Wide challenges encountered in refugees' education in Europe

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ABSTRACT: *This research paper explores the different obstacles faced by refugees in accessing a secondary level of education in Europe. Although the EU claims to have introduced in the community space a number of policies aimed at implementing equal educational opportunities, refugees face significant obstacles to their educational advancement, including integration in the host state. The challenges encountered begin with language difficulties and are compounded by inadequate educational infrastructure and potential psychological trauma. Most refugee students experience difficulties with the language of instruction, which hinders their ability to keep up with their peers. Other barriers to their educational experience include overcrowded classrooms and lack of specialized resources. In addition, bureaucracy (due to complex application processes and problems with recognition of previous qualifications) exacerbates these problems. From a psychological perspective, the trauma experienced by most refugees also affects their concentration and motivation. In this context, the research highlights the need to develop complex policy and legislative initiatives, taking into account improved language support.*

KEY WORD*: refugee children, access to education, barriers, policies, support, good practices.*

I.   INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report, Refugee Population Statistics Database, updated in June 2024, 117.3 million were forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2023 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order. The statistics shows that 68.3 million are internally displaced people, 37.6 million are refugees, 6.9 millionare asylum-seekers and 5.8 million are other people in need of international protection.

At the end of 2023, of the 117.3 million forcibly displaced people, an estimated 47 million (40 %) are children below 18 years of age. Between 2018 and 2023, an average of 339,000 children were born as refugees per year.

The level of migration has risen immensely in the recent past since the Syrian conflict, the Russia-Ukraine war and nowadays Israeli–Palestinian conflict, especially the number of refugees. Consequently, refugees or those who have had to flee their home have a most strenuous time in acquiring their right to education, especially since language remains a major hindrance(Dryden-Peterson, 2010). Added to this, education now wants to take advantage of the existing technology in order to bring out new and sometimes unconventional ways to ensure that refugees get their education.

Education as a human right enable the society and it has brought changes within societies. To refugees it is a *lifeline*, an opportunity to come out of the camps, regain their respect and start afresh, be productive members of the societies in which they have taken refuge. However, education could be achieved only through considerable difficulties(San Pedro Veledo& López Manrique, 2017). This study explores education of refugees, their challenges and ways of achieving the education deserving for these students.

Education acts like a key that equips the refugees with essential knowledge and skills that they need for reconstruction in an effort that enhances of autonomy (Alsharabti& Lahoud, 2016). This creates employment chances for them, which help them to fend for themselves and their families. In the same time, itbuilds up a sense of normality and stability while travelling.

Also, hardly can educated refugees be regarded as a burden on the economy of host communities because they are capable of boosting the economy of such host communities within a short time. They bring with them skills and experiences that are different from that offered by traditional workforce; they also come in to close existing skill gaps in the labour market; they contribute towards innovation (Magos &Margaroni, 2018).

Another advantageof this social benefits is*integration*. It is education that makes refugees and host communities appreciate each other and respect one another's' cultures. It also assists in eliminating prejudice as well as in creating harmony hence leading to social integration and thus harmony(Crea&Sparnon, 2017).

Refugees undergoing the following severe barriers in accessing education (especially in Europe):*language barrier, bureaucracy, limited education facilities* and *psychological trauma*.

Being in a new school the students, particularly the refugee students face a problem of understanding the teachers when they are teaching or even following instructions that have been given to or during interactions in class. Most refugees have been subjected to high levels of stress that impacts attention, commitment and mental health making it difficult for them to learn(Dryden-Peterson, 2010). This causes overcrowded classrooms and a deficiency of special instructional and assistance halting the refugee students' appropriate consideration. Registration processes can also be complex and it may be challenging for children to use official records such as past school records which hinders the refugee children from going to school(San Pedro Veledo& López Manrique, 2017). It is common to encounter challenges in the recognition of former education when seeking education further, or seeking for a vocation in a new country.

Discrimination and isolation are another issue that refugee students can experience in school from other students and teachers and this make refugee students uncomfortable to learn and socially included(Crea&Sparnon, 2017).. Lack of funds might mean that refugee families cannot afford to purchase school materials, to travel and cater for other expenses for education thus denying refugee children an education. Many refugee children do not attend pre-school, which is highly important for their learning and development, and for their transition to primary school.

By practicing the mentioned challenges with respective interventions and policies, Europe will be in a position to enhance achievement of refugee students and integration process.

1.2 Research Objectives

This research paper aims to explore and highlight the essential role of education in the lives of refugees. The main objectives are understanding educational needs, identify and analyse the specific needs and challenges faced by refugee populations, including children, adolescents and adults. Other objectives include the analysis of the impact of education on the psychosocial well-being, economic prospects and social integration of refugees.

By addressing these objectives, the research aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of why education is vital for refugees and to inform strategies for improving *access to* and *quality of education for displaced populations*.

1.3 Research Methodology and Data Analysis

The value of education in refugee experience is examined in this research through a mixed methods approach. The rationale, advantages, and exemplification of this methodology are that it entails the use of a wide range of numeric and non-numeric data thereby offering an all-inclusive view of hindrances and possibilities of educating refugees.

Quantitative Component: As the second type of data, the quantitative form of the study involves accumulation of large-scale data from international organizations including UNHCR, UNESCO, UNRWAand THE WORLD BANK. Such information covers enrolment indicators plus refugee rates of literacy, resources, and other factors by region and country. Studying educational participation incorporates analysis of long-term patterns, trends and inequalities of refugees(Alsharabti& Lahoud, 2016).

Qualitative Component: The use of qualitative data analysis completes and adds value to the primary quantitative analysis by considering the behaviour patterns, self-narratives, preconditions and circumstances that define learning paths of refugees. This entails implementing face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions with refugee students, teachers, education service delivers, and policy makers in various environments. The above-mentioned qualitative data will endure narratives of refugees' everyday lives and appreciation of the obstacles they meet, the approaches used to manage these challenges, and the effects of education in their lives. This means that areas of culture, language, trauma and resilience will be looked at.

Data Triangulation: Due to the combination of quantitative and qualitative data collected and analysed in this study, this mixed approach of research provides more accurate information on the aspect of refugee education. Thus, various probabilistic indicators combined with elaborate qualitative data provide more evidence to understand the factors affecting the educational outcomes and, therefore, make sound recommendations to policy and practice.

This methodological approach does not only address the complexity of studying and understanding refugee education but also makes refugees themselves as active informants, as active participants in the research process offering a voice and real-life experiences rather than a stereotype view of refugees.

1.4 Findings and Interpretation

Within the context of intense tension, shelters represent the majority of individuals impacted.In 2020, a total of 80 million people were housed, including 26.4 million in shelters under the jurisdiction of the United National Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Agencies for Helping to Profit from Palestinian Refugees in the Appropriate East (UNRWA).
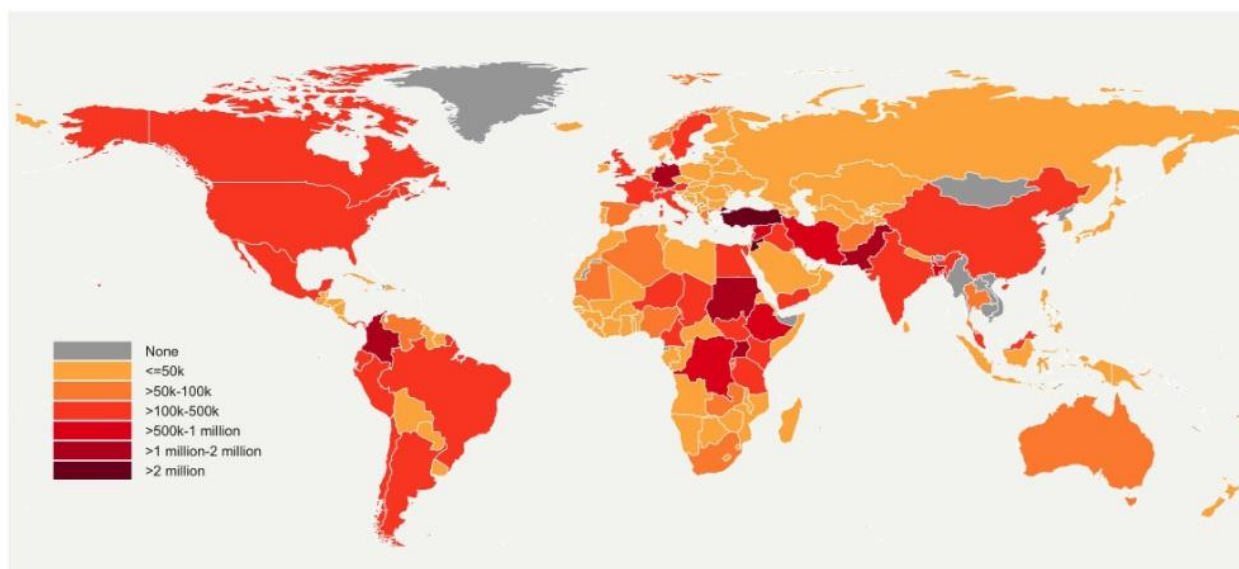

Figure 1: Number of refugees and refugees in the country, 2020
Source: UNHCR, *Refugee Education Statistics: Issues and Recommendations*

In UNHCR's view, access, quality and safety are the key concepts in ensuring the education of refugees, looking after the equity and results of the process. The main actor of the actions taken is the host state, which is directly responsible for the proper management, financing, registration and certification of the refugees. In order to achieve the intended targets, it is imperative that all stages of the process to be accurately monitored and evaluated.

European Union framework is divided into EU directives and regulations (e.g. Directive 2011/95/EU on admission conditions, Directive 2013/33/EU on reception conditions, Common European Asylum) and European Commission (EC) initiatives. The EC has launched several initiatives to support refugee education, including funding programmes under Erasmus+ and the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). The Integration and Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2027 focuses on inclusive education systems and provides guidance to Member States.

In the followings, we underline some examples of national regulations and policies in Europe:
- In **Germany**, refugees have the right to education and children must go to school. Integration courses, including language and vocational training, are offered to help refugees integrate into the education system. Implementation varies from state to state but the general framework guarantees access to education for all refugee children.
- **Sweden** emphasises early integration, placing refugee children in mainstream schools with additional support such as language classes and preparatory programmes. Adult refugees can access education through SFI (Swedish for Immigrants) programmes and vocational training.
- In **France**, refugee children have the right to go to school with measures to support their integration, including special language classes and support for those in need. Programmes are also offered to adult refugees to learn French and access vocational training.
- **Italy** has a wide range of support for educating refugee. Refugee children have access to education at all levels, with guidance from the Italian Ministry of Education for the integration of refugee children,

including language support and psychological assistance. Adult education programmes focus on language skills and vocational training.

➢ The **Romanian** state quickly mobilized in the context of the Ukrainian refugees who fled from the Russia-Ukraine war. The Romanian government faced a series of challenges in supporting the access to education of Ukrainian refugees. The measures taken include the allocation of additional human resources, the hiring of more Romanian and Ukrainian teachers, the provision of the necessary material resources and allowances for food, supplies and clothing. More than 4,060 students and youth participate in remedial courses or extracurricular activities, including language classes, and 6,516 children and youth received recreational materials or supplies.

The wide challenges encountered in refugees' education in includes language barriers, inconsistent implementation, financial constraints and the last, recognition of qualifications.While EU directives provide a framework, implementation can vary significantly between Member States due to differences in national policies, resources and administrative capacities.

Language remains a major barrier, and the availability and quality of language support programmes vary considerably.

Financial and logistical challenges affect the provision of adequate educational resources and support to refugees, particularly in regions with high numbers of arrivals.

Refugees often face difficulties in having their previous qualifications recognised, making it difficult to access higher education and employment opportunities(San Pedro Veledo& López Manrique, 2017).

Addressing the trauma and psychological needs of refugee students is crucial, but many education systems lack adequate resources and qualified staff.

1.5 Solutions and strategies

There are some pillars that can contribute significantly to the integration of refugee in the educational system of an EU country:

➢ *Infrastructure investments*: this implies that governments and international organizations should undertake constructions and repair schools in the areas hosting refugees. Permanent structures for teaching accommodation are not available or can take a long time in construction hence mobile classrooms and other temporary learning facilities can offer a solution.

➢ *Language support programs*: receiving countries should provide languages assistance facilities for the refugee group to learn the medium of instruction. This can is only possible through availing bilingual education and language courses to act as a middle ground between the two entities.

➢ *Inclusive policies and legislation*: the governments have to make policies that guarantee that all the refugees have the right to education. Supported methods of registration of learners and recognition of prior learning enhance access to education.

➢ *Financial assistance*: tuition fees and other costs such as books and accommodation fees can be a burden calling for grants and scholarships to support the refugee families. Opportunities include rewarding relationships with business and non-profit organisations can mobilise extra resources.

➢ *Psychosocial assistance*: schools ought to implement psychosocial support services, such as trauma-informed instruction and counseling. It is important to train instructors on how to recognize and assist pupils who have experienced trauma in the past.

➢ *Community involvement*: Since the community accepts and supports refugees, their involvement in refugee education is beneficial. Hence, community schooling initiatives that involve parent and teacher organization and mobilization can be highly beneficial.

Three components are crucial for minorities groups, such as refugees, who are prone to having had previous traumatization:

- *The impact* or effects of the damage and dangers inflicted upon children, school staff, and facilities, as well as acts of violence against schools, whether by threats or deliberate attacks;
- *Prevention,* referring to the measures taken to avoid physical or psychological harm caused by the environment, community, teachers, or classmates. This includes addressing corporal punishment, bullying, physical mistreatment, sexual abuse,
- School *preparedness* as the infrastructure and ability of educational establishments to deal with emergencies, conflicts, and natural disasters.

Figure 2: The essential components for refugees who had previous traumatization
Source: Authors' own elaboration

It is important to note that the creation of legal means to strengthen links between the country of origin and the country of asylum can significantly contribute to the easy adaptability of refugees in the host state, and implicitly to balanced access to education(Dryden-Peterson, 2010). For example, the transfer of databases on children registered in the country of origin, allows the authorities in the host country to quickly and easily identify the exact age and current level of training (school) of the children.

In this point we consider that UNHCR has an active role, being able to be the agent of the host state in the collection and transfer of mentioned data.
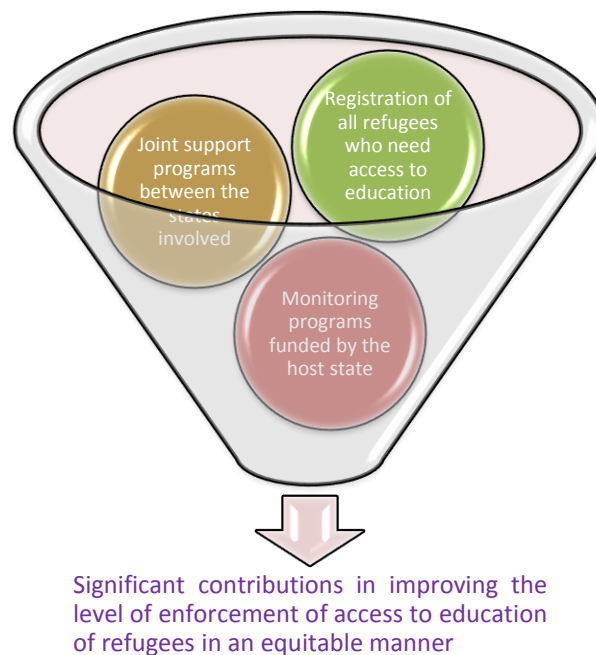

Figure 3: Proposal regarding the assumed roles in the process of ensuring refugees' access to education
Source: Authors'own elaboration

There are examples of successes and good practice such as equal opportunities policies and measures, integrated and more generally person-centred approaches, involvement of local communities, and possibly. international collaboration.

Developed countries have sought to include refugee children to their normal schools while offering them special assistance like we notice in the case of Sweden and Germany. Where such intervention has been applied, including education with psychosocial support, language and vocational training in the mentioned countries, it has been effective. Using voluntary programs, mentorship, and cultural interchange with refugees in

school, boosts up the acceptance among the communities. Government, NGO and international organisations' collaboration enhances the flow of support, knowledge and model practices making refugee education general to be of better quality.

Conclusion

The disparity between refugee students and the rest of the school population remains significant, particularly at higher levels of schooling. This inconsistency is a clear illustration of the challenges which refugees continue to experience in terms of enrolment and accomplishment in education despite the increasing number of forced displacements globally on a yearly basis. The task of sustaining, let alone increasing school enrollment among refugees is one of the most challenging tasks that requires constant and strategic effort and creativity (Crea&Sparnon, 2017).

Not only is education a basic need, basic freedom and human right but also a critical tool in the process of integration and formation of refugees as well as a requirement for sustainable development. To be educated means to become empowered and to be able to reclaim life, to be economically productive and to be able to impact with the host societies. However, the various challenges related to refugees' education in Europe including language, psychosocial, and lack of adequate facilities as well as refugee policies call for solutions that are holistic and integrated.

These difficulties call for the European states to focus on building the suitable education facilities that will meet the need of the refugees such as offering classes in local language translation and counseling sessions(Dryden-Peterson, 2010). Moreover, there is a need to embrace polces of inclusive education in order to provide education facilities for refugee as per their situations. Promoting active participation of the community in the education process also has the potential to create a pass to make refugee students feel welcome in school (San Pedro Veledo& López Manrique, 2017).

Thus, Europe is able to minimize the deficit of refugees in education and give everybody, who wants, a fair chance to become successful and useful members of the society. These efforts will not only assist the many refugees but also contribute to the social cohesion and economic development of the different host communities in the continent.

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