Mind the gap: asylum seeker and refugee access to post-compulsory education

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Abstract

Asylum seekers' and refugees' inclusion in post-compulsory education (PCE) is limited, as well as neglected in research. This chapter applies a critical analysis, drawing on anthropological conceptions of the refugee as outside 'the national order of things' (Malkki 1995:495) and Ahmed's work on diversity in institutional life to argue that while there are commitments to inclusion in PCE, educational systems that operate within existing immigration regimes will struggle to advance this agenda. Focusing on providing more provision, or on 'bridging gaps' for refugees are insufficient solutions without reflection on how education systems operate as bordering practices (Gerrard and Sriprakash 2019). The chapter explores the variety of ways – that often go unremarked – through which legal status of asylum seekers and refugees retains significance for their access and experience to PCE. It argues that truly 'minding the gap' requires a critical scholarship in education and migration that makes visible the unspoken (and therefore often complicitly accepted) issues of legal status and bordering operating within PCE domains. This invites reflection on the multiple exclusions experienced within national education systems and a need to confront the limited opportunities refugees and asylum seekers face within PCE and beyond it.

Introduction and conceptual framework

There is an urgent need to address asylum seeker and refugees' limited access to post-compulsory education (PCE). At a time when the number of refugees in the world – 26.6 million – is the highest in recorded history (UNHCR 2022) only 3% have access to higher education, compared to 37% of non-refugee students in the world's population (UNHCR 2019). Those figures indicate a significant

waste of talent globally, bringing significant psychosocial and material costs for refugees, while withholding the benefits that tertiary education could play in aiding with post-conflict recovery (Milton 2018).

The importance of refugee education is increasingly recognised in the global policy and legislative context. The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) affirmed the right of all children, regardless of immigration status, to free and compulsory primary education, to available and accessible secondary education, and to higher education on the basis of capacity (United Nations, 1989, Article 28). Education is also central in the United Nation's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), where in SDG 4 there is an aim for 'inclusive and equitable quality education' and the promotion of 'lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UN 2015). The Global Compact in Refugees (GCR, 2018) encourages more collective responsibility internationally for refugees and includes aspirations for better access to education for refugees. To date however, policy and law focus mostly on refugee *children's* inclusion in primary and secondary school, especially since in tertiary levels, refugee participation is low, while few countries provide pathways to higher education for refugees (Arar 2021). Nevertheless, a new UNHCR tertiary education strategy of refugee inclusion (UNHCR 2019) aims by 2030 'to enrol 15% of college-eligible refugees in tertiary, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) or connected education programmes in host and third countries, and to achieve equitable gender representation across tertiary enrolments' (UNHCR 2019:7). Within this strategy, increased enrolment is to be met by more technical and vocational training and the use of tertiary education scholarships in the country of asylum or home country (ibid.).

The extent to which the inclusion implied within policy initiatives is merely rhetorical or translates into practice is less clear. This chapter utilises a critical analysis to consider refugee inclusion in PCE, informed by social anthropological and sociological theorising that identifies the figure of the 'refugee' as one that is liminal and often kept apart from mainstream privilege. Historically, as anthropologist Malkki (1995: 498) identifies, the refugee has been constituted as a domain of knowledge, emerging as 'a knowable, nameable figure' in post-World War II Europe, when standardized techniques for managing displacement were developed. This included the creation of spatially isolating refugee settlements, camps, administration and through the domain of international law and its legal apparatus. Within academia, a sedentarist norm has also prevailed where displacement has often too been constructed as 'an anomaly in the life of an otherwise "whole," stable, sedentary society' (ibid: 508). This functionalist and essentialist model renders the State as the natural and necessary order of things, with refugees an exception to that order.

Such conceptual thinking is helpful when extended to educational systems in analyses of refugee inclusion because it necessitates recognition of the wider contexts in which refugees are positioned and inclusion is expected to occur. This acknowledgement invites radical reconsideration of how educational logics are based on similar taken for granted ideas of the nation, as well as being founded on systems of colonialism and empire, which have been vital in shaping the continued exclusions of the present (Bhambra and Holmwood 2021). In countries in the Global South, where most refugee reception occurs, those exclusions endure through limited capacity, as well as politically unfavourable environments for inclusion to occur (Pherali and Abu Moghli 2021). In the Global North too, increasingly educational institutions are 'increasingly being drawn into […] highly ideological and politicised spaces of immigration' (Morrice 2019. 21). Thus, while there are indications of inclusion in PCE systems, especially seen in practical action to develop more provision and underpinned by research which draws attention to 'gaps' that need bridging, this chapter contends that these do not significantly challenge the broader picture of exclusion facing refugees, and especially those still seeking asylum. Drawing especially on Ahmed's (2012) incisive deconstruction of 'inclusionary' initiatives at university, the chapter argues further that some of the concessions to inclusion, such as scholarships, and the partial and lesser inclusion they promote, even enables scholars to 'look over' exclusions (ibid p.181) founded on immigration regimes and associated modalities of regulation.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first part reviews the current state of the field in policy and research. It explores the limited research on migrants' access to education at the post-compulsory level, as well as the increasing international recognition that more provision of PCE is needed. The next section considers refugee students' experiences in further and higher education (FE and HE) and explores the multiple barriers they face, including structural, financial, linguistic and gendered cultural barriers, as well as psychosocial issues of adjustment and misrecognition. The third part of the chapter suggests however that conceptualising the issue in these terms – using barriers to education – though a useful metaphorical shorthand, can also obfuscate by implying that 'bridging gaps' is a solution, maintaining an image that existing education systems *a priori* are functional systems to which refugees can be 'slotted into'. The chapter suggests that such a reading needs to be augmented rather with more critical recognition of how challenges of refugee participation are not solely about meeting the 'needs and deficits' of refugees (ibid.: 401) but are embedded in much less visible, but no less powerful, structural issues that arise from 'the failure of education systems to effectively manage migrancy' (ibid.: 401).

The final part of the chapter therefore draws attention to how asylum seekers and refugees' legal status is significant in institutions, and how access is governed by nationally oriented logics around

immigration. It examines the financial exclusion of refugees, whereby concessions are offered only to who are deemed most worthy of investment (cf. Devine 2013) and examines the challenging learning conditions for those without legal status. Within educational research and policy, the neglect of attention to this issue, indicates that legal status operates as something of an unspoken 'elephant in the room', where despite its profound effects on participation, it is often left little considered. The chapter concludes by arguing that a broader reflection on how tertiary education institutions operate often as agnostic to, but ultimately often complicit with, bordering practices of national policy regimes is required. While education spaces can be undoubtedly vital sites of 'hope, aspiration and agency' (Gerrard and Sriprakash 2019:1), there also needs to be explicit reflection and questions raised about the genuine inclusivity of education if individuals moving out of conflict situations are to achieve more equitable access – and ultimately more socially just outcomes.

Forced migration and post compulsory education: research and policy overview

Currently, there is only limited research on forced migrants' access to education at the post-compulsory level and most attention is paid to compulsory schooling (Gerrard 2017; Mangan and Winter 2017; Milton 2018; Pinson and Arnot 2020, Arar 2021). As Stevenson and Baker (2018: 51) argue in relation to higher education, refugees' experiences are largely 'under researched and under-theorised' (see also Milton 2018; Mangan and Winter 2017). Education research on mobility has a wider focus on 'global citizenship education' and themes of global mobility, transnationality and globalisation, or international student mobility (Gerrard 2017) while research on refugee education is predominantly based on schools (Morrice et al. 2020; Pinson and Arnot 2020). Morrice (2019) argues too that educational research also often applies an overly simplistic distinction between migrant and non-migrant (Morrice 2019) which overlooks the heterogeneity in legal status, and the fact that each category of migrant brings with it a range of rights, protections, and freedoms, including to education (Pinson and Arnot 2020; Oliver 2020).

Prioritising forced migrants' access to PCE is important for policy, practice, and research as it can yield significant benefits for individuals and society. Tertiary education can make important contributions to post-conflict recovery (Milton 2018) by improving capacity for national reconstruction and rebuilding in post-conflict situations, raising future leaders and bringing significant wider societal benefits (Anselme and Hands 2010; Dryden-Peterson 2011). Within settlement countries, education is a means of 'integrating' newcomers in new surroundings (Ager and Strang 2008). It can potentially aid with refugees' arrested 'integration' within labour markets, whereby even many years after their arrival, refugees still experience a 'refugee gap' where their outcomes in the labour market are worse than those of comparable migrants (Connor 2010 and

Fasani et al. 2017). Access to PCE can also help individuals in rebuilding professional identities (see Morrice 2013 on HE in the UK). There is growing demand too from refugee youth since many refugees displaced from middle-income countries, such as Syria, are already university-eligible (Pherali and Abu Mogli 2021). Especially in contexts of protracted displacement, they desire furthering their educational trajectories, and seek opportunities for further mobility emerging from opportunities in the international knowledge economy (ibid. and Dryden-Peterson 2019). For individuals, education provides a vital source of stability, hope and motivation (Gerrard and Sriprakash 2019; Dryden-Peterson 2011) while participation can also operate as a powerful 'enabling right' whereby it helps individuals realise other rights (Morrice et al. 2020).

While the legal and human right to education is upheld in the UN instruments, on the other hand, there is only very limited implementation of this right by refugee-hosting countries (Anselme and Hands 2010; Arar 2021). This is especially the case in the sphere of PCE, reflecting the more limited participation of students at this educational phase in refugee receiving countries, where until comparatively recently, advocacy has been directed at securing access for children rather than youth or adults (Morrice et al. 2020). Refugee participation in education notably decreases at each stage of education: 61% of refugees attend primary school but this drops to 23% by secondary school (UNHCR 2018) and diminishes even further still when it comes to tertiary education (Dryden-Peterson 2010). Currently, few countries provide pathways to higher education for refugees (Arar 2021) especially due to neighbouring host countries having overstretched educational systems (Dryden-Peterson et al. 2019) as well as politically unfavourable environments for inclusion to occur (Pherali and Abu Moghli 2021). Lower participation at the post-compulsory stage can also be explained by resistance from donors and agencies towards investing in further and higher education on the basis too that higher education is perceived as something of a '"luxury" for an elite few' (Dryden-Peterson 2011:58).

However, as Milton (2018:2) argues, when considering the value for post-conflict recovery, 'the higher education sector is due a serious reappraisal', with HE providing a potential 'critical space' in refugee settings (Pherali and Abu Moghli 2021). Realisation of the lost potential that results from limited provision has led to the new UNHCR tertiary education strategy aiming to enrol 15% of college-eligible refugees by 2030 (UNHCR 2019). This corresponds with a broader emphasis in programming for forced displacement on more developmental opportunities that focus on developing 'self-reliance' (Skran and Easton-Calabria 2020) rather than providing humanitarian aid (Arar 2021). It aims to improve participation through increased enrolment in HE and provide more technical and vocational training to enhance professional development, upskilling, and reskilling. There is also an emphasis on connected learning in collaboration with external HEIs (e.g.

through MOOCs and knowledge exchange programmes) and the development of complementary education pathways to resettlement (ibid.)

A further strand of the UNHCR strategy is the use of tertiary education scholarships (such as the UNHCR DAFI Scheme (*Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative*) which supports students up to the age of 28 to pursue undergraduate degrees in their country of asylum or home country (Dryden-Peterson 2010). These complement various provisions adopted at regional, national, and local levels, as well as by HEIs themselves to encourage participation. Murray (2019) charts the growth of 'sanctuary scholarships' for HE attendance in the UK, for example, particularly in the wake of the 2015-2016 increase in asylum applications within Europe. These are bursaries offered by universities to cover costs of tuition fees and sometimes living costs for migrants without settled status, who would otherwise face extortionate costs of overseas student fees. Other provisions have been offered to support postdoctoral fellowships at participating universities, such as through the UK's *Council for At-Risk Academics* (CARA) which have received further investment in 2022 in response to the conflict in Ukraine. Other similar programmes include *Scholars at Risk* (SAR) in the US, and in Germany, the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation and the Philip Schwartz initiative.

Refugee student experiences: problems and possibilities

While expanding opportunities is one part of the solution, research on experiences of students from refugee backgrounds highlights challenges of refugee retention and progression, located in numerous 'barriers' to their integration or inclusion (Stevenson and Baker 2018). The UNHCR 2030 strategy identifies first, barriers in the pipeline, where students' limited access to schooling even at secondary school level within many refugee-receiving countries is still relatively low, and this therefore affects the eligibility of refugee secondary school graduates to progress, especially among girls (UNHCR 2019). Where a student is eligible, they still may not possess academic certification or be able to prove past achievements in countries of settlement and experience little or no recognition of their prior learning (Morrice 2011). This especially affects migrants from low-income countries where there is institutionalised suspicion of overseas qualifications (ibid.) Further barriers are seen in the living and tuition costs associated with attendance (Pherali and Abu Moghli 2021). Particularly within refugee receiving countries in the Global South, potential participants are hindered from attending education at any level through risks of bullying and violence, and younger girls, from some cultural backgrounds, inhibited through pressures towards early marriage (Majthoub 2021).

Even when access is achieved, students with a refugee background may arrive at FE and HE institutions affected negatively by their experiences of forced migration. Morrice et al's (2020) analysis of the trajectories of young, resettled refugees through PCE in the UK conclude that 'many

of the experiences and barriers to education are not dissimilar in kind to those facing refugee youth in countries of first asylum' (p388). Refugee students face conflict as they try to reconcile their past experiences with current realities and adjust to shifts in status and role (Morrice 2013). Transitions to university are complex for such students, especially as they arrive with interrupted educational trajectories, having experienced instability and trauma (Baker and Irwin 2021). Students from refugee backgrounds face being 'stuck': subject to assumptions about what they bring to higher education, as well as unrealistic expectations of their capacity to help themselves (ibid.:76). They may also be inhibited by limited experience of formal learning and national higher education systems (Stevenson and Willott 2007). Scholars have argued that support systems within educational institutions fail to recognise that students with refugee backgrounds have specific needs and require specialist support to thrive (Anselme and Hands 2010; Baker and Irwin 2021).

Participation in PCE can also come at high personal costs for students from refugee background. They may experience resistance from family members (Stevenson and Willott 2007) and face challenges through their culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds (Baker and Irwin 2021) which present difficulties in accessing the curriculum in the language of instruction. In common with other non-traditional participants in HE, they may also experience feelings of lack of belonging, alienation and cultural mismatch, or race-based exclusions (Harris, Spark, Ngum Chi Watts 2015) especially when confronted with the dominant middle-class environment of higher education (Stevenson and Baker 2018). Mangan and Winter (2017:486) argue that 'despite education's potential for being an egalitarian, empowering and validating environment', the experiences documented in the research literature are conceptualised as 'relationally in-egalitarian' and an instance of 'misrecognition' of a group of students'. As such, students from refugee backgrounds may face invalidation of their life stories and their intelligence, as well as dismissal and negative judgement in higher education spaces (ibid.)

Harris, Spark, Ngum Chi Watts (2015) document how social exclusion is problematic for some groups such as diasporic African students, but especially for women due to cultural challenges around gender role expectations and discrimination, which lead to feelings of a lack of belonging and challenges for their identities. In some circumstances, they argue, enrolment cannot always be understood therefore as evidence of success, given the high personal costs associated for some female students, which 'can constitute a threat to gender roles within their families and communities of origin' (ibid.: 375). The authors argue that HEIs show a lack of understanding of such needs affecting students from refugee backgrounds, and provide very limited targeted and responsive support, including as these students make transitions beyond the institutions.

From barriers to borders

The previous section identifies that more provision of PCE is required, but also how multiple barriers interfere with the inclusion of students in those environments. While the language of 'gaps' and 'barriers' common within this field of study is helpful as a metaphorical shorthand, there is a danger that such language can also be reductionist in addressing the issues at stake. There is an assumption inherent that these barriers can be dismantled practically, or gaps lessened, usually through *more* provision and *more* targeted support. However, this neglects the range of wider and unspoken, implicit issues of how education systems operate complicitly within national bordering policies. The language of barriers and gaps as inhibiting access must be therefore complemented with an understanding that 'place[s] bordering processes front and centre' (Favell 2019) by considering how education systems operate as bordering practices (Gerrard and Sriprakash 2019). Reframing understanding in this way recognises that it is not just that there are 'gaps' or things 'missing' from existing provision, but rather that challenges are embedded in PCE's institutional logics independently of the quantity, quality and content of provision. Drawing attention to these issues, including multiple practices of structural exclusion based on legal immigration status, exemplifies how, as Morrice (2019:23), argues that through being:

> drawn into [...] highly ideological and politicised spaces of immigration control, integration and securitisation [...] education is being enlisted to do the work of maintaining and strengthening abyssal lines based on colonial models of exclusion and control.

Such co-opting of education may appear at odds with the ways in which PCE systems see themselves as liberal, democratic institutions. Yet as Ahmed (2012: 74) explores, institutions might ostensibly commit to ideas of inclusion and diversity and may be experienced by some as 'open, committed and diverse'. There not only remains blockages and restrictions within institutional worlds however, but inherent racism is obscured exactly via that very institutionalization of diversity. Concessions made to inclusion therefore encourage us to 'look over' (Ahmed 2012:181) those restrictions, yet ironically their very existence becomes the mechanism through which restrictions and blockages are reproduced. Extending Ahmed's examination to the inclusion of forced migrants within PCE requires a questioning of the inclusivity of education as well as the need for a critical focus in research, particularly by drawingattention to how bordering practices operate in PCE. As Ahmed (2012: 186-187) argues:

> Things might appear fluid if you are going the way things are flowing. When you are not going that way, you experience a flow as solidity, as what you come up against. In turn, those who are not going the way things are flowing are experienced as obstructing the flow.

We might need to be the cause of obstruction. We might need to get in the way if we are to get anywhere. We might need to become the blockage points by pointing out the blockage points.

Legal rights to education

First, in terms of values and ideals, while education is a recognised international human right, offering a 'global promise' (Dryden-Peterson 2016:473) this requires commitment at the national level that is mainly lacking, as 'refugees are unable to realize many of the individual legal rights that characterize modern nation-states' (ibid.:474). This is particularly the case in many receiving countries such as Thailand, Lebanon, and Malaysia, which are not signatories of the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees and its 1967 protocol. In countries already struggling with provision for their own citizens, there is little commitment to the provision of education for non-nationals, especially in situations of protracted displacement where refugees are considered 'guests' (Majthoub 2021). Refugee communities themselves must weigh up the high opportunity costs of attending education rather than gaining employment, where education may be judged as irrelevant in contexts where there are legal restrictions on employment open to non-nationals. For example, in Lebanon, non-nationals cannot be employed in skilled occupations such as medicine, teaching and engineering (Pherali and Abu Moghli 2021). Similarly, Dryden-Peterson (2016) notes restrictions on the rights of non-nationals in Uganda, citing the example of a Congolese national who despite her education, was unable to access a job in nursing, nor vote, or own property. In such contexts, higher education can serve as 'a place of false hope and frustration' (Pherali and Abu Moghli 2021:2163) where access alone does not necessarily lead to better life outcomes.

Evidence also suggests the entitlement to education as a universal human right has a limited reach when it comes to the inclusion of forced migrants in costly PCE provision in settlement countries. Many states prioritise education only for immigrant and refugee *children and youth*, mirroring Western societal values which privilege childhood as a period of vulnerability and protection (Devine 2013). Even for younger migrants, Devine shows how societal values bleed into 'competitively structured' education systems, as they promote the investment of migrant children in terms of neoliberal ideals, valuing those who can 'enrich' educational systems and have been shown to 'contribute to the talent pool through their performance in school' (2013:282). Oliver, Dekker and Geuijen (2022 forthcoming) also note the 'youth gaze' within state asylum seeker and refugee reception and integration programmes. Such research highlights the implicit focus on the needs of the younger, already more educated participants, and the lesser attention paid to the needs of those outside the core, younger group of refugees. Exclusion is enacted too in the harsh withdrawal of

rights of young people without settled status to attend universities at the point of legal adulthood. In many countries, such as the UK, institutional frameworks which offer legal protections to children are removed at the age of 18, leaving unaccompanied asylum seekers vulnerable to detention and forced removal as they 'age out' of the asylum process (Allsopp, Chase and Mitchell 2015; Morrice et al. 2020). As a result, many asylum seeker students find themselves no longer eligible for funding remissions or financial support for further and higher education, as they are classified as 'international' students rather than 'home' students, and thus subject to fees that are much higher than domestic students (Oliver and Hughes 2018).

Solutions in the form of scholarships are valuable, but limited in effect, especially as demand outstrips provision enormously: there is only a small number of scholarships available, while they are not available in all countries (Dryden-Peterson 2010). There is also a further consequence that tertiary education is made only available to those refugees considered most 'deserving' (Dryden-Peterson 2010) corresponding with Devine's (2013) argument in relation to migrant children, that only those 'worthy' according to a neo-liberal ideal and considered as bringing added value to societies will be supported. Selective scholarships, coupled with regular high admissions tariffs in higher education, can therefore mean in practice that only elite members of refugee communities are able to access provision (Pherali and Abu Moghli 2021). This is because even when tuition fees are covered, some are unable to afford the additional associated costs of travel and subsistence; others will be disadvantaged by lack of access to information about such opportunities in the first place (ibid.).

Murray (2019) suggests further that British universities see adopting sanctuary scholarships as a means of developing their reputations as 'compassionate' and concerned for diversity and inclusion (see Ahmed 2012). However, those universities also reported challenges of low take up, and problems from the supply side emerging from lack of knowledge and understanding about how to apply immigration status in decision-making, as well as concerns about the quality of applicants (especially for high status universities). Universities also expressed concern about their relationship with government agencies (in this case the UK Home Office) especially through making 'politically bold' statements in association with the sanctuary movement (Murray 2019: 6). This reticence might be explained by the recent onus facing universities to comply with immigration agencies through regulating student attendance, providing further evidence of how 'education is becoming yoked to different political and social agendas' (Morrice 2019:20). It may also give insight into why between 2015/16 and 2018/19 over 100 of the new scholarships offered by UK HEIs were only open to those who had refugee legal status, rather than offering scholarships to a wider group of forced migrants

(Murray 2019: 5). In other words, scholarships offering financial support were granted to those who would *already* be eligible for student support (ibid.).

Conditions of learning in post-compulsory education for those without legal status

A second set of examples of the bordering practices inherent in educational systems centres on how legal status affects the conditions in which students experience education and learning when they have not yet received resolution on asylum applications. Farrell, Brunton, Costello, Delaney, Brown, and Foley (2020) report on the experience of asylum seeker recipients of HE scholarships in Ireland, who would otherwise experience lack of access to state financial support for further and higher education. Recipients of scholarships, despite being rare exceptions and overcoming the access barrier, reported feeling a wide disjuncture between their 'study world', where they feel they belong, and the 'asylum world' where they live, characterised by harsh conditions in direct provision hostels. Students are disadvantaged in their educational progress through a lack of study space, privacy and internet access and find it difficult to bridge this world with the world of study in HEIs. On a more positive note, and in contrast to other studies, these students felt a sense of belonging through seeing a 'way out' of this system and were hopeful of opportunities to reciprocate and give something back.

Farrell et al.'s (2020) research draws attention to the incompatibility of conditions of asylum, when individuals are awaiting a decision, with experiences of studying, which have received scant attention in existing research. Physical and material conditions of asylum accommodation within European countries have been characterised by low standards. There are also financial implications and psychological effects of asylum that affect educational engagement. Mbembe's (2003:39-40) work on 'necropolitics' demonstrates how conditions of asylum-seeking are akin to 'death-worlds,' or 'new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead'. Mayblin, Wake and Kazemi (2019) extend this to show how asylum seekers experience a 'slow violence' through the waiting period of an asylum claim, where life characterised by poor housing and very low levels of financial support, aggravated by dispersal schemes in European countries which locate asylum seekers in areas of high deprivation and low prospects for employment (Fasani, Frattini and Minale 2017). Despite education being a productive activity for asylum seekers, they can be negatively affected by disruptive processes of regular movement between asylum accommodation and issues such as negotiating study space in shared rooms with strangers, as noted by Oliver, Dekker and Geuijen (2019) in the Netherlands. Such experiences occur within a wider context of a hostile public climate towards immigration or resentment from already vulnerable host communities in neighbouring countries (Majthoub 2021).

Despite the harsh conditions of 'the asylum world' (Farrell et al. 2020) individuals without resolution of their status often desire learning and perceive education as a vital means of improving prospects (see Oliver et al 2019), yet their status affects the provision they access. Though a limited few may access scholarships, it is more common for asylum seekers to be channelled into specific local and specialist educational provision, where educational courses may have a focus on language or civic education to shape them into 'full' citizens (Feje 2019). Even countries like Sweden that have historically provided generous access to adult education have recently implemented special initiatives designed for asylum seekers, in the wake of pressures placed put on state-funded institutions by recent migration flows (ibid.). This constrains asylum seekers in their access to programmes, with most only able to engage in non-accredited programmes. Yet as Fejes (2019) shows, while provision of popular education is provided free to participants in Sweden, the design, content, and pedagogy remains the remit of providing institutions and is not subject to the same aims and standards governing other forms of adult education. Pherali and Abu Moghli (2021) note a similar point in relation to provision of HE through digital platforms, where subcontracting to external service-providers raises questions about the sustainability, accountability, and quality of provision. Moreover, the realisation for participants that their courses are non-accredited and therefore of lower value for future prospects can lead to disappointment. As Oliver, Dekker and Geuijen (2019) note with respect to a non-accredited initiative run by reputable providers in Utrecht, some participants misunderstood the value of their certificates of participation, believing them initially to be a more formally recognised qualification.

Furthermore, when engaging with voluntary provision by NGOs, adult education providers or other options provided by universities, asylum seeker participants may be limited by logistical issues and financial difficulties, such as meeting travel expenses of travelling to college on very limited funds. They are reliant on welfare provisions which are intended to meet only basic needs[1]. There are limited opportunities to contribute to programmes themselves (Oliver, Dekker and Geuijen 2019) especially as non-Western forms of knowledge, qualifications and experiences are devalued, in a process that Morrice (2019:30) refers to as 'epistemicide'. Gendered aspects affect participation too, especially as more informal provision is not always accompanied by childcare services.

Finally, even when educational opportunities are provided at the point of arrival for asylum seekers, legal status still plays a role in shaping the subject choices, the classroom learning experience and more. This is demonstrated by Oliver, Dekker and Geuijen's (2019) research within the Utrecht Refugee Launchpad, an initiative which offered classes and a coaching project to residents of both

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[1] For instance, in the UK, the current rate of support is £40.85 per person per week.

an asylum seeker centre and its environs. It was governed by an ethos that participants' legal status was not relevant, and the same education would be provided to all. However, status remained tacitly relevant, first by affecting the choice of subject taught, whereby English was provided rather than Dutch. This adhered to government restrictions that limited Dutch teaching to only those with refugee status, to discourage settlement for those whose claims were rejected and whose futures would be expected elsewhere. Delivering a free programme 'for all' meant that all participants, whatever their prior level of education and language competency were, also by necessity, placed in the same classes. As a result, some highly educated participants, often graduates already, found classes slow paced and basic, while others had to drop out as they did not understand the content. Finally, participants were encouraged to develop business plans as part of the entrepreneurship programme, but vital next steps such as securing bank loans or registering businesses with the Chamber of Commerce were only open to refugees with status and citizens, thwarting the plans of those without it.

Invisibility of the refugee legal status in post-compulsory education

The examples thus far draw attention to the 'invisibility yet ultimate visibility' of legal status in PCE. However, even individuals who *do* possess the legal status of a refugee can find themselves vulnerable due to the enduring associated effects of legal status, while accessing and experiencing PCE.

First, even where refugees possess a legal right to education, exercising them in practice is another matter (McIntyre, Neuhaus and Blennow 2020) and having a refugee status does not automatically lead to students securing the educational provision to which they are entitled. Morrice et al. (2020) found that younger refugees can wait a long time to access school (or can be denied access) which impacts on their later options in PCE. Oliver (2020) also identifies how access can be denied as a result of the complexity of immigration-related bureaucracy, and demonstrates that admissions staff in PCE (for instance, FE colleges) face interpreting complex regulations for funding associated with immigrants' different legal statuses. According to some commentators in the research, FE admissions staff were not always confident in their interpretation of funding eligibility rules, but since they are audited on decisions, they erred on the side of caution by refusing students admittance rather risk making the wrong decision (ibid.). A similar theme is emphasised in Murray's (2019) investigation into sanctuary scholarships, where seventeen universities cited a lack of knowledge and understanding around the application of immigration status to their decision-making. In such a scenario, universities may then be tempted to opt for the 'safer' option of offering

scholarships to those refugees already clearly eligible for financial support rather than to asylum seekers.

Moreover, once students from forced migration backgrounds are granted refugee status and associated rights to education and funding support, they can become invisible when accessing provision. With reference to monitoring categories, those students simply become categorised as 'home' students for fee status purposes, and part of the regular domestic student cohort (Stevenson and Baker 2018). As a result, there is little known about the specific kinds of supports that refugee students need as they move through and beyond their studies and into employment and/or further study, as noted earlier. Willott and Stevenson (2013) show that while such students experienced a high desire to find meaningful work in order to support their families and contribute to the country that had given them refuge, they also struggled to move into employment. Participants experienced little understanding of work cultures, or job application processes, including the importance of seeking feedback on applications for example.

Conclusion

The UNHCR strategy has rightly drawn attention to the extensive waste of forced migrants' talent and opportunity through limited tertiary provision and sets out an urgent and important strategy to increase participation. This chapter has focused on the challenges facing forced migrants as they access and move through PCE systems. While not diminishing the importance of the barriers faced, it also urges a reckoning with existing models that view this only in terms of impediments to education. Solutions need not only dismantle barriers and bridge gaps.

The chapter instead suggests that truly 'minding the gap' requires a more critical scholarship in education and migration that makes visible the unspoken (therefore often complicitly accepted) issue of legal status operating within domains of PCE that ultimately maintains a notion of the refugee as 'outside the national order of things' (Malkki 1995: 495). It requires reflection on how scholarship and advocacy focusses on some subjects at the expense of others: on younger students in compulsory education, and a homogenised understanding of migrants, based on a distinction between migrant and non-migrant in educational studies. This diminishes the importance of the different range of rights, protections and freedoms that legal status brings (Morrice 2019; Oliver 2020; Pinson and Arnot 2020). Scholarship requires critical attention exploring how national immigration policy frameworks affect the values of PCE systems and shape access and experiences. It requires consideration of how even ostensibly 'inclusive' institutions operate under the auspices of nation-states often hostile to refugees and which continue to make immigration status count. Doing so might invite reflection within PCE systems about their ethical stance on this issue and how they

could devise innovations that might recentre the value of education for forced migrants, address the multiple exclusions within national education systems, and confront the limited opportunities facing refugees in their post-education futures (Dryden-Peterson 2019). As scholars of migration, one cannot be serious about refugee education without addressing these glaring issues of refugeeness itself.

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