RESEARCH REPORT

HIGHER EDUCATION AND SYRIAN REFUGEE STUDENTS: THE CASE OF JORDAN

Policies, Practices, and Perspectives

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UNESCO Beirut Office
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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ABSTRACT

This report on the higher education for young Syrian refugees in Jordan is part of a broader regional study commissioned by UNESCO. The project aims to assess the impact of the conflict in Syria and the results of the crisis on higher education policies, provisions for Syrian refugees in the host countries, including Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey.

This report presents the findings of an investigation that aims to identify major lines of action in higher education in emergencies, namely, legal frameworks and policies implemented by key actors within the sector, whilst offering insights into the current status of Syrian refugees enrolled in higher education institutions in Jordan. The report employs a qualitative approach that intends to explore and understand the challenges and opportunities of Syrian refugee students to access higher education. Research shows that due to Jordan's financial difficulties, the government's attempts to revise clear and effective policies to accommodate for the influx of Syrian refugee students to the higher education sector are limited. Similarly, the lack of communication and coordination between key stakeholders including tertiary sector institutions, international organizations, and policy-makers, result in a significant gap in the understanding and implementing of these potential policies. Moreover, scholarship providers and international and local policy-makers are focusing more on the primary and secondary education sectors in Jordan. The findings of this study shed light on the vital role that higher education plays in improving living standards and the importance of Jordan as a host country to accustom to the increasing populations of Syrian refugee students in the tertiary education sector. This large influx of refugees presents a challenge for both the state and the local communities in satisfying both parties' needs and goals. Several of these challenges are directly linked to the education sector: (1) legal issues including lack of accreditation and citizenship alongside restrictive host country policies, (2) inexperience in university application procedures or lack of academic and career guidance, which are potential pathways to the labor market or further education, and (3) financial shortcomings. The demand for higher education continues to far outstrip the opportunities available in Jordan, thus creating a large pool of Syrian students whose socio-economic returns of tertiary education are limited. This case study of Jordan offers policy and program recommendations to decision- and policy-makers for the national and international communities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donors, education stakeholders and other institutions with the overall goal to improve and guide further practice and research in supporting displaced persons in protracted situations to access higher education and reap its future rewards.

Keywords

Young Syrian refugees, Displaced persons, Higher Education, NGOs.

INTRODUCTION

As the Syrian crisis continues into its sixth year with no end in sight, the future of Syria and its people hang in the balance. Before the war, around 26 percent of Syrian young people were enrolled in higher education (Watenpaugh, Fricke & King, 2014). A general estimate places the total participation from Syrians aged 18-24 in tertiary education at 20 percent before the war and less than 5 percent in 2016 (EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, 2016). But as the protracted crisis continues, Syrian youth are facing barriers to accessing higher education in the countries in which they seek refuge. The continued disruption of Syrians' higher education poses a great threat to the financial status and quality of life of refugees. Moreover, an uneducated "lost generation" will not be equipped to rebuild the economic, political, educational, and infrastructures in post-war Syria. Jordan, neighboring Syria to the south host a large number of Syrian refugees. It is therefore important to understand the current status of higher education in Jordan, in order to study the case of Syrian refugees in this matter.

Jordan is a leader among Arab countries in educational spending as a percentage of GDP. Jordan has 10 operating public universities; seven in the north and central part of the country, and three in the south, It also has 19 private universities in the north and the middle of Jordan. Furthermore, Jordan has 41 community colleges (18 private colleges, 6 military colleges, 12 public colleges and five governmental colleges). The current capacity for all Jordanian community colleges is 41,000, while the current number of students is 13,000 students. Jordan also has 43 vocational training centers with a capacity of 10,000 students in 338 training workshops (VTC, 2016).

JORDANIAN NATIONAL CONTEXT

Jordan is a country of approximately 7.6 million people, with about 30.6 percent of the population representing non-Jordanians (World Bank, 2016a). Hosting a large Syrian refugee population, the Jordanian government has implemented strict measures to contain refugees in government-organized camps, limiting the integration of refugees within society. The country's GDP per capita is about US$ 5,000 in 2016 making it an upper middle-income country. The country's economy depends heavily upon remittances from its skilled labor working abroad in the oil rich countries of the region and external grants/loans from international and regional partners (World Bank, 2011). The country faces a number of challenges which are not quite unique to its context; among which are high unemployment, a dependency on grants and remittances from Gulf economies, as well as the continued pressure on natural resources (World Bank, 2016a). Unemployment in the country has been reported at 14.6 percent during the first quarter of 2016 (Department of Statistics, 2016). This rate is particularly higher among university degree holders by almost 20 percent compared to other levels of education. This presents an added challenge for the government in regulating higher education and aligning it with labor market demand.

SYRIAN REFUGEES CONTEXT IN JORDAN

As a result of the civil war in Syria, there has been a large influx of Syrian refugees to Jordan. Regional conflicts in Syria and Iraq have impacted the already fragile economy; disrupting trade and straining previously scarce resources with the increased population as a result of the influx of refugees (Luck, 2016).

Jordan is host to about 1.3 million Syrians, according to the Ministry of Planning (MOP), increasing Jordan's population by almost 20 percent, including around 656,400 of whom are registered as refugees (Watenpaugh et al., 2013; UNHCR, 2016b). About 78 percent of the majority of Syrian registered refugees live outside of official camps in the north and central part of the country, with the remaining 22 percent living in one of three official UNHCR camps. (UNHCR, 2016b). Table 1 shows the increase in registered refugees, with the vast majority of migration occurring during 2013 and numbers steadying since 2015, due to increased border control. With such a large population of Syrians already living in Jordan, along with cultural and historical ties, an open border, and relative safety, Jordan has become a logical destination for many Syrians fleeing violence.

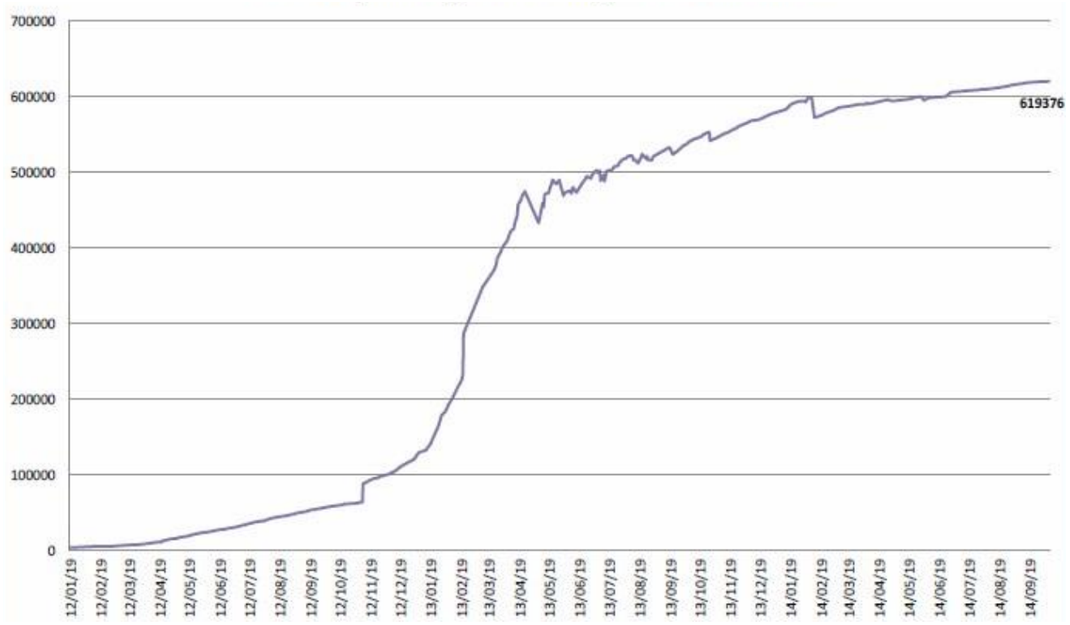
Table 1

Population of Registered Syrian Refugees in Jordan (Source: UNHCR, 2016b)

YEAR	REGISTERED SYRIAN REFUGEES
January 2012	2,749
January 2013	120,018
January 2014	582,166
January 2015	622,287
January 2016	635,324
September 2016	656,400

Figure 1

Influx of Registered Syrian Refugees in Jordan (Source: UNESCO Education Response to the Syria Crisis, 2015-2016)



In providing for the needs of refugees, Jordan has received support from the international community. Funding, however, has not been proportionate to response requirements, and whilst needs are increasing in some sectors, trends in contributions for 2015 suggest that overall international support has not kept pace. By November 2015, roughly 1.07 billion US dollars had been committed to the Jordan Response Plan (JRP) 2015, which corresponds to 36 percent of the funding requirements (Azzeh, 2015). Meanwhile, refugee communities are becoming increasingly vulnerable. The presence of refugees has placed significant demands on overstretched public service sectors in Jordan. One of the main disruptions and a particular area of concern caused by the crisis and displacement is in the education sector.

Throughout the six year Syrian refugee crisis, education for refugee children has been prioritized in development, humanitarian aid, media coverage, discussion, and research. So far, the majority of support in the field of education has targeted the age group 6-18, which is typical in an emergency situation. As a result, the age group 18-25 has mostly been forgotten. The initial response to higher education was isolated and sporadic, only recently becoming coordinated as the crisis and consequent displacement became protracted (DAFI, 2013).

Education sector in Jordan

Education in Jordan was central to transforming the country from a traditional, tribal society to a modern, national state. As a country poor in natural resources, much hope was placed in education as a tool for modernization and industrialization. Today, Jordan aims to become a "knowledge-based economy", and education has become even more important as the country recognizes the need for highly skilled students.

According to the records of the Ministry of Education (MOE), the total number of students at different school stages in Jordan in the scholastic year 2015/2016 was 1,846,963, out of which 915,164 were females (49.5 percent), and the total number of teachers and school principals for the same year were 89,937 (one teacher to every 21 students), out of which 34,017 were females (38 percent) throughout the education stages (primary, intermediate, and secondary). There has been a series of education reforms to improve curriculum and expand access to schools throughout Jordan. These have resulted in less illiteracy rates and higher enrollment rates in basic education. The MOE is responsible for preschools, primary and secondary education, while the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) is responsible for higher education. The Vocational Training Cooperation (VTC) is responsible for vocational programs in which students enroll after the 10th grade of their secondary education. Preschool is not mandatory in Jordan, but recommended for ages three and four year old children, they are operated by private institutions, and parents usually pay fees to enroll their children.

Primary education is compulsory and free of charge, serving children from five to fifteen years of age. About 30 percent of primary school students attend private schools. Secondary school in Jordan is a two-year program in which students have a choice between an academic track and vocational training. The majority of primary school graduates (which includes grades 1-9) enroll in secondary school, but there is a high drop-out rate at the secondary school level. The academic track leads to the national examination certificate, *"Tawjihi"*, which determines access to university and other institutions of tertiary education. The vocational courses are concluded with an apprenticeship giving students a certificate in a specific vocation.

For Jordan's 2 million registered Palestinian refugees, primary education is provided by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The UNRWA schools are known to be overcrowded due to strained budgets, and they often have to run double shifts. As such, one-third of Palestinian refugee children attend Jordanian public schools instead, particularly if they live far away from UNRWA school locations. Some Palestinian children also attend private schools.

Although Jordan has accomplished much in its efforts to provide quality education with access for all, particularly with regard to enrollment in higher education, there are still many challenges for education in Jordan, and the most significant is Jordan's youth bulge. Jordan is a middle-income country, but it has one of the youngest populations among countries in the same income category, with an estimated 63 percent of the population under the age of 30.The country's population has been growing at a rate higher than the regional average over the past two decades, and its population has nearly tripled.

Issues relating to the Syrian Crises and the Education Sector in Jordan

The education sector in Jordan receives considerable support from the government, representing 14.2 percent of the public expenditure, placing the country ahead of other countries in the region (Knoema, 2016). Nevertheless, recent evidence suggests a decline in the quality of education in public institutions, which the government fears may result in a generation of youth that is unprepared for a competitive regional and global workforce (Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, 2015). Despite the reform within the education sector in Jordan, the sector remains in need for new schools and teachers to accommodate the growing number of students. The challenge of improving the quality of education in Jordan and delivering more competitive results has been further strained by the influx of more than 200,000 Syrian refugees of school-going age (six to seventeen), out of which 101,000 refugee students were enrolled in Jordanian schools in the 2013–2014 academic year. The number of enrolled students increased slightly in 2014–2015, but 38 percent of school-age refugees in host communities are still not enrolled in formal schools. There are simply not enough classrooms and teachers to meet the increased demand within the sector. Double-shift schools have been introduced as a means to address this challenge. However, as demand outpaces supply, barriers to education for Syrian refugees develop, and Jordanian authorities are repeatedly voicing the need for international support to provide assistance to Syrian refugees in the country.

There are over 120,000 Syrian refugees between the ages of 15-24 years (about 19 percent of registered Syrian refugees) currently in Jordan. Approximately 20 percent (25,000) live in camps, while the remaining 95,000 reside in host communities. Syrian students can access government schools up to the age of 16. The adolescent age group among Syrian refugees living in Jordan is disproportionately out of school. Although formal school is obligatory in Jordan until the age of 16, many Syrian girls drop out of school because families think it's unsafe, and boys drop out of school because they have to work illegally to provide an income for their families. The vulnerability assessment of the education sector was carried out by JRP in 2015 at the district level and used three indicators: ratio of classes to students, ratio of students to schools, and ratio of students to teachers. The national standard that was used is 27 students per class. Vulnerability to crowding in classes was found to be most severe in seven districts in governorates with high concentrations of Syrian refugees; namely, Amman, Irbid, Mafraq, and Zarqa. Statistically, 86 percent of this vulnerability is explained by the additional demand from Syrian refugees. The assessment found that 300 new schools would be needed to meet the national standard of 19 classes per school (JRP, 2016). The assessment found that an additional 8,600 teachers would be needed to meet the national standard of 17 students per teacher.

Higher Education in Jordan

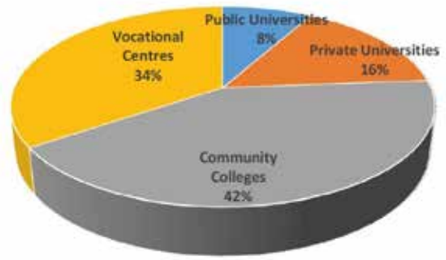
Despite the continuous governmental support to the higher education sector in Jordan, high rates of youth unemployment persist in a country where increasingly greater numbers of families are seeking to further their children's education through investments in university education.

The higher education sector in Jordan has grown significantly in the last three decades, largely due to a demographic shift characterized by natural population growth, and to regional crises, which resulted in the influx of thousands of refugees to the country (Al-Hamadeen and Alsharairi, 2015). These have in turn significantly increased the demand for higher education, with enrollment rates for Bachelor's and graduate studies increasing significantly, which has been met by the establishment of a growing number of higher education institutions (AlHamadeen and Alsharairi, 2015). Jordanian universities also attract many international students. For example in 2007, international students constituted almost 10 percent of students enrolled in higher education institutions in the country (Kanaan et al., 2010). Also in response to the growing rate of enrollment, Jordan introduced a parallel program, through which students, who do not meet the qualifications for higher education, can still enroll in an institution by paying a higher tuition fee (El-Araby, 2011). In 2007, the parallel program enrolled approximately 20 percent of students in higher education institutions across Jordan (El-Araby, 2011).

The capacity for public universities in the year 2009 was 162,914 students in 10 universities (the numbers provided are for undergraduate degrees, BA, BSc, etc.). Based on the Jordanian Higher Education Accreditation Commission (HEAC) accreditation criteria, the number should be much bigger today. As for private universities (19 universities) the capacity is up-to-date and it is 90,460 students (the numbers provided are for undergraduate degrees, BA, BSc, etc.). Jordan presently has 10 public universities, 19 private universities, 51 community colleges and 42 vocational training centers with a capacity of 10,000 students in 338 training workshops (MOHE, 2016; Vocational Training Corporation, 2017). As for postgraduate courses, Masters and PhDs, the total number of students is 21,721 among whom 17,994 are Master degree students and 3,727 are PhD students. Figure 1 illustrates types of higher education institutions in Jordan.

Figure 2

Types of Higher Education Institutions in Jordan (Source: MOHE, 2016; Vocational Training Corporation, 2017)



According to the records of the MOHE, the total number of students in public and private universities at the bachelor degree level in Jordan in the academic year 2015/2016 was 268,851; About 139,695 of whom were females (52 percent). The number of foreign students enrolled at Jordanian universities was close to 35,000. The total number of students in public and private community colleges in Jordan in the academic year 2015/2016 was 13,000. The number of students in public universities, private universities, community colleges and vocational training centers in Jordan in 2015/2016 are presented in figure 2 below.

Figure 3

Students in Public Universities, Private Universities, Community Colleges and Vocational Training Centers in Jordan for the Academic Year 2015/2016 (Source: MOHE, 2016)

Issues relating to the Syrian Crisis and the Higher Education Sector in Jordan

One of the most significant long-term consequences of the Syrian crisis is the disruption of Syrians' education. It is important to note the comparison between Syrian students' enrollment in higher education institutions before and after the war, as well as its effect on policy-making in Jordan. Statistics on university enrollment before the war estimate that 26 percent of Syrian urban men and women, as well as 17 percent of rural men and 15 percent of rural women, studied in college, at university, or had vocational training in Syria (Watenpaugh et al., 2014). Estimates depict a plummet in the percentages of Syrian students participating in higher education, compared to pre-war statistics, placing the total participation from Syrians aged 18-24 in higher education at 20 percent before the war and less than 5 percent in 2016 (EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, 2016). These figures echo a UNHCR participatory assessment conducted in 2014, which ultimately highlight the demand for higher education before the war, and the resulting impact of the war on enrollment rates. Analysis of media, organization reports, and academic literature shows that there has been a very limited and consistent dialogue on the issue of higher education for Syrian refugees prior to 2015 (Inter-Agency, 2015). The significant decline in participation rates in higher education of Syrian students was followed by a response from Jordanian policy-makers to attempt to include the sector in their policies.

Higher education was integrated into the Jordan Response Plan (JRP) for the first time in 2015. The two main reasons behind the inclusion of higher education issues in JRP were the length of the Syrian crisis and the advocacy of different international stakeholders regarding the access Syrian refugee students have to higher education institutions. According to the records of the MOHE and HEAC, only 7,024 of the Syrian refugee students were in higher education (6024 in universities and 1,000 in community colleges) for the academic year 2015/2016. The HEAC believes that the needs of post-war Syria will not differ from that of the current Jordanian job market. Hence, a Syrian graduate from a Jordanian university is going to be needed by post-war Syria. Table 2 below shows the number of Syrian students in Jordanian universities (refugees and non-refugees) from the academic year 2012/2013 until the year 2015/2016.

Table 2

The Number of Syrian Students in Jordanian Universities 2012-2016 (Source: Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research)

UNIVERSITY TYPE	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
Public Universities	1363	1850	1922	1804
Private universities	2528	3506	3995	4220
Total	3891	5356	5917	6024

The 18-24 age group of Syrians who live in Jordan form about 12.5 percent of the whole Syrian population. The total number of the Syrian 18-24 age group who reside in Jordan is estimated to be 80,471. The 7,024 Syrian students who were in higher education in Jordan during the academic year 2015/2016 represent only 4.5 percent of this age group, while before 2011, the ratio was 26 percent. If that 26 percent was applied to the same age group today, there would be 40,560 Syrian students in higher education in Jordan. This is an indication of the devastating impact of the war on Syrian youth in tertiary education.

Figure 4

No. of Syrian Students Compared to Jordanian Students and all Non-Jordanian Students in Tertiary Education Institutions

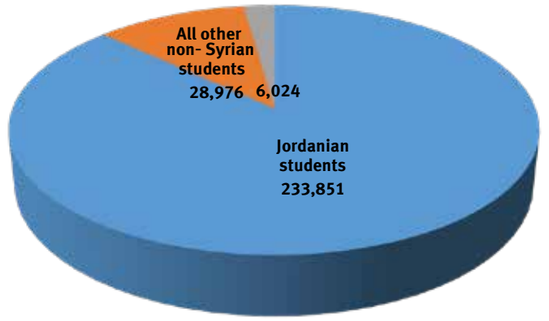
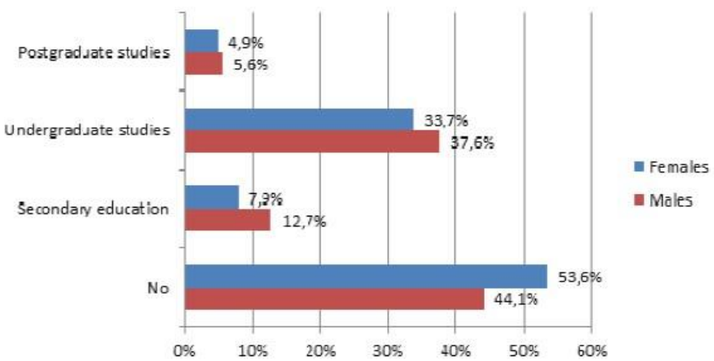


Figure 5

Drop-out by level of study and gender in Jordan (Source: European Union Delegation to the Syrian Arab Republic, 2015)



RATIONALE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Syrian youth are vulnerable to the recruitment of radical groups, particularly when faced with a lack of the protective environment, the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills, and the opportunities that result from education. There is a need to alleviate the situation with innovative educational strategies to coordinate efforts, share knowledge, make evidence-informed decisions, improve efficiency or effectiveness, and solicit resources. A particular area of concern is tertiary education for refugee students as it is important for the future of Syrian as well as the societies within the host country. Research supports the need to include tertiary education in the global movement for the provision of education to refugees, as it offers a number of benefits for the refugees themselves as well as the host country, and post-conflict country of origin. In this sense, tertiary education is seen as an instrument of protection in refugee contexts, as it provides youth in conflict settings with an opportunity for peace building and can serve as a counter-terrorism method (Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Fricke, et al., 2014). This study examines tertiary education provisions for Syrian refugee students in Jordan in order to contribute to the ongoing policy discussions and planning on how to provide access to tertiary education for a vulnerable population.

Preventing a 'lost generation' and ensuring access to tertiary education for Syrian refugees is of paramount importance in response to this protracted refugee crisis. Multiple barriers complicate the process of Syrians accessing tertiary education in Jordan. Studies that have been conducted on Syrian refugees' access to tertiary education in Jordan call attention to the barriers facing Syrians whilst recommending possible solutions. These studies include regional surveys (Cremonini, Lorisika & Safar Jalani, 2015; EU Regional Trust Fund, 2016) and Jordan case studies (Watenpaugh, 2013). Such reports investigated Syrian university students in Jordan and found barriers to tertiary education ranging from a lack of resources to discriminatory practices, as well as a lack of programs and policies to address these barriers. The studies identified opportunities for establishing programs, specifically through scholarships and support centers, and building capacity to improve the situation for refugees, recommending collaboration between non-governmental organizations and universities. UNESCO (2015) called for a situational analysis and gap assessment of the tertiary education sector in Jordan and neighboring countries to understand the programs, priorities and needs.

Syrians struggle to establish their lives and integrate into the host communities, and Jordan struggles to accommodate the refugee population while maintaining security. Therefore, this study aims to identify policies, practices, and perspectives relative to accessing tertiary education for Syrian refugees in Jordan with the aim of understanding the challenges and opportunities during this protracted crisis by investigating the perspectives of key stakeholders. This study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the international, regional, and national legal frameworks and practiced policies for provision for tertiary education for refugees in Jordan?
2. What are the policies and practices of the different organizations and bodies involved in the funding, planning, administering and providing tertiary education opportunities for Syrian refugee students in Jordan?
3. What are the challenges facing the formulation, planning an execution of tertiary education access for Syrian refugee students in Jordan?

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to contribute to the ongoing policy discussions on higher education for Syrian refugee students in Jordan, the main concerns being the effective planning and execution of programs and opportunities for refugees in the tertiary education sector. The present study follows an exploratory qualitative approach that aims to present a multifaceted approach to the recommended policies, including perspectives of key stakeholders, challenges to both the policy-makers and the refugees, as well as the specific context of the policies and legal frameworks, with a constant focus on their direct relationship to the higher education of Syrian refugees in Jordan. The research identifies the major trends, partners, and components related to tertiary education for Syrians in Jordan.

Data Collection Procedure

Desk reviews and interviews with relevant stakeholders were carried. The desk review consisted of a literature review, media review, policy and document review. Desk-based research was complemented by semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders who are involved in the response to Syrian refugee access to tertiary education in Jordan, such as donors, representatives from governmental institutions and representatives of universities.

Data was collected from multiple sources: (1) individual interviews with representatives from the government organizations, the Jordanian public and private universities, and from aid organizations; (2) focus group interviews with Syrian refugee students; (3) documented legal frameworks and policies and procedures; (4) and online studies and journals. The thorough desk and media reviews conducted were supplemented by a survey of policies and regulations governing student access to tertiary education.

Research Participants

A purposive sampling approach was adopted for the study of tertiary education response for Syrian refugee students in Jordan. Select actors within the tertiary education sector in Jordan were interviewed in order to provide a better understanding of the current policies endorsed and practices implemented in order to facilitate the access of Syrian refugees to tertiary education institutions in the country. Since the selection of respondents and participants was also purposive, the sampling approach was not intended to generate statistically significant findings. Instead, it allowed for a more nuanced thematic understanding of the tertiary education policies and practices for Syrian refugees in Jordan. In some cases, there were occasions when stakeholders were reluctant to participate in the study, while most of the interviewees did not allow interview recording. Furthermore, the participants in the focus group interviews explained that too many studies were conducted on Syrian refugees in Jordan, but very few actions are being taken to follow up on the results of such studies.

The stakeholder's interviews included policy-makers, namely the representatives from the Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research (MHESR), the Ministry of Education (MOE), Higher Education Accreditation Commission (HEAC), Ministry of Planning (MOP) and the Ministry of Labor (MOL). Also, data through interviews were collected from six tertiary education institutions (namely: Jerash University, Yarmouk University, Al-Albait University, Ajloun University, Zarqa University, and Al Quds College). Interviews were also conducted with representatives of international organizations/NGOs (namely: UNESCO, UNHCR, HOPES[1] and SPARK[2]). There were many more informal meetings and phone calls with other stakeholders.

Additionally, two focus group interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees. These were employed in this study in order to provide in-depth insights into the perspectives of the Syrian refugee students on the challenges and priorities within the access to tertiary education. Focus group interviews were held with 22 Syrian refugee students from different public and private universities in Jordan (nearly 50 percent females). The students were divided into two groups to allow for a more nuanced discussion (11 students in each group). Prior to each focus group interview, participants were asked to answer a survey questionnaire. The questionnaires were filled

1 HOPES: Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians is a program established by the EU "Madad Fund" with the objective of empowering young people from Syria to build their own career paths by directly addressing their tertiary education needs. It is implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in collaboration with its partners; British Council, Campus France and EP-Nuffic. The life-span of the project is from 2016 until 2019.

2 SPARK: It is a Dutch NGO that aims to provide tertiary education scholarships and entrepreneurship training for youth in conflict affected societies; it launched its ambitious regional scholarship program with support from various funders in 2015 to tackle this acute need with a regional approach.

out individually with the enumerator's guidance, and served the purpose of gauging the individual challenges, priorities, and perceptions held by participants in the focus group interviews. The survey was completed before the focus group interviews, so as not to have the group dynamics of the focus group interview influence the responses.

Data Analysis

The researcher followed the procedure for interpretive data analysis and treated the case as a comprehensive case. In contributing to the ongoing discussions among different stakeholders in this study, some raw data that were made available by national policy-makers such as MOE and HEAC were analyzed. Moreover, semi-structured interviews with representatives of tertiary education institutions, policy-maker and NGOs/ international organizations and focus group discussions emphasized the main changes that have taken place nationally to the legal and practical framework regarding enabling Syrian students to commence degrees or courses at universities or community colleges in Jordan. Challenges and possible solutions in relation to Syrians access to Jordanian tertiary education and prospects of employment were also explored. Understanding the characteristics of the Syrian community that live in Jordan to efficiently plan for their needs and skills is also fundamental to this process.

The results reported in this section answer the three research questions of this study pertaining to: (1) The legal frameworks and practiced policies for provision of tertiary education for refugees, (2) the policies and practices of the different organizations and bodies involved providing tertiary education opportunities for Syrian refugee students in Jordan, and (3) the challenges facing the formulation, planning, and execution of tertiary education access for Syrian refugee students in Jordan

LEGAL FRAMEWORKS AND POLICIES: RESPONSE TO CRISIS

The following section presents the findings related to the desk based research and the interviews conducted with policy makers of tertiary education in Jordan, a number of tertiary education institutions, and focus group interviews. These findings provide an understanding of the national tertiary education policies and practices for Syrian refugees in Jordan.

National Policies and Practices

The amendment or introduction of new national policies addressing the Syrian refugees' access to tertiary education in Jordan were not observed since the beginning of the crisis and the influx of refugees to Jordan. One of the factors leading to a rather slow policy development to address some aspects of the refugee crisis is the lack of data on the Syrian refugee population residing in Jordan. Hence, it is very difficult for the Jordanian government and international organizations to identify the refugees' needs for tertiary education or that of their integration into the Jordanian labor market. There is also ambiguity about the Syrian community's tendencies toward tertiary education now or even before the crisis breakdown in 2011. Therefore, the Jordan Response Plan (issued by the MOP) has not addressed the issue of Syrian tertiary education.

Data on the needs for rebuilding post-war Syria as well as the Jordanian labor market are also vital and missing, which presents challenges for creating good opportunities for development whether in Jordan, or for Syria when the crisis is over.

The only main change of policy that has taken place regarding enabling Syrian students to commence degrees or courses at universities or community colleges in Jordan, is to allow a certain period of time for Syrian students to bring their certificates and academic records from Syria after being admitted and enrolled at the university. This is not normally the case with other nationalities. Syrian students are allowed to do so as they face difficulty in obtaining their certificates and authenticated academic records, and the MOHE does not want them to lose their chance to enroll in tertiary education institutes in Jordan. Syrian students are not waived from the obligation entirely and still need to present their certificates to the tertiary education institution. Other than this, Syrian students are still treated like students of any other nationality who pursue tertiary education in Jordan.

An example of one of the policies that has remained intact was the policy dealing with the National Syrian (*Tawjihi* equivalent) certificate, which so far is the only accepted certificate. The same grace period is applicable for those who wish to transfer credit to a Jordanian tertiary education institution. Indeed, documents and certificates still need to be ratified via the normal route, with the exception of the grace period. Qualifying exams, placement tests, and foundation years for Syrian students who have difficulty in obtaining documents are not implemented. It is important to highlight that one of the factors impacting the static nature of the policy introduction is the high turnover in the leadership position within a number of ministries in Jordan, among which is the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Changes have taken place nationally to the legal and practical framework regarding the employment of Syrians who have acquired or who are currently obtaining tertiary education in Jordan. Syrians are able to join the Jordanian labor market with a work permit without paying fees for it. After the London conference "Supporting Syria and the Region" in February 2016, Syrians were granted a grace period by the Ministry of Labor (MOL) to apply for work permits without paying fees.

In line with policy discussion, the main focus of the Jordanian government remains the quality of the tertiary education sector. Universities are directed to provide courses that are needed by the Jordanian job market and abroad, with the aim of producing graduate entrepreneurs, whether these students are Jordanians, Syrians, or otherwise. Finally, efforts between various policy-makers in Jordan in responding to the Syrian crisis in general and the Syrian tertiary education in particular have not been coordinated well yet.

NGOs and International Organizations Response

There is no doubt that access to higher education is limited, and financing Syrian tertiary education is indeed the biggest challenge for scholarship providers. Donors, scholarship providers, NGOs, and international organizations vary in target groups for their funds; some scholarship providers only work with Syrian asylum seekers. Others expand this to include all Syrian students living in Jordan. Moreover, scholarship providers also vary in whether or not to sponsor a ratio of local students from host communities. Selection criteria used to allocate

scholarships also varies, but most scholarship providers focus mainly on the academic merits and the economic background of applicants.

Jordan has worked with donors to create scholarships for Syrian students at Jordanian universities. The focus of donors, scholarship providers, NGOs, and international organizations' responses vary. Some concentrate their efforts on vocational courses, others on undergraduate university courses. Some initiatives focus on online and distance learning while others focus on postgraduate courses and English language skills. However, there is a great deal of overlap and sometimes competition between various institutes and hence, more coordination and cooperation between donors, scholarships providers, NGOs and international organizations is needed.

Coordination of the efforts of scholarship providers is of particular importance for many reasons, such as avoiding one student obtaining scholarships from multiple sources and therefore prohibiting other students from receiving support. This happens because by the time a particular student has selected his or her preferred scholarship program, it is too late to allocate the declined offers to anyone else, resulting in wasted resources and lost opportunities. Moreover, another significant challenge that faces scholarship providers is the geographical location of Syrian students, since it is often the case they have to travel long distances to the institution where they have been offered the scholarship, wasting time, money and effort. Travelling from the refugee camps could also be a problem as it is often the case that there is not a direct means of transportation to the institutes where they are studying.

Tertiary Education Institutions Response

Dialogue between Jordanian tertiary education institutions and other stakeholders is very limited. More coordination and partnerships are needed between tertiary education institutions and other stakeholders including policy-makers, donors, and scholarship providers. Some universities have introduced changes such as lower tuition fees to try to attract more Syrian students to join their programs. A major obstacle for Syrian students joining tertiary education institutions is the set capacity and the infrastructure of these institutions. However, there are 29 operating universities and many community colleges and private universities that could accommodate the Syrian refugees, especially in the south of the Kingdom. Moreover, community colleges have the capacity to enroll over 40,000 students while the current number is less than 13,000 students.

Jordanian higher education institutions are independent from both the point of view of finance and administration. The main mission of the MHESR is licensing tertiary education institutions and their programs and setting the general national policy such as admission.

The socio-economic situation of Syrian refugee students coupled with expensive tuition fees is a big hurdle to overcome. High tuition rates may also play a role in the lack of retention of students, the ratio of which is difficult to establish. According to the MOHE's data, the drop out ratio for all students enrolled in the year 2015/2016 (Jordanian and foreigners including Syrian students), was 2.33 percent for public universities and 6.07 percent for private universities, however it is unclear how many of these are Syrian students alone.

Syrian Refugee Students Response

Syrian students face many challenges in joining tertiary education institutions including: providing the approved documentation and credentials; residency issues; lack of understanding of the Jordanian higher education system; lack of awareness of the availability of scholarships and counseling; English language abilities; lack of cooperation or coordination between governmental entities; and high tuition fees. However, despite these challenges, there are still students who manage to enroll in tertiary education institutions in Jordan. Some students even risk their lives or the lives of others travelling to Syria to get their authentic certificates. Hence, as the Syrian crisis continues, a more conducive and effective system needs to be established.

CHALLENGES

This study outlines a number of barriers and obstacles facing Syrian refugees attempting to enroll in tertiary education institutions in Jordan. These barriers and obstacles can be grouped into the following major groups: financial barriers, which include tuition fees and cost of living; academic barriers, including enrollment in primary and secondary education as well as English language requirements; documentation; and scholarships.

Financial Barriers

Essential goods and services for most Jordanians have increased in price over the last two decades, implying a continuously higher cost of living. The Consumer Protection Society records show that the cost of electricity has gone up by 100 percent since 2000, water by nearly 60 percent, gas by 120 percent, education by 80 percent, and medical and hospital by 80 percent (Consumer Protection Society, 2015). With this rising cost of living, coupled with the low income of Syrians (especially refugees), there is no doubt that tertiary education is hard to afford for most refugees.

There has been a dramatic shift in tertiary education from a blend of government support and nominal tuition fees towards university finance-based tuition fees. Nearly every public institution has had to become significantly more dependent on tuition revenue in order to pay for the resources they need. Private institutions are almost totally dependent on tuition revenue in order to pay for their resources and as a result, fees are high. Cost has been highlighted by study participants as prohibitive for enrollment and also for retention as current students face challenges paying tuition. Many of the students are the primary bread winners for their families, and in many cases they reported having to either juggle the academic life and the need to work and earn a living for their families. This presents an added challenge of securing the cost of attending university, let alone continuing their education.

Academic Barriers

Enrollment of Children and Youth in Pre-tertiary Education

The pathway to tertiary education is made more difficult with many students outside the formal education system. Increasing the number of Syrians in primary and secondary education and retaining them could lead into higher enrollments in tertiary education. This study found evidence that there has been a great effort made by the MOE and international organizations / NGOs in the last year to tackle the issue of enrollment and retention.

English Language Requirements

English language requirements for most Jordanian universities (the medium through which the majority of courses are taught) emerged as another critical factor inhibiting Syrian refugees from accessing tertiary education at local institutions. This is particularly the case for Syrians who completed their secondary education in Syria, as the main medium of education is Arabic. This study found that there are efforts from some tertiary education institutions, organizations such as the British Council and programs such as HOPES to tackle this challenge, especially for postgraduate degrees.

Legal Documents

All Jordanian tertiary education institutions demand official documents and certificates from students in order to be enrolled in the programs they offer. Lack of the required documentation and academic records at the time of admission delays or even prevents enrollment. Additionally, the necessary documentation that qualifies students for many scholarships may also be missing indefinitely, resulting in lost opportunities. There is currently discussion at a policy-makers' level in Jordan to pilot the implementation of a placement test for access to a foundation year, whereby Syrian refugee students seeking tertiary education admission would take the placement test. However, this might be difficult to implement as it differentiates between Syrian and Jordanian students, and thus presents the likelihood for discrimination.

Other Barriers

The demand for scholarships remains significantly higher than what is currently supplied. While there are thousands of applications, there are only about 2,000 scholarships actually offered in Jordan for Syrian refugees to access tertiary education. Additionally, many scholarship providers in Jordan have announced that due to funding shortfalls, scholarships will actually be less in the year 2016 than those offered in previous years. A major issue regarding scholarships is that most providers make them available for graduate programs over undergraduate courses in Jordan, limiting the opportunities for those who have not previously studied in tertiary education.

It appears that international organizations / NGOs and the Jordanian government do not have a clear idea about whether tertiary education for Syrian refugees should respond to the Jordanian market, the Syrian community's needs in Jordan, or rebuilding Syria when the war is over. This is evident in the fact that Syrians in Jordan are left to decide on the degree or the course that they want to do. Having said that, with the limited number of scholarships and hence, a limited number of Syrian students in tertiary education, there is probably not much leeway to be selective.

CONCLUSIONS

Little has been done to better understand characteristics, skills, and traits of the Syrian refugee population who live in Jordan. The lack of data makes it extremely difficult to plan for ways to improve the chances of Syrians joining tertiary education institutions and the labor market afterwards. Jordan is already struggling with financial difficulties, which limits the government's commitment to more financial aid for Syrians to access tertiary education. This results in a late and non-institutionalized response to ensuring such access. Policies that enable Syrians to access tertiary education are not clear, enrollment of Syrian refugee students is low, actual attendance is unknown and is difficult to accurately quantify. Recent efforts towards supporting primary and secondary education for Syrians who live in Jordan are a step in the right direction towards better access to tertiary education.

Nationally, the legal and practical frameworks have not been significantly modified to promote access of Syrian refugees to tertiary education in Jordan. In fact, the only significant change to the MHESR's policy, is the grace period granted to Syrian refugees to obtain the required documentation or for those who wish to transfer credits to a Jordanian tertiary education institution. However, such a requirement presents a security threat to students' lives since their documentation is usually back in war-torn Syria. The MHESR neither provides qualifying or placement exams for the Syrian refugees who have difficulty in obtaining documents, nor a foundation year for students struggling to adapt to the new system.

Interviewing the various national policy-makers also showed a lack of coordination among them in response to Syrian refugees' access to tertiary education. For instance, it wasn't clear which department should deal with placement tests of qualifying exams for Syrians who do not have proper documentation. Forming a consolidated group of government departments is needed to respond to ensuring Syrian refugees' access to tertiary education.

International organizations', donors', scholarship providers' and NGOs' efforts are still sporadic and uncoordinated. There is evidence to suggest that there is very limited coordination among international organizations and hence, financial resources are not allocated appropriately. Policy-makers in Jordan, as expressed by the MOP, are not used to coordinating the work of international organizations. Moreover, policy-makers and scholarship providers are not as engaged as they should be with universities regarding providing better access to Syrian students.

Tertiary education institutions in Jordan, especially southern and private universities, as well as community colleges, have room to accommodate many more Syrian students than their current numbers. This study found that some universities treat Syrian refugees as international students, charging them very high tuition fees, which can be significantly more than those of Jordanians. There have been recent sporadic efforts by some international organizations, scholarship providers, donors and NGOs in making tertiary education institutions aware of the desperate need for Syrian students' tertiary education, and in response some have lowered their tuition fees. Such effort should be extended across the board, as changing fee policies would result in better Syrian access into these institutions.

As a result, more dialogue between national policy-makers and other stakeholders is needed to try to solve these obstacles, taking into consideration the needs of the local community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Engaging the Jordanian local community is important since many Jordanian youth are also in need of help as poverty is high in the country. Hence, Syrians refugees are not the only population in need of support for accessing education in Jordan. There are two overriding recommendations that should be considered by the various stakeholders involved in enhancing the Jordanian tertiary education response to the Syrian crisis. First, efforts should be placed on providing opportunities for Jordanian youth to pursue tertiary education, particularly in domains that are in demand within the local labor market. Second, stakeholders need to form a national consortium to jointly engage in dialogue with the Jordanian government, preferably at the Jordanian Cabinet Ministers' level. With these overriding recommendations in mind, the following sub recommendations should be considered.

The first step towards increasing Syrian students' access to tertiary education is improving access and retention within primary and secondary education in Jordan, taking into account delivering good quality instruction. Special attention to English language instruction is also needed at school level to increase students' pass rate in the *Tawjihi* exam, which would in turn increase the ratio of Syrian students being accepted to a wider range of courses in Jordanian tertiary education institutions that have English instruction. This recommendation is within the scope of expanding access to high quality secondary education as a path towards tertiary, vocational and technical education for refugees, recognizing that post-primary education in all its forms can support transition to work, sustainable livelihoods and durable solutions for displaced persons.

Second, as tertiary education enrollment is currently very low (4.5 percent) among the Syrian age group 18-24 years, scholarship providers should not limit scholarships to those who are considered legal refugees. Instead, financial background and academic merits should be the criteria applied to Syrian students who reside in Jordan. There are discrepancies among scholarship providers on what actually constitutes a refugee, affecting the eligibility of some Syrian students applying for scholarships.

Third, it should be taken into account by policy-makers that the legal and regulatory frameworks in Jordan, from an access to tertiary education point of view, hinder Syrian students from accessing tertiary education institutions. As previously mentioned, authentication of documents via the formal route could result in great danger to students or those who try to help them. Hence, the Jordanian government, in cooperation with international organizations and scholarships providers, should consider other methods, such as placement tests or offering a foundation year to better prepare Syrian refugee students. As such, it is recommended that the government provides a legal framework that recognizes refugees as special students instead of international students. This distinction is important as refugees do not have access to the documents necessary for admission as do international students, which presents a challenge when applying to admission at the tertiary education level. This may entail the need to develop a national pedagogic assessment for refugees that does not undermine the education certification quality within the country. Such an assessment would replace the need to present certain documents that would allow the refugees to enter into local universities. The Jordanian government is also encouraged to develop policies and legislation that mainstream crisis response in national higher education planning and policy and allow for the inclusion of those affected by crises in higher education institutions in an equitable manner, through policy responses pertaining to language, needed documentation, recognition and accreditation.

Fourth, as Jordanian tertiary education institutions are autonomous, there should consistently be direct dialogue with donors, scholarship providers, and international organizations. As Jordanian tertiary education institutions have the capacity to accommodate many more students than they currently have, especially in southern and private universities, and in community colleges, cooperation between all parties involved could ensure the enrollment of a larger number of Syrian students.

Fifth, better coordination between scholarship providers could limit competition and duplication of scholarships between them as well as affecting the specificity of the programs that universities offer.

Sixth, in order to better plan for Syrian refugees' access to tertiary education in Jordan, a more coherent understanding of the Syrian refugee population is needed. Also, reliable surveys on the Syrian refugee population's characteristics should be conducted to identify their needs in the tertiary education sector, as well as skills courses for Syrian graduates in their specializations, to ensure they are up-to-date, since it is unlikely they will be employed immediately after graduation.

Seventh, more funds by NGOs, international organizations, donors and scholarship providers are critical in order to ensure more Syrians are joining Jordanian tertiary education institutions. These scholarships should also target vulnerable Jordanians. Moreover, diversity of the programs offered by scholarship providers should be employed, taking into consideration the option of vocational programs, undergraduate and postgraduate programs, skills development after graduation, and online education. English language courses for Syrian refugee students should be maintained and enlarged to all levels of education, as English language is not only a requirement for tertiary education in Jordan, but also within the labor market.

Eighth, better awareness of scholarships and scholarship application training should be provided as Syrian students face difficulties during this process. Hence, simplifying the application for scholarships is also important.

Ninth, employability of Syrians who graduate from tertiary education has not been fully addressed by the various stakeholders in Jordan, particularly the government. According to the Jordanian Department of Statistics, the overall rate of unemployment in Jordan in the last quarter of the year 2016 was 13.8 percent for males and 25.2 percent for females. Unemployment was even higher among university degree graduates, reaching 26.4 percent for males and 79.4 percent for females, in the last quarter of the year 2016 (DOS website, 2016). With such figures in mind, it is hard to assume that industries in Jordan are in a position to offer jobs for Syrian graduates, particularly within the formal sector. Tertiary education institutions in Jordan, especially universities, seem to be disengaged from market needs. Much more focus by universities is needed on producing entrepreneurs instead of job seekers, helping both Jordanian and Syrian graduates alike. Moreover, incentive initiatives by the international community could produce jobs for unemployed Jordanians alongside Syrian graduates.

Tenth, while international and regional efforts in addressing Syrian youth tertiary education are vital and should be maintained, Jordan's engagement with the various stakeholders is of steep importance as other countries in the region differ in their legal framework, needs and backgrounds. Understanding country specificity could result in much faster solutions to Syrian tertiary education in host countries.

Eleventh, the target group for Syrian tertiary education should be extended to the age of 30, due to the interrupted studies of some young Syrians. Some scholarship providers have already addressed this issue.

Twelfth, develop local universities into multi-dimensional institutions that add to the traditional curricula and traditional teaching modalities that go beyond on-campus offerings. These changes should also include the introduction of dynamic pedagogical practices where the focus is no longer on the professor but rather on the needs of the learner through active, interactive and experiential learning modalities, where students learn on their own or from peers. Such practices are particularly important in the context of refugee tertiary education, as the students are not typical students. It is critical for institutions to evolve and be creative in what they have to offer and how they offer it. For example, new skills and competencies may be introduced within the curriculum that is offered to Syrian refugee students not only because of their specific needs as learners, but also because of the prospects of employment that would enable them to change their realities of being a refugee. Such competencies include information analysis, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and communication. In addition, developing students' character to encourage their curiosity, sense of initiative, persistence, adaptability, ethical awareness and reasoning are equally essential for refugees. Obviously, emphasizing such traits will strengthen all students.

Thirteenth, develop and ratify the "Arab Convention on Regulating the Refugee Situation in the Arab region" and its adoption. This includes the introduction of a specific provision on the right of education in the current text of the Arab Convention.

Fourteenth, ensure that refugee youth are systematically included in national higher education plans and programs and quality data is collected to monitor their participation and educational attainment. In addition, develop policies and legislation that mainstream crisis response in national higher education planning and policy and allow for the inclusion of those affected by crises in higher education institutions in an equitable manner, through policy responses pertaining to language, needed documentation, recognition and accreditation.

Fifteenth, develop a Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) to track students' progress and drop out in light of youth mobility. Such a system would include nationals as well as refugees.

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