

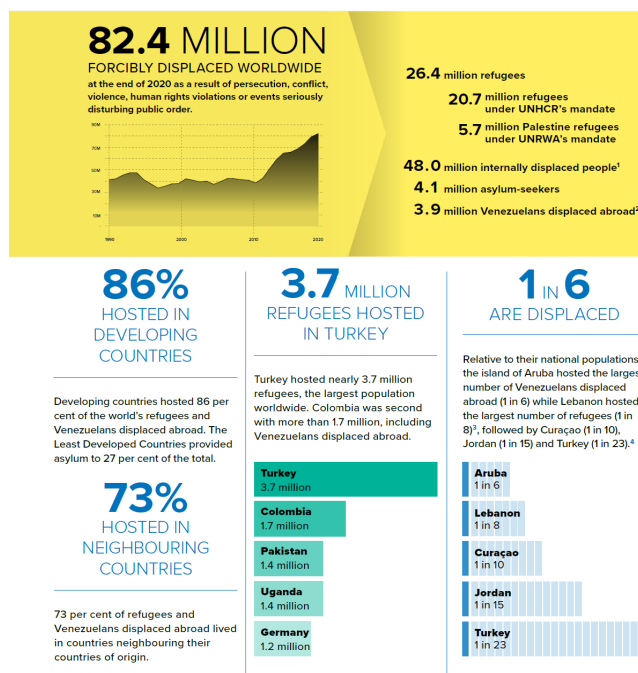
“Introduction through Optimistic Numbers: SDG 4, 2030, and The Other 5%”

Johanna Fassl
Franklin University Switzerland

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I started to write this introduction in mid-August of 2021 and made a pretty good start when the images of Afghans clinging to an US Force airplane in a disparate attempt to flee the Taliban rule brought my writing to a halt. The graphic images visualized the failure of Euro-American strategic thinking in Afghanistan and became the powerful symbols of yet another humane tragedy that the West’s procrastination failed to prevent. On August 27th UNHCR launched a Regional Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan which envisages a worst-case scenario of 500’000 Afghan refugees arriving in neighboring countries by the end of the year. I picked up the pen again in September after a three-day symposium at Franklin University Switzerland, which took a look at the SDGs from the perspective within the context of environmental and social justice. At stake for this volume is Goal Number 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” How to design, plan, and deliver value formation for all and especially how to get access to secondary education for displaced students up to the 15% benchmark that UNHCR plans to reach in 2030. Without secondary education, there is no tertiary education and the current number of 5% of displaced students enrolled in higher education will stagnate or even fall. Before addressing the contributions by the authors in this volume, this introduction highlights the alarming numbers when it comes to forced migration that down one’s hope that 2030, which is almost around the corner, will be the maker for having made a significant difference.

Trends at a Glance



Source: UNCR “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2020,” <https://www.unhcr.org/60b638e37/unhcr-global-trends-2020>.

In 2020 UNHCR counted 281 million international migrants, which makes up for 3.6 percent of the global population. There are 128 million more migrants than 30 years ago in 1990 and migration has tripled since 1970. Migration is not all negative: we live, study, and work in countries other than where we were born; we cross borders every day to get to and from work; we travel to conferences, meetings or for leisure and to enrich our lives; we cover great distances to reunite with loved ones or decide to stay with a special one in a foreign country. We move by choice for economic, professional, and private reasons, also because we seek political climates that grant more freedom of expression. Voluntary movement for a better existence, luckily, makes up for most migration. But it is the 82.4 Million forced migrants (equaling the total population of Germany) that were counted in 2020 that make up for a human tragedy that has

doubled since the beginning of the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011. It currently seems to be sliding off the radar given the continuous waves of the Covid-19 pandemic and the pressing issues caused by climate change. Forced migration is also an effect of climate change, however, not counted as such but in dire need of official recognition.

In 2020, out of the 82.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, there are 26.4 million refugees, 48 million internally displaced people, 4.1 million asylum seekers, and 3.9 million Venezuelans displaced abroad (please see the latest numbers for end 2022 as published by UNHCR in the addendum at the end of this article). This distinction matters for the legal status of the individual. Officially recognized refugees are lawfully protected: by the immigration laws of their new host country, by the 1954/67 Geneva Convention, and under the UNHCR mandate (including the UNRWA decree for 5.7 million Palestinian refugees). Asylum seekers are not (yet) protected or just have limited safeguard from their new host country until obtaining refugee status; often they are subject to both detention and deportation. IDPs, internally displaced people, have no legal protection other than the one from their home country, which is often the reason for migration in the first place together with climate change effects.

The term “climate refugee” is widely used but not officially recognized. The Global Compact on Refugees of 2018 (which is not legally binding as the Geneva Convention) states that “[w]hile not in themselves causes of refugee movements, climate, environmental degradation, and natural disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements. In the first instance, addressing root causes is the responsibility of countries at the origin of refugee movements.”¹ However, educated refugees are part of the future hope to mitigate climate change: “Every young person is our responsibility because every young person will help us face the challenges of health care, climate change, poverty, tech and employment, equality and human rights, and more.”²

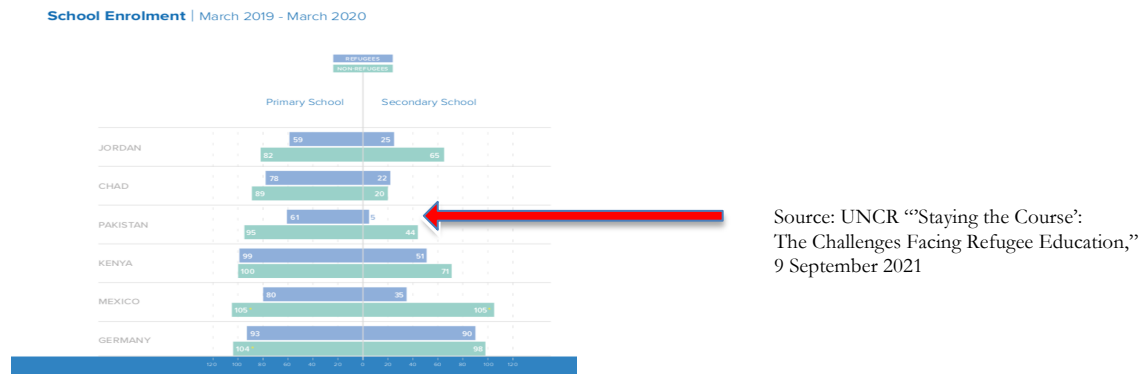
The last quote is taken from the most recent UNHCR report “Staying the Course: The Challenges Facing Refugee Education,” issued on 9 September 2021.³ The agency had predicted 85 million forcibly displaced people by the end of 2021 but the number most likely will be higher, given its brief of 17 August 2021 that estimates an additional 500,000 Afghans refugees arriving in neighboring countries (Pakistan and Iran) by the end of 2021. As I am writing, catastrophes are unfolding in Ethiopia, Myanmar, in the Channel, and at the border between Belarus and Poland, where refugees, including children, are being treated as human capital in the political interests of autocrats.

Children account for 30% of the world’s population and make up almost half of all forcibly displaced people. Almost 1 million children were born in displacement between 2018 and 2020, an average of 290-340,000 per year. Many of them are at risk of remaining in exile for years to come, some potentially for the rest of their lives. In more concrete terms, one of the most alarming figures in *Staying the Course* is provided by the graph on school enrolment in 2019-20 for Afghan refugees. Pakistan and Iran host 90% of Afghan refugees but only 5% of them attend secondary school in Pakistan, 95% have no chance to ever make it to university at all and will make up a good chunk of a “lost generation” when it comes to education beyond the primary level.

¹ United Nations, New York, The Global Compact on Refugees, 2018, p.4, <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4.pdf>. Ironically, the only other page that mentions “climate” in the 50-page document is on page 13, where it mentions a “business climate” that should provide opportunities for refugees.

² UNHCR Education Report 2021, “Staying the Course: Challenges Facing Refugee Education,” 9 September 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/education/612f85d64/unhcr-education-report-2021-staying-course-challenges-facing-refugee-education.html>, p.45.

³ UNHCR Education Report 2021, “Staying the Course: Challenges Facing Refugee Education,” 9 September 2021, <https://www.unhcr.org/publications/education/612f85d64/unhcr-education-report-2021-staying-course-challenges-facing-refugee-education.html>.



But who are “the other 5%” of the global refugee population with access to tertiary education? To what kinds of institutions are they admitted? What is the success rate of them finishing an undergraduate degree? And, what kind of impact has the Covid-19 pandemic had on education for refugees?

Stating a positive figure, there are more refugees attending tertiary education courses than ever. On the occasion of world refugee day in 2019 the German Foreign Office, UNHCR, and the German Academic Exchange Service co-hosted a conference titled “The Other 1 Percent - Refugee Students at Higher Education Institutions worldwide,” which aimed at fostering discussion of promising practices and to identify needs and gaps to integrate refugees in institutions of higher education.⁴ Two years later in 2021 the fruits may be visible as “Staying the Course” states: “The good news is that the most recent enrolment level for higher education is at 5 per cent, up from 3 per cent year-on-year and 1 per cent only a few years ago.”⁵ The number itself is promising but the raw data somewhat taints that hope. Good and bad is that UNHCR improves the methodologies for gathering reliable information every year. This might mean that the numbers are on the rise or that they are (finally) counted due to improved data collection but factually are not increasing. In 2020 the agency reported data for 12 countries that host around half of the global refugee population. In 2021, that number has risen to 40 countries assessing the situation of 12.65 million refugees, which makes up for more than half of the refugee population and Venezuelans protected under UNHCR mandates. The other half, plus data from asylum seekers and IDPs, approximately 69.75 million displaced people in 2020, is missing, which means that 5% is a rather optimistic figure.⁶ Furthermore, for 2020 counting stopped in March when most schools closed as a result of the pandemic; here enrolment statistics do not account for the impact of Covid-19 on access to education.

What kinds of institutions and degrees actually make up the educational landscape for displaced students? Analysis shows three types: informal education, hybrid programs, and formal higher education. Formal education of course consists of recognized courses of study at accredited institutions, such as universities or polytechnics or institutions of applied sciences that bestow credentials (degrees) accepted by national education authorities. Informal programs might seem of lesser value, which they are in terms of officially recognized qualifications and assessment; however, they are important and have key functions during the Covid-19 pandemic. They are mainly composed of low intensity workshops and seminars, in addition to or as

⁴ German Federal Foreign Office (FFO), German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “The Other 1%: Refugees at Institutions for Higher Education Worldwide,” 2019, https://www2.daad.de/medien/microsites/the-other-one-percent/report_2019.pdf.

⁵ UNHCR Education Report 2021, “Staying the Course,” p.7.

⁶ The average gross enrolment rate for the year from March 2019 to March 2020 for reporting countries was 68 per cent for primary level. For secondary level, the corresponding rate for reporting countries was 34 per cent, illustrating that significant structural barriers remain for refugee learners to access post-primary education. UNHCR Education Report 2021, “Staying the Course,” p.9.

alternatives for formal education; they are offered to guarantee the right of access to education for all (one of the mandates of SDG 4). Hybrid programs often serve as bridges in the transition from informal to formal education, such as open lecture halls with recognized certificates that might be steppingstones to degree programs. All these forms of education have their place and contribute to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all,” and work towards the goal of 15% of all refugees to be enrolled in tertiary education by 2030.

At Franklin University Switzerland we established *Scholarships Without Borders* in 2015 (<https://www.fus.edu/academics/undergraduate-programs/swb>). The program grants funded scholarships to immigrated refugee students to finish or embark on their university education, obtaining a BA or Masters in the field of their choice. Our first student graduated in 2020 with BA in Economics and International Management and currently we have two more students enrolled in the program. We are small, which allows us a boutique approach to education, and we make a very small but hopefully effective contribution to “the other 5%.” The assessment of our program shows that the main criteria of success for a refugee student to graduate is a functional network of both on- and off-campus support and resources with the following components:

- Formal scholarships with financial support
- Trial semesters and academic bridge programs
- Workshops, tutor and “buddy” programs
- Specific language courses
- Early integration into research or creative programs
- Direct interaction with faculty
- A designated point-to person for all concerns
- Constant communication with (local) service providers and NGOs
- Professional psychological care providers

In discussion in our networks with the Swiss initiative *Perspektiven Studium* (<https://www.perspektiven-studium.ch/en/>) and the *European Universities Critical Futures-Higher Education* project (<https://projects.au.dk/european-universities-critical-futures/working-groups/refugee-access-to-higher-education/>), we found that the main obstacles for refugee students to get through the doors of a university and to make it to graduation are:

- Political barriers
- (Missing) Documentation and recognition of home diplomas
- Language level (C1)
- Bureaucracy (in another language)
- Opportunities provided by institutions of higher education
- Easily accessible information of opportunities
- Rigidity of academic admission processes
- Finances
- Understanding the university system
- Personal trauma
- Stigma: social definitions and visual representations of “the refugee”

Scholarships Without Borders saw its first graduate in 2020, the second will follow in 2023, and the third in 2025, after that, hopefully many more to come. With a program this small and with such a tight-nit support structure of faculty, staff, tutors, interns, and volunteers, and all the support from the university administration, it is easy to trace progress and intervene immediately when

problems arise. The question for me has always been how many of “the other 5%” will actually hold a degree in their hands? The UNHCR reports provide no data with respect to dropout or graduation success rates and at this point it is impossible to assess how effective we are with our efforts. An additional stumbling block for both tracing records and for students themselves to be able to focus on classes and to complete their programs is presented by disruptions of pandemic.

Global measures to contain the spreading of the Covid-19, such as border closures and lockdowns, have had a detrimental effect on the refugee crisis. Globally speaking, migrants had to either return to the place they fled due to closed borders or take extreme risks to cross borders illegally. Shutdowns have the potential to reinforce preexisting inequalities in the global system. What concerns migrant education, learners who are already protected by refugee status, lost an average of 142 school days from the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak until March 2021, which is “an enormous deficit to recover.”⁷ However, counter intuitively, refugee students with access to varying forms of instruction in some instances dealt reasonably well with school closures and lockdowns and used more forms of education than their host communities.

A study by Haakon Gjerløw and Gudrun Østby (both from the Peace Research Institute Oslo) and Sabrina Karim (Government Department at Cornell University), published in *Frontiers in Education* (16/6/2021), aimed at understanding the sources of educational services before and after the shutdown in Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh.⁸ It used phone-survey samples of 719 households: 366 from the Rohingya refugee and 353 from host population. The Rohingyas had access to 4 education providers: NGO based learning centers, Madrasa/religious schools, community based private tutoring, and private home tutoring. The Bangladeshi host community did not have the NGO option, as such services are not available to them, but went to government or private schools, to which refugees have no access. The survey showed that the refugee population on an average used two or more education providers while the host community mainly relied on one provider.⁹

As encouraging as it may sound that refugees actually had the chance to receive more instruction, the report also raises the question about the quantity and quality of such informal education. It was impossible to ascertain how regularly informal learning took place and what kind of material was taught by private tutors and religious schools. Given the lack of sustained funding and resources and the lack of oversight and standardization organs, the quality of alternative options most likely cannot make up for formal education. Although providing an important safety net, informal instruction is not of significant value to bridging the gap between refugee and host education.

Is there anything positive that we take away from the pandemic for our understanding on how to better integrate refugee learners? Surely that official protection under UNHCR and host government laws is essential. Beyond that, building platforms, networks, and 360-degree services for refugees in higher education systems, requires getting out of ivory towers and strict academic thinking to shift the focus on constructing comprehensive safety systems for displaced students that include a broad offering of educational services in both formal and informal sectors. While the focus must remain on the mandate that at least 15% of all refugees be enrolled in tertiary education by 2030, the informal tutors, NGO offerings, religious, and community schools play

⁷ UNHCR Education Report 2021, “Staying the Course,” p.7.

⁸ Since August 2017 more than 650’000 Rohingya people have fled their persecution in the Myanmar Rakhine State, totaling the Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh to more than 900’000, thus making up a rather large number of communities. *Frontiers in Education*, Brief Research Report, “When Governments and International Organizations Shut Down: The Impact of COVID-19 on Refugees’ and Host Community’s Use of Educational Services in Cox’s Bazar,” 16 June 2021, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/educ.2021.696176/full>. See also Save the Children, Child Rights and Resource Center, Cox’s Bazar Education Sector: COVID 19 Response Strategy, 2020 – Reaching Every Learner, March 2020, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/coxs-bazar-education-sector-covid-19-response-strategy-2020-reaching-every-learner/>

⁹ *Frontiers in Education*, “When Governments and International Organizations Shut Down,” p.5.

an important part as well and should be reciprocally interlinked with formal education.

In 2017 Scholarships Without Borders hosted the two-day international workshop “Connecting the Dots: Refugees in Higher Education in Switzerland and in Europe” at Franklin University Switzerland. The intention was to literally to connect the dots of institutions on the European map that offer educational services with degree, certificate, and support options to refugee learners and to assess challenges and best practices. The aim of our presentations and discussions was to learn how to overcome obstacles and structure education offerings for refugees from a cross section of individuals who came from within or travelled to Lugano from Bard College Berlin, Kiron Open Higher Education, the Municipal Center of Education Hamburg, SOS Ticino, MORE/UNIKO (Austrian Universities Conference Refugee Program), Perspective - Studies Switzerland, the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration, Università della Svizzera Italiana, and Franklin University Switzerland. Four years later, all programs contributed to the current 5% of refugees enrolled in programs of higher education, the vision of raising that number to 15% by 2030S, and the overall mission to fulfill SDG 4. They have evolved and are better connected at the benefit of the refugee students in them. But challenges and obstacles remain and crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, should provide the opportunity not only to reflect on what does not work but also on what works and how to improve education for displaced students. It is also a chance to examine how refugees are perceived from in the global social and visual worlds and in what manner this perception may be a root cause obstacle to their success.

This volume picks up from the 2017 workshop and aims to take Covid-19 as an opportunity to reflect up what the pandemic brought to the surface in terms of general perceptions of borders, migration, and the perception of the migrant. It also highlights specific initiatives that prove to be successful and will find applications in the future, and, most importantly, lets displaced students speak for themselves through their creativity and critical thinking.

The volume is roughly divided into two sections. Part 1 opens with a poetic contribution by Raisan Hameed, visual and multi-media artist at the Leipzig Academy of Fine Arts. Hameed’s photography and his text are marked by rifts, voids, discontinuities, which, at the same time, become part of a greater whole and reflect on his background, his roots, and his journey. Johanna Fassl met Hameed and their conversation provoked her to take a closer look at the visual culture of migration in award winning photography and its impact on refugee education; she advocates for a tipping point in the portrayal of displaced people for them to have a real chance to arrive at the lecture halls of institutions of (higher) education. The subsequent article by Marie-Agnès Détourbe explains how the pandemic has reconfigured people’s movement and connections on different levels and calls for a rethinking of the sociological and philosophical definition of “the migrant.” Intellectually, Caroline Wiedmer’s contribution continues the discussion of what it means to be “foreign,” by examining what happens when the migrant has reached a “final shore.” It is presented as an *essai* in the technical and French sense of the word, reflecting on the archaic concept of *xenia* (translatable as both the hospitable and the foreigner), and taking arrival rites in the ancient texts by Homer and Plato as a basis to examine contemporary welcome-cultures. While Part 1 is characterized by more philosophical and systemic reflections, Part 2 presents a concrete voice and examples from situations that actually manifested during the height of the pandemic. It starts with an article by Emrah Bal who is a participant in the Open Lecture Hall at the University of Basel, in which he ponders the notion of time: how time stood still during Covid-19 and how the pandemic not only stifled progress but also invited reflection due to the standstill. Heike Koelln-Prisner’s concluding article assesses the concrete situation of how the pandemic has changed the situation for refugees enrolled or wanting to enroll into study programs in Germany and what kind of support systems are sustainable and resilient to pressures from the crisis.

As this volume became delayed and articles went through a number of iterations, contributors had the chance to revise their text or insert addenda at the end of their articles in order to stay *au courant* with contemporary developments, which, when it comes to discussions of forced migration, means increased numbers and an escalation of local and global crises.

Is there an overall conclusion to be drawn from all the contributions in this volume? Other than a call to continuous reflection upon our own constructions of “the migrant” and how we handle processes of welcome and integration, I leave it to the reader at a moment where a whole continent is struggling to find solutions on how to respond to a raging war and growing streams of migration.

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ADDENDUM UPDATE:

As the numbers concerning migration continue to drastically change due to the war in Ukraine, which adds to the already existing crisis zones, it is necessary to include this addendum. Here are the latest statistics as published by UNHCR data finder, reporting the numbers for the end of 2022:

[HTTPS://WWW.UNHCR.ORG/REFUGEE-STATISTICS/](https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/)

- **108.4 MILLION** FORCIBLY DISPLACED PEOPLE WORLDWIDE.
 - **62.5 MILLION** ARE INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE
 - **5.4 MILLION** ARE ASYLUM-SEEKERS
 - **35.3 MILLION** ARE REFUGEES
 - **5.2 MILLION** ARE OTHER PEOPLE IN NEED OF INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION
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BIOGRAPHY

Johanna Fassl is Professor of Art History and Visual Communication and the Co-Director of the Scholarships Without Borders Program at Franklin University Switzerland. She received her PhD with Distinction from Columbia University and has been the recipient of numerous fellowships, including from the Mellon and Getty research foundations. Her research analyzes the production and reception of art within an interdisciplinary framework of science, philosophy, and the psychology of perception whereby she places a specific emphasis on the void and other forms of abstraction. In 2023 she was invited to become a fellow at the Siebold Collegium Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of Würzburg.

jfass@fus.edu