

**EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PROVIDING POST SECONDARY EDUCATION  
TO REFUGEES IN CRISIS SITUATIONS: A STUDY OF IMPLEMENTATION AND  
IMPACT**

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## Abbreviations

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CHE	Connected Higher Education
CLCC	Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium
DAFI	Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
FDP	Forcibly Displaced Person
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IESALC	International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America
ILO	International Labour Organization
IT	Information Technology
INEE	Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OER	Open Educational Resources
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East

# 1. Introduction

In our increasingly interconnected and advanced world, the global refugee crisis underscores the urgent need for accessible and effective education avenues for displaced populations. As millions flee conflict, persecution, and natural disasters, educational needs are often sidelined amidst numerous other challenges refugees face. However, ensuring access to education is vital for fostering stability, empowerment, and sustainable development (UNESCO IESALC, 2023a, p. 4; Lawson, et al., 2024, p. 4).

The right to education, enshrined as a fundamental right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, remains crucial. Since its inception, the global landscape has transformed significantly. Higher education, once reserved for the elite in certain nations, has now become a vital part of the education continuum, with at least half the population accessing it in many regions. Despite these advances, the right to higher education has garnered less focus compared to other educational levels (Sabzalieva et al., 2022, p. 5).

Refugees face significant barriers to accessing education, with older individuals encountering even greater obstacles. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 63% of refugee children are enrolled in primary education globally, but this figure drops to 24% at the secondary level. In stark contrast, only 3% of refugees are enrolled in higher education, compared to 37% of non-refugee students (UNHCR, 2019a, p. 7; Morrice, 2021, p. 852). This highlights a substantial drop-off in educational attainment for refugees beyond secondary school. Similar data from 2020 indicates persistent disparities in global refugee enrollment rates across educational levels, although a slight increase can be seen at each. While 68% of refugees were enrolled in primary education and 34% in secondary education, the enrollment rate at the post-secondary level was markedly lower, at only 5% (UNHCR, 2021a, p. 9).

The UNHCR's "*Education 2030: Strategy for Refugee Education*" report aims to increase the refugee enrollment rate in higher education from 5% to 15% by 2030. This goal seeks to enroll 15% of college-eligible refugees in tertiary, technical and vocational education and training, or connected education programs in host and third countries, while achieving equitable gender representation across tertiary enrollments (UNHCR, 2019a, p. 7). This initiative aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) which advocates for free and quality education at all levels, emphasizing equitable access for all children and youth, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes (United Nations, 2015, p. 19).

Primary education is generally considered formative, providing the essential skills and knowledge needed for personal development and future learning. In contrast, higher education has the potential to be transformative, offering opportunities that can significantly alter an individual's personal and professional trajectory. As noted by Milton and Barakat (2016), while primary education lays the groundwork, higher education often enables profound changes and advancements (Milton & Barakat, 2016, p. 414).

Access to and successful completion of higher education remain uneven, highlighting the need for ongoing efforts to uphold the right to quality higher education. Despite the indisputable foundation of this right, systematic and structural barriers continue to prevent many students worldwide from fully realizing it (UNESCO & IESALC, 2023b, p. 4). Tertiary education is a crucial component of the education continuum, motivating students to complete their primary and secondary studies and supporting lifelong learning opportunities as advocated by SDG 4 (INEE, n.d., para 5; Lawson et al., 2024, p. 3). Among refugees, there is a significant unmet demand for tertiary education, with nearly all refugees who complete secondary school aspiring to attend university (INEE, n.d., para 6). However, access to tertiary education for refugees varies widely across regions and displacement settings, particularly affecting women (Jesuit

Refugee Service, 2022, p. 3). The 2016 Global Refugee Youth Consultations revealed that increased enrollment in secondary education among refugee youth has heightened the demand for tertiary education opportunities (INEE, n.d., para 6).

Education policies and practices play a crucial role in shaping access and quality of education for refugees in crisis contexts. While extensive literature exists on primary and secondary education for refugees, there is a notable gap regarding post-secondary education. This thesis examines the landscape of post-secondary education opportunities available to refugees, with a focus on Niger and Jordan as case studies. While the global literature on refugee education provides valuable insights, its relevance varies across different displacement contexts. This study focuses on Niger and Jordan, two countries with distinct socio-political environments and educational infrastructures, to explore how these insights manifest in practice.

## **1.1 Research Question**

The central questions addressed in this thesis are: What avenues of education are currently available for refugees at the post-secondary level, and how can these be expanded to increase participation and opportunities?

## **1.2 Methods**

To achieve UNHCR's 15 by 30 target, it is essential to address not only the individual challenges faced by refugee students but also the structural and institutional barriers that impede their access to higher education (Berg, 2023, p. 2). This study employs a comparative case analysis approach, focusing on Niger and Jordan, both of which face significant challenges in educating refugee populations amidst crisis contexts. The methodology involves a combination of primary and secondary data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape for refugees.

Primary data was gathered through a survey of refugee students in Niger conducted by a University of Ottawa research project in partnership with the Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium (CLCC). With over 40 institutional partners, the CLCC collaborates with governments, foundations, academic institutions, community-based organizations, and student leaders to foster inclusive, accessible, and supportive higher education environments for displaced learners (UNHCR, 2024a, p. 12). In accordance with the 15 by 30 Roadmap, the CLCC prioritizes enhancing leadership among refugee students through the Student Engagement Task Force, providing support to refugee-led organizations, and fostering international collaborations, particularly with universities and governments in countries hosting significant refugee populations. Its mission is to promote, coordinate, and support the delivery of high quality connected higher education in contexts of conflict, crisis, and displacement (Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium, 2024).

The University of Ottawa and CLCC project looks to improve access to higher education for refugees in Niger by establishing digital learning hubs that provide flexible, relevant, and accessible academic programs. The initiative follows a 2022 roundtable co-hosted by the UNHCR and CLCC, which revealed the extremely low enrollment rates of refugees in universities across the Lake Chad Basin region. By focusing on two key refugee-hosting areas, Diffa and Niamey, the project aims to assess the current state of higher education access for refugees, identify existing virtual learning opportunities, and explore the feasibility of creating connected learning communities in these resource-constrained environment (Koné, 2022, p. 2). The project received approval from the University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board, and all participants gave informed consent. I had access to the anonymized survey data as a student researcher working under the guidance of the project team. While I do not analyze the full

dataset, I refer to key findings throughout the thesis to support key points related to online and blended learning.

Secondary data collection relied heavily on reports and publications from reputable sources such as the UNHCR, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE), and other relevant international and non-governmental organizations. These sources are crucial for understanding the broader context and obtaining statistical data on refugee education enrollment rates, policies, and initiatives. For instance, UNHCR reports were instrumental in providing up-to-date statistics on refugee education enrollment at various levels and the progress towards the targets set in the *"Education 2030: Strategy for Refugee Education"* report. Similarly, resources such as the INEE offer insights into best practices and challenges in providing education in emergency contexts, which are applicable to the situations in Niger and Jordan. Additionally, academic journals and publications from organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the World Bank, and other educational bodies were reviewed to gather information on the impact of higher education on refugee populations. These sources will help contextualize the findings from primary data and support the analysis with existing research on the subject.

The comparative analysis involves an examination of the educational policies, programs, and initiatives in Niger and Jordan. This includes different educational delivery methods, such as online education, TVET and blended learning programs as well as scholarships designed to help refugee students reach to higher education. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected, triangulation will be used, comparing information from multiple sources and stakeholders. This approach will help in identifying common themes and divergences in the experiences of refugees in both countries, providing a well-rounded perspective on the issues at hand. Synthesizing research findings can offer valuable insights for this endeavour. This

integrative review enhances the current understanding by summarizing the main obstacles encountered by refugees seeking to enter and succeed in higher education, as well as by higher education institutions striving to create and execute targeted support initiatives.

Overall, this methodology aims to provide a thorough and nuanced understanding of the opportunities and barriers to post-secondary education for refugees in Niger and Jordan. The findings will be used to propose practical recommendations for improving access to and the quality of higher education for refugee populations, contributing to broader efforts towards achieving SDG 4.

### **1.3 Findings**

The findings of this study reveal that while there has been progress in expanding access to higher education for refugees, significant barriers remain, particularly in low-resource settings like Niger. The comparative analysis between Jordan and Niger illustrates the distinct challenges faced by each country, with Jordan showing greater strides in integrating refugees into higher education despite issues like overcrowding and tuition costs, while Niger struggles with severe socio-economic and infrastructural limitations.

Key educational avenues such as scholarships, online education, blended learning, and TVET programs offer potential solutions to these barriers. However, each of these avenues faces challenges in implementation, including limited funding, technological barriers, and the need for local adaptation. The study also highlights the critical need for policy interventions that address financial constraints, improve credential recognition, and enhance access to technology and reliable information for refugees. Overall, this research underscores the importance of continued efforts to remove barriers and implement targeted interventions to create more equitable and

sustainable educational opportunities for refugees, ultimately contributing to their academic and professional advancement.

#### **1.4 Justification for the Study**

Education was recognized as a fundamental human right following the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26). Building on this foundation, UNESCO's 1960 Convention against Discrimination in Education established legally binding provisions to ensure equal access to education, which have been ratified by 109 states (UNESCO, 1960, p. 2).

Acquiring post-secondary skills and qualifications is crucial for transitioning from education to employment, fostering independence and self-sufficiency (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 6). However, education is frequently overlooked and not included in humanitarian responses (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2012, p. 3). Higher education has even been largely excluded from the global education movement, which has primarily focused on primary education (Fincham, 2020, p. 329; Dryden-Peterson, 2012, p. 10).

Education is crucial for refugees, offering a safe haven amid disruption, enhancing post graduation employment prospects, and improving livelihoods for refugees and their families. It provides essential skills and knowledge necessary for rebuilding and sustaining their home country, while enabling positive contributions to host countries (El-Ghali et al., 2019, p. 8). UNESCO IESALC found that higher education is generally considered to be a key driver of social and economic development (UNESCO & IESALC, 2023b, p. 8).

While there is extensive literature on primary and secondary refugee education, higher education for refugees is less explored (Unangst & Crea, 2020, p. 228). Gaps exist in the availability, access, expectations, and experiences of higher education for refugees due to insufficient attention within displacement contexts (Fincham, 2020, p. 329). The body of

research on refugees' access to higher education, particularly within developing countries, remains sparse (Lawson, et al., 2024, p. 2).

A 2023 study by UNESCO IESALC key findings underscore that higher education serves as a potent tool for inclusion among host countries of refugees and forcibly displaced people (FDP), recognized for its manifold benefits in fostering social, economic, and gender equality. It also helps alleviate negative emotional impacts such as pessimism, depression, and low self-esteem resulting from displacement. Whether refugees and FDPs return to their home regions or not, higher education facilitates sustainable peace and post-conflict rehabilitation (UNESCO & IESALC, 2023a, p. 7).

UNESCO (2024) emphasizes higher education as a valuable cultural and scientific resource, fostering personal growth and driving economic, technological, and societal transformations. It facilitates knowledge exchange, research, and innovation, empowering students with adaptability required for dynamic labor markets. Particularly for vulnerable individuals, higher education offers a pathway to economic stability and a secure future (UNESCO, 2024b, para 2).

Tertiary education also safeguards and enhances durable solutions by fostering critical thinking, knowledge production, and information literacy skills essential for post-conflict reconstruction. It further supports social, economic, and gender equality, empowering refugee communities to achieve self-reliance and contribute to the peaceful development of host and home countries (INEE, n.d., para 7).

Furthermore, research indicates that awareness of higher education opportunities is a major motivator for refugees to complete their secondary education. According to the UNHCR (2023a), broadening access to inclusive higher education for refugees, under the same conditions as nationals, is essential for realizing the economic, social, and political advantages of higher education for both refugee and host community youth (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 5). This insight is

particularly relevant in Niger, where limited access to secondary education constrains upward educational mobility, and in Jordan, where high demand for tertiary education is met with policy and financial constraints.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education systems worldwide, and the impact has been particularly severe in crisis contexts such as conflict-affected and refugee-hosting countries. The closure of schools, the shift to remote learning, and the exacerbation of preexisting vulnerabilities have posed significant challenges to education responses in these contexts.

Brehm, Unterhalter, and Oketch (2021) present a comprehensive analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on education in low- and middle-income countries. Drawing on a range of case studies, the authors highlight how the pandemic has deepened existing inequalities in education access and quality, with the most vulnerable learners, including those in crisis contexts, bearing the brunt of the disruption. The authors argue that the crisis has underscored the urgent need for investment in resilient and inclusive education systems that prioritize equity and social justice (Brehm et al., 2021, p. 12).

Menashy and Zakharia (2022) focus specifically on the education responses to COVID-19 in refugee contexts. The authors draw on case studies from four countries (Kenya, Lebanon, Uganda, and Turkey) to examine the challenges and opportunities of providing education to refugee learners during the pandemic. The authors highlight the importance of context-specific responses that consider the diverse needs and experiences of refugee learners and underscore the crucial role of community-based organizations and local actors in supporting education continuity in crisis contexts (Menashy & Zakharia, 2022, p. 315).

Shamieh, Ihab, and Madanat (2022) present a vulnerability and capacity assessment framework for education responses in refugee crises. Drawing on a case study of Syrian refugees

in Jordan, the authors argue that a comprehensive understanding of the education ecosystem in crisis contexts is essential for developing effective and sustainable responses. The authors stress the importance of partnerships and coordination among diverse actors, including national governments, humanitarian organizations, and civil society groups, in addressing the complex challenges of providing education in crisis contexts (Shamieh et al., 2022, p. 262).

Altogether, these studies underscore the urgent need for context-specific and inclusive education responses in crisis contexts. The pandemic has exposed and deepened existing inequalities, and effective responses will require a comprehensive understanding of the diverse needs and experiences of learners in crisis contexts, as well as the mobilization of diverse actors and resources to support education continuity and resilience.

In Jordan, where a large Syrian refugee population is integrated into the public education system, the strain on infrastructure and tuition costs have become major barriers. This ongoing pressure has impacted the education system as a whole. Challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, limited resources, and the use of double-shift schooling have hindered efforts to reform and strengthen educational services. With the vast majority of refugees integrated into host communities and enrolled in local schools, and with instruction provided exclusively by Jordanian teachers, refugee education is deeply embedded within the national system (Rauschenberger & Sabella, 2023, p. 6).

In contrast, Niger presents a very different set of circumstances. As a low-income country facing both developmental and security challenges, Niger's education system operates under considerable constraints. Limited infrastructure, a shortage of trained educators, and sporadic access to learning materials affect both host and refugee communities (African Center for Economic Transformation, 2023, p. 4). Political uncertainty and regional instability have added layers of complexity, particularly in areas near the country's borders (Munshi, 2023, p. 4).

Despite these challenges, Niger has made efforts including at the tertiary level. These contextual differences between Jordan and Niger underscore the importance of designing education strategies that are responsive to each country's specific environment, resources, and needs (UNESCO IESALC, 2023b, p. 8).

Ultimately, while global frameworks provide a foundation for understanding the role of higher education in refugee contexts, their effectiveness depends on how well they are adapted to local realities. As illustrated by the contrasting experiences of Jordan and Niger, context matters. The unique socio-political environments, resource availability, and educational infrastructure in each country shape not only the challenges refugees face but also the strategies that can succeed. This thesis aims to bridge the gap between global recommendations and practical implementation by examining what is currently available to refugees at the post-secondary level in both countries and identifying context-responsive approaches to expand access. By doing so, it contributes to the broader goal of making higher education more inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of displaced populations.

## 1.5 Concepts

*Higher education* encompasses all formal post-secondary education provided by universities, colleges, technical institutes, and vocational schools (World Bank, 2024, para 1). According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, it builds on secondary education and offers learning activities in specialized fields, aiming for high levels of complexity and specialization. This includes both academic and advanced vocational or professional education. Institutions involved in higher education include public and private universities, colleges, polytechnics, and vocational training institutions, offering various qualifications through formal education programs, which can be on-site, distance-based, or in a blended format (INEE, n.d., para 4).

According to 1998 UNESCO “World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century,” *higher education* encompasses 'all types of studies, training, or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent State authorities' (UNESCO, 1998, p. 1). Unlike adult education, which includes any form of learning or training aimed at adults and does not necessarily follow secondary education, higher education directly follows secondary education and is crucial not only for individual development but also for societal economic growth and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2024, para 2).

For the purpose of this paper, I will be using the internationally recognized definition of a *refugee*, set out in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and elaborated in the 1967 Protocol. The Convention defined a refugee as someone 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 their nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country"* (United Nations General Assembly, 1951, Article 1(A)(2)). Additionally, the term 'refugee' in this paper will refer to all people displaced outside of their country of origin and of concern to UNHCR, including refugees as defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention, asylum seekers, and stateless people (Martin & Stulgaitis, 2022, p. 14).

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are central to international refugee protection. Over time, the Convention's refugee definition has expanded to include individuals fleeing armed conflicts, organized violence, persecution based on sexual orientation or gender identity, and disasters linked to conflict. Regional instruments like the 1969 OAU Convention, the 1984 Cartagena Declaration, and the European Union (EU) Qualification Directive complement the 1951 Convention, offering additional protection frameworks. Despite variations,

a person fleeing these situations is recognized as a refugee under UNHCR's mandate and often under the 1951 Convention's definition (UNHCR, 2017, p. 2-3).

***Internally Displaced Person (IDPs)***, are individuals or groups who have been forced to flee their homes due to threats such as armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, natural disasters, or development projects but have not crossed an international border (UNHCR, 2023c, p. 25). Unlike refugees, IDPs remain within their own country and are subject to the laws and protection of their home country, even if the government is responsible for their displacement and they often encounter discrimination and mistrust from the communities to which they flee (Gladwell et al., 2016, p. 9). IDPs often face significant challenges in accessing humanitarian aid and protection, making them among the most vulnerable populations globally (UNHCR, 2021b, p. 7).

The broader category of ***Forcibly Displaced Person (FDPs)*** encompasses both refugees, who flee across national borders, and IDPs, who move within their own countries. Refugees and IDPs differ in their legal definitions, access to education, available assistance and protection from governments and the international community, and the continuity of their educational experiences (Bengtsson & Naylor, 2016, p. 1).

In UNHCR terminology, ***Person of Concern*** encompasses individuals under its protection mandate, including refugees, asylum-seekers, refugee returnees, stateless persons, and often IDPs. The term is used generically and is often replaced in communication by phrases like "*forcibly displaced and stateless people*" to reflect a more respectful and human-centered approach, incorporating the perspectives and feedback of those affected (UNHCR, 2017, p. 4).

## 1.6 Theoretical Framework

This thesis is grounded in a human rights-based approach to education, which views access to education as a fundamental human right, rather than a privilege. This framework is rooted in international legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26), the 1951 Refugee Convention, and SDG 4, all of which assert that education should be accessible to all individuals without discrimination, including forcibly displaced populations.

A human rights-based approach emphasizes that education systems must be designed to uphold the principles of universality, non-discrimination, participation, accountability, and empowerment (UNICEF & UNESCO, 2007, p. 10–11). This approach insists that access alone is not sufficient, and that education must also be available, acceptable, adaptable, and of good quality. These principles are especially relevant to refugee populations, who often face structural and policy-level barriers to higher education despite international recognition of their rights. In this framework, forcibly displaced persons are not passive recipients of aid but rights-holders who can and should claim education as a means of realizing their full potential.

This human rights-based approach shapes the comparative case study design of this thesis and informs the questions guiding its analysis. By examining how Jordan and Niger address refugee participation in higher education, the research goes beyond simply cataloguing scholarship programs or institutions; it considers the broader educational context, including accessibility, program diversity, and inclusion strategies. However, it is important to acknowledge that the human rights-based approach also faces limitations in practice. Although international instruments outline clear commitments to inclusive and equitable education, many host countries face considerable barriers to implementation. Resource constraints, political instability, or competing national priorities can prevent full realization of these rights, particularly in low-income contexts like Niger. Additionally, the broad nature of frameworks

such as SDG 4 may result in commitments that are difficult to enforce or measure. These challenges do not invalidate the value of a rights-based approach but highlight the need for complementary policies and accountability mechanisms to translate legal and moral obligations into effective action.

## **1.7 Country Context: Jordan**

Situated in the heart of the Middle East, Jordan is bordered by Syria to the north, Iraq to the east, Saudi Arabia to the southeast, and Israel and Palestine to the west. Renowned for its political stability amidst a volatile region, Jordan has leveraged this stability to address its economic challenges and limited natural resources by prioritizing education as a key strategy for development. As a result, despite having over a third of its 10 million residents being non-Jordanian, the country has made significant strides in education (Rauschenberger & Sabella, 2023, p. 6).

With a population of 10.8 million, Jordan hosts the world's second-highest number of refugees per capita (UNICEF, 2022, p. 1). As of the latest reports, over 760,000 refugees are registered with UNHCR, with the majority being from Syria, followed by significant numbers from Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, and Somalia. Notably, nearly half of these refugees are children under the age of eighteen (Rauschenberger & Sabella, 2023, p. 6; UNICEF, 2022, p. 1). In addition to these figures, Jordan also hosts roughly 2.2 million registered Palestinian refugees under the mandate of The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), many of whom have lived in the country for decades, though their legal status varies depending on origin and date of arrival (El-Ghali et al., 2019, p. 9).

Jordan's approach to refugee protection is focused on temporary humanitarian support rather than long-term integration (ILO, 2021, p. 24). The country is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol and instead operates under a 1998 Memorandum of

Understanding with UNHCR that allows the agency to conduct refugee status determinations. However, this agreement does not facilitate permanent settlement, and local integration is not considered a durable solution (Tsourapas & Verduijn, 2020, p. 14).

For Palestinian refugees, legal status has historically depended on their time of arrival and place of origin. In 1950, Jordan granted citizenship to Palestinians who wished to naturalize at that time, along with their descendants, but not to those who arrived afterward (Tsourapas & Verduijn, 2020, p. 1). As El-Ghali et al. (2019) note, many Palestinian refugees in Jordan hold full citizenship, though not all. Those who do not, particularly some who arrived from Gaza or Syria, often face legal and social exclusion, and are frequently left out of national education and employment data (El-Ghali et al., 2019, p. 9).

For Syrian refugees, who make up the largest group of registered refugees in Jordan, about 81% live in urban areas while the rest reside in camps like Zaatari and Azraq (El-Ghali et al., 2019, p. 9). Refugees living in camps must have Ministry of Interior (MoI) service cards and need special permits to leave the camps for things like work, medical appointments, or visiting family (Tsourapas & Verduijn, 2020, p. 17). Although Jordan has expanded access to public services such as education, its laws and policies still prevent refugees from settling permanently or becoming citizens.

Despite limited legal frameworks for long-term integration, Jordan permits refugees to work in specific, predefined sectors. As of 2022, these included agriculture, factory work, machine operation, blacksmithing, metalwork, and textile production such as sewing and embroidery. Refugees must obtain a work permit to access these jobs, a process that remains bureaucratic and can be costly or delayed. Furthermore, financial access is constrained, as refugees can only open bank accounts if they possess a valid passport which is an obstacle for

many who lack formal documentation. These constraints reflect the country's broader approach to refugee inclusion: functional, but narrow and controlled (UNHCR, 2022b, p.44).

While over a third of its 10 million residents are non-Jordanian, including many refugees, this demographic diversity has not hindered the country's educational development. On the contrary, the presence of refugees has, at times, spurred international investment and innovation in the education sector, enhancing access and quality for both refugees and host communities (Lenner & Turner, 2019, pp. 66–67). Given the large number of refugees Jordan has accommodated, the national education system and refugee education are deeply interconnected. With over 80% of refugees integrated into local communities and schools, and all refugee children being taught exclusively by Jordanian citizens, the national education system serves as the primary means through which refugees access educational services (Rauschenberger & Sabella, 2023, p. 6).

Refugees in Jordan have access to higher education. However, while they are treated the same as Jordanian nationals in private universities, they often must pay double the tuition fees compared to nationals in public universities (UNHCR, 2022b, p. 44). There have been recent improvements on this front however, in 2023, Al-Yarmouk University became the first public university in Jordan to permit refugee students, irrespective of their origin, to study at the same fee as Jordanian students. Subsequently, three other universities have also reduced fees for refugee students (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 15; UNHCR, 2024b, p. 1).

Jordan has demonstrated a strong commitment to education, reflected in its high educational expenditure relative to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The country boasts ten public universities and nineteen private universities, predominantly located in the northern and central regions. These institutions play a vital role in providing higher education opportunities not only for Jordanian citizens but also for the large refugee population (Al-Hawamdeh & El-Ghali, 2017,

p. 3). Jordan continues to work towards integrating refugees into its education system, with various initiatives aimed at improving access to education at all levels. These efforts are crucial in fostering a more inclusive and educated society, which can contribute positively to both the host country and the refugees' countries of origin. The ongoing Syrian refugee crisis is unparalleled in the scale of university-ready students displaced. Consequently, there has been a significant increase in initiatives aimed at improving access to higher education for refugees from this region in recent years (Gladwell et al., 2016, p. 6).

In 2016, Jordan pledged to transform the refugee crisis into a “development opportunity” (Lenner & Turner, 2019, p. 66). To address the situation, Jordan allowed Syrian refugees to access formal employment and education, which in turn enabled the country to gain facilitated export access to the European Union market and favourable credit terms. Since then, the Ministry of Labour has issued approximately 64,000 work permits to Syrian refugees and introduced several reforms to ease the employment process for both Syrians and Jordanians, particularly in the manufacturing sector. Currently, Jordan remains susceptible to both internal and external shocks and is pursuing reforms aimed at boosting economic growth and job creation, particularly for its young population (ILO, 2020a, p. 10).

## **1.8 Country Context: Niger**

Located in West Africa, Niger is often described as one of the world’s least developed countries, yet such terminology risks obscuring the historical and structural factors that have contributed to its current socio-economic challenges. Niger’s vast natural resource wealth including uranium, gold, and oil has long been exploited by foreign interests, including French, American, and Canadian companies, with limited benefit to the local population. The continued use of the CFA franc, a colonial-era currency arrangement, has also been critiqued for constraining economic sovereignty and reinforcing dependency (Sylla, 2020, p.54). The country

faces significant issues such as political instability, food insecurity, and frequent natural disasters, all of which strain its already limited resources. In recent years, Niger has been at the center of a security crisis, with armed groups frequently attacking security forces and civilians in regions bordering Nigeria, Burkina Faso, and Mali. This security situation has been compounded by an influx of refugees from neighbouring countries, including Nigeria and Mali. As of February 2021, Niger hosted approximately 241,321 refugees and 300,320 internally displaced individuals (Munshi, 2023, p. 4). The arrival of these refugees has placed additional pressure on Niger's fragile educational system, which struggles to meet the needs of both the local and refugee populations.

Niger has recently faced significant political instability. On July 26th, 2023, a military junta seized power in the country, suspended the constitution, and arrested Mohamed Bazoum, the democratically elected President of Niger (Avoulete, 2023, p. 1). As the situation is recent, and ongoing, the full scope of the impacts and outcomes of the coup on the country itself as well as its implications on foreign aid projects are unclear.

According to UNESCO (2024a) the Human Capital Index for Niger evaluates several key education-related variables: child survival rate past the age of five (92%), expected years of schooling by age eighteen (5.5 years), learning outcomes (score of 305), adjusted years of schooling considering learning levels (2.7 years), adult survival rate to age sixty (77%), and the share of children not stunted in early childhood (52%). These metrics collectively estimate that a child born in Niger today will achieve only 32% of their potential productivity in adulthood, reflecting challenges in education and health outcomes compared to regional and global averages. This is lower than the average for Sub-Saharan Africa region and low-income countries (UNESCO, 2024a, para 4).

Niger faces significant socio-economic challenges: with a life expectancy of 59.7 years, literacy rates are low at 19.1% overall (27.3% for males and 11% for females). School life expectancy is only six years, supported by 3.5% of GDP spent on education, ranking 118 globally. The United Nations Human Development Index places Niger at 0.394, the lowest in the world, with a gross national income per capita of \$600, also the lowest globally. Additionally, 90.5% of the population lived in poverty as of 2012, the highest percentage worldwide (Munshi, 2023, p. 4).

In many countries across Africa, the realization of the right to higher education remains elusive. The 2023 report by UNESCO IESALC highlight that low enrollment rates are just one indication of the need to reform higher education in the region. To enhance access and success, policymakers must also tackle challenges in primary and secondary education. Despite the provision of free primary and secondary education in many African countries, current qualification criteria may still prevent students from accessing higher education (UNESCO & IESALC, 2023b, p. 8).

Niger is among the nations with the highest proportion of children in their IDP population, with 58% of the IDPs in Niger being children as of 2023 (UNHCR, 2023c, p. 28). Furthermore, as of 2023, Niger had the highest child labour rate in the world at 34.4% which can severely impact children's educational progress (Munshi, 2023, p. 4). Niger's education sector faces numerous challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient trained teachers, and limited access to learning materials. Despite these hurdles, efforts are being made to improve the situation, often with support from international organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO). Educational initiatives focus on providing access to primary and secondary education, with an increasing emphasis on creating pathways to higher education for refugees and host community students (UNESCO, 2024a, para 2).

In Niger, higher education is available to refugees under nearly the same terms as nationals, including registration for exams, tuition costs, and entrance requirements. In reality, however, some universities charge greater tuition to refugees that is comparable to that of international students. Additionally, fully financed private scholarships are offered to aid students who are refugees (UNHCR, 2022b, p. 70). Niger's context underscores the importance of international support and innovative solutions to address the educational needs of refugees in such challenging environments. By focusing on improving educational infrastructure and access, Niger can help ensure that refugee populations have the opportunity to pursue higher education, thereby contributing to their long-term stability and development.

Refugees in Niger are granted the legal right to work under national policy, a notable step in supporting self-reliance. However, in practice, administrative and logistical barriers often inhibit access to formal employment. While there are no sector-specific restrictions like in some other host countries, these practical difficulties which can range from unclear procedures to limited local infrastructure can prevent refugees from fully benefiting from their right to work. The gap between legal provisions and implementation highlights the need for stronger institutional support and clearer regulatory pathways to ensure that employment rights are not only granted but effectively realized (UNHCR, 2022b, p.70).

Despite Niger's significant role as a host country for refugees, detailed data on the educational experiences of refugee populations, particularly in higher education, is limited. Data collection in Niger is often hampered by political instability, security challenges, and the country's limited infrastructure, which impacts the availability of comprehensive statistics on education. This lack of data complicates efforts to fully understand the scope of educational access and outcomes for refugees in Niger. Therefore, while this thesis draws on the best

available data, the conclusions regarding Niger should be viewed as part of an ongoing effort to understand refugee education in this context.

## **1.9 Comparative Analysis**

The approaches needed for effective refugee education differ according to each country's unique humanitarian, political, and social needs. For instance, UNESCO's programs and UNICEF initiatives often implement country-specific strategies that are highly responsive to local conditions. These programs aim to improve educational practices, goals, and curricula and typically include activities designed to enhance refugees' skills while also promoting personal ethics and societal values (Shamieh et al., 2022, p. 258).

Both Jordan and Niger present unique challenges and opportunities in the context of providing education to refugee populations. While Jordan benefits from relatively better infrastructure and political stability, it faces significant pressures due to the high number of refugees. On the other hand, Niger, despite its severe socio-economic challenges, demonstrates resilience and a growing commitment to improving educational access for refugees.

Jordan hosts a much larger displaced population, with a significant majority being Syrian refugees. The demographic distribution is balanced between genders. Niger has a more varied demographic with a higher percentage of female and child displaced persons and a large number of IDPs originating from within the country itself (UNHCR, 2023b). Both countries face distinct challenges based on the scale and composition of their displaced populations.

This comparative analysis highlights the need for tailored educational policies and programs that address the specific contexts and challenges of each country. By learning from each other's experiences and adopting best practices, both countries can improve their educational systems to better serve refugee populations, fostering greater stability and development in the process.

## **1.10 Chapter Outline**

This thesis explores post-secondary education opportunities for refugees, with each chapter focusing on a distinct access avenue. The introduction contextualizes the global refugee crisis and the imperative of accessible education for displaced populations. The second chapter outlines the common obstacles that refugees face when trying to access higher education. Subsequent chapters delve into educational support avenues which can be potential solutions to the various obstacles discussed in chapter two, beginning with scholarships which provide much needed financial assistance for higher education. The following chapters examine innovative education delivery approaches, such as online education, blended learning programs and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), highlighting their potential to overcome geographical and resource constraints. The conclusion synthesizes key findings and proposes recommendations for expanding and enhancing post-secondary education opportunities for refugees, emphasizing education's significance in fostering stability, empowerment, and sustainable development amidst displacement.

## **2. Obstacles**

Higher education and skills development are crucial pathways for enabling refugees to achieve self-reliance and contribute to sustainable development, innovation, global leadership, peace building, and the labor market. In response to this, a global movement within the higher education community seeks to create substantial opportunities for refugee youth to access inclusive, quality higher education and build promising futures (UNHCR, 2024a, p. 8). However, even after meeting the academic requirements for enrolment, refugees encounter numerous barriers that hinder their pursuit of higher education (Gladwell et al., 2016, p. 12). Addressing these barriers is essential for providing a sustainable future that benefits not only individual students but also the broader communities they are part of.

### **2.1 Host Countries**

Refugees often face significant challenges in accessing post-secondary education due to resource constraints in host countries, which frequently struggle to meet the educational needs of their own populations. These nations typically lack the capacity to extend adequate support to refugees, who in turn encounter distinct obstacles that limit their mobility and restrict their access to affordable education and training opportunities (Jesuit Refugee Service, 2022, p. 1, 3; Reinprecht et al., 2021, p. 3198).

In 2018, global tertiary education enrolment rates ranged from 9% in low-income nations to 75% in high-income countries, highlighting significant disparities across income brackets (Morrice, 2021, p. 853). Despite the social benefits of including refugees in higher education, the political prioritization of this issue remains insufficient, particularly in low- and middle-income countries that host 85% of the world's refugees. These countries' higher education systems are

already strained, further compounded by the lack of institutional policies and procedures to address refugees' unique needs (UNESCO & IESALC, 2023b, p. 16).

## **2.2 Financial Barriers**

Financial constraints are among the most immediate and tangible obstacles to higher education for refugees. The costs associated with higher education are multifaceted, encompassing application fees, documentation and testing expenses, tuition, study materials, transportation, and more. For refugee students, who are often living in precarious conditions these expenses present a significant barrier to access.

In many cases, even when higher education opportunities exist, they remain out of reach because refugees lack the financial means to enrol or persist in their studies. A survey in UNESCO IESALC (2023b) found that there is an urgent need to promote diverse financing options for refugee students, as self-financing is rarely feasible (UNESCO IESALC, 2023b, p. 16). This financial limitation is exacerbated by the fact that 70% of refugees reside in countries where their right to work is restricted, making it difficult to earn an income and subsequently afford school fees (Martin & Stulgaitis, 2022, p. 34).

Moreover, many refugees face restricted access to financial institutions, limiting their ability to open bank accounts, receive transfers, or apply for student loans or aid (Martin & Stulgaitis, 2022, p. 34; UNHCR, 2023a, p. 18). Even when scholarships exist, the absence of mechanisms to distribute funds or verify recipients can render such support ineffective. These financial constraints often compound pre-existing vulnerabilities, leading to much lower enrolment and completion rates for refugee students compared to their host country peers (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 18).

## **2.3 Policy-Related Barriers**

Many of the financial obstacles faced by refugees are closely linked to national policies that limit access to higher education either directly or indirectly. Restrictive labor laws, for instance, prevent refugees from working legally in many host countries, which can prevent them from being able to earn an income to support their education (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 18).

Refugees are also frequently classified as international students by host country institutions, which often leads to inflated tuition fees that are far higher than what local students pay. This classification is a policy decision—whether institutional or national—and it places an additional burden on already disadvantaged learners. For instance, some public universities in Mexico apply a “foreigner’s fee,” though its enforcement varies by institution (Martin & Stulgaitis, 2022, p. 34).

Beyond financial implications, such policies also signal a lack of political will to prioritize the educational inclusion of refugees. According to UNESCO IESALC (2023b), the political prioritization of refugee access to higher education remains weak, especially in low- and middle-income countries that host the majority of the world’s refugees (UNESCO IESALC, 2023b, p. 16). In many of these contexts, there are few institutional policies or procedures tailored to the needs of displaced learners.

Overall, policy-related barriers deepen inequalities and often negate the potential benefits of international aid and scholarship programs, emphasizing the need for coordinated legal and administrative reforms alongside financial interventions.

## **2.4 Documentation and Credential Recognition**

Beyond financial challenges, refugees often struggle with the recognition of their prior credentials and educational experiences. In the tumultuous and unpredictable conditions often

associated with fleeing conflict, refugees frequently arrive without their educational credentials or documentation. These documents can be lost or stolen during migration, and retrieving or replacing them is often impractical and costly, if not impossible. Most host countries either do not recognize credentials obtained informally or acknowledge incomplete or interrupted education and contacting their countries of origin for verification is often challenging (Martin & Stulgaitis, 2022, p. 35; Jesuit Refugee Service, 2022, p. 3). This lack of educational certification and documentation represents a major obstacle to accessing both secondary and higher education (World Bank and UNHCR, 2021, p. 17; Reinprecht et al., 2021, p. 3198; Anselme & Hands, 2010, p. 93). Consequently, higher education institutions frequently require refugee students to redo parts of their education. This redundancy is not only wasteful for both the refugees and the host countries but can also lead to exclusion, as the financial constraints of many refugee students may prevent them from repeating their education (Bajwa et al., 2017, p. 57).

## **2.5 Broken Educational “Pipeline”**

The concept of higher education as part of a continuum often referred to as a "pipeline" is essential to understanding the challenges refugees face. This pipeline begins with early childhood education and progresses through primary and secondary school. However, limited opportunities to complete primary and secondary education significantly hinder refugees' ability to advance to higher education (UNESCO & IESALC, 2023a, p. 4). The educational trajectory for refugees is seldom a smooth continuum, with opportunities narrowing at each stage, making access to higher education increasingly inaccessible. Conversely, when higher education is out of reach, young people may lack the motivation to complete earlier stages of education (Dryden-Peterson & Giles, 2010, p. 4). Establishing stronger connections between different educational levels is critical for realizing the right to higher education (UNESCO & IESALC, 2023b, p. 7).

## **2.6 Language**

Language barriers further complicate access to post-secondary opportunities for refugees, particularly in regions where advanced language skills are required (Jesuit Refugee Service, 2022, p. 3; Reinprecht et al., 2021, p. 3198; Anselme & Hands, 2010, p. 93). Ben-Moshe et al. (2008) identified language as a significant obstacle for refugees seeking tertiary education. This challenge is especially frustrating for educated refugees eager to resume professional work, as the lengthy process of achieving proficiency in a new language can be demoralizing and lead some to abandon their educational pursuits altogether (Ben-Moshe et al., 2008, p. 6).

For example, language barriers represent a significant hurdle for refugees seeking higher education, particularly when they attempt to study in a language, they are not fluent in. According to Lorisika et al. (2015), many Syrian refugees report challenges with proficiency in English, German, and French, which are among the most commonly learned foreign languages in Syria. These language difficulties often prevent them from pursuing further education abroad, as they need to meet minimum language proficiency requirements, which include international certifications like Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), often difficult or expensive to obtain (Lorisika et al., 2015, p. 58).

## **2.7 Informational Barriers**

Another significant barrier is the lack of reliable information about available higher education opportunities and the related application procedures. This challenge is particularly acute for urban refugees, who often struggle to find information about existing opportunities (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 50; Reinprecht et al., 2021, p. 3198; Gladwell et al., 2016, p. 12; Lorisika et al., 2015, p. 24).

Bajwa et al. (2017) found that due to informational barriers and exposure to misinformation, participants often felt disappointed, confused, frustrated, and overwhelmed. Their repeated, unsuccessful attempts to access appropriate guidance led to a sense of mistrust. Many participants described their experiences as a "waste of time" and believed that their educational progress was stalled or frozen due to the lack of timely and reliable information. For example, one participant shared that misinformation from a legal professional delayed the issuance of a study permit, which hindered the ability to begin schooling on time and caused significant confusion and distress (Bajwa et al., 2017, p. 61).

## **2.8 Potential Solutions**

Despite social advantages of higher education for refugees, significant barriers remain, including inadequate political prioritization, particularly in low to middle-income host countries where the majority of refugees reside. Financial constraints, exacerbated by high tuition fees and limited self-financing opportunities, further impede access. Participants in a UNESCO & IESALC study emphasized the need for streamlined educational pathways, recognition of prior qualifications, and removal of legal barriers to ensure equitable access to higher education for refugees and FDPs worldwide (UNESCO & IESALC, 2023a, p. 7).

Addressing the barriers to higher education for refugees requires targeted strategies that include scholarships, online learning, and recognition of prior qualifications (Bengtsson & Naylor, 2016, p. 19). Additional approaches, such as accelerated learning programs, bridge courses, and support services like advice and mentoring, can further support refugees in overcoming these challenges (Gladwell et al., 2016, p. 22). The World Bank has recommended the implementation of deliberate and effective policies, including merit-based scholarships, grants, and student loan programs, to close equity gaps in tertiary education. These policies

should be accompanied by remedial interventions to prepare disadvantaged groups for postsecondary studies (World Bank, 2021, para. 16).

## **2.9 Conclusion on Obstacles**

In summary, refugees face significant and multifaceted barriers to accessing higher education, rooted in both structural and systemic challenges. Host countries often struggle with limited resources and insufficient political will, further complicating the educational prospects for refugees. Financial constraints, exacerbated by restrictive policies, pose substantial obstacles, while issues with documentation, disrupted educational pathways, and language barriers further limit access. Additionally, the lack of reliable information compounds these difficulties. Addressing these challenges requires a coordinated approach involving policy reforms, financial support, and targeted educational programs. These efforts are essential not only for empowering refugees to achieve their academic goals but also for fostering more inclusive and equitable societies.

### **3. Scholarships**

Financial barriers are a significant obstacle to accessing higher education for refugees. Scholarship opportunities create avenues for refugees to pursue higher education; however, these opportunities vary around the globe. Scholarships are financial awards given to students to support their education, typically based on various criteria such as academic merit, financial need, or specific talents and interests (Al- Hawamdeh & El-Ghali, 2017, p. 19). These awards can significantly reduce or even eliminate the cost of tuition, fees, and other educational expenses, thereby making higher education more accessible. Scholarships play a crucial role in enabling students, including refugees, to pursue post-secondary education, which might otherwise be unattainable due to financial constraints. While scholarships help address the financial obstacles faced by refugees, the limited availability of these scholarships remains a challenge, especially given the growing number of students seeking higher education (UNHCR, 2024b, p. 2).

By the year 2020, SDG 4b sought a substantial global effort to expand the number of scholarships available to developing countries. This initiative particularly targeted least developed countries, small island developing states, and African countries, facilitating their enrollment in higher education. The scholarships were to cover various fields, including vocational training, information and communications technology, technical, engineering, and scientific programs, in both developed and other developing countries (United Nations, 2015, p. 21).

Balfour (2016) defines target 4b scholarships as those which are for university study actually taken up by students from developing countries. They are for study at higher education institutions in countries other than the students' home country, including those by distance learning. These scholarships require no further contribution from the student or the developing

country to meet the costs of study, travel, and living. They are provided, as a matter of policy, out of public funds by nations or consortia of nations excluding the beneficiary country and are accounted for as scholarships in the public accounts of the donor nations. This includes scholarships co-funded by private interests if reported in the public accounts of donor nations. Additionally, these scholarships are awarded based on publicly disclosed criteria (Balfour, 2016, p. 12). Balfour concludes that while a wide variety of scholarships exist, not all of them are captured under the formal definition of target 4b. The complexity of tracking and measuring scholarships, particularly when co-funded by private sources, makes it difficult to assess progress toward this target. Additionally, the expansion of scholarships is necessary, but the challenge remains in accurately measuring their availability and ensuring that they align with the goal of supporting students from developing countries (Balfour, 2016, pp. 15-16).

Lawson, Essah, Samson, and Welsh-Kinnersley (2024) highlight a critical gap in scholarship opportunities for refugees, revealing that dedicated programs are significantly limited relative to demand. Their analysis underscores that many refugee students face substantial financial challenges in their host countries, which are exacerbated by high tuition fees, particularly at private higher education institutions, and the cost of educational materials. This financial strain significantly impedes refugees' ability to pursue tertiary education in West and Central Africa (Lawson, et al., 2024, p. 19).

Scholarship programs tailored for refugees play a crucial role in bridging the gap between exclusion and inclusion, even in countries where refugees can access higher education. Over time, refugee scholarship programs have shown long-term benefits, such as enabling refugees to contribute to their host communities, motivating them to complete secondary education, and creating pathways to postgraduate opportunities (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 18). According to El-Ghali et al. (2019), expanding scholarship opportunities and creating pathways to bridge middle school

to secondary education, TVET, and tertiary education are critical to addressing the low enrolment and high dropout rates among refugee youth (El-Ghali et al., 2019, p. 27).

### **3.1 DAFI Scholarship**

The Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship program, established in 1992, has supported over 22,500 refugee students globally, making it one of the most prestigious and enduring higher education initiatives for refugees (UNHCR, 2022c, p.1; Bengtsson & Taylor, 2016, p. 19). With the goal of achieving 15% enrollment of refugees in higher education by 2030, the DAFI program remains pivotal in UNHCR's strategy. Primarily funded by the German Government, with additional support from the Danish Government and private partners, the program was active in 56 countries in 2022. The Aiming Higher Campaign, UNHCR's fundraising effort for tertiary education, raised \$8.98 million in 2022, directly funding scholarships for refugee youth. In 2022, 9,043 young refugee men and women from 50 countries were enrolled in DAFI scholarships, with a notable increase from the previous year and a focus on achieving gender parity by 2025. Majority of DAFI scholars were from South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Syria, with programs in the East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region supporting the largest share (UNHCR, 2022a, p. 4).

A notable finding by the UNHCR (2022c) found that financial support for students, including tuition payment and living allowances, is crucial for maintaining high completion rates. Furthermore, many students indicate that they would not have been able to complete their degrees without financial assistance from the DAFI program (UNHCR, 2022c, p. 1).

Scholarship programs like DAFI, designed to assist refugees, remain crucial, particularly in host countries where refugees are integrated into the national education system. Almost three-quarters of the countries where DAFI operates allow refugees to pursue higher education. However, even in cases where refugees can enroll in universities, they typically do not qualify

for government-issued loans or other financial aid, posing a significant obstacle to their education (UNHCR, 2022a, p. 4). In the countries where it is active, the DAFI program frequently serves as the sole means for refugees to pursue tertiary education (UNHCR, 2022a, p. 132).

Graduation rates across the DAFI program have consistently risen since 2014, reaching 84% as of 2022 (UNHCR, 2022c, p. 1). Financial support for students, including tuition payments and living allowances, was essential for maintaining high completion rates, as most students would not have completed their degrees without the DAFI program's financial assistance (UNHCR, 2022c, p. 2).

### **3.2 Scholarship Opportunities in Jordan**

As higher education is a key component of UNHCR's education strategy, in 2022, UNHCR in Jordan organized an initial roundtable to promote the 15 by 30 Goal, targeting 15 percent enrolment of refugee students in higher education institutions by 2030 (UNHCR, 2024b, p. 1). Additionally in Jordan, UNHCR has been negotiating with public universities to reduce tuition fees for refugee students to match those of Jordanian students, already achieving a 40-45% reduction with four universities (UNHCR, 2022a, p. 44). Unfortunately, the demand for scholarships for Syrian refugees in Jordan far exceeds the available supply, with only about 2,000 scholarships for thousands of applicants (Al-Hawamdeh & El-Ghaali, 2017, p. 23).

Financing is a major challenge for scholarship providers, who vary in their focus on Syrian asylum seekers versus all Syrian students in Jordan, and in their inclusion of local students from host communities. Selection criteria differ among providers, but most prioritize academic merits and the economic background of applicants (Al-Hawamdeh & El-Ghali, 2017, p. 19). Furthermore, most scholarships are for graduate programs, limiting opportunities for those without prior tertiary education. There is also confusion among international organizations,

NGOs, and the Jordanian government about whether these scholarships should address the needs of the Jordanian job market, the Syrian community, or future reconstruction in Syria, leaving Syrians to choose their degrees independently with restricted options due to the limited scholarships (Al-Hawamdeh & El-Ghaali, 2017, p. 23).

In addition to programs targeting Syrian refugees, there are also limited opportunities for refugees from other nationalities residing in Jordan. Refugees from Iraq, Sudan, and Yemen, for instance, have sometimes been included in international scholarship schemes such as DAFI or through institutional partnerships, although data on their inclusion remains sparse and inconsistent (UNHCR, 2022b, p. 43). Programs such as the Edu-Syria program have historically supported diverse refugee populations, not solely Syrians, depending on funding cycles and partnership agreements. Limited data is available on how many non-Syrian refugees are benefiting from these scholarship programs. DAFI does share information about the nationalities of its recipients, but detailed breakdowns are not always made publicly available. The same goes for EDU-SYRIA, as it is difficult to find the extent to which non-Syrian refugees are involved, which makes it tough to get a clear picture of their inclusion. EDU-SYRIA does state that while their primary focus is on supporting Syrian refugees, they also include vulnerable Jordanian youth from host communities (EDU-SYRIA, 2023, para 1). Overall, while Syrian refugees are clearly the main group being supported by education programs in Jordan, there are some opportunities for refugees from other backgrounds too, however, on a smaller scale and with less consistent reporting.

The DAFI scholarship program is available in Jordan, but the limited availability of scholarships remains a challenge (UNHCR, 2024b, p. 2). As of 2022, 190 refugee students are benefiting from the DAFI scholarship in Jordan, the number of applicants, however, was 2261 that same year (UNHCR, 2022b, p. 43). In 2023, UNHCR and the German Jordanian University

collaborated to jointly administer their scholarship programs, DAFI and Edu-Syria. This partnership aims to enhance refugees' access to higher education through mutual assistance and shared resources, thereby reaching a larger population of refugees. Additionally, UNHCR's Vulnerability Assessment Framework will be used as a criterion for scholarship decisions, ensuring that scholarships consider refugee students' needs and vulnerabilities, not just merit (UNHCR, 2024b, p. 2).

Most countries in the region do not provide national education financial aid to refugees, limiting their participation in post-secondary and TVET programs due to high fees. However, several DAFI countries, including Jordan, actively support the 15 by 30 strategy by forming partnerships with universities, expanding connected higher education programs, providing third country scholarships, and creating opportunities for participation in TVET (UNHCR, 2022a, p. 44).

### **3.3 Scholarship Opportunities in Niger**

When researching scholarships for post-secondary education for refugees in Niger, it became evident that the available options are quite limited, with the DAFI scholarship being one of the few prominent programs. While DAFI provides crucial support to refugee students, there are only a few other opportunities, mostly for qualified master's students or scholarships that require studying abroad. This scarcity of options highlights the challenges refugees face in accessing higher education within Niger, emphasizing the need for more local and regional scholarship initiatives.

In 2022, DAFI programs in West and Central Africa (WCA) accounted for 10% of the total student body, with 905 scholars (UNHCR, 2022a, p. 132). As of 2022, 50 refugee students were

benefiting from the DAFI scholarship in Niger, with the number of applicants being 73 that same year (UNHCR, 2022b, p. 70).

## 4. Online Education

Technology is opening new and sometimes unforeseen pathways to education for refugees (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017, p. 2). In resource-constrained environments, more flexible educational delivery methods are being promoted as promising alternatives. These include non-formal and technology-enhanced approaches, such as online learning (Gladwell et al., 2016, p. 17). Higher education is evolving from a teacher-centered approach to a collaborative model, driven by advances in communications technology, particularly the internet. This shift has enabled new teaching and learning innovations, making education more accessible and convenient through online learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 144).

Institutions have the opportunity to develop digital learning curricula that are accessible to learners globally. This approach facilitates access to high-quality academic resources offered by the university, in formats that are adaptable to various settings. Such a model can effectively reach a diverse audience, including displaced youth, ensuring broader educational opportunities (Gardi, 2021, p. 11). According to UNHCR (2023d), digital technology has the potential to greatly enhance the ability of displaced individuals to learn, work, communicate, and access various needs more efficiently. However, it remains a valuable resource that is not yet accessible to everyone (UNHCR, 2022d, p. 3). Colucci et al (2017) found that offering online education in camps presents common challenges that are often intensified by the camp environment, such as poor connectivity, unstable learning conditions, insufficient infrastructure, the necessity of tailoring course content to vulnerable students, and security issues. For initiatives to be effective, they must find ways to address all of these factors (Colucci et al., 2017, p. 16).

The global COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift from physical to online classrooms for universities worldwide. Despite the challenges, this transition demonstrated the feasibility of innovative alternatives to traditional classrooms, highlighting how online learning

can address accessibility issues by enabling at-home education. This change has positively impacted access to education for refugees and displaced students by providing high-quality, accessible courses (Gardi, 2021, p. 11). However, for these students, accessing online services remains challenging due to limited access to necessary technology (Moser-Mercer, 2014, p. 120).

The expansion of global connectivity has fueled the growth of online and blended learning, highlighting the importance of digital services such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), and data in enhancing institutional planning, financing, and quality (UNESCO, 2024b, para 8). Accessing education online is nothing new, however, in recent years the need for rapid expansion and benefits of online education options have been made more evident. Whereas blended learning options have been more frequently used in the past decade at various educational levels, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the transformation to online education, increasing providers and expanding degree offerings. Additionally, technical support and policy advice are provided to promote access and inclusion through information and communications technology and innovative learning opportunities, both on-campus and online (UNESCO, 2024b, para 9).

Access to mobile phones, internet connectivity, and social networks, along with the skills to navigate these platforms, collectively shaped refugees' ability to pursue higher education opportunities, empowering them to exercise their agency (Dahya & Dryden-Peterson, 2017, p. 24). According to Fraser-Moleketi (2021), transitioning to fully online higher education has raised concerns about equity and equal opportunity, potentially infringing upon the right to higher education. This shift highlights disparities in access to essential tools like computers, tablets, smartphones, and reliable internet, which are crucial for learning and completing studies.

As the education sector evolves, there is a pressing call for transformation that prioritizes social justice through inclusive, equitable, accessible, and connected approaches (Fraser-

Moleketi, 2021, para 6). Multiple reports and interviews have suggested that to address bandwidth challenges, exploring flexible delivery options for online education, such as making MOOCs available offline, should be considered. Since many refugees in camps and other locations have mobile phones, free mobile learning is seen as an effective way to enhance access to online education (Colucci et al., 2017, p. 16).

My own experiences with online education have further shaped my perspective on both its potential benefits and inherent limitations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I participated in remote university courses that underscored the convenience and flexibility of digital learning. Eliminating the need for long daily commutes allowed me to better balance academic and personal responsibilities. However, I also experienced periods of unreliable internet connectivity that disrupted live lectures and limited access to course materials. These challenges can be even more pronounced in refugee-hosting regions where technological infrastructure is often underdeveloped. Additionally, becoming familiar with the various functions of online learning platforms required time and effort, making the initial transition to digital learning environments difficult. The increasing integration of digital services, including AI-based tools, has the potential to enrich the academic process by providing quick access to information, writing assistance, and research support. However, these technologies remain relatively new and do not always produce accurate or contextually appropriate information. These reflections mirror broader critiques of online education, suggesting that while it holds great promise for expanding access, it must be intentionally designed to foster meaningful, equitable learning experiences, particularly for vulnerable populations such as refugees, who often face compounded technological and infrastructural barriers.

## 4.1 Open Educational Resources (OERs)

Open Educational Resources (OERs) encompass a wide range of teaching, learning, and research materials that are freely accessible to anyone for use, adaptation, and distribution (Colucci et al., 2017, p. 10). These resources include textbooks, lecture notes, syllabi, assignments, quizzes, lab activities, instructional videos, and other materials that facilitate access to knowledge (Meinam et al., 2023, p. 1). Efforts are ongoing to enhance and expand the availability of OERs, particularly in response to the needs of those in crisis and conflict situations (Dahya, 2016, p. 5). Central to the concept of OERs is their open licensing, which not only encourages but also simplifies their use and reuse by a wide audience (Meinam et al., 2023, p. 1). One of the key advantages of OERs in these contexts is their ability to be rapidly deployed at low cost, with the flexibility to be locally adapted to meet the specific needs of target groups. This adaptability makes OERs especially valuable in humanitarian contexts where timely access to educational materials is crucial (Dahya, 2016, p. 5).

OERs are a cornerstone of the broader "Openness" movement, which is grounded in the belief that information should be freely accessible online for the benefit of society. The two most critical aspects of this openness are the free availability of resources and the absence of barriers to their use, whether technological, legal, or financial (Meinam et al., 2023, p. 1). According to Moser-Mercer et al. (2018) OERs, particularly MOOCs, have significantly impacted higher education in the Global North by challenging conventional teaching and learning practices. By prioritizing the learner and leveraging technology to enhance the learning experience, MOOCs have spurred a reevaluation among educators regarding the current and future design of educational programs (Moser-Mercer et al., 2018, p. 44).

However, while OERs offer significant potential, there are challenges that must be addressed. The content of OERs, although freely available, may not always be suitable for all

contexts, particularly in refugee-hosting regions where cultural and linguistic differences can create barriers. Additionally, the successful implementation of OERs requires adequate technological infrastructure and pedagogical training for educators and community members who will use these resources (Dahya, 2016, p. 5). The UNHCR has raised concerns that OERs, often produced in high-income countries, may not be well-suited to the needs of refugee-hosting regions, potentially exacerbating global educational inequalities if these resources are not carefully adapted (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 32). Successful implementation of OERs in fragile contexts requires careful consideration of the local environment. Challenges such as connectivity issues, language barriers, and cultural relevance must be addressed to ensure these resources effectively meet the needs of refugee learners (Moser-Mercer et al., 2018, p. 44).

It is also essential to distinguish between OERs and other forms of online learning or E-learning. OERs can be produced in various formats—text, audio, video, and multimedia—and are openly licensed for both digital sharing and physical printing (Meinam et al., 2023, p. 2). This versatility highlights the broad utility of OERs but also underscores the need for careful consideration in their application to ensure they meet the diverse needs of learners worldwide.

Mocer-Mercer et al. (2018) concluded that OERs and innovative educational technologies have significant potential to foster twenty-first-century skills in fragile contexts, particularly for refugees. It highlights the importance of human-centered design in creating effective learning environments, emphasizing that a bottom-up approach is essential due to the varying nature of protracted displacement settings. Traditional higher education programs are often rigid and limited in accommodating alternative learning pathways, whereas online education platforms provide more flexibility and access. However, challenges such as accreditation and degree recognition remain. OERs can inspire non-traditional learners and promote creativity, making them valuable tools for refugees to unlock their potential. The paper stresses the importance of

refugee ownership and empowerment to ensure the sustainability of learning initiatives and advocates for the inclusion of innovative, learner-centered pedagogical approaches in the broader of SDG 4 (Moser-Mercer et al., 2018, p. 50).

## **4.2 Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)**

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are increasingly recognized as a significant development in global higher education, particularly due to their alignment with open education principles shared by OERs (Meinam et al., 2023, p. 1). While both MOOCs and OERs aim to democratize access to education, they differ markedly in their structure and application. This section will explore the characteristics of MOOCs, their advantages, challenges, and the implications for their use in refugee education.

MOOCs are distinct from OERs in that they provide complete or partial courses with defined start and end dates, often involving the active participation of graduate or faculty assistants who facilitate ongoing engagement and support throughout the course (Meinam et al., 2023, p. 2). Unlike OERs, which allow users to remix and redistribute content, MOOCs are generally fixed in their format and content, offering a more structured and guided learning experience.

MOOCs offer several advantages that have the potential to transform higher education, particularly in terms of accessibility and cost-effectiveness. They can provide higher education to large and diverse populations at a relatively low cost, making education more accessible on a global scale. Additionally, MOOCs are reshaping higher education worldwide through disruptive innovation, often simulating a live classroom experience through segmented, concise streaming media formats (Moser-Mercer, 2014, p. 120). The involvement of graduate or faculty assistants in MOOCs ensures that learners receive ongoing support, which is a significant advantage over OERs where interaction typically ends once resources are uploaded. Moreover, MOOCs

incorporate mechanisms for interaction, feedback, and evaluation, including peer assessments and automated quizzes, which can enhance the learning experience. Furthermore, MOOCs are increasingly being considered as a viable option for education in fragile contexts, such as refugee camps, with suggested adaptations including lower-resolution videos, short-duration podcasts, and offline burst connectivity tools to facilitate access despite limited internet connectivity (Moser-Mercer, 2014, p. 121; Colucci et al., 2017, p. 16).

Despite their potential, MOOCs face several challenges, particularly when it comes to their applicability in refugee education. Research indicates that MOOCs generally have high dropout rates, with participation varying widely among students, highlighting a key challenge in maintaining learner engagement over the course duration (Reinhardt et al., 2018, p. 203; Halkic & Arnold, 2019, p. 347). Additionally, there are significant inclusivity issues, as current data suggests that successful MOOC participants are predominantly male, highly educated, and from Western countries, raising concerns about the accessibility of these courses for refugees and other marginalized groups (Greene et al., 2015, p. 926; Reinhardt et al., 2018, p. 203). Language and cultural barriers also pose challenges, as the majority of MOOCs are offered in English and reflect Western intellectual and cultural traditions, potentially limiting their relevance for non-English-speaking refugees from diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, the implementation of MOOCs in refugee camps is complicated by the lack of necessary technical infrastructure, such as high-speed internet, which is essential for accessing course materials and participating in online discussions (Reinhardt et al., 2018, p. 203). Lastly, despite their educational value, MOOCs do not currently confer academic credits or lead to recognized degrees, limiting their utility for refugees who may need formal qualifications to improve their circumstances (Colucci et al., 2017, p. 18).

In summary, while MOOCs offer considerable promise for expanding access to higher education, particularly in fragile contexts, several challenges must be addressed to fully realize their potential. For refugees, in particular, the issues of inclusivity, technical infrastructure, and the lack of formal recognition must be carefully considered. Ongoing research and adaptation efforts are necessary to ensure that MOOCs can be effectively utilized to meet the educational needs of refugee populations, regardless of their location or circumstances.

### **4.3 Kiron Open Higher Education**

Kiron Open Higher Education is a prominent example of an innovative online education model designed to support refugees. Launched in late 2015 by two volunteers, Kiron offers refugees worldwide free access to curated online curricula (Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium, 2023, p. 42). This model combines MOOCs and OERs, organized into five bachelor study tracks: business & economics, computer science, engineering, social work, and political science. Kiron's goal is to provide refugees with access to higher education by offering a modular curriculum that incorporates existing MOOCs, language support courses, and mentorship. It also allows students to transfer to partner universities to complete their degrees in person (Colucci et al., 2017, p. 14). Collaborating with renowned MOOC providers, Kiron enables students to earn certificates and accumulate up to 60 credit points within two years, which can be transferred to partner universities under the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). By September 2018, Kiron had enrolled approximately 2,700 students and established partnerships with 56 higher education institutions, mainly in Germany. Supported by a blend of public and private funding, Kiron exemplifies the potential of online education to broaden access to higher education for refugees, leveraging internationalization and globalization to provide globally accessible educational offerings (Halkic & Arnold, 2019, p. 349; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2021, p. 2).

Analyses by Reinhardt et al. (2018) found that work-related motivation significantly influences course participation on the Kiron online platform. This suggests that refugees in the sample view education as a pathway to professional advancement. However, the vast differences in educational experiences, levels of knowledge, and external conditions necessitate new strategies to ensure the academic success of refugee students. Their study highlights the importance of considering the extreme heterogeneity of educational experiences, backgrounds, and cultural contexts when planning educational initiatives (Reinhardt et al., 2018, p. 217).

A study by Halkic & Arnold (2019), highlights that despite the state-of-the-art academic model offered by Kiron, only a small percentage of students follow the planned trajectories. Instead, students engage with Kiron's courses and support services in individualized ways, reflecting the diversity within the student cohort and the impact of their precarious life situations. The findings underscore that online education is not a straightforward solution for educational challenges, particularly for disadvantaged groups. The complex needs and diverse circumstances of these groups must be considered to avoid (re)producing social inequalities. Despite the flexibility of online offerings, students' life situations, including time and place constraints, continue to affect their ability to engage effectively with online education (Halkic & Arnold, 2019, p. 360).

Kiron's model has several strengths, particularly in its ability to provide flexible, accessible, and low-cost higher education to refugees. The modular nature of the curriculum, combined with language support and mentorship, allows students to tailor their learning experience to their needs and goals. Additionally, the possibility of transferring credits to partner universities enables students to transition into formal higher education systems, potentially leading to recognized degrees. However, there are also significant challenges and limitations associated with Kiron's approach. One major concern is the low percentage of students who follow the

intended learning pathways, which may indicate that the program does not fully meet the diverse needs of its users. The diversity within the refugee student population—including differences in educational background, cultural context, and life circumstances—complicates the delivery of a standardized online curriculum. Furthermore, the precarious life situations of many refugees can limit their ability to engage with online education effectively, even when the courses themselves are flexible. This suggests that while Kiron offers valuable opportunities, it may not be sufficient on its own to address the complex educational needs of refugees, and additional support mechanisms may be necessary (Halkic & Arnold, 2019, p. 360; Reinhardt et al., 2018, p. 217).

#### **4.4 Online Education in Jordan**

The majority of Jordanians access the internet primarily through their mobile phones. As of January 2023, there were 8.6 million mobile connections, corresponding to a mobile penetration rate of 76.1 percent. During this period, there were 9.95 million internet users in Jordan, resulting in an overall internet penetration of 88 percent (Kemp, 2023, p. 4). According to a report released by the Market Research Unit of the Information and Communications Technology Association of Jordan (Intaj), by 2024, 91 percent of Jordanians are connected to the internet (Jordanian Times, 2024, para 1).

In their examination of higher education access for refugee students in Jordan, Al-Kharouf et al. (2024) proposed a policy to enhance opportunities through online and blended learning modalities. Their analysis indicates that implementation of this policy could be achieved within a relatively short timeframe, with comparatively low financial costs. Moreover, they predict that the impact of such a policy would be significant, suggesting a high potential for substantial improvements in educational access for refugees (Al-Kharouf et al., 2024, p. 21).

## 4.5 Online Education in Niger

The feasibility study on connected universities for refugee and internally displaced students in Niger conducted by CLCC provides valuable insights for expanding online learning opportunities for post-secondary refugee students. One key finding is the language preference among students, with 62.35% favouring English and 37.65% preferring French. This highlights the need for bilingual online platforms to cater to both language groups. Ensuring that course content is accessible in both languages is critical for fostering inclusive and effective online education.

Access to technology is another significant factor identified in the study. Students reported using digital tools such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Gmail, and Coursera, indicating a basic familiarity with popular online learning platforms. However, many students face challenges with limited access to reliable internet and digital devices, which restricts their ability to fully participate in online education.

In Niger, approximately 1.1 million people use the internet, which constitutes 5.25% of the population. Broadband access is scarce, with only about 8,650 users estimated to have access to broadband networks (Munshi, 2023, p. 8). This technological gap underscores the need for targeted interventions to improve digital access for refugee students. There are even more challenges in rural areas of the country as within Niger, there is a stark disparity in access to electricity. As of 2023, 71% of the urban population has access, compared to just 2% of the rural population. Overall, only 14% of the entire population has access to electricity (Munshi, 2023, p. 9).

In terms of learning resources, the most commonly used platforms include Zoom, Teams, and WhatsApp. Students expressed a desire to access more structured online learning platforms, such as Coursera and DisasterReady, indicating an interest in gaining professional skills through

recognized educational tools. These preferences suggest that online education programs for refugees should include a variety of platforms and resources that align with the students' aspirations for professional development.

The study also highlights several challenges and recommendations. Many students emphasized the need for reliable internet access, digital devices, and financial support to cover internet costs. To address these challenges, recommendations include creating connected learning centres, improving internet infrastructure, and providing affordable devices and learning materials. These measures are crucial to ensuring that refugee students have the necessary tools and resources to fully engage in online education, thereby expanding their opportunities for higher education and professional development.

## 5. Blended Learning Programs

Despite technological advancements, traditional lecture-based methods have persisted, limiting the initial transformative impact of online education on higher education (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 144). Effective blended learning practices involve integrating technology to enhance face-to-face instruction (Dahya, 2016, p. 5). This method leverages the strengths of both in-person and digital learning environments, providing a more flexible and personalized learning experience. Blended learning often involves using technology to deliver part of the curriculum, such as through online discussions, multimedia resources, and interactive assignments, while maintaining the benefits of direct teacher-student interaction and hands-on activities in a physical classroom. It provides a framework for the educational experience that avoids the drawbacks of both online and face-to-face formats, offering a balance that maximizes effectiveness and efficiency. Online learning was often seen as isolating and not well-aligned with the ethos of campus-based higher education institutions (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 145).

Blended learning is increasingly recognized not only within higher education institutions but also by international organizations such as UNESCO and UNHCR, who view it as an effective way to address the challenges of purely online or traditional education (Al-Husban & Shorman, 2020, p. 45). In resource-constrained environments, flexible delivery methods are being promoted as promising alternatives to traditional in-person education. Blended learning, as a non-formal and technology-enhanced approach, combines online and face-to-face instruction (Gladwell et al., 2016, p. 17). A study by Colucci et al. (2017) concluded that donors, funders, researchers, and refugees/migrants agree that targeted blended learning approaches are the most effective for engaging migrant and refugee learners, particularly in formal education. These approaches are also somewhat effective in language learning and civic integration-related

flexible and distance learning. This finding applies to both settings inside and outside refugee camps, though flexible and distance learning initiatives within camps must also address additional factors like the quality of the learning environment, connectivity, and security (Colucci et al., 2017, p. 5).

Dahya (2016) found that overall blended learning plays a crucial role in post-secondary education. Furthermore, a notable feature of programs in post-secondary education is their use of multiple teaching and learning tools. This approach provides learners with varied opportunities to participate in unstable contexts, including utilizing locally available technologies, such as mobile phones (Dahya, 2016, p. 5). Garrison and Vaughan (2008) point to blended learning as providing a means to extend and enhance the educational experience effectively and efficiently. They further state that it has emerged as a significant breakthrough for improving the quality of teaching and learning, as well as the cost-effectiveness of designing blended learning courses (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008, p. 146). According to Moser-Mercer et al. (2022), traditional learning methods in conflict settings must be adapted to ensure sustainability and learner ownership. While face-to-face interactions are crucial for building trust and supporting skill development, blended learning is more effective than one-off, in-person sessions (Moser-Mercer et al., 2022, p. 6).

Colucci et al. (2017) emphasize the essential role of language learning for refugees and migrants. To address this need, free digital resources such as MOOCs provide comprehensive language instruction coupled with content on civic integration, including democratic participation and navigating social systems (Colucci et al., 2017, p. 25). Integrating MOOCs into a blended learning approach can further enhance these outcomes. This model not only supports language acquisition but also facilitates employability and social integration through targeted vocabulary training, offering a robust framework for both educational and civic engagement.

Feitosa de Moura et al. (2021) examined how MOOCs can be integrated into blended learning. They found that MOOC-based blended learning enhances pedagogy and reduces costs, particularly related to faculty. Despite not fully meeting quality criteria, the MOOC-based blended learning designs they studied, which included group activities and diverse assessments, addressed various educational gaps. The study highlighted that different MOOC-based blended learning designs can vary in perceived quality and offered practical insights for improving pedagogical processes and cost efficiency in higher education, especially in developing countries (Feitosa de Moura et al., 2021, p. 11).

Al-Husban and Shorman (2020) explored Syrian refugees' perceptions of blended learning in the Middle East, a region affected by crises and displacement. Their study, conducted at Arab Open University-Jordan, found that blended learning helped students in higher education overcome geographical, social, and work-related constraints. Participants expressed satisfaction with the flexibility of blended learning, which also fostered self-learning and computer skills more effectively than traditional systems. Gender did not significantly impact perceptions of blended learning, but age did, with older participants facing more constraints than younger ones. Despite the positive findings, the study highlighted challenges such as limited internet access, lack of necessary equipment, and students' preference for traditional exams over assignments that required critical thinking. The authors noted the need for policymakers to address these challenges to enhance blended learning's effectiveness. They also called for further research in different contexts, focusing on the perspectives of both students and instructors to optimize blended learning for refugee students (Al-Husban & Shorman, 2020, p. 57).

## **5.1 InZone**

Recent efforts to improve access to higher education for refugees increasingly rely on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to extend educational opportunities into

refugee camps. A leading example is the InZone Higher Education initiative, founded more than a decade ago to train humanitarian interpreters in refugee camps, InZone has since significantly broadened its course offerings to include both credit and non-credit programs in fields such as global health, medicine, human rights, and interpretation (Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium, 2023, p. 32). InZone is a pioneering program designed to deliver higher education to refugees in camps or nearby countries through a culturally sensitive, mentored blended learning model (Colucci et al., 2017, p. 13; Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2021, p. 5). InZone has developed innovative training approaches in conflict zones, driven by the need for effective multilingual communication as training needs differ even within the same organization, requiring continuous reassessment. (Moser-Mercer et al., 2022, p. 6). By 2022, the program had reached nearly 1,000 students across refugee camps in Kenya and Jordan (Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium, 2023, p. 32).

InZone's approach is built on three core principles that ensure the sustainability and success of its educational offerings. First, it emphasizes creating a community of learners by fostering a collective learning environment where the needs of the group are prioritized over individual achievement. This approach is reinforced by a transformative pedagogy that empowers students to reach their educational goals and adapt knowledge to serve their communities. Second, InZone tailors its course offerings to local needs and interests. The initiative developed a building-block approach, allowing learners to assemble their qualifications step by step, integrating context specific learning opportunities rather than strictly adhering to formal content (Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2021, p. 5). Finally, InZone forms partnerships with local universities to ensure that its courses are formally recognized and integrated into broader educational systems. These collaborations enhance the formal recognition and impact of

InZone's educational efforts, advancing inclusive and equitable higher education in crisis contexts (Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia et al., 2021, p. 6).

This course has been successfully implemented in fragile environments like Afghanistan, Sudan, and refugee camps in Kenya and Jordan. However, each new setting is thoroughly assessed before launching the InZone Basic Course, as every fragile environment presents unique challenges (Moser-Mercer, 2014, p. 115). In the InZone program, educational activities are structured asynchronously, enabling learners to submit their coursework whenever they have access to a reliable internet connection (Gladwell et al., 2016, p. 20). In addition to online courses and tutoring, InZone integrates on-site work with refugee communities to foster practical engagement and learning, strengthening the connection between education and local needs.

As discussed by Goldsmith, Moser Mercer and Newton (2021) InZone encounters numerous challenges in low-resource settings, including technological obstacles such as limited access to computers, outdated mobile devices poorly suited for academic purposes, and unreliable internet connectivity. External factors, including power outages, security concerns, and other disruptions, further impede the learning process. Refugee learners often face the added burden of balancing their professional, personal, and academic responsibilities, with mobility issues exacerbating the difficulties of maintaining consistent educational engagement. In response to these challenges, InZone has developed a comprehensive array of technological and pedagogical strategies. These include a virtual learning support matrix aimed at enhancing IT competencies, a low-bandwidth platform to accommodate limited internet access, and the integration of WhatsApp for efficient communication. Pedagogically, InZone's courses are predominantly asynchronous, allowing learners the flexibility to manage their studies alongside other commitments. The tutor-led model, featuring local tutors who are often program graduates, provides ongoing support, fosters

a sense of community, and plays a pivotal role in motivating learners, offering feedback, and guiding them toward becoming autonomous learners (Goldsmith et al., 2021, p. 88-89).

## **5.2 Blended Learning Programs in Jordan**

In 2016, InZone launched its Higher Education Space in the Azraq refugee camp, drawing inspiration from a successful initiative in Kenya. This space offers a range of innovative programs, including Princeton University's Global History Lab, Purdue University's engineering and innovation course, a collaboration with MIT, and InZone's Applied Arts curriculum developed with the Flux Foundation. The initiative is built on the belief that reimagining higher education requires a fresh approach, demonstrating that even in a refugee camp, quality education can thrive (UNIGE, 2023b, para 1). Through the UNHCR Community Learning HUB, the Azraq Higher Education Space provides refugees with access to connected learning opportunities. Facilitated by InZone, a center within the University of Geneva, these courses—such as the Global History Lab and Introduction to Engineering—equip students with valuable skills in areas like engineering and problem-solving, empowering them to tackle challenges within their community (UNHCR, 2018, p. 2).

## **5.3 Blended Learning Programs in Niger**

In 2022, InZone, with support from the University of Geneva and the Geneva Municipality, launched its first connected learning hubs in Niger, targeting displaced individuals. The first hub opened in Niamey in May 2023, followed by a second in Diffa that September. These digital campuses, developed in collaboration with local institutions and the UNHCR, provide refugees with access to higher education through multidisciplinary online courses. Equipped with essential resources like computers and high-speed internet, these centres have enrolled 142 students, including 86 refugees, by the end of 2023, offering courses such as language refreshers

and specialized certificates in emergency education and community health, significantly boosting the professional prospects of graduates (UNIGE, 2023a, p. 12; UNHCR, 2024d, p. 6).

## **6. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)**

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), as delineated by Cong and Wang (2012), encompasses the educational facets concerning the study of technologies, related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding, and knowledge pertinent to various sectors of economic and social life. The primary aim of technical and vocational education is to nurture individuals with application-oriented talents possessing both technical theoretical knowledge and practical abilities (Cong & Wang, 2012, p. 68). TVET presents a good opportunity for many by offering a wide range of skills to improve employability, thus enhancing the productive capacity of businesses and industries (African Union Development Agency, 2024, p. 1).

TVET is understood as comprising education, training, and skills development relating to a wide range of occupational fields, production, services, and livelihoods. As part of lifelong learning, TVET can take place at secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary levels and includes work-based learning and continuing training and professional development, which may lead to qualifications. TVET also includes a wide range of skills development opportunities attuned to national and local contexts. Learning to learn, the development of literacy and numeracy skills, transversal skills, and citizenship skills are integral components of TVET (ILO et al., 2021, p. 17).

TVET systems can be categorized into formal, non-formal, and informal types, each serving different educational and training needs. Formal TVET operates within a structured framework, adhering to established rules and guidelines. This type of training typically takes place in public or private schools, with fixed-term cycles that culminate in accreditation, such as a state diploma or certificate. In contrast, non-formal TVET is less rigid, often lacking formal rules and accreditation. It usually consists of on-the-job training, providing practical skills through daily

practice, but without formal recognition. Informal TVET is the least structured, occurring outside educational institutions, often with unwritten rules of trade. This type of training is less organized and typically does not result in formal qualifications, but it allows learners to acquire skills through experience in real-world environments. Together, these three types of TVET offer a range of opportunities for skill development, from highly structured programs to more flexible, experience-based learning paths (African Center for Economic Transformation, 2023, p. 5).

Globalization has led to a need for more specialized labor markets, advanced skill levels, and varied vocational education (Cong & Wang, 2012, p. 68). According to the UNHCR, TVET is recognized as an essential component of national education systems in many countries, playing a pivotal role in advancing economic development by aligning skills development with labor market requirements (UNHCR, 2019b, p. 1). As a facet of lifelong learning, TVET can encompass secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary education levels, integrating practical learning experiences within workplaces.

TVET offers refugee youth and adults access to formal, nationally accredited training and diploma courses. UNHCR's Refugee Education 2030 strategy underscores TVET's essential role in equipping learners with market-relevant skills for sustainable futures. Through DAFI scholarships, UNHCR facilitates refugee participation in TVET programs focused on green and digital skills, aligning with industry demands and promoting economic inclusion (UNHCR, 2024a, p. 18).

Additionally, TVET promotes employability and livelihood prospects for refugees in their host or third country, as well as in their home country upon return, should they be able to repatriate. It is important to support both displaced persons and their host communities through a holistic and integrative TVET approach that can enhance their access to job opportunities in any location. The aim of quality TVET programming is to provide demand-led, practice-oriented,

and competence-based training in cooperation with the local private sector. The qualification of TVET personnel also plays a decisive role in achieving this. In addition to transitional solutions in acute crises and displacement situations, it is critical to strengthen local structures and secure government-led coordination to include refugees in national education systems. Alignment across humanitarian aid, development, and peace-building actors, and ministries responsible for TVET nationally remains a key element in this process (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 36).

When TVET systems are effective, graduates acquire the necessary skills for current job markets while also being equipped to adapt to evolving skill demands in the future. Robust TVET programs can play a crucial role in helping countries achieve the SDGs by fostering sustainable employment and enhancing productivity efficiently (The World Bank, UNESCO & ILO, 2023, p. 20).

## **6.1 Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Jordan**

In 2024, Jordan established a multiparty Higher Education Alliance aimed at facilitating access to higher education and TVET. This Alliance, which emerged from a series of roundtable discussions and will soon be formalized by a multi-party Memorandum of Understanding, unites seventeen key stakeholders, including philanthropists, higher education institutions, vocational training institutes, a Syrian business association, and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2024c, para 1).

The Alliance's primary goal is to ensure that refugees and vulnerable Jordanians can access higher education and TVET opportunities linked to the job market, reflecting the importance of these sectors for individual self-reliance, national economic development, and innovation (UNHCR, 2024c, para 7). Additionally, the Alliance is committed to removing obstacles for refugees to access universities and vocational training, with plans to triple the number of universities in Jordan that make studies more accessible to refugees and lower tuition

fees to match those of Jordanians, a measure already implemented by several universities since 2023 (UNHCR, 2024c, para 1). Notably, this is the first network of its kind in Jordan and the first Alliance specifically designed to advance the 15 by 30 goal, which aims to enhance the educational and vocational prospects of refugees in a refugee-hosting country (UNHCR, 2024a, p. 10).

Al-Balqa Applied University (BAU) oversees approximately 30 private and public community colleges in Jordan, which provide 2-year diploma programs in various technical and vocational fields. These programs, at the technician level, allow students to continue on to bachelor's degrees if they pass. Despite this, Jordanian students have traditionally favoured academic university education over technical education. Even though the government has made efforts to strengthen and reform technical education, enrollment in BAU colleges has significantly declined, dropping from 11,895 students in 2007 to 7,650 in 2017, a decrease of 36 percent (ILO, 2020a, p. 23).

Private sector entities in Jordan also offer vocational training programs, though the number of private training providers is limited. Additionally, not all of these providers are certified by the Centre of Accreditation and Quality Assurance (CAQA). Among the notable private training providers are the Luminus Group and the Ammon Applied University College of Hospitality and Tourism Education (ILO, 2020a, p. 23).

## **6.2 Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Niger**

The vocational training and employment landscape in Niger faces substantial challenges, primarily due to a mismatch between training programs and the country's employment needs, as well as issues inherent to the broader education system. This challenge is not unique to Niger; many low- and middle-income countries, including Niger, grapple with TVET systems that do not adequately align with labor market demands and are ill-prepared to handle the expected

surge in TVET enrollment in the coming years. To address this, Niger has increasingly focused on professionalized training tailored to the needs of an economy dominated by the informal sector.

Niger established its public TVET system in the 1970s, aiming to provide education at various levels across the entire country. This system has gradually expanded, and in the 2000s, the private sector also began contributing by opening TVET institutions (African Union Development Agency, 2024, p. 1; World Bank, 2023, para. 1). As of today, Niger's formal TVET system comprises 467 institutions, of which 377 are public and 90 are private (African Center for Economic Transformation, 2023, p. 5). Supporting these developments, Niger enacted Law No. 2015-25, which created a structured framework for vocational and technical education, consisting of three levels: elementary, intermediate, and higher vocational and technical education. This framework is intended to promote comprehensive training and skills development across different stages of education (African Union Development Agency, 2024, p. 2).

The growth of TVET in Niger has been particularly notable in enrollment. Between 2012-2013 and 2016-2017, the number of trainees in both formal and non-formal TVET programs surged from 68,486 to 332,025, representing a 385% increase over just five years (ILO, 2020b, p. 18). This dramatic rise highlights the increasing demand for vocational training, which is expected to continue in the coming years. A joint study by the World Bank, ILO, and UNESCO forecasts that in Niger, demographic trends and higher completion rates at lower educational levels will likely result in a ten-fold increase in TVET enrollment over the next two decades. The country is already under significant strain due to a growing proportion of youth who are neither in education, employment, nor training (The World Bank, UNESCO & ILO, 2023, p. 21).

Since 2006, the governance of TVET in Niger has been centralized under the Ministry of Vocational and Technical Training (MEP-T). The MEP-T operates through three primary bodies: the General Directorate of Formal Education (DGEF), the General Directorate of Employment Direction and Integration (DGOIP), and the National Directorates for Support. Together, these entities are responsible for implementing TVET policies nationwide (ILO, 2020b, p. 21). These efforts are further supported by three state agencies: the National Agency for the Promotion of Employment (ANPE), which coordinates job placements and provides youth training; the Support Fund for Vocational Training and Apprenticeship (FAFPA), which offers both continuous and short-term training; and the National Employment and Training Observatory (ONEF), which conducts studies to ensure TVET strategies are aligned with labor market needs (ILO, 2020b, p. 21). Despite these comprehensive governance structures, Niger's vast territory and limited financial and logistical resources present significant obstacles to effectively managing and monitoring TVET centers across the country (ILO, 2020b, p. 21).

In summary, while Niger has made considerable progress in expanding its TVET system to meet the growing demand, persistent challenges related to governance, resources, and accessibility must be addressed to fully leverage vocational education as a driver of economic development.

### **6.3 Analysis of TVET in Jordan and Niger**

The examination of TVET in Jordan and Niger underscores its growing importance as an alternative post-secondary pathway for refugees. While often less emphasized in the broader discourse on refugee higher education, TVET offers practical avenues for skill development, especially in contexts where access to academic institutions may be limited.

In Jordan, TVET has been integrated into national education and employment strategies with a degree of institutional formality. Programs are often tied to labor market needs and

supported by international and domestic actors aiming to bridge the gap between education and employment. However, these programs continue to suffer from low enrolment rates among refugee youth, in part due to the social stigma associated with vocational training and the perception that it leads to lower-status or unstable employment. As a result, many refugee students prefer academic tracks.

In contrast, TVET in Niger is largely informal, community-oriented, and geared toward subsistence and survival within the informal economy. This reflects the broader socio-economic conditions of the country, where formal employment is limited, and most economic activity occurs outside regulated markets. In this context, TVET plays an important role in fostering basic livelihood skills and income-generating capacities for both refugee and host populations. However, these programs are often constrained by limited resources, lack of standardization, and an absence of formal certification processes, which in turn limit their ability to serve as a stepping-stone to further education or secure employment.

Across both contexts, a key finding is the disconnect between the practical utility of TVET and its perceived value. Despite its potential to provide immediate, market-relevant skills, TVET is frequently undervalued by refugee students, who view it as a second-choice option. Moreover, challenges such as inadequate funding, limited availability of training centers, gender disparities in participation, and insufficient linkages with labor markets further diminish the effectiveness of vocational programs.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that while TVET can play a crucial role in expanding educational and livelihood opportunities for refugees, its impact is highly contingent on factors such as national education policy, economic context, social perceptions, and the degree of alignment between training and employment opportunities. To enhance the role of TVET within refugee education frameworks, interventions must not only improve the quality and accessibility

of training programs but also work to shift public perceptions and build pathways for further educational and professional advancement.

## **7. Country Comparison Synthesis**

In comparing Jordan and Niger, two distinct refugee-hosting nations with different contexts, several important differences and similarities emerge, shedding light on the causes and effects of their divergent approaches to refugee education. Both countries, despite their unique challenges, face pressures to expand access to higher education for refugees, yet the underlying causes of their successes and struggles can be traced to factors such as infrastructure, international attention, and economic capacity.

### **7.1 Differences**

One of the most striking differences between Jordan and Niger is the state of infrastructure, particularly related to education. Jordan boasts a relatively well-developed educational system with established universities, vocational institutions, and increasingly available blended learning programs. Its ability to accommodate refugees in higher education, though not without challenges, is supported by better connectivity and access to educational resources compared to Niger. This infrastructural advantage allows Jordan to focus on integrating refugees into its education system more effectively, despite issues like overcrowded classrooms and tuition costs. In contrast, Niger faces severe limitations in infrastructure, particularly in rural areas and refugee camps, where access to even basic educational facilities is sparse. The lack of reliable internet, electricity, and digital devices in Niger further exacerbates the challenges of delivering education to refugee populations. These infrastructural disparities are key factors that explain why Jordan is able to implement more comprehensive education strategies while Niger struggles with the foundational aspects of providing higher education.

Another significant difference is the internal displacement dynamics within Niger. Unlike Jordan, which primarily hosts refugees from other countries, Niger contends with a substantial

population of IDPs alongside its refugee community. As of 2023, Niger had over 300,000 IDPs, adding immense pressure to an already overburdened and under-resourced education system. The government faces the complex task of dividing its limited educational resources between local populations, refugees, and IDPs, which creates significant competition for services. This competition exacerbates disparities in access to education, often leaving both refugees and IDPs underserved. Additionally, the presence of such a large IDP population complicates policymaking. Government policies aimed at improving educational access for refugees may be delayed or deprioritized as the immediate needs of IDPs. The overlapping needs of these groups can also create confusion and inconsistencies in policy implementation, as different programs and resources might be designed for one group but not adequately address the other. In contrast, Jordan's smaller IDP population allows for more streamlined and focused policies on refugee education, reducing internal competition for resources and ensuring that policy efforts can be more consistently applied to refugees.

The level of international attention and aid both countries receive is another big difference. Jordan, located in the politically volatile Middle East and at the center of the Syrian refugee crisis, has garnered significant international attention. This attention has translated into financial aid, partnerships with international universities, and scholarship programs like DAFI, Edu-Syria, and support from major donors such as the European Union and the United States. In contrast, Niger, despite hosting a large number of refugees and displaced people, has received comparatively less attention on the global stage. This lack of international focus limits the resources available for refugee education, making it difficult for Niger to implement large-scale educational initiatives or attract significant foreign investment in education.

The economic wealth of both countries also plays a pivotal role in shaping their ability to provide higher education to refugees. Jordan, while not a wealthy country by global standards,

has a higher GDP per capita than Niger and has been able to leverage its political stability to attract international aid and investment. This relatively stronger economic position allows Jordan to invest more in its education system, even as it faces economic challenges from hosting a large refugee population. Niger, on the other hand, is one of the least developed countries in the world, with limited financial resources to devote to education. The economic constraints in Niger mean that even with the best intentions, the country lacks the capacity to expand its higher education system to adequately serve both its citizens and refugee populations.

## **7.2 Similarities**

Despite these differences, Jordan and Niger share several challenges when it comes to providing higher education for refugees. Both countries host large refugee populations relative to their own populations, which strains their already limited educational resources. In both contexts, refugees face financial barriers to accessing education, such as high tuition fees, limited scholarships, and the inability to work legally or obtain student loans. These financial challenges are compounded by political constraints—neither country fully prioritizes refugee education at the national level, as both governments face significant internal pressures to meet the needs of their own citizens.

Additionally, both Jordan and Niger rely heavily on international aid to support refugee education. Programs like DAFI play a crucial role in both countries, but the limited availability of scholarships leaves many refugee students without the financial means to pursue higher education. While Jordan has been more successful in securing international partnerships, both countries ultimately depend on external funding to sustain and expand their educational offerings for refugees.

Another key similarity is the impact of displacement on refugees' educational trajectories. In both Niger and Jordan, many refugee students arrive without proper

documentation or credentials, making it difficult to enroll in higher education. The educational pipeline is often broken, with students facing disrupted learning experiences, language barriers, and limited access to preparatory programs that could help them transition into higher education. This challenge is not unique to either country but is a common issue faced by refugees worldwide.

### **7.3 Possible Causes of Differences**

The differences between Jordan and Niger can largely be attributed to three main factors: infrastructure, international attention, and wealth. Jordan's more developed infrastructure and its geopolitical significance have made it a focal point for international aid and attention, allowing it to develop more robust educational programs for refugees. The country's relatively stronger economy also provides more opportunities to integrate refugees into its higher education system, even if challenges remain.

In contrast, Niger's severe infrastructural limitations—stemming from its status as one of the world's poorest countries—make it difficult to provide even basic education to refugees, let alone higher education. The lack of international attention on Niger, compared to the spotlight on the Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan, further contributes to the disparity. Niger's fragile economy, political instability, and security issues exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult to implement long-term, sustainable educational programs for refugees.

In summary, while both Jordan and Niger face substantial challenges in providing higher education to refugees, their respective capacities to address these challenges are shaped by differences in infrastructure, international attention, and economic wealth. These factors help explain why Jordan has made more progress in integrating refugees into higher education, while Niger continues to struggle with basic educational access. Understanding these underlying causes and effects is crucial for designing effective policies and interventions that can support

refugee education in both countries. By addressing the root causes of these disparities, international organizations, donors, and policymakers can better tailor their efforts to meet the specific needs of each country and expand access to higher education for refugees more equitably.

## **8. Policy Recommendations**

Based on the research conducted in this thesis, several key areas have emerged where targeted policy interventions could significantly improve access to higher education for refugees. The following recommendations are proposed as potential strategies to address the barriers identified in this study, including financial constraints, limited educational pathways, and the challenges of navigating new educational systems in host countries. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can contribute to the creation of more equitable and sustainable educational opportunities for refugees, helping them achieve their academic goals and build brighter futures.

Although this study focuses on Jordan and Niger, the findings offer insights with broader applicability for other refugee-hosting nations. The strategies explored, such as blended learning models, expanded scholarship programs, and strengthened TVET systems, possess significant potential for scalability. For example, the InZone program illustrates how blended learning can be extended to other low-resource settings if infrastructure, digital tools, and academic support systems are adequately developed. Likewise, the DAFI scholarship model presents a replicable approach that, with coordinated funding and political will, could be scaled regionally or globally. Adaptability is also crucial; while these strategies may be effective in Niger and Jordan, their implementation in other contexts must consider specific local conditions, including political stability, educational infrastructure, and cultural norms. Therefore, any efforts to scale these models should be accompanied by localized assessments and stakeholder engagement to ensure that interventions are not only feasible, but contextually appropriate. The experiences of Jordan and Niger underscore that educational strategies for refugees must be both scalable and adaptable to meet the diverse needs of displaced learners across varying displacement settings.

## **Bridging Programs for Refugee Access to Higher Education**

Bridging programs are vital for achieving the UNHCR's 15 by 30 target by preparing refugee students for higher education through skill and knowledge enhancement. Bridging programs offer tailored pathways for refugee students to navigate educational systems and bridge academic gaps. These programs address the challenges faced by refugees with under-resourced educational backgrounds, improving academic readiness and increasing their chances of admission. By bridging the gap between secondary and higher education, these initiatives facilitate the integration of students into host community learning environments, offering tailored pathways that strengthen the post-secondary education pipeline (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 46). Bridging programs vary widely from short courses focusing on specific skills, such as language proficiency or information technology, to more comprehensive year-long programs that prepare students for degrees, certificates, or livelihoods. Effective programs are crucial for fostering diversity and social cohesion, enhancing skills for voluntary return to post-conflict areas, and supporting pathways to third countries. Refugees entering higher education through these programs bring valuable perspectives and skills, which can enrich academic environments and expand the pool of qualified applicants from marginalized communities (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 46).

Additionally, bridging programs alleviate financial burdens on universities by providing scholarship funding, enabling institutions to admit more students without the need for additional resources. This creates opportunities for both learners and academic institutions, fostering a more inclusive and diverse higher education landscape (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 47). To overcome one of the significant barriers refugee students face, which is the lack of reliable information about available opportunities and application processes, bridging programs can also serve as essential informational tools. The Global Peer-to-Peer Solutions Advisor Network is an example of a successful model, using trained refugee advisors to guide their peers through application

processes, improving transitions into education and work. Scaling similar initiatives can help address the informational barriers that often hinder access to higher education (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 50). In conclusion, the implementation and expansion of bridging programs tailored to the unique needs of refugee students should be a priority in efforts to achieve equitable access to higher education. These programs not only improve educational outcomes for refugees but also contribute to the overall diversity and strength of academic institutions.

### **Increase Funding for Refugee Scholarships**

To enhance access to higher education for refugees, it is crucial to increase funding for scholarship programs specifically tailored to their needs (El-Ghali et al., 2019, p. 27). Expanding existing initiatives, such as the DAFI scholarship program, and developing new opportunities in host countries like Niger and Jordan should be prioritized. These scholarships should align with local labor market demands, ensuring that recipients acquire skills that contribute to the host country's economic development. In addition, fostering regional partnerships can help create more accessible scholarships for refugees, reducing their reliance on studying abroad and addressing the limited availability of local scholarships, particularly in regions like Niger. Increasing the availability of scholarships for refugees, including the reduction or waiving of tuition fees where feasible, would help break down the barriers that currently prevent many from accessing tertiary education (Lawson, et al., 2024, p. 19). Expanding refugee scholarship programs further would ensure that higher education becomes a right for all refugees, rather than a privilege reserved for a select few, ultimately supporting broader inclusion within the global academic community (Anselme & Hands, 2010, p. 95). This recommendation aligns closely with the UNHCR's 15 by 30 strategy, which identifies financial support, particularly through expanded and diversified scholarship programs such as DAFI, as critical to reaching tertiary enrollment targets (UNHCR, 2023a, p. 5).

## **Strengthen TVET Programs and Improve Accessibility**

Strengthening Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs for refugees is crucial for improving their access to employment opportunities. TVET programs should be tailored to align with the demands of local and regional labor markets, with a particular focus on enhancing partnerships with the private sector to ensure that vocational training is relevant and leads to meaningful employment (El-Ghali et al., 2019, p. 25-26). Moreover, integrating TVET programs for refugees into national education systems can enhance both access and quality. This integration may require revising enrollment criteria and offering targeted support to address the specific needs of refugee students, ultimately facilitating their successful participation in the labor market.

Governments and international organizations should look to offer free, accredited TVET programs in refugee camps. These programs will equip refugees with essential skills and knowledge needed to enter the job market, thereby enhancing their employability and promoting economic self-sufficiency. Furthermore, these skills will enable refugees to contribute meaningfully to the economic development and resilience of their communities.

Recommendations to strengthen TVET are strongly supported by recent various reports, including the UNHCR 15 by 30 Roadmap. They emphasize the importance of tailoring vocational training to local labor markets and ensuring certifications are portable, affordable, and recognized (UNHCR 2023a, p. 37; El-Ghali et al. 2019, p. 6). Additionally, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE, n.d.) underscores that TVET, as an integral part of tertiary education, can foster critical thinking, self-reliance, and leadership among displaced youth. By incentivizing completion of secondary education and aligning with local employment needs, TVET not only empowers individuals to pursue viable career paths but also contributes to

the longer-term development of both host communities and refugees themselves (INEE, n.d., para 8-10).

### **Support the Expansion of Blended Learning Programs**

Expanding blended learning programs is vital for improving educational access for refugees, especially those in remote areas and refugee camps where traditional educational resources are often limited. To achieve this, significant investment in both digital and physical infrastructure is necessary. This includes establishing reliable internet connectivity, providing digital devices, and creating conducive learning environments within refugee settings. Blended learning programs combine the flexibility and scalability of online education with the critical support and engagement of in-person instruction (Al-Husban & Shorman, 2020, p. 57). By leveraging technology, these programs can reach a broader audience, offering refugees the opportunity to continue their education despite geographical and logistical barriers. Successful models, such as InZone in Niger and Jordan, highlight the feasibility and effectiveness of these initiatives, demonstrating how they can be adapted and scaled in similar contexts worldwide.

For blended learning programs to be truly impactful, it is essential to ensure that the educational content is culturally and linguistically relevant to the refugee populations they serve. This means incorporating bilingual or multilingual materials that reflect the diverse languages and cultural backgrounds of refugee learners. Moreover, content should be tailored to address the unique challenges and experiences of refugees, including trauma-informed approaches to education and materials that are sensitive to their specific needs. To support the expansion of blended learning programs, partnerships with local governments, international organizations, and the private sector should be fostered. These partnerships can help in resource mobilization, capacity building, and the development of sustainable models for blended learning. Additionally, training educators and facilitators to effectively deliver blended learning programs is crucial,

ensuring that they are equipped to engage students in both online and in-person settings. Finally, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be implemented to assess the effectiveness of blended learning programs, allowing for continuous improvement and adaptation. By supporting and expanding these programs, we can make significant strides in providing equitable, quality education to refugees, ultimately empowering them to build better futures for themselves and their communities.

### **Enhance Access to Online Education**

Enhancing access to online education for refugees requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both technological and infrastructural barriers, particularly in refugee camps and remote areas where connectivity is limited or inconsistent. Many refugees lack access to the necessary digital devices, such as laptops or tablets, and often rely on mobile phones with limited data plans. To bridge this gap, investments should be made in the provision of affordable or donated devices, as well as the development of stable internet infrastructure. One effective strategy is the establishment of connected learning hubs which provide safe, equipped spaces that offer internet access, digital tools, and academic support.

In addition to improving infrastructure, educational providers must account for the realities of intermittent or absent connectivity. Flexible and inclusive learning models are essential. Additionally, to accommodate the challenges posed by unreliable connectivity, flexible learning solutions should be developed. These solutions might include offline access options for MOOCs and other educational resources, ensuring that refugee students can continue their studies even in low-tech environments.

## **Promote Inclusive National Policies to Ensure Equal Access to Higher Education for Refugees**

Governments should adopt and implement inclusive national policies that guarantee refugees have equal access to higher education, comparable to that of nationals. This includes advocating for policies that allow refugee students to pay the same tuition fees as nationals in public universities, a practice already in place in countries like Jordan, and extending this to other institutions and TVET programs. Furthermore, it is essential to ensure that refugees have access to national financial aid systems, including grants, loans, and work-study opportunities. By addressing these financial barriers, we can significantly reduce the economic burden on refugees, thereby promoting greater inclusion and participation in national education systems.

Another potential solution to reduce financial barriers is for universities to offer education at cost, rather than for profit. In many cases, the actual cost of delivering a course is significantly lower than the tuition charged. For instance, an institution may cover its instructional expenses through modest student contributions, but tuition is often set much higher to generate surplus revenue. While other factors such as administrative costs, infrastructure, and technology must also be considered, this example demonstrates that substantially lower tuition is possible if the goal is simply to recover operational costs. Adopting such a model could significantly expand access to higher education for refugees and other marginalized learners.

## **Improve Credential Recognition and Documentation Processes**

Improving credential recognition and documentation processes is vital for enabling refugees to access post-secondary education (Jesuit Refugee Service, 2022, p. 3). Simplified procedures for recognizing refugee credentials and prior learning experiences should be developed, potentially through partnerships between universities and international organizations that facilitate credit transfers and the certification of qualifications. (Anselme & Hands, 2010, p. 95).

Additionally, the implementation of digital documentation systems can streamline the storage and validation of educational records. This could help reduce bureaucratic barriers and make it easier for refugees to pursue higher education without being hindered by a lack of accessible documentation as frequently.

Improving credential recognition and documentation processes is vital for enabling refugees to access post-secondary education. As the World Bank & UNHCR (2021) report notes, integrating refugees into national education systems is essential for ensuring that their educational efforts are formally recognized, which in turn facilitates access to higher education and the labor market. However, many refugees still face significant barriers due to missing or unrecognized documentation. The report highlights that lack of certification is a major obstacle to participation in secondary and tertiary education. Simplified procedures for recognizing prior learning experiences alongside the implementation of digital documentation systems, could streamline the validation of educational records and reduce bureaucratic hurdles (World Bank & UNHCR, 2021, p. 17).

### **Establish Internationally Recognized Accredited Programs for Refugees**

In order to support the educational and professional advancement of displaced populations, the international community should consider investing in the creation of widely recognized accreditation programs tailored specifically to refugees. As many refugees are unable to retrieve academic records or obtain official documentation from their home countries, they face significant challenges in proving prior learning or accessing higher education and employment opportunities in host or third countries.

An internationally accepted accreditation system would provide refugee learners with a reliable and portable proof of education that transcends national borders. This could take the form of standardized certification programs developed through multilateral cooperation among

universities, international organizations, and refugee education networks. These programs should be flexible, and inclusive of prior learning assessments and alternative pathways to demonstrate knowledge and competencies. While challenging, the establishment of specialized international programs, similar to those seen in other areas like the Olympics, where refugees compete under a refugee team, illustrates the possibility of such initiatives. As the global refugee population continues to grow, addressing issues unique to refugees becomes increasingly urgent and cannot be overlooked.

## 9. Conclusion

Various international conventions have stipulated that education is a right for all, including refugees. Given the increasing global refugee population, advocating for the right to higher education becomes pivotal in policy design aimed at safeguarding this right both now and in the future (UNESCO & IESALC, 2023a, p. 5). Accepting refugees can benefit both the receiving country and the host communities. By granting refugees the rights to work, health, and education, they can begin productive lives in their new environments. The quicker they integrate into the labor force, the sooner they can contribute as productive members of society (Bahar, 2018, para. 3).

Breaking down the barriers that prevent many refugees from achieving higher education can benefit not only the individual refugees, but the society of which they are integrating into as well. Effective tertiary education sectors equip countries with well-trained professionals, such as doctors, nurses, teachers, managers, engineers, and technicians. These individuals are essential for delivering quality education, healthcare, and fostering economic growth. Moreover, efficient investment in tertiary education yields numerous benefits, including higher employment and earnings, productivity growth, innovation, enhanced social stability, more effective public sector institutions, increased civic engagement, and improved health outcomes (World Bank, 2021, paras. 4, 15).

While this thesis highlights several pathways to improving access to higher education for refugees, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in the data, particularly for Niger. Due to political instability, security challenges, and infrastructural limitations, comprehensive data on refugee education in Niger remains scarce. Consequently, the conclusions drawn about Niger reflect the best available information but should be viewed as part of an ongoing effort to understand and address the educational needs of refugee populations

in this context. Further research and more robust data collection will be critical in refining these findings and guiding future policy interventions.

This thesis has explored the critical avenues for improving access to higher education for refugees, emphasizing the essential role that education plays in fostering stability, empowerment, and sustainable development amidst displacement. The analysis conducted, with a focus on Jordan and Niger, reveals that while progress has been made, substantial barriers remain that hinder the realization of equitable and sustainable educational opportunities for refugees. Digital technology has the potential to greatly enhance the ability of displaced people to learn, work, communicate, and meet other needs more efficiently. However, it remains an elusive resource that is not accessible to everyone (UNHCR, 2022d, p. 3).

The study highlights several key educational models—scholarships, online education platforms, blended learning programs, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training initiatives—as potential pathways to address these barriers. However, the successful implementation of these solutions requires overcoming significant challenges, including financial constraints, limited access to technology, and the need for localized adaptations to meet the specific needs of refugee populations. Furthermore, policy interventions at both the national and international levels are crucial in creating an enabling environment that supports the academic and professional advancement of refugees.

The comparative analysis of Jordan and Niger underscores the unique challenges faced by each country yet also reveals common issues that are pervasive across different contexts. Financial barriers, documentation hurdles, and the lack of tailored educational pathways are significant obstacles that persist, regardless of the specific national context. Therefore, coordinated efforts that address these issues are necessary to ensure that refugees can access and

succeed in higher education, contributing positively to their host communities and, eventually, to their countries of origin if they choose to return.

The findings from this research reinforce the importance of expanding existing scholarship programs, enhancing access to online and blended learning opportunities, and strengthening TVET initiatives. Additionally, promoting inclusive policies that guarantee refugees equal access to education, comparable to that of nationals, is essential for making meaningful progress toward the global goal of 15% refugee enrollment in higher education by 2030.

Ultimately, this thesis advocates for a holistic and integrated approach to refugee education that considers the diverse needs and experiences of refugee populations. By addressing the multifaceted barriers that refugees face in accessing higher education, stakeholders can contribute to building more inclusive and equitable educational systems that empower refugees to achieve their academic goals and fully participate in the social and economic life of their communities. The ongoing challenges in data collection, particularly in contexts like Niger, highlight the need for continued research and more robust data collection to inform future policy interventions and ensure that the educational needs of refugee populations are adequately addressed.

## **9.1 Findings**

This study has demonstrated that while progress has been made in expanding access to higher education for refugees, substantial barriers continue to hinder the achievement of equitable and sustainable educational opportunities. The comparative analysis of Jordan and Niger reveals that, although each country faces unique challenges, common issues such as financial constraints, limited access to technology, documentation hurdles, and a lack of tailored educational pathways persist across different contexts.

Key educational models, including scholarships, online education platforms, blended learning programs, and TVET initiatives, provide promising avenues for addressing these barriers. However, the implementation of these solutions requires overcoming significant challenges related to funding, infrastructure, and the need for localized adaptations to meet the specific needs of refugee populations.

The study also highlights the critical role of policy interventions in improving access to higher education for refugees. These include increasing funding for scholarships, enhancing online and blended learning programs, strengthening TVET initiatives, and ensuring the recognition of refugee credentials. Additionally, promoting inclusive national policies that guarantee equal access to education for refugees, comparable to that of nationals, is essential for making meaningful progress toward the global goal of 15% refugee enrollment in higher education by 2030.

Ultimately, this research underscores the need for coordinated efforts at the local, national, and international levels to remove barriers and create more inclusive and accessible educational opportunities for refugees. Such efforts are crucial not only for the academic and professional advancement of refugees but also for their broader social and economic integration into host communities.

## **9.2 Further Considerations**

An important consideration in evaluating the long-term benefits of higher education for refugees is their right to work. Tertiary education graduates experience the highest economic returns within the educational system, with an estimated 17% increase in earnings compared to 10% for primary and 7% for secondary education. In Sub-Saharan Africa, these returns are even higher, with an estimated 21% increase in earnings for those with tertiary education (World Bank, 2024, para. 3). However, without the legal right to work, these benefits remain largely

theoretical. Although more than half of the countries where the DAFI scholarship program operates permit refugees to work in principle, significant barriers often persist in practice. These include exclusion from civil service jobs, complex and expensive procedures for acquiring work permits, and inconsistent policies regarding the ability to open bank accounts or register businesses (UNHCR, 2022a, p. 5). Expanding access to higher education must therefore be paired with efforts to protect and promote refugees' right to work. Only then can refugee graduates fully leverage their education to support themselves, contribute to host communities, and participate in global development.

This study presents a comparative analysis of post-secondary educational opportunities for refugees in Jordan and Niger. While it offers insights into existing barriers and potential solutions, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations and the broader political dynamics that may influence its findings and future directions for research. In particular, the political instability in Niger, including the 2023 military coup, introduces significant uncertainty regarding the long-term implementation of educational initiatives. Shifts in government priorities, the withdrawal or redirection of international aid, and regional security concerns may all hinder efforts to expand refugee access to higher education. The situation remains fluid, and the long-term impacts of the coup on education systems are not yet fully understood. As such, any policy recommendations made in this study for Niger must be seen as contingent on future developments in governance and stability. Consequently, the data landscape in Niger is limited due to ongoing conflict and infrastructural constraints, making it difficult to capture a full picture of refugee education outcomes. This underscores the need for more context-specific, longitudinal research that can assess how political transitions and regional conflict dynamics directly influence access to and the quality of higher education for refugees.

Another key consideration for future research and program development is the persistent gender gap in refugee access to higher education. Despite global efforts, such as UNHCR's push for gender parity within the DAFI scholarship program, female refugees remain significantly underrepresented in tertiary education (UNHCR, 2022a, p. 5). Structural, cultural, and economic barriers disproportionately impact women and girls (Berg, 2023, p. 14). These include early and forced marriage, domestic responsibilities, gender-based violence, limited access to safe transportation, and restrictive social norms that discourage female participation in public life (Jesuit Refugee Service, 2022, p. 3). The consequences of these disparities are far-reaching. When women are excluded from education, entire communities miss out on the potential social and economic contributions they can offer. Future research could examine the specific barriers refugee women face and assess the effectiveness of gender-sensitive strategies. Addressing these disparities is essential not only for advancing gender equality but also for realizing the full transformative potential of higher education in refugee settings.

Finally, future research should explore how political crises shape the educational environment in refugee-hosting states, particularly in fragile contexts like Niger. Events such as armed conflict, regime changes, or military coups can disrupt national education systems, delay reforms, and lead to the withdrawal or redirection of international aid, all of which can jeopardize access to higher education for refugees. These disruptions often exacerbate existing challenges such as poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, and underfunded institutions, while also triggering changes in refugee policy that may limit access to public education services. Refugees may face renewed restrictions on mobility, legal status, or work rights, all of which directly impact their ability to enroll in and complete tertiary education. Understanding how different forms of political instability affect education systems and identifying strategies that

promote institutional resilience will be essential for designing adaptable and sustainable education initiatives in crisis-prone settings.

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