several countries in West and East Africa around 1 per cent. Given that the majority of the world's refugees are hosted in countries that themselves have a lower average enrolment rate, greater economic barriers to access and already high demand for access to higher education informed the 15 per cent objective, with parity as a longer term goal. Based on current population data, achieving 15 per cent enrolment in 2030 will mean that approximately half a million young refugee women and men will be participating in and enriching academic life while earning their degrees.

The 15by30 Roadmap is developed around five core education pillars for access to higher education: enrolment in national higher education institutions, technical and vocational education and training, connected higher education, the UNHCR tertiary education scholarship programmes (DAFI) and complementary education pathways for admission. The Roadmap also integrates essential enabling programmes and services that support refugee youth to effectively transition to and succeed in higher education. Access and support programmes address the need for reliable information about tertiary education opportunities, assistance navigating application and acceptance processes, language training, verification of education credentials and qualifications, information and technology skills development, soft skills training and other aspects.

It is well established that education at all levels can serve a protective function in situations of conflict and fragility while higher education specifically, positions refugee youth for self-reliance and sustainable futures, allows them to serve as role models for other youth and become contributors to their communities whether in a first country of asylum, their country of origin or a safe third country. A recent independent evaluation of the UNHCR tertiary education scholarship programme suggests that awareness of tertiary education opportunities can provide an incentive to finish basic education, particularly for girls. With higher education that is inclusive of refugees, all students can benefit from a richer academic environment, social cohesion gains, improved academic infrastructure and resources.

## Americas Regional Context

The Americas region is home to approximately 18 million refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons and stateless persons. The exodus of Venezuelans, with approximately 6 million people, and the mobility of people to and from Central America, with approximately 549,000 asylum seekers and refugees, constitute the main large-scale situations of displacement. This is in addition to the continuation of internal displacement.

Violence, persecution, massive human rights violations and limited access to fundamental rights are the main causes of displacement in the region. In addition to all these factors, the impact of climate change further aggravates the situation of displaced populations and communities at risk of displacement, exacerbating their vulnerability and accelerating human mobility.

Human mobility in the region disproportionately affects young people, who suffer limitations to regularization processes, documentation and access to adequate livelihoods that allow them to create spaces and opportunities to continue their studies. In addition to the gaps inherent to the contexts and the various risks to which they are exposed, there are also legal barriers associated with the recognition or homologation of degrees and documents from the country of origin, as well as the lack of flexibility to complete the entry processes. Despite the adverse conditions, through coordinated work with UNHCR, civil society, academia and the States, it has been possible to generate opportunities through scholarship funds, agreements between universities and the development of education complementary pathways that allow for the creation of broad training spaces not only in the country of origin but also in third countries, seeking to promote the inclusion and integration of people of interest.

**In-Country Universities**

Traditional college or university degree programmes delivered through public or private institutions located in host countries

**Technical and Vocational Education and Training**

Accredited technical education, training and skills development programmes of at least two years duration, that lead to certificate or degree

**DAFI Tertiary Scholarship Programme**

Bachelor degree scholarships funded by the DAFI Tertiary Scholarship Programme

**Connected Higher Education**

Online, distance and blended higher education programmes that lead to a tertiary degree

**Complementary Education Pathways**

Opportunities that allow refugees to access higher education and have their international protection needs met in a third country

# Refugees' access to higher education in Ethiopia: Addressing the challenges of social justice

By **Wondwosen Tamrat**, Lecturer St Mary's University (Ethiopia)

## Introduction

Higher education (HE) for refugees is widely acknowledged for its multiple benefits including contribution toward social, economic and gender equality. However, research indicates that despite its articulated purposes, access to quality education, social belonging and economic opportunities remain elusive for many refugees (Dryden-Peterson et al, 2019). Higher education for refugees still remains low on the agenda and is even perceived as a luxury in contexts without universal primary or secondary education (Sheehy, 2014). Until 2018 only 1 in 100 refugees of the relevant age was enrolled in some form of post-secondary education (UNHCR Stepping up 2019).

The UNHCR plans to increase enrolment of refugees in tertiary education from the current 3% to 15% by 2030 which means raising the number of refugees in tertiary education from 90,000 to 500,000. According to UNHCR (2019), the goal of expanding higher education access to refugees assumes significant expansion of and inclusion in quality national higher education systems, access to third-country education and connected education pathways, and overall investment in higher education opportunities.

UNHCR's '15 by 30' goal is seen as critical to enabling refugees to thrive and establish sustainable futures for themselves, their families and the communities where they live in. The plan aligns with SDG4's goal of promoting 'lifelong learning opportunities for all'. However, fulfilling this goal requires not only identifying with its altruistic motives but most importantly examining the status and implementation challenges in specific geographical contexts which often obstruct the global goals identified. This small study seeks to identify and address the status and challenges of access to refugee higher education in the Ethiopian context.

## Methodology

This study is based on a desk review and analysis of policy documents and available data on refugee higher education in Ethiopia. International conventions to which Ethiopia is a signatory to and data obtained from the Ethiopian Ministry of Education and UNHCR about refugees in general and refugee higher education in particular have been used to analyze the HE opportunities availed and the challenges faced by refugees in Ethiopia. Suggestions for future action are offered at the end.

### Refugee higher education: the issue of social justice

In many contexts, the provision of higher education in and of itself is not regarded as an effective or sustainable approach unless it ensures that there is a well-informed strategy to target underprivileged individuals (Talha-Jebril, 2021). The social justice principles embedded in

refugee education align with the principles of enabling full participation of people in society through equal opportunities, fairness for all, and respect for human dignity (Abamosa, 2021). In fact, providing opportunities for refugees to advance their education is assumed to serve the fundamental human right to education (Unangst et al., 2020).

Higher education provided for refugees can play a significant role in overcoming feelings of hopelessness, depression and low self-esteem among refugees by safeguarding them from negative life experiences, offering a sense of hope for the future and serving as a tool for building the social basis for lasting and sustainable peace and for post-conflict reconstruction (Galdwell et al., 2016). It can pave the way for refugees to acquire the skills and qualifications needed not only for self-development but to support livelihoods and competition in the job market. The inclusion of refugees in national education systems can also enhance the successful integration of individuals and communities fostering mutual acceptance, tolerance and respect (UNESCO, 2019). In addition to empowering refugee communities, access to higher education can serve as a strong incentive for students to complete primary and secondary education and especially for developing the human and social capital needed for future reconstruction and economic development in countries of origin (Gladwell et al., 2016; UNESCO, 2019).

In spite of its benefits, the realization of the right to education for refugees poses daunting challenges everywhere, but particularly in low- or middle-income countries which host about 86% of refugees worldwide (UNHCR, 2019). The challenges abound both at macro and micro levels involving a plethora of policy or operation related hurdles. Among others, issues such as the lack of comprehensive policy or strategy at national and institutional levels, the treatment of refugees as foreign students, enrolment quotas that give priority to nationals, and matriculation restrictions often appear to be key factors in determining whether refugees would be able to have access to higher education in the host country (Crea, 2016).

Even in contexts where there are positive policy directions, refugee students continue to encounter a multitude of academic and school-related challenges that can hamper their success. Issues such as the integration of refugees into local institutions, the need to modify the curriculum or learning outcomes, having proper documents and credentials, differing institutional requirements, tuition fees and teacher preparation have been often cited as common challenges faced by refugees (Tamrat & Habtemariam, 2020).

## Refugee access to higher education in Ethiopia: Policy directions and realities

Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa host roughly one in every five refugees, with Uganda, Sudan and Ethiopia hosting two thirds of all refugees in the region (UNHCR, 2020). Ethiopia has become one of the largest refugee-hosting countries at global level owing to its geographical location and the political instability and humanitarian crises in neighboring countries. It hosts around 800, 000 forcibly displaced persons the majority of whom are from South Sudan, Somalia and Eritrea followed by Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Yemen, among others (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2020). The majority of registered refugees and asylum-seekers are housed in twenty-six camps located in the four peripheral regional States of Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambella and the Somali region. The capital

Addis Ababa and other cities of the country also host refugees living out of the designated camps (UNHCR, 2020). As of June 2020, Addis Ababa city had 27,492 registered refugees of whom the majority are Eritrean nationals under the Out-of-Camp Policy (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2020).

On top of its long history of hospitality to refugee populations, Ethiopia's protection of refugee rights is guided by the various agreements as well as conventions it has signed. It is a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, the 1969 OAU Refugee Convention, the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and many other international and continental legal instruments on the protection of refugees' rights. Through its 2016 signatory commitment to the UNHCR's Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), Ethiopia has also pledged to improve the education, livelihoods, documentation, social services, local integration, work permits, and out-of-camp living of refugees without any discrimination (OECD, 2017). The implementation at the federal and regional level of the Global Compact for refugees (GCR)/(CRRF) in Ethiopia and the adoption of the 2017 Djibouti Declaration on Education for Refugees, Returnees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and Host Communities' (as IGAD member state) have strengthened the earlier commitments and have paved the way for gradual inclusion of refugee education into the national education system (MoE, 2020). Ethiopia is also committed to global agendas like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which provides additional impetus for action on refugee education. In fact, Ethiopia's Refugee Education Strategy 2020-2025 is said to be aligned with UNHCRs Global Refugee Education 2030 Strategy, as well as the emerging 2020-2024 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) in Ethiopia and specifically SDG 4 (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2020).

Following its 2004 refugee proclamation, Ethiopia developed another progressive refugee law in 2019 which has received acclaim for catering to the fundamental needs of refugees and encompassing many of the goals of the global commitments made. The new law gives refugees the right to engage in wage-earning employment; acquire and transfer property and assets under the same circumstance as "the most favorable treatment" accorded to foreign nationals. In addition to allowing refugees access to national health and education services on the same basis as Ethiopian nationals, the law gives refugees access to telecommunication, banking, financial and judicial services, identity and travel documentation and driver's license certification (FDRE, 2019). The law stipulates that every recognized refugee or asylum-seeker shall receive the same treatment as accorded to Ethiopian nationals with respect to access to education given at all levels, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships.

The above commitments have been supplemented by practical actions like the incorporation of refugees into government policies, plans, budgets and the Education Management Information System (EMIS), as well as the mainstreaming of refugee education into national and sub-national education levels. Government efforts to integrate refugee's education in the national system is reflected in the development of the Education Sector Development Plan VI (2020-2024) and the May 2019 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between ARRA and Ministry of

Education (MoE) that outlines the principles, technical and coordination arrangements between the two government entities with a long-term aim of facilitating joint efforts on the integration of refugee education (MoE, 2020). In terms of governance, regional states are made administratively responsible for management of general education and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), while policy guidance, financial contributions and management of tertiary education are provided at the national level (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2020).

When it comes to access to higher education, refugee students, who sit for national examinations and meet the minimum "cut -off" points set at a national level are in principle entitled to placement in public universities on par with Ethiopian nationals. Government provides support through its division called Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) which provides orientations, facilitates special functions such as authenticating credentials and arranging placement exams with responsible institutions and coordinates and assists specific needs that the refugees might have (Tamrat & Habtemariam, 2020). Refugees pay the same fees as nationals. The cost sharing scheme developed for local students is permitted for refugee students who, upon enrollment at public universities, are required to pay 25% of their tuition fees and settle the remaining payment after graduation and upon securing employment (Martin & Stulgaitis, 2022). Ethiopia's new refugee proclamation allows refugees access to the labour market.

The enrollment mainly takes place through three major routes: international scholarships provided by UNHCR, host-country scholarships given by the Ethiopian government and paid enrollment thorough refugees own self-financing schemes (Tamrat & Habtemariam, 2020). A significant number of foreign students in Ethiopian HEIs are drawn from free local scholarships offered by the Ethiopian government the highest share of which is taken by refugees sheltered in the country. In 2017, there were more than 1500 students who were given government scholarship. Twenty-five public and one private higher education institutions currently host UNHCR's popular international scholarships for refugees known as the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund (DAFI). The Government of Ethiopia subsidizes 75% of the education costs for DAFI scholars. In 2020, the country had the largest DAFI country programme with 816 students. The five most popular fields of studies attended were Medical Science and Health-related (236), Social and Behavioral Science (221), Commercial and Business Administration (119), Natural Science (86), Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery (37). The exact number of self-financing refugees and their field of studies is not well-documented but medicine and health related sciences still appear to be popular (Tamrat & Dermas, 2019) while the number of students could range from hundreds to a few thousands. Despite such efforts, the number of refugees enrolled in the Ethiopian higher education sector is still less than 3% of those eligible and only a limited number of students among those graduating from secondary education. The GER for refugees in secondary education is 13% (MoE, 2021).

## Challenges and mitigating mechanisms

Despite the increasing efforts to address the plight of refugees in Ethiopia, there are still a variety of challenges that need to be addressed. Among these challenges the key appear to be those related to implementing the new regulatory framework, lack of resources, poor

coordination among stakeholders and limited efforts in galvanizing the higher education community toward the refugee cause.

Although Ethiopia has won wider acclamation for its 2019 progressive law and the corresponding refugee strategy it has devised, the political, demographic and economic ramifications of the policy cannot be underestimated. Among others, the mechanisms for realizing the commitments enshrined in the new refugee law remain fussy and, given Ethiopia's limited capacity, the goals may not be attained without significant strain (Tamrat & Habtemariam, 2020). One such challenge is related to availing additional access for refugees in a country that provides access only to 13% of its own eligible student population. Arguably, the low absorption capacity at the university level which is often cited as the main challenge for low tertiary enrolment of refugees is attributed to the system's limitation in terms of addressing local needs. This is a common problem shared by many developing countries that do not have the wherewithal to absorb refugees in their systems. in fact, most of the world's refugees are hosted in countries that themselves have a lower average enrolment rate, greater economic barriers to access and already high demand for access to higher education (UNHCR, 2020).

Despite the call for availing similar opportunities for refugees on similar terms to national students and the introduction of non-discriminatory financing schemes, funding continues to pose one of the most fundamental barriers to refugee higher education (UNHCR, 2019). As is the case elsewhere, the absence of substantial and predictable external funding can forcibly shift the "big responsibility" for refugee education from global to national actors (Drysden- Petersen, 2019) which appears to be a reality in Ethiopia which lacks clear national strategy to meet this challenge. Recognizing the reliance of refugee education largely on humanitarian funding that is short-term and unpredictable, Ethiopia's Refugee Education Strategy 2020-2025 (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2020) underscores the need for establishing funding predictability on a medium- and long-term basis. Addressing the challenge requires not only strengthening the existing donor-country relationships and diversifying resources but also exploring alternative means to widen opportunities for refugee higher education. In this regard, the provision of distance and online education could be sought as an alternative cost- saving strategy but little appears to have been done in this regard. The fact that there are new developments in accreditation and recognition of online degree programs in Ethiopia is a good opportunity to enhance efforts in this direction.

As noted earlier, Ethiopia's new legislation can be regarded as a significant step in the protection of refugee rights including widening opportunities for higher education. However, there appears to be limited knowledge of this policy direction and its implications at national level and across the higher education sector which continues to obstruct the implementation process. Despite some encouraging starts there is also need for strengthened link among relevant stakeholders involved at various levels as the role of strong partnerships, old as well as new, remains key to achieving future goals (UNHCR, 2020). One of the possible reasons for this is the fact that the policy framework at the national level is characterized by fragmented directives on refugee education which are practiced outside the education sector national policy framework and multiple administrative and management structures of refugee education within the country (UNHCR Ethiopia, 2020). Among others,

changes in this direction require concerted and sustainable efforts toward awareness creation at all levels of the education strata and the alignment of tasks and responsibilities allotted to different stakeholders. Academic institutions and their community particularly need to have a good understanding of the essence of the proclamation and its implication in terms of discharging their responsibilities and meeting expectations set at a national level.

In addition to the lack of efforts in promoting refugee higher education as a component of their overall academic efforts, the level of attention provided to refugees enrolled in Ethiopian HEIs appears to be meagre or non-existent. Refugees face a variety of challenges at institutional level including academic challenges (e.g., lack of academic support, lack of academic skills, disrupted schooling, fear of classroom participation, lack of language proficiency, etc), emotional/psychological challenges (e.g., traumatic immigration experiences, low self-esteem, etc), and socio-cultural challenges (e.g., differences in values, norms and customs) which require special attention (Tamrat & Habtemariam, 2020). These challenges are often compounded by the lack of institutional policies and strategies designed to address refugees' peculiar needs. In addition to the little link between national policies and institutional actions, institutions that make refugee higher education part of their strategic plans and operational directions are very rare or non-existent. A cursory glance at the strategic plans of Ethiopian HEIs shows that the case of refugee higher education is rarely treated as an issue of institutional direction. In addition to developing proper policies, institutional responses require setting proper offices, designing support systems, mainstreaming refugee education and catering to the needs of refugee students on continuous basis. The various international offices set up at Ethiopian universities can be used to shoulder this responsibility making refugee higher education one of their operational responsibilities.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the current move in Ethiopia towards the protection of refugee rights at tertiary levels is encouraging and even exemplary in some respects. The inclusion of refugee higher education in national policy documents and efforts directed at mainstreaming refugee education indicate the level of attention the country has given to implementing its commitments. However, the full realization of this intention requires additional efforts far beyond current policy endorsements, commitments and some operational achievements.

As it stands now, despite the positive policy environment, the response of Ethiopian HEIs toward refugee higher education is characterized by ad hoc, spontaneous, and unsustainable initiatives many of which are aimed at refugees' limited access to higher education without considering the participation and empowerment dimensions of social inclusion (Abamosa, 2021). This suggests the need for reexamining and reconceptualizing the current state of affairs and designing mechanisms that address current obstacles that affect refugees fair inclusion in the system.

In the pursuit of UNHCR's goal of 15 per cent enrolment of young women and men refugees by the year 2030 the five key pathways of national universities, the DAFI scholarship programme, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), connected higher education, and complementary education need

special consideration. Success in providing additional higher education access to eligible refugees in Ethiopia depends on addressing issues of political sensitivity and strengthened economic capacity which call for wider participation and substantial assistance from the international community. Proper alignment between relevant stakeholders and forging strong partnerships with communities are needed while searching for sustainable funding schemes is also a critical move that the sector needs to make. The difficulties faced by refugee students also require greater understanding and strengthened institutional support on top of galvanizing the higher education community toward addressing the key barriers to successful refugee higher education. Focused interventions are particularly needed in areas such as providing guidance and counselling services, tutorials, and targeted pedagogic training for instructors. It is only through proper policy directions and concerted efforts that the promises made through political commitments can be realized in a meaningful way.

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# The right to higher education

## Regional and thematic consultations

These compendiums present the briefing notes shared by participants in a series of regional and thematic consultations on the right to higher education. As an integral component of the evolving right to lifelong education, the right to higher education incorporates access to higher education, participation and student success, and students' post-higher education trajectories.

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