

AUSTRALIAN OUR FORUM

Project Eucalyptus

Collaborate, Create & Change



Post-Forum Report
February 2019

Acknowledgements

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About the Australian OUR (Project Eucalyptus) forum

The Australian Opening Universities for Refugees (OUR) Forum—titled Project Eucalyptus—took place at UNSW over two days in November 2018 as a collaborative venture between OUR, 2016 Young People’s Human Rights Medal recipient [Arash Bordbar](#), the UNSW [Forced Migration Research Network](#), [UNSW’s Grand Challenges](#) on Refugees and Migrants, and the [Refugee Education Special Interest Group](#). This free forum sought to build effective collaborations amongst participants, leading to new initiatives to increase access to, participation in, and successful transitions out of higher education, not only for recently resettled refugees in Australia, but also for displaced communities in the region. Our main goal was to involve as many interested parties and stakeholders as possible, from all levels of engagement and responsibility for refugee and asylum seeker education, to ensure the participation of the most representative group of people who have the energy and expertise to develop solutions to the challenges posed by the provision of higher education in Australia, and to examine Australia’s role in supporting higher education provision in transit countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia. Participants came from across the country, representing universities, institutions, schools, the NSW Department of Education, and Professor Peter Shergold, NSW Coordinator General for Refugee Resettlement.

The ‘unconference’ format on Day 1—a hallmark of the OUR ‘3C’ forum series—yielded rich descriptions, observations and insights into the complexities of supporting students with higher education in the resettlement context of Australia, as well as possible ways for Australian institutions to support the opening of access to higher education in the Asia-Pacific region. These conversations were distilled into four thematic working groups on Day 2 which met with a mandate to action plan according to SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timebound) principles, over three timeframes: short-term (March 2019), medium-term (November 2019), and longer-term (November 2020). These action plans were presented at the end of the second day, and were announced by Professor Peter Shergold. These plans will help to maintain the momentum for the future collective action and advocacy for the participants and the wider networks of the Forced Migration Research Network and the Refugee Education Special Interest Group for the next two years.

Organisers

Arash Bordbar, OUR/ Western Sydney University
Dr Sally Baker, UNSW Co-chair of the Refugee Education SIG
Gul Inanc, OUR
Zaana Hall, OUR
Keren David, UNSW



UNSW
SYDNEY

Opening Universities for Refugees (OUR)

Opening Universities for Refugees (OUR) is a charity registered in the UK who share a commitment to build knowledge networks and consortia to offer higher education to displaced communities in need.

OUR is designed to help meet the higher educational needs of communities in protracted refugee/displacement situations globally, particularly in Southeast Asia.

OUR builds projects to utilise existing and emerging knowledge systems to address common fundamental foundation stone issues and simultaneously offer site-specific relevance by organizing 3C Forum (Collaborate, Create and Change).

OUR, brings together institutions which offer, or are willing to offer, higher education courses and/or diploma and certificate programs to refugees and displaced peoples.

Through the provision of higher education, OUR seeks to restore the dignity and hope of communities in crisis.



OUR 3C events have been held across the Asia-Pacific region since 2016...

Malaysia - Project Acacia
August 2016

New Zealand - Project Manuka
November 2017

Indonesia - Project Banyan
September 2018

Australia - Project Eucalyptus
November 2018

Refugee Education Special Interest Group

Exploring issues of access to, participation in, and transition out of higher education: Collective action through the Refugee Education Special Interest Group

The Refugee Education Special Interest Group (SIG) is a network of practitioners, educators, researchers, and advocates who are interested in advancing the educational needs of students from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds. The SIG is deliberately designed to erode the siloed boundaries that hinder information sharing and development of effective pathways into higher education, including colleagues from the school, VET, higher education and community sectors, while also placing students at the heart of the conversation.

The SIG emerged from a recognised need for a coordinated approach to advocacy and networking to support the access and engagement of students from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds in post-compulsory and higher education across Australia. The need was made apparent in two public meetings with a focus on refugee education in November 2015: a special interest group at the Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia (EPHEA) conference, and a national symposium at the University of Newcastle. The Refugee Education SIG repurposed the regular national teleconferences exploring education pathways for young people seeking asylum and young refugees on TPVs and SHEVs that had been co-hosted by the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network (MYAN Australia) and the Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) since November 2015. Since its launch on International Refugee Day 2016, the Refugee Education SIG has been working hard to share good practice, offer a much-needed discussion space, and engage in advocacy to raise awareness and advance the educational needs of students from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds. In addition to running quarterly teleconferences and writing a monthly newsletter, our website includes key resources and information to help students, and those working with students, to find pathways into higher education, to advance scholarship, and to share educational resources.



Refugee Education Special Interest Group

Refugee Education Special Interest Group

The areas of practice and research advanced by the Refugee Education SIG to date include:

- Scholarships for people seeking asylum and refugees with temporary protection visas₁
- Transitions into higher education from school_{12,3}, Intensive English Centres_{3,4}, TAFE₃, and enabling education₃ and a review of pathways into higher education₅
- Access to information/ refugee students' preferences for support₆
- Questions of whether students from refugee backgrounds should be a separate equity group₇
- Participation in undergraduate studies for students from refugee backgrounds₈, with a focus on language and cultural diversity₉
- Refugee mentoring programs₁₀
- Participation in school for refugee young people₁₁ and student performance in national standardised tests (NAPLAN)₁₂
- Development of further education-focused resources for teaching into AMEP or equivalent₁₃
- Transitions out of higher education for students from refugee backgrounds₁₄

(See page 37 for the full list of references)



Refugee Education
Special Interest Group



Students from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds and higher education

Education is a key part of successful integration into settlement contexts (Ager & Strang, 2008; Fozdar & Hartley, 2013; White, 2017). Given the recent increase of refugee populations globally, facilitating the participation of people from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds in higher education is an important component of resettlement. However, addressing the needs of these people and responding meaningfully to the barriers that may be faced remains an ongoing area of scholarly and practitioner concern (Baker et al., 2018; Olliff, 2010; Earnest et al., 2010; Joyce et al., 2010; Naidoo et al., 2018).

The experiences of university students from refugee backgrounds differ significantly from those of other disadvantaged 'equity' student groups. Students from refugee backgrounds encounter a variety of complex challenges that often negatively impact on their participation within university settings, including psychosocial issues relating to past trauma, disrupted education prior to resettlement, language barriers (including the development of formal literacies), inexperience with the structures of western education systems, and sociocultural barriers.

The Australian Context

Australian Government higher education policies persistently overlook the unique needs of this cohort and inappropriately cluster them with other disadvantaged groups. The Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP) focuses on students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, Indigenous students, and students from remote or rural locations, and unhelpfully collapses the multiple forms of compound disadvantage that many students face. Students from refugee backgrounds' particular needs are largely invisible within this broad remit. We argue that there is a significant dearth of tailored responses within higher education contexts to address the various needs of students from refugee backgrounds.

Key Issues

There is a significant body of work that has explored the challenges that students from refugee and asylum seeking students face in the Australian context (Baker et al., 2018a; Earnest et al., 2010; Terry et al., 2016; White, 2017; Hartley et al., 2018). There are a number of challenges that impact on engagement and performance within HE, including poverty, developing English language proficiency, interrupted education prior to arrival, limited social connections, unfamiliarity with cultural norms and psychological trauma (Campion, 2018; Naidoo et al., 2018; Olliff, 2010; Stevenson & Baker, 2018; Student, Kendall & Day, 2017). The Australian higher education system has struggled to deliver tailored support to refugees—particularly in regional Australian contexts—

Settlement Contexts

there is a pressing need to investigate their experiences in order to inform existing policies and improve service delivery within HE (Naidoo et al., 2018; Schneider, 2018; Stevenson & Baker, 2018). However, we also note that there has been a marked increase in responsive teaching and learning supports across Australia, and the coordination offered by the Refugee Education Special Interest Group has been integral in helping to facilitate better information-sharing and collaboration.

At the policy level, the current federal higher education polycscape offers little to specifically recognise the particular challenges that students from refugee and asylum seeking students face. The central policy and funding mechanism for equity in higher education is the Higher Education Participation and Partnership Program (HEPPP). In the last decade, HEPPP has limited its focus to for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, Indigenous students and students from rural and remote locations, Although this narrowing of HEPPP activity does not preclude universities from creating refugee-specific programs and supports, it does mean that such activities are ad-hoc. Strong arguments have been put forward for widening the target groups to ensure that universities use their HEPPP funding to purposefully respond to the needs of refugee students (Sladek & King, 2016; Terry et al., 2016).



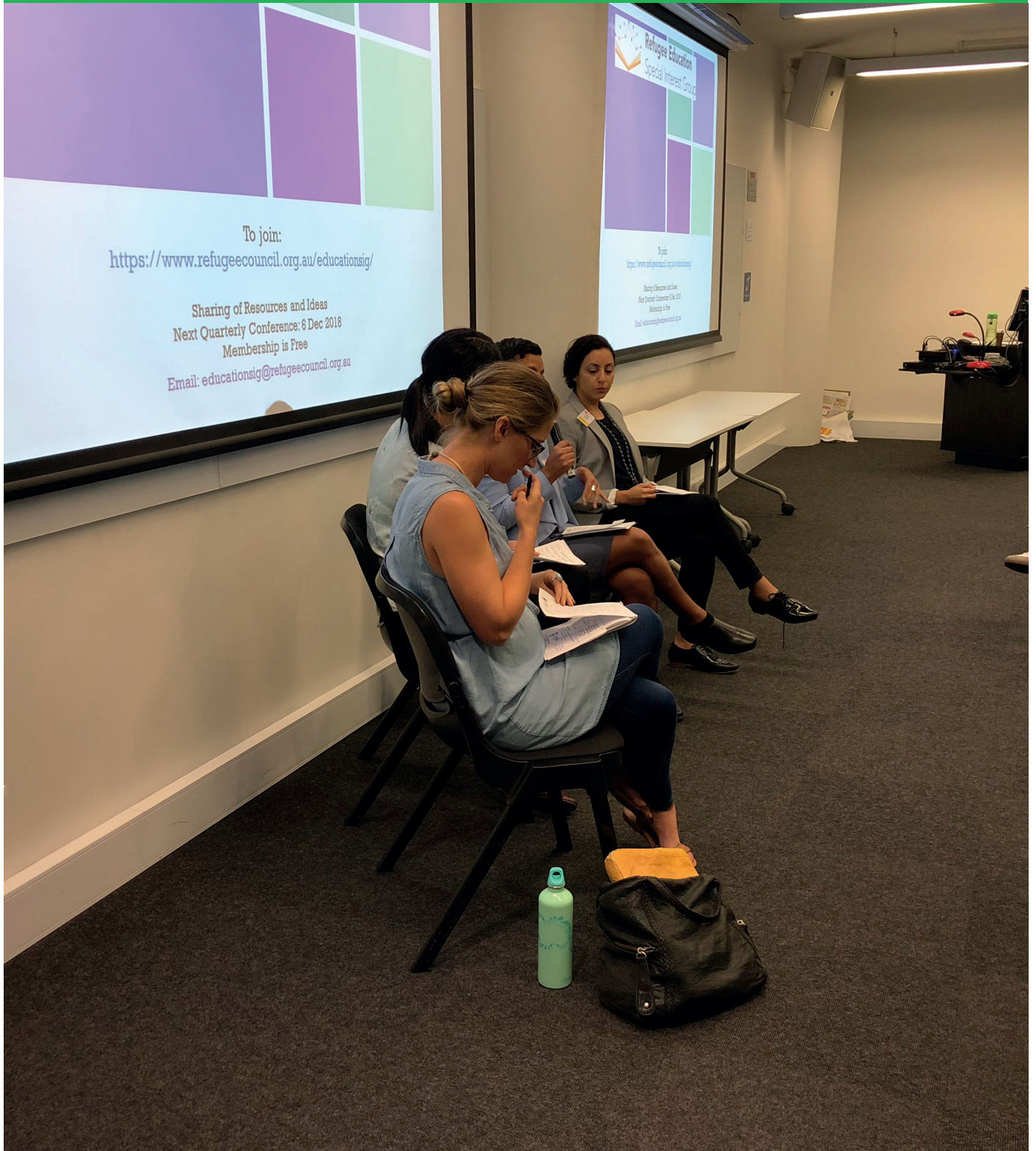
Displacement Contexts

According to the UNHCR (2011), the need to provide education to refugees and asylum seekers has been prioritised since the World War II, and before then during emergencies. The provision of education to all children and refugees is embedded in Article 22 of the 1951 Convention on Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 2010). Over the years since the end of World War II, the provision of primary education has been made a priority by UNHCR and other Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) running refugee camps across the world, but quality and access have long been an issue for many children, parents and carers, as noted by Waters and LeBlanc (2005). Some host countries do not accept the enrolment of refugee children into mainstream educational programs for several reasons, ranging from poor infrastructure, and lack of funds to facilitate the establishment of new schools with trained teachers, and security concerns. As a result, refugee children rely on unstructured education within the camps provided by volunteers, UNHCR and international humanitarian organisations.

As at June 2018, an estimated 68.5 million people were forcibly displaced globally due to war, conflict and persecution, representing the highest number of displaced people in recorded history (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018). In their 2016 report on refugee education, the UNHCR reported a total of 6.4 million refugees of school age children, of whom 2.9 million were enrolled in primary or secondary schools, compared with 3.5 million who did not go to school. These numbers could be higher because of the ongoing instability and conflict in the Middle East, Africa and Asia and the Pacific, which makes it difficult to gather accurate and up-to-date numbers.

In general, refugees and asylum seekers of all ages value all forms of education, ranging from learning a language to basic life skills in a new environment (Crisp et al., 2012). The majority of refugees and asylum seekers are young people, women and children (Bhabha, 2004; Macklin, 1995; Musalo & Lee, 2017). The desire for continuity and a better life brings enormous innovation, creativity and curiosity to learn new skills and languages, which has led to initiatives by refugees themselves to provide education programs as evidenced in the Kakuma and Daadab refugee camps in Kenya and in Karen and other Burmese refugee camps in Thailand (Mareng, 2010; Oh et al., 2008). The provision of social and community development services in refugee camps is usually delivered by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)/ United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF, or not for profit organisations, and international organisations like Red Cross, Save the Children and Relief International and Mercy Corps among others. Their priority is to provide basic needs like food and shelter and where possible, to support refugee-led education initiatives.

The provision of refugee education has evolved over the years. It was first started as part of an emergency response to help displaced children continue with their education in camp-based contexts. For example, in Kakuma (Kenya), structured classroom settings did not exist until 1992 when refugees advocated for the establishment of schools within the camps (Mareng, 2010). The academic literature suggests that Kakuma and Daadab refugee camps in Kenya were the first camps to have formal schooling systems for refugees, with curricula for Kindergarten to high school study (Mareng, 2010). Other camp-based schools can be found in camps on the Thailand-Burmese border. More recently several temporary camp-based educational settings have been established which include Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, Syrian refugee camps in Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey, and Jordan (UNHCR, 2016).



Discussions

Day 1 was split into two topics: the morning was spent discussing the challenges that persist in opening opportunities and improving outcomes for people from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds in the settlement context of Australia; the afternoon was spent discussing the issues facing refugees and asylum seekers in displacement contexts in the Asia-Pacific region. Each group had a Chair who reported back on the group's discussion in a plenary at the end of each session. Four broad thematic areas were selected to be the focus of the discussions and action planning on Day 2.

These four areas were:

- How can we build stronger supports and networks to support refugee education (pathways into, participation in, and transition out of) in Australia?
- How can Australia's universities respond to and assist refugee education in displacement contexts?
- How can we share information better to build the evidence base?
- How can we strengthen our advocacy networks to encourage universities to offer more equitable access to, better educational opportunities and outcomes for, refugee and asylum seeking students?

“Changing lives one degree at a time: Refugee students’ digital narratives of higher education experiences”

Findings from a UNESCO-funded project

In 2018, Dr Caroline Lenette collaborated with Arash Bordbar, Hayatullah Akbari & Anyier Yuol on a participatory video research project funded by the Australian National Commission for UNESCO.

The project aimed to document their experiences at university with a view to improve support for students from refugee backgrounds in higher education. These videos can be used in future advocacy efforts across several fields like resettlement, education, gender and youth issues.

Arash and Anyier’s videos were launched at the workshop, and the feedback from audiences was positive, suggesting that these are effective means to share key insights in an engaging way. The vignettes used in this report are drawn from Arash, Hayat and Anyier’s videos and discussions on the topic.

The videos can be found at <https://www.unescoinaustralia.com/news/2019/2/3/young-people-from-refugee-backgrounds-present-short-films>



Theme 1: How can we build stronger supports and networks to support refugee education (pathways into, participation in, and transition out of) in Australia?

Pathways into university

Transitions and pathways were significant themes that emerged strongly in the first set of discussions about higher education in settlement contexts. In particular, discussed centred on the challenges for students wanting to move through the 'traditional' high school-university pathway, especially for people on temporary visas classed as international students the need to locate a fee-waiver scholarship (see Hartley et al., 2018). There was consensus that there are significant challenges for all involved, including students, school teaching/ support staff, university staff, and community advocates in getting systems and timetables to align.

Main discussion points

High school to university transitions: challenges

- Scholarships, navigating pathways and application processes are problematic: schools and high school students have limited knowledge of what scholarships are available and how they can be accessed/ the processes to be followed for application;
- Many participants perceived problems resulting from 'red tape' in application processes, especially for scholarships, and lamented a lack of human face to offer support (although examples of good practice were also discussed, such as Western Sydney University, Swinburne University, Deakin University, RMIT);
- High school students are often deprived additional ATAR points, which can be acquired on the basis of disadvantage, as they may not be eligible for scholarships or HECS;
- Lack/ limited number of career/university degree choice information at school;
- Students often don't know what HSC subjects to choose;
- There is a higher volume of intensive levels of support in schools in comparison to university settings, which makes students' transitions difficult with the comparative diminished support at university;
- Regional and rural schools: how do we ensure that they receive as much ESL support and access to targeted/ specialist services as metro areas?;
- High school students require more support to transition to university, especially if their parents / families are not familiar with local systems or have issues resulting from their own developing language proficiency;
- There are age barriers to finishing school relating to the compulsory age limit, thus highlighting the reductive focus on chronological age, rather than the development needs of newly/recently arrived students;

Theme 1: How can we build stronger supports and networks to support refugee education (pathways into, participation in, and transition out of) in Australia?

- High school representatives also raised issues around the unaffordability of tertiary education for people holding temporary visas, and the fear of deportation impacts on their ability to focus on education.

Alternative pathways, such as via TAFE courses or through enabling or sub-degree education, also generated significant discussion.

Alternative pathways into university: challenges

- Some parents and students are resistant to alternative pathways as they are seen as being 'lesser' than the school-university pathway;
- Non-school leavers (NSLs) and mature age students face complications with engaging with application processes;
- Mature-age students have different needs to high school leavers;
- Issues were discussed regarding technological barriers for students entering Australian education for the first time, both face-to-face and distance learners, but for those studying via distance education in particular; and
- Language proficiency and language entry requirements can present additional barriers to entering an alternative pathway — and when language pre-requisites are not implemented, this can cause additional challenges for students whose academic language and literacies are not ready for a full program of study.

Theme 1: How can we build stronger supports and networks to support refugee education (pathways into, participation in, and transition out of) in Australia?

Recommendations

- Career advice and information about pathways into further education should be delivered early and frequently to help students gain ideas, information and make plans (such as making informed choices about subject choice);
- Policy change is needed at the federal and state levels with regards to extending the age that students can access school education;
- Long-term, sustainable institutional partnerships need to be developed in local contexts and at state and national levels, with a specific remit of supporting and advocating for students from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds;
- Partnerships should facilitate academic, vocational and social connections between key educational settings in local areas: schools, universities and TAFEs. Heads of welfare at schools and key student support staff at TAFEs and universities should interact and make connections on behalf of students where appropriate;
- People-rich supports were strongly agreed to be the best possible model of support, particularly case management models such as the one that exists at Western Sydney University for scholarship holders;
- There is a need for more free or low cost preparation programs to facilitate access with language — for example, IELTS preparation classes, language tuition that goes beyond the functional level of the Adult Migrant English Program — and cultural/navigational issues, such as rolling orientations, online learning, library access, summer programs;
- Universities should consider more carefully the supportive role that NGOs play in supporting students to apply for scholarships, and should involve them more closely in the work of administering scholarships;
- We need to identify and better promote the supports that help (such as homework clubs), particularly in regional and rural areas, where there may be little or no supports existing in the community;
- For people awaiting status resolution, universities could establish language support programs to help people develop their English language proficiency (and confidence) during waiting periods i.e. detention/resettlement;
- Need to improve systems to recognise relevant qualifications/grades acquired overseas;
- We should explore the possibilities of donor-based scholarships for students from refugee backgrounds to support a higher proportion of deserving students, rather than the relatively small numbers who are currently able to access entry.

What do students with lived experience have to say about their studies?

Participating within University

The experiences of the students who participated in the Australian OUR forum, and the observations of the practitioners and educators in the room strongly chimed with the experiences recorded in the UNESCO project, 'Changing lives one degree at a time: Refugee students' digital narratives of higher education experiences'. Of the many challenges identified, most significant is the absence of support. As Hayat (an undergraduate student, Macquarie University) reports, "Lack of support is another big problem for people coming from asylum seeker and refugee backgrounds. Many people like myself who transition from school to university, or TAFE to university, this is a big step for them".

Other challenges that students face are related to the relatively inflexible schedules of academia, that rarely align with other commitments (such as school holidays, work, caring duties). Other challenges included: the limitations of support available (and its concealment behind digital gatekeepers), the lack of availability of support personnel in the evenings or at weekends when students often have time to study, the lack of targeted language support for culturally and linguistically diverse students, the lack of identified area/ people who can advocate and broker for refugee students, the lack of trauma-specific counseling supports, and the lack of representation of refugee/asylum seeking [unclear?]. Language, in particular, was a consistent theme across the two days. Participants lamented the barriers to participation and success resulting from reductive views of what counts as 'good writing', and a total disregard for the wealth of linguistic knowledge that students bring with them. For example, one participant noted that although students have the intellectual capacity?, they do not always have the language to articulate their understandings and contributions, but they are marked predominantly on their capacity to articulate. A related issue is the time allocated for marking (and the fact that it is mostly undertaken by precariously employed casual teachers) – resulting in few if any opportunities for useful developmental feedback.

What do students with lived experience have to say about their studies?

Moving forward

Hayat foregrounds the need for supportive networks and practices to help students like herself through their studies:

To be able to overcome all these barriers and problems that [students from refugee backgrounds] face during their university life, a support group can guide them through university, guide them the environment in the university, take them to workshops or a networking event where they can make friends

Similarly, Anyier foregrounds the need to create opportunities for students to be able to share their experience so that other students and universities might benefit from their valuable experience:

I think it's really important that we [students from refugee backgrounds] raise some of the issues that we face and hopefully... universities can consider and are able to change some of the issues that might come up

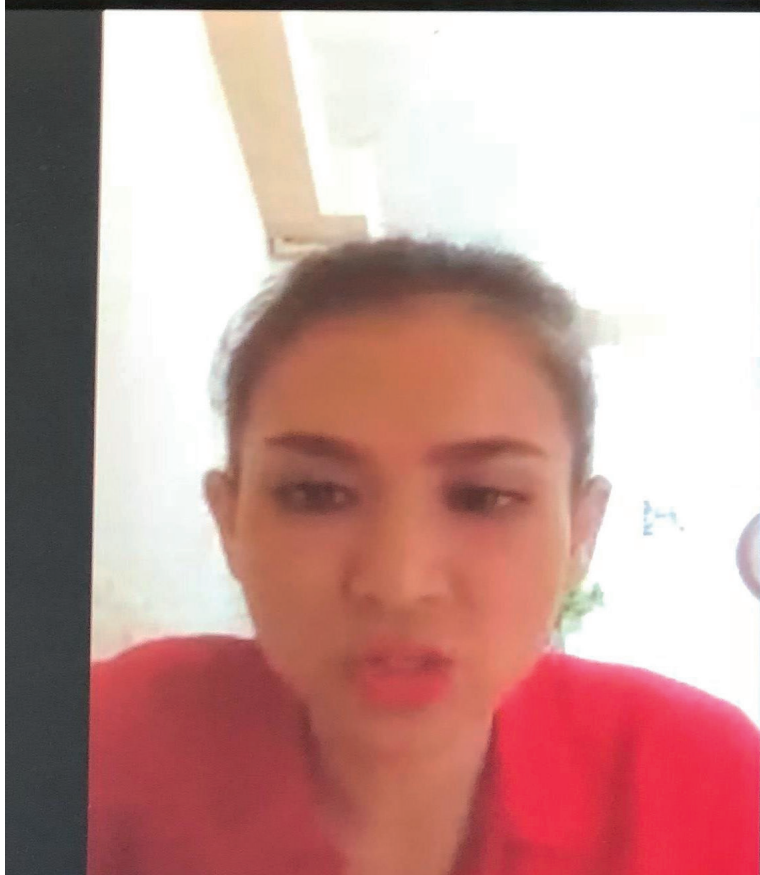
(Anyier, postgraduate student, University of New South Wales).

Although the OUR event was one such opportunity, Anyier's comment is a reminder that these kinds of opportunities for sharing and consultation need to be happening more frequently at the local level, with student representation sought throughout institutions.

Theme 1: How can we build stronger supports and networks to support refugee education (pathways into, participation in, and transition out of) in Australia?

Recommendations

- Supports identified as needed but not widely available include:
- Assistance to navigate systems;
- Hands-on assistance to deconstruct the language in assessments;
- Assistance with more general language development;
- Assistance with applying for equity scholarships or other forms of financial support;
- Assistance with accommodation issues;
- Campus/ course orientations (flexible/ more frequent);
- Establishing safe/welcoming spaces within universities for students from refugee backgrounds that they can access if they choose, which is made visible and easily accessible;
- A system similar to current special consideration that applies to students with disabilities was suggested for gaining extensions on assignments and accessing adapted course materials (although there needs to be a strong emphasis on confidentiality and sensitivity if implementing such a system);
- Any assessments for special consideration should be completed once (rather than requesting that students submit multiple applications) to avoid the additional stress of applying each time there is a traumatic/re-traumatising situation;
- There should be an identified point of contact for students experiencing changing circumstances (for example, a student granted a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa who has moved to regional area and needs to find a pathway to continue via distance education);
- Existing supports/resources within universities need to be expanded and tailored to students' needs
- Proposed models: WSU's peer mentorship 'mates program', each student assigned a Welfare Officer during their first semester/term at university, as intensive support is poorly resourced;
- Facilitating [paid] work experience and internship opportunities during studies;
- Source in-kind donations of study aids such as textbooks, laptops;
- Student peer mentoring and tutoring systems should be widely implemented across institutions;
- Universities currently have infrastructure for private language institutions: these facilities could be appropriated to offer language preparation for refugee students, and to better support disciplinary-specific language development in foundation studies and degree programs.



skype™

Humaira speaking to us live from Indonesia during the forum, to provide insight into the educational challenges that refugees face in accessing education in Indonesia and kickstart our discussion on how Australian universities can support refugees in the region

Theme 2: How can Australia's universities respond to and assist refugee education in displacement contexts?

International strategies to promote better access to higher education in displacement contexts

There was strong consensus that Australia could do more to advocate for changes in neighbouring Asia-Pacific countries where there are numbers of displaced people stuck in limbo, especially in those countries that are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention. In particular, Australian universities should be advocating for improved access to education for displaced people who, by virtue of their circumstances, have no rights to access formal education in transit countries.

Participants shared examples of good practice that currently exist in the regions, such as the CERTE mentoring program run as a partnership between Monash University, OUR and NGO Pyong in Malaysia. This initiative runs twice-yearly as a one-month program (with 15 students the first time, and 19 the second time). Our Monash KL representative, Priya Sharma, confirmed that it was well-received by the students, and feedback included the request that the program last longer.

Tracey Donahue (UNSW), who is working with a Refugee Learning Centre (RLC) in Indonesia, shared another initiative. Tracey has set up a mentoring program, working in partnership with UNHCR Indonesia, OUR and Dulwich College Singapore to help some of the refugee teachers working in the RLC to prepare for their General Education Diploma (GED), which will offer educational currency and facilitate movement into higher education when the teachers are resettled. Both these examples suggest that community based organizations often come together to support learning initiatives in the region, and that refugee communities often establish educational facilities. However, there is a clear need for support from institutions and educators/ educational advocates from settlement and resource-rich contexts like Australia.

Theme 2: How can Australia's universities respond to and assist refugee education in displacement contexts?

Recommendations

- Set up a working committee to strategise how Australian universities in Malaysia or Indonesia can enroll students through the cracks despite immigration issues.
- Explore the possibility of increasing the number of refugee students who can enter Australia as international students, with scholarships that cover tuition, living expenses and all associated costs
- Consider how to deliver more bridging/preparation courses to facilitate entry/ to help potential students meet the entry requirements.
- Follow the CERTE model and make more use of the facilities and networks at international campuses of universities from settlement countries
- Develop partnerships with different NGOs and universities in Asia to understand the issues on the ground
- Further exploration of systematic ways of helping people to volunteer with people in displacement contexts in ways that both provide useful experiences for those displaced and volunteers, and also advocate for better educational opportunities
- There is a need for a platform to facilitate Australian educators going overseas and teaching/ mentoring for short periods
- Explore the possibilities that online forums and online teaching offer to supporting refugee education in the Asia-Pacific region
- Consider establishing an online portal where scholarship information and advice can be shared with displaced people and support staff in the region
- One example that could be further explored is the Japan Alternative Pathway, which takes students from refugee camps in Syria (the government program is open to a maximum of 30 students and each student can bring their family). This is a system of private sponsorship between NGOs and universities - if students can be identified then Japan will grant visas. However, this is not a pathway to permanency.



Theme 3: How can we share information better to build the evidence base?

Building the knowledge/evidence /research base

More metrics are needed that capture who students are and the diversity that exists within groups, but there are challenges in identifying numbers as people may prefer not to be identified as being from refugee or asylum seeking backgrounds, which leads to challenges in seeking equity funding. This needs to be balanced with the need to protect individuals' right to privacy.

There is an urgent need to build the sector capacity and knowledge:

- Education staff need training on visa types, refugee experiences, and students' potential needs, which they don't always understand.
- Teaching staff must be trained to provide more feedback and support beyond just marking, and more flexibility when necessary, i.e., "Academics need more education".
- Careers advisors, ESL staff and school leadership may have biases against students from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds
- Careers advisors need greater awareness regarding opportunities available to such students.

Leaders should facilitate opportunities at institutional levels for people with refugee experiences to speak out.

There are challenges such as lack of collaboration among key NGOs competing with each other for funding.

High school teachers require education around refugee issues to prevent students from falling through the gap, as sometimes students can be discouraged from applying to university altogether.

Establishing a central or key point of contact within organisations of all types, would be useful to assist organisations supporting people seeking asylum with basic needs that are over-stretched.

There is prejudice within specific faculties to be addressed, and there is a need to change attitudes about diversity.



Theme 4: How can we strengthen our advocacy networks to encourage universities to offer more equitable access to, better educational opportunities and outcomes for, refugee and asylum seeking students?

Community engagement/advocacy

Community groups have a central role to play. Cultural associations and other volunteer community groups are key in providing social support and assistance in navigating systems/processes (the example of support groups for Afghan students was given). Students can also share their experiences and act as role models for other community members.

The key issue of changing refugee narratives and public identities, by targetting advocacy efforts towards specific groups (students from refugee backgrounds, more settled successful refugees, middle-aged Australian citizens/residents, existing advocates), can be achieved through the following strategies:

- Identify approximate number of target groups
- Devising ethical counter-narratives
- Having a coordinated approach
- Leading by example

Advocacy at State level could be effective, by speaking with diverse MPs from health, education, etc. collaborative lobbying from NGOs and universities to State MPs (e.g. FECCA, SCOA, RCOA, etc.) can also assist.

Mentoring from local businesses is another possibility.

Academics should draw upon key ethical research principles to guide practice (e.g. sustainability, “do no harm” – open universities)

Opportunities to facilitate meetings between students, advocates and MPs, paired with collaborative lobbying to state-level Vice Chancellors’ committee, would be useful.

There is a need to advocate with state government for transport concessions.

Action plans

Throughout the event, we shared rich discussions on issues relating to access to, participation in, and transition out of higher education for people from refugee backgrounds in Australia, and people seeking refugee (and currently displaced) in the Asia-Pacific region.

These conversations from Day 1 were distilled into four thematic working groups on the second day, which met with a mandate to action plan according to SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timebound) principles, over three timeframes: short-term (March 2019), medium-term (November 2019), and longer-term (November 2020). These action plans were presented at the end of Day 2, and were announced by Professor Peter Shergold.

Promoting equitable access into universities

Agreed tasks	Date	Responsibility
Create a list of key contacts who can be available to respond to questions about scholarships and admissions during the post-HSC break	March 2019	
Organise pop-up information stalls within university campuses that provide info on scholarships and admission processes	November 2019	
Lobby to central administration to change the questions within scholarship application processes to focus primarily on educational disadvantage/gaps and aspirations, to mitigate the risk of retraumatisation	November 2019	
Engage with community student associations to promote informal mentoring and orientations	November 2019	
Explore the language proficiency requirements/ pathways available to students from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds	November 2019	
Introduce bridging courses and transition to university programs which include English language learning	November 2020	
Set up a tailored process to recognise prior qualifications and study	November 2020	
Offer scholarships to males and females equally	November 2020	
Examine possibilities for mandated cultural diversity training for school leaders and careers advisors from each school in directorate	November 2020	
Roadshow across states with information for school students and people in the community interested in higher education	November 2020	
Translate university/ educational materials on higher education into different community languages	November 2020	

Improving supports and practices within universities

Agreed tasks	Date	Responsi- bility
Include specific strategies within university equity plans that address the needs, strengths and experiences of people with refugee backgrounds	November 2019	
Universities to report back on their progress in relation to these strategies	November 2019	
Implement a system whereby students can access other university libraries, to improve accessibility	November 2019	
Increase partnership between unis and NGOs and more opportunities for outreach within universities	November 2019	
Implement additional English language support within universities that is tailored to the students' areas of study and their specific needs (e.g. addressing learning gaps caused by disrupted education)	November 2019	
Create a campaign to appoint a refugee liaison person/ support coordinator in each university (a la Swinburne model)	November 2019	
Create a campaign to advocate for mentoring programs (paid) in each university (a la WVSU model)	November 2019	
Create a campaign to advocate for academic mentoring programs in each university (a la Macquarie model)	November 2019	
Explore the possibilities of creating accreditation pathways to encourage staff and students to undertake cultural diversity training (e.g. through micro credentialing)	November 2019	
Review mental health policies and make sure refugee-specific concerns are included	November 2019	
Create a campaign to argue for additional time/ flexibility in assessments for refugee students (thus not needing disability sign off)	November 2019	
Implement peer mentoring programs within unis that offer opportunities for existing students to mentor those transitioning into university	November 2020	
Create a campaign for more holistic views/ approaches to language, literacies and cultural diversity into 'core business'	November 2020	Sally Baker

Information sharing to build the evidence base

Agreed tasks	Date	Responsi- bility
Gather data on the number of students with refugee backgrounds who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are studying in university • have applied and have been unsuccessful in entering university • have applied for scholarships and have been unsuccessful • have transitioned out of university (in terms of where they are employed/ whether they pursue further study) 	November 2019	
Gather data on the experiences of students around applying for entry into university and scholarship supports, food vouchers, laptops, orientations, ELICOS, transport etc.)	November 2019	
Invite relevant NGOs to gather and report on similar data, through interagency networks	November 2019	
Gather demographic data to identify key groups of students with refugee backgrounds, and explore the needs of these groups (e.g. school leavers, mature age students)	November 2019	
Map out language and literacies supports in local areas/states	November 2019	Sally Baker
Cooridnate across the higher education sector to plan counter-narratives to challenge the institutional reliance on individualised 'refugee-as-hero' promotional stories	November 2019	

How can Australian universities assist refugees overseas?

Agreed tasks	Date	Responsibility
Email Distribution List regarding the General Education Diploma (GED) volunteer tutoring program currently being run in Indonesia	March 2019	Tracey Donahue
Promote volunteer tutoring GED and widely advertise how it can support future participation in higher education for people displaced in the A-P region Need to ask for more Mentors - Qualified Teachers (Secondary or University) with a teaching background	March 2019	Tracey Donahue
Investigate the geographic spread of people with refugee backgrounds in Malaysia	November 2019	Asher Hirsch
Map Australian Universities Overseas (e.g. Curtin, Monash, Swinburne) and promote Monash model as possible pathway into higher education in refugee-hosting countries	November 2019	
Reach out to Connected Learning Initiatives - contact Michael Smith	November 2019	Asher Hirsch
Get the survey results from HOST International to see the baseline for educational needs in Indonesia	November 2019	Melita/HOST
Investigate scholarship opportunities for people seeking asylum with Open Universities Australia	November 2019	Asher Hirsch
Investigate universities in the region to see if mentoring could be provided for students enrolled in Australian online education	November 2019	
Investigate scholarship opportunities and enrollment criteria within Australian universities for people seeking asylum in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand	November 2019	
Liaise with UNHCR to develop relationships with NGOs overseas, such as APRRN	November 2019	
Explore opportunities to facilitate access into Australian universities for people who are overseas through student visas	November 2020	
Explore the possibilities of an initiative to match potential students in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand with study opportunities in Australia	November 2019	
Investigate Scholars in Exile Program - develop supportive network	November 2019	

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