

## Access to Tertiary Education Among Palestinian, Iraqi, and Syrian Refugees in Jordan

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Four million Syrians have fled their country, nearly nine million are internally displaced within Syria, and nearly three million Syrian children have been out of school since the Arab Spring movements started in 2011 (UNHCR 2013; UNHCR 2016). For Jordan, one of the first receiving countries of Syrian refugees, waves of inbound refugees are not a new phenomenon. From 1948 onward, displaced Palestinians took up residence in Jordan, and U.S. military actions in Iraq led many Iraqis to flee to Jordan over the past three decades. Under intense population pressures, these three groups of refugees must coexist with one another and with Jordanian citizens. Taking the Palestinian case as a prime example, refugees from neighboring countries are often in Jordan for a long stay. When residing in Jordan, how much access do Arabic-speaking Palestinian, Iraqi, and Syrian refugees have for enrollment in Jordanian tertiary education in order to improve professional opportunities and quality of life?

A body of literature exists on individual refugee populations in Jordan and each group's access to all levels of education (Abu Amer 2016; Abu Lughod 1973; Dhingra 2016; Human Rights Watch 2016; and Libal and Harding 2011). However, a comparative analysis of access to higher education among these different populations has not been conducted. While a number of smaller refugee populations exist in Jordan, such as Circassians and Chechens, this comparison focuses on largest Arabic-speaking refugee populations. Arabic-speaking refugees do not face linguistic difficulty integrating into Arabic language dominated Jordanian higher education, so this exploration exposes Jordanian policies that factor into restricted access. While the country has tried to incorporate refugees into educational systems, there are more refugees than there are spaces for integration in Jordan, and Jordanian

identity politics encourage exclusionary policies to push for short-term refugee stays in the country (Culbertson and Constant 2015; Yahya 2015).

Access to tertiary education in this context is defined as the ability for populations to enroll. There are many factors which tie into the ability to enroll in higher education, including but not limited to geographical proximity to educational opportunities, the cost of tertiary education and funding available to those unable to afford enrollment, and discrimination based on language, sex, or race/ethnicity (Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley 2010). The methodology of this comparative study includes 1) a thorough review of existing educational access literature on each refugee population, 2) a textual analysis of Jordanian university websites regarding access and student services for refugees, and 3) an examination of Jordanian education policy in the way of international students and refugees.

Access to education is a lens to view the achievements of internationalization initiatives and quality of education systems worldwide. Exclusion from educational opportunities ties into larger societal social inequalities, and especially when governmental policies restrict access for certain groups of people, this goes against the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights (Altbach et al. 2010). As outlined by the Brookings Institution about Syrian refugees, lack of educational access may affect the human capital development of an entire generation of displaced people (Steer, Ghanem, and Jalbout 2014). It is necessary to comparatively assess Jordanian higher education policies relating to access of the country's Arabic-speaking refugee populations. Problem-solving to increase access as a result of this comparison can help to reduce the long-term human capital educational deficit of refugees. Although research is ongoing, an

early analysis suggests that only descendants of Jordan's earliest arriving Palestinian refugees with Jordanian citizenship have greater tertiary educational access. Palestinians who had Jordanian citizenship revoked after Jordan's 1988 ceding control of the West Bank, Iraqis, and Syrians are often not able to enroll due to difficult-to-obtain work and residency paperwork and the requirement to pay higher international tuition and student fees (ARDD-Legal Aid, 2015; Human Rights Watch 2016; and Libal and Harding, 2011). By exposing common policy issues that affect tertiary education access, hopefully enrollment roadblocks for Arabic-speaking refugee populations in Jordan can be addressed.

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