Access to Higher Education for Refugees in Jordan
Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD)-Legal Aid is a Jordanian non-governmental organization established in 2010, operating across Jordan and with regional programs through our partners in Iraq and Lebanon. The organization’s mission is to actively contribute as a civil society organization to a just and stable society, free of inequity and conflict. We empower marginalized groups to acquire and enjoy their universal rights and freedoms by representing their needs and mobilizing relevant duty bearers to conform to human rights, good governance and the rule of law.

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Foreword
Education opens minds; it opens doors to new opportunities, and offers a sense of normalcy where it may no longer exist. In contexts of mass displacement education also forms one mechanism for protection. This is as much the case for basic education as it is for higher education. The benefits of higher education are manifold and have profound effects on individuals, communities, and stability. This report serves to provide insight on the response to the provision of higher education for refugees, particularly Syrians, in Jordan as well as documentation of the ongoing challenges in this process.

Reflection on access to higher education for refugees should be welcome to not only understand the challenges but also as way to better address youth concerns in situations of mass displacement. While this report specifically focuses on the Jordanian context, further research could be dedicated to comparing responses between the three major host countries of Syrian refugees. There are various initiatives throughout the region and one consolidated understanding of the variety of responses could feed into the future development and standardization of such responses.

Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) – Legal Aid has a firm belief that the ongoing challenges outlined through this report can be worked through with consistent advocacy and coordination. However these challenges, can only be properly addressed if there is a solid commitment to higher education opportunities for refugees on the part of the international funding community. In short, sustainable funding is required. Without this, practical concerns do not exist and all efforts are theoretical. The rhetoric and commitments made at the London Conference are a step in the right direction. Ensuring that the commitments made are translated into the provision of diverse educational entry points, including tertiary, post-basic, as well as academic options, will be key to ensuring the future of post-conflict Syria and the region more broadly.

Many thanks must go to the various organizations that provided generous insights into the varied organizational responses to higher education, namely UNHCR, UNESCO, NRC, IIE, DAAD, GIZ and JRS. Thanks must also go to the refugee youth who were spoken to. They provided clear individual insight into the experiences of the different stages of the response cycle which supports previous efforts of other agencies to improve where challenges lie.

ARDD-Legal Aid Director, Samar Muhareb
Introduction
Throughout the five-year Syrian refugee crisis, education for refugee children has been prioritized in development, humanitarian aid, media coverage, discussion, and research. Extensive efforts have been made to increase children’s access to basic education to ensure their continued healthy development and provide security and stability during the refugee experience. As the majority of Syrian refugees in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan are under the age of 17, this attention is not unfounded. However, refugees’ access to higher education in Jordan did not receive the same focus. The initial response to higher education was isolated and sporadic, only recently becoming coordinated as the crisis and consequent displacement became protracted. While movement on the issue did not really begin until 2015, conversation and advocacy on the issue had started long before. This paper maps the prior and current initiatives undertaken and the ongoing challenges present for refugees and other stakeholders. This is done with a clear ambition to contribute to the ongoing development of such programs as well as allow for reflection on how such programs could be better implemented in responses to mass displacement.

The importance of improving responses to higher education should not be underestimated. Education, and the protection it guarantees, should not stop once a child reaches the age of eighteen. Higher education offers the opportunity to lead a fulfilling life and combats feelings of stagnation and hopelessness. Ensuring access to higher education provides refugees with the opportunity to develop essential skills to rebuild in their home countries. Higher education serves a dual purpose for the refugee community: it is both a tool for sustainable development and a component of immediate security and stability. While challenges to accessing higher education rest predominately on the limited opportunities available, meaning that only the brightest students have opportunity for advancement, the crux of the issue is funding. The current mass migration to Europe should call immediate attention to the international funding community to create more opportunities for people in countries of first asylum, including access to higher education though not exclusively, and lay a path for development of a better response to other crises in the future. This must include pathways to access the labor market. While this was discussed at the London Conference, in early February 2016, the actual implementation of the proposed funding towards higher education remains unclear.

As this paper will demonstrate, higher education also poses protection concerns for refugee youth as it intersects with the civil documentation issue common to many refugee situations as well as an issue specific to the Jordan context, whereby refugees are not allowed to return to Jordan once they leave, regardless of their reason for leaving. Based off these identified protection concerns it appears that stakeholders are increasingly focusing on providing higher education opportunities for refugees within the Kingdom.
Methodology
The research was conducted through initial desk based research of publically available documents related to higher education for refugees in Jordan, collation of all available higher education opportunities for refugees within the Kingdom and available meeting minutes from different sector working groups. This highlights the historical development and conversation around the response. However as higher education opportunities have emerged for refugees in Jordan literature about the issue has not kept pace. Accordingly, desk based research was complemented by structured interviews with key stakeholders who have been involved in the response to higher education in Jordan. The interviews conducted shed light on the differing organizational roles to increase attention to the issue and the consequent need to address the protection challenges that have emerged. A limitation of the paper is that formal interviews were unable to be conducted with all stakeholders involved in the response or refugee youth themselves. Insight about various refugee experiences through the higher education process was gained through programs as well as informal conversations with different refugee youth. Future research should draw further upon the experiences of refugees through the higher education process to complement the current study on the institutional response and development.
A Mandate for Higher Education
The importance of access to higher education is clearly outlined in Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26), in International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13), and Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28). Activating these articles in times of emergency response to refugee crises has long proven difficult despite the recognized need and importance of it.¹ Indeed, currently, only one percent of refugee youth worldwide are enrolled in tertiary education.² Such a small percentage clearly delineates how opportunities and access to rights are reduced by the refugee experience.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the only UN agency with the mandate for higher education. The Incheon Declaration made in 2015 outlines that UNESCO will lead the coordination to secure Sustainability Development Goal Four which commits to providing inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels. However this mandate is not limited to them in refugee situations. As the dedicated organization for the protection of refugees, the United National High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) set up the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund (DAFI) in 1992 to provide the possibility of scholarships for refugees. Through funding from the German government, DAFI has consistently provided a limited number of scholarships for refugees in countries of first asylum to study topics that can one day contribute to the rebuilding of their home countries. Over the more than twenty year period in existence, DAFI has provided more than 6,000 scholarships for students in countries as diverse as Iran to Ethiopia.³ UNHCR describes DAFI as having pioneered ‘a new approach, one that went beyond the usual primary and secondary education focus by specifically providing tertiary education... DAFI forms an integral part of the UNHCR mandate and the realization of durable solutions.”⁴ The provision of higher education to refugees is thus seen explicitly as a means to access durable solutions, which is a key component of UNHCR’s mandate.

After more than twenty years of providing scholarships, in November 2015, UNHCR launched the Education 2030 Framework for Action in which they outlined the grave dangers of not educating refugees. Mr. Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner for Protection for UNHCR, indicated that the movements of people heading into Europe ‘are largely undertaken by young people seeking safety and the means to a more secure future, particularly through access to education.”⁵ The journey is thus a reflection of a want for more than countries of first asylum are able to provide. Even before the mass arrivals of refugees on European borders, UNHCR’s Education Strategy for 2012-2016 indicated that amongst refugees there is a ‘huge demand for higher education, however this is largely unmet."⁶ UNHCR committed in this strategy to increase the number of refugees who could follow higher education courses, provide academic support to secondary students, facilitation of open and distance learning and reduce barriers to education in host countries.⁷ In their most recent DAFI Annual Report, UNHCR further indicated that attention should be directed to ensuring increased enrolment into secondary schools; expand scholarship opportunities as well as distance learning; in an attempt to address the barriers to higher education from a variety of levels.⁸

⁷ Ibid.
UNHCR’s DAFI program is testament that efforts have long been made to increase and expand opportunities for refugees in countries of first asylum, however the demand far outweighs the number of potential students; meaning that the majority live idle, with few prospects for the future. As clearly expressed by UNHCR, this is one of the reasons that aggravates people to make a decision to leave. Currently some voices in the European Union see this as a security threat rather than a potential resource as refugees continue to arrive on Europe’s doors. The conflation of the word refugee with security threat should be untangled with haste, as refugees, like all people, have much to contribute to societies. The larger threat for the world is the consistent and ongoing un-education of mass populations of youth that will have profound and manifold consequences into the future. The Incheon Declaration 2030 clearly outlines a commitment to education for refugees, including access to higher education. As the Declaration states, funding is required from developed countries to ensure that the commitment is realized.

**“Benefits of Higher Education”**

Access to education in emergency situations, after the provision of basic protections such as shelter, clothing, food, and healthcare, has become one of the primary initiatives of the international humanitarian community. UNESCO says that it is ‘increasingly recognized that education must be a principal part of any humanitarian response.’ In UNHCR’s Education Strategy 2012-2016 it was clearly outlined that education would be a part of all emergency responses. UNICEF is no different, with education a core component of their emergency response. This is precisely because education is seen as a protection tool against various forms of abuses as well as a means to create stability in the lives of refugee children and young people. The importance of education in emergency contexts is broadly recognized as essential to providing the foundation from which children can grow.

UNESCO found in their study, Education in Emergencies, that if there is no opportunity for continuation from primary to secondary through to higher education, then there is little incentive for students to stay in school and apply themselves to their education. Indeed it is widely accepted that the dropout rate of refugee children and youth in countries of first asylum is much higher than children and youth from the host community. This is undoubtedly a consequence of the significant and varied challenges that these children and youth face living in a country which, generally speaking, does not provide equal rights. Refugees often face inequality in work rights and protection, meaning that children may leave school to support their families to reduce the financial burden. These reasons as well as many others, demonstrate that because of their status as refugees, children and youth are substantively denied equal access to primary and secondary education. It is this inequality that international agencies and local actors throughout the world remain committed to overcoming by ensuring that access to basic education is not determined by one’s legal status, but rather in respect of their fundamental human right to have an education.

Inequality of substantive access to basic education extends to accessing higher education for refugees. This has long been the case. For many stakeholders this is a consequence of the ongoing issues in primary and secondary education and the ever present funding issues.

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However, issues in primary and secondary education should not be seen in isolation of higher education. It is necessary through these pathways that access to higher education opportunities arise. All levels of education initiatives must be conducted in tandem to ensure continuation through the education system and continuity, just as in a context undefined by emergency. The aim should be to reduce the impact that forced displacement has on individual’s education opportunity and life choices.

Higher education has a variety of benefits that do not simply affect the individual, but also has a positive impact on the community. This is broadly accepted for all people but holds even more significance for refugee communities. As UNHCR states ‘studies at the tertiary level endow refugees with the knowledge and skills to contribute to the community as role models, particularly in the case of female DAFI graduates... (They) proceed to transfer these benefits in turn to their communities through employment in fields which enable them to have a lasting impact upon reconstruction and sustainable development in the refugee community and their country.’¹³ Access to higher education thus provides refugee youth the opportunity to continue with their life, despite their situation of forced displacement. This allows them to support their communities in exile and contribute to the future development of their home countries; ensuring that vulnerability, marginalization and isolation is not exacerbated and unaddressed. Higher education provides an opportunity to bridge the gap between emergency response and sustainable development. In this sense higher education holds a dual role as both protection and sustainable development.

Benefits aside, there are challenges involved in the provision of higher education precisely because of the individual’s status as a refugee. As the below case study of Jordan will highlight, there are ongoing barriers to accessing higher forms of education for the vast majority of the refugee population, education and civil documentation issues for those who do gain access, as well as protection concerns that arise through such opportunities. While significant attention is dedicated to the experience of Syrian refugees this is virtue of the nature of the response to the Syrian refugee crisis and does not reflect a lack of commitment to other refugee communities. Just as access should not be based on status, nor should it be based on nationality.

¹³ Morlang, Claas, and Sheri Watson. Tertiary Refugee Education Impact and Achievements: 15 Years of DAFI.
Case Study: Jordan
“Background”

At the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011, the international community initially focused on the provision of immediate needs and protection. Despite the Jordanian Government’s commitment to provide free access to education for school age children it became increasingly obvious to local and international actors that thousands of school age children were out of school. Since 2012, UNICEF has provided support to the Kingdom's Ministry of Education (MOE) to establish learning spaces in the refugee camps and strengthen the capacity of primary and secondary schools in the host communities.¹⁴ In an effort to increase access to education for school age children, a number of assessments were conducted, outlining the various barriers to education. The biggest challenge was the perceived temporary nature of displacement and as the crisis continued, new obstacles developed: financial insecurity leading to child labor and early childhood marriage, indirect financial costs of entering schools such as for transport and books, as well as fear of bullying within the school system.¹⁵ The Jordanian government, with the support of international agencies has successfully increased enrolment amongst Syrian students. In fact, as a result of advocacy efforts by international organizations and increasing acceptance of the semi-permanence of the conflict, a 60% enrollment rate of Syrian school-aged refugees has been achieved.¹⁶

As it stands in Jordan, UNICEF reports that 90,000 students remain outside of the formal education system, 30,000 of whom are accessing various forms of informal education while 60,000 have limited to no access.¹⁶ While these are improved numbers, the significant drop out rate and lack of progression from primary to secondary school also remains a matter of concern. As it stands there are only 5,371 Syrian students enrolled in secondary education.¹⁷ Considering there are approximately 85,605 students between the ages of 12-17,¹⁶ this indicates that 94% of all eligible secondary students are not enrolled.

At the same time as ongoing issues with access to education, the issue of the quality of education received within the schools has become increasingly evident. This has been a primary issue identified through focus group discussions conducted by ARDD-Legal Aid through the ‘Education for the Future’ initiative in Mafraq governorate.¹⁹ Parents, teachers, and students have indicated that challenges include the violence in schools, the double-shift teaching system, and the limited capacity of teachers to work with conflict-affected children and to handle increased workload. Indeed this has been acknowledged by His Excellency Mohamad Alaqoor, Secretary General of the MoE, who noted that Jordan is approaching a new phase beyond providing access to education for Syrian refugees: the pursuit of quality education.²⁰ Despite the ongoing issues facing the education sector to address the needs of refugee children within Jordan, it is evident that significant attention has been paid to ensure children their right to access, and more recently, quality education and these efforts will continue because of the deep importance of education to a child’s development and protection while in the Kingdom.

In contrast, 2015 was the first year higher education was included in the Jordan Response Plan (JRP). For many this largely accords with the nature of emergency response. There is little understanding at the beginning of a refugee crisis how long the situation will endure. Accordingly, planning focuses on the short term and measures are stop gap rather than systemic.

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¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ Ibid.
¹⁷ Ministry of Education document
¹⁸ UNHCR, (2016), Registered Syrians in Jordan, 15th January 2016. PDF.
¹⁹ Internal ARDD-Legal Aid document
How higher education came to be a part of the JRP is due to both the length of the crisis and the continued and ongoing advocacy of different international stakeholders. In discussions with different actors, the issue of lack of access to higher education opportunities became clear in 2014 and advocacy continued thereafter. In the specific case of Za’atari Refugee Camp, a Youth Task Force initiated a process of focus group discussions to determine the primary challenges of youth within the camp at the end of 2014. The results of which, outlined in the UNHCR Participatory Assessment, showed clear demand for higher education, as well as increased community inclusion. Since this point, actors have indicated, to differing extents, that addressing the needs has taken significant time and energy and there remains much room for improvement.

This is one of the reasons that Maysa Jalbout outlined, ‘Youth (15-24 years old) have arguably been the most underserved and the most negatively impacted by the Syrian crisis.’ 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. Higher education as a topic for discussion in the response was initially alerted in 2013, a year into the camps existence, by an academic group led by Dr. Kevin Watenpaugh. According to Watenpaugh, the team was originally told by the aid organizations that, ‘there are no university age students [in Za’atari Refugee Camp], but that it instead houses almost exclusively poor peasant-farmers and urban laborers and their families.’ However upon arrival in Za’atari, the research team discovered that there were university students in the camp eager to continue their studies. Further, the team found the situation was no different for urban refugees outside of camps. There were, and continue to be, university students present in all major Syrian refugee populations throughout the Kingdom.

As an explanation for this misperception among aid workers, Watenpaugh wrote in The Higher Education Chronicle that:

Workers often imagine refugees. Historically, whether its Armenian survivors of genocide, Palestinians displaced by the creation of Israel, or Iraqis fleeing foreign invasion and civil war, Middle Eastern refugees can appear to be an undifferentiated, opaque mass in the collective consciousness of international humanitarianism.

While this statement generalizes the approach of aid workers, it is an important critique of how benefactors of aid must not make assumptions regarding beneficiaries of aid. The stakeholders spoken to for this report were shocked by the sentiment expressed. Though there was an understanding of how such sentiments can generate. Many aid workers are coming to the Syria crisis from a different crisis, and their experience may not account for an urban refugee population that had access to educational opportunities in their home country. The understanding of what a refugee means then is transplanted across contexts and borders thereby removing history, culture and different levels of access to opportunities; as though by virtue of becoming a refugee, people’s experience, needs and expectations become the same. As higher education in Syria was publically available to all, the assumption that Syrians would not want to continue their studies or were uneducated shows a lack of knowledge about the context of which people come from. This example clearly demonstrates the importance of understanding the social, cultural, economic and political context from which refugees have fled, to best serve their needs and develop programming that can support their ongoing development, regardless of their status as refugee.

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
As is the case for accessing basic and secondary education, all efforts should be made to ensure that access to higher education opportunities are not maligned as a consequence of the refugee experience. With the right to accessing higher education clearly enshrined in international conventions and protracted displacement now the norm for the majority of refugees in the world, including Jordan, developing best practices to the provision of higher education opportunities for refugees must be continually strived for. Importantly, this must take into account the desires, aspirations and expectations of the refugee youth themselves and not based on preconceived notions or impositions of what stakeholders or donors want. This was eloquently expressed by one stakeholder who made the point that while primary and secondary education is largely provided on a mass basis, higher education is by nature individualized and must be because it reflects the interests and desires and future ambitions of each student. The point made was that this should not be taken away simply because of one’s forced migration.

“A push to help the ‘Lost Generation’ ”

As the crisis has continued, more attention and funding have been brought to this issue.

2012
- January: UNHCR begins reporting Syrian refugee numbers.
- March: First Syrian Regional Response Plan released.
- June: Jesuit Commons: Higher Education at the Margins program piloted in Jordan.

2013
- DAFI begins to grant scholarships to Syrian refugees.
- Kaplan Test Prep opens academic support programs for 500 students in crisis environments, focusing on Syrian refugees.

2014
- Fall: German Academic Exchange (DAAD) establishes the "New Perspectives for Young Jordanians and Syrians" scholarship program.

2015
- February:
  » UNHCR profiles a DAFI scholarship recipient, Alaa, a Za’atari Refugee camp resident and student at al-Bayt University in Mafraq.
  » UNHCR announces funding shortfall which means DAFI will only award 10 scholarships in 2016.
- June:
  » 59 Syrian refugees have received DAFI scholarships.
  » DAAD accepts 20 Syrians and 20 Jordanians into its scholarship program and summer courses begin.
- July: UNESCO launches Jami3ti Initiative (My University Initiative).
- November: UNHCR reports breakthroughs in Jordan: 1) Ministry of Higher Education will now recognize the Ministry of Interior cards and asylum seeker certificates for admission to specific universities. 2) Jordan Hashemite University will reduce school fees by 20% to ease the financial burden for Syrian refugees.
- The University of People offers 500 scholarships to Syrian refugees.
- First Jordan Response Plan (JRP) released with 'Higher Education' as a line item.
The first major program to offer higher education scholarships to refugees of Syrian origin was DAFI in October 2013, with an initial 33 places offered and then continued in 2014 with 144 scholarships offered throughout the region.²⁵⁄²⁶ Of this total MENA allocation, in Jordan 17 Syrians secured scholarships in 2013, a total of 57 in 2014, with 13 Iraqi and one Somali recipient.²⁷ As of June 2015, 59 Syrian students were receiving DAFI scholarship in Jordan. In a July 2015 DAFI status report, UNHCR profiled Alaa, a Syrian refugee living in Za’atari Refugee Camp and a recipient of a DAFI scholarship. Through her scholarship she was able to study Arabic language and literature at al-Bayt University in Mafraq.²⁸ While celebrating the achievements of students like Alaa, the article also clearly outlined that as a consequence of a funding shortfall only 10 scholarships would be made available in 2016. A representative from UNHCR has since indicated that 1700 DAFI scholarships will be given within the MENA region although a further breakdown by country is not yet available.

In October 2014 the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) established a major scholarship program for Syrians wanting to study a Master’s degree in Germany. Throughout the world 221 students received these scholarships and travelled to Germany to study. To the question of why the program started in 2014, a representative of DAAD indicated that the original concept note for scholarship opportunities for Syrians was developed two years previous and had been handed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, though was never acted upon. After a public petition organized by German academics attracted media attention to the issue of Syria’s ‘Lost Generation’, there was quick movement on the part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which primarily funded the scholarships, with some support from the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).²⁹ Applicants were required to ‘intend to actively contribute to the peaceful co-existence of Syrian refugees and Jordanian communities.’³⁰ The first cohort for fall 2015 consisted of 20 Syrians and 20 Jordanians and offered summer preparatory courses for Syrians to facilitate completion of mandatory requirements for Master’s programs. A second round of 20 Syrians and 20 Jordanians will be accepted for the fall 2016 academic semester. This scholarship program is primarily funded through the BMZ, which focuses on south-south exchanges. In addition to a full scholarship, the program also provides psychosocial support in the form of both individual and group sessions to help manage stress levels and ease the transition back to education. To increase social cohesion and emphasize the benefit of higher education, recipients also have the opportunity to “earn” items that complement their education through community engagement activities. For example, this has allowed a dentist to provide dental care in orphanages on the weekend to earn a laptop to help with their studies.

Another edition to the scholarship opportunities for Syrians was made available in 2016 through EDU-Syria, a project funded by the European Union. Like the DAAD New Perspectives Scholarships it aims to provide higher education to both Young Syrians and Jordanians.

²⁷ DAFI 2013 Annual Report (The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative); DAFI 2014 Annual Report (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative)
The project is led by the German Jordanian University with three partner institutes: Zarqa University, Yarmouk University and Al-Quds College.\textsuperscript{31} This is potentially the largest scholarship opportunity currently available, with 300 places to be offered at Zarqa University alone. In this project, scholarships will primarily be provided to those whose university studies were distributed as a consequence of the crisis, with clear provision for both Masters, undergraduate and vocational courses. There were 2,000 Syrian students in attendance at the Zarqa open day in early 2016, clearly demonstrating the significant demand for such an initiative.\textsuperscript{32}

Increasingly individual universities in third countries have offered scholarship opportunities for Syrian refugees. International Institute for Education (IIE) has consolidated a list of colleges and universities predominately in the United States, which offer a range of scholarship opportunities which are either partly or fully funded.

Following the DAAD “Leadership for Syria” scholarships, other scholarships were advertised by IIE in quick succession in 2015. In large part these scholarships appear to have been galvanized by the IIE consortium who have long advocated for universities to play a larger role in the response to the Syrian crisis. The original call for scholarships came in 2013 through funding from the US Department of State and Global Platform for Syrian Students and Kaplan Test Prep International. Since the original opportunity another round of scholarships has been launched. Over the course of the two rounds 333 Syrian students have received support of some kind including 159 scholarships, 175 free online test prep courses and 24 institutional top up grants. In each round of applications there were approximately 4,000 applications for 100 scholarships available.\textsuperscript{33} It is not clear how many Syrian students from Jordan received scholarships. Based on their experience, IIE now advocates for fully funded scholarships over an increased number of partial scholarships. This is primarily due to the financial challenges students face under partial funding as well as the need to prove financial independence for the visa application process.

IIE also started a pilot program in Jordan to provide scholarship opportunities for Syrian refugees through the Emergency Student Fund. In early 2014, the then Jordanian Secretary General of the Ministry of Higher Education indicated the importance of supporting Syrian refugee students enrolled in Jordanian Universities. The pilot program was then developed to assist those at risk of dropping out due to financial reasons. The first six scholarships were dispersed during the fall semester of 2015 and due to the success of the pilot program this will be expanded in the fall of 2016.

Despite increasing scholarship opportunities offered through individual universities, there has been a noticeable organizational shift away from supporting scholarship applications in third countries. As will be explained in the challenges section of the paper below, this appears to be primarily a consequence of the perceived and real protection issues that emerge when refugee students leave the Kingdom, the expense involved with such scholarships and the want to not aggravate the vulnerability of families left behind. DAAD is the exception here; with the switch from third country to host country explained entirely by who funds the programs. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs funds programs in Germany, the BMZ focuses on in country programs. This may reflect a decision made at government level.
As scholarships to actually study at a university, whether in host country or abroad are limited, alternative learning options, such as online programs, have also developed as an avenue for further education for refugee youth. The online University of the People offered five hundred scholarships for Syrian refugees in 2015 and Kaplan Test Prep offered support to five hundred students in crisis, with a focus on Syrian refugees, in 2013. However, both of these services require that students already speak English, which potentially acts as a barrier to entry for some Syrians. Another interesting program was opened by Kiron University in 2015, providing free language and university courses for refugees online and funding for students’ final year at diverse universities. This was an important addition to the higher education opportunities for all refugees, because it serves to address the legal, language and financial issues many refugees face. In Jordan, online learning is not accepted when transferring credit and therefore students in online learning programs will not be able to use the certification that they receive in such programs. Thus, the only way for those using online education methods to continue their education is to leave Jordan to a country that accepts online learning and certification.

Increasing Access to Higher Education Requires Increasing Access to Information

To increase accessibility to scholarship information, UNESCO launched the Jami3ti Initiative (‘My University’ Initiative) in July 2015. The Jami3ti Initiative is an online database in Arabic of scholarship opportunities and resources to help students better understand the application process. This website consolidates the widely dispersed scholarship information into a single, searchable platform, which may prove invaluable to Syrian refugee students. There are approximately 2,000 opportunities listed.

To discern the intention and desires of Syrian refugee youth, UNESCO conducted a mobile based survey with the intention of drawing upon the data collected to initiate further dialogue with key stakeholders in addressing the issues and aspirations of the refugee youth. While disaggregated by gender and location, there is a resounding message expressed across all cohorts: the vast majority has not accessed any form of education while in Jordan; clearly indicating that displacement has had a significant impact on the academic progress of Syrian refugees in the Kingdom.

To the question of future education options, the majority was clear: 92% of respondents indicated a preference for obtaining a degree over any other category of education, with very small interest in online (3%), non-degree/certificate (6%) or blended learning (7%). Interestingly Za’atari respondents expressed less enthusiasm for anything other than degree and campus based education (97%) (Education Sector Working Group, 2015). There was limited interest to stay in Jordan to continue their education, though this was evidently gendered: with a higher interest to stay amongst females. There was also a gendered aspect to the perceived need for preparatory courses; with males across all locations suggesting they required less support than females; with the highest self-perceived needs from respondents in Mafraq. UNESCO’s findings provide a solid foundation from which stakeholders can continue their efforts to advocate making higher education options available for refugees; though it also makes clear the differences in expectations of Syrian students and actual opportunities on the ground.
These opportunities are the result of persistent advocacy on the part of different stakeholders to increase access to higher education for refugees in Jordan. The broadened provision reflects strong partnership and cooperation between international agencies, donors and the Jordanian government. This is best reflected in the progressive inclusion of higher education in the JRP/3RP. While there was only brief mention of it in the 2015 plan, the 2016 call for funds clearly outlines higher education to be a key component of the education sector, including vocational training. Advocacy has continued a pace in different avenues. For example, in November 2015 UNHCR reported breakthroughs in regards to the civil documentation issue, with the Kingdom’s Ministry of Higher Education indicating that they will recognize the Ministry of Interior (MOI) card and asylum seeker certificate in lieu of education documentation and transcripts with support from the Jordan Hashemite University and al-Bayt University.³⁶ Further, the Jordan Hashemite University informed UNHCR of a reduction in school fees by 20% to ease the financial burden for refugee students; a certification course for communication, technical, and life skills open to all refugees regardless of age; and a proficiency test for application in lieu of certified transcripts.³⁷ This has since expanded to include Al Abayt University, Zarqa University, Jadara University and Amman Arab University. The Za’atari Refugee camp coordination meeting minutes also indicates that 100 scholarship places have been made available at al-Bayt University.³⁸

Another significant development in the higher education response has been the introduction of the Tertiary Education Coordination Group (TECG) at the end of 2015. This group is largely made up of UN and other agencies working on higher education and with youth in Jordan, co-chaired by UNHCR and UNESCO, though is currently not open to all implementing partners in the field. Importantly education institutions are also attending. The group is specifically focused on coordinating efforts in programming, discussing policy changes and developing shared advocacy points. Stakeholders highlighted that the creation of the group is an important step in coordinating what was previously isolated and sporadic efforts, which may serve to bring more focused and directed attention to the issue.

These are important developments in ensuring access to higher education for Syrian refugees in Jordan. However these developments should also not be overstated. In the case of the 20% reduction in fees at select universities, as well as most of the scholarship opportunities, they are available for Syrians, to the exclusion of non-Syrian refugees. A February 1st policy announcement by the Ministry of Higher Education calls into question whether non-authentic documents of higher school completion can be used in lieu of authentic documents. As stated in meeting minutes about the policy, ‘this is a clear step backwards.’³⁹ Concerns have also been raised for students who have received a scholarship but do not receive a stipend; without this financial support students have started to drop out.⁴⁰ Further, various stakeholders indicated that the existence of the TECG does not wholly overcome the communication and coordination challenges present because organizations are entering largely on a program basis rather than with a holistic approach.

Progress has clearly been made, but as various stakeholders expressed, there remains significant work ahead to address the ongoing obstacles obstructing access. These challenges exist at all stages of the higher education cycle: from low rates of enrollment in secondary school, to overall limited opportunities and the type of opportunities, to financial and protection concerns for those who have received scholarships.

³⁷ Ibid.
³⁸ ZA’ATARI CMC meeting minutes 16th February 2016
³⁹ ZA’ATARI CMC MEETING MINUTES 16th February 2016
⁴⁰ ZA’ATARI CMC MEETING MINUTES 16th February 2016
To be sure, most of this relates to Syrian refugees to the exclusion of other refugee groups in Jordan. It is important to mention that there have long been providers of scholarships not based on nationality. Since 1978 World University Service of Canada has offered opportunities for refugees of different nationalities. Currently, 60-65 mandated refugees from five refugee hosting countries including Jordan receive the opportunity yearly. Distinct from long standing DAFI program this opportunity is explicitly linked to resettlement and the refugee becomes a permanent resident of Canada through the higher education program.⁴¹

“Obstacles to Higher Education”

In Watenpaugh et al 2013 study, students highlighted that the major barriers for their entry into Jordanian universities were: high tuition fees as well as high cost of living in Jordan which prevents the majority of university age Syrians from entering Jordanian institutions; lack of appropriate documentation including academic progress or certificates or travel documents.⁴² Other issues have arisen over time but student’s interest to continue studying has not subsided.

» Supply and Demand

With difficulties securing funding for basic primary and secondary level education ongoing, initiatives to fund access to higher education are often seen as a luxury. The EU delegation to Syria estimates that there are 77,718 Syrian refugee youth in Jordan alone.⁴³ The demand for scholarships thus remains significantly higher than what is supplied. This is clearly evidenced in applications for DAAD scholarships under the ‘Leadership in Syria’ program with only one in 18 applicants, or 5%, receiving a scholarship.⁴⁴ One stakeholder suggested that there were no more than 2,000 opportunities available overall. This is further reflected in the difficulty in maintaining even the limited scholarship opportunities through the DAFI program. Due to funding shortfalls, DAFI scholarships available in Jordan for 2016 were announced to be less than those offered in previous years.⁴⁵ However, as indicated by a stakeholder, this was said to increase. There is also an organizational focus on scholarships for Masters Students rather than undergraduate courses. It is unclear whether this is the case for IIE support to Syrians students in Jordan. Connected to the limited supply issue of all opportunities provided is the question of sustainability of such initiatives. As it stands, scholarships have been provided on yearly basis but no clear message has been sent as to whether these will be consistent and ongoing.

» Nationality and Discrimination

Syrians make up the majority of refugees in Jordan and therefore the majority of higher education scholarships are available for Syrians. Refugees of other nationalities have few options available to them. There are some exceptions to this, including DAFI, the WUSC and the various online platforms. Another important initiative available to any refugee in Jordan is run by the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS). JRS has been present in Jordan offering English certification programs and classes to refugees since 2010 and has broad reach in the Sudanese, Iraqi and Somali refugee communities.

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42 Watenpaugh, Keith D., Adrienne L. Fricke, and Tara Siegel. Uncounted and Unacknowledged: Syria’s Refugee University Students and Academics in Jordan.
45 UNHCR Jordan. UNHCR Jordan Operational Update, November 2015.
In 2012, after recognizing the increasing need for further education opportunities, an online diploma program credited by Jesuit Universities such as Georgetown University, St. Regis University and Gonzaga University, was piloted. Each year, 20-40 students have been offered a place in this three-year program which offers blended learning. The intensive program has had an alleged 50% resettlement rate for participants, the majority of which have come from the Sudanese and Iraqi communities. This high resettlement rate has been attributed to the extra support offered as a part of the program; which works to improve cross-cultural communication. Scholarships have been seen as a way for refugees from any background to be resettled as it often removes nationality from the equation and relies on the academic ability of the applicant. However, the recent push for higher education opportunities have left refugees who are not Syrian struggling to find options that they qualify for.

» Low levels of enrollment in secondary education

While this has not been tested statistically, it is clear that the finite opportunities for higher education have been a contributing factor to the low numbers of Syrian youth enrolled in secondary education. As UNESCO points out, it is crucially important for there to be next steps in the education system for refugees so there is an incentive to work hard, whether that is tertiary education paths or technical skills-building. Without the explicit ability to move further through the education system there is little incentive for refugees to take their education seriously. Especially with so many youth outside of the formal education system, the pathway to higher education in the future will be difficult. It is thus essential that there are post-basic opportunities made available so that those who have missed out on the opportunity to continue through secondary education have a way back into the system. NRC provides this with youth centers in Za’atari and Azraq. UNESCO’s most recent BTEC program, through the ‘Youth Skills Development and Mentoring Project in Jordan’ is another example of this in the urban context. BTECs are vocational qualifications specifically designed to provide students skills that will enable them to move on to higher education or straight into employment. In this specific program, 120 Syrian students from Za’atari, 160 from host communities as well as 120 vulnerable Jordanians will have access. More programs like this should be developed and expanded to provide broadened opportunity. At the same time further efforts to get eligible secondary students back into school should be made a concerted priority. Efforts continue to be made in this regard with the Education Sector Working Group having developed key messages for increasing retention rates.

» Documentation issues

Beyond the limited opportunities and low secondary enrollment there are many practical issues that refugees face in applying for such opportunities whether they are for university placement or tertiary education. The refugee experience of fleeing for safety often times means that the necessary documentation that qualify them for these scholarships are missing or lost forever. Students must provide this paperwork for matriculation and visas, but lack the necessary documentation or the financial resources to pay for expensive document translation services for scholarships available to study abroad.

46 Jesuit Refugee Services
48 Education Sector Working Group, Retention Key Messages 2016.
As mentioned, there has been some formal acknowledgement of this difficulty and Al Bayt University has indicated, along with other universities, that they would be willing to do placement tests for prospective students to determine their level. The new policy mandates that all students must provide authentic documentation and this is the only form of documentation that will be accepted. This poses a setback for the progress made in regards to documentation issues. If this policy is to be maintained protection concerns about getting these documents from Syria will begin again. For example, through previous processes, Syrians have requested for family members still in Syria to obtain their documents. In one case identified by a NGO, a Syrian refugee asked a relative to collect documents within Syria. During that process, the family member was arrested and went missing. This is an extreme risk, especially for an application process which may not lead to an actual scholarship. Although the Jordanian Government’s policy was developed in response to the emergence of fraudulent documents, this is a serious concern. To ensure the protection of Syrian refugees in Jordan and their family members still present in Syria, alternative mechanism must be investigated to verify individuals’ educational history.

» Lack of knowledge, access to information

Youth present at the Global Refugee Youth Consultation held in Amman in December 2015, indicated that they do not know about opportunities and often only found out about them right before the deadlines due to the lack of direct communication with the refugees themselves. Importantly this was expressed by students in both urban and camp settings suggesting that access to information is an ongoing issue. The Jami3ti Initiative is an important step in the right direction. With an approximate 80,000 Syrian youth alone, only 2.5% of the Syrian youth have accessed the service. UNESCO indicated that another push would be made to encourage further participation of the youth and to do this they will be drawing upon relationships with different NGOs to distribute information about the initiative to their respective beneficiaries. Challenges remain of how to distribute this information with youth living in urban areas as not everyone is involved with NGOs or connected to networks with information specific to higher education. This is not a problem specific to the information relating to higher education but an ongoing challenge for stakeholders in the provision of any information or services in urban settings. Social networks such as Facebook and wide access to smart phones are strong approaches to address the scattered population but to target the right populations through this approach remains a challenge. Importantly, this initiative relies on the fact that refugee youth have access to the internet. The issue of internet access holds especially true for refugees situated in rural areas or in refugee camps in Jordan, where internet connection is not reliable.

» Language and Culture

Language continues to be a barrier beyond access and information sharing issues. The DAAD ‘New Perspectives for Young Jordanians and Syrians’ program requires applicants to speak English, even though students are expected to attend Arabic-language universities.
This is not a unique request among scholarship benefactors for either the application process or admittance to specific programs, for either host country or third country provision. Importantly all higher education programs are providing English language support, however an average command of English is needed. This necessarily means that only those who have previously had the opportunity to study English can be considered for such opportunities. Many universities further require that the beneficiary of a scholarship speak the native language of the benefactor.

Cultural differences in application and interview styles make scholarship applications more difficult for students who do not have access to career coaches or guidance counselors. Without these resources, students may struggle to identify and express the qualities that scholarship providers and universities look for in students.

The difficulties that students have with the application process and the individualized attention they seek is reflected in the number of enquiries that scholarship providers receive. This is the case in the application process and for the recipients of scholarships. Demand on scholarship staff is high. In one specific case, the director of a scholarship provider spoke with a recipient for an hour and then spoke with staff to identify a solution to the student’s problem, something that the director identified as normal. DAAD has set up a specific Syria desk to support the caseload. ⁵⁴ Other agencies working with youth also identify that there is limited capacity or organizational resources to support in these issues.

» Protection Services

The process of accessing higher education has presented a number of challenges in protecting Syrian refugees, with both host country and third country scholarships. Through their protection mandate, UNHCR offers protection services to registered refugees. In regards to recipients who receive scholarships in third countries, questions largely remain unanswered as to who in the third country will assist with visa issues, basic necessities, and assistance should the refugee fail a course or their program; and whether there will be a possibility for naturalization. In the case of the Leadership for Syrians scholarships from DAAD, support staff were available originally on a one to one basis to help address the problems that students encountered. This has since shifted to an increased caseload per support staff.

Another concern centers on the Jordanian policy of not permitting the reentry of refugees who leave the country and the fact that there is no clear provision for naturalization through the scholarships. By accepting these scholarships abroad, refugees may be leaving behind family members in Jordan without a guaranteed means of returning. While some stakeholders were unsure if this was communicated to recipients of overseas scholarships, DAAD indicated this to students through a written consent form. In one identified case, a scholarship recipient refused to accept because she did not want to leave family behind. While there is no clear provision for naturalization in Germany through the scholarship, after completing the degree in Germany students are allowed to look for work within a 12 month period. If no work is found, people are by law meant to leave Germany. However, in the case of Syrians, they can apply for asylum in the country. There have been no cases reported of people being sent back to Syria or Jordan and there is little expectation that this will be attempted. This concern about non-reentry has been acknowledged and understood by actors involved in the response.

UNHCR indicated in the Education Sector Working group in January 2016 that they are drafting a document to address these concerns for both refugees and donors, and a protection training has been organized by UNHCR for members of the TEG.

Along with this broader challenge, when travelling abroad, refugees must have a passport. If they do not have one, the only formal option is to go to the Syrian Embassy in Jordan. For those who left Syria for political reasons, approaching the embassy may expose them to risk by interacting with officials from the Syrian government. In an effort to avoid this there have been cases of individuals paying large amounts of money for a passport through informal means, without any guarantee of receiving a true document. This also exposes them to exploitation and legal prosecution in Jordan because of this illegal activity.

»Inexperience with Humanitarian Crises

Many scholarship providers and academic institutions now involved in the Syrian refugee crisis do not have previous experience with humanitarian crises and as a result do not understand the realities or the concerns of refugees. For example, institutions have inquired about NGOs requesting documentation from the Syrian government or Syrian institutions instead of individuals. This goes against the humanitarian imperative of “do no harm” as it would flag individuals as refugees who have fled Syria and pose risks to family members or connections remaining in Syria. There is the added risk of a refugee returning to Syria under duress should the Syrian government or another entity blackmail the individual through threats. While scholarship providers have suggested that students could sign consent forms, this does not remove the responsibility of the stakeholders because of the ‘do no harm’ principle.

This approach, based off the normal process of universities, also impacts the creation of selection criteria and standards for scholarship programs. While NGOs may have an open feedback loop with scholarship providers, such providers may not have the flexibility to alter criteria due to requirements from academic institutions or the host country’s Ministry of Education or funders.

Some stakeholders indicated that they have stepped in as a link between refugees and scholarship providers in an effort to ‘translate’ challenges and expectations between the two groups. UNHCR has played an instrumental role in this regard from the beginning of the response, as well as other actors such as NRC, who, through their community centers can immediately relay refugees’ challenges. The need for this does not seem to be the case across the board, with some scholarship providers having a direct line of communication with potential applicants to understand the challenges they face.

»Masters over lower levels of higher and tertiary education

Scholarships that have been made available have focused on Masters Programs over undergraduate courses or other tertiary education opportunities. This provides opportunities for those who have already entered the higher education system but limits opportunities for those who have not had the opportunity to engage with the higher education system. This was a major issue raised by the youth present at the Global Refugee Youth Consultations in December 2015.
Considering that the majority of secondary school aged Syrian students are not enrolled and that there are over 80,000 Syrian youth present in the Kingdom, the majority of whom have not entered higher levels of education as witnessed through the UNESCO Ja3mi-ti findings, more programs need to be designed and created for this section of Syrian youth in Jordan. This is further reflected in the decreasing numbers of Syrian applicants for the Masters programs that DAAD is providing. The question of why there is such a focus on Masters programs considering this largely remains unanswered. It is clear from reviewing the scholarship opportunities available that there needs to be varied opportunities at a variety of entry points to address the different stages of educational attainment of the youth population. Importantly, this should include vocational training as well as undergraduate courses. Increased coordination and advocacy about this to funding bodies must be continually made to better reflect the needs and aspirations of the refugee youth in Jordan.
Why help now?
Since September 2014, there have been several articles on education opportunities for Syrian refugees. These articles have largely adopted the term ‘lost generation,’ referring to former Syrian university students. These articles generally argue that scholarships and education opportunities provide potential leaders with the tools to rebuild a post-conflict Syria and prevent young, ambitious refugees from falling through the cracks. As Kaisth and King wrote, ‘By failing to support the educational needs of Syria’s students and scholars now, we run the risk of a lost generation of leaders, with potentially devastating effects on Syria and the region.’ An open letter from British academics was discussed in widely circulated publications, in September 2015, urging universities to take in Syrian refugees and academics. An October 2015 article in the Atlantic also encouraged universities to aid refugees and discussed barriers to accessing opportunities. A NRC report from January 2016 indicated that 50% of refugees surveyed in Jordan said that they would be leaving Jordan ‘because they saw no future, in particular because of not being able to find legal work, coupled with insufficient levels of assistance.’ Along with the financial difficulties encountered for refugees in Jordan, the lack of higher education opportunities has been cited as a challenge for refugee youth, which may aggravate their decision to leave. This has been noted as a challenge in Za’atari Camp Management and Coordination (CMC) meeting minutes in the last months of 2015. In the context of major displacements of refugees and significant vulnerability in countries of first asylum, such as Jordan, access to higher education can be a protection mechanism for refugee youth to not pursue irregular migration. This was further indicated by the Oxford University’s Refugee Studies Centre which said: ‘barriers in access to education (including higher education) in regional hosting countries due to high cost and perceived risks contributes to the attraction of Europe as a destination for building viable futures.’ Increasing higher education opportunities for refugees provides the ‘glue’ for people to stay in countries of first asylum.

At the London Conference held in February 2016, there was a clear agreement from the international community to both education and work opportunities for Syrians. In the co-host declaration at the end of the event, a statement was made to ensure ‘No Lost Generation’ and this included post-basic education such as vocational training. In the case of Jordan, the commitment is to provide increased ‘access to vocational training for Syrians and to tertiary/higher education opportunities for all vulnerable youth (Jordanian and Syrian).’ The recognition of the need to provide such increased assistance is a welcome step in the response to the refugee crisis in the region, and in Jordan in particular.

While holding specific intent of halting irregular migration to Europe, increased funding towards higher education opportunities in countries of first asylum like Jordan is positive. However, it should be made clear that the move to increase opportunities will be insufficient to address the magnitude and diversity of needs of the Syrian refugee youth community in Jordan. A number of stakeholders noted during interviews that scholarship programs alone are not enough; they must incorporate services and skill-building which address daily stressors, such as building life skills, economic empowerment, and psychosocial support. For example, the “New Perspectives” program offered by DAAD and GIZ has developed to include an academic scholarship, a community service portion, community-building, and psychosocial support. This serves to support the varied needs of students as they move through their education.

It is clear that progress on the issue of access higher education for refugees has been made but more can and should be done. Further, as has been outlined, higher education in refugee contexts also creates protection challenges that must be addressed for scholarship provision in host and third countries so that the positive impacts of higher education can feed into the post-conflict Syria: the nurses, teachers and scientists educated through these programs will ensure an educated population ready to engage the manifold issues present in the immediate and long term future of Syria. Increasing access to higher education is thus an avenue for protection, sustainable development and stability and security into the future.
1. Continued support to primary and secondary education to ensure the education pathway is not disrupted as a consequence of displacement. Higher education initiatives should not displace focus on other education level initiatives: All education initiatives should be seen in tandem with each other; feeding to the ultimate goal of education provision for all.

2. Strong working relationship with hosting government developed early to address the specific concerns of the youth population. This could be achieved with a coordinated group such as the Tertiary Education Coordination Group.

3. Programs targeting youth should offer a diversity of options, beyond Masters programs, including vocational, post-basic and academic. This reflects the needs of any society.

4. Incorporation of services and skill-building to support students to address daily stressors while they are studying.

5. Higher education can be expensive. To overcome this challenge diverse methods should be employed to ensure some form of access: direct face to face, online, or blended.

6. Access to higher education opportunities not based on nationality: as has been clearly witnessed in the case of Jordan priority has been given to Syrian refugees over any other refugee population. With a variety of refugee communities in Jordan, inclusion of these groups into the application process is central to reflect commitment to non-discrimination.

7. Coordination with scholarship providers/Training for scholarship providers on the difficulties that refugee youth continue to face so that they can better reflect this in their programs.

8. Alternative pathways to secure validation of previous education level considering civil documentation issue and protection challenges involved in obtaining from home country.
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