Higher Education in Contexts of Mass Displacement
Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

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Higher Education in Contexts of Mass Displacement

• High levels of demand for university-level programmes among refugee students (Gladwell et al, 2016)
  – Refugees from countries with high enrolment rates;
  – Protracted nature of displacement; and
  – Availability of knowledge intensive jobs

• Only less than 1% refugees have access to higher education (UNHCR, 2014)

• Global campaigns – INEE, Education Cannot Wait, SDGs
The Role of Higher Education in Conflict and Crisis Settings

• Providing vital human capital, acting as a point of critical reflection on national development – also incentives for completing primary and secondary education;

• Serving as a training ground for national political elites, a key point of socialisation for a new generation of citizens;

• Higher education as an autonomous space, between state and capital, religion and society, where key issues can be debated and solutions developed [potentially] through democratic engagement and debate;

• A protection mechanism in refugee situations to rebuild lives and communities and cultivate hopes and aspirations for future;

• But also, higher education could be:
  – a mechanism of elite closure, a key tool in the maintenance of elite power, a reproducer of colonial hegemony/dominance;
  – a space of silence, rote learning and memorisation; a place of alienation and victimisation, a place of false hope and frustration
Higher Education for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

• Before the Syrian crisis, 26% of university-aged Syrians from towns and cities, and 17% of men and 15% of women from rural areas, were enrolled in some form of tertiary education in Syria (El-Ghali, Berjaoui & McKnight 2017).

• Between 1-5% of the total number of university age refugees from Syria living in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq were enrolled in tertiary education programmes regionally (El-Ghali, Berjaoui et al 2017).

• In Lebanon, the right to public education limited to Lebanese citizens only. Access to public education for guests is a privilege not a right.

• 95% of Syrian refugees aged 15-24 are not enrolled in secondary or tertiary education in Lebanon (El-Ghali, Berjaoui, and McKnight 2017).

• Despite programmes such as RACE I/ RACE II, 48% of 6-14 year olds are not enrolled in primary or secondary education in Lebanon – barrier to higher education access for Syrians.
Available Opportunities

• Students who completed their schooling in host countries (face-to-face/ physical presence)
• Vocational pathways - targeted support from UNICEF, UNHCR, SPARK and HOPES (UNESCO 2017).
• Collaborations between private universities and humanitarian organisations – AUB, LAU and LIU programmes for refugees
• Host country/institutions scholarships
• Scholarships through UNHCR and other organizations
• Online courses

Academic, technological and pedagogical features and content of existing modalities, sustainability and impact as well as the impact of the refugees themselves
Challenges to Access

- Acute poverty among refugees and high costs of university education
- Complex political, economic and demographic conditions in Lebanon, e.g. graduate unemployment
- Refugees are doubly disadvantaged from professional sectors e.g. medicine, engineering, nursing, teaching etc.
- Mobility and Security issues
- Stigma and marginalisation
- Syrian Palestinians facing further exclusions including - bleak prospects of relocation or return – no protection
- Public universities account for 30% of Lebanese higher education which cost between USD700-900 – still difficult to access for refugees despite fee reductions
Other Challenges

• Long-term demands vs. short term crisis response
• Higher education is not prioritised
• Lack of residency permits, IDs, certificates
• Assuming that countries in the region are transit countries
• The broad availability of internet courses often remains inaccessible to refugees settled in rural parts/ camp settings of host countries
• Coordination
• Language
• Outreach
• Lack of career guidance
Facing Challenges and Overcoming Barriers

- **Online education** is being promoted as a viable solution
  - Attractive to refugee host countries – easing direct financial and resource pressures - Subcontracting education to external/non-state actors
  - Deflection from the real crisis of access, quality and funding

- **Providing vocational training** for employment – online based

- **Arabic** online courses
Partnerships

Multi-dimensional partnerships (University – NGO partnerships; University – MEHE partnerships; University – INGO/Donors partnerships; Scholarships – in host country/region/other)

• Are they collaborative? Or North-South partnerships as neo-colonial project in action?
• Further strengthening existing elitist institutions through new collaborative projects – enhancing social/ economic/knowledge gaps
• Educational partnerships in conflict-affected contexts: risky, sensitive and difficult to implement
• Project-based interventions – largely depend on donor priority areas
Future Education

• Think about questions dealing with the purpose of education for refugee contexts, living under various political, social and economic constraints

• What should education look like to deal with complex issues in contexts of mass displacement and future of refugees

  – A relocated society that is other than their host or the country of origin;
  – Protracted transitional situation in a host country;
  – The host country where they become legal residents/citizens with all the rights; or
  – Their country of origin, after return

• Holistic approach to higher education beyond the market oriented approach: peace-building, equity, diversity and knowledge production and moving beyond the idea of the homogeneity of the refugee population, their needs and aspirations
Reflections

• Innovative approaches – rethinking conventional notion of education
• Sustainable approaches – financial, institutional and including various actors (primarily the refugee community)
• Knowledge production - bottom up, needs-based and driven by aspirations of displaced populations
• Rights based approach and equity
• Think critically about homogeneous categorisation of refugees: intersections of gender, displacement, refugeehood, age, marital status and sexuality
• Multi-dimensional partnerships: refugee communities, universities, host governments, private sector, humanitarian organisations and charities
References

- UNESCO. (2017).“Higher Education in Lebanon Q&A. UNESCO