

Migration Summit, Workshop 5 Report: Higher Education and Protection

9:30am – 12:30pm, 10 October 2016, University of Geneva

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Description of Session:

With the refugee crisis spilling across borders, there is growing global attention to protection issues and concerns for refugees. Education is repeatedly mentioned by refugees as a top protection priority, and particularly by refugee youth who request higher education opportunities that can lead to livelihoods. Global policies have shifted with the adoption of the SDGs; there is now more emphasis on lifelong learning, universal access to education beyond primary school. Some universities are now joining traditional humanitarian actors, such as NGOs, governments, UN bodies, to address the challenge of providing higher education. How does this shift impact the role of universities and their mission of promoting critical thinking, global citizenship, peace and tolerance?

Key objectives of the session:

Participants will:

1. Understand major issues facing migrant and refugee youth globally, particularly their needs with respect to higher education;
2. Be able to explain key advocacy points to support higher education programs for refugees;
3. Reflect critically on the role of academic institutions in higher education in emergencies;
4. Reflect critically on the role of humanitarian organisations, governments and NGOs in higher education in emergencies (HEiE);
5. Deepen their understanding of the potential possibilities of higher education in emergency contexts.

Speakers:

Moderators: Erin Hayba, PhD Assistant, InZone, University of Geneva
Emma Bonar, PhD Assistant, InZone, University of Geneva

Speakers: Jean-Dominique Vassalli, former Rector, Member of InZone International Advisory Board
University of Geneva
Barbara Moser-Mercer, Director of InZone, University of Geneva
Anton Mangstl, Former Vice President, International Affairs, German-Jordanian University
Christof Müehlberg, Strategic advisor to the President of German-Jordanian University,
Amman, Jordan
Josephine Gitome, Director of Refugee Education Center, Kenyatta University
Kenneth King, Norrag, University of Edinburgh
Tatjana Klein, Education Officer, UNHCR, Amman, Jordan
Sally Ward, Director of Higher Education for British Council in MENA
Keith Watenpaugh, Professor and Director, Human Rights Studies/
Co-Director of UC Human Rights Collaboration University of California, Davis

Introduction

Globally, a mere 1% of refugees have access to higher education compared to the 33% global average and demand for higher education opportunities among refugee populations continues to far outstrip supply. In a recent scholarship opportunity in the Middle East, just 10% of those who applied were successful. Progress made at primary and secondary levels has also increased demand for tertiary level education opportunities and in an attempt to reflect this, the Sustainable Development Goals aim to ensure equal access to affordable, quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university, by 2030. Despite the clear and acknowledged need, education, and higher education in particular, remains one of the most underfunded sectors in humanitarian aid.

This workshop focused on major issues facing migrant and refugee youth in accessing higher education globally while trying to identify opportunities and policy commitment to overcome these difficulties in assuring higher education for refugees. To do so the workshop was divided in three sections; the first focused on the policy and the context, the second on the purpose and the outcomes of Higher Education in Emergencies (HEiE), while the third was more focused on the roles of the various actors: the NGOs and the academic institutions.

Recent quotes from refugee youth helped set the scene and encourage a reflection on the lived experiences and views of young people.

Refugee Youth Quotes

"Before I became a refugee, I wanted to be a doctor. My dream is to study and continue my education. But I can't tell my family because I know they cannot afford it now and every school here costs money."

"Even if a girl gets a scholarship to university, if it is far from her place of residence, her family won't let her go."

"Here you can't reach higher education, you are stopped either after primary or secondary. There are no opportunities to further yourself beyond that... Why is it that we as young refugees must always be restricted?"

"We need opportunities to go beyond what is available in the camp and go to universities or have apprenticeships. To access the knowledge and information that is available in the outside world so that we can make a real difference in the future."

"I believe my future is bright now. I come from a place where people did not get education very easily. I have a dream that if I continue studying and I am able to specialise and become a professional I will have a bright future where I can help rebuild my country and I can help others to see the light of education."

"Increased university education would also lead to changes in societal attitudes towards women, leading to increased empowerment and participation of women in society."

Session 1: Policy and Context

Speakers: Kenneth King, Keith Watenpaugh

Key question:

Given major changes in global policies, especially the SDGs' inclusion of lifelong learning, what should be the impact on universities' mission, mandate and civic responsibilities in terms of humanitarian engagement?

Discussion:

Access to higher education for refugees is important. There is a need to promote access to higher education opportunities, not only for students but also for academics fleeing war and persecution. In the climate of Brexit and current US elections, and with the largest number ever of people displaced, there are fears, tensions, and thus a need to make the case for higher education for refugees if we are to build and rebuild societies that address these issues. There is need to look beyond the issues that force people to flee, at ways youth want to invest their time and efforts in order to pursue their goals.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) this year include goal four on education, which aims to “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”, and represents a shift from the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which with regard to education focused essentially on primary education. These goals and their targets, while nearly impossible to attain, still provide a platform on which to justify and strive to provide higher education for all refugee learners. However, how this will be achieved is not clear and lacks commitment and vision as current efforts insufficiently address the needs of refugees.

The SDGs were adopted by governments and the impact this has on universities is not immediately clear. Universities are also impacted by the scale of the refugee crisis and face tough questions regarding their responsibility and mission. University admission for refugee learners proves difficult as many lack the required eligibility documents such as proof of prior learning, of nationality and other vital information. With limited opportunities refugees often engage in risky attempts to return to the place they fled, or have smugglers retrieve original documentation from their country of origin. Refugee learners often do not meet admission criteria. Universities need to show a certain degree of flexibility and involve the university's administration and registrar offices in their refugee initiatives.

The question was then raised as to how universities can be more inclusive, rather than exclusive. Universities are selective, some potential students may not be admitted. How then can equity as well as quality assurance be achieved while providing access to higher education for refugee learners? Different strategies were suggested, included working to change the “institutional will,”

building support mechanisms to prepare learners for admission and accompany them throughout their university experience, and to develop inclusive practices.

Particular focus was given to the Syrian crisis throughout the workshop, due to the expertise many speakers had on the topic. It was noted that before the war Syria had free public education and many of the refugees have been educated up to and through professional training and university degrees.

A proposal to address the issue of facilitating access to higher education was made: the *“Article 26 Backpack.”* This is an on-line repository and tool that could help refugees to upload and save information about their education, as well as copies of their certificates and transcripts, to submit these for evaluation with a view to ensuring learning pathways in higher education.

The session concluded that universities have an immense power as an engine of social and political inclusion. Not only can universities provide higher education to refugees who may eventually return to their home countries and be agents of the change, but universities can also raise public awareness about the value of refugees and migrants to society.

Policy considerations

- Build a community to address the challenge of documentation and recognition of prior learning for refugee applicants
- Adjustment of attitude and goals through HE
- Embed policy in the realities on the ground
- Design alternatives to admissions, documentation, placement/entry testing
- Raise awareness with hosting societies about the importance of critical thinking developed in HE programmes
- HEIE offerings must be interdisciplinary
- Higher education efforts need to be in line with societal needs of host countries and countries of origin
- Tertiary education should address pressing needs such as skills
- Universities should be more inclusive and involve policy custodians
- Universities should use administrative means to confront prejudice
- Protection needs of refugees should be clearly addressed when providing visas for third country scholarships (i.e. sometimes there is no right to return)

Session 2: Purpose and outcomes of Higher Education in Emergencies

Speakers: Barbara Moser-Mercer, Anton Mangstl

Key Question:

Does higher education play a role in building more peaceful, cohesive and tolerant societies at a time when there is great fear, tension and conflict arising due to large scale migration?"

Discussion:

This session highlighted the necessity to develop an [agenda for higher education in emergencies](#), that should include some of the values embodied in the [“decent work agenda”](#) of the International Labour Organization. The purpose is not only to build places where people can go and learn, but to build a place where refugees can go to develop goals, where they can gain knowledge and skills that will help them in their personal development, enable them to be the agents of change in their host countries and, if repatriating, in their countries of origin. Universities should be more inclusive, offer different platforms for those really in need, diversify programming that integrates vocational skills with a university degree.

Higher education institutions play an increasingly important role in emergencies and host countries. Programs such as those offered by the German-Jordanian University and dubbed, “a system of enlightenment”, in which students enrolled for bachelor programmes spend one year studying in Germany, in order to experience different cultures and to develop inclusiveness in the University, could be considered for refugee learners as well.

Higher education plays an important role in our society, and an increasingly important role in the lives of refugees. For that we need to improve access to higher education institutions; access has been highlighted as the primary policy consideration. But access is not to be thought of only in terms of physical access, but includes cultural, linguistic and intellectual access. All of these dimensions need to be taken into consideration when designing and deploying HEiE programs. Building a team of fellow advocates and engaging faculty across the institution, taking fellow professors that share the vision of HEiE to refugee camps to understand refugee learners’ needs and challenges, for example, has allowed InZone’s vision to slowly spread across the University of Geneva’s various faculties.

Facilitating access for refugees to higher education and ongoing support during their studies is an important factor and a necessity in the current refugee crisis, in light of the serious risk of a lost generation of citizens of countries in crisis and in war.

Refugee lives are disrupted on so many levels, that even while admitted to university programs, they may not have the space to study and think freely. Higher education that actively contributes to peace and tolerance, that supports an individual’s freedom to think, allows learners and

graduates to make a valuable contribution to their communities and host societies, and ultimately to their countries of origin by building back better.

Challenges and opportunities for higher education in emergencies:

| Challenges and limitations | Opportunities and solutions |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How can we find a solution that is applicable in more than just one institution? - How can we make the refugee situation real for university administrators and others who decide on admission? and - How can we prevent HE institutions from producing (refugee) ghettos? - How can we close the gap between current HE policies and realities? - How can we promote lifelong learning while integrating guidance about career paths in HEiE? - How might we ensure that the practical training required to practice a trade is integrated in a coherent plan for tertiary education opportunities for refugees ? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborative pedagogies have the potential to promote peaceful communities and societies and can be applied across HE institutions - Integration of refugee learners should be a cross-cutting mission for the entire HE institution that looks specifically at implementation issues such as the role of international offices, student unions, Centres for Islamic studies, etc. - Building national and international partnerships and capacity of institutions in host communities; develop standards/guidelines for inclusive policies and practices - We need to develop foundation programmes for refugee learners, strengthen support mechanisms and provide career guidance relevant to the refugee's status - 'Access' to HE for refugees is about much more than access but is about continuation, retention, successful learning outcomes and career guidance. |

Section 3: Roles of academic institutions and humanitarian organisations in Higher Education in Emergencies

Speakers: Jean-Dominique Vassalli, Josephine Gitome, Cristof Muehlberg, Tatjana Klein, Sally Ward

Key question:

What are the possibilities and limitations higher education institutions face as they admit and develop programs for refugees, IDPs and other migrants?

Discussion:

Higher education is traditionally the role of universities, but providing higher education in an emergency context for refugees involves other stakeholders and an expansion of universities' traditional role. Can universities also play a role as humanitarian actors? Who do they need to partner with in order to provide higher education to refugees? The differing nature of refugee contexts makes the issue of providing higher education to refugees an interdisciplinary issue.

Universities, particularly public universities, operate within a specific social and political context to achieve their specific mandate and mission. How and why would a university become engaged in education programs with refugees? Arguments in favor are that such programs would not only be the right thing to do socially, but also enrich the university and provide unique research opportunities. This would then raise questions around resources (financial, teaching time, learning materials, etc.) and associated risks (security of staff and facilities in remote locations and campuses). However, such programs also are very interdisciplinary in nature and allow for unique partnerships within the universities, with other universities and with other entities, such as humanitarian organizations, all of which provide benefits and opportunities to learn for the entire institution.

There are challenges determining the types of programmes universities could offer. Refugees are highly mobile and their futures are not always clear, which makes planning for longer programs difficult. Some of the proposals included offering long-distance courses that could be followed online or in a blended format, short professional courses focused on a limited number of skills but with stackable options. While universities differ in nature and resources, the University of California, Davis, for example, conducted a study and found that enrolling refugees into the university did not actually strain resources as many of the support mechanisms were already in place. However, refugee programs required vision and leadership from within to really grow programs both within the university and in the field (such as in refugee camps).

International humanitarian organisations, such as UNHCR, have a particular role to play in higher education in emergencies, with a main focus on supporting partnerships (such as InZone) and overseeing several scholarships programs (from different donors) for refugees to gain access to

local or foreign universities. However, these scholarships are very limited in number, come with different regulations and support packages, have only a 10%-20% acceptance rate of those who apply, making administration confusing and applications difficult for refugees. Student visas are difficult to obtain for refugees, even when a university in Europe or North America is offering to pay a full scholarship, as granting of visas is made dependent on the refugees intention to return to their country of origin, which is both difficult to prove and usually impossible to implement if conflict continues to reign in countries of origin.

Enrolling students at local universities in host countries, can also bring some needed funding to higher education programs. In the case of Kenyatta University, as one of the host universities for DAFI scholarships (Albert Einstein scholarship run through UNHCR), the scholarship money for refugee students helps subsidize programs, as many national students do not pay the full rate. Universities are always a part of the communities and countries within which they operate and need to navigate complex relationships, especially if locals are under the impression that refugees are receiving preferential treatment. It is thus important to build programs in which locals and refugees have opportunities to learn together. For example, German-Jordanian University has a program for training humanitarian professionals that enrolls both Jordanian and refugee (Syrian) learners.

Yet despite these efforts, the majority of refugee youth who complete secondary school do not have access to higher education. Challenges can be linked to gender issues, finance, safety, lack of exposure, poor performance in secondary school and incomplete documentation or certificates from their countries of origin. Even with original documents, equivalency of degrees and certificates issued by foreign ministries of education, admission to a university is challenging for refugee students.

NGOs are the traditional humanitarian actors on the ground in refugee contexts. They work closely with UN organizations and ministries of education to provide access to education for refugee learners. While their scope was traditionally more limited to primary, secondary and vocational training, they are now partnering with universities to support the provision of higher education.

Entities universities should consider partnering with to provide higher education for refugees:

- Intergovernmental organisations with a humanitarian mandate (e.g. UNHCR)
- Institutional partnerships in front-line states
- INGOs/NGOs in the region
- Ministries of higher education and other political authorities whose support is essential
- Donors
- Bilateral aid agencies
- Private foundations
- North – South university partnerships
- Networking with organizations and universities concerned with refugee studies
- Community leaders
- University colleagues
- programs already operating on the ground

In conclusion, IOs, NGOs and higher education institutions need to work together in order to improve access to HEiE and ensure success of refugees in their studies. Higher education institutions' mission is to provide higher education; IOs and NGOs are equally important since they operate in the field and have first-hand knowledge of refugees' needs.

Concluding activity

Participants were divided in two groups and were asked to debate the following statement, highlighting their key arguments to substantiate their position.

“The provision of higher education for refugees (even in refugee camps) is primarily the responsibility of educational institutions.”

| Pro: | Con: |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Universities have <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the competencies - the structures - the capacity - the research resources • Universities offer accredited degrees, certify learning, etc. • Universities have international and institutional recognition • Universities have credibility as providers of Higher Education • If not universities, who else could? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not the sole role of universities because the scale of the refugee crisis exceeds the universities' capacities • Need to think through the protection lens of “do no harm” • Universities lack training and experience in basic humanitarian practices • Emphasis should be on partnership, not on going it alone • Provision of additional financial resources and support services is not necessarily assured • Little time for understanding the complexity of refugee context • Lack of refugee relevant locations in which universities operate • Access + Diversity = Top 10% (leaving women and those with diverse needs behind) |

Conclusion and Recommendations

The goal of the short but intense workshop was to address several key questions around higher education and protection of refugees and arrive at three recommendations. The workshop participants agreed on the following:

- 1. University of Geneva / InZone to advocate for quality higher education for refugees within the framework of humanitarian principles.**
- 2. Global Higher Education Institutions to develop a mobility tool to aid in refugee access to higher education opportunities.**
- 3. Develop policies and procedures on inclusion of refugee learners in Higher Education.**

In addition to the core recommendations, there were several other recommendations to be noted:

- University of Geneva to obtain resources (human and financial) through InZone to develop the scientific evidence for quality higher education for refugees
- Capacity building for university staff and dedicated trainers, administrators, and for refugee learners
- Host universities to develop more flexible and creative approaches to admission requirements and documentation for refugee learners
- Increased focus on rebuilding Syrian and regional universities (not just western universities providing programs)
- Develop visa and flexible pathways for third country scholarships
- Develop a comprehensive holistic support mechanism for refugee-hosting institutions

Throughout the workshop participants were asked to note down their reflections on various issues that arose during the discussions:

Reflections

- Equitable access is different for refugees. Support is needed to achieve equity in access and promote learner success.
- Traditional methods of international support to refugees are insufficient.
- Universities need to address the issue of large numbers of potential students
- Our collective role is to think holistically and help young brains, empowering refugee youth to 'become' against all odds.
- Does the Right to education include higher education?
- Increase focus on girls and women
- We need every refugee to learn and reflect critically on their situation.
- Refugees who access higher education become leaders and change makers.
- Refugees have hopes, ambitions and potential; collectively we must ensure that they can realize these.