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**“Higher Education in Crisis Situations: Synergizing Policies and Promising Practices  
to enhance Access, Equity and Quality in the Arab Region”**

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**Higher Education and Syrian Refugee Students:  
The Case of Lebanon  
(Policies, Practices, and Perspectives)**

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## Abstract

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

This report presents the findings of an investigation that aims to identify major lines of action in tertiary education in emergencies, namely, legal frameworks and policies implemented by key stakeholders within the sector, whilst offering insights into the current status of tertiary education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The report employs a qualitative approach that intends to explore and understand the challenges and opportunities of Syrian refugee students in accessing tertiary education. Research demonstrates that due to financial strains on the Lebanese economy, the government's attempts to revise clear and appropriate policies to deal with the rising number of Syrian students in the tertiary education sector are restricted. The Lebanese government incurs higher costs than their budget, and as a result, resources and effort towards the tertiary education sector with regards to Syrian students are limited. Moreover, the lack of coordination among key actors in the sector ultimately results in the misallocation of resources and effective policy planning in Lebanon. The study findings show that the large number of refugees, who have significantly altered the national demographics within the country, present a challenge for the state and local communities in meeting the needs of both the refugees and the host communities. The challenges specific to the education sector are: (1) legal issues and restrictive host country policies and procedures, including residence restrictions, (2) experiences in university application procedures or lack of academic and career guidance, which present potential pathways to the labor market or further education, and (3) financial shortcomings. This case study offers policy and program recommendations to decision- and policy-makers for the national and international communities, with the overall goal to improve and guide further practice and research in supporting protracted refugee situations to access tertiary education, and its long term benefits.

### Keywords

Young Syrian refugees, displaced persons, Higher Education, Tertiary Education, NGOs.

# Table of Contents

Acronyms .....	6
Introduction .....	8
Lebanese National Context .....	8
Syrian Refugees Context in Lebanon .....	10
Higher Education in Lebanon .....	12
Higher Education for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon .....	14
Rationale and Purpose of the Study .....	16
Methodology.....	18
Data Collection Procedure .....	18
Research Participants .....	18
Data Analysis .....	19
Legal Frameworks and Policies: Educational, Residency, and Labor .....	19
Educational .....	19
Requirements for University Admission .....	20
Special Allowances for University Admission .....	21
Residency .....	21
Employment .....	23
Scholarship programs .....	24
JUSOOR-Lebanon for Higher Education: JUSOOR.....	24
Scholarships for Syrians: LAsER .....	24
Special Teaching Diploma (STD): LAsER .....	25
Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund (DAFI): UNHCR .....	25
Higher Education 4 Syrians (HES): SPARK .....	25
Quality Universal Education for Syrian Students and Teachers (QUESST): UNESCO .....	26
MasterCard Foundation Scholarship: .....	26
Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians (HOPES): DAAD	7
English Language Programs .....	29

Higher Education English Access Program (HEEAP): British Council .....	29
British Council LASER Program: British Council .....	29
<b>Different Types of Support to Syrian Refugee Students .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Financial Support.....	30
Academic Support .....	30
Counseling Support .....	30
Other Support .....	31
<b>Why Is More Coordination Needed? .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Challenges .....</b>	<b>33</b>
Financial Barrier .....	33
Academic Barrier .....	33
Lack of Academic and Career Counseling .....	34
Legal Documents .....	35
Psychosocial .....	35
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Recommendations .....</b>	<b>36</b>
Recommendations for the International Communities .....	36
1. Tertiary Education ‘a fundamental right’ .....	36
2. Collaboration among Actors. ....	37
3. Outreach .....	37
4. A variety of Options .....	37
5. Academic and Career Counselling. ....	38
6. The Lebanese Issue .....	38
Recommendations for the Lebanese Community .....	38
1. Tertiary Education a human and legal right. ....	38
2. Host community’s right to scholarship programs .....	38
3. Certificate qualifications proof .....	38
4. Preparatory program. ....	39
5. Academic and career counsellin .....	39
Recommendations for Further Research .....	39
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>41</b>

## Acronyms

ALLC	American Lebanese Language Center
AOU	Arab Open University
AUB	American University of Beirut
AUL	Arts, Sciences, and Technology University in Lebanon
BT	Baccalaureate Technique
DAAD	German Academic Exchange Service
DAFI	Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund
EU	European Union
GCE	General Certificate Exam
HEEAP	Higher Education English Access Program
HES	Higher Education for Syrians
HOPES	Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians
ISG	Interim Syrian Government
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
JU	Al-Jinan University
LASER	Language and Academic Skills and E-learning Resources
LASeR	Lebanese Association for Scientific Research
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
LIU	Lebanese International University
LU	Lebanese University
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MENA	Middle East and North Africa

MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Non-governmental organization
QUESST	Quality Universal Education for Syrian Students and Teachers
RACE	Reaching All Children with Education
STD	Special Teaching Diploma
TDH Italy	Terre des Hommes Italy
DAFI	The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund
LASeR	The Association for Scientific Research
UK	United Kingdom
ULF	Universite Libano-Francaise
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations Refugee Agency
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UT	University of Tripoli
UPP	University Preparatory Program
VTE	Vocational and Technical Education



## Higher Education and Syrian Refugee Students: The Case of Lebanon

### Introduction

As the Syrian crisis continues into its sixth year with no end in sight, the future of Syria and its people remains unknown. More than four million Syrians have fled the war to become refugees in the neighboring countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The majority of the refugees reside in neighboring countries within the region. Before the war, an estimated 20 percent of Syrian young people were enrolled in tertiary education (EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, 2016), but as the war continues, Syrian refugee youth face barriers accessing tertiary education in the countries in which they seek refuge. The continued disruption of Syrians' tertiary education poses a great threat to their financial status and quality of life. Moreover, an uneducated "Lost Generation" will not be equipped to rebuild the economic, political, educational, and health infrastructures in post-war Syria. Increasing access to tertiary education for Syrian refugees is not only critical to prepare the labor force for rebuilding post-war Syria, but also to provide these young people with a meaningful contribution to life. As a result, it is important to understand the current status of access to tertiary education for Syrian refugees in host countries within the region and beyond.

Lebanon is the second largest host of Syrian refugees, with the highest per capita rate of refugees globally. The two countries have a long and interconnected history as part of Greater Syria. The modern nations have shared almost open borders both physically and socially. Despite complicated political relationships in recent decades, deep social, economic and familial connections exist. The two countries continue to have diplomatic relations with a number of formal and informal agreements that have facilitated the movement of families, workers, expertise, and exchange of goods and more. Lebanon provided one of the secure areas for Syrians to seek refuge given the geographic proximity, the common language, culture and even family ties between the two countries.

### Lebanese National Context

Lebanon is a fragile state given its turbulent political and security situation. The fifteen-year civil war that ended in 1990 placed the need to rebuild the country's infrastructure and economy. Although the war ended in 1990, Israeli forces did not evacuate southern Lebanon until 2000 and the Syrian military occupation ended in 2005 following the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. The confessional government, rife with corruption and sectarian tension, delayed the election of the president for over two years and postponed its parliamentary elections since 2013.

The rebuilding process in Lebanon has been slow but steady. The government struggles to provide basic services to its citizens, such as consistent electricity and waste management. A significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line. According to 2015 estimates, 28.5 percent of the Lebanese population, around 1.5 million people, live below the poverty line. Rates are even higher in areas such as the Beqaa Valley and North Lebanon, and they have increased in recent years (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2015). Since 1948, Palestinian refugees have lived in Lebanon. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) support Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. They live primarily in twelve official camps across the country in a protracted refugee situation, with 66 percent living below the poverty line (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2015).

Beyond political and social tensions, Lebanon faces threats to its security and stability due to regional conflicts, particularly neighboring Syria's civil war. Supporters of the regime and rebels, Syrian and Lebanese alike, clash within Lebanon. Fighting breaks out along the border regularly and has even occurred in the major cities of Tripoli and Beirut. A series of bombings have occurred throughout the country since 2013, killing hundreds and often targeting civilians. Towns such as Hermel and Arsal and most military checkpoints near the border are consistent terrorism targets. Additionally, there have also been several large attacks in cities farther from the border such as Tripoli and Beirut. The national Internal Security Forces endeavor to keep Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and other terrorist organizations out of the country.

Lebanon, a very small country with an area of only 10,452 square kilometers and an estimated population standing at almost 6 million<sup>1</sup> (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2015), faces a number challenges in accommodating its population with limited resources. Lebanon is suffering from high unemployment rates. Unemployment rates are highest among the educated youth, particularly due to the high demand for low-skilled workers in the country. According to the distribution of the Greater Beirut labor force by education surveyed in 2000, the unemployment rate is 42.2 percent for female and 28.6 percent for male university graduates, particularly those with a bachelor's degree (El Ghali, 2011).

In 2010, worker productivity growth was reported to be negative indicating an increase in the labor force within informal settings and low-paying jobs. Reduced outputs and incomes, in addition to decreased trade with and through Syria due to the Syrian conflict, have negatively impacted the Lebanese economy (Ajluni & Kawar, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> The Lebanese population had been estimated at about 4 million up until the break of the Syrian crisis, which led to a fast paced influx of refugees into the country and increased the country's population sharply in a very short period.

## Syrian Refugees Context in Lebanon

Syrian refugees started crossing the border to Lebanon with the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011. Within Syria, the number of internally displaced Syrians is estimated at 6.5 million, while the number of registered Syrian refugees outside the country has risen to 4,863,684 people (UNHCR, January 2017). The influx of refugees over the past five years has overwhelmed the main host countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq.

The Lebanese government refers to Syrians as displaced persons rather than “refugees” due to political reasons, and it maintains a position that Lebanon is not “an asylum country” (Janmyr, 2016, p. 10). For the purposes of this report, however, the term refugee will be used instead of displaced person. A displaced person or refugee is one that is forcibly displaced “as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human rights violations” (UNHCR, 2015). Article I of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) defines refugee as a person who:

*owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.*

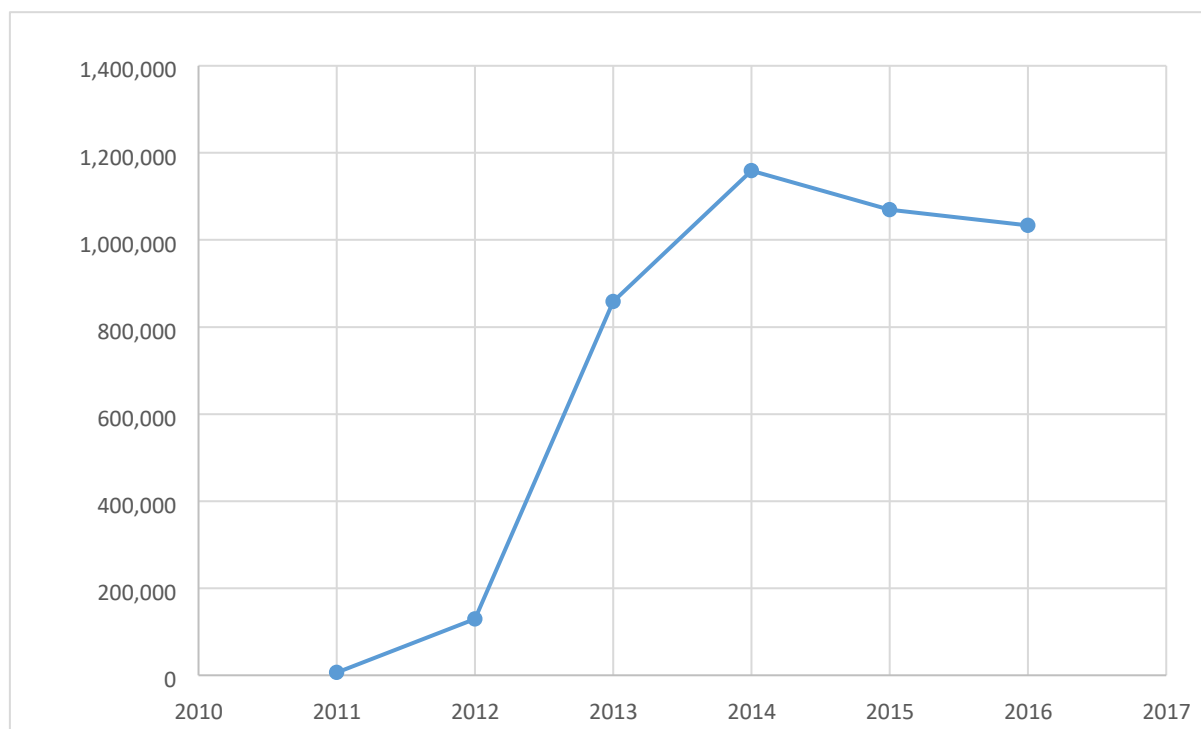
Lebanon, however, is not a signatory to the Convention or the subsequent 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) (UNHCR, January 2017), there are currently 1,017,433 registered Syrian refugees comprising 247,736 households in Lebanon, with an additional estimated 300,000-500,000 unregistered refugees (Janmyr, 2016), adding to existing Palestinian and Iraqi refugee populations. Lebanon currently has the largest number of refugees per-capita in the world (Yassin, Osseiran, Rassi, & Boustani, 2015). Such a sharp increase in population has strained the small country’s limited resources and impacted economic, social, health and education sectors.

Over half of the registered refugees in Lebanon are under the age of 18. The majority of the refugees, 35 percent, live in the Beqaa valley in eastern Lebanon, and close to 30 percent live in Beirut and Mount Lebanon area. Most of the migration occurred in 2013, with the registered population increasing by over 700,000 individuals during one year. At its peak, there were almost 1.2 million registered individuals in April of 2015. However, in May 2015, UNHCR stopped registering new refugees and now only allows refugees to be recorded (UNHCR, 2016b). Table I and Figure I respectively show the population of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon for the years 2011-2016 and the influx of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon between 2011 and 2016.

**Table I. Population of Registered Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (UNDESA, 2016; UNHCR, 2016b).**

Year	Registered Syrian Refugees	Total Population of Lebanon	Percentage Syrian Refugees
2011	6,290	4,592,000	0.14
2012	129,106	4,924,000	2.62
2013	858,641	5,287,000	16.24
2014	1,158,995	5,612,000	20.65
2015	1,069,111	5,851,000	18.27
2016	1,033,513	5,988,000	17.26

**Figure I. Influx of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon, 2011-2016)**



Source: UNESCO Education response to the Syria Crisis, 2015-2016

Syrians that had ties in Lebanon or were already working in the country and then brought their families to join them made up the first wave of refugees. Some wealthy families that had the means to flee Syria and reestablish life in Lebanon came as well. As the war intensified, Syrians from different regions, religious and ethnic backgrounds, and socio-economic strata began to enter the country, some legally and others illegally. Many lost everything in Syria before coming to Lebanon,

and others continue to struggle to make ends meet as the crisis continues. Some fled to Lebanon with the intention of staying, at least until they can return to Syria, but others found themselves trapped in Lebanon without documents. Although the number of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon has steadied and did not increase in the past year due to strict border controls, the situation for those refugees already in Lebanon is deteriorating.

Around two-thirds of refugees in Lebanon do not have legal residency papers. Close to 70 percent of Syrians live below the poverty line in Lebanon, a sharp increase from 49 percent in 2014 (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2015). Debt levels are increasing as refugees continue to incur expenses, particularly rent, particularly that refugees are unable to make decent wages. The unemployment rate of Syrian refugees in 2013-2014 reached 33.04 percent, and for those working, the vast majority are employed in the informal market resulting in unstable, low-paying wages (Ajluni & Kwar, 2015).

The experience of Palestinian refugees undoubtedly is echoed in Lebanon's responses to the Syrian refugee crisis. The Lebanese government does not encourage any efforts to help Syrians settle in Lebanon in any sort of permanent camps like the Palestinians, who have remained in Lebanon for almost sixty years now. The Lebanese government views Palestinian camps as possible breeding grounds of radicalization and militarization. As a result, the Lebanese government refuses to set up camps or any kind of permanent housing solution for the Syrians. Instead, most refugees rent apartments or live in temporary settlements on rented land (Yassin, et. al., 2015).

## Tertiary Education in Lebanon

Lebanon's tertiary education sector has its roots in the late nineteenth century when missionaries founded the Syrian Protestant College (now American University of Beirut, AUB) in 1866 and University of St. Joseph in 1875. The Lebanese University (LU) in 1951, followed by a number of other private universities. The first law regulating tertiary education was passed in the 1960s, and was recently reformed by the passing of law No.285 in 2014. The civil war stalled the development of the sector as many students sought education outside of Lebanon. As the civil war ended, enrollment at local universities increased significantly (El-Ghali, Yeager, & Zein, 2011). Lebanon now has 47 private tertiary education institutions and one public tertiary education institutions recognized by the MEHE. Table 2 presents an overview of tertiary education institutions in Lebanon by type for the year 2016.

**Table 2. Total Number of Tertiary Education Institutions in Lebanon by Type for the Year 2016**

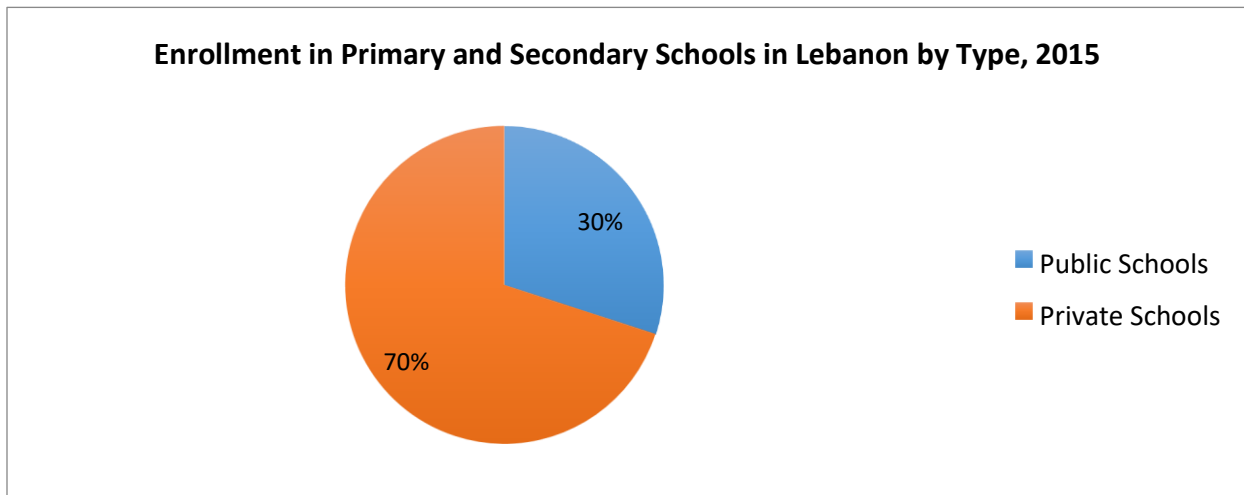
Type of Institution	Number of institutions
Public University	1
Private Universities (Licensed and operational)	35
Private University Institutes and colleges	9
Private University Institutes of Theology	3
Private Universities (Licensed but not operational)	3

Source: MEHE Website, 2016

Some of the private universities are for-profit and affiliated with a single religious sect or political party (Fricke, et. al., 2014). The language of instruction at most universities in Lebanon is English and/or French following the American or French systems. Beyond a secondary school certificate, many universities require standardized tests such as the SAT or university-specific entrance exams as a part of the application process. Since essentially all universities in Lebanon are private, with the exception of the one public tertiary education institution, the LU, institutions are very autonomous. This high autonomy is also a right granted to the institutions of tertiary education in the country according to the law No.285 that governs the sector (MEHE, April 2014). Although the number of tertiary education institutions in the country is high, many of these institutions still struggle to take on refugee students (Jazar, 2015). Lebanese universities have experience working with Palestinian refugees, however, the concerns are different for Syrians as Palestinians follow the Lebanese curriculum (even those educated in UNRWA schools), have access to their official academic records, and are charged the same tuition as Lebanese students at the public university (Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, 2016).

Students reach tertiary education by obtaining the Lebanese baccalaureate. Basic education lasts nine years in Lebanon and is free and compulsory according to the law No.150 (MEHE, 2011). Secondary school is three years, and students who follow the Lebanese curriculum choose one of four tracks: Sciences, Life Sciences, Humanities, and Economics. A parallel technical track exists at the secondary level, resulting in a technical baccalaureate. Schools in Lebanon often offer multiple options for students beyond the Lebanese system, including the French baccalaureate, American system, or International Baccalaureate, among others. The language of instruction varies among schools, including Arabic, English, and French. French or English are used for math and science instruction even in the Lebanese system as per the government curriculum. Similar to tertiary education institutions, a large number of private schools operate at the basic and secondary level, with only 30 percent of students attending public schools (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2015).

**Figure 1. Enrollment in Primary and Secondary Schools in Lebanon by Type, 2015**



Source: Government of Lebanon & UN, 2015

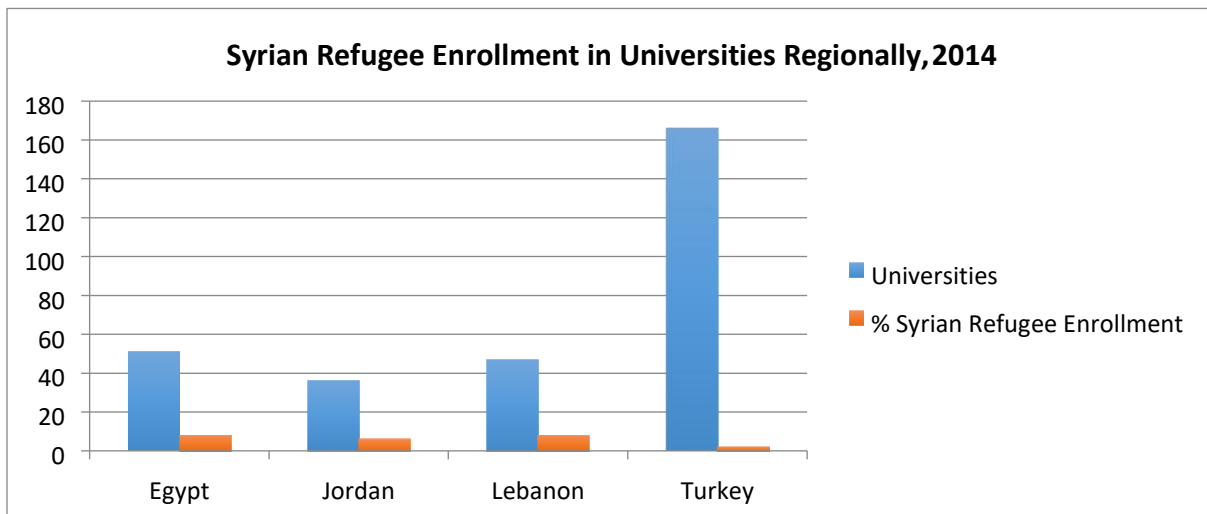
Lebanon's education system contrasts with Syria's mainly with respect to the proliferation of private institutions and the use of English and French instruction. At the basic and secondary levels in Syria, instruction is done in Arabic and 97% of basic education schools are public. Syria otherwise follows a similar system of mandatory primary education lasting nine years, followed by a secondary system resulting in a General Secondary Education Certificate. Students can choose from either the science or literature stream in general education, or pursue a technical stream resulting in a technical certificate. Students in tertiary education in Syria mainly attend free, state-funded public universities with the language of instruction in Arabic. Private universities have been recognized by the state since 2001 (Immerstein & Al-Shaikly, 2016).

## Tertiary Education for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

One of the most significant long-term consequences of the Syrian crisis is the disruption of Syrians' education. As of 2015, an estimated 90,000-110,000 out of 450,000 Syrians in the MENA aged 18-22 years are qualified for tertiary education, which does not include would-be students over the age of 22 (Redden, 2015). According to UNHCR, the number of Syrian refugees aged between 18 and 24 years old reached 108,639 in 2016 (42,230 males and 66,409 females). Statistics on university enrollment before the war estimate that 26 percent of Syrian urban men and women, as well as 17 percent of rural men and 15 percent of rural women, studied in college, at university, or had vocational training (Fricke, King, & Watenpugh, 2014). A more general estimate places the total participation from Syrians aged 18-24 in tertiary education at 20 percent before the war and less than 5 percent in 2016 (EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, 2016). Estimates from 2014 depict a plummet in the percentages of Syrian students participating in tertiary education, compared to pre-war statistics. A mere 17 percent of internally

displaced Syrian students aged 18-24, eligible for tertiary education, were enrolled; under 2 percent of refugees in Turkey; 8 percent in Jordan; 6 percent in Lebanon; 8 percent in Egypt (Cremonini, Lorisika & Safar, 2015). These low percentages of enrolled students contrast sharply with the number of tertiary education providers in those countries: 166 in Turkey; 36 in Jordan; 47 in Lebanon; 51 in Egypt (Cremonini, et. al, 2015).

**Figure 2. Syrian Refugee Enrollment in Universities Regionally, 2014**



Source: Cremonini, et al., 2015

A large number of refugees in Lebanon are not enrolled in formal education, reaching 48% of children aged 6-14 and 95 percent of youth aged 15-24, according to the 2015-2016 Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2015). Attention is primarily given to addressing this issue within primary education, with programs such as MEHE’s Reaching All Children with Education (RACE) plans and the multi-actor LCRP directing attention towards enrolling students in formal education at Lebanese public schools and providing support for informal education (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2015). It is reported that almost half of the refugee population enrolled in public schools in Lebanon is lost after cycle one or grades 3 and 4. This leaves a very limited number of refugees who continue their education within the second cycle through secondary school, with only 2000 students reported to be enrolled in secondary public schools in the country.

Considering the large number of students not receiving primary and secondary education, tertiary education is even more threatened as a result of the crisis. The majority of Syrian refugees aged 18-24 years, including Syrian university students whose studies were interrupted by the war, are unable to access Lebanese tertiary education. UNHCR reports that there are an estimated 101,892 young Syrian refugees ages 18-24 in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2017). It is further estimated that the number of Syrians with disrupted tertiary education in Lebanon at 70,000 based on pre-



war enrollment figures (Fricke et al., 2014). Tragically, the estimated number of Syrian students in Lebanese universities in 2014 ranged between 6,500-10,000 (Jazar, 2015), with the Lebanese MEHE placing the estimate number at 7,072 (MEHE, 2016). Table 3 shows the total number of Syrian students in comparison to Lebanese students in all universities.

**Table 3. Number of Syrian Students in Comparison to Lebanese Students in All Universities. (Source: MEHE, 2016)**

Academic Year	Private Universities			Public University			Total All Universities		
	Lebanese Students	Syrian Students	Total Students	Lebanese Students	Syrian Students	Total Students	Total Lebanese Students	Total Syrian Students	Total Students
2013-2014	-	-	-	-	-	70,164	99,550	5,549	187,209
2014-2015	102,894	5,059	120,530	65,230	2,013	69,994	168,124	7,072	190,524
2015-2016	124,011	4,370	142,204	68,778	1,490	72,518	192,789	5,860	214,722

## Rationale and Purpose of the Study

Preventing a lost generation and a generation of youth highly susceptible to be recruited by radical terrorist extremists or become social delinquents, and ensuring access to tertiary education for Syrian refugees is of paramount importance in response to this protracted refugee crisis. This study aims at mapping the policies and practices that enable Syrian refugees to access tertiary education in Lebanon, highlighting the perspectives of key stakeholders in this process. A number of challenges prevent Syrians from accessing tertiary education in Lebanon. Yet students of tertiary education are often overlooked as international aid goes initially to primary education; neither the 2015-2016 nor the newly published 2017-2020 Lebanese Crisis Response Plan allocate any funding for Syrian students beyond the primary school level (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2017). Most of the research and the literature on Syrian refugees' education in Lebanon centers around primary school students (El-Ghali, Ghalayini & Ismail, 2016; Khawaja, 2016; REACH, 2014; UNICEF, 2015; Shuayb, Makkouk & Tuttunji, 2014; Watkins & Zyck, 2011). This limited scope of research clearly demonstrates a need for increased attention to the understanding of adolescent and adult students within the education sector.

Reports presented on Syrian refugee access to tertiary education in Lebanon and regionally highlight the high percentage of Syrians out of the formal education system. These reports also highlight the various barriers prohibiting access to education while recommending possible solutions. These studies include regional surveys (Cremonini et. al., 2015; EU Regional Trust Fund, 2016) and Lebanon case studies (Fricke, et. al., 2014; Jazar, 2105). Existing reports investigated Syrian university students and scholars in Lebanon and found barriers to tertiary education ranging from resources to discriminatory practices, as well as a lack of programs and policies to address these barriers. They identified opportunities for establishing programs, specifically scholarships and support centers, and building capacity to improve the situation for refugees, recommending collaboration between non-governmental organizations and universities.

Education is ultimately necessary as Syrians struggle to establish their lives and integrate into host communities, and as Lebanon struggles to accommodate its growing population and maintain security. Research supports the need to include tertiary education in the global movement for the provision of education to refugees, as it offers a number of benefits for the refugees themselves, as well as the host country and post-conflict country of origin. In this sense, tertiary education becomes an instrument of protection in refugee contexts, as it provides youth in conflict settings with an opportunity for peacebuilding and can serve as a counter-terrorism method (Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Fricke, et al., 2014). Therefore, this study aims to identify policies and practices that enable Syrian refugees to access tertiary education in Lebanon with the aim of understanding the challenges and opportunities during this protracted crisis by investigating the perspectives of key stakeholders. This report will build on research previously conducted and attempt to answer the following questions:

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

## Methodology

The present study follows an exploratory qualitative approach that aims to gain insight into the perceptions of the study participants and understand intra-subjective multiple meanings of the policies, practices and perspectives with a focus on tertiary education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Interviews were conducted at MEHE located in Beirut; universities located in Beirut and Beqaa; and aid organizations located in Beirut and Tripoli.

### Data Collection Procedure

The main tools for data collection included individual and focus group interview protocols developed for this study. These protocols sought to gain insights into the perspectives of the participants regarding policies, practices, and challenges for the provision of tertiary education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Data was collected from multiple sources:

1. individual interviews with representatives from the MEHE, from Lebanese public and private universities, and from aid organizations;
2. focus group interviews with Syrian refugee students;
3. documented legal frameworks and policies and procedures;
4. online studies and journals. Thorough desk and media reviews were conducted, in addition to a survey of policies and regulations governing access of students to tertiary education.

### Research Participants

The participants interviewed in the present study included four representatives from MEHE; 14 representatives from 11 local universities, including the Lebanese public university and 10 private universities; 10 representatives from seven international and national NGOs; two participants from one international organization; and two focus groups of eight students each. The study included a total number of 46 participants, of whom 30 were representatives of the selected organizations based on their roles as main actors in providing support to tertiary education for Syrian refugees, and 16 of whom were Syrian refugee students supported by aid organizations. The selection of the MEHE was based on its role in legislating and decreeing national educational policies. In order to select the universities, a non-random, purposeful sampling selection was used based on (1) enrolling a large number of Syrian students (statistical data provided by MEHE for the year 2015/16) and (2) enrolling Syrian refugee students in partnership with the aid organizations. In order to select the international and national organizations, a non-random, purposeful sampling selection of eight organizations was used based on organizations supporting tertiary education for Syrian refugee students. Random selection of eight students from one of the sample universities and random selection of eight students from one of the sample aid organizations was carried out. Once selected, the researchers invited the 46 participants to take part in the study through voluntary participation.

## Data Analysis

The researcher followed the procedure for interpretive data analysis and treated the case as a comprehensive case in and of itself following the guidelines provided by Merriam (2009). The analysis progressed in three phases following an inductive approach (Lichtman, 2006): (1) data preparation, which involved the transcription of interviews and the write up of notes; (2) data identification, which included the coding and organization of the data of the text into analytically meaningful, and easily locatable segments; (3) and data manipulation, which included the finding, sorting, retrieving, and rearranging of segments of data in order to interpret the findings while accounting for both the emic and etic perspectives.

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

## Legal Frameworks and Policies: Educational, Residency, & Labor

### Educational

At the international level, recognition for refugees in tertiary education has little global precedent. Article 22 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) explicitly calls for equal access of refugees to elementary education. It further calls for the treatment of refugees equitably to other non-nationals at other levels of education about access and recognition of foreign certificates. UNESCO has not yet succeeded in executing a global convention to cover recognition for refugees. It is consulting with Arab countries on the proposed international convention. The more recent regional recognition conventions, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, was adopted at Lisbon (1997) and the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education was adopted at Tokyo (2011). Both Conventions include a requirement for establishing procedures for the recognition of refugees, though only 14 of 53 signatory countries to the Lisbon Convention even have national regulations in place (UNESCO, 2016b). In the Arab world, countries hold bilateral agreements for recognition of documents in the region, but the Arab States have not ratified a new UNESCO convention for recognition since the Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the Arab States in 1978. This convention called for recognition of certificates, diplomas and degrees at the secondary and tertiary education levels among member states. Fourteen Arab countries signed and ratified the convention. Three Arab states were also signatories to the International Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in the Arab and European States bordering on the Mediterranean of 1976 (UNESCO, 2016b). Lebanon is not a signatory

to international recognition of qualifications or refugee conventions; therefore, regional and national policies dictate the provision for tertiary education for Syrian refugees.

However, at the bilateral level, Lebanon and Syria have an agreement allowing for mutual recognition of secondary and tertiary education certificates. Article 2 of the decree for equivalency dictates that “Certificates and degrees under the same types of studies and scientific level issued by authorities of another State are equivalent to similar certificates and degrees issued by Lebanese authorities, based on the principal of mutuality” (MEHE, April 1962). Historically, many Syrians have enrolled in universities in Lebanon due to these policies. There has not been a legal framework in the form of policies or decrees have been issued for provision for tertiary education for refugee students or displaced persons in Lebanon. According to a representative from MEHE, there are written agreements between Lebanon and other countries with regard to tertiary education; however, none of these agreements are related to refugees. The adopted and practiced policies for diploma certificate and degree recognition and equivalency are similarly applicable to all students seeking tertiary education status.

### ***Requirements for University Admission***

First, for students seeking undergraduate status, the Lebanese secondary certificate (Baccalaureate), an authenticated certificate including grades issued from the Lebanese Ministry of Education, or an equivalency, is required (LU, April 2015). A participant from the Ministry of Education confirmed: “It is not possible for students, including young refugees, not holding a secondary certificate, to join the tertiary education in Lebanon”. Some private universities require the school transcripts of grades, however the Lebanese university does require a copy of the school grades for admission (MEHE, January 2017). Second, for students seeking transfer, in addition to the Lebanese secondary certificate or an equivalency, authenticated grades of the completed university courses are required. Third, for students seeking graduate status, three authenticated documents and academic records are required: 1) A copy of the Lebanese secondary certificate or an equivalency, 2) a copy of the university degree, and 3) completed university grades for all years of study (MEHE,n.d.).

Residency is another requirement for university admission (General Security, n.d.). However, results showed that despite this, participants from six private universities said that they do not follow up; students are getting their degrees without showing proof of residency. A participant from a private university stated that “once students are admitted, all they need is a proof of university registration and they can apply for residency at the Lebanese General Security... after that it is not the job of the university.”

MEHE requires the original secondary certificate and passport in order to review for equivalency. This poses a problem for refugees who fled without documents, they were unable to obtain their official secondary school certificate from the government, or their previously submitted original copy in order to enroll in university back in Syria. The original

certificate must first be authenticated from the Syrian Ministry of Education, then from the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and last from the Lebanese Embassy in Syria. Once the certification is authenticated in Syria, additional ratification is required from the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Representative from MEHE, August 2016).

Results also showed that in order to access tertiary education in most host countries, some Syrian students have taken the General Certificate Exam (GCE), which was given by the Ministry of Education of the Interim Syrian Government (ISG) (Cremonini et. al, 2015). It is worth noting, however, that MEHE no longer recognizes the GCE in Lebanon.

Unlike the equivalency of degrees, the equivalency of courses is dictated by university legislation. MEHE informally decreed that universities recognize 50% of the courses completed in Syrian universities. The majority of the universities said that they do equate half of the courses, per MEHE's informal decree; very few either equate all the completed courses or none of them.

### ***Special Allowances for University Admission***

According to representatives from MEHE, universities were advised to work with Syrian students and facilitate their access to tertiary education. As a facilitation procedure at the government level, the MEHE informally decreed two years ago that universities may accept an authenticated copy of the secondary certificate and/or the degree as an alternative to the original document. Though rare, some fake copies were discovered. To protect from fraud, MEHE double checks names with the Syrian Lebanese Higher Council or with the Syrian Embassy. Students with neither an original Syrian Baccalaureate/degree nor an authenticated copy cannot get equivalence; therefore, they legally cannot enroll at any local university. The majority of the universities register Syrian refugee students even before ascertaining the equivalency of their certificate or degree, with the condition that they would present an authenticated copy no later than the second semester of their enrolment. This procedure allows student more time to get the document.

## **Residency**

The international standard for refugees' rights is the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, followed by the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. The Convention and Protocol outline the standards of treatment for refugees such as providing documentation, protection, and non-refoulement. Lebanon did not sign either the Convention or the Protocol, and does not have a formal general policy regarding refugees in Lebanon. As such, Lebanon has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with UNHCR allowing it to handle registration, documentation, assistance, and status determination for non-Palestinian refugees entering Lebanon. Although it is not party to the conventions on refugees, Lebanon is signatory to international human rights instruments and has a long history of hosting Palestinian refugees.

Currently, the Lebanese government restricts UNHCR from registering any new Syrian refugee and does not allow Syrians to be designated as asylum seekers (Janmyr, 2016). A representative from the UNHCR stated that:

*The UNHCR stopped registering the Syrian refugees more than a year now; they only recorded, but still recording in the fast track of UNHCR is not a legal status. It doesn't provide for the protection required for a Syrian refugee.*

In January 2015, the Government of Lebanon adopted new policies for Syrians to obtain residency in Lebanon. To renew or apply for residency, Syrians either have to be registered with UNHCR or sponsored by a Lebanese. UNHCR has not been registering new refugees since May 2015, and for those that were registered before, renewing residency is still extremely difficult. The cost is prohibitive for most refugees at 200,000 Lebanese pounds per person over the age of 15 for the application fee, along with other costs incurred in obtaining the extensive paperwork (UNHCR, 2016d). This is accompanied by a required pledge not to work, further pushing refugees into poverty or illegally working in the informal sector. For those not registered with UNHCR, finding a Lebanese sponsor is difficult and puts Syrians at risk of exploitation (Human Rights Watch, 2016). As a result, most Syrians have not been renewing their residency and prefer living in Lebanon illegally. Overstaying residency permits and entry can result in severe fines and entry bans, even permanent bans barring future entry into Lebanon (UNHCR, 2016d).

The situation is even more precarious for Palestinian refugees formerly residing in Syria. The Lebanese Minister for the Interior announced in May 2014 that these refugees must possess an entry permit approved by the General Directorate of General Security, a residency of one to three years, or an exit and return permit in order to enter Lebanon. These extreme restrictions on entry put Palestinians formerly living in Syria in danger by forcing them to remain in a war zone and are an international violation of refugee rights (Fricke et. al, 2014).

The basic act of expanding legal residency status to Syrians is particularly important for students hoping to continue their studies. In order for Syrians to enter Lebanon legally as displaced persons, the current regulations as of January 2015 stipulate that this can only happen “under exceptional circumstances to be finalized by the Ministry of Social Affairs. It is unclear how Syrian refugees will be assessed under this category” (UNHCR, 2016d). Syrian refugees therefore are entering the country either illegally or under other categories of entry that may not reflect their true status. For Syrian students, entry requirements are strict in the event that the students need to go to Syria to obtain documents and then return to Lebanon or if they are trying to move to Lebanon in pursuit of their studies. Entering Lebanon as a Syrian student requires the following, “You need to provide proof of acceptance by a Lebanese university, and a valid student card and previous certificates. You will be granted a seven day entry permit to finalize your student residency permit” (UNHCR, 2016d).

For those who hope to leave Lebanon and study in a third country, Lebanon is not responsible for giving refugees travel documents since it is not a signatory to the Convention or Protocol (Fricke et. al, 2014). Registering with the UNHCR and gaining refugee status in Lebanon can limit Syrian refugees' tertiary education as well. In most cases, the simple act of registering with the UNHCR terminates the dream of studying elsewhere: countries rarely issue visas to these students so that they cannot seek asylum in the third country (Fricke et. al, 2014).

## Employment

Foreigners are restricted from joining 25 professional syndicates in Lebanon such as law, medicine, engineering and finance. This prohibits international students from pursuing professional careers in Lebanon in highly desirable fields if they were to stay and work after obtaining their degree (Fricke, et. al., 2014). For refugees whose studies in such fields were interrupted in Syria and who are able to enroll in Lebanon, they face the dilemma of attempting to continue their studies knowing that they cannot practice in Lebanon or start over in a new field. New students interested in these academic disciplines must abandon their professional ambitions and previous coursework in pursuit of an accessible job. A representative from MEHE stated: "Even if there is no law that forbids foreigners to practice pharmacy or engineering, but the syndicates do not usually give them the 'license to work' the system is very rigid."

Beyond the general restrictions on foreigners, as of 2015 Syrians in Lebanon are restricted from work by the Ministry of Labor and only allowed to work in three sectors: Agriculture, construction, and environment (Ministry of Labor, 2015). As such, most of employed Syrian refugees are working in the informal sector with low salaries and harsh labor conditions, and are not incentivized to pursue tertiary education.

## Scholarship programs

National and international organizations have launched scholarship programs in the region providing young Syrian students with opportunities to fund tertiary education. Such programs help address the funding gap for youth and lack of resources supporting tertiary education for refugees. A representative from a Non-governmental organization (NGO) stated: "These programs are not based on a scholarship merit; which is the normal case; they are based on an urgent call for acute need of the refugees." The following section reviews scholarship programs that serve the Syrian refugee students in Lebanon.

### **JUSOOR-Lebanon for Higher Education: JUSOOR**

Founders of JUSOOR are Syrian expatriates living abroad, and benefactors include The Asfari Foundation, The Said Foundation, and Chalhoub Group (Jusoor, 2016). The program was launched in 2011 in Syria. They started an Exchange Mentorship Program with Syrian students



living abroad to mentor students living and receiving their education in Syria. The original objective was teaching Syrian students soft skills in addition to English language proficiency. In Lebanon, JUSOOR started in 2012 with an activity center. In 2014, nine students were awarded university scholarships out of 200 applications (Jusoor, 2016). In 2015, out of 12 Bachelor's degree scholarships in five private universities, the project supported eight students through partnership with Lebanese International University (LIU) based on a scheme share up to 50%. One of the students pursued Master's degree. Syrian students, on equal gender base, were supported through almost full tuition fee. Currently, 15 undergraduate students are enrolled and for the next year, six more students will be selected. The outreach reaches thousands of applicants through Facebook (A representative from JUSOOR-Lebanon, August 2016).

### **Scholarships for Syrians: LAsER**

The Lebanese Association for Scientific Research (LAsER) created an academic program for refugees in Lebanon Launched in 2013, Scholarships for Syrians program provides funding for students to attend the LU and four private universities: Arts, Sciences, and Technology University in Lebanon (AUL); LIU; Al-Jinan University (JU); and University of Tripoli (UT). LAsER provided in 2013 around 250 scholarships to Syrian (50%) and Lebanese (50%) students (Bollag, 2016b). In 2015, LAsER provided 440 scholarships that negotiated up to 75% discounts at JU and LIU (Al-Fanar Media, 2015). Six hundred students are supported in 2016, out of which 240 are new Bachelor's degree scholarships (Bollag, 2016a) with the biggest number enrolled at JU and a majority of the students attending university in Tripoli. In addition to full and partial scholarships for Bachelor's degree programs, LAsER students are also supported in English language and professional soft skills. For outreach purposes, LAsER posted 500 posters in camps, the United Nations (UN) office, and were advertised on Facebook.

### **Special Teaching Diploma (STD): LAsER**

LAsER launched the (STD) program in partnership with LIU. Around 35 male Syrian teachers pursued their Master's degree (A representative from LAsER, August 2016).

### **Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund (DAFI): UNHCR**

UNHCR launched DAFI in 2014 to access tertiary education for Syrian refugees as a component of the global DAFI program. DAFI provides scholarships and cooperates with Terre des Hommes (TDH) Italy for implementation in Lebanon. Funded by the German government (Bollag, 2016a), UNHCR supports both registered Syrian refugees willing to start or continue their university studies in Lebanon and Lebanese students through a Bachelor's degree in partnership with LU. In 2014, 60 students (ReliefWeb, 2015); in 2015, 131 students (UN, 2016), and in 2016, around 300 students (A representative from DAFI, August 2016) were provided with: (1) Financial support including full tuition fees; monthly allowances for transportation, food, and living stipend; and twice a year clothes and books. (2) Language support in coordination with the British Council and the American Center for English and the Institute Française for French. (3) Legal support through workshops or sessions (A representative from UNHCR; a representative from TDH, August 2016).

## **Higher Education 4 Syrians (HES): SPARK**

SPARK, a Dutch NGO that aims to develop tertiary education and entrepreneurship among youth in conflict affected societies, launched its ambitious regional scholarship program with support from various funders in 2015 to tackle this acute need with a regional approach. The first year grant program was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. SPARK has received additional funding from the Qatar Foundation Education Above All to implement scholarships with Al-Fakhoora (SPARK, 2016b). Recently, SPARK is a beneficiary of The European Union (EU) Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis, the 'Madad Fund' (European Commission, 2015). Through online registration and outreach in camps, SPARK received over 5,000 applications since mid-2015. In Lebanon, the goal of SPARK is to enroll 2369 students in four years (2015-2019) in certified language courses, vocational education or bachelor education (SPARK, 2016a). In 2015, HES program supported 160 students and in 2016, the program supported 576 young Syrian students in Bachelor's degrees through scheme share partnerships up to 50% with LIU and JU (a representative from SPARK, August 2016). In 2017, SPARK intake will support 30% students from the host communities in Bachelor's degrees program. In addition to full tuition fee commitment until the end of 2019 and the English language support, HES program is supporting students with monthly allowance living stipend, transportation, and legal counseling.

Beyond Bachelor's degrees, 300 students received English language courses at different levels through partnership with the American Lebanese Language Center (ALLC) (A representative from SPARK, August 2016). HES program also supported 150 students in 2015 and 485 Syrian and Lebanese students in 2016 for vocational programs through partnership with Al Kayrawan Vocational Institute (A representative from SPARK, 2016). SPARK has enrolled Syrian students at the Center for Continuing Education at AUB. AUB offered 35% discounts on certified short courses in early childhood education, tailored to the needs of the students; 265 SPARK students recently graduated (A representative from SPARK, August 2016).

## **Quality Universal Education for Syrian Students and Teachers (QUESST): UNESCO**

UNESCO launched QUESST in 2015 as part of its regional education response strategy to the Syria crisis, entitled *Bridging Learning Gaps for Youth*. Funded by the State of Kuwait (UNESCO, 2015b), UNESCO supported 206 students that were already enrolled and were at risk of dropping out due to financial constraints to complete their studies in 2015 through full financial packages (A representative from UNESCO, August 2016). Both Lebanese (40%) and Syrian (60%) students were supported in this project through a partnership with three Lebanese private universities: The Arab Open University (AOU), Haigazian University, and Université Libano-Française (ULF) (A representative from UNESCO, August 2016).

## **MasterCard Foundation Scholarship: MasterCard Foundation**

The MasterCard Foundation funded and launched a global program in 2012 to enroll students from Sub-Saharan Africa in the Faculty of Health Sciences at AUB. It expanded in 2016 to include Syrian refugees and students from the local host community in all majors. The aim was to provide students with quality education and build leadership skills. Based on a new proposal launched in 2016, MasterCard Foundation project will provide 180 scholarships over the next nine years, 50% from Africa and 50% from Lebanon with the focus on Syrian refugees (33%) and underprivileged Lebanese and other communities, such as Palestinians (66%). A representative from AUB stated: “We needed to take care of our own backyard, Lebanon.” The scholarships will cover 110 graduate students 70 undergraduate students with a full commitment from the day they are enrolled until graduation (AUB, 2016). The program includes full tuition fees, accommodation in dorms, stipend, computer, books and stationery, health insurance, and counseling. One preparatory year of University Preparatory Program (UPP) is included in addition to freshman year for students who have the Syrian Bacculaureate; for students who have the Lebanese Bacculaureate they enroll as sophomores after finishing the UPP. In addition to financial and academic support, the program includes community projects, workshops to build leadership and community engagement, as well as relevant internships to prepare them for future careers. There are dedicated counselors in addition to the health support. In 2015, initial outreach started through AUB faculty members, then through NGOs, and last through JUSOOR posting on their Facebook page. Selection was based on interviews in addition to house visits. Sixty undergraduate students were selected in 2015 from Lebanon. The first cohort included 75% Lebanese and 25% Palestinians: 60% females and 40% males. At the time, reaching out to Iraqis and Syrians proved difficult and only one Syrian student received a scholarship.

## **Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians (HOPES): DAAD**

The European Union (EU) ‘Madad Fund’ established HOPES with the objective of empowering young people from Syria to build their own career paths by directly addressing their tertiary education needs. HOPES is implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in collaboration with its partners; British Council, Campus France and EP-Nuffic (Lindsey, 2016). The life-span of the project will be from 2016 until 2019. Cooperating with UNHCR (UNHCR, 2016c) and a number of EU-funded institutions. HOPES, regionally, will be providing (1) financial support for more than 300 Master’s and Bachelor’s degree scholarships to Syrian students and vulnerable youth from the host communities in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt; (2) linguistic support for 4000 students in English; (3) academic counselling support for 42,000 students, (4) information on tertiary education opportunities, (5) funding for short projects by local institutions, (6) opportunities for networking and dialogue between stakeholders (Representative from HOPES, August 25, 2016). Table 4 shows the scholarship programs launched to support Syrian refugee and local students access tertiary education in Lebanon.

**Table 4. Scholarship programs to Support Syrian Refugee and Local Students Access Tertiary Education in Lebanon**

Program / Year	Organization	Number/ Types of scholarship	Partnership university/ Types of support	Sources of support
<a href="#">JUSOOR Lebanon:2012</a> <a href="#">JUSOOR Scholarship Program</a>	JUSOOR	In 2012: An activity center teaching English courses & professional soft skills. In 2014: 9 scholarships In 2015: 12 scholarships In 2016: 15 scholarships In 2017: 6 more scholarships. Bachelor's degree for Syrian students. One student pursued Master's degree.	5 private universities: Majority at LIU- Almost full scholarships- Scheme share with universities.	The Asfari Foundation, The Said Foundation, and Chalhoub Group. (Jusoor, 2016)
<b>Scholarship for Syrians: 2013</b> <a href="#">Scholarships for Syrians</a>	<b>LASeR</b>	In 2013: 250 scholarships In 2015: 400 scholarships In 2016: 600 out of which 240 new scholarships. Bachelor's degrees: Syrians (50%) & Lebanese (50%) students.	In 2013: LU and 4 private universities- In 2015: Full and Partial scholarships. A scheme share up to 75% with LIU & majority at JU- English courses-	SPARK and severa foundations from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait (AL Fanar,2016)

			Soft skills workshops.	
<b>STD: 2015</b> Special Teaching Diploma	<b>LASeR</b>	In 2016: 35 TD students graduated- 2 pursued Master's degree Program for male Syrian students.	LIU- Teaching Diploma.	
<b>DAFI: 2014</b> <a href="#">The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative Fund</a>	<b>UNHCR &amp; Terre des Hommes (TDH), Italy</b>	In 2014: 60 scholarships In 2015: 131 scholarships In 2016: 300 scholarships.  Bachelor's degree to Syrian & Lebanese students.	LU- Full scholarships- Allowances: Living stipend- English courses with the British Council & the American center- Legal counselling.	German government
<b>HES: 2015-2019</b> <a href="#">Higher Education for Syrians</a>	<b>SPARK</b>	In Lebanon, 2015-2019: 2369 scholarships in Bachelor's degrees, English courses and Vocational program. In 2015: 160 Bachelor's degree- 300 English courses- 150 Vocational program- 275 SPARK students graduated from AUB in certified short courses. In 2016: 576 Bachelor's degree- 485 Vocational program.- Bachelor's degrees for Syrian students; (In 2017, 30% Lebanese)- Vocational for Syrian & Lebanese.	LIU & JU. Full scholarships, a scheme share up to 50% with the universities- English courses through the ALLC- Vocational program through Al Kayrawan Vocational Institute- Allowances: Living stipend- transportation- Legal counseling.	In 2015, funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. & Education Above All Foundation (SPARK, 2016). In 2016, funded by The EU 'Madad' Fund & Education Above All Foundation.
<b>QUESST: 2015</b> <a href="#">Bridging Learning Gaps for Youth</a>	<b>UNESCO</b>	In 2015: 191 Bachelor's degrees Syrian (60%) & Lebanese (40%) students-	AOU- Haigazian University- ULF.  Full scholarships.	State of Kuwait
<b>MasterCard Foundation: 2015</b>	MasterCard Foundation	In 2016: 180 scholarship- 50% from Lebanon with the focus on Syrian refugees (33%) & Lebanese and other communities, such as Palestinians (66%). Open to all	American University of Beirut (AUB)- Full scholarships- University preparatory program (UPP)-	MasterCard foundation

		AUB majors. 70: Bachelor's degree 110: Master's degree with a full commitment (AUB, 2016)	Allowances including accommodation dorms – living stipend – Counseling- Health insurance.	
<b>HOPES: 2016-2019</b> <a href="#">HOPES</a>	<b>DAAD&amp;</b> partners. In Lebanon cooperating UNHCR.	300 Master's scholarships to Syrian students- English courses 4000degree - 42,000	LU- Full scholarships- English courses with the partnership of the British Council- Academic and legal Counselling.	The EU 'Madad Fund'

## English Language Programs

Some scholarship programs supported students specifically through English language courses in partnership with international organizations, one of which the British Council.

### Higher Education English Access Program (HEEAP): British Council

**HEEAP** is the English language component of the regional HOPES program, implemented by British Council. HEEAP partners with universities to build English capacity for currently enrolled Syrian students. The target number of students is 250 per year per country and it is a four-year project (total 4000 students). Some of the students are at the LU and have finished their courses but are unable to graduate because of insufficient English. Students living in Beirut, the Beqaa and Tripoli are targeted for support (A representative from British Council, August 2016). DAFI recipients may also receive the HEEAP scholarship (A representative from UNHCR, August 2016).

### British Council LASER Program: British Council

The British Council is seeking to bridge both access and quality as a route to tertiary education through the EU-funded Language and Academic Skills and E-learning Resources (LASER) program, targeting Syrians and host communities aged 18-25 in Lebanon and Jordan. The three-year project is providing 3,100 disadvantaged young people with the necessary language and academic skills to meet the entry standards of tertiary education institutions, as well as providing accredited tertiary education distance learning online through the United Kingdom's (UK) Open University.

## Different Types of Support to Syrian Refugee Students

The scholarship programs presented provide a range of types of support to Syrian students in order to address barriers or gaps that prevent refugees from accessing tertiary education.

### Financial Support

Financial support is available by providing full or partial scholarship tuition fees and/or facilities in terms of payments to students. A participant from a university stated: “There are no penalties for Syrian students for late payments... to minimize drop out, we even accept installments.” Other financial allowances included transportation, living stipend, food, clothes, books and other miscellaneous needs.

### Academic Support

Academic support is provided through language courses in English. A participant of an aid organization stated: “Education in Lebanon is in a foreign language and in addition, the labor market in the host country requires English regardless of what is the subject they are studying...if you don’t speak English, you don’t have high chances to find a job.” In some cases, remedial courses are provided in specific fields like math and science. A representative of an organization said that “based on their English level... then [they enroll in a] one year ‘university preparatory program’ (UPP); we call it transition support.”

### Counseling Support

First, academic and career counseling are supported through the universities and in few cases through the scholarship programs providing clarifications and advice for students regarding the existing opportunities. A representative at an aid organization said that “their role is to facilitate the access of the Syrian refugees to tertiary education as they are not aware of the different opportunities that exist.” He explicitly stated: “We have to explain to them what opportunities generally exist for them... they become aware of their own situation... what is possible for them and what is not possible.” Another participant said that they are following up case by case. Then he added:

*Supporting undergraduate and vocational students, we have identified exceptions out of which, students are studying subjects that have been identified in the labor market analysis as subjects of absolutely no output after graduation... one option is for these students who already have completed their second year to go start from the beginning with a new subject which is a tough decision...*

A third participant from a scholarship granting organization explained that “through workshops plus the internship, the program supports students preparing them with career [skills].” She stated: “We have a career counselor working with students; they start build[ing] their CV from

the day they enter university. In few years we will have graduates... but with restrictions to work for Palestinians and Syrians, who is talking employability?" Upon graduation, students are aware that they will face restrictions in the labor market in Lebanon, which remains a big challenge for students.

Second, legal counseling is supported through legal workshops or legal sessions and provided by some aid organizations for students who do not have the right legal documents. A participant from an aid organization explained: "In our scholarship program, the student is not allowed to enter the end-year exams without having the legal residency papers... in our application, there is a section [where] students receive a message informing where these documents are." And for those who have the interim degree, another participant stated:

*Six hundred students that we were not able to pull them in class just because legally they don't have the right documents...since there is nothing that can be done to them, what can be seen as a solution, is to go vocational, the Baccalaureate Technique (BT).*

### Other Support

In limited cases, organizations provided socio-psychological and health support to accompany educational support. A participant talked about social workers supporting students offering an anti-oppression education. She explained:

*In parallel with their studies, dedicated counselors are there for students from the day they access the university and lasts till they graduate to build in them leadership and community engagement. The university prepared community projects, workshops to make them feel empowered and capable enough to work with the community.*

## Why Is More Coordination Needed?

Following a meeting in early March 2016, UNESCO and UNHCR have taken the lead in coordinating tertiary education activities for refugees in Lebanon in collaboration with MEHE. A mapping exercise was undertaken to identify all tertiary education actors and the availability of scholarships for Syrian refugees. A stakeholder dialogue was conducted to discuss outreach capacity and data sharing.

According to the participants, meetings were fruitful. A representative from a scholarship granting organization said that "it is definitely important to be part of this group, to know who the different stakeholders are and hear the different perspectives." She stated:

*At least there was a 'communication'...I learned more about the environment and the context of the issue and where our program fits; for example, SPARK are advanced in the outreach through online application so as an organization, we learn...though haven't heard before neither about SPARK nor LAsER.*



Coordination took different forms. To reach out to students, some organizations share their lists of refugee students; others, in collaboration with other NGOs, post ads on their own Facebook page. In some cases, organizations played complementary roles. A participant explained:

*Our program is now a kind of complementary offer to another program... and we follow same procedure of selection... coordinating to provide language support, legal advising sessions or language courses in English. Our program will take care of Master candidates which cannot be supported by the other program or support in fields of study that might be excluded in the other program as well. It is more than cooperation; it is harmonization.*

The idea to work together is crucial to consolidate efforts because no one has the capacity to support all Syrian refugees in need. However, more coordination is needed. A participant said that “more coordination needs to happen across sectors...unfortunately, this is not happening. While there are many organizations working toward providing support to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, results revealed missing opportunities. Outreach remains a problem as there are qualified students who are not aware of scholarships and other support. Conversely, some of the more well-known opportunities are inundated with applications and not all students are able to receive support. A participant from an NGO explained:

*The grant is there; there are agreements with the universities and available programs, cohort of teachers, campuses all over the country, subjects that are required ... but didn't have the students! At the same time, there are lots of applicants who are not able to get scholarships. Lack of proper outreach lead[s] to lost chances.*

Results also revealed some duplication in student records. Representatives from three different organizations confirmed that some students applied and received two scholarships at the same time from two different organizations. The counterparts have not yet reached an agreement on the basis of data sharing. From one perspective, a participant stated: “No data can be shared without the consent of the applicant; protection, secrecy and confidentiality of policies come first...the organization cannot provide students to any other aid organization.” Another participant explained how a platform has been successfully implemented in a neighboring country. He stated:

*The student knows that the information provided is uncovered; same platform, same application has been implemented in all the region... it literally provides the information that is required by every single scholarship program in the entire region... The foundation for avoiding the duplication.*

A third participant explicitly said, “It would be very dangerous if providers become competitors.” He stated: “We try at least to coordinate our activities and make sure that there is no duplication.” Additionally, it has been noted that coordination among government entities is essential in order to overcome some of the barriers facing Syrian refugees trying to get access to tertiary education in Lebanon. For example, coordination between the MEHE and the Ministry of Interior is critical in order to ensure that all Syrian refugee students obtain the residency permits easily and in time for university admission.

## Challenges

Many young refugees dream of being able to attend university, and the demand continues to far outstrip the opportunities available. Results shed light on the challenges and barriers from the perspectives of the participants hindering young refugee students' access to education in Lebanon. A student unfortunately stated: "We had a dream but no hope."

### Financial Barrier

There remains a tremendous funding gap. All participants, including students, confirmed that finance is a major barrier hindering access to tertiary education. While public university tuition costs between 700-900 USD per year for Syrians, private universities can cost between 2,500 – 18,000 USD annually (UNHCR, 2016b). Syrian students who enroll in private universities may rely on financial support from extended family or scholarships from universities, foundations, and NGOs (Fricke et. al, 2014). As many Syrians work illegally and are paid less than Lebanese workers, affording tertiary education even at the public university while working part-time or even full-time is nearly impossible. Since most universities are private, costs can be prohibitive for Lebanese and Syrian students alike. Participants from universities said that due to financial obstacles, Syrian and Lebanese students drop out. A student explicitly stated: "University is expensive; we need to pay to get our documents, we need to renew our residency, we need books and transportation... however, money can solve it all." Another student stated: "... to get my secondary certificate from Syria, I need to pay \$450." A third student confirmed and added: "...that's why we have to work too." While the scholarship programs discussed attempt to address this challenge, there is not enough funding to meet the needs of all eligible or interested students. Yet for those lucky students that receive support, particularly comprehensive support, a scholarship can make a university education attainable.

### Academic Barrier

Issues of language and academic qualifications continue once Syrian students enter university, as most Lebanese universities either conduct their studies in English or in French. A participant from an aid organization explained:

*Language is a big obstacle, a big problem which partly even endangers that students can graduate. Our program has at the moment about 50 students who are ready to graduate more or less but only ten of them could because the others (40) failed in some obligatory English exams... so now we have to think how to support these students who were very near to graduate but face huge problems.*

Another participant added: "Others had to drop out... ending their studies." A third participant from an NGO stated: "Our program had secured last year 40 study places in engineering from a university and half of them couldn't start their studies because their English was not sufficient." A student explicitly stated:

*We know we are weak in language; we struggle to adjust to foreign language... we don't consider what we have learned in Syria is enough to be enrolled in universities where the language of instruction is in English as our studies had been in Arabic.*

According to participants from three aid organizations, students suffer from insufficient academic qualifications and lack of familiarity with the academic culture and expectations, such as critical thinking skills, level of independence and study habits common in Lebanon versus Syria. Similarly, a student stated: "I had difficulties in the language; especially the way the lesson is taught is different from what we are used to in Syria."

### **Lack of Academic and Career Counseling**

A representative from an aid organization stated that "most of the students either don't know where they can excel or don't know what available opportunities are there for them." A representative from an NGO said that when interviewing one of the students, she stated: "I asked the student why does he want to study pharmacy, he answered because his cousin is studying pharmacy... another student wanted to study English literature but in fact based on his English test, he was elementary level." A participant added:

*They cannot all be doctors and engineers... a society like Syria doesn't only need doctors and engineers and not all students are really qualified. But they could become nurses or classroom teachers where the academic demand is not that high. But they would not do it due to reputation of certain studies, subjects. And this is a problem, to move into more competitive subjects where they cannot succeed.*

A representative from an NGO said that students are not interested in vocational education when they have the right documents. He explicitly stated: "So we are trying to help them in vocational when they don't have the right documents." Another representative of an aid organization explained:

*Career guidance is definitely an important issue; it is for sure different than will be career guidance at another country where Syrians have the opportunity to work. In Lebanon this is not the case and don't expect it to be because it is not in compliance with the Lebanese reality; we still have Lebanese unemployed... We prepare people for the labor market for post-graduation; employability through education is our main domain.*

Confusion regarding what studies to pursue and what employment possibilities exist after graduation remains a major challenge for refugee students.

### **Legal Documents**

Last but not least, legal documents were also main barriers; including academic certificate qualifications and proof of registration. A representative from an aid organization clearly stated, "Nothing has been affecting our work except for students who did not get their professional qualification documents." In some cases, even when students have their right documents, the

process for equivalency is taking a lot of time. A representative from an NGO stated: "...In terms of accreditation and equivalency, they are suffering a lot and they are keeping them waiting a lot." Similarly, students "pleaded for help to get their academic documents from Syria." Universities are not supposed to register any student without residency papers, although there are some exceptions as previously noted. A student stated: "I heard about a scholarship that pays allowances in addition to full fees... but without my residency papers, I am not eligible for that scholarship."

## Psychosocial

Additionally, Syrians' acceptance to universities may be barred due to "de-facto religious segregation" of Lebanese tertiary education. Muslim, Druze, and Christian Arab Syrian students, as well as students of Armenian, Kurdish, and Palestinian heritage formerly residing in Syria, have faced confusion and anxiety about Lebanon's sectarian communities and the procedure to pursue their studies without discrimination (Fricke et. al, 2014).

## Conclusion

The scale of the Syrian refugee crisis is unprecedented. As the Syrian crisis continues into its sixth year with no end in sight, the future of Syria and its people is unknown. Meeting the needs of the high number of refugees in Lebanon has posed significant challenges to Syrian and Lebanese society, infrastructure and economy. Several of these societal challenges are related to education:

1. legal issues including lack of accreditation and citizenship alongside restrictive host country policies,
2. language barrier,
3. ignorance of application procedures or lack of academic and career guidance which will provide pathways to the labor market or further education, and last but not least,
4. financial shortcomings. The demand continues to outstrip the opportunities available.

Since the presence of the Syrians in neighboring countries is likely to be a medium- to longterm situation, a long-term view from the outset can result in outcomes that are more effective on the short and long terms. This requires plans in recognition of this period including: (1) investments that can be made to ensure an equitable tertiary education provision that meets the needs of individual refugees and the Lebanese society or any society where their futures may be; (2) international responsibility to support the refugees and the host countries financially. Lebanese civilians and educators fear that Syrians are taking opportunities from Lebanese students. MEHE's concern is that integrating more refugees would lead to a more serious crisis due to lack of absorption capacity among the institutions as well as within the labor market. However, if refugees are not integrated, a number of disruptions are expected within the society. Results highlight social and political issues in the host country that requires immediate solutions. The question remains: which is a more serious problem – integrating or not integrating the refugees?

Government budgets and infrastructure are increasingly burdened, and funding from the international community does not cover the costs. In communities that are most affected by a significant refugee presence, direct tensions can arise between host country nationals and Syrians, causing concerns for security and social cohesion. Even if graduates choose not to return to their local communities, actors should be aware that human capital will not be wasted as they will use their skills to the good of some other community and might help their home community through remittances, advocacy or policy work, the impact of which is not to be underestimated (Zeus, 2011). The international community must do more to support Syrian students to continue their university education in Lebanon or abroad, particularly those students who demonstrate a commitment to community service and supporting their fellow refugees.

As such, there is a need for better knowledge sharing and enhanced coordination between governmental agencies within Lebanon, international actors and educational institutions in order to best provide access for refugees to tertiary education.

## Recommendations

In this report, the goal was to examine the educational needs and challenges of displaced Syrian students in Lebanon and to identify programming opportunities to facilitate their access to tertiary education. Based on interviews, literature review and analysis, we propose a set of recommendations on the policy considerations to the international and Lebanese communities to guide further practice and research. In highlighting the need for tertiary education in protracted refugee situations, this report should not fail to emphasize that it is primarily the political causes of conflict and forced displacement that need to be addressed by the international community.

### Recommendations for the International Communities

1. **Tertiary Education as ‘a fundamental right’.** Governments, international organizations, and donors should consider tertiary education as an undeniable fundamental right of refugees and an essential part of the humanitarian response and future development efforts. Actors should maximize their support to Syrian refugees’ post-secondary education and equip the ‘Lost Generation’ to rebuild Syria’s economic, political, educational, and health infrastructures post-war. Education must not be inextricably tied up with the politics of how long the Syrians will remain in these countries. The challenge remains to keep a focus on immediate needs while looking toward the future.
2. **Collaboration among actors.** There is a need for more collaboration in order to tackle the enormous challenges to creating opportunities for tertiary education for refugees. Governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and educational institutions should analyze the scope of barriers to access tertiary education, coordinate their activities, and develop plans to address them. Scholarship programs should not be

ad hoc; processes and outcomes should be documented; and efforts should be harmonized.

- 3. Outreach.** Scholarship programs should reach the highest number of refugees without risks of duplication. There is a need for an online joint common clear protected and friendly platform to cater for the needs of Syrian refugees and vulnerable young local students and help them find educational opportunities at tertiary level: (1) Vocational and technical education (VTE) and (2) tertiary education. The platform can serve as a means for dissemination of relevant information to those that are either seeking or providing tertiary education opportunities. UNESCO is currently working on expanding the Jami3ti platform in Jordan to cover Lebanon with the hope of addressing this determined need. The current Jami3ti system states: “Registered members in the platform are able to visualize a set of openings matching their profiles and afterwards apply to those opportunities. Conversely, registered donor institutions can access data briefs including student profiles and regional outlooks” (UNESCO, Jami3ti).
- 4. A variety of options.** The international community, practitioners and organizations should expand opportunities for refugees to participate in tertiary education. Hence, actors should offer a variety of options for quality learning tailored to cater to the needs of these groups of young students in an equitable way. For example, through developing (1) additional vocational programs at a post-secondary level to improve effectiveness and efficiency of the refugee education response with creative use of technology; (2) useful certified short courses designed for Syrian refugees [similar to what SPARK is doing in collaboration with AUB]; (3) Teaching Diploma programs [similar what LAsER is doing in collaboration with the LIU]; (4) centers providing opportunities for skills development and language [similar to what JUSOOR and LAsER are doing]; or (5) certified quality distance education programs providing online diplomas. Scholars should consider quality, reliable access, options for accreditation, and a linkage to rebuilding quality tertiary education in countries of origin. Online and blended learning are not among the recommended alternative options for providing Syrian refugees access to tertiary education, as such pedagogical procedures require needs such as electricity and internet, which are in most cases not easily accessible for the refugees, particularly for those in camps.
- 5. Academic and career counseling.** Scholarship programs should provide supplemental academic and career counseling based on legal restrictions, a labor market analysis and a goal to connect enrolled and recently graduated Syrian students with opportunities to work with refugees, particularly in the areas of primary and secondary education.
- 6. The Lebanese issue.** The national and the international communities should consider the long-term impact of the presence of refugees in Lebanon. Any solution that exacerbates tensions between the Lebanese and Syrian communities is not an appropriate solution. Programs should aim to benefit Lebanese students and institutions as well, many of whom are also facing the effects of political instability and poverty.

## Recommendations for the Lebanese Community

- 1. Tertiary education as a human and legal right.** The Lebanese community, government and educational institutions should be aware of the recognition of education as an inalienable and enabling human and legal right.
- 2. Developing tertiary education institutions in Lebanon.** Develop local universities into multi-dimensional institutions that add to the traditional curricula and traditional teaching modalities that go beyond on-campus offerings. These changes should also include the introduction of dynamic pedagogical practices where the focus is no longer on the professor but rather on the needs of the learner through active, interactive and experiential learning modalities, where students learn on their own or from peers. Such practices are particularly important in the context of refugee tertiary education, as the students are not typical students. It is critical for institutions to evolve and be creative in *what* they have to offer and *how* they offer it. For example, new skills and competencies may be introduced within the curriculum that is offered to Syrian refugee students not only because of their specific needs as learners, but also because of the prospects of employment that would enable them to change their realities of being a refugee. Such competencies include information analysis, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, and communication. In addition, developing students' character to encourage their curiosity, sense of initiative, persistence, adaptability, ethical awareness and reasoning are equally essential for refugees. Obviously, emphasizing such traits will strengthen *all* students. This crisis brings funding to the local institutions to further develop the programs and the capacity of the universities in order to address issues that are inherent within the sector such as these related to quality assurance, governance and sustainable financing.
- 3. Host community's right to scholarship programs.** The Lebanese government should integrate the host community in scholarship programs for refugees. The Lebanese government should require by law, as Jordan does, that a certain percentage of scholarship programs address the financial needs of the host community. This will help to address social tensions between refugee and host communities and respect the education needs of host country nationals.
- 4. Certificate qualifications proof.** The Lebanese government should develop a customized bridging exam that can serve as an alternative to certificate qualifications. [For example, Turkey successfully implemented a placement test. Last year, the Jordanian government accepted to pilot the "placement test" approach, which allows Syrian students to determine whether or not they can enter university and which major and which level, etc. It is currently a discussion in Kurdistan Iraq.] This system allows the refugees to overcome the documents barrier when seeking access to tertiary education (a representative from an NGO, September 9, 2016). This might also be an alternative for those who have the interim exam too. Within the scope of recognizing the qualifications and academic credentials of refugees, Lebanon is encouraged to develop and ratify the "Arab Convention on Regulating the Refugee Situation in the Arab region" and its

adoption. This includes the introduction of a specific provision on the right of education in the current text of the Arab Convention.

For some students, a proof that they have finished their Baccalaureate exam with passing grades is all they need. As a facilitation procedure, the Lebanese government should consider the *online verification* process through website of the Ministry of Education in Syria. The student ID number given for the exam will show the information of the student including the grades and can serve as proof [For example, SPARK is doing this (A representative from SPARK, August 2016)]. Hence, a copy will be authenticated at the Ministry of Education.

A third alternative is an example of the “*Qualifications Passport*” for refugees developed in Norway. Norway established a clear policy and procedures regarding recognition of academic qualifications for refugees lacking required documentation in the early 2000s (NOKUT, 2016). Faced with a flood of refugees, Norway has tested a new fast-track procedure to evaluate the qualifications of those who arrive in the country without proper documentation of their academic degrees or professional certificates. This process should allow them to begin studying or working much sooner than has been possible up to now. The aim is to avoid months or years of forced inactivity for such asylum seekers and speed their integration into Norwegian society (Bollag, September 2016).

5. **Legal framework and national higher education planning.** Provide a legal framework that recognizes refugees as special students instead of international students. This distinction is important as refugees do not have access to the documents necessary for admission as do international students, which presents a challenge when applying to admission at the tertiary education level. This may entail the need to develop a national pedagogic assessment for refugees that does not undermine the education certification quality within the country. Such an assessment would replace the need to present certain documents that would allow the refugees to enter into local universities. The Lebanese government is also encouraged to develop policies and legislation that mainstream crisis response in national higher education planning and policy and allow for the inclusion of those affected by crises in higher education institutions in an equitable manner, through policy responses pertaining to language, needed documentation, recognition and accreditation.
6. **Preparatory program.** Lebanese government and educational scholars should improve access to tertiary education for refugees beginning in the high schools. All Lebanese universities should include a ‘preparatory program’ as a transition program from high school to university. This program offers students with limited proficiency, literacy and language in French or English instruction in core subjects such as math, science, history, and social studies to help ensure that students are prepared to pursue regular university classes [Some Lebanese universities have already launched a preparatory program].
7. **Academic and career counseling.** All Lebanese educational institutions and organizations working with refugees should provide adequate academic and career



counseling for Syrian refugee students who lack of information about tertiary education, university admissions and labor market opportunities in the host country and/or abroad.

- 8. Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS).** Develop a Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) to track students' progress and drop out in light of youth mobility. Such a system would include nationals as well as refugees.
- 9. Ministry of Education and Higher Education Capacity Building.** The Directorate General for Higher Education at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education has limited capacity in managing the sector in the country. This has been mitigated within areas of quality assurance through the establishment of professional committees staffed by faculty members from local universities and funded by international organizations such as the European Union. These local committees provide support to the Ministry through organizing local events for professional development and capacity building of local institutions to address issues within tertiary education in the country. Establishing such a committee to assist the Ministry in regulating issues related to refugees in higher education in the country is essential. Such a committee would also be responsible for managing data and generating recommendations to overcome some of the challenges that are encountered within the scope of providing access and retention within tertiary education for refugees in Lebanon.
- 10. Undoing the collapsing pipeline of education of refugees.** Expand access to high quality secondary, in order to bridge the path to tertiary, vocational and technical education for refugees, recognizing that post-primary education in all its forms can support transition to work, sustainable livelihoods and durable solutions for displaced persons.

### Recommendations for Further Research

Because the provision for tertiary education for refugee students remains a field less researched and in which a knowledge base is still being developed, further empirical research studies are necessary. Clearly, managing refugee education and implementing new initiatives is no easy task, particularly for such a rapidly growing population. While this study serves as a broad overview of the needs, challenges, and ideas for the way forward, further studies are needed to assess both feasibility and implementation.

Future investigations might focus on the long journey of refugee students to access tertiary educational, drawing on their experiences: 'pre-access', 'during enrollment' and 'aftergraduation'.

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