Access for Refugees into Higher Education: A Review of Interventions in North America and Europe

ABSTRACT

This paper examines current interventions to reduce barriers to access into higher education for refugees in North America and Europe. We analyze a diversity of interventions sponsored by host governments, higher education institutions, foundations, non-governmental organizations, and individuals. These interventions differ in size, delivery method, focus, and extent of support, and range from a single language course or limited online learning opportunity to fully accredited higher education programs. However, significant problems hamper the efficacy of many current interventions. We examine providers' rationales for working with refugees using Knight & de Wit's (1995) rationales for internationalization of higher education, later reconceptualized in four interrelated groups of rationales (De Wit, 2002): academic, political, economic, and socio-cultural. To these we propose adding a fifth category: Humanism. To widen refugee participation and success in higher education, we suggest that policy makers and administrators should adopt a longer-term perspective, increase transparency, and use evidence-based approaches to develop and evaluate refugee programming.

**Keywords:** refugees, higher education, integration, internationalization, Europe, North America
INTRODUCTION

Within the last five years, the global refugee population has increased by a staggering 65%. By the end of 2017, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recorded 25.4 million refugees worldwide, the largest number in the agency’s history and unprecedented since the end of World War II. While securing shelter and safety is the primary concern of refugees following displacement, beginning or resuming education is often an immediate next step for successful integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). Returning to an educational routine is part of a larger process of providing pathways for integration into the host community and serve as a powerful counterweight to the trauma of forced migration (Crea, 2016; Dryden-Peterson, 2015). With renewed educational perspectives, refugees have been found to be resilient and ambitious learners (Mangan & Winter, 2017; Shakya et al., 2010) even while facing extraordinary challenges (Joyce, Earnest, de Mori, & Silvagni, 2010; Stevenson & Willott, 2007; Zeus, 2011).

In this paper we catalogue current interventions into six categories from Europe and North America that are aimed at helping refugees access higher education opportunity and discuss the characteristics and weaknesses of each intervention grouping. We also utilize Knight and De Wit’s (1995) framework of rationales for higher education internationalization, later put into four related groups (De Wit, 2002)—academic, political, economic, and socio-cultural—and advocate for the addition of a fifth rationale, humanism,
to further examine providers’ rationales. This last rationale reflects a critical but under-discussed component of internationalization that relates to refugees and at-risk migrants.

Much of the literature on refugee education has so far focused on access to primary and secondary education, which indeed captures the largest demographic of refugee students. That research focuses on education in refugee camps or countries of first and temporary asylum. Within these locations, the literature points to a wide range of barriers to education, including limited availability and accessibility of schools, problems with curriculum and language, and certification and recognition hurdles (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Talbot, 2013). According to the UNHCR (2016), 61% of refugee children have access to primary education and 23% to secondary schooling.

However, while the challenges of access to primary and secondary schooling are indeed great, the statistics for refugees of university age are far more stark. According to the UNHCR, only 1% of refugees will ever transition into, or back into, tertiary education compared with the 36% of the global average who have access to higher education (2016, p. 10). While this 1% figure is highly alarming, it is also important to realize that the statistic can vary, in some cases significantly, depending on the region in question and contextual factors present. Even so, within the academic literature, relatively few discussions have so far focused specifically on refugee access to higher education with
regard to the scope and impact of existing interventions to help provide tertiary-level access (Dryden-Peterson, 2012; Felix, 2016; Authors, 2018).

Among this small group, researchers have identified unique educational challenges refugees face. These include 1) acquiring general proficiency in the local language and an academic vocabulary (Shakya et al., 2012; Felix, 2016); 2) gaining understanding of the host country’s higher education system (Shankar et al., 2016; Author 2, 2017); 3) financing their education, especially in tuition-driven, high-cost systems like the U.S. and in some European countries (Shakya et al, 2012; Author 2, 2017, Giles, 2018); 4) having qualifications recognized for students who fled without paperwork (Author 2, 2016; Tobenkin, 2006; Felix, 2016; Ferede, 2016); and 5) obtaining academic, logistical, and other support that is critical for successful integration into higher education.

THE STUDY

In an effort to describe and categorize a wide range of existing interventions for refugees to gain access into higher education, we focused on efforts initiated by, originating from, or operating within North America and Europe, as these regions are particularly well resourced and have capacities that distinguish them from Africa and the Middle East, where the vast majority of refugees reside. In this paper we focus on resettled refugees, but also included some interventions for refugees still in developing regions and refugee camps. We focused on initiatives designed to provide access to opportunities generally
considered to be within the tertiary education sector broadly, including but not exclusive to universities. We recognize that because universities are generally well resourced and able to manage additional enrollments, they are seen as desirable for tertiary level study, but there are other paths as well. Yet in this age of rankings and competition for world-class excellence (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2010; Yudkevich, Altbach & Rumbley, 2016) universities have significant incentives to attract new kinds of students and become global players (Author 1, 2017).

**Conceptual Framework**

While categorizing various interventions for refugees, we examine providers’ rationales for working with refugees within the context of the internationalization of higher education. In their landmark 1995 publication, Jane Knight and Hans de Wit outlined interrelated types of rationales for the internationalization of higher education under the two broad categories of “economic and political” and “cultural and educational.” De Wit (2002) later broke these categories into four groupings: academic, political, economic, and socio-cultural. We believe the refugee interventions we review in this paper span all four rationale types, but we also advocate for adding a fifth rationale, humanism, which we discuss in detail below. Knight (2008) updated the previous classification to include multiple levels of actors, most notably the national and the institutional. At the national level, rationales for the internationalization of higher education often seek to improve the country’s economy and diplomatic relations, while at the institutional level, rationales
focus on increasing international ranking and reputation, recruiting top scholarly talent, and generating revenue. This framework provides opportunities to analyze the multiple ways that various actors approach the refugee crisis.

More recently, scholars have paid more attention to the (potential) negative aspects of internationalization, such as brain drain and cultural imperialism (e.g., Beck, 2012; de Wit & Jooste, 2014). These are certainly concerns, even in assisting refugees and asylum-seekers, but a fuller discussion of these concerns lies beyond the scope of this particular study and will be addressed in future research.

**Method of Developing Intervention Groupings**

Our analysis primarily covers higher education interventions initiated between 2013 and 2017, but we also include some with longer histories. Many newer efforts were established in response to the civil war in Syria, but are also due to protracted civil conflict in parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia, and European recognition of the refugee crisis (Dragostinova, 2016; Author 1, 2018). We looked at interventions involving multiple institutions and reaching substantial numbers of refugees, but intentionally left out efforts supporting refugee scholars, post-doctorates or faculty. While these supports are critical, they were beyond the scope of our study and will be taken up in subsequent work. Our review also omitted re-certification or bridging programs aimed at professionals with degrees, as well as technical and vocational education programs, since these were also
beyond our survey. For additional coverage, other lists and maps, such as that by Jigsaw Consult (2016) and by the European University Association (2017), are helpful.

The research team reviewed scholarly articles and journals, relevant publications, and institutional and organizational websites to learn more about various types of tertiary educational refugee assistance. In light of interventions common in Europe and North America, it developed a system to categorize efforts based on types of educational assistance and ultimately developed six categories. 1) Accredited, on-site or blended learning programs; 2) international online learning platforms; 3) scholarships; 4) information sharing platforms; 5) assessment of credentials and qualifications; and 6) efforts to address other barriers to access. Due to evolving shifts in migration flows and the inconsistencies of publicly available information, the list of interventions is not exhaustive but exemplifies what is currently being done and suggests ways to meet future challenges. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of the review and recommendations for action and future research.

**INTERVENTIONS BY CATEGORIES AND TYPE**

Table 1 below illustrates the variety of higher education interventions serving refugees in North America and Europe or originating from those regions. The table is organized by six categories and shows the key characteristics for each category, along with examples of specific interventions for each described in detail later in the text. It is important to note
that the six categories are not in order of importance, but rather are meant to classify the variety of interventions based on size, delivery method, focus, and extent of support, who they support, and the outcomes they generate. Examples of interventions are first divided by region (North America and Europe) and then by the type of actors implementing each intervention. This includes higher education institutions (HEIs) but also intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), regional institutions (e.g., in the EU), government, and private sector and civil-society organizations (CSOs).

1. Accredited On-Site or Blended Learning Programs

Unlike scholarship programs, accredited on-site or blended learning interventions are often designed outside of traditional university programs to meet the specific circumstances of refugee students. Although some of these programs offer degrees and certifications from North American and European HEIs, the on-site learning usually takes place in developing regions, including in refugee camps, where students participate in face-to-face education with peers and teachers or tutors. Blended programs also include significant online learning components.

These programs often reach more refugee students than is possible through individual scholarships to traditional university-based programs, and are often designed to include
further study or employment in host or resettlement countries (Gladwell et al., 2016).

Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER), formed in 2010, provides various levels of internationally recognized university credentials, from certificates to bachelor degrees. It was initiated by York University in Canada, in partnership with Kenyatta University and Moi University in Kenya, along with Windle Trust Kenya and the UNHCR. It mainly serves untrained teachers in refugee camps and prepares them to contribute back to their community (BHER, 2017). BHER has supported 393 students since 2013, of which 20 earned bachelor’s degrees offered by York University. One hundred and twenty six more students are on track to earn bachelor’s degrees in December 2018 and June 2019 from one of its three partner universities (H. Kim, personal communication, September 3, 2018; Redden, 2017).

Jesuit Worldwide Learning: Higher Education at the Margins (JWL), which originated in North America, offers English-language programs, certificate-level courses, and diploma programs to refugees in camps. Since its three-year pilot program in 2010, JWL has offered its own curriculum for a diploma in liberal studies, which consists of 45 credits of coursework taken over three years; the degree is awarded by Regis University in Denver, Colorado (JWL, 2017).

Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) launched its global initiative for refugee higher education in July 2017, after receiving a $10 million donation (Keane, 2017). Its goal
was to enable 50,000 refugees to earn degrees from accredited American universities in 20 locations by 2022. SNHU has piloted a blended learning approach in two refugee camps in Rwanda, in cooperation with Kepler, a nonprofit university program based in Africa. The program plans to expand into four additional sites over the next two years. Individual refugees receive tuition benefits worth $3,000 per year from the program (Redden, 2017).

InZone’s Rapid Response Module for humanitarian interpreters, which started in Europe in 2005, has adapted and expanded to meet changing humanitarian needs. Initially, the University of Geneva in Switzerland designed an innovative blend of face-to-face tutoring and online courses aimed at learners in fragile contexts (InZone, 2017). Currently, InZone offers programs for refugees in developing regions as well as for resettled refugees, diasporas, tutors of refugees, and humanitarian professionals working with refugees.

Other accredited on-site or blended learning initiatives have been developed since the Syrian refugee crisis began. The Certificate Program in Community Mobilization in Crisis (CMIC), initiated by the University of Ottawa and World University Service of Canada, offers a 30-credit, 16-month online and on-site certificate program for Syrian refugees in Lebanon (Duval, 2015). In addition, the program provides seed grants to design and implement community mobilization projects. Arizona State University (ASU), in partnership with Kepler, is piloting the Borderless Opportunities for Learning and Development (BOLD) project in Rwanda’s Kiziba refugee camp. Program completers are expected to use their
credits at ASU or to transfer to their home institution (Lingenfelter, 2017). The Jamiya Project, founded in Europe by two professionals who worked with Syrian refugees, began in September of 2016 with a 12-week blended pilot program in applied IT for refugee students in Jordan. The online courses were certified by Sweden's University of Gothenburg in collaboration with the Norwegian Refugee Council and Jesuit Refugee Service. The project provides a diploma designed to fulfill the first year of a university degree, and is expected to expand beyond Syrian refugees (Emma, 2016).

2. **International Online Learning Platforms**

International online learning platforms are particularly promising because they can be accessed by anyone with an Internet connection anywhere, making them more flexible than traditional on-site, brick-and-mortar providers. The opportunities described below originated in North America and Europe and serve refugees across the globe. Often they rely on partnerships with existing MOOC (massive open online course) providers, HEIs, and NGOs based in different countries. Most provide courses accredited by a participating or partner academic institution, although the level of accreditation and scope of intervention can vary greatly. Not all of the online accredited courses available lead to credits or completed degrees from HEIs, and cost for credit has also been a point of contention.

One particularly promising global initiative, the University of the People (UoPeople), provides accredited online associate or bachelor degrees to refugees and asylum-seekers.
Based in the U.S., this nonprofit, online accredited university has aimed to provide global access to higher education since 2009. Although its courses are tuition-free, the university charges a $100 exam fee per course, which totals $4,000 over a four-year degree (Vanunu, 2015). The university currently enrolls over 1,000 refugee students, about half of whom are Syrian refugees (Redden, 2017). According to its website, refugee students can have the total cost of $4,000 waived to pursue an associate or bachelor degree in computer science or business administration. UoPeople and UNHCR have established a policy, approved by a U.S. distance education accrediting organization, to admit refugees and asylum seekers when official transcripts and documents cannot be obtained (Vanunu, n.d.). The university is supported by foundations, and its academic partnerships enable graduates to continue their education at several well-known universities.

Other international online learning initiatives offer catalogues of courses from various universities worldwide. Some online programs grant credits that can be transferred to offline university programs, while others provide non-credit course certificates. The EdX platform, for example, founded in 2012 by Harvard University and MIT, offers online courses that earn college credit from top universities around the world. In 2016, EdX began supporting newly arrived Syrians and other refugees in Europe through a partnership with MOOC providers in Germany (Kiron) and Jordan (Edraak). As of June 2017, refugee learners had taken 30 different courses from 13 EdX partners. After completing EdX-Kiron
online courses for two to three years, refugees can complete their studies on the campuses of several partner European universities (Lapal, 2016).

Coursera for Refugees began in 2016 with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, although the original Coursera platform was founded in 2012. Coursera for Refugees offers MOOCs through partnerships with nonprofits that host in-person cohorts of refugees taking the same course. According to its website, as of June 2017, Coursera offered more than 1,300 course certificates to over 5,000 refugees through more than 30 nonprofits. Refugee students who complete a course receive an electronic certificate from an accredited institution but do not receive official academic credit. Rather, the initiative emphasizes opportunities for refugees to build career skills and transition into new host communities (Taber, 2017).

Kiron Open Higher Education was founded in March 2015 by Kiron, a Berlin-based startup. The program currently partners with 53 universities and MOOC providers to help refugees, internally displaced persons, and asylum-seekers continue or begin university-level studies; about 2,700 refugee students have benefited since the launch (Kiron, 2017). According to the website, the program provides certificates that meet European Higher Education Area standards but not a full university degree. However, offline support is available to help refugees in Germany, France, and Jordan transfer their credits to official universities after one or two years of online study.
Open University, based in the UK, has offered flexible distance learning degree programs since 1969 (Clifton, 2015). More recently, it has become part of the Language and Academic Skills and E-learning Resources (LASER) program funded by the EU through the British Council (Bubbers, 2015). LASER provides English, French, and German language courses to Syrian refugees who are temporarily residing in Lebanon and Jordan. The plan as of September 2015 was to select a cadre of the highest-achieving students to participate in Open University-accredited online degree programs and select additional course completers for Open University’s non-accredited online FutureLearn course, which is focused on employability and employment skills (Clifton, 2015). Information on the project’s outcomes was not publicly available.

3. Scholarships

Scholarship interventions directly tackle the financial challenges of higher education by providing refugees with full or partial support or in some cases stipends to attend HEIs. Most of these interventions provide refugees, as any other students, with access to the same degree programs in mainstream institutions. Although the scholarships vary in their requirements, most are designed to lead to an accredited diploma or undergraduate or graduate degree.
Scholarships specifically for refugee students have expanded in Europe and North America, with some provided by host country governments. Two standout institutions are the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) in Europe, and the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) in North America. In Germany, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) devoted €100 million through 2019 to integrate refugees at all levels of education (DAAD, 2015). Of that amount, €29 million was directed to the DAAD to offer competitive grants to German HEIs via the “Integrating Refugees in Degree Programs” (Integra) initiative intended to set up pathways into university study. Most Integra programs begin with German language training. By 2016, more than 130 German HEIs had already initiated training programs or applied for funding to develop them (O’Malley, 2016), and more than 6,500 refugees had enrolled in additional language and content-specific preparatory programs. The DAAD’s “Refugees Welcome: Students Helping Refugees” (Welcome) initiative also provided funding to support university students to coordinate and run language classes and social programs for refugees in the summer.

In Canada, WUSC’s Student Refugee Program (SRP) serves the dual purpose of helping young refugees access Canadian higher education and also resettle them into Canadian life as permanent residents (Peterson, 2012; WUSC, 2017). This unique, government sponsored model allows certain designated private entities, including WUSC, to sponsor and resettle refugees. Using staff on the ground in first countries of asylum and refugee camps, WUSC identifies potential participants. Student-led committees at participating
campuses across Canada then sponsor refugee students on behalf of WUSC. These local committees agree to provide refugees arriving on campus with at least 12 months of full financial support and other support services; however funding levels and sources vary among participating institutions providing scholarships (Ferede, 2014; Ferede et. al., 2017). One unique approach uses nominal student and/or faculty fees, which are voluntarily added to students’ tuition bills or deducted from faculty salaries, to fund refugee students. The WUSC program supports 130 students per year on 80 campuses, and since its founding in 1978 has hosted roughly 1,700 refugee students from nearly 40 countries (WUSC, 2017).

European HEIs have been particularly active in providing scholarships to Syrian refugees and asylum seekers. Assistance has taken the form of waiving fees, providing tuition scholarships, and offering free courses. Among the many examples are the scholarships provided by the Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Sussex, and Warwick. The University of York in England has promised $750,000 USD to help Syrian refugees (Cremonini, 2016). In Germany, the Technical University of Munich, the University of Tuebingen, Bielefeld University, and many others offer free German language courses. Some universities provide not only tuition-based scholarships but also additional financial aid addressing wider needs. For example, the University of Barcelona (UB), with support from various stakeholders, has pledged to take in 100 Syrian refugees and offer them an impressive combination of 20 rent-free apartments, full tuition scholarships, free courses in Catalan
and Spanish, and mentoring programs (UB, 2015), along with access to legal advice for obtaining refugee status, psychological support, and dental care.

The oldest refugee organization in the Netherlands, the Foundation for Refugee Students University for Asylum Fund (UAF), provides support, academic counseling, and employment opportunities to refugees and asylum seeking students in the country. UAF also offers grants and loans for higher education courses to highly qualified refugee students. In 2016, UAF began the Refugees@campus program, which connects 500 refugee students to Dutch student mentors (UAF, 2016).

The HOPES program (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians) was implemented by the DAAD, in collaboration with the British Council, Campus France, and Nuffic, the Dutch organization for internationalization in education. HEIs and organizations in host communities receive financial support to provide educational offerings for refugees to improve their own capacity. As an EU regional trust fund, HOPES has a €12 million project to provide academic counselling to up to 42,000 young Syrians, as well as 4,000 language courses, more than 300 full academic scholarships for study in the region, and higher education short courses for more than 3,500 student refugees (HOPES, 2017).
In the U.S., an initiative developed by the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) and Jusoor, a Michigan-based NGO, provides Syrian students with needs-based scholarships for all of ITT’s degree programs. Since 2012, at least 40 students have received scholarships, and some graduates have been employed by major U.S. corporations (Jusoor, 2017a). Jusoor helps Syrian refugees engage in university study in the U.S. and elsewhere by increasing scholarships, advising students during the application process, and sponsoring other academic programs (Jusoor, 2017b). According to their annual report, as of 2016 over 3,400 Syrian students have enrolled in Jusoor programs, 490 scholarships have been awarded, and 600 students have been mentored. In total, Jusoor has provided almost $656,000 in higher education scholarships for Syrian refugees.

Civil society organizations in North America and Europe also provide scholarships for refugees, mostly working in collaboration with HEIs. For example, the Syria Consortium for Higher Education in Crisis, led by the U.S.-based Institute of International Education (IIE), offers full and partial scholarships for Syrian refugees at 60 member HEIs (IIE, 2017a). The program has served more than 500 Syrian refugee students and spent upwards of $4.5 million, largely through foundation and U.S. government grants (IIE, 2017b). Additionally, IIE has partnered with Jusoor to create “100 Syrian Women, 10,000 Syrian Lives,” a new scholarship fund to enable Syrian women to study at U.S. and Canadian HEIs (Milner, 2016).
Member institutions of the IIE Syria Consortium have made commitments to accept Syrian refugees, provide them with financial support, and support their integration into the campus community. The consortium’s top five hosting institutions in the U.S. are IIT, Monmouth College, Montclair State University, University of Saint Joseph, and University of Evansville (IIE, 2018). A new student-led campaign, Books Not Bombs, urges universities to join the IIE Syria Consortium and provide scholarships for Syrian students. The campaign is active in 170 universities in various countries and is supported by over 16,000 students in the U.S. (Books Not Bombs, 2017). Currently, 28 U.S. institutions participate (Heim, 2016).

A large variety of IGOs have also stepped up their efforts. The UNHCR’s DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) is one of the most established interventions, and grants scholarships to recognized refugees to attend HEIs in their host countries, as well as education opportunities to refugees considering repatriation in their countries of origin. Since 1992, more than 13,500 refugee students in 50 countries of asylum have benefited from DAFI scholarships (UNHCR, 2018).

4. Information Sharing Platforms

Comprehensive online platforms do not typically provide direct access to higher education enrollment. Instead, they connect refugees to information and resources for accessing higher education. These platforms are geared toward refugee students who may be unfamiliar with the higher education systems in their countries of resettlement. The
Refugee Center Online platform, for example, provides resources to help newly arrived refugees to build a better life in the U.S., including information about educational scholarships, financial aid, and online courses. Their website lists dozens of scholarships for refugees and migrant students that are categorized by specific characteristics as well as free online classes, videos, apps, and other resources for learning English (Refugee Center Online, 2017).

In 2016, the European Universities Association (EUA) created a comprehensive online Refugees Welcome Map, which identifies higher education interventions for refugee students that are offered by more than 200 education institutions throughout 27 countries (EUA, 2017). HEIs that offer support to refugee students voluntarily complete a short survey to add their initiative to this map, which gets continuously updated. The Catalyst Foundation for Universal Education and IIE are also developing the web-based Platform for Education in Emergencies Response (PEER) program to help refugee students identify scholarships and other higher education resources. Once PEER is fully developed, this database will include student advising, translation services, education advocacy groups, access to online courses, and additional needed services (University World News, 2016).

5. Assessment of Credentials and Qualifications

Policies for recognizing the educational qualifications of refugees vary from country to country. In Europe, for example, collaborations among various nations and UN
organizations has increasingly led to a European-wide response to qualification recognition, particularly among the ENIC-NARIC network of national education information centers. Efforts in North America, on the other hand, have so far been more fragmented, although Canadian and U.S. actors are working to address this issue. Globally, UNESCO is currently finalizing a Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, in which a special provision for refugees is included (UNESCO, 2017).

One innovative intervention is the new European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, which verifies higher education credentials for refugees through an authorized assessment. The Council of Europe is working with the Greek Ministry of Education and UNHCR to recruit students for the self-assessment. The Council plans to expand this service to other countries and to implement a new policy, in coordination with the UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention, that calls for a fair, quick assessment of higher education credentials for refugees and displaced people (Custer, 2017).

The European Qualifications Passport has built on the efforts of national bodies like NOKUT in Norway, which has developed a streamlined process for refugees and other migrants who lack official or verifiable documentation of their academic qualifications. These applicants are routed to an alternative procedure through which they can present whatever documentation they have (Skjerven & Malgina, 2015a, 2015b). In Germany, the Anabin database provides a similar service.
Institutions in Canada and the U.S. vary tremendously in their responses to credential issues for applications from resettled refugees and asylum-seekers, but most institutions do not make their policies publicly available. A few have signaled their willingness to look at applications from refugees and other displaced individuals without documented credentials on a case-by-case basis. Ryerson University in Toronto and the University of Colorado Boulder, for example, have both developed limited policies along these lines (Author 2, 2016).

Some organizations that evaluate foreign education credentials have attempted to aid HEIs in recognizing qualifications of refugees who lack full, official documentation. World Education Services (WES), which operates in Canada and the U.S., piloted a project for Syrian refugees in Canada beginning in the summer of 2016 (WES, 2016; 2017). WES has produced an alternative assessment that could be used to access higher education, and has partnered with community partners, such as refugee resettlement organizations, to connect with Syrian refugees who lack full documentation but have some evidence of their educational backgrounds. As of September 2017, the project was being evaluated, and at the time of writing little is known yet about its impact.

In the U.S., the Educational Credential Evaluators (ECE) Aid initiative covers the substantial costs of credential evaluation through vouchers for fee waivers for refugees. As of June
2017, the initiative hoped to support an additional 50 credit evaluations for refugees (ECE, 2017). ECE apparently provides participants in the refugee initiative with the same type of credential evaluation report as its regular applicants receive, but its impact is also unclear at this point in time.

6. Addressing Other Barriers to Access

Our final category covers interventions that help refugees adjust to university life in North America and Europe. HEIs often provide language support programs that prepare students to pass language tests required for entry into regular degree programs. Universities in Germany, for example, offer language programs for refugees before they apply for degree programs. Interventions in this category are also geared toward helping refugee students cope with social and emotional challenges related to integrating into university life.

Many innovative programs address language barriers for refugees. For example, Paper Airplanes, an American NGO established in 2016, connects college-aged refugees with one-on-one virtual tutoring by volunteers around the world. Tutoring sessions mainly focus on language learning and help refugee students at no cost to prepare for higher education and employment. They also help students prepare for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam, which many universities require for entrance. According to their website, 1,200 students have benefited from their programs (Paper Airplanes, 2017). Southern New Hampshire University in the U.S. is preparing to open a Center for New
Americans at the YWCA New Hampshire (Plourde, 2017). The Center will increase access for local refugees and immigrants to college-level courses and degrees, as well as college preparation, accredited English for Speakers of Other Languages, mentorship, and other services.

The University of Paris 8 is launching a University Diploma (DU) in French as a foreign language for refugee students. While this is technically a scholarship, it is being created specifically for refugees who have little knowledge of French, the university's language of instruction. Once students complete this language instruction, they will be able to enroll in additional courses (University Paris 8, 2017). In Canada, Ryerson University’s Lifeline Syria Challenge (RULSC) provides comprehensive support to refugee students and families (Ryerson University, 2018). Ryerson and other participating universities in Toronto provide information on resettlement and an online fundraising platform. More than 400 student volunteers from the universities provide assistance with translation, English language, tutoring, financial literacy, employment, peer mentoring, and other support.

**DISCUSSION**

While the UNHCR estimates that just 1% of the global refugee population will manage to access higher education, our review makes it clear that many providers are trying to help. Clearly, a wide range of interventions are underway through the six broad categories we have outlined, and supported with examples. These interventions use different and
creative approaches and serve diverse populations. Some consist of the initiative of individuals, while others were launched by teams of engaged personnel. Some are products of NGOs and foundations and focus locally, while others are multinational and span continents. The interventions also differ by their mode of delivery: some serve individual refugees at brick-and-mortar institutions, while the majority are virtual and accessible to anyone with computer or mobile device.

We found strong examples of policies and programs developed by governments and regional institutions in North America and Europe, particularly the latter. Regionally coherent policies and programs exist throughout the EU on such issues as documenting refugees’ educational qualifications. At the national level, the DAAD in Germany and NOKUT in Norway are good examples of government-level leadership. At the institutional level, coordination is more ad hoc, but promising examples also exist, such as the IIE Syria Consortium in the U.S. and the Refugee Welcome Map in Europe.

Many higher education interventions for refugees are the result of collaborations across governments, HEIs, and civil society organizations. However, coordination could be vastly improved through more stable and dedicated leadership. More research and communication is necessary to understand which actors are doing what, to what extent, and for how long, in order to avoid overlap and to more effectively learn from one another.
Ultimately we found little publicly available data and information about the actual outcomes of most interventions. While sponsors described their plans for supporting refugees, they often did not share the amounts of funding, the number of beneficiaries impacted, and other key data. This makes it difficult to truly know what is and what is not working. More evidence-based approaches will be necessary to effectively learn from these interventions. Few of the interventions seemed to be truly intent on learning from the needs and experiences of the refugees themselves. Rather, they were designed and implemented by governments, HEIs, or civil society organizations without including the voices of the refugee students themselves, who appeared to be seen more as mere “beneficiaries” than valued assets in design, assessment, monitoring, or evaluation. This one-sided approach must change.

Many of the interventions reviewed were also one-offs that appeared to have a short-term focus. For refugees, the completion of a few online courses offered by international learning platforms or MOOC providers does not necessarily lead to an accredited diploma or degree program. Therefore, money spent on these efforts might not in the end effectively help refugees enter or reenter higher education. We believe that a longer-term perspective is needed to design and support opportunities that are more likely to have a meaningful impact on the higher education prospects for refugees.
The extent of support also varies greatly. Some programs provide full scholarships but no living expenses, while others provide only one or two years of scholarship support. Although covering full or partial tuition may make higher education possible for some individuals, support that at first looks promising may end up being insufficient. More hopeful in this regard are the comprehensive programming efforts, like the WUSC’s Student Refugee Program, that integrate higher education opportunities with broader resettlement assistance.

De Wit’s (2002) update to the original internationalization framework proposed by Knight and DeWit (1995), which includes four rationales for higher education internationalization, mentioned above, offers a cogent framework for exploring institutional-level factors that shape efforts to integrate refugees into higher education. Their first category, academic/educational, includes two often-cited and interrelated rationales—the internationalization of the curriculum and the addition to classrooms of student voices from diverse cultural backgrounds. Many scholarships and other interventions bringing refugees onto campus emanate from these two goals. Another, more practical, academic rationale is to further scholarship and practice in refugee studies, international development, international education, and related fields. The InZone research center at the University of Geneva, for example, offers innovative approaches to multilingual communication and higher education in communities that are affected by conflict and crisis. The university launched different modules and curricula tailored to specific contexts,
including its Rapid Response for Humanitarian Interpreters; a MOOC on resilience in a refugee context; and history, engineering, and applied arts course and curricula designed with other universities and foundation partners.

An important rationale, though largely unstated, is that assisting refugees can help improve an institution’s “profile and status” (Knight, 2008, p. 25), particularly for HEIs in Western countries that may be seen as elitist or focused mostly on generating revenue. Institutions and organizations may regard assistance to refugees as a “win-win” scenario. This likely is the case for many institutions that are actively working to bring refugee students to campus, such as those of the IIE Syria Consortium in the U.S. Bringing these students to campus not only helps to protect the students and help them advance their educations and lives, but it also brings positive attention to the hosting institution.

The next two types of rationales, political and economic, have strong national dimensions. National, regional, and local governments may have a strong interest in ensuring that refugees within their borders become integrated and not pose a security risk by radicalizing or turning to crime. The UK’s Prevent strategy and the EU’s Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) illustrate this rationale (Author, under review). Many political leaders also feel the need to demonstrate to their constituencies that refugees contribute to society, so encouraging refugees to settle, finish their education, and work may help fill labor market shortages.
A strong economic rationale for internationalization at the institutional level, generating revenue, seemingly runs counter to the notion of assisting refugees. Unlike many international students who bring in personal funding or large scholarships from their home countries, most refugees cannot easily afford higher education, particularly in more expensive institutions. Still, institutions may have a financial incentive to assist refugees who bring with them generous grants from other government or private sources, as is the case with the HOPES Program.

The two socio-cultural rationales laid out by Knight (2008) that most pertain to refugee integration are citizenship development and social and community development. Most of the refugee initiatives we surveyed are designed to help refugees integrate into their host societies and become contributing community members or even citizens. Many of these interventions also develop the knowledge and skills of other students, faculty, and the higher education community that interacts directly with refugee students in the classroom and beyond.

A Humanistic Rationale

Based on the above discussion and our review of refugee interventions, we feel a fifth group of rationales, *humanistic rationales*, must be added to de Wit’s list. This rationale is particularly pertinent to working with refugees and is squarely based in human and civil
rights, notions of social justice and human dignity (Gidley et al., 2010), and the desire we see in these interventions to simply “do the right thing.” This fifth rationale group, focused mostly on the institutional and organizational level, encompasses, for example, the desire of institutional leaders to express their best core principles or to live out the humanitarian values in their institution’s stated or historical mission. Some organizations or individuals may act out of a conviction that higher education is a public good (Marginson, 2011). Others may be responding to “bottom-up” pressures from students or faculty to help refugees as a matter of social urgency. Books Not Bombs is a good example of a student-created organization. Similarly, organizations such as Paper Airplanes and WUSC’s Student Refugee Program rely on the work of motivated students to support refugees. An institution may concurrently help refugees to exercise humanitarian convictions, enhance its profile, and diversify its campus community. It may be easy to be cynical about the true motivations of many universities and colleges, but in fact they act from diverse motives that are not necessarily incompatible. All five rationales overlap and work in combination, as Knight (2008) mentions in her updated framework.

Globalization has provided a strong economic force for internationalization by spreading neoliberal economic ideas and creating competition among institutions for students, funding, and prestige (Gidley et al., 2010). It has also made local conflicts, such as the Syrian Civil War, into challenges for the broader international community, as refugees and asylum-seekers flow across borders. But globalization has given HEIs and other providers
Furthermore, humanistic values are not easily categorized in Knight and de Wit’s existing framework. While humanism in higher education touches on issues of building “peace and mutual understanding” (a political rationale) and “social development” (a social rationale) (Knight, 2008), the political and social rationales do not adequately cover the convictions of many in higher education - both individuals and institutions - related to helping people in need, giving those in dire and unfortunate circumstances the ability to regain dignity and meaningful lives through higher education.

CONCLUSION

Our study sought to provide powerful and relevant examples of current efforts to help refugees find pathways into, or back into, higher education. The initiatives we identified took different forms—innovative uses of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), large-scale efforts coordinated across governments, policy formulation by foundations and think tanks, regional and community actions, and efforts by individuals to make a difference for people they will likely never meet. We believe these efforts demonstrate that the world community cares and wants to help refugees regain a lifeline to a stable life, which includes educational access and career advancement. Many of the interventions we found were catalyzed by the Syrian refugee crisis, but needed for many
other populations too. We hope these well-intended and often creative interventions will
be greatly expanded to serve refugees from other crisis spots and contexts outside of the
public spotlight.

It is clear that many gaps remain and the list of unresolved questions abounds. Are
scholarships providing the level of access, sustainability, and quality that refugees need?
Are online courses accessed by refugees in camps translating into legitimate credits and
eventually into university degrees? Are mentorship programs at universities providing
refugees with the academic and social support they need to advance and succeed in their
studies? Is the provision of psychosocial counseling sufficient? Can services that seem to be
working be scaled up to have a greater impact? Are refugees being supported in building
networks and integrating? What will integration mean for both sides, and how will it look?
In the current global refugee crisis, we are reminded that despite its negatives,
internationalization within the broad scope of tertiary education activity has always
included some form of humanitarianism as a rationale. Indeed, internationalization
provides opportunities for higher education institutions to act on forces reaching far
beyond their own self-interest. This is a motivation they should proclaim proudly and
openly.

Our review of interventions has sought to provide a snapshot of what is being done at this
moment in time and to develop a system for classifying disparate efforts. We have also
sought to offer insights about the characteristics, advantages, and limitations of current interventions. We hope the various actors involved, from policy makers and entrepreneurs to researchers, students, and ordinary citizens, will build upon the existing momentum to make interventions more robust over time, evaluate their efficacy, and give them the financial viability they need to become sustainable and impactful in the lives of those who require them most urgently. The most important outcomes, which are often the hardest to identify, must show how the impressive attention being put toward refugee support is in fact making a meaningful difference. The world is witnessing the largest refugee crisis in recorded history and one that is only likely to grow with increasing global instability on nearly all continents, including from environmental destruction. It remains to be seen how higher education will continue to respond.
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