

Michaela Martin and
Manal Stulgaitis (eds)

Refugees' Access to Higher Education in their Host Countries: Overcoming the 'super-disadvantage'

Policy Paper



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Published by:
International Institute for Educational Planning
7-9 rue Eugène Delacroix, 75116 Paris
info@iiep.unesco.org
www.iiep.unesco.org
Cover photo: UNICEF/Tadesse
Typesetting: Regent Typesetting
© UNESCO 2022



Acknowledgements

This Policy Paper has been prepared under the collective guidance of Michaela Martin from IIEP-UNESCO and Manal Stulgaitis from UNHCR. Major contributions have been made by young and enthusiastic researchers, in particular Lara Walkling and Alanna Heyer, and also Uliana Furiv and Louise Dubaile.

We would like to thank the respondents to the many interviews that were conducted by the researchers. Special thanks also go to the IIEP Documentation Centre for supporting the literature review.

We are particularly grateful to the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) which has made a generous grant to UNESCO to support activities in support of refugees and their education. Without this grant this Policy Paper would not have been possible.

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List of Abbreviations

3RP	Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
AIMES	<i>Accueil et Intégration des Migrants dans l'Enseignement Supérieur</i> / Reception and integration of migrants in higher education
ARRA	Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs
AUF	<i>Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie</i> / University Agency of French-speaking countries
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DAFI	Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative
DIAIR	Interministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees, France
DU	<i>Diplôme d'université passerelle</i>
ENIC	European Network of Information Centres
EQPR	European Qualifications Passport for Refugees
EU	European Union
EUF	<i>Entraide Universitaire Française</i>
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
GER	gross enrolment ratio
HAW	Hamburg University of Applied Sciences
HEI	higher education institution
HRK	German Rectors' Conference
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IIEP	UNESCO International Institute of Educational Planning
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
MEEnS	<i>Migrants dans l'Enseignement Supérieur</i> / Association of Migrants in Higher Education
NARIC	National Academic Recognition Information Centre in the European Region
NLG	No Lost Generation initiative
NOKUT	Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education
NUCAS	Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OsloMet	Oslo Metropolitan University
RPL	recognition of prior learning
RVA	recognition, validation, and accreditation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TestAS	Aptitude Test for Academic Studies
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UiO	University of Oslo
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UQP	UNESCO Qualifications Passport
YÖK	Council of Higher Education, Turkey
YTB	Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities

Executive summary

The number of forcibly displaced persons is on the rise worldwide, and they are displaced for increasingly protracted periods. Access to education for refugee children and youth remains a major concern, including at the higher education level. While data on refugee access to higher education remain scarce and incomplete, it is estimated that only 3 per cent of refugees were enrolled in higher education in 2021. This figure stands in contrast to a global gross enrolment ratio (GER)¹ in higher education of 38 per cent worldwide in 2018. Against this background, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has set the **15by30** target, meaning that by 2030 15 per cent of refugees should gain access to higher education. In order to reach this target, the access to host countries' higher education systems is of particular importance, as 83 per cent of refugee youth who are enrolled in higher education (for whom data are available) are enrolled in their host countries.

The present Policy Paper has analysed the empirical literature on the benefits of access to higher education for refugees. It shows that there are considerable direct benefits for refugee youth themselves, and also clear advantages for the host countries' economies and social development, to which refugees contribute. Access to higher education enhances their motivation to succeed in pre-university education. It offers identity and social position, and access to skills development and economic opportunities, including through entrepreneurship, and therefore greatly enhances their social and economic integration and life chances.

In addition to discussing the benefits of refugees' access to higher education, this paper

has taken stock of international and regional policy frameworks which commit to non-discriminatory access to higher education, with a special focus on refugees. Among the most important frameworks is Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, committing to 'equitable and increased access to quality technical and vocational education and training and higher education and research'. More recently, in 2018, the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) recognized the need to 'contribute resources and expertise to expand and enhance the quality and inclusiveness of national education systems to facilitate access by refugee and host community children (both boys and girls), adolescents and youth to primary, secondary and tertiary education'.

However, refugees face many obstacles when trying to access their host country's higher education system. These include host country legal restrictions, for instance on movement or on access to labour markets, information barriers, constraining language requirements, psychosocial and newcomer obstacles, difficulties in getting often incomplete credentials recognized, financial barriers, and physical and connectivity issues. Together these add up to a 'super-disadvantage', which makes access to host country higher education more than difficult. There are additional obstacles for women refugees, whose families may not be supportive, among other problems.

With a view to identifying inclusive policies and good practices to respond to these challenges, contributors to this Policy Paper have conducted a review of available statistical data and literature on the access of refugee youth to their host country's higher education. In addition, six selected countries with

¹ The gross enrolment ratio is the proportion of enrolments in higher education out of the relevant age group five years after the end of secondary education (typically 19- to 23-year-olds).

Executive summary

considerable refugee populations have been analysed in more depth: France, Ethiopia, Egypt, Germany, Norway, and Turkey. For this purpose, some 50 interviews were conducted with UNHCR and UNESCO officials, representatives from national higher education authorities, agencies in charge of academic recognition, and statistical offices, as well as representatives from selected higher education institutions (HEIs) and refugee students.

From this analysis, this Policy Paper presents inclusive policies and good practices from these countries and their HEIs, organized by type of obstacle to access. It concludes by presenting 15 recommendations on how host countries can support refugees' access to their national systems, arguing strongly for an 'equality of opportunity approach' in terms of national policies, and also for caring measures at the level of HEIs. The 15 recommendations are made mainly for national policy-makers and planners, but also for HEIs, who share a combined responsibility and whose actions can mutually reinforce each other. The recommendations suggested at the end of the Policy Paper are the following:

1. Include the access of refugee students to higher education in national higher education policy documents.
2. Establish intra-ministerial coordination structures for the facilitation of refugees' access to host countries' higher education institutions.
3. Adopt an 'equal opportunities policy' for refugees' access to host countries' higher education.
4. Collect enrolment information in a standardized, protection-sensitive format to enable the monitoring of refugee participation in host country higher education.
5. Make available to refugees easily accessible information on national higher education systems, admission formalities, funding opportunities, and credential recognition.
6. Offer structured opportunities for preparatory courses to allow refugees to obtain student status as soon as possible after arrival in host country.
7. Combine preparatory programmes with opportunities for social integration.
8. Provide special support and coaching programmes to women students.
9. Offer flexible procedures for credential recognition.
10. Offer flexible recognition of prior learning (RPL) policies and procedures that recognize non-formal and informal prior learning through interview-based documentation.
11. Recognize credits obtained from HEIs in home or host country and apply them to further study.
12. Offer fee exemption to refugee students or link up with international donors to cover tuition fees.
13. Provide access for refugees to national (contingency-based) student loan systems to cover their living cost.
14. Make available funding for higher education institutions to support refugees.
15. Organize and support networks of higher education institutions that engage collectively to support refugee students.

National and Institutional policy-makers: how to move forward?

01 Policy

- Include access of refugees to higher education in national higher education steering documents based on an 'equal opportunities approach'
- Allow flexible combinations of admission requirements, student support approaches, and appropriate policy adjustments



02 Funding/Access

- Offer fee exemptions, waivers, or scholarships to refugees
- Provide access for refugees to national student loan systems
- Support HEIs with funding to support refugees
- Make available easily accessible information for refugees on national higher education systems, admission formalities, funding opportunities, and credential recognition



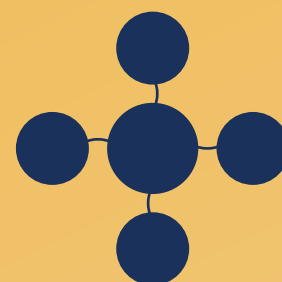
03 Recognition

- Offer flexible procedures for credential recognition
- Recognize credits obtained in HEI in home or host country
- Provide flexible RPL procedures that recognize non-formal and informal prior learning



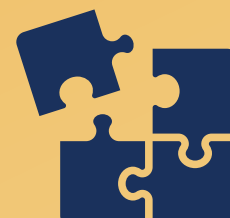
04 Coordination

- Establish intra-ministerial coordination structures for refugees' access to host countries' higher education systems
- Organize and support networks of HEIs that engage collectively to support refugee students
- Collect enrolment information in a standardized, protection-sensitive format



05 Preparation & Integration

- Offer structured opportunities for preparatory courses to allow refugees to obtain student status
- Combine preparatory programmes with opportunities for social integration
- Provide special support and coaching programmes to women students



Introduction

By mid-2020, 79.5 million people were displaced worldwide as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order. This number includes 20.7 million refugees under the mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 45.7 million internally displaced people, 4.2 million asylum seekers, 3.6 million Venezuelans displaced abroad, and 5.7 million Palestinian refugees under the mandate of UNRWA. 86 per cent of refugees were hosted in developing countries, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab region (UNHCR, 2020b). The number of displaced people was nearly double the 2010 figure of 41 million, and an increase from the 2018 figure of 70.8 million.²

Providing educational opportunities for refugees is a challenge at all levels of education, but particularly at the higher education level. According to data from UNHCR, in 2019, 23 per cent of refugee children were not attending primary schools and 69 per cent of young refugees had no access to secondary education (UNHCR, 2020d). It is currently estimated that the global gross enrolment ratio of refugees in higher education stands at about 3 per cent (UNHCR, 2020a).³

In 2019, UNHCR and partners formulated an education strategy including an ambitious target: that 15 per cent of refugee youth worldwide would be enrolled in higher education by the year 2030 — the 15by30 target. This goal was preceded by the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR), affirmed by the

international community in 2018. The GCR commitment states that ‘in line with national education laws, policies and planning, and in support of host countries, States and relevant stakeholders will contribute resources and expertise to expand and enhance the quality and inclusiveness of national education systems to facilitate access by refugee and host community children (both boys and girls), adolescents and youth to primary, secondary and tertiary education’ (UN General Assembly, 2018: 26).

Ever-increasing numbers of refugees living in protracted displacement situations make it seem likely that the issue of providing access to higher education for refugees will continue to be important. According to a pilot data collection exercise conducted by UNHCR in November 2020, 140,613 refugees in 58 countries were enrolled in higher education in 2020. Achieving the 15by30 target would mean that approximately half a million young refugee women and men will have access to higher education in 2030.

Higher education is increasingly recognized as one of the indispensable goals for sustainable development, including as part of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to provide inclusive and equitable quality education for all at all levels. UNESCO and UNHCR recognize that the provision of education at all levels must be an essential part of all humanitarian responses, and that these responses should be aligned with development goals and approaches.

² More than two-thirds (68 per cent) of all refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad came from just five countries: 6.6 million from Syria, 3.6 million from Venezuela, 2.7 million from Afghanistan, 2.2 million from South Sudan, and 1.1 million from Myanmar. A majority of refugees were concentrated in four countries. Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees worldwide with 3.6 million, followed by Pakistan (1.4 million), Uganda (1.4 million), and Germany (1.1 million) (UNHCR, 2020b).

³ This estimate includes data on national university enrolment, UNHCR tertiary education scholarships (DAFI), TVET, connected higher education programmes, and complementary pathways for admission to third countries.

Introduction

Existing literature suggests that higher education, as well as other levels of education, has a protective function against crises, marginalization, and abuse. In addition, it is a means to enable individuals to enhance their lives, and to become leaders and role models in their communities or upon return home. Access to higher education is also a strong incentive to finish basic education, and higher education completion has higher economic returns compared to completion of primary and secondary school. There are also other benefits for host countries' technological development, social innovation, and strengthening of basic education, since higher education trains the teachers of tomorrow. Higher education can enhance the skills of refugees, and provide them with qualifications and opportunities for self-development, so that they can contribute equally to the economic development of home and host countries.

While higher education has many benefits for both society and individuals, there are major barriers for many refugees who wish to access it, such as limited proficiency in the language of instruction, credential recognition, lack of financing, lack of access to reliable information, physical and connectivity barriers, and social and cultural challenges. The right of refugees to access (higher) education is grounded in international and regional policy frameworks but is not always translated into national legislation. It is also implemented in different ways in national higher education systems. Policies restricting labour market access or freedom of movement can also have a negative impact on access, as they lower learners' motivation and ability to participate in higher education.

This Policy Paper intends to shed light on the access of refugees to higher education in host countries by taking stock of available statistics, existing policy frameworks, known benefits of access to higher education for refugees, widespread barriers, and good practices at both the host country and higher education institution (HEI) levels. This Paper also suggests policy recommendations that are evidence-based and therefore grounded in reality. It draws on a review of the existing academic literature on international policy frameworks and good practices of inclusive policies and practices at the country level.

In order to compare the literature with contextual higher education situations, six countries were selected as case studies — Egypt, Ethiopia, Germany, France, Norway, and Turkey. They were chosen because they host a considerable refugee population and are known for their inclusive practices with respect to refugees in their higher education systems. Stakeholder interviews in these countries were conducted with representatives from national higher education authorities, agencies in charge of international relations, recognition authorities, UNHCR officials at the country level (Egypt, Ethiopia, and Turkey), representatives at higher institutional levels, and refugee students. Stakeholders provided information on the implementation of policies and practices to facilitate the access of refugee students to higher education in these selected countries. The Paper draws considerably on selected good practices identified, in order to provide guidance for policy-makers at the national and institutional levels in supporting greater access to higher education by refugees in host countries.

Introduction

It is necessary to clarify terminology from the outset. The term ‘refugee’ is used in this Policy Paper to refer to all people displaced outside of their country of origin and of concern to UNHCR (refugees after the 1951 Refugee Convention, asylum seekers, stateless people, and other populations).⁴

The term ‘higher education’ refers to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels 4 (post-secondary non-tertiary) to 8 (doctoral level). It refers to the broad definition coined by UNESCO in its World Declaration of Higher Education as ‘Higher education encompass[ing] all types of education (academic, professional, technical, artistic, pedagogical, distance learning, etc.) provided by universities, technological institutes, teacher training colleges, etc., which are normally intended for students having completed a secondary education, and whose education objective is the acquisition of a title, a degree, certificate, or diploma of higher education’ (UNESCO, 1998).

The scope of this Policy Paper is limited to issues of access to HEIs within host country systems. Progression within and completion of higher education and access to the labour market are not within its scope, as this would have considerably widened the issues under consideration. While there are other means to access higher education, such as online higher education programmes and complementary pathways for admission to third countries, this Paper does not analyse

those avenues.⁵ With more than 83 per cent of all refugee higher education enrolment taking place in host countries, available refugee enrolment data show that host country enrolment has by far the largest potential to provide refugees with access to higher education, and will therefore be the focus of this Paper.

The Policy Paper is organized in five parts. The first part presents an overview of access to higher education in general and existing opportunities for refugees to access higher education, in comparison with non-refugee students. The second part discusses the benefits of access to higher education for refugees, from both an individual and host country perspective, underpinned by empirical evidence. The third part presents the international policy landscape supporting refugees’ access to higher education. The fourth part discusses common obstacles faced by refugees when trying to access higher education in their host country. The fifth part presents good practices, at both the country and institutional level, which facilitate and support greater access by refugees to higher education in the host country. Building on the good practices identified, the sixth and last part presents recommendations for governments and other stakeholders to facilitate the access of refugees to their higher education systems.

⁴ Article 1 of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) defines refugee as a person who: owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

⁵ Refer to UNHCR documentation on other pillars of access to higher education here: www.unhcr.org/tertiary-education.html.

1. Access to higher education internationally: where do refugees fit in?

Access to higher education has rapidly increased worldwide. This has been true in all world regions, but in particular in middle-income countries. While refugee participation in higher education has increased in recent years,⁶ the proportion of refugees who access higher education is significantly less than the proportion of host communities that access higher education. This chapter presents some key figures on changes in access to higher education worldwide, and existing (though scarce) statistics on refugee access to higher education. It discusses general and alternative conditions for gaining access to higher education, with particular reference to recognition of prior learning by refugees.

1.1. Access to higher education globally

Over the past two decades, access to higher education has greatly expanded throughout the world. Between 2000 and 2018, the global gross higher education ratio (GER) increased from 19 to 38 per cent (UNESCO-UIS, 2019). This rapid increase in access internationally marks an increase in social aspirations to higher education, in particular by students from middle-income countries. This evolution has been widely due to the rapid development of private higher education, which today accounts for nearly a third of all enrolments worldwide.

However, there are large differences between regions: Central and Eastern Europe stand at the top with a GER of 85.3 per cent (in 2018), while sub-Saharan Africa stands at only 9.2 per cent, although absolute enrolment figures in sub-Saharan African higher

education doubled between 2000 and 2018. There is also a difference between the global GER in higher education for women (41.7 per cent) and men (36.2 per cent).

International student mobility increased from 2.2 million people accessing higher education abroad in 1998 to 5.6 million in 2018 (OECD, 2020). The number of international students attending HEIs in countries other than their own has grown on average by 4.8 per cent per year between 1998 and 2018. Although OECD countries host the great majority of international and foreign students, the fastest growth has been among internationally mobile students enrolled in non-OECD countries (OECD, 2020).

For students from marginalized groups, higher education is one of the strongest factors enhancing life chances (Gray, 2013). However, these groups face major difficulties when trying to access HEIs. Socio-economically disadvantaged groups, minorities, students with disabilities, and women in low-income countries face severe disadvantage. This is particularly true in the poorest countries (McCowan, 2016).

When compared with other disadvantaged students from the host country, refugee students face what is called a 'super-disadvantage' (Lambrechts, 2020). As already mentioned in the introduction, it is currently estimated that their GER stands around 3 per cent. Only a limited number make it to and through secondary education, resulting in an even smaller pool of individuals prepared and qualified to take up higher

⁶ It is estimated that their GER has increased from 1 to 3 per cent over the past three years.

1. Access to higher education internationally: where do refugees fit in?

education. Many refugees face financial, information, language, and social barriers, and sometimes credential issues, which combine to make their access to higher education particularly difficult. These obstacles will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 4.

1.2. Access of refugees to higher education: what do we know?

Statistics on the access of refugees to higher education on a national level are rare, and it is therefore difficult to obtain a full and clear picture of refugees' access to higher education internationally. Refugee students are often enrolled as international students at HEIs. Important data and privacy regulations often prohibit the capture of information about refugee or immigration status within higher education enrolment management systems, and therefore HEIs do not usually account for refugee students as a separate category.

Many countries do, however, try to collect data on refugees' enrolment and estimate the number of refugee students they are hosting. Turkey, for instance, provides data on refugees' enrolment in higher education, based on the students' nationality: for example, all students with Syrian nationality are counted as refugee students. But not all Syrians are refugees and not all refugees are Syrians. In France, available statistics on refugees are derived from the number of participants in support programmes set up for refugees. The German Rectors' Conference (*Hochschulrektorenkonferenz*) collected data via a survey of member universities about the number of refugee students who enrolled in regular degree programmes, but also included those who participated in special preparatory programmes and used counselling services. UNHCR collects international data on the access of refugees to host countries from the countries where the agency works.

BOX 1

UNHCR pilot data collection exercise

In November 2020, UNHCR conducted a pilot data collection exercise on refugees' access to tertiary education, to help close the gap of systematic statistics. Different sources in 58 countries reported data (academic, non-governmental organizations, state providers). The following categories of education were distinguished: in-country college or university, connected higher education (online, distance, or blended programme), and technical and vocational education and training (TVET). There are also Third Country Education Pathways for Admission, applying to refugees who move to a country other than the country of first arrival through higher education access programmes. UNHCR also lists separately the number of recipients of the UNHCR tertiary education scholarship programme known as DAFI.⁷

⁷ The Albert Einstein Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) is UNHCR's tertiary scholarship programme, which supports young refugees and returnee students to earn an undergraduate degree in their country of asylum or home country. It is supported by the governments of Germany, Denmark, and the Czech Republic, UNHCR, and private donors.

1. Access to higher education internationally: where do refugees fit in?

The exercise has shown that 96,417 refugees were enrolled in higher education in 2020 worldwide, across the five pathways and in the 58 countries that provided data: 80,322 refugee students were enrolled in a host country college or university, 7,087 were enrolled while receiving a DAFI scholarship, 6,526 were enrolled in TVET programmes, 2,432 were enrolled in connected education, and 50 were enrolled in Third Country Pathways. Women refugee students tend to be less well represented than men. For example, only 41 per cent of refugees enrolled in the UNHCR tertiary refugee scholarship programme (DAFI) are women, in contrast to global enrolments where women form the slight majority (UNHCR, 2019c).

These data show clearly that most refugee students are enrolled in a host country college or university, which forms the most promising avenue for widening their access to higher education. The need for more reliable data on refugee enrolment remains a major concern. It is currently being considered by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, which has been working on a global data platform on education in emergencies, including the situation of refugees and migrants. The current, highly fragmented data sources are being mapped out and a common framework to create comparable data is under development.⁸

1.3. General and alternative conditions for accessing higher education

Under the current international agenda, SDG-4, and Education 2030, the notion of equitable access is at the centre of education policies. Equitable higher education

systems ensure that an individual's potential for achievement at higher levels of education is not based on personal and social circumstances, such as socio-economic status, gender, ethnic origin, immigrant status, place of residence, age, disability, or refugee status.

Access to higher education can be guided by various policy approaches, and perspectives on equitable access to higher education have changed over time. In the nineteenth century, the norm was 'inherited merit', based on an individual's particular circumstances such as gender and social class. Now, nearly all countries have adopted either the 'equality of right' or 'equality of opportunity' approach to access to their higher education systems. 'Equality of right' means that everyone should be treated in the same way, independent of individual circumstances. 'Equality of opportunity' implies that unequal treatment, such as affirmative action, is justified in order to redress severe social disadvantage attributable to past unequal treatment (Goastellec, 2010; McCowan, 2016; Santiago et al., 2008). This Paper argues that refugees' access to higher education clearly requires an equality of opportunity approach, given the 'super-disadvantage' that they face.

Access to higher education is generally based on completion of a secondary education qualification. Depending on the type of institution or study programme, candidates for higher education may also be required to take an additional entrance examination or undergo an interview. Inflexible access conditions to higher education can be a considerable hurdle for all candidates facing a disadvantage, and in particular for

⁸ Interview with Bindu Sunny of UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 13 January 2021.

1. Access to higher education internationally: where do refugees fit in?

refugees facing the many obstacles that will be discussed in Chapter 4. For an overview of access conditions to host countries for refugee students, see Annex 2.

However, some higher education systems have become accessible to a wider range of learners than the regular secondary school leaver. Adult learners, including refugee students, and those returning to higher education following an interruption of studies, may sometimes not meet conventional entry requirements. This creates the need for alternative means of entry into higher education which consider candidates' backgrounds and special circumstances. For instance, access can be facilitated through special admissions, aptitude or university entrance tests, and recognition, validation, and accreditation of prior learning, as well as through preparatory programmes and bridging programmes that enable progression to higher learning.

Most commonly, individuals who enter higher education for the first time do so at the level of a short-cycle (ISCED 5) or bachelor's (ISCED 6) programme. Some countries also have integrated first-degree programmes where new entrants can access higher education at the master's level (ISCED 7); however, first-time entry into such programmes tends to be less common (OECD, 2019).

A recent IIEP survey⁹ brought to light that a more diverse range of pathways is available to facilitate entry to a short-cycle programme

(ISCED level 5) compared to a bachelor's or equivalent programme (ISCED level 6). This is not surprising, given that short-cycle qualifications generally provide entry to the labour market as well as (sometimes) progression to more advanced learning. They often serve a more diverse group of learners who require different entry pathways. Short-cycle programmes therefore have a stronger potential to bring students who did not follow a traditional pathway into higher education (Slantcheva-Durst, 2010).

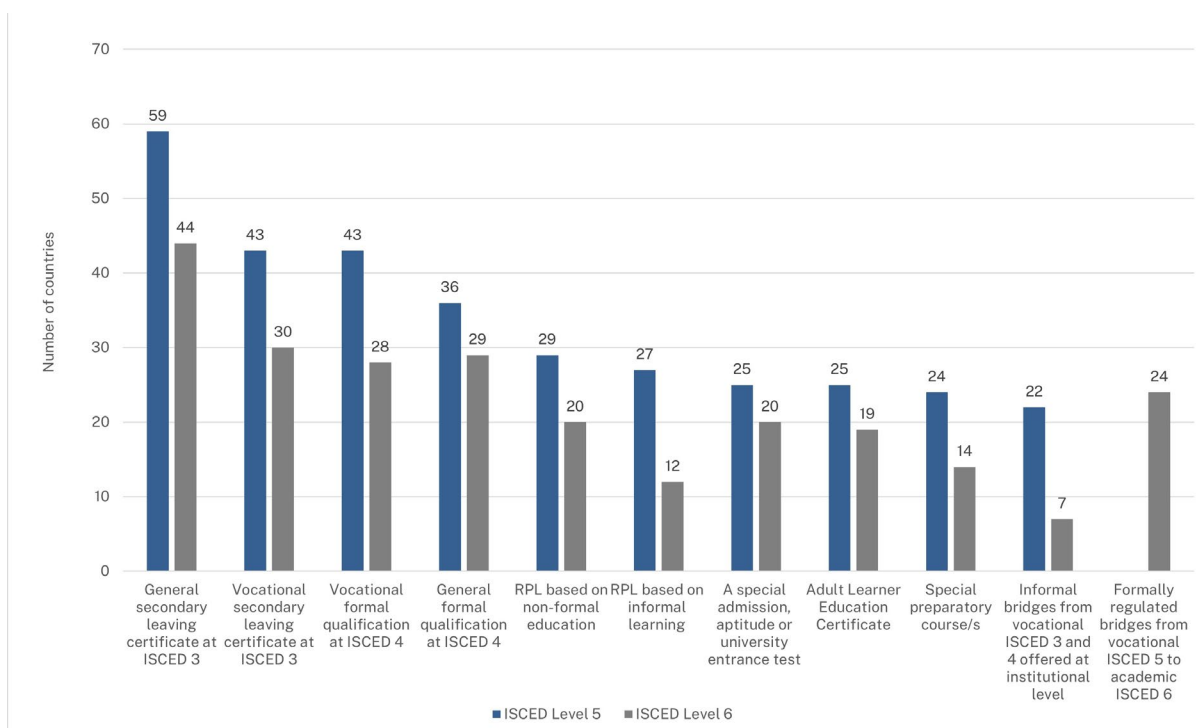
Survey findings show (Figure 1) that most commonly a short-cycle degree programme (or an equivalent ISCED level 5 programme) can be accessed through a general secondary leaving certificate (available in 59 countries), a vocational secondary certificate (43 countries), or a vocational formal qualification (43 countries).

By contrast, a bachelor's degree programme (or an equivalent ISCED level 6 programme) is more difficult to access through non-conventional entry requirements. Entry at this level is achieved most frequently through a general secondary leaving certificate (available in 44 countries), a vocational secondary leaving certificate (30 countries), or a general formal qualification at ISCED level 4 (29 countries). This finding suggests that admission to higher education at the bachelor's level is frequently more rigid than that at the short-cycle level.

⁹ In 2019, IIEP-UNESCO conducted an international survey among UNESCO member states on flexible learning pathways to higher education. The survey investigated general and alternative modes of entry to higher education. Countries that responded to the survey were therefore asked to list the pathways that they have in place to allow access to higher education, namely ISCED level 5 (e.g. short-cycle degrees) and ISCED level 6 (e.g. bachelor's degrees) programmes.

1. Access to higher education internationally: where do refugees fit in?

Figure 1. Entry pathways to higher education, global



Source: IIEP-UNESCO (unpublished).

1.4. Recognition of prior learning for refugees

The above-mentioned survey findings also reveal that recognition of prior learning (RPL), particularly that acquired in non-formal or informal settings, is not yet a common practice across higher education systems. In systems that do recognize RPL, this is more frequently used to facilitate entry to short-cycle than to bachelor’s or equivalent programmes. This corroborates the earlier finding that entry to higher education at the level of short-cycle programmes is somewhat more flexible compared to access to bachelor’s level provision.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines the RPL as ‘a process of identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying formal, non-formal and informal learning outcomes against standards used in formal education and training’ (ILO, 2018: 9). Non-formal learning results from activities that contain an important learning element but are not exclusively designated as learning activities, while informal learning results from activities at work, at home, or in leisure time (ILO, 2018). Formal learning takes place through specially designed training with precise learning objectives.

1. Access to higher education internationally: where do refugees fit in?

The recognition, validation, and accreditation (RVA) of prior learning is a key to establishing flexible pathways between formal and non-formal education and to encouraging lifelong learning. The design and scope of RVA systems differ between countries, but there are usually three key stages of the process (ILO, 2018):

1. Awareness and information, which includes awareness of potential applicants about the process, the general availability of information, and transparency of the steps of the RPL process.
2. Counselling and facilitation, which includes the availability of counselling, guidance, and pre-screening opportunities.
3. Assessment and certification, which includes a final assessment via a test or demonstration and, if applicable, information on shortcomings and potential ways to overcome them.

Given refugees' interrupted educational biographies due to flight or the reasons that led to flight in the first place, RPL can facilitate their access to host country higher education systems, as they are often unable to bring their credentials with them. In these cases, measures for recognizing undocumented credentials (discussed in Chapter 5) are not sufficient. Most national RPL systems focus on the recognition of work-related qualifications and on the facilitation of labour market access.

A limited number of countries have RVA procedures to facilitate access to higher

education or recognize equivalent qualifications. France is an example of a country with a well-established and legally based practice of recognition of prior learning. RPL in France offers a special procedure for refugee students, taking into account their particular circumstances.

Other countries, such as Finland and Turkey, have similar initiatives. The initiative 'Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland', supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture, aims to identify and recognize the prior learning of highly educated immigrants and direct them to higher education opportunities or into the labour market.¹⁰ The purpose is to ensure that the previous studies and degrees of highly educated immigrants are rapidly identified and recognized according to national policies so that individuals can be efficiently directed to appropriate education and career paths. Eight HEIs participate in the initiative.

The Turkish Council of Higher Education issued an instruction in 2018 describing the basic principles of RPL but delegating the responsibility for applying RPL procedures to university senates. Two HEIs have since established RPL principles and procedures. Prior learning can be assessed through exemption exams or work experience portfolios, and certificates from other universities can also be recognized (Akkök, 2019).

In some situations, the recognition of prior learning may be subject to the acquisition of complementary learning organized by HEIs. The Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet)

¹⁰ www.oph.fi/en/simhe-services-higher-education-institutions.

1. Access to higher education internationally: where do refugees fit in?

BOX 2

Recognizing prior learning in France with special provisions for refugees

France has created the Validation of Acquired Experience (VAE – *Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*), a tool for recognizing academic, professional or personal skills which allows direct integration into a training programme or occupation (subject to a minimum of one year of experience directly related to the targeted certification). The objective is to bring the targeted certification in line with the level of responsibility already acquired by the candidate, to have their skills recognized, and to obtain a certification that can take the form of a diploma, a title, or a certificate of professional qualification. Since 2020, the National Agency for Adult Vocational Training (AFPA – *Agence nationale pour la formation professionnelle des adultes*) has established a more flexible and simplified procedure for refugees who cannot document their experience. This specific system, which is still in the experimental stage, enables them to be assessed and supported in their certification project through interviews, support workshops, and 'job dating' sessions, when refugees are able to meet with employers. This flexibility in the examination of refugees' files allows them to be integrated more easily and with less discrimination with regard to their situation. In October 2020, 1,000 validations of prior learning courses were implemented for newcomers, that is to say those who have held a residence permit for less than five years.

Source: www.vae.gouv.fr/.

in Norway, for instance, has developed a complementary educational programme for people with a refugee background and an education in nursing, teaching, or engineering from their home country.¹¹ A fourth course in bioengineering will start soon. The aim of these complementary courses is to provide refugees with the opportunity to be authorized to practice their profession in Norway. Applicants must first apply for recognition of their foreign qualification at the Department of Health (nurses) or at the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance

in Education (NOKUT) (teachers and engineers). If the application is rejected, they can apply for the bridging course.¹²

These initiatives illustrate existing models for more flexible access in a number of higher education systems. Recognition of prior learning, including that obtained in non-formal and informal settings, is a promising avenue for refugee students, given their interrupted trajectories, which are often linked with difficulties in documenting their prior learning.

¹¹ www.oslomet.no/studier/studietilbud-flyktninger-asyloskere

¹² Interview with representative of OsloMet on 11 March 2021.

2. Benefits of higher education for refugees and host countries: what is at stake?

This section will discuss existing evidence of the benefits for refugees and their host countries when refugees participate in higher education. It will first explore the broader benefits of higher education for development, which are not specific to refugees, but to which refugees contribute. It will then discuss the benefits of higher education for refugees at the individual level, and the benefits that accrue to host countries when they widen the participation of refugees in their national higher education systems.

2.1. Benefits of higher education for development

When discussing the general benefits of higher education for development, the available literature emphasizes impacts on economic and social development. Regarding economic development, higher education increases individual earning power and supports the development of knowledge and skills for active participation in the labour market. With respect to social benefits, higher education contributes to better-engaged societies and strengthens the development of institutions and systems, which consequently contributes to overall social development.

Promotes economic, technological, and social development

The benefits of higher education for economic development are strongly supported by research (Howell, Unterhalter, and Oketch, 2020; Ma, Pender, and Welch, 2016; Oketch, McCowan, and Schendel, 2014). Economic growth and higher earnings are among the strongest results of higher education for society and individuals respectively. The rates of return for higher education graduates are the highest in the entire educational system – an estimated 17 per cent increase

in earnings compared with 10 per cent for primary and 7 per cent for secondary education (Montenegro and Patrinos, 2014). Oketch, McCowan, and Schendel (2014) indicate that the impact of higher education on individuals from lower- and lower-middle-income countries can be seen in the increase of their earnings and macro-level economic benefits for those countries. In the OECD report *Education at a Glance 2020*, the authors indicate that in the OECD countries those with a higher education degree earn 54 per cent more on average than those with an upper secondary education. For example, in countries like Chile young adults with a master's degree earn more than double the amount earned by recent graduates from the upper secondary programmes (OECD, 2020). People with secondary or tertiary level education tend to withstand shock better. During the 2008 debt crisis, for example, unemployment among people with a tertiary education rose by only 1.1 per cent between 2008 and 2009, while for those with a lower secondary level education unemployment rose by 2.8 per cent (OECD, 2021). Differences between unemployment rates for tertiary education graduates in higher- and lower-income countries, however, are evident. Unemployment rates for tertiary graduates are highest in low-income countries, suggesting that better access to higher education must be accompanied by other measures, such as alignment to the labour market and employers' needs, in order to improve employment outcomes (World Bank, 2017: 91).

Women benefit even more from higher education qualifications, in improved salaries and employment prospects. Women with a secondary school education may earn twice as much as those with no formal education, while women with a higher education degree may make three times as much. Furthermore,

2. Benefits of higher education for refugees and host countries: what is at stake?

it is the investment in the final years of higher education that results in the greatest gains (Wodon et al., 2018). However, in many countries women with tertiary education still earn only 77 per cent of what their male peers earn (OECD, 2020).

Contributes to a healthy and engaged civil society

Further study by Ma, Pender, and Welch (2016) suggests that higher education qualifications positively impact individuals' well-being, improve health, and reduce health care costs. Healthy and educated individuals are more likely to be actively engaged in societal development. For example, in 2015, 39 per cent of US adults 25 years or older with at least a bachelor's degree reported volunteering in their communities, compared to 16 per cent of adults with only a high school diploma. Similarly, among the 8,347 individuals enrolled in the UNHCR tertiary refugee scholarship programme worldwide, 39 per cent participated in community engagement or volunteer activities during the 2019 academic year. Highly educated individuals are also more likely to vote in elections. In 2014, the voting rate for the midterm elections in the US was 45 per cent for adults between 25 and 44 years old with a higher education degree, and 20 per cent for high school graduates of the same age.

2.2. Benefits of refugees' access to higher education for host countries and countries of origin

While the general benefits of access to higher education also apply to refugees, there are specific benefits for refugee individuals and their host and home countries. The following

section will discuss these benefits, which include social inclusion, development of human capital, and transfer of skills and knowledge, as well as empowerment of refugees and support of sustainable solutions.

Develops human capital and acquisition of transferable skills

Higher education plays an important role in the development of social and human capital, which forms the basis for social and economic reconstruction and development. Higher education supports the development of human capital, through which refugee students and graduates contribute to strengthening or rebuilding their communities. A study commissioned by the Brookings Doha Centre in 2015 has found that higher education systems can support conflict-affected countries by providing refugees with skills and knowledge necessary for reconstruction and economic development as well as the development of governance systems (Gladwell et al., 2016).

Providing higher education opportunities for refugees has been shown to support socio-economic upward mobility and also to enable greater participation by refugees in the job markets of host countries, depending on host country labour markets and the right to work (Baker, Ramsay, and Lenette, 2019). The GEM Report (2018) supports the evidence on the benefits of higher education for the social and economic mobility of refugees. Refugees with higher education qualifications can access higher-skilled and better-paid jobs, as well as building networks and connections in the host countries. For example, among 5,000 holders of the DAFI scholarships¹³ in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe, some 75 per cent were able to integrate into their

¹³ The DAFI scholarship is mainly provided to qualified refugees to earn an undergraduate degree in the host country (country of asylum).

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host countries and 93 per cent who repatriated were employed. Many of these graduates later held leadership positions in their host societies (GEM, 2018).

HEIs can provide courses and training to support refugees to bridge knowledge gaps or gain new expertise to amplify their entrepreneurship. According to the report *Policy Guide on Entrepreneurship for Migrants and Refugees* (UNCTAD, 2018), a number of universities in the UK, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Greece, and other countries offer entrepreneurial training for refugees. This training provides them with ‘access to and training in technologies for the development of new products, access to and training in technologies for the development of their businesses (e.g. marketing), training in digital skills that are needed in high-growth sectors (e.g. coding and digital fabrication) and digital technologies that facilitate further learning (e.g. online entrepreneurship and higher education courses)’ (UNCTAD, 2018: 64). The training showed positive outcomes for refugees utilizing entrepreneurial skills, creating businesses, and promoting networks and sharing skills for the local labour market.

Encourages social inclusion and civic engagement

Higher education can play an important role in promoting and facilitating refugee integration in host countries. Refugees who participate in higher education may more easily integrate into host communities and economies. Crea and McFarland (2015) found that, like other students, refugee students who participated in higher education felt more engaged in their host communities, as they spent time in the classroom and on campus with students from their host countries.

Additionally, higher education may have benefits for better civic engagement of refugees. As an example, the DAFI Programme incorporates community service into higher education scholarships provided for refugee students. In 2019, 39 per cent of the DAFI student body worldwide engaged in volunteer work. DAFI students volunteered with local and community-based organizations and also with international organizations (UNHCR, 2019a).

Empowers refugees and supports durable solutions

Refugees who complete higher education can also take an active role in the reconstruction and economic development of their host countries or countries of return in the future. In interviews with refugee students, Crea and McFarland (2015) report that higher education empowers refugees and expands their world view. These benefits form the foundation for social inclusion, sustainable peace, and post-crisis recovery (Baker, Ramsay, and Lenette, 2019). The skills acquired by refugee students can contribute significantly to peace-building upon return to their home country. A study conducted by Coffie (2014) demonstrated that Liberian refugee returnees from Ghana and Guinea who had access to higher education in their host countries demonstrated the use of professional knowledge and skills for peace-building in Liberia upon return.

2.3. Individual benefits of higher education for refugees

The literature also mentions the benefits of higher education for individuals. The prospect of higher education serves as a strong incentive for refugee children to complete primary and secondary education,

2. Benefits of higher education for refugees and host countries: what is at stake?

improving the quality of their lives and giving them hope for the future. It is also significant for providing refugees with a positive identity and protects them from violent situations or crises.

Incentivizes to complete basic education

Several studies indicate that the mere availability of higher education can serve as a great incentive for refugee students to complete basic education. It has been found that in instances when higher education was available, refugees reported higher motivation to finish primary and secondary education levels (Gladwell et al., 2016; Tamrat, 2020). This finding has also been supported by the UNESCO research on *Education in Emergencies* (UNESCO, 2016b). The dropout rates of refugee children and youth decrease in host countries where higher education is provided as an option for the future (Sherab and Kirk, 2016). But the sheer availability of higher education is not enough; it also has to be accessible from a financial point of view. World Bank impact evaluations find that ‘student financial assistance [is] effective in improving transition rates from secondary to higher education’ (World Bank, 2017). And the provision of information on higher education opportunities and additional support (e.g. scholarships, financial aid, peer support) is important for improving the access and retention of refugee students.

Improves quality of life and offers a sense of hope

There is also evidence that higher education can have benefits for enhancing equity and quality of life of refugees (Howell, Unterhalter, and Oketch, 2020; UNHCR, 2015a).

Access to higher education can have positive effects for refugees’ sense of belonging and later impacts their social connection in the host countries (Baker, Ramsay, and Lenette, 2019). Higher education can have a positive influence on the mental health of refugees and improve their self-esteem, provide hope for the future, and develop resilience (GEM, 2018; Tamrat, 2020).

Promotes a positive identity and protects from violence

Multiple studies point to the development of positive identity and self-esteem in refugees as a result of education more generally, and higher education in particular. For example, education can contribute to social cohesion and prevention of conflict (IIEP-UNESCO, 2015). In addition to associating their identity with the difficulties that they face (such as lack of food, health, security, or shelter), refugees can view themselves as ‘students’ or ‘scholars’. While some studies suggest that higher education campuses can be unsafe, since refugee students may be exposed to targeted attacks and protests, the ‘student’ identity can also prevent young people from being associated with violent situations during conflicts (Gladwell et al., 2016). Hence higher education fulfils a dual function, providing refugees with necessary skills while also ensuring their security, stability, and sense of belonging (Sherab and Kirk, 2016; UNHCR, 2015a).

Presents specific benefits for women refugees

Besides the social obligation¹⁴ that countries must meet in terms of providing equal educational opportunities for all citizens without

¹⁴ Social obligation refers to governments’ duty to create policies that benefit society at large.

2. Benefits of higher education for refugees and host countries: what is at stake?

discrimination, the literature also highlights the importance of higher education specifically for refugee girls and women. While higher education may also create risks for women and girls in terms of marginalization within their communities, the studies mention significant benefits for girls and women, including higher earnings, improved standards of living, reduced early childbearing and number of children, planned fertility, improved health, nutrition, and well-being, improved agency and decision-making, and enhanced social capital (Morlang and Watson, 2007; World Economic Forum, 2020; OECD, 2020). There are also specific economic benefits for educating women and girls: higher earnings, gains in welfare, and budget savings for host countries and countries of return (Wodon et al., 2018). Higher education

is also significant for gender equality and empowering girls and women to become role models and contribute to peace-building and reconstruction (see Box 3).

In short, the literature recognizes the many benefits of higher education for refugees in two ways: for society (host countries and countries of return) and for individuals. However, it should be noted that the policies and practices of host countries regarding the status of refugees and access to the labour market play an important role in the realization of the benefits of higher education. Financing mechanisms, admission policies, and in particular legal frameworks regarding the right to work can enable or create barriers to realizing these benefits.

BOX 3

Benefits of higher education for women higher education graduates

After 15 years of evaluation of the impact of the DAFI scholarship, it was noted that women higher education graduates demonstrated very high returns for all development investments, including for higher education. Women higher education graduates were able to transfer the skills gained in higher education into the labour market by being employed in fields that can have a sustainable impact on reconstruction and peace-building in the refugee communities and countries of return. They also acted as role models and reinforced the importance of higher education for others, including in the refugee communities (Sherab and Kirk, 2016). The DAFI evaluation report contains many examples of women graduates who have become role models in their communities and encouraged parents to send their children to receive basic and further education.

Source: Morlang and Watson, 2007.

3. The policy landscape: what are the commitments to refugees' access to higher education?

This section provides an overview of international legislative frameworks that protect refugees' right to access higher education. It also elaborates on initiatives to promote the access of refugees to higher education and international frameworks for the recognition of their credentials. This section demonstrates that many host countries have committed to the obligation to facilitate refugees' access to their higher education systems. Gaps remain, however, in the ratification of international commitments as national laws and the practical implementation of commitments.

3.1. International legislative framework protecting refugees' right to education, including higher education

The right of refugees to access education, including higher education, is grounded in international and regional instruments which establish the right to education for every person, without discrimination and regardless of their legal or migratory status. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in Article 26, recognizes that 'everyone has the right to education' (UN General Assembly, 1948). The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, a fundamental pillar of the normative framework establishing and protecting the right to education for all, requires States to ensure equal opportunities and conditions for education, and specifically prohibits 'distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference ... based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth' (UNESCO, 1960). Speaking directly to obligations towards non-nationals, Article 3(e) of the Convention compels States 'to give foreign nationals resident within their territory the same

access to education as that given to their own nationals' (UNESCO, 1960). Regarding higher education, the Convention claims that it should be 'equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity'.

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees refers specifically to State obligations to 'accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education' (Article 22(1)). The same Convention stipulates the right 'to education other than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships' (Article 22(2)) (UN General Assembly, 1966a).

The right to education without discrimination is further enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which Article 28 compels States to recognize the right of every child to education, including making 'higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means' and making 'educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children' (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1990). Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes 'the right of everyone to education', further specifying that 'higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education' (UN General Assembly, 1966b). The right to education is additionally recognized in the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 5(v)),

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the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24), and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (Article 10).

3.2. Agendas and initiatives to promote refugees' access to higher education

Building on the international legal framework that underpins the right to education for refugees, additional global compacts and agendas articulate the foundation of obligations related to education and higher education for refugees.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commit to 'leave no one behind', with SDG-4 setting out the commitment to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' by 2030. The Incheon Declaration articulates a Framework for Action to achieve SDG-4, and recognizes that education is connected to the realization of all other SDGs. With specific attention to the fact that 'a large proportion of the world's out-of-school population lives in conflict-affected areas, and that crises, violence and attacks on education institutions, natural disasters and pandemics continue to disrupt education and development globally', the Declaration calls for action towards 'developing more inclusive, responsive and resilient education systems to meet the needs of children, youth and adults ... including internally displaced persons and refugees' (UNESCO, 2016a). Turning specifically to inclusive higher education, Article 10 outlines a commitment 'to promoting quality lifelong learning opportunities for all, in all settings and at all levels of education. This includes equitable and

increased access to quality technical and vocational education and training and higher education and research' (UNESCO, 2016a).

The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2016, in Article 32 commits to protect 'the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all refugee and migrant children, regardless of their status', and work 'to provide for basic health, education ... determined to ensure that all children are receiving education within a few months of arrival' (UN General Assembly, 2016). Of particular relevance to the situation of refugee youth seeking higher education is the recognition in Article 44 that since 'the lack of educational opportunities is often a push factor for migration, particularly for young people, we commit to strengthening capacities in countries of origin, including in educational institutions'. In articles 57 and 79, the Declaration points to measures to expand education-related opportunities for safe and orderly migration, such as through student visas and scholarship programmes. In particular, Article 82 establishes a commitment to 'promote tertiary education, skills training and vocational education' recognizing that 'in conflict and crisis situations, higher education serves as a powerful driver for change, shelters and protects a critical group of young men and women by maintaining their hopes for the future, fosters inclusion and non-discrimination and acts as a catalyst for the recovery and rebuilding of post-conflict countries'.

Set out in Annex I of the New York Declaration, the comprehensive refugee response framework is a set of commitments, actions, and best practices in four areas (reception and

3. The policy landscape: what are the commitments to refugees' access to higher education?

admission measures; support for immediate and ongoing needs, including education; support for host countries; and enhanced opportunities for durable solutions) to be implemented in situations involving large-scale movement of refugees.

The affirmation of the GCR in 2018 signalled the next step in the process put in motion by the New York Declaration to ease pressure on the host countries, enhance refugee self-reliance, expand access to third-country solutions, and support conditions in the country of origin for return in safety and dignity. Section 2.1 of the GCR recognizes the need to 'contribute resources and expertise to expand and enhance the quality and inclusiveness of national education systems to facilitate access by refugee and host community children (both boys and girls), adolescents and youth to primary, secondary and tertiary education', in line with national education laws, policies, and planning, and in support of host countries (UN General Assembly, 2018). Section 2.4 further recognizes that measures are needed 'to strengthen the agency of women and girls, to promote women's economic empowerment and to support access by women and girls to education (including secondary and tertiary education)'.

The discussion of the above policy frameworks demonstrates that the specific right of refugees to education, including higher education, is increasingly acknowledged and enshrined in international legal texts. It also shows that there is a growing awareness of the importance of including the host country in education policy, as refugee situations become more and more long term.

3.3. Regional legislation and agendas

Signed in 2017, the Djibouti Declaration on Refugee Education outlines the commitment of seven IGAD (Intergovernmental Authority on Development) member states — Djibouti, Eritrea (suspended), Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Uganda — to develop and implement quality and inclusion standards within their national education systems. Articles 9, 10, and 11 of the Plan of Action call for 'increased refugee access to secondary education as a way to increase student numbers through to higher education,' reinforced capacity of universities to 'monitor cross-border provision of higher education opportunities,' and support for 'alternative pathways to higher education for youth' as part of an overall commitment to inclusion of refugee education in national education systems.

Also relevant to the refugee situations in the East and Horn regions of Africa, the Nairobi Declaration on Durable Solutions for Somali Refugees and Reintegration of Returnees in Somalia states the need to 'enhance, with the support of the international community, education, training and skills development for refugees to reduce their dependence on humanitarian assistance and prepare them for gainful employment in host communities and upon return' (IGAD, 2017).

Implemented across five countries hosting refugees from Syria and Iraq, the No Lost Generation initiative (NLG), as part of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), represents a commitment by humanitarian actors and donors to consolidate investments and action across sectors in support of children and youth. NLG emphasizes the need to

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continuously strengthen national education systems, promote conducive national policy frameworks, and accelerate scaling of access to quality education (3RP, 2017).

3.4. Legislative frameworks on the recognition of higher education qualifications

Where refugees do have access to higher education opportunities, the ability to successfully apply to and gain admission to tertiary study programmes almost always depends on the ability to prove prior learning and academic achievements. This is not always a straightforward process for refugees and migrants. Significant international attention has been paid to the fact that recognition of prior learning and qualifications earned in another country is vital to ensuring the smooth transition of children into school, youth into higher education, and graduates into the labour force.

In addressing this issue, some countries have put in place systems to ensure access to assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications within national frameworks, waived fees for recognition processes, or established processes to assess educational achievement where documentation is wholly lacking. Others have entered into bilateral arrangements to facilitate recognition of qualifications.

Since the 1970s, UNESCO has taken the lead in developing Regional Conventions for the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education to foster student mobility. A number of regional conventions exist, specifically intended to ease recognition of qualifications within global neighbourhoods. The Convention on the Recognition

of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab States was adopted as early as 1978, but has not been updated since then. In all other regions, a second-generation convention has been developed to take into account the specific situation of refugees. The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the Lisbon Recognition Convention) is the first of the second-generation conventions, adopted in 1997. The Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (the Tokyo Convention) was adopted in 2011, followed by the Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States (the Addis Convention) in 2014. The Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean was adopted in 2019.

These Regional Conventions for the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education contain provisions in article VII which oblige State Parties to take reasonable steps to develop procedures designed to assess whether refugees fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education. However, there is wide variation in how countries deal with the commitment they have made in ratifying the Conventions. Some have translated this obligation into national law and established specific recognition procedures for refugees, while others have procedures in place without a legal obligation to apply them. Yet other countries have no procedures in place and have not translated the obligation into national law. A report by the European Commission (EACEA, 2019a) found that in 2017/2018 in 16 out of

3. The policy landscape: what are the commitments to refugees' access to higher education?

35 European countries clear legal requirements for procedures to be followed existed, while 14 countries had not outlined any legal requirements but had applied recognition procedures nonetheless.

Lastly, in 2019 the UNESCO General Conference adopted the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education. The Convention explicitly refers to existing international commitments made to refugees. It puts in place standards for the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, stipulating the principle of fair assessment and placing the burden on countries to show why a specific qualification

should not be recognized due to lack of correlation with national education and professional systems. The Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education promotes non-discrimination and the right of individuals to have their higher education qualifications evaluated through fair and transparent means. Like all the regional conventions before it, the Global Convention contains provisions that oblige State Parties to take reasonable steps to develop procedures designed to assess whether refugees, displaced persons, and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education.

BOX 4

The UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications

Article VII. Recognition of Partial Studies and Qualifications Held by Refugees and Displaced Persons

Each State Party shall take the necessary and feasible steps, within its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legislative and regulatory provisions, to develop reasonable procedures for assessing fairly and efficiently whether refugees and displaced persons fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher-education programmes, or to the seeking of employment opportunities, including in cases where partial studies, prior learning, or qualifications acquired in another country cannot be proven by documentary evidence.

Source: Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, 2019. Available at: <http://portal.unesco.org/en>.

4. Barriers to higher education for refugees: what are the obstacles?

The widely cited refugee higher education access metric — that 3 per cent of refugee youth are enrolled in 2021 compared to the global average of 39 per cent of all youth in 2019 — is tied to a group of interrelated barriers that create unique challenges for young refugees. An important first step towards achieving the 15by30 goal is understanding the most critical barriers to higher education for refugees and, more importantly, how they relate to one another and how they can be overcome.

Recent research proposes the concept of ‘super-disadvantage’ to describe how the barriers to higher education access accumulate and exacerbate one another in the specific situation refugees face as forced migrants as well as often unwelcome newcomers to a host country (Lambrechts, 2020). Rather than establishing a hierarchy of relative disadvantage, this idea acknowledges the unique barriers facing refugees. This is especially important when many countries still do not include specific higher education access policies in their migrant integration plans, and may not consider refugees as a group with distinct obstacles and particular needs (EACEA, 2019b).

The most critical barriers facing refugees include a scarcity of opportunities to complete secondary school, limited access to reliable information, financial needs, language requirements, legislative restrictions on education access, and difficulty in validating prior education credentials and documentation. These barriers compound circumstantial or situational challenges such as the host country situation, newcomer factors, psychosocial challenges associated with forced displacement, and physical

barriers of encampment. Of course, these barriers do not operate in isolation. For example, refugee students are typically less familiar with higher education benefits and available support systems because they are new to the country and do not understand the functioning of the higher education system. Without specialized guidance and support, these conditions can compound difficulties navigating and accessing financial aid or scholarships.

The following section will offer a detailed discussion of the primary barriers facing refugees in accessing higher education. Although we will consider their general implications, it is important to note that many of these barriers disproportionately affect and exclude often marginalized groups including, but not limited to, women, students with disabilities, students who identify as part of the LGBTQIA community (due to societal expectations and structural discrimination), and cultural or linguistic minorities (UNHCR, 2019b).

4.1. Host country restrictions and context

The host country context and environment often operates alongside explicit host country policies to further limit access to higher education for refugees. In 2018, UNESCO reported that insecure host country conditions reduce students’ safety, freedom of movement, and scholarship opportunities. Furthermore, 86 per cent of the world’s refugee population is hosted in low- and middle-income countries (UNHCR, 2020b) where higher education systems are already under pressure to provide education for greater numbers of students from the host community. An influx of refugees may further stress their capacity to absorb students

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into the higher education system in light of limited financial resources, coupled with the existing demand expressed by national secondary school leavers.

Administrative and bureaucratic restrictions facing current students and recent graduates entering the workforce add to the challenge of realizing the benefits of higher education. 70 per cent of refugees live in countries of asylum with limited right to work (UNHCR, 2019d).¹⁵ Limitations include the requirement to acquire work permits or to work under strict encampment policies. Some countries do not allow refugee graduates to access public sector employment, while others only provide access to legally recognized refugee graduates and a few prohibit all access to the formal labour market.

Even when the right to work is granted, the absence of other enabling rights (such as those related to registration requirements, freedom of movement, housing, land, education, financial services, justice, and property rights) can hinder de facto access to work for refugees. As a result of employment restrictions or high graduate unemployment, many refugees end up working in the informal economy, where they risk exploitation, discrimination, arrest, and other abuses.

Other barriers to higher education for refugees include high unemployment rates and congested labour markets. Furthermore, there may be movement restrictions on refugees living in camps, policies may explicitly exclude refugees from national education systems, and educational programmes in camps may lack national recognition.

4.2. Informational barriers

A central barrier facing refugees in their pursuit of higher education is a lack of knowledge about available opportunities, the higher education system, application processes, and support mechanisms in their host country. Such information gaps are exacerbated when processes are administered without consideration for the specific socio-economic conditions and language capacities of those from refugee backgrounds, which contributes to de facto inequities in access to higher education.

Limited formal information or counselling services add to these knowledge barriers (GEM, 2018), and newly arriving students frequently report a dearth of accessible services available to help them navigate and make informed decisions about higher education. Students in this situation frequently access information via social media or word of mouth, both sources which may not provide relevant or accurate information for a given student (UNHCR, 2020c).

When information is available, in many cases the information provided (by counselling services or online) is inconsistent, not up to date, or not specific to students with refugee backgrounds. Organizations working with forced migrants often focus on the provision of more basic needs such as legal advice and resource benefits, without a targeted focus on higher education (Bajwa et al., 2017).

¹⁵ Data provided from DAFI scholarship countries (see Appendix 2) also depict a variety of situations.

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Lastly, information barriers are not limited to the application process. Once students secure an opportunity in their current country or a third country of refuge, knowledge gaps associated with benefit entitlements, the details of a scholarship, financial and legal logistics, and academic expectations present added challenges during their transition and throughout their higher education experience.

4.3. Financial barriers

Previous reporting by UNHCR and UNESCO captures the prohibitive cost of higher education due to high tuition fees and related other costs. These include application fees, documentation and testing costs, study materials, lodging, and transportation, among many others (UNHCR, 2019c). 70 per cent of refugees live in countries that restrict their right to work, which results in disproportionate challenges for income generation and hence payment of school fees.

Furthermore, costs and fees payable by refugee students vary significantly by country as well as by refugee status. Some countries require refugee students to pay tuition on a par with their own nationals, while countries such as Turkey have established partnerships with government agencies or multilateral agencies. The Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB), for instance, covers the tuition fees for Syrian students who are studying in state universities. In 2014 the government of Turkey issued a tuition fee waiver policy (for state universities) covering all Syrians under temporary protection, although this was cancelled as of autumn semester 2021/22. In some host countries, however, refugees are considered

international students for admission purposes, and are subject to higher fees than those charged to national students. For example, some public universities in Mexico impose a ‘foreigners’ fee’ (*‘tarifa de extranjería’*), but not all universities apply it, and the amount differs depending on the institution. In most countries, refugees are unable to access public or private financial aid due to limited financial inclusion, capital, and access to bank accounts.¹⁶

Even in countries where refugees are charged the same fees as nationals, education at public universities is often highly competitive. For example, students in Ecuador must earn the highest scores on national placement exams to qualify for a place at university. UNHCR is coordinating with universities in Brazil to expand the number of university places reserved specifically for refugees. Where scholarships and grants do exist, they are typically limited in numbers of available opportunities, require unique steps and processes to apply, and vary significantly in the level of funding and support they offer.

Beyond the immediate and actual costs of higher education, there are opportunity costs associated with losing out on earnings (often derived from work in the informal labour market) over the course of study, as well as years of potential debt that many students must balance with the expectation that they will support their own families (GEM, 2018).

4.4. Restrictive language requirements and limited proficiency

Limited language proficiency and restrictive requirements create another significant barrier to accessing higher education (UNHCR,

¹⁶ For an overview on fees for refugee students, see [Appendix 2](#).

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2019c). UNESCO research published in 2018 reports that, apart from Arabic in some cases, in 2015 there was almost no overlap in official languages between the five countries that most refugees were fleeing from and the five countries hosting the highest numbers of refugees (GEM, 2018). Limited proficiency in the language of instruction places an immediate restriction on students' ability to navigate the application process, qualify, and participate in national education systems. Some countries or institutions require greater language proficiency for certain degree paths, which limits some refugee students in the studies they are able to pursue.

Digital literacy places a further limitation on refugee students' ability to access higher education and information about opportunities. Refugee students interviewed in Canada reported that limited computer skills made it difficult for them to access essential information. HEIs repeatedly pointed them to websites and highly detailed online resources for support, which students found difficult to navigate on their own (Bajwa et al., 2017). Inconsistent and expensive connectivity also hinders refugee students' ability to sift through the volume of programme and application information, which is almost exclusively available online.

4.5. Missing credentials, documentation, and qualification evaluation

In the uncertain, chaotic circumstances that often surround flight, refugees may not bring credentials or education documentation with them. Documents may be lost or stolen during migration, and replacing or obtaining copies of missing credentials is often

impossible. Where it is feasible, it can be a costly and lengthy process. Most countries do not acknowledge or recognize informally obtained credentials, or partial or interrupted education, and when they do it is difficult for refugees to contact their countries to obtain written proof of such experience. As a result, HEIs often require refugee learners to repeat years of their education, which is wasteful for refugees and their host countries and can lead to exclusion, since students' economic situation most likely does not permit them to repeat their education (Bajwa et al., 2017).

Failure to recognize completed secondary education further compounds the widening gender gap in secondary completion and access to higher education. A low level of secondary education completion is one of the most significant barriers to higher education access, particularly among girls. Less than half of refugee children who start primary school today make it to secondary school. This gap continues to widen: in 2019, only 27 per cent of eligible refugee girls were enrolled in secondary education, compared to 36 per cent of eligible refugee boys (UNHCR, 2020d). UNHCR data indicates that girls continue to have less access to education than boys, being half as likely as boys to be enrolled at the secondary level. In the absence of investment in education for women, the post-COVID-19 lockdown outlook is bleak. The Malala Fund estimates that 20 million girls of secondary school age, previously enrolled, could have dropped out of school by the time the crisis has passed (Malala Fund, 2020).

Students who have completed some or all of their secondary schooling may not know how to have their prior educational documentation

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recognized. This is yet another lengthy, complex process, and waiting for it can result in significant delays in students restarting their education after flight (GEM, 2018).

4.6. Psychosocial and newcomer challenges

Apart from the procedural barriers that refugees face in accessing higher education, they may face psychosocial and mental health challenges linked to their unique circumstances as refugees and newcomers to a host country. Unlike some other groups of migrants, refugees' experiences may have included detention, torture, war, encampment, exploitation, and a lack of essential resources. Once refugees arrive in the host country, their living situation may continue to be precarious, due to protracted conflict or unsafe circumstances in their host country. These traumas can affect mental health and students' ability to deal with a new country and system of education.

Refugees in many countries experience discrimination, harassment, and social exclusion that can further affect their mental health generally and students' ability to enter into and navigate higher education. Refugees continue to be underrepresented even in those national university systems

that do allow enrolment and practise inclusion (Lambrechts, 2020). These psychosocial challenges are exacerbated by procedural barriers linked to their status as newcomers. Refugee students are more vulnerable to institutional barriers because they are new to the country and procedures, may not have the resources necessary to exert agency, and often do not have a strong social network for support.

4.7. Physical and connectivity barriers

The well-known physical barriers that limit refugees' access to higher education include remote camp locations as well as limited transportation and access to physical campuses. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent shift to online learning at many HEIs created a new set of access barriers. Many refugee and host community students struggled to secure reliable connectivity and internet without dedicated funding or the necessary hardware. In addition, as instructors adjusted to the new context of learning, students often found that material was less accessible and comprehensible. Finally, students who returned home from their campuses to continue their studies remotely struggled to find quiet physical spaces to study that were conducive to learning.

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An estimated 83 per cent of all refugees who are enrolled in higher education are enrolled in their host countries, and we have argued that this avenue offers at present the greatest potential to reach the 15by30 target. This chapter will discuss inclusive policies and good practices in terms of national policy approach, information availability, financial support, language training, preparatory programmes, psychosocial support, and recognition of foreign documented and non-documented credentials and qualifications, as well as networking initiatives between HEIs to support the access of refugees to higher education in their host countries.

Inclusive policies and good practices were mainly identified from six country case studies, in Egypt, Ethiopia, France, Germany, Norway, and Turkey. Egypt, Germany, Norway, and Turkey have received a large number of Syrian refugees, as has France to a lesser extent. Ethiopia hosts large refugee populations from South Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea. While the exact number of refugee students is not always known precisely, they represent several thousands in these countries. These countries were chosen as case studies because they had large numbers of refugees and also policies and practices to facilitate their enrolment in higher education.

5.1. Policy approach: the national level

National policies and structures play a critical role in supporting or hindering refugees' access to higher education. The general political approach toward refugees, specific structures, institutions, and processes related to higher education, and of course the general political and social situation in a country (e.g. security

issues) have a great influence on whether refugee students can access higher education.

The degree to which national top-level authorities adopt and apply a comprehensive policy approach to provide access to higher education for refugees varies. A report by the European Commission found that in 2017/2018, in almost half of the systems in Europe, refugees were not explicitly mentioned in top-level steering documents covering higher education (EACEA, 2019a). However, the absence of a top-level approach for the integration of refugees into higher education does not necessarily mean that no large-scale measures are being undertaken in this regard. Sometimes regional authorities or local institutions apply measures in the absence of a top-level responsibility or a unified approach. A progressive policy approach aimed at providing refugees with opportunities for integration and development also indirectly influences access to higher education, as illustrated by the example of Ethiopia.

The several international and regional instruments establishing the right to education for every person, without discrimination and regardless of their legal or migratory status, were mentioned in Chapter 3. However, the translation of these international conventions into national law varies widely. Many states have introduced reservations on access to education and other areas, such as the labour market, which are indirectly linked to access to higher education. Other states have introduced geographical reservations to the 1951 Geneva Convention, meaning that refugee status can only be granted to people who come from certain countries or regions of the world.¹⁷ Other

¹⁷ For instance, in Turkey only people from Europe can be granted full refugee status.

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BOX 5

Ethiopia's policy approach towards refugees and access to higher education

The government of Ethiopia made nine pledges to improve the livelihoods of refugees and foster their local integration during the 2016 Refugee Summit, including one on higher education. The out-of-camp policy, which allows refugees to live outside camps, was expanded to 10 per cent of the refugee population. This affected refugees' opportunities to access higher education, since there are no opportunities for this in the camps. Two pledges also concerned the issuing of work permits and the creation of jobs for refugees, which may also have an indirect influence, as employment opportunities provide an incentive to pursue higher education. One pledge was specifically devoted to expanding access to education (Riggan and Poole, 2019). The Ethiopian refugee law of 2019 is regarded as one of the most progressive refugee policies in Africa. It stipulated that refugees enjoy the same right to education as the national population, including higher education. It explicitly stated that recognized refugees enjoy the same rights concerning access to studies, recognition of secondary school-leaving credentials, diplomas and degrees, and the award of scholarships and tuition fee waivers as any other international students. The strategy also included the adaptation and implementation of an Education Management Information System for refugee education, which has been implemented since 2016. It serves the purpose of recording key educational indicators at all levels to monitor progress and effective planning.

Source: Tamrat, 2020 and Woldegiyorgis, 2020.

refugees are only granted temporary protection, which may also affect their access to higher education.

An important part of UNHCR's work on expanding access to higher education for refugees is national-level advocacy with host countries. UNHCR has advised several countries on the development of a national refugee education strategy. The Egyptian refugee education strategy from 2015 included the objective of access to adult education; UNHCR is the only organization to work on adult education for refugees in Egypt.¹⁸ Ethiopia's Refugee Education Strategy from 2015 includes key strategies

to provide tertiary education opportunities for young refugees: expanding the number of scholarships, harmonizing tertiary education scholarship programmes to guarantee equitable access for refugees, broadening access to professional training courses in the refugee camps, and making higher education accessible through open and distance learning (UNHCR, 2015b).

National strategies benefit greatly when there are structures that support interministerial coordination. France's interministerial delegation for the reception and integration of refugees (DIAIR — *Délégation interministerielle à l'accueil et à l'intégration*

¹⁸ Interview with representative of UNHCR on 1 April 2021.

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des réfugiés) has as its mission to participate in the definition and organization of the policy of reception and integration of refugees and to coordinate actions at all levels (local, territorial, national, associative, and academic).¹⁹ Its goal with respect to higher education is to promote access by acting as a coordinating entity.²⁰

In some countries the coordination of the national strategy to support refugee students is situated within a national organization. The Federal Ministry of Education and Research in Germany has commissioned the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to manage the support of higher education programmes for refugees.²¹ A special section within DAAD has been created for this purpose. It has also managed several programmes since 2015. HEIs can apply for grants on a yearly basis.

5.2. Exemption from fees and offers of financial support

Limited or absent funding is one of the most decisive obstacles preventing qualified refugee students from accessing higher education. Funding is necessary to cover tuition and other fees, as well as living and study expenses. As mentioned above, an increasing number of countries charge international students special fees, which can be several times the fees charged national students. When refugee students enter the category of international students, fees can be exorbitant, making access to higher education totally out of reach.

Fee exemptions

An important measure aimed at alleviating the financial burden on refugee students is exemption from fees. In Egypt, a presidential decree was issued in 2013 to exempt Syrian nationals from paying the international student tuition rates, thus allowing them to attend university on the same terms as nationals. This policy was eventually abandoned, and today only Syrian refugees who have completed their secondary education in Egypt are treated as Egyptian nationals and do not have to pay tuition fees. Syrians who have completed their secondary education in Syria pay 50 per cent of the regular tuition fees for international students, and Syrians who have completed their secondary education in a country other than Egypt or Syria have to pay the full amount of tuition fees for international students (3RP, 2020).

In Turkey, university fees for Syrian students are covered by the YTB for up to four years (the regular study period).²² As mentioned above, the fee waiver policy for Syrian students, in effect since 2014/15, was cancelled for the autumn semester 2021/22. Currently enrolled Syrian students will be able to continue to benefit from the waiver, whereas newly enrolling Syrian students will have to pay the tuition fees for foreign students. In France, persons with refugee status are exempt from paying any tuition fees.²³

Apart from tuition fees at public HEIs, UNHCR strives to secure agreements with private universities for tuition fee waivers

¹⁹ <https://accueil-integration-refugies.fr/>.

²⁰ Interview with the education, youth and culture advisor of DIAIR on 8 March 2021.

²¹ www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/expertise-on-subjects-countries-regions/refugees-at-higher-education-institutions/how-the-daad-is-helping/.

²² Interview with representative of YÖK on 14 April 2021.

²³ www.campusfrance.org/en/practical-information-daily-life-migrant-students.

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or a reduction of tuition fees: for example at the Egypt-Japan University of Science and Technology, refugee students pay only 50 per cent of the regular tuition fees.²⁴ There are numerous examples of this progressive contribution by HEIs.

In Germany, general tuition fees are not charged by public universities, but there are still administrative fees related to studying which are in some cases reduced or waived for refugee students. The DAAD funds a series of activities and initiatives to support refugees' access to higher education. In the admission phase, DAAD covers the fees for examinations and processing of applications, for instance for the TestAS (Aptitude Test for Academic Studies), which measures a candidate's general and subject-related cognitive abilities (the test is not compulsory but is beneficial in the application process), and for the processing of application documents via UNI-assist, an organization that checks the application documents of foreign applicants on behalf of the universities.²⁵

In some cases, universities exempt refugees from paying registration fees (e.g. in France), or paying guest auditor fees or fees for their language courses (both in Germany). In Germany, a resolution was adopted in 2016 by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (*Kultusministerkonferenz*) regarding the reduction of costs for refugee students (KMK, 2016). All possible costs that may have to be paid to universities by students and the legal possibilities of reducing or waiving these

fees are listed in this document. Universities can also use their hardship or social funds to pay these costs.

Scholarships

Limited scholarships for refugee students cover a range of expenses associated with higher education. Scholarships are granted by a variety of actors, and are frequently based on academic merit. Refugees can apply on the same basis as any national student. Some organizations offer scholarships especially for refugee students, such as *Entraide Universitaire Française* (EUF) in France.²⁶ The scholarship holders are also supported through occasional financial assistance. In addition, EUF finances French courses for people at a proficiency level lower than B2 to prepare them for higher education.

In Ethiopia, refugees can apply for two scholarship schemes for higher education. The DAFI scholarship programme has been running in Ethiopia since 2000 and is presented in more detail in Box 6. A governmental scholarship programme originally targeted only refugees of Eritrean origin, but was opened to refugee students from other countries in 2013. In both programmes, the government covers 75 per cent of the total cost of education through subsidies to public universities and UNHCR covers the remaining 25 per cent. Students under both programmes receive additional financial support from UNHCR. The governmental scholarships target mainly refugees who have no education certificates but qualify

²⁴ Interview with representative of UNHCR on 1 April 2021.

²⁵ www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/expertise-on-subjects-countries-regions/refugees-at-higher-education-institutions/free-integrating-language-offer/.

²⁶ <https://entraide-universitaire.fr/>.

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BOX 6

The DAFI scholarship programme for refugees

The DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarship programme is the longest-running and largest standalone higher education scholarship programme for refugees and returnees. It offers scholarships for undergraduate studies and is supported by the government of Germany, UNHCR, and private donors. Since its initiation in 1992, the programme has supported more than 18,500 refugee students. The strategic priorities of the programme are the promotion of self-reliance, the empowerment of scholarship holders to contribute to peaceful coexistence with host communities and to their local communities upon return, strengthening the protective impact of education, and providing role models for refugee children and youth. The scholarship covers a range of costs and provides additional tailored support through close monitoring and academic preparatory and language classes, as well as mentoring and networking opportunities. In 2020, 7,433 students in 53 countries around the globe were enrolled on DAFI scholarships.

Source: UNHCR, 2019a.

for university education through a placement examination. The DAFI scholarship programme targets refugee students who can document their qualification for higher education (UNHCR, 2015b).

There are also several European initiatives to support refugee students financially. The HOPES-LEB (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians and vulnerable youth in Lebanon) is funded by the European Union (EU) Madad Fund and implemented by the DAAD, Campus France, and Nuffic.²⁷ It offers up to 1,000 scholarships for vulnerable refugee youth from Syria. Scholarship holders can also benefit from preparatory courses and further postgraduate courses to increase their employability and entrepreneurial chances.

Public study grants and loans

In some countries, public loans and grants (or a mixture of both) are available for refugee students. The German *BAföG* is Germany's Federal Training Assistance Act for students at secondary schools and universities, and regulates federal student grants and loans. Eligibility is dependent on parent income. Refugee students and asylum seekers with pending cases who have been in Germany for at least 15 months can also apply for a *BAföG* loan (BAMF, 2016). The regulation was adapted in 2020 to better meet the needs of international students, because they often face difficulties meeting the narrow eligibility criteria due to their special situations (e.g. they are too old, have changed their subject of study because their former subject does not exist in Germany, or have quit their former studies), which are all reasons to reject an application for a *BAföG* loan.²⁸ In

²⁷ www.hopes-madad.org/.

²⁸ Interview with representative of DAAD on 23 February 2021.

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Norway, all students who have been granted asylum are entitled to receive financial education support under the same rules as domestic students by the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (*Lånekassen*).²⁹ Both *BAföG* and loans by the *Lånekassen* are partly converted into grants after graduation, based on different criteria. The balance must be repaid by the student.

In Turkey, only Syrian refugees receive tuition fee waivers (see above). To compensate this lack of funding for refugees of other nationalities, UNHCR has established a financial assistance programme. Students who are registered with the Turkish authorities under international protection and enrolled in a Turkish university can apply for a semester-based grant provided by UNHCR. Assistance is provided once per academic semester and a new application for assistance must be submitted each semester. Applicants are chosen on the basis of academic achievement, with 700 to 750 persons funded per semester.³⁰

Ethiopia has put in place a generous policy for refugees by opening its cost-sharing policy for tuition fees to refugee students. Upon enrolment, students sign a cost-sharing contract with the government whereby they pay only 25 per cent of the tuition fees while they are enrolled and repay the remaining 75 per cent after graduation, once they have found employment. The tuition fees cover accommodation, food, and education services.³¹

Financial support for higher education institutions

Some models provide funding directly to HEIs for the support and integration of refugee students, rather than via grants to the students themselves. This has the advantage that such funding can help HEIs to set up special support structures (e.g. a guidance counsellor for refugees) or to cover the supplementary costs that the special mentoring of refugee students can entail. It also allows student support to be channelled directly to the HEIs which are also responsible for admitting refugee students.

In Germany, the DAAD has established a new section for 'University programmes for refugees'. This section does not award individual scholarships to students or researchers (as the DAAD normally does in its programmes), but funds projects for the integration of refugees at HEIs. The Federal Ministry for Education and Research has been granting 27 million euros annually for these programmes since 2015. The funding is part of the national budget and universities can respond to a call for funding each year. Funding is provided for language and other preparatory courses offered in German universities, for student initiatives that are committed to improving the integration of refugees at HEIs, and for subject-specific qualification programmes to prepare refugee students for the labour market.³²

²⁹ www.nyninorge.no/en/Ny-i-Norge-velg-sprak/New-in-Norway/Children--Schools/The-school-system/The-Norwegian-State-Educational-Loan-Fund/.

³⁰ Interview with representatives of UNHCR on 23 March 2021.

³¹ Interview with representatives of UNHCR on 30 March 2021.

³² www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/expertise-on-subjects-countries-regions/refugees-at-higher-education-institutions/how-the-daad-is-helping/.

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BOX 7

The AIMES Programme of AUF

The AIMES programme (reception and integration of migrants in higher education) was set up in 2016 by the *Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)*. AUF is an international university network association of French-speaking universities, which promotes the development and solidarity of HEIs in Francophone countries. Through this programme the AUF offers financial support to universities involved in the reception and integration of refugees among their students. Each year, a call for projects is launched to member institutions and grants are awarded to the selected candidates. Today, this represents 40 French HEI institutions, which annually select 1,500 refugee students out of over 3,000 candidates. The purpose of this grant is to alleviate the burden of financing borne by universities in the implementation of training and programmes adapted to the academic and linguistic integration of refugee students. Since its inception four years ago, the programme has helped to train 6,000 students from 54 countries, nearly 40 per cent of whom were women.³³ In dialogue with the French government and UNHCR-France, the AIMES programme contributes to the structuring and highlighting of actions for refugees in higher education. Each year, a fundraising campaign complements the budget allocated to the programme in order to increase its financial capacity.

Source: Interview with the coordinator of the AIMES programme on 9 March 2021.

5.3. Providing easily available information

It is particularly difficult for refugee students to access information on national higher education study possibilities, admission requirements, and available financial resources, as they often do not speak the language of the host country and have little understanding of its higher education system. The provision of information in an easily accessible manner is therefore of crucial importance.

Some countries (e.g. France and Germany) provide information about access to higher education for refugees online as a first central point of information. The homepage study-in-germany.de is addressed to all foreign students who are interested in

studying in Germany.³⁴ It provides basic information in English and German on German culture and society, universities and their programmes, admission requirements, the higher education system, financing and scholarships, and organizational questions linked to studying and everyday life as a student. The DAAD has created the homepage under the authority of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. A special section for prospective refugee students and their needs is included, containing a FAQ section in German, English, Arabic, Urdu, Pashto, and Dari.

France has established a website specifically designed for potential refugee students, in six languages. The website offers information

³³ www.auf.org/nos-actions/toutes-nos-actions/soutien-linguistique-et-culturel-aux-etudiants-refugies-en-europe-de-louest-francophone/.

³⁴ www.study-in-germany.de/.

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BOX 8

One-stop access to information for refugees in France

The French [refugee.info](http://www.refugee.info) website was set up in November 2019 by the Interministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees (DIAIR), which acts as an umbrella to improve the national coordination of arrangements aimed at the integration of refugee students, and the mobilization and coordination of actors³⁵ involved in this process. The site's purpose is to centralize all essential information and support measures for refugees in France in one single platform. By addressing refugees directly, the site acts as a directory of administrative procedures, training, and cultural activities available by location. The goal is to overcome the lack of available, easily accessible, and understandable information that hinders and isolates refugees with little or no knowledge of French. The information is therefore reliable, written in simple French, and translated into six languages (English, Pashto, Persian, Tigrinya, Russian, and Arabic). Its collaborative approach encourages the sharing of any new changes or practical information to keep the site updated and useful.

Source: Interview with the education, youth, and culture advisor of DIAIR on 8 March 2021.

on both administrative procedures and available higher education programmes.

Online clearinghouses

Some organizations have created clearinghouses that provide information on opportunities for scholarships, online courses, and language learning opportunities for refugees. The Institute of International Education (IIE) is an international non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of international student exchanges, international affairs, peace, and security. It has developed the global Platform for Education in Emergencies Response for displaced and refugee students to connect with educational opportunities in formal and informal higher education.³⁶ UNHCR's Opportunities Portal houses information on a variety

of scholarship opportunities specifically for refugees, in both countries of asylum and third countries.³⁷ The database can be searched by country of origin, field and degree of study, and desired language of study.

Information on the equivalence of foreign qualifications

Databases of information on the recognition of foreign educational certificates support higher education authorities, employers, and private individuals in reclassifying foreign qualifications in terms of national education systems.

In Germany, the database *anabin* provides information on foreign qualifications to help HEIs, individuals, and employers assess these qualifications with regard to the

³⁵ www.refugee.info/.

³⁶ <https://iiepeer.org/>.

³⁷ <https://services.unhcr.org/opportunities/>.

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German educational system. The service is open access for all and free of charge.³⁸ All entries are based on resolutions by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (*Kultusministerkonferenz*) and are updated regularly. The entries are so-called 'assessment proposals' for the recognition of foreign qualifications ('proposals' because legally binding decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications are made by the HEIs). These assessment proposals are published in order to offer more predictability on recognition outcomes, transparency, and equal treatment. Foreign secondary school-leaving certificates are sometimes insufficient for immediate access to higher education, and have to be supplemented by a two-semester preparatory course of upper-secondary-level studies (*Studienkolleg*). These preparatory courses end with an assessment examination (*Feststellungsprüfung*), which in combination with the foreign school leaving certificate enables the holder to enter German HEIs.

Norway has a centralized application system for undergraduate studies. *Samordna opptak*, the Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS), is in charge of receiving and assessing applications. Information on the equivalence of foreign higher education entrance qualifications can be found on the NUCAS homepage.³⁹ There is also a list (the *GSU-list*) with information on the equivalence of foreign secondary school-leaving credentials from countries all over the world, which

Norwegian universities and university colleges use in the admission process.⁴⁰

There are also international initiatives aimed at facilitating the recognition of foreign qualifications. The international Q-ENTRY database provides information on school-leaving qualifications that give access to higher education in EU and non-EU countries.⁴¹ It is available free of charge to the general public. The construction of the database started in 2018 with a project involving five ENIC-NARIC centres,⁴² including the Italian CIMEA Centre, which is the coordinator, and the French Centre for the recognition of diplomas. The database is targeted at ENIC-NARIC centres, HEIs, credential evaluators, the European Commission and international organizations, evaluation agencies, student associations, employers, and all stakeholders involved in the recognition of foreign qualifications to facilitate access to higher education.

Study information events at higher education institutions

Some HEIs host information days for prospective refugee students. The University of Oslo organized information days as part of their Academic Dugnad project to welcome refugees and asylum seekers in Norway (UiO, 2017). It was planned together with NUCAS and NOKUT. In preparation for the day, special information material was created, since the existing information was either directed at people who had lived in Norway for a long time or at potential international

³⁸ <https://anabin.kmk.org>.

³⁹ www.samordnaopptak.no/info/utenlandsk_utdanning/.

⁴⁰ www.nokut.no/databaser-og-fakta/nokuts-landdatabase2/GSU-listen/.

⁴¹ www.q-entry.eu/.

⁴² ENIC is the European Network of Information Centres in the European Region and NARIC is the National Academic Recognition Information Centre in the European Region.

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students applying from abroad. Universities and university colleges in Oslo were invited to set up information stands at the event. Presentations on the recognition system for non-documented qualifications and on admission procedures for undergraduate and graduate studies were given, and a peer-to-peer meeting with students was arranged.

The HAW (Hamburg University of Applied Sciences) has a special Office for Migration. It organizes information days for prospective refugee students on a regular basis. In the interviews with refugee students at HAW, almost all of them emphasized how beneficial this day was for their decision to start studying in the first place or to apply to HAW.⁴³

Personal study guidance and counselling

Individual academic counselling is important for all students, but particularly for refugees, given the particular challenges they face in accessing information, financial support, and academic and personal documentation. In order to provide targeted support to refugee students, some universities have recruited additional staff or trained their staff to provide guidance and counselling specifically for them. In Turkey, HEIs have recruited additional psychologists and consultants for their guidance and opened consultancy centres to provide additional support to refugee students.⁴⁴ UNHCR's higher education interventions include the assignment of academic advisors to monitor students' academic progress and provide tailored support for students in certain programme countries.

Personal study guidance can also be provided to refugees through structured orientation programmes. The British charity Mosaik⁴⁵ organizes guidance workshops that leverage connected learning opportunities and community-based leadership to distribute information on higher education opportunities coupled with skills building and training, application support, language skills development, and interview preparation. Another example is Kepler's Iteme programme,⁴⁶ which targets secondary school graduates from refugee and host communities who wish to pursue tertiary education. The Iteme curriculum focuses on English language development, soft skills, basic technology, and numeracy. Participants are also introduced to a range of tertiary education scholarships and specialized training programmes. A final example is the transfer programme offered by Kiron Open Higher Education (see Box 9).

5.4. Addressing language barriers and language test requirements

Limited language proficiency poses a significant barrier for refugees as it is unusual to have already mastered the language of instruction of their host countries. This language is typically the local language or occasionally English, and sometimes instruction is given in several languages. Many of our informants indicated that reaching the necessary level in the language of instruction is the biggest challenge for prospective refugee students. For successful studies, a level of C1⁴⁷ is often the prerequisite. Depending on prior knowledge and individual language learning skills, it can take several years to reach this level of proficiency.

⁴³ Interview with refugee students at HAW on 24 March 2021.

⁴⁴ Interview with representative of YÖK on 14 April 2021.

⁴⁵ <https://mosaik.ngo/about-us>.

⁴⁶ kepler.org.

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BOX 9

Transfer Programme of Kiron Open Higher Education

Until 2020, the German social start-up Kiron Open Higher Education offered a University Transfer Programme to help refugees to orientate themselves in the German higher education system and to provide support for their application to a German higher education institution. It started out as one-to-one counselling. To minimize the personal counselling time needed per person, a responsive online tool (transfer checklist) was developed in 2019. This checklist is structured in sections, which have to be completed one after the other. It contains a section on skills and interests, as well as information sections on the German educational system, financing, and the equivalence of university entrance qualifications. The checklist speeded up the counselling process, since the relevant information had already been collected by each refugee student before the personal meeting with the counsellor.

Source: Interview with representative of Kiron on 16 March 2021.

HEIs often do not differentiate between refugee students and other foreign students with regards to language prerequisites. Foreign students typically have to certify a level of B2 or C1 in the language of instruction upon enrolment. Since proficiency in the local language is a prerequisite for the successful integration of refugees into their host society at all levels (social, academic, and professional), prospective refugee students very often take a number of language courses as part of the general support and integration process for refugees. However, general language courses do not prepare students adequately for academia, which often requires technical language not taught in general courses.

In many cases HEIs offer their own language courses for foreign students, including refugees. Turkish universities offer one-year language preparatory schools for prospective

refugee students, free of charge.⁴⁸ Besides language classes for refugee students, preparatory programmes at HEIs are common everywhere. These normally include some kind of language training, but also training in scientific working methods, subject-specific courses, and tutoring. In addition, many HEIs offer language training combined with initiatives for social integration.

Turkey has applied a different approach to facilitate access to higher education for the large number of Syrian refugee students who arrived from 2011 onwards. Following a decision by the Executive Board of Higher Education in November 2015, eight universities in the south-eastern border region with Syria were allowed to open programmes in Arabic or other languages (Erdogan and Erdogan, 2020). Degree programmes in Arabic still exist at some universities today.

⁴⁷ C1 refers to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The CEFR organizes language proficiency in six levels, A1 to C2 (most proficient), which can be regrouped into three broad levels: Basic User, Independent User, and Proficient User, and that can be further subdivided according to the needs of the local context.

⁴⁸ Interview with representative of YÖK on 14 April 2021.

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5.5. Organizing structured preparatory programmes

Preparatory programmes aim to address a variety of other challenges that refugees face when accessing higher education in their host country. They are often provided by HEIs, but also other providers. They can be tailored to the requirements at the specific institution or even to specific degree programmes. Programmes may follow a pre-determined schedule for all participants, or participants can choose from a variety of elements. Language training is usually included, but also courses to prepare for

academic work in general or specific subjects, and psychosocial support to address the typical newcomer challenges that refugees face.

The research for this Paper has shown that in some countries preparatory programmes are very common and offered by a large number of providers, while in other countries they are mostly unknown. This can be due to a lack of resources, but also because there is no real or perceived need for this kind of support, for example in Egypt, where Syrian refugees do not face a language barrier and the social and academic differences are not

BOX 10

Combining social integration with language learning at university level

To address the special needs of prospective refugee students, the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (HAW), Germany, has adapted a special strategy. Participants are admitted to the preparatory programme *Kompetenz Kompakt* with a German level of B2 (the prerequisite for regular enrolment is C1) and are assigned an individual language partner, a peer student who is also a native speaker of the refugee student's native language. This approach has proven to be beneficial, since the students can switch between languages to discuss difficult topics in depth.

A similar approach has been developed at the Metropolitan University of Oslo (OsloMet) in Norway, where refugee students are invited to meet and chat with local students on a regular basis. OsloMet offers a language café for levels A1 to B2 in English and Norwegian twice a week in addition to its regular language courses for prospective refugee students. At a language café people can just participate without registering, paying fees or committing to regular attendance. They can socialize and network with Norwegian students while practising their language skills and learning more about the culture and the educational system. This also aims at teaching the languages at an academic level and giving Norwegian students the opportunity to meet with refugee students.

Source: Interview with representatives from HAW on 18 March 2021; interview with representative of OsloMet on 11 March 2021.

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perceived to be as vast as between Syria and a European country. The difference in this regard between Germany and France on the one hand and Norway on the other is notable. Whereas in France and in Germany academic preparatory programmes for refugees are widespread and supported by authorities on a national level, they do not exist in Norway. Prospective refugee students there participate in the Introduction Programme for all newly arrived refugees in Norway, which provides an introduction to Norwegian society through courses in Norwegian language, society, and culture. The Programme is combined with work internships and usually lasts for two years.⁴⁹ Refugees who are admitted to higher education programmes may end the Introduction Programme prematurely. Several interviewees noted that the Introduction Programme does not sufficiently take the needs of prospective higher education refugee students into account and that the requirement to participate in the programme can cause difficulties, because they could make better use of the time preparing for academia.

France offers an interesting example of a structured and certifying approach to the preparation for entry into higher education, the *Diplôme d'université passerelle* (DU). The DU lasts an average of one year and provides methodology and orientation courses, as well as intensive courses in French as a foreign language.⁵⁰ The supervision of the course and its accreditation have been entrusted to the university association *Migrants dans l'Enseignement Supérieur* (Association

of Migrants in Higher Education – MEnS),⁵¹ which is organized under the stewardship of the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation. The association brings together those universities actively involved in receiving and supporting refugee students. Each institution follows an adjustable framework model for the development of its own DU, which has been developed by MEnS to provide guidance to French universities on a comparable content and structure for the DU. Supported by the French Ministry of Higher Education, the DU allows refugees to gain student status and therefore benefit from access to university housing, libraries, and canteens, and eligibility for scholarships based on social criteria.

Prospective refugee students without a recognized secondary school-leaving certificate can gain entrance qualification to a German university by completing a foundation course (*Studienkolleg*), if they successfully pass an entrance examination and can demonstrate a German level of B1. Foundation courses usually take two semesters and end with a university entrance assessment examination. Several subjects which are relevant for the intended field of study and the German language skills are tested.⁵²

Another possibility for preparation for enrolment in a regular degree programme was offered by the German social start-up Kiron Open Higher Education.⁵³ This non-profit organization was founded in 2015 with the goal of breaking down existing barriers to higher education for refugees by means of digital

49 www.imdi.no/en/the-introduction-programme/the-introduction-programme/.

50 Interview with the head of MEnS on 17 March 2021. Interview with representative of Paris Nanterre University on 25 March 2021.

51 In English, 'Migrants in Higher Education'.

52 www.study-in-germany.de/en/plan-your-studies/prep-courses-and-foundation-courses_28537.php.

53 <https://kiron.ngo/en/>.

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learning and support services. The organization developed an online study programme for refugees to provide access to higher education with the help of MOOC-based (massively open online course) curricula. Six degree programmes were compiled out of these courses. The participants had the opportunity to transfer to one of Kiron's 45 partner universities to receive an accredited bachelor's degree. The degree programmes still exist, but in 2020 Kiron shifted its strategic focus away from refugees' access to higher education and expanded its range of courses as well as the target group. The reason for this shift of focus was that the challenges refugees face on their way to a public HEI in Germany could only partly be met by Kiron's offer. Participants in a university's preparatory programmes often have specific requirements in the application process which could not be met through Kiron's

programmes. Also, in Germany the only way to make up for an inadequate university entrance qualification is by participating in a foundation course (*Studienkolleg*).⁵⁴

Utrecht University in the Netherlands offers students with a refugee background, who are waiting for a decision on their application for refuge or asylum, the opportunity to participate at no cost and without bureaucratic hurdles in all kinds of courses.⁵⁵ This project, called *Inclusion*, started in 2016. However, it is not intended as a way for refugee students to acquire academic credit of any sort, but rather to facilitate academic and social integration. The application process consists of three steps. First, a simple online application form has to be filled in. Next, applicants receive an e-mail after registration, asking them to send in a CV and a motivation letter. Finally, they are invited to an interview aimed

BOX 11

The preparatory study programme *Kompetenz Kompakt*

As part of the *Kompetenz Kompakt* programme offered by the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (HAW), Germany, participants can attend selected courses in their desired field of study with support through specialized tutorials. They can earn credit points, which can be transferred upon regular enrolment, and learn subject-specific German language skills. The programme is accompanied by multilingual tutoring, strategy training in preparation for the German language examination, interdisciplinary welcome tutoring, psychosocial counselling, and workshops to improve learning strategies, self-management, intercultural skills, study orientation, career guidance, and career planning. Participants can take the programme for a maximum of two semesters and receive a certificate of participation. Each semester, 40 participants are selected through an application procedure with a scoring system. The programme is supported by the DAAD programme *Integra*, whose goal is to provide academically qualified refugees in Germany access to higher education as early as possible.

Source: Interview with representatives of HAW on 18 March 2021.

⁵⁴ Interview with representative of Kiron on 16 March 2021.

⁵⁵ www.uu.nl/en/education/inclusion.

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at checking whether the course matches their academic background and interests. Ultimately, the teacher in charge of a course decides if an applicant can join. *Inclusion* participants are not properly enrolled but only registered at the university. They receive a certificate for successful completion of a course, but unfortunately no credit points should they join the programme later.

Preparatory programmes for refugees also exist in countries of the global South. The Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA) in Ethiopia is a division of the Ethiopian government which accommodates the various needs of Ethiopia's large refugee groups. ARRA provides orientation sessions for refugee students before they begin their higher education. The sessions focus on the Ethiopian higher education system. ARRA also assists with challenges refugee students face, such as departmental change or grading (Tamrat and Dermas, 2019).

5.6. Offering psychosocial support and opportunities for social integration

As previously discussed, refugees face many psychosocial and mental health challenges linked to their unique circumstances as refugees and newcomers to a host country. Some of them have lived through traumatic experiences related to war, persecution, scarcity, and basic living conditions. These circumstances can also affect how prepared they are to access and succeed in higher education. A number of measures addressing these challenges have been developed.

In a survey conducted by the German Rectors' Conference (HRK) among its member universities in 2015,⁵⁶ more than 35 out of 80 universities reported that they have taken measures to socially integrate refugees. These included accompaniment during visits to authorities, counselling, homework help, childcare, translation services, medical care, regular get-togethers, festivals, joint sports, theatre, and music events, help with apartment search, and guided tours of the city.

An important lever for social integration is the creation of linkages between local and refugee students. The DAAD currently funds 162 projects at HEIs within the 'Welcome – Students Helping Refugees' programme.⁵⁷ The programme supports student-organized projects and university-based support and integration measures, which are conducted by students and targeted at academically qualified refugees. These projects include tutorials, creation of information materials, mentoring, translation, counselling, and language courses. Some university departments also offer support based on their specific expertise, such as special 'law clinics' or psychological and social education services.

The programme *Tremplin*⁵⁸ ('springboard') in France was created in 2015 by the association Each One. It is designed like a sports coaching programme within its 12 partner establishments and run by a dozen student volunteers. Through the programme, the association has set up a series of workshops and courses to overcome language and cultural barriers, establish social connections, and obtain soft skills. Three-day sessions are

⁵⁶ www.hrk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk/02-Dokumente/02-07-Internationales/02-07-13-Lateinamerika/Massnahmen_HRK-Werkstattgesprach_Fluechtlinge.pdf.

⁵⁷ www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/further-information-on-daad-programmes/welcome/.

⁵⁸ <https://www.eachone.co/>.

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led by professional coaches to help students with their career orientation. The programme is flexible, allowing volunteer teams the freedom to run optional workshops and supporting students by linking each refugee to three people in a mentor-like relationship.

The Buddy System⁵⁹ in France is an online platform that brings together international students (including refugee students) and local students in a mentoring programme. The idea is to help students with administrative procedures and also to integrate them quickly into the social and cultural life of the location where they study.

The University of Oslo (UiO) in Norway created a project called Academic Network. Groups of four to eight refugees and an equal number of student guides from matching academic fields met every two weeks throughout one semester to exchange academic experiences and learn from each other. It provided refugee students with the opportunity to obtain low-threshold information and build networks and friendships (UiO, 2017).

There are also initiatives specifically dedicated to the support of women refugee students, such as the French Intercultur'elles programme (see Box 12).

5.7. Facilitating the recognition of qualifications and prior learning

Meeting entrance requirements for higher education applications and admission can be challenging for refugee students when it comes to producing proof of prior learning, recognition of partially obtained academic achievements, and recognition of foreign

undergraduate study degrees as a prerequisite for graduate studies. The conditions and procedures for credential recognition vary between host countries. An additional challenge exists when qualifications cannot be documented, or only partially, due to the loss or destruction of documents during or due to flight.

European countries have established national information centres (ENIC or ENIC-NARIC) in all member states of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (see Section IX). Their task is to 'facilitate access to authoritative and accurate information on the higher education system and qualifications of the country in which it is located; facilitate access to information on the higher education systems and qualifications of the other Parties; give advice or information on recognition matters and assessment of qualifications, in accordance with national laws and regulations'.⁶⁰

Recognition of documented credentials

In countries with a centralized application system for higher education, one or several national units are often in charge of the recognition of foreign credentials. In general, the recognition of foreign credentials is a shared responsibility between national entities and HEIs, with different mixes of responsibility.

Some countries have put in place special measures to facilitate the recognition of foreign credentials submitted by refugee students. The French ENIC-NARIC Centre, for instance, significantly adapted its procedure for refugees in line with the requirements of Article VII of the Lisbon Convention. Refugee

⁵⁹ <https://buddysystem.eu/en/>.

⁶⁰ www.enic-naric.net/welcome-to-the-enic-naric-website.aspx.

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BOX 12

Specific support for women refugees in France

The Intercultur'elles programme of the UniR association is a six-month mentoring programme, launched in 2020, and aimed specifically at supporting young refugee women seeking to access higher education or to enter the labour market. It has been labelled a #GenerationEquality initiative by UN Women France. The aim is to improve the integration of women into higher education and the labour market by sharing personal, professional, and academic skills with local mentors trained for the programme. The programme supports these women in building their academic or other professional futures through monthly group workshops organized by experts on self-confidence, public speaking, soft skills (creativity, team spirit, negotiation, etc.), organization, and time management. The training focuses on migration, gender, and intercultural issues.

On their website, UniR explains that studies show that mentoring programmes are 90 per cent effective if both mentor and mentee are trained, compared with 65 per cent if the mentor is trained and 33 per cent if neither is trained. This is why UniR trains all programme participants.

Source: Intercultur'elles | UniR (uni-r.org).

application files are processed with priority and are free of charge (there is a 70 euro charge for other international students). In 2019, out of 23,956 applications submitted, the Centre assessed 3,816 requests for recognition that concerned refugees, asylum seekers, and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection. The certificate issued by the Centre is not a mandatory or a legally binding document; rather, it aids employers and HEIs to better understand the level of qualification of the refugee applicant as reflected by the foreign-issued documentation.

Recognition of non-documented credentials

Not all refugee students are able to produce academic credentials, as they may have been lost or left behind due to the circumstances of flight. In Ethiopia, the Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs and the

Ministry of Education have created a placement examination, equivalent to the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination, for refugees who wish to apply for higher education and cannot provide their education records. Addis Ababa University has been delegated to conduct the examination. Refugee students are issued a letter based on their results in the examination, which can be used to register at the HEI of their choice (Tamrat and Dermas, 2018).

The Council of Higher Education in Turkey issued a regulation in 2012 concerning Syrian and Turkish nationals who had to interrupt their higher education in Syria due to the war. Seven public universities in the border region were allowed to accept these students as 'special students'. As special students, they were not considered to be regularly enrolled and could not receive a degree without providing a secondary school-leaving

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BOX 13

Transfer of academic achievements to Turkish higher education institutions

In Turkey, a 2013 regulation by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) allowed students who had started associate, undergraduate, or graduate programmes (except for medicine and dentistry) in Syria and Egypt, and who could not pursue their education due to violence and crisis, to transfer achievements from before the 2013/2014 academic year to HEIs in Turkey. If they could provide documentation of their achievements, they were allowed to transfer their credits to any Turkish university for the first year or the final year. The HEIs remained responsible for assessing and admitting applicants. A 'special student status' was established for refugee students who could not present documentation of their academic achievements (see next section).

Source: Erdogan and Erdogan, 2020.

qualification or previous academic records, but they were permitted to continue their studies until documentation could be provided (Erdogan and Erdogan, 2020). The HEIs formed special committees by academic field which were in charge of conducting the examination of these students. If they passed the exam successfully, a letter of temporary acceptance was issued and they could access the university as regular students based on this. The universities proceeded in this way so as not to reject anyone.⁶¹

Following the arrival of a significant number of refugees in 2015, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, or *Kultusministerkonferenz*) adopted a resolution on refugees who are unable to provide

evidence of a higher education entrance qualification.⁶² The resolution was adopted to implement the legal obligation designed by Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention⁶³ and to introduce a simple procedure to enable HEIs to react to cases of refugees with missing documents. In the resolution, the German states (Länder) agreed on a joint procedure for cases where an applicant is unable to provide documentary evidence of qualifications required for entrance into higher education. The procedure checks on three requirements: asylum or residence status; plausibility of the educational biography; examination and/or assessment procedure. Indirect evidence can be taken into account, such as a former student ID card, examination certificates, or course record books (KMK, 2015). One common assessment procedure is the TestAS, which can also be taken in Arabic.⁶⁴ This is a central standardized aptitude test for prospective

⁶¹ Interview with representative of YÖK on 14 April 2021.

⁶² Resolution of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (KMK) dated 3 December 2015 on the 'Access and admission to institutions of higher education for applicants who are unable to provide evidence of a higher education entrance qualification obtained in their home country on account of their flight'.

⁶³ www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2015/2015_12_03-Hochschulzugang-ohne-Nachweis-der-Hochschulzugangsberechtigung_ENGLISCH.pdf.

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foreign students, originally designed to give them information about their individual ranking compared to other applicants.

NOKUT has been working on the development and implementation of recognition procedures to support refugees in accessing further studies and employment. Two special interview-based procedures for refugees with incomplete documentation have been developed. First, the UVD-procedure (Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation) has been applied since 2013. The assessment is conducted by experts from academia in English and Norwegian. While the result is legally binding, HEIs can still reject applications because of their autonomy in the application process for graduate studies. Second, a qualifications assessment for incomplete qualifications or in the case of insufficient language skills has been applied since 2015/2016. It does not provide a legally binding decision but provides qualified advice to refugees on how to proceed.⁶⁵

NOKUT has also played an important role in the development of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR).⁶⁶ The assessment scheme has been specially developed for refugees to support their progression towards employment and admission to further studies. This project is based on the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The EQPR provides an assessment of the applicant's higher education qualifications as well as work experience and language proficiency. The assessment is based on available documentation, a self-assessment,

and a structured interview with credential evaluators. Candidates complete a questionnaire which serves as the basis for an interview. After the interview, a decision is made on whether or not to issue the EQPR document. It is valid for five years from the date of issue. In Italy, 57 EQPR holders have obtained places to study and the country has also opened a scholarship programme to this group (Bergan, Malgina, and Snildal, 2020).

5.8. Networking among higher education institutions

In addition to offering a welcoming and supportive environment, the university and its staff play a crucial role in facilitating access and supporting the success of refugee students in higher education. Advocacy for refugee inclusion in higher education may emerge from within the teaching staff or among committed students, as was the case in a number of European HEIs during the Syrian crisis in 2015–2016. However, management support is needed for setting up a structured approach. It is also good practice to put in place structures (i.e. positions or units) entrusted with supporting refugee students. International or national legislation sets the legal framework and national ministries or authorities provide support to the institutions and their staff. Non-governmental organizations can also play an important role in achieving successful integration at the institutional level.

In a survey conducted by the HRK among its member universities in 2015,⁶⁷ over 30 of the 80 universities surveyed reported

⁶⁴ <https://refugees.testas.de/en>.

⁶⁵ Interview with representative of NOKUT on 5 February 2021.

⁶⁶ www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications.

⁶⁷ https://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk/02-Dokumente/02-07-Internationales/02-07-13-Lateinamerika/Massnahmen_-_HRK-Werkstattgespraeche_Fluechtlinge.pdf

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that they had taken measures to ensure effective coordination of internal and/or external actors engaged in supporting refugees. The internal structures involved were international offices, offices for student counselling and guidance, admissions offices, faculties, language centres, and student committees. The external structures collaborating with HEIs were foreigner registration offices, social welfare offices, employment agencies, refugee councils, refugee initiatives, municipal authorities, migration associations, educational associations, and (potential) employers.

The DAAD supports networking initiatives for staff and students at HEIs as well as training

opportunities for staff involved with refugees. A national conference on higher education programmes for refugees takes place every two years to support such networking. Project leaders from HEIs are also invited on a regular basis to smaller networking and training events.⁶⁹ From 2021 onwards, a prize for integration measures at HEIs has been awarded annually at a national conference.⁷⁰ The International DAAD Academy (iDA) has been offering training events for university staff working in the field of refugee integration since 2015.⁷¹ Seminar topics include the conception of preparatory study and language courses, measures to support academic success, and advice for student counselling and career guidance of refugee students.

BOX 14

The UNESCO Qualifications Passport for Refugees and Vulnerable Migrants

The UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP) is currently being piloted in several countries with the aim of establishing it as a global mechanism to support recognition of the qualifications held by refugees and vulnerable migrants.⁶⁸ It is based on the methodology used for the EQPR, including a self-questionnaire form, an assessment of the available documentation by a credential evaluator, and a structured interview with the credential evaluator. The UQP is in three parts: an assessment part with information on qualifications, relevant job experience, and language proficiency; an explanatory part with information about the status of the document; and a third part with information about the way ahead and contact information for the right authorities and agencies. It has been piloted in Zambia, and 12 passports have already been issued. Further pilot projects will soon follow. UNESCO reaches out to national authorities to cooperate on the pilot projects. A pool of credential evaluators is selected, and they are systematically trained to carry out the actual procedure at refugee camps. The national authorities co-evaluate the results of the assessment procedure together with NOKUT evaluators to guarantee a peer-review process.

Source: Interview with representatives of UNESCO Section of Migration, Displacement and Emergencies in Education on 27 January 2021.

⁶⁸ <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-emergencies/qualifications-passport>.

⁶⁹ Interview with representative of DAAD on 23 February 2021.

⁷⁰ www.daad.de/de/infos-services-fuer-hochschulen/expertise-zu-themen-laendern-regionen/fluechtlinge-an-hochschulen/ausschreibung-hochschul-integrationspreis/.

⁷¹ www.daad-akademie.de/seminare-und-workshops/themenreihen/ida-sonderprogramm-zur-begleitung-gefuechteter-studierender/de/.

5. Facilitating access to host countries' higher education for refugees: what can be done?

HEIs can also build networks to share experience and good practices for the support and integration of refugees on campus. In France, several university networks advocate for the interests of students with a refugee background. MEnS is the largest French association supporting the rights of refugees in higher education.⁷² Initially constituted as a network of French HEIs committed to welcoming and supporting students, MEnS obtained association status in September 2020 and had 42 member institutions by 2021. The association also works in close collaboration with institutional partners (state and local authorities). The role of MEnS is to support the actions of HEIs, and to coordinate their practices as much as possible. It takes an intermediary position between the universities and the government; in this

capacity it can bring questions, proposals, and claims to the attention of partners and competent authorities.

Finally, associations of refugee students can play a crucial role in providing support and social integration. The *Union des Étudiants Exilés* was created by and for exiled students.⁷³ It stands up for the access of exiled people to higher education in France and works in close collaboration with HEIs to uphold the rights of refugee students and to support them in their academic choices and administrative procedures. The student association also offers workshops on French degree programmes and methodology to make the complex French university landscape clearer.

BOX 15

Office for Migration at the Hamburg University of Applied Sciences (HAW)

The Office for Migration at the University of Applied Sciences (HAW) in Hamburg⁷⁴ is a unique facility in Germany. Usually, international offices at HEIs oversee questions concerning refugees and other international students. The Office for Migration is an alternative concept. It is not a service unit, which would be part of the university administration, but located at the highest level of the university and reporting directly to the head of the institution. The head of the office is also a professor of educational sciences and a representative of the presidential board of the university for migration-related university development. The field of activity of the office is based on three related pillars: integration, higher education development, and research. The office is in charge of a preparatory study programme for refugee students and thus of their practical integration. The structural barriers which become evident in the context of this project are addressed and worked on in the field of higher education development. The third pillar, research, provides scientific support for the activities of the other two pillars and acquires third-party funding for further research in the field of migration and integration practices.

Source: Interview with representatives of HAW on 18 March 2021.

⁷² <https://reseau-mens.org/>.

⁷³ <https://uniondesetudiantsexiles.org/>

⁷⁴ www.haw-hamburg.de/hochschule/hochschuleinheiten/arbeitsstelle-migration/.

6. Fifteen recommendations for policy-makers and planners: how to move forward

This Policy Paper has aimed to explore refugees' access to higher education in their host countries. Current international policy frameworks, and in particular SDG-4 and the Education 2030 Agenda, emphasize the right to quality higher education, based on capacity, without discrimination. Refugees face manifold obstacles that add up to a 'super-disadvantage'. When exploring inclusive policies and practices from six case countries, we have been able to identify many examples of good practices that facilitate the access of refugee students to higher education. Derived from these good practices, we will present recommendations to inspire the development of inclusive policies and practices for the facilitation of refugees' access to higher education by the national authorities of host countries.

1. Include the access of refugee students to higher education in national higher education policy documents

Our research has shown that certain countries take a strong policy approach to the inclusion of refugees in their (higher) education system. They demonstrate this commitment in top-level steering documents for higher education (i.e. national higher education policy or strategy) or through legal documents such as the Ethiopian refugee law. These documents can contain a national commitment to allow refugees to access higher education, similar to nationals, to allow fair and flexible recognition of credentials, diplomas, and degrees, tuition fee waivers, and access to financial support.

2. Establish intra-ministerial coordination structures for the facilitation of refugees' access to host countries' HEIs

The successful integration of refugee students into their host countries' higher education sector requires a comprehensive and

collective approach, which targets support with administrative procedures and related paperwork, access to one-stop information, language and psychosocial support, funding, and academic support in particular during the first years of study to prevent drop-out. In order to tackle issues related to the access of refugees in a holistic manner and to achieve a coordinated approach among different ministries (in particular the ministries of interior and education), as well as administrative levels and organizations, collaborative structures are necessary, for example a permanent working structure (as in France). It is also possible to entrust one national organization (in Germany the DAAD) with this coordination task and with acting as intermediary between HEIs, NGOs, and ministries.

3. Adopt an 'equal opportunities policy' for the access of refugees to host countries' higher education

Throughout this Paper, it has been argued that refugee students face a super-disadvantage when it comes to accessing higher education. They have frequently experienced disrupted educational trajectories and have sometimes gone through traumatic experiences. They are often now in a country whose language they do not speak, and whose customs and social norms they do not know. In order to overcome the super-disadvantage, refugee students require a strong 'equal opportunity' approach to support their access to higher education. They also need flexible combinations of admission requirements, student support approaches, and appropriate policy adjustments.

6. Fifteen recommendations for policy-makers and planners: how to move forward

4. Collect enrolment information in a standardized, protection-sensitive format to enable the monitoring of refugee participation in host country higher education institutions.

This Policy Paper has shown the difficulties of accessing comparative data across countries on the participation of refugees in host country higher education. At present, data sources are fragmented and incomplete. It is important to establish a common framework to create comparable data that reflect refugee participation in higher education while taking into account the evident data and individual protection considerations.

5. Make available to refugees easily accessible information on national higher education systems, admission formalities, funding opportunities, and credential recognition

Accessing information on the national higher education study offer, admission requirements, equivalency of credentials, and available financial resources is a particular challenge for refugee students. Ability to speak the primary language of the host country and ability to navigate national higher education systems can be determinative of ability to access available opportunities. The provision of information in an easily accessible format and in several languages is therefore of crucial importance. One-stop information portals are particularly useful. In addition, admission offices as well as guidance and counselling services can also play an important role in the direct provision of information. They can also organize specific information events (Open Days) targeted at refugee students and provide such information directly to students in secondary schools.

6. Offer structured opportunities for preparatory courses to allow refugees to obtain student status as soon as possible after arrival in host country.

Higher education institutions and other education providers should expand the offer of preparatory programmes to equip refugee students with the necessary knowledge, soft skills, and academic support to transition to and succeed in higher education. Preparatory courses can be designed to meet specific gaps in student preparedness, depending on the context. Courses can be provided remotely, on campus, or in a blended format. Ideally, preparatory courses should be accredited and structured in such a way that they allow refugee students to be officially enrolled in university and thereby have access to the benefits attached to enrolment, such as housing and meals, education finance, and so on. Accreditation of preparatory courses can help to assure quality standards and comparability across the higher education sector.

7. Combine preparatory programmes with opportunities for social integration

When preparatory programmes or language support are organized by higher education institutions, staff and student organizations can be mobilized to support inclusion of refugee students. 'Buddy' or mentoring programmes, language cafés where local and refugee students can meet and discuss, and inclusive social activities facilitate language acquisition, social integration, and intercultural exchange, and are beneficial for both refugee and non-refugee students.

6. Fifteen recommendations for policy-makers and planners: how to move forward

8. Provide special support and coaching programmes to women students

Women refugee students may face a specific super-disadvantage resulting from gender norms that discourage their participation in higher education. When women refugees are able to participate and complete upper secondary education, they need the context-appropriate support to gain information about tertiary opportunities and the benefit that can be gained as a result of higher education. They may benefit from tailored interventions to ensure they are prepared for entrance exams, meet admission requirements, and meaningfully participate in higher education and campus life. Women students may also be in special need of psychosocial support, counselling, and academic mentoring to overcome negative attitudes to their participation in higher education, and to remain involved. Persons in charge of supporting women refugee students need to be aware of the particular obstacles that they face.

9. Offer flexible procedures for credential recognition

Recognition of academic credentials is a persistent need for refugees trying to access higher education in host countries. It is important to offer flexible yet fair procedures to assess foreign-earned qualifications. This is particularly important for refugee applicants who were unable to bring proof of prior learning when leaving their home countries or are unable to retrieve or replace it. Interview-based assessment procedures, conducted in the home country or first language of the refugee applicant, such as practised by the EQPR and UQP for refugees and vulnerable migrants are helpful to facilitate credential recognition. National recognition authorities should consider

collaboration on the UQP project with a view to integrating the procedure into their national recognition systems in cases where procedures to assess foreign qualifications are not meeting the needs of refugees.

10. Offer flexible (RPL) procedures that recognize non-formal and informal prior learning through interview-based documentation

Refugee youth also need to have their non-formal or informal education recognized. National RPL procedures to facilitate access to higher education or recognize equivalent qualifications should account for and anticipate the particular circumstances of refugees. An example is France which has been experimenting with a flexible RPL procedure in which refugees are assessed and supported in their certification project through interviews.

11. Recognize credits obtained in higher education institutions in home or host country and apply them to further study

In many cases refugees have had to interrupt their higher education in their home countries. For a smooth transition into the host country's higher education system, HEIs need to be flexible in recognizing already obtained credentials, course work, and credits. In some countries, refugees are allowed to follow selected courses in higher education, online or face to face, even if they do not (yet) comply with all admission requirements. This practice is recommended as it allows them to bridge difficult waiting periods, for instance to obtain legal status or documentation, or master the host country's language of instruction, while making good use of this time to learn and gain academic knowledge.

6. Fifteen recommendations for policy-makers and planners: how to move forward

12. Offer fee exemption to refugee students or link up with international donors to cover tuition fees

Cost is one of the most important hurdles preventing refugee youth from accessing higher education. Countries and their higher education systems follow a diverse range of practices with regard to tuition fees, including for refugees. Given the particular circumstances of refugee students, many cannot afford the fees charged by countries that consider refugees as international students, or fees that are generally high. Exemptions, waivers, and scholarships should be made available for refugee students who are unable to pay higher education costs. The same holds for other administrative costs such as application, language test, or enrolment fees, which can be prohibitive as well.

13. Provide access to refugees to national (contingency-based) student loan systems to cover their living costs

The issue of finances goes beyond the tuition fees, since students also need to cover living expenses, particularly where they are not allowed to work during their studies. Refugee students need greater access to education financing such as study grants or loans. Many countries have put in place contingency-based student loan systems for their nationals, which require reimbursement only after graduates have acquired a job and are able to make a living. As refugee students tend to stay in their host countries, in particular when they are graduates from their host country's higher education institutions, contingency-based student loans should be made accessible to refugee students.

14. Make available funding for higher education institutions to support refugees

HEIs play a critical role in supporting the access of refugee students to their host country's higher education system. They can develop language training and courses that prepare refugee applicants for higher education. They can create special support structures, such as guidance and counselling services, to offer tailor-made support to refugee students. They can mobilize their staff and student organizations to provide support to the integration of refugee students. However, providing special support for refugees at the HEI level requires resources that may not be easily available. It is therefore important that national authorities and their buffer organizations, when possible, support HEIs for the specific contributions that they make to welcome and cater for refugee students.

15. Organize and support networks of HEIs that engage collectively to support refugee students

Given their crucial role in supporting refugee students to succeed, and given the many facets of this process, it is desirable that officers in charge of university refugee admission and integration meet and exchange on issues and approaches. The creation of university networks is a promising avenue for organizing such exchanges. Such networks give the higher education sector a more unified voice to discuss with ministerial authorities the best support they can offer and related resources. However, networks do require time and resources, and therefore need to be supported by national authorities.

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Appendix 1. Interviews conducted for the Policy Paper

List of UNESCO personnel consulted

Name	Institution	Position	Date
Mr. Anasse Bouhlal	UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Arab States	Programme Specialist	17 December 2020
Mr. Ruud Duvekot Ms. Marie Macauley	UNESCO-UIL (Institute for Lifelong Learning)	Research Fellow Programme Specialist	6 January 2021
Mr. Peter Wells	UNESCO Section of Higher Education	Chief of Section	7 January 2021
Ms. Bindu Sunny	UNESCO-UIS (Institute for Statistics)	Research Analyst	13 January 2021
Mr. Wesley Teter	UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Bureau for Education	Senior Consultant	13 January 2021
Ms. Anna Seeger	UNESCO-IIEP (International Institute for Educational Planning)	Programme Specialist	15 January 2021
Ms. Caterina Ferrara Ruiz Ms. Min Zhang	UNESCO Section of Migration, Displacement and Emergencies in Education	Associate Project Officer Associate Project Officer	27 January 2021

Appendix 1. Interviews conducted for the Policy Paper

List of interviewees for country case studies

Name	Institution	Position	Date
Ms. Marina Malgina	NOKUT (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education), Norway	Head of Section <i>Interview-Based Evaluations</i>	5 February 2021
Mr. Thomas Böhm	HRK (Rectors' Conference), Germany	Head of Division <i>Africa and Middle East, International Students, Recognition</i>	10 February 2021
Ms. Anna Kolberg Buverud	UiO (University of Oslo), Norway	Senior Advisor <i>Office for Research and International Cooperation</i>	17 February 2021
Ms. Rachel Estévez Prado	DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), Germany	Head of Division <i>Higher Education Programs for Refugees</i>	23 February 2021
Ms. Silke Lübbers	KMK (Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs), Germany	Head of Division <i>University Entrance and University Admission</i>	4 March 2021
Ms. Ute Seibold		Advisor	
Ms. Elisabeth Sonnenschein		Head of Division <i>Assessment, Certificate Evaluation, Recognition of Foreign Educational Certificates (Country Group II)</i>	
Ms. Miriam Wiederhold		Head of Division <i>Assessment, Certificate Evaluation, Recognition of Foreign Educational Certificates (Country Group IV)</i>	
Ms. Ingrid Grimstad Helset	Samordna Opptak/NUCAS (Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service), Norway	Senior Advisor	4 March 2021
Ms. Marianne L. L. Holen		Senior Advisor	
Mr. Wondwosen Tamrat	St. Mary's University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	Associate Professor, President	5 March 2021
Ms. Frédérique Pharaboz	DIAIR (Interministerial Delegation for the Reception and Integration of Refugees), France	Advisor <i>Education, Youth and Culture</i>	8 March 2021
Ms. Annick Suzor-Weiner	AUF (University Agency of French-speaking Countries), France	Consultant/Coordinator of <i>AIMES Programme</i>	9 March 2021
Mr. Jean-Luc Nahel	CPU (Conference of University Presidents), France	Advisor <i>International Relations</i>	9 March 2021
Ms. Winnie Joanna Greenwood Ormerod	OsloMet (Oslo Metropolitan University), Norway	Senior Advisor <i>Section for Career Services, Internationalisation and Student Services</i>	11 March 2021
Mr. Konstantin Selesnew	Kiron Open Higher Education, Germany	Scrum Master/Agile Coach	16 March 2021

Appendix 1. Interviews conducted for the Policy Paper

Name	Institution	Position	Date
Mr. Mathieu Schneider	MEnS (Association of Migrants in Higher Education), France	Head of MEnS	17 March 2021
Ms. Yvonne Fietz Ms. Janina Hertel Mr. Louis Henri Seukwa	HAW (Hamburg University of Applied Sciences), Germany	Managing Director Pedagogical Management Head of the Office	18 March 2021
Ms. Yuka Hasegawa Ms. Elif Göğüş Ms. Nihan Tüzel	UNHCR Representation in Turkey	Assistant Representative (Ops) Associate Education Officer Assistant Education Officer	23 March 2021
Mr. Abedallah Abuhawa Mr. Awet Gebregergs Ms. Maral Moozarmi Mr. Nabil Safieh Ms. Alaa Zetauny	HAW (Hamburg University of Applied Sciences), Germany	Refugee Students	24 March 2021
Ms. Anissa Dziri	CIEP (International Centre for Educational Studies), France	Education Cooperation Officer	25 March 2021
Mr. Youssef Ettai	University Paris Nanterre, France	Administrative and Financial Manager <i>RSU DD Department</i>	25 March 2021
Mr. Bernahu Geneti Ms. Lyydia Makinen	UNHCR Representation in Ethiopia	Education Officer Education Officer	30 March 2021
Ms. Ragna Senf	Utrecht University, Netherlands	Project Manager <i>Inclusion</i>	31 March 2021
Mr. Mohamed Shawky	UNHCR Representation in Egypt	Education Officer	1 April 2021
Ms. Emilie Depons Ms. Raphaëlle Hallier Mr. Olivier Marichalar Ms. Karine Mouchelin Ms. Johanna Rasplus	Campus France	Regional Delegate of Toulouse Deputy Head <i>North Africa and Middle East Department</i> Study Coordinator Assistant Director <i>Hospitality and Student Life</i> Deputy Head <i>European Projects and Funding</i>	2 April 2021
Mr. Yaser Hosainy	HAW (Hamburg University of Applied Sciences), Germany	Refugee Student	12 April 2021
Mr. Mustafa Efe	YÖK (Council of Higher Education), Turkey	Director <i>International Relations Division</i>	14 April 2021

Appendix 2. DAFI countries' access conditions, fees, and labour market opportunities for refugee students and graduates

Access to education

Region	Access to education at all levels	Access to education at all levels as nationals	(Free) Access to education at (pre-primary), primary, and secondary levels	Access to tertiary level	Access to education for specific refugee contexts	Insufficient resources restricting access
Africa – 46 states	Benin Burkina Faso Burundi Chad Côte d'Ivoire Ethiopia Gambia Guinea Guinea-Bissau Kenya Liberia Niger Nigeria Rwanda Senegal	Cameroon Niger Nigeria Mozambique Tanzania Togo Uganda Zimbabwe	Botswana Ghana Namibia (in camps only) South Africa (and Eswatini) – free for primary grades 1–9	Ghana (direct and indirect fees) Zambia (by obtaining a study permit) Namibia (need to acquire permit to leave the camp) South Africa (and Eswatini) – fee-based	Eritrea (only for Somali refugees)	South Sudan Yemen
Arab States – 19 states	Algeria Sudan Syria		Iraq KRI	Iraq KRI – fee-based Mauritania Morocco (with legal status documents)	Egypt (only for Sudanese and Syrian refugees) Lebanon (only for Syrians) Jordan (only for Syrians)	
Asia and the Pacific – 50 states	India Kyrgyzstan		Tajikistan	Islamic Republic of Iran Pakistan – as nationals Tajikistan (limited access due to financial barriers)		

Appendix 2. DAFI Countries access conditions, fees, and labour market opportunities for refugee students and graduates

Region	Access to education at all levels	Access to education at all levels as nationals	(Free) Access to education at (pre-primary), primary, and secondary levels	Access to tertiary level	Access to education for specific refugee contexts	Insufficient resources restricting access
Europe and North America – 53 states		Russia	Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan (limited available free study places) Ukraine (scholarships scarce)	Turkey (for Syrians)	
Latin America and the Caribbean – 44 states			Ecuador	Ecuador (limited access)		

Appendix 2. DAFI Countries access conditions, fees, and labour market opportunities for refugee students and graduates

Tertiary education fees

Region	Fees for refugees below those of the nationals	Same as nationals	Higher than nationals	Higher fees for both nationals and refugees	Reduced fees or free tertiary	Non-standardized fees
Africa – 46 states	Mali (DAFI partner universities reduced fees for DAFI scholars)	Benin Burkina Faso Burundi Cameroon Ethiopia Mozambique Namibia Niger Nigeria Rwanda Tanzania Togo Uganda Zambia Zimbabwe	Côte d'Ivoire Gambia Ghana Liberia Senegal (in most public universities)	Chad Guinea-Bissau Kenya	Eritrea	South Sudan (officially, same fees as for nationals should apply, but some universities demand payment in USD)
Arab States – 19 states		Algeria Mauritania (exceptions exist) Sudan	Lebanon Iraq KRI	Morocco Syria	Egypt (same as nationals for Sudanese and Syrians)	
Asia and the Pacific – 50 states		Pakistan Islamic Republic of Iran (if they pass national university entrance exam)		Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan		India

Appendix 2. DAFI Countries access conditions, fees, and labour market opportunities for refugee students and graduates

Region	Fees for refugees below those of the nationals	Same as nationals	Higher than nationals	Higher fees for both nationals and refugees	Reduced fees or free tertiary	Non-standardized fees
Europe and North America – 53 states		Ukraine		Azerbaijan	Turkey (fees paid by Turkish government for Syrians if enrolled in full-time degree programmes at state universities) Russia (free – if selected)	
Latin America and the Caribbean – 44 states		Ecuador				

Appendix 2. DAFI Countries access conditions, fees, and labour market opportunities for refugee students and graduates

Post-graduation opportunities

Region	(Full) Access to labour market	Access to labour market for legally recognized refugees	Legal restrictions with documentation, work permit needed	Restricted legal access to labour market (certain fields of employment)	No access to formal labour market	Data availability
Africa — 46 states	Benin (full) Burkina Faso (full) Burundi (full) Cameroon (full) Guinea-Bissau Liberia Mali Mozambique Nigeria Rwanda Senegal Uganda South Africa (and Eswatini)	Togo	Gambia (additional permits needed) Ghana (employer commitment needed) Namibia (work permit occasionally granted) Zimbabwe	Botswana Chad (access not specifically reflected in legislation) Ethiopia (change expected) Guinea (certain trades limited due to documentation) Kenya (strict encampment policy) Niger (only to private) Côte d'Ivoire (access exists only in certain fields of employment) Tanzania (encampment policy) Zambia	Eritrea (only in camps)	Available in 28, missing in 18 states out of 46
Arab States — 19 states	Iraq KRI Yemen		Morocco South Sudan	Egypt South Sudan Jordan Sudan (only to private sector) Lebanon (access for Syrian refugees in certain fields)	Algeria Mauritania Syria	Available in 11, missing in 8 states out of 19

Appendix 2. DAFI Countries access conditions, fees, and labour market opportunities for refugee students and graduates

Region	(Full) Access to labour market	Access to labour market for legally recognized refugees	Legal restrictions with documentation, work permit needed	Restricted legal access to labour market (certain fields of employment)	No access to formal labour market	Data availability
Asia and the Pacific – 50 states	Tajikistan	Kyrgyzstan	India Islamic Republic of Iran Pakistan (flexible work visa regime for different categories of Afghans)	Islamic Republic of Iran India (documentation challenge/work permit needed)		Available in 5, missing in 45 states out of 50
Europe and North America – 53 states	Azerbaijan (no legislative barriers, extra fees for employers)	Ukraine (for registered refugees) Russia (restrictions for public sector employment)	Turkey (work permits available for Syrians)			Available in 4, missing in 49 states out of 53
Latin America and the Caribbean – 44 states	Ecuador					Available in 1 state, missing in 43 states out of 44

About the paper

With a view to identifying inclusive policies and good practices to respond to the many challenges that refugee students face to access higher education in their host country, this Policy Paper has conducted a review of available statistical data and literature. In addition, six selected countries with considerable refugee populations have been analysed more in-depth. They are: France, Ethiopia, Egypt, Germany, Norway, and Turkey. From this analysis, the paper presents inclusive policies and good practices from these countries and their higher education institutions by type of obstacle to accessing higher education. It concludes by presenting 15 recommendations on how host countries can support the access of refugees to their national systems, arguing strongly for an 'equality opportunity approach' in terms of national policies, and caring measures, at the level of higher education institutions.

About the editors

Michaela Martin is a Programme Specialist who has specialized over the past 30 years in selected areas of higher education policy-making, planning, and management, both at the systems and institutional levels. She is in charge of the research project into flexible learning pathways in higher education. She also works on internal and external quality assurance in higher education, indicator systems for higher education, management of university–enterprise partnerships, tertiary education in small states, and management of higher education institutions. Since 1990, she has been involved in research and training activities related to higher education policy and planning.

Manal Stulgaitis is Education Officer with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). She currently oversees UNHCR's tertiary education portfolio, including work on inclusion of refugees in national education systems, accountability, higher education scholarships, education transitions and protection, humanitarian-development approaches, and complementary education pathways for refugees. Manal's professional expertise is in refugee protection, including durable solutions, urban displacement, child protection, and coordination. Holding a professional degree in law and a Master's degree in international law and economic development, she has served in civil society, UN, research, and consulting roles throughout the Middle East, North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Asia.