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## Refugees and Higher Education: Trans-National Perspectives on Access, Equity, and Internationalization

Melissa Hauber-Özer

### BOOK REVIEW

Unangst, L., Ergin, H., Khajarian, A., DeLaquil, T., & de Wit, H. (Eds.). (2020). **Refugees and higher education: Trans-national perspectives on access, equity, and internationalization**. Brill, pp. 321. ISBN: 9789004435834

**HISTORY** Published 23 August 2022

**Refugees and Higher Education: Trans-National Perspectives on Access, Equity, and Internationalization (2020)** addresses an important gap in the literature on refugee education. This collection, organized by scholars affiliated with Boston College's Center for International Higher Education, provides fundamental insights into issues of higher education (HE) access and equity in numerous displacement and (re)settlement contexts.

Part 1, "Framing the Landscape," begins with a short chapter by the editors setting the scene for the book project in light of increasing forced migration and limited research on HE for refugee populations. The second chapter provides useful background with a concise but somewhat dated review of the literature on barriers to HE for refugees in displacement and resettlement countries and

several initiatives to increase access. Chapter 3 examines ethical issues in refugee research and calls for increased research in the developing countries hosting the majority of the world's refugees and asylum seekers.

Part 2, comprising the bulk of the volume, provides regional and national perspectives on the topic. Its first section consists of three chapters set in Latin America. Chapter 4 offers detailed information about the Venezuelan crisis and educational challenges and then speculates about possible examples from Turkey's and Europe's responses to the Syrian crisis that could be applied in Latin America. Next, an exploratory qualitative study reports on barriers to HE for Venezuelans in Colombia, analyzes institutional responses, and offers recommendations. Chapter 5 gives an informative but concise glimpse into national and interna-

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tional initiatives in the competitive Brazilian HE sector.

The next section focuses on three distinct issues pertinent to migrants in the United States. Chapter 7 illuminates the policy context as well as financial, humanitarian, socio-political, and psychological issues and supports for Syrian students in the US. Chapter 8 offers a powerful depiction of the educational difficulties Latin American migrants face and the blurred boundaries between status categories through a qualitative study focused on permanent residents from the Dominican Republic. Chapter 9 wraps up the section with a content analysis study of HE institutions in Maine and Idaho, concluding that a cohesive response for equal access and treatment of refugees is lacking despite many small-scale initiatives.

Section 3 moves to Europe, the nexus of the ongoing "refugee crisis." Chapter 10 provides an informative summary of initiatives in Germany and Europe more generally responding to the needs of Syrian refugees and asylum seekers, including scholarships and credential verification processes. Chapter 11 focuses on vocational training and recertifying and upskilling programs in Germany and Sweden, intended to support refugees' economic integration. Next, Chapter 12 describes Ireland's shifting migration patterns and legal frameworks and highlights related tensions regarding refugees' access to HE.

Asia and Oceania are each represented by one chapter in Section 4. First, Chapter 13 critiques Bangladesh's provisions for stateless Rohingya refugees using Hannah Arendt's conception of human dignity and taking a more conceptual approach than other contributions. For the Australian HE context, Chapter 14 provides interesting insights into policy oversights and suggestions for needed improvements.

The volume dedicates Section 5 to Ethiopia, led by an informative picture of national HE strategies and challenges in a little-known but important refugee context in Chapter 15. Chapter 16 offers a very interesting and informative outline of challenges and supports for self-financed Eritrean refugee students in Ethiopia.

Turkey, the host of the largest number of refugees in the world, receives due attention in Section 6. Chapter 17 takes an asset-based approach to report the experiences of 60 Syrian immigrant and refugee students in Turkish HE and offers a series of useful recommendations to stakeholders in Turkey and other host countries for assessing and responding to refugee students' needs. Chapter 18 focuses on Turkey's multi-stage policy response and HE strategies, drawing on data from surveys with Syrian university students and workshops with Syrian academics working in Turkish universities.

Part 3, titled "The K-12 to University Pipeline," seeks to tie together the insights provided by these regional and national cases. Chapter 19 is packed with information about policy challenges, immigrant identity, and effective instructional practices in the US K-12 context and provides a number of speculative recommendations for applying these insights to HE. Chapter 20 closes the volume by examining disparities between refugee- and non-refugee-background students in the US and offering recommendations to improve experiences and outcomes in both K-12 education and HE.

The cases making up Part 2 reveal common themes, including structural barriers to HE, xenophobia and discrimination, and inadequate national policy, but the book is missing a conclusion that draws together the various threads explored in the chapters. There is some repetition in contributions' discussions of international policy frameworks as

well as larger-scale initiatives. Although it would place more of a burden on editors, it would have been useful to concentrate the relevant background information in an introductory chapter and then devote more space to detailed examinations of the particular cases. In addition, the geographical distribution of cases is noticeably uneven, a common issue in edited volumes that might have been ameliorated by casting a wider net beyond the Boston College community. For example, most sections encompass entire regions such as North America or Europe, but Ethiopia and Turkey each have separate sections, which could have been combined under the Middle East and Northern Africa for consistency. Moreover, while the book provides useful insights into numerous refugee and asylum settings, due to the contemporary nature of the issue, some of the information is already out of date. For instance, Chapter 15 cites UNHCR data from 2014 estimating that 1% of refugees are in HE, but this number has since tripled.

However, several contributions address the gap established in the framing chapters of research on HE for refugees in displacement and asylum countries such as Colombia,

Ethiopia, and Turkey. These chapters provide important and timely insights into relevant challenges and responses and will help build the knowledge base for future research. As such, the volume is a valuable resource for scholars of refugee education, secondary and tertiary administrators and faculty hoping to better support refugee students, and other stakeholders developing policy and practices to increase access and equity for displaced young adults.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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