

**DRIVING BEHAVIOR—BUT IN WHAT DIRECTION?**

Instruments that raise wider questions about university public good are welcome. However, most effort is about economic impacts—how higher education meets the objectives of effectiveness, equity, and efficiency—rather than wider societal impact. This is partially because measuring cultural and societal impact or the value to public discourse through new ideas etc. is complicated. Yet, soft power, expressed through contribution to cultural institutions, democracy, international understanding, and overall society's value systems and policies, is equally powerful and can significantly influence a country's international standing with mobile investment and talent.

No doubt rankings drive behavior, but the direction of travel depends upon the choice of indicators. Governments and universities are not innocent victims: they have too often slavishly changed their policies and priorities to rise in the rankings for fear of falling behind their neighbor or competitor. BUT do the ranking organizations themselves bear any responsibility given that their real intent is to sell magazines and newspapers and/or consultancy? Indeed, despite their calls for greater transparency and accountability, their methodologies display very little. It is no longer good enough to only talk about universities' corporate social responsibility. Isn't it time we talked about the corporate social responsibility of the ranking organizations themselves? ■

## Religion, a Major Driver for Forced Internationalization

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In an article published in *IHE* #97, "Forced Internationalization of Higher Education," the authors and Betty Leask show how policy makers can be "forced" to internationalize their higher education systems as a result of massive and unexpected arrivals of refugees (in today's world, 68.5 million people have become forced migrants—the largest forced displacement since the World War II according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR). While regular international students or scholars arrive equipped with sufficient sponsorship, well-document-

ed academic credentials, and foreign language proficiency, the drivers through which refugees access higher education in their host countries are untraditional. This article discusses how religion has become a strong driver for Syrian refugees' access to higher education in Turkey.

**RELIGIOUS MOTIVATION**

Adopting an "open door" policy for people fleeing the conflict in Syria, Turkey is currently host to over 3.6 million Syrian refugees according to the UNHCR. The unceasing conflict in Syria and extended stay of the refugees in Turkey have "forced" the Turkish government to strategically internationalize higher education to ensure the "unexpected" and "seemingly permanent" Syrian refugees' access to universities.

First, no "selective" and "restrictive" credential evaluation procedure is taking place. While some of the universities admit Syrian refugees based on their secondary or (interrupted) postsecondary education's grade point average, others admit them without any requirement. Next, in order to overcome the language barrier, a free preparatory one-year Turkish language program is offered, and several universities have established study programs taught in Arabic.

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Last, Syrian students are exempt from paying tuition fees and provided with governmental scholarships. According to the Council of Higher Education (CoHE), these reforms have resulted in over 27,000 Syrian refugees enrolling in universities, which has made Turkey one of the countries hosting the highest number of refugee students in the world.

Getting into a university is highly competitive for domestic students in Turkey. Every summer, over two million candidates sit the university entrance test and very few can find a place at top public universities. Most have to enroll in private universities or in open education programs, or to re-sit the test the following year. In such a competitive context, the driver securing privileged access to Syrian refugees is based on a religious doctrine, the "Hegira."

According to the Islamic belief, the Hegira is the forced migration of Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina in 622 as a result of persecutions by local people in Mec-

ca who denied his prophethood and attacked him and his companions. Prophet Muhammad and a group of his followers, the Muhajirs, were warmly welcomed in Medina by the local population, the Ansars. This displacement is considered to be a sacred journey by Muslims, who believe that the Prophet and his followers were forced into exile due to their Islamic belief and were protected by God during their journey and their arrival in welcoming Medina.

In March 2019, a cabinet minister declared that Turkey had spent almost US\$40 billion to cover the needs of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Not surprisingly, increasing nationalism and economic instability in Turkey have led to a societal resistance against sharing limited public resources with Syrian refugees. With this in mind, the Hegira has repeatedly been used as a reminder by the Turkish government to justify the access of Syrian refugees into higher education. President Erdogan has defined Syrian refugees as “today’s Muhajirs” and Turkish society as “today’s Ansars.” Helping Syrian refugees, he argues, is a requirement for Muslim brother- and sisterhood, and he has ordered the CoHE to facilitate their access to universities. In a press release, the president of the CoHE shared his belief that being Ansars for Syrian refugees is a “divine will of God,” and he has promised to expand their access to universities in Turkey.

In a country with a conservative majority in power, ongoing economic recession, and highly competitive university admission, religion is thus a tailor-made driver that secures people’s understanding of the privileges granted to refugees with regard to access to higher education. This has successfully been implemented in Turkey and resulted in thousands of Syrian refugees enrolling in universities. The ruling party has performed in accordance with its conservative identity and Turkish society is behaving like Ansars, for the sake of Muslim brother- and sisterhood, in line with Islamic teaching.

#### CONCLUSION

In Europe, the emergence of nation-states transformed scholars from “cosmopolitan wanderers” into “citizens.” In the era of globalization, some scholars have become “global citizens,” while the fate of others is to be stateless refugees. The number of stateless refugees is increasing every day and these struggle to gain access to higher education in their host countries. It is obvious that their unintended inclusion among incoming international students will continue forcing policy- and decision-makers to walk a fine line between giving them access to higher education, and closely monitoring and managing the impact of this policy on public opinion.

## What Works to Reduce Inequality in Higher Education?

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*The full working paper on which this article is based can be accessed at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31497>*

Graduating from college remains one of the best routes out of poverty. Recent research from Dr. Harry Patrinos (World Bank) shows that in most countries today, returns to higher education are now higher than those to lower levels of education. Women tend to have higher rates of return than men, and there is even some evidence (from the United States) that children from poor families benefit the most from higher education. So the question for policy makers is not *whether*, but *how* to help children from disadvantaged families get into higher education, and how to help them graduate.

The bad news is that in most countries today, large groups of disadvantaged students (e.g., low income, first generation, belonging to a racial or ethnic minority, as well as intersections between these groups) are unable to access higher education, even when they have the ability to do so. Another piece of bad news is that governments around the world do not seem to have very effective policies in place to target such groups (see Salmi, *IHE* #98). But there is good news as well: there is now a sizeable and high-quality body of literature that analyzes interventions and policies aiming to support disadvantaged students in higher education. In our new paper (World Bank Working Paper 8802), we rigorously selected, gathered, and compared over 200 causal estimates, from 75 (quasi-)experimental studies, of the effects of such interventions around the world. Four main lessons from this review can be applied by policy makers around the world.

#### POLICY MAKERS SHOULD TARGET SEVERAL MECHANISMS OF EXCLUSION

The first lesson is that there are different mechanisms driving exclusion and each of these can be targeted by different types of policies. One is that disadvantaged students have unmet financial needs to pay for college tuition (especially now that private higher education has soared), but they