

# REVIEW ARTICLE ON ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SYRIAN YOUTH: A WAY FORWARD TO STABILIZE SYRIA THROUGH HUMAN CAPITAL

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Since 2011 Syria has been facing severe destruction in almost every field and education is one of them. Tertiary education has been ignored badly by the country itself and also the national and international NGOs have ignored this part of the education.

**Objective:** This is a review article with the objective of exploring the current literature on Syrian refugees' access to higher education and how the process of recovery for Syria could be helped by providing higher education to the deserving Syrian youth population while in the host countries.

**Materials and Methods:** Secondary data sources were used to obtain related articles for this review article. The literature consulted was obtained from Google Scholar, JSTOR, Web of Science, and Scopus. The scope of the search covers the studies conducted for the year 2013 to 2018.

**Conclusion:** Review findings strongly suggest that the absence of higher education or access to higher education compelling the brilliant and deserving Syrian youth to join radical groups and in long term disturbing the peace of the region. A review of the related literature suggested that the provision of higher education could be a very strong tool to rebuild peace in the region and to rebuild Syria by building up the human capital. This will also speed up the international efforts to save Syria from complete or partial depending on host nations and to be a fine inclusion into the host communities with higher education up to the mark.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Syrian youth, Syria conflict, Peacebuilding, human capital.

## INTRODUCTION

Educational help in conflict and post-conflict contexts, usually focuses on primary education; higher education is mostly ignored. In the Syrian crisis, the higher education provision for refugees is not a priority on a humanitarian basis [1]. Higher education is also considered beyond the scope of entitled ministries and international agencies. Another problem is the lack of enough information on the needs of refugee higher education as very little attention is paid to the higher education and training needs of refugees [2]. However, higher education information does not control the provision of certain resources for foreign organizations which are working with emergency relief [3]. Among charitable service providers in the host countries, there is very little knowledge of the need and distribution of university-aged of whom have had their university studies interrupted [4].

Human capital has been defined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), as the "knowledge, skills, competencies and other attributes embodied in individuals or groups of individuals acquired during their life and used to produce goods, services or ideas" [5]. Higher education plays a vital role in the building of human capital. The strong future of Syria is basically in the process to restore its human capital and on the side, education can improve other institutions, which are beneficial for growth [6]. It has been suggested that a powerful educational policy for the refugee crisis can reduce the risk of many problems in the region, including stigma, isolation, intra-community tensions, marginalization, and most importantly radicalization [1].

There were 150,000 Syrian refugees who are capable of attending university and about 6% get the opportunity to study at university [7]. Unfortunately, a large number of young people ended up getting low paid labor and had been recruited by armed forces mostly terrorist groups [1, 8]. They are persuaded to do it just to fill the gap and to get a

normal identity and do something to at least change their bad situation.

The migration policies in Europe, mostly are recruiting the educated refugees in the labor markets, and not offering capacity-building training to them and they are also not supporting the reconstruction of the home country of refugees (European Parliament, 2016).

There is a need for a more strategic and harmonized sector engagement in addressing political and bureaucratic bottlenecks, poor communication, and low learning outcomes. The implementation of a new Curriculum Framework will be critical to enhance the quality and relevance of education, as well as diversified learning pathways through a policy framework for Non-Formal Education (NFE). A capacity-building strategy has been established to ensure that all education sectors including NGOs and other organizations should be highly equipped for implementing relevant educational activities. Severe poverty continues to push children out of education and the education sector is continuously investing in the expansion of NFE programs and in social protection schemes. Systematic investments should be made in the professional development of the teachers. Educational partners should also work towards ensuring a cooperative and applicable approach to resolve issues related to teachers with the aim of improving and measuring learning outcomes. More attention should be given to youth and employment needs [9].

In the year 2018, there was a great increase in the number of refugees pursuing higher education. This makes a rise in enrollment remarkably from 1 to 3 percent, was in the right direction. The data has shown that in the past few years only 1 in 100 refugees have the opportunity to get a post-secondary education. So this shift means that now there is a total of 87,833 higher education refugee students [10].

Access to higher education is always life-changing and effective. It gives opportunities for refugees who have been

deprived of hope during times of distressed displacement. Not to forget that education is a very important and powerful factor for sustainable development when comes along with the right to work. This helps in the socio-economic development in the countries receiving refugees. It also reduces the burden on the host economy and turning them a productive inclusion to the host country and makes refugees less dependent and self-reliable [11].

Unfortunately, most host countries did not allow refugees to work, and hence, after completion of higher education, they have to go back to the distracted state, and in return, they are unable to use their education, skills and unable to fulfill their full potential [12].

## METHODOLOGY

This review paper carried out a narrative review of literature in thematic areas such as challenges in seeking higher education, perception for higher education among Syrian refugees, stabilizing Syria, future reconstruction of Syria, and development of field competencies and economic stability among Syrians. The literature covers mostly the time between 2013 and 2018, while few review documents have been carefully selected from the preceding period to lay a foundation for the review. This review utilized academic search engines and databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and Google Scholar to discover a broad range of literature. Key terms used to obtain research data among others, were Syrian youth, education for Syrian youth, Syria conflict, future of Syrian youth in higher education, and challenges faced by Syrian youth. This review describes several issues in the provision of higher education to Syrian refugees and future aspirations of higher education in terms of stabilizing Syria.

## DISCUSSIONS

### *Challenges in Seeking Higher Education*

There are certain educational needs pointed out by scholars facing young refugee students [13]. Some important challenges are quoted here.

- Getting local language proficiency and learning the language of academic communication [14, 15].
- Need to understand the higher education system of the host country which includes the registration process, grading system, etc, [16, 17].
- The opportunities to finance education [16, 17], which is a big challenge in high-cost education systems.
- Searching the institutions in the host country to accept the qualifications of students who do not have documents due to their forced displacement [7, 18]. Because it has been observed that with resettled refugees, documents proving their refugee status are not always issued [15, 18].
- Getting enough and appropriate support to settle into higher education, including general academic support; accommodation, transportation, and psychosocial counseling.

### *Perceptions for Higher Education among Syrian Refugees*

Rasheed and Munoz [19], investigated the perceptions of the Syrian refugees toward the host community and higher education and explored personal views regarding intergroup relationships and the role of higher education for a better future. This study provides some practical implications for using current education resources more

efficiently, i.e., considering online and blended learning classes, especially in the context of expanding credentialing opportunities for the host community in addition to refugees. Second, this study emphasized clarifying the processes and communications between higher educational institutes and humanitarian organizations to work effectively in tertiary education, and third to plan long term ideas for cutting down dependency and comparing economic benefits of broader access to higher education.

### *Stabilizing Syria*

After the war in any zone, higher education is one of the strongest tools to get things back to normal and also to fight radicalization [20]. From different researches, here are three interlinked issues that are needed for refugee higher education, and have a direct connection to society rebuilding and for the long-lasting impact of higher education.

First, refugee higher education should build capacity for taking an interest in new and constantly changing problems, in places with high instability [21, 22].

Second, these problems are present at the societal level so they are massive in scale, cutting across sectors, institutions, and national borders [22, 23].

Third, getting enough funding for the public, and highlighting the challenges in which higher education is only the interest of the private sector [22].

### *Future Reconstruction*

Avery and Said [24], strongly revealed that there is a need for higher education for refugees, which should be directed toward the needs of future reconstruction, peace building, and economic recovery of Syria. These efforts will also be needed to build a bridge between the Syrian displacement and reconstruction efforts within Syria. Kirk and Sherab [25] suggested that higher education must be protecting refugees against marginalization and abuse, moreover enabling them to support their communities in exile and contribute to the future development of Syria. So, higher education can be considered as a 'bridge between emergency response and sustainable development [25].

### *Development of Field Competencies and Economic Stability*

In one of the research, Ayoubi and Saavedra (2018)[26] suggested that higher education is the basic need for the refugees to gain employment and jobs for the successful integration into the host society. This research also suggested that the admission of refugees into the host education systems make it possible for younger generations to develop problem-solving and other important skills needed for the labor market.

In war-stricken states, education is considered as a means of socialization and identity development; education is also considered critical for post-conflict state-building, and the absence of education often results in failed nation-building efforts [27]. This study also suggested that Syria's human capital is defined as the accumulated stock of education, knowledge, and skills and is unfortunately dislocated, dispersed, and currently virtually unaccounted for. Syria's long term conflict slows down the efforts to build the human capital that is important for future economic sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

This study has provided powerful and relevant examples of some of the current efforts that exist to help refugees and to

find pathways into higher education. The initiatives identified in this research paper took different forms and advanced uses of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), policy formulation by founders and think tanks, regional and community action, efforts by individuals to make a difference in the life of people. It is believed that these efforts, shows that the world community cares to help refugees regain a foothold to a stable life, including educational access and career advancement.

In the displaced life of refugees, getting the opportunity of higher education is not a luxury, it is a very important and need of the time for their life ahead and for their best future. It is not only an excellent opportunity for the young refugees but maturity and an advanced experience for them to become productive in terms of peacebuilders, teachers, and policymakers of their home country. It helps them to productively participate in society. And in the end, they end up building their home country again.

In short, the education discrepancy among Syrian refugees will have deep-rooted negative impacts on economic growth and regional security in the future. Addressing this deficit is not only a duty because education is a fundamental human right, but, crucially, the provision of high-standard education is also of critical importance to the building of a post-conflict Syria, and the long-term stability, security, and economies of its neighboring states.

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