



A proposal for the consideration of expanding access to higher education opportunities for people coming from disadvantaged backgrounds.

A short proposal from Uni4All

## Identifying the problem

In a world of exponential growth in inequality, education is considered one of the strongest and most effective pathways to improving your quality of life. Across the world, the value of high education has become increasingly more important to overcoming generational poverty and forging a path into economic security. This problem gains weight when you consider the rise in events (both social, environmental and economic) that massively displace people out of their homes and their nearest opportunity to gain an education. Empirical evidence has shown that the number of displaced people has risen sharply since the early 2000s, with the number going from 3 to 14 million people world-wide in 20 years and with no indication of this trend slowing down anytime soon.

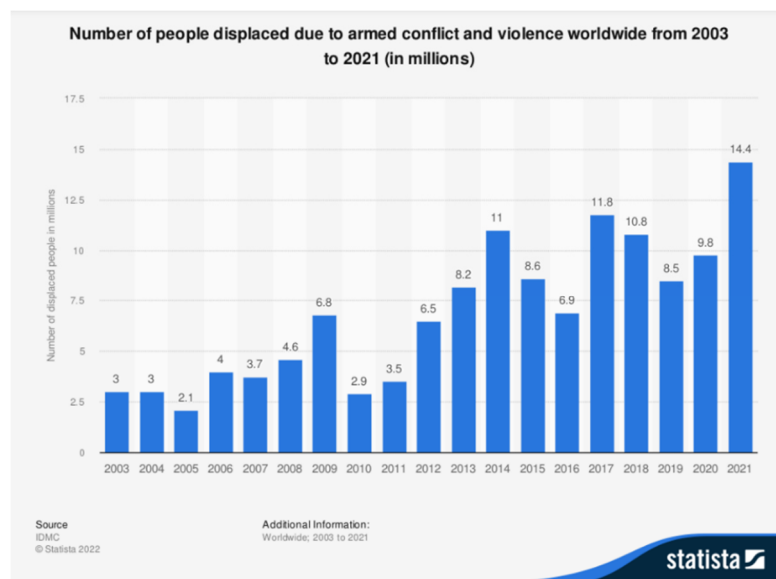


Figure 1. A clear increase in the number of people displaced worldwide

Many of these displaced people are unable to consider or even continue their education wherever they find sanctuary, with the UN reporting that 5% (2022) of the refugee population go on to attend higher level education, compared to the global average of 39%.

But why is this important?

According to Sutton Trust (DfE and IFS), attending higher education has proven beneficial to young people from low-income backgrounds, who are four times as likely to become more socially mobile, not to mention the clear trend between level of income and standard of education, with graduates and master candidates generally working for greater levels of compensation.

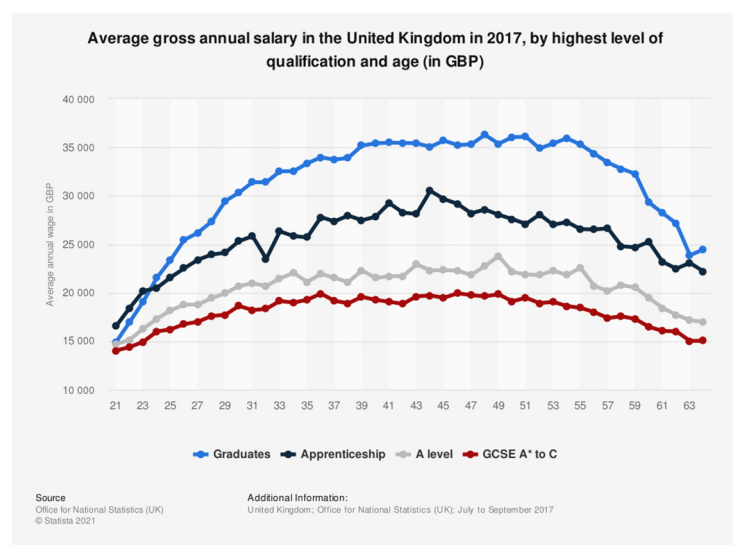


Figure 2. Average income against highest qualification and age.

Data like this helps demonstrate the serious disparity in access to higher education between displaced people and the general population. It also helps understand the potential benefits that it can have on the life of a person seeking to stabilize and improve their life and the life of their loved ones. This is all worth considering when we realize that the number of displaced people is showing no evidence of going anywhere but up. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), an annual average of 21.5 million people have been forcibly displaced by weather-related events since 2008.

Additionally, the IEP predicts that 1.2 billion could be displaced globally by 2050. These figures indicate that we should, as soon as possible, begin assessing how effective our current systems are in providing access to a group of people whose importance within society and whose numbers are only going to rise. Finding ways of educating and integrating as many people as possible is one of the only ways to avoid the widescale social consequences having such a large amount of displaced people.

Consequently, ensuring equal access to higher education across the globe is an issue that this paper will examine, comprehend and then offer innovative solutions for. We will look at many existing support systems that are already out there and examine whether countries across the world are effective in implementing programs to help overcome some of the barriers that stand between many people that don't have the economic or social capabilities to overcome much more than they already have. In the end, we believe that we can use this information to procure some innovative ideas that might offer a way for those without access to reach higher levels of education with ease.

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Unequal access to higher education is a common issue across the world. For years now Universities have been encouraged to open vacancies specifically for refugees and displaced people with relative success in increasing the percentage of refugees actually attending higher education. The reality is, there are still many obstacles in the way of anyone keen on pursuing higher education when coming from a disadvantaged background. While some schemes such as the University of Sanctuary are more effective, many of the more popular Universities in the UK have done little to nothing to mitigate the financial burden that their school can have on a potential applicant.

For example, Asylum Seekers are often treated as international students by universities, and therefore forced to pay significantly more money to access higher education, while also being unable to access student loans or even work in an effort to sustain a living. Even when considered refugees, the fees demanded by universities are not attainable for individuals who often arrive in their host country with little to no assets or ways of making money.

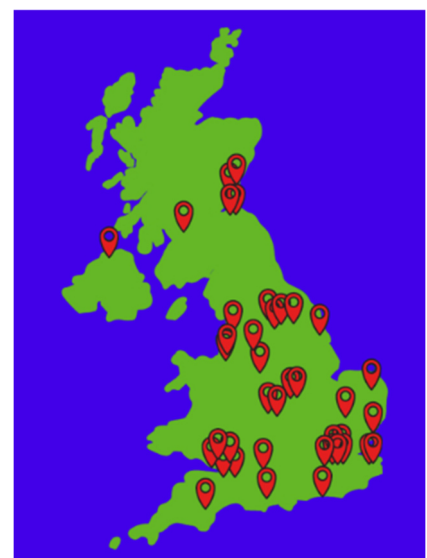


Figure 3. Universities in the UK that offer Scholarships for Refugees

What have governments done to work towards facilitating access to university? In the UK, this process is often hidden and not well advertised. The government itself, presumably keen to prioritize paying students, is not the primary source of engagement for support. The most accessible help point is the Student Action for Refugees (STAR) site, which has a list of University Scholarships on offer on their website. Despite this being available, many applicants often have to wait long periods of time to know whether they have been accepted or not, even if they meet the entry requirements set. This is because even with 70 UK universities participating, none of these are offering enough placements to satisfy the number of applicants looking to study. There are also still many Universities who don't offer any sort of support, and some only accept people for post-Graduate positions, the conditions to enter often disregarding differences in educational systems that might make it impossible for people to apply.

University	Region	Level of study	Eligibility	Offering	Website	Opening date	Closing date
Aberystwyth	Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foundation</li> <li>Undergraduate</li> <li>Postgraduate (Master's)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asylum seeker</li> <li>DLR/LLR*</li> <li>Humanitarian Protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fee waiver</li> <li>Accommodation</li> <li>£8,000 per year</li> <li>English language support</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Aber Sanctuary Scholarship</a>	Open	30 June 2022
Aston	West Midlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undergraduate</li> <li>Postgraduate (Master's)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asylum seeker</li> <li>DLR/LLR*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fee waiver</li> <li>Up to £25,000 throughout course</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Ernest Edward Scholarship 2022</a>	Open	12 June 2022
Bath	South West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foundation</li> <li>Undergraduate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refugee Status</li> <li>Humanitarian Protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Up to £7,000 per year</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Financial Support for Refugees</a> <a href="#">Refugee Bursary terms and</a>	Open	31 October 2022

Figure 4. List of universities offering scholarships for refugees

Unlike the UK, some European countries have developed more comprehensive and effective systems to accommodate for displaced people looking to participate in higher education. One of the biggest difference makers is the fact that Germany offers free higher education to all its citizens which means already it is much easier for anyone to pursue a career at a high-level institution. Additionally, they offer tailor-made scholarship offers for foreigners who are looking to continue their studies in Germany and go to great lengths to offer those without the right qualification's apprenticeships paired with foundations courses to prepare them for the experience. The German Academic exchange service consistently offers bundles of information and resources for anyone that is interested to maximize their opportunities.

The German approach to integrations is both nuanced and comprehensive. There is an understanding that Education should still be a principal aspect of the lives of any person that seeks it out and allows for flexibility in not only choice of school or course but also type of education by setting up support systems that effectively inform people of their options without limiting them for financial reasons.

What can we learn from this? Here are our solutions

## REMOVING FINANCIAL BARRIERS

- The biggest limitation that exists on pursuing education today is the economic inequality that usually accompanies forced displacement. People that have uprooted their lives arrive at their sanctuary countries with little to no financial assets or support and what they have usually goes to securing their families first.
- Removing financial barriers, either through increasing the number of scholarships or/and lowering the financial requirements would encourage large parts of the population to pursue higher education.
- Universities should offer a wider variety of courses and placements specifically for displaced people and the government should be involved in encouraging these institutions to do so.
- Across the European continent, some nations have increasingly accessible prices for tuition (figure 5). We believe that this pattern should continue across the world, especially in places where prices for education are out of control such as in the United States private schooling system, where many students have to assume generational levels of debt simply to get an education

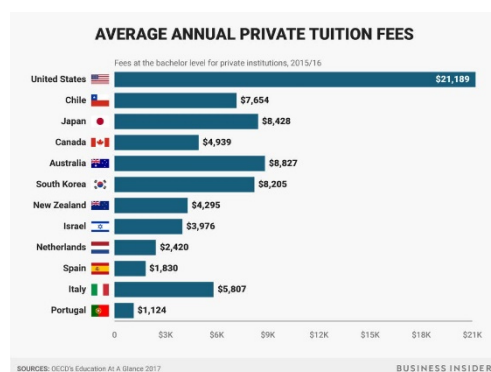


Figure 5

## FACILITATING ACCESS TO VALUABLE INFORMATION

- It's hard to decide what is best for you if you are unaware of your options. People who are trying to create a new life in a foreign country could benefit from not having to desperately seek out information about how to enter higher education.
- The government should centralize the support system for accessing information. If people could be easily guided to one central directory that can offer them all the information they need, this could help streamline the process of applying to higher education.
- The government could also use external groups that have more knowledge about the refugee crisis to help coordinate the process of applying to universities and understanding individual choices.

## **INCREASING PARTICIPATION**

- While the previous two solutions would hold the most effectiveness if implemented, the reality is that such widescale changes are hard to come by in modern policy making. Because of this, we believe that there are many more grounded and community-based actions that can be taken to help bridge this inequality.
- Student-led groups such as STAR are incredible actors in facilitating the transition to quality education. They help bridge this connection by contacting the leaders of these communities and offering help in the form of tutoring for younger students and information regarding higher learning for the older students.
- When partnered with bigger organisations like we are proposing (University of Sanctuary, The government) these community-based groups can really help inform and bring willing students to university.
- A new scheme that could be introduced to help accommodate potential new students to university life is the Buddy/Mentor scheme. Under this program, refugees attending university would be assigned an existing university student to help them acclimate to the everyday life. This could be done potentially even before the student even attends the university in anticipation of what can often be a rough transition. Additionally, if there are any issues of mental health, alienation or other similar problems, the student can receive immediate help.

## **POLITICAL/LEGAL SOLUTIONS**

Our proposed legislative solution –

- Contact the government (specifically the Education Secretary or the Department for Education) arguing in support of the Lift the Ban campaign and the House of Lords amendment on the right to work for asylum seekers, particularly focusing on the economic and social benefits the right to work could have on students who are seeking asylum.
- We would encourage the DfE to publicly endorse and support the UNHCR's target of 15% of refugees enrolled in higher education by 2030.
- Also propose that the government recognizes the UCAS HE provider good practice briefing which gives recommendations to higher education institutions on how they can best support displaced students. Whilst a good practice briefing is not legally enforceable, we could propose the government creates a league table assessing how successful universities are in adhering to the briefing in order to hold higher education institutions to account and to force universities to offer more support for displaced students.
- In the long-term, we would contact and encourage other governments to take a similar approach.

At UNI4ALL, we insist that unequal access to higher education is not only an issue of the present, but a dilemma that we will have to answer for in the near future. The amount of people being forcibly displaced is increasing and coming from unpredictable situations doesn't line up with many states' "normal" path to higher education. Learning to account for and manage the increasing number of complicated cases of students pursuing higher education will become essential to ensuring equal access for millions of potential students and ensuring a higher quality of life for as many people who want it.