

FROM THE CAMPS TO THE CAMPUS
University campuses as potential resettlement territories
for non-student and non-academic refugees

Written contribution for the Programme of Action of the forthcoming UNHCR GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES, specifically for the topics “Expanding resettlement” (thematic discussion four, panel two) and “Ensuring a whole-of-society response to large movements of refugees and protracted situations” (thematic discussion five, panel two)

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FROM THE CAMPS TO THE CAMPUS frames university campuses as protective territories for refugee resettlement. It results from a doctoral research¹ about the responsive infrastructures and the inclusive culture of university campuses, and consists in the following ideas:

1. University campuses are highly diverse and inclusive territories where hundreds of people of all nations, colors, ages, classes, faiths, political convictions and genders, are able to work and live together, cooperatively and in peace.

2. Universities have been historical providers of complementary pathways of admission for students and academics refugees. In critical times such as the recent war in Syria, universities have opened their doors to student refugees, and served as educational emergency platforms for those whose higher-education studies were brutally interrupted by war and displacement ².

¹ Cutileiro Correia , Leonor. *Learning From the Campus: An Ethnography on the Convivial Life of Universities*, unpublished PhD dissertation in Media and Cultural Studies, University of Sussex, 18th October 2017.

² See, amongst others, the Global Platform for Syrian Students at: <http://globalplatformforsyrianstudents.org/>.

3. Considering the campuses diverse and inclusive environments, it is my belief that universities can expand their welcoming capabilities to other refugee groups beyond student ones, through the use, precisely, of their campuses infrastructures. Let me briefly explain why and how:

a) University campuses have infrastructures and services that may prove particularly beneficial for the resettlement of refugees. For instance:

- Campuses provide accommodation for individual students and also for families, through the provision of family-flats;
- Most university campuses provide on-campus health care. In Europe, campuses health centers and university-hospitals are part of national health systems, which may facilitate the inclusion of refugees in national data bases. Mental health care as well as psycho-social counseling are part of the provided supporting services;
- Campuses provide nurseries and child-friendly equipments. Due to the international publics they serve, most university nurseries employ staff specially trained to assist non-native children;
- Social canteens and food markets exist on campuses to cater for the diversity of food needs of the community;
- Campuses provide a whole range of leisurely infrastructures such as sports centers, walking and bike lanes, panoramic tracks, gardens, woods, allotments and small farms. Most campuses are actually located in tranquil places of outstanding natural beauty, providing ideal environmental conditions for trauma relief and health regeneration;
- University campuses include in their premises religious and faith-based spaces and buildings, such as non-denominational churches, chapels, mosques, temples and meditation rooms, all used as public spaces;
- University libraries and museums are public spaces, frequently used by non-university publics and local communities, making campuses open, diverse and vibrant territories.

b) University campuses' small-scale facilitates piecemeal integration and convivial relationships.

The small-scale of university campuses may grant the sense of protection most needed by refugees, particularly by the most vulnerable amongst them, such as

girls, women, unaccompanied children, the disabled and chronically ill, the elderly and LGBTs. Campuses display a particular trait, one maybe only observable in international airports: when one looks around, nobody is a foreigner, because everybody is a foreigner. The everyday flow of people coming from all corners of the world is conducive, therefore, to the dilution of the image of the refugee as an ‘outsider’ or as a ‘campus curiosity’, granting them opportunity to engage in everyday life activities within a responsive community, and in a protected environment;

c) Universities are sustained by a broad range of academic and professional services that make campuses great providers of job opportunities.

Academic activity and campus life in general are sustained by a whole network of academic, administrative, social and maintenance services that offer job opportunities in a variety of professional fields, and employ staff with a broad range of skills and academic qualifications – from professors, lecturers, researchers, language teachers, interpreters, health workers, social workers, counselors, nursery staff, clerical and library assistants, cooks, carpenters, electricians, cleaners, porters, security guards, storekeepers, gardeners and drivers, amongst many others. Such a variety of offers could grant refugees living on campuses the opportunity of a job experience in a ‘safe zone’, enhancing the chances of integration through employment³.

d) Refugees already living and studying at university campuses and benefiting from academic emergency programs, could act as mediators and mentors for non-student and non-academic campus refugees. Such type of action would ensure the aimed participation of refugees in the implementation of resettlement policy (a campus resettlement program in the case).

4. In operational terms, a campus resettlement program could work as a sponsorship program, with universities offering a small quota of their campuses’ accommodation, as well as subsequent access to campuses health, counseling, social and catering services. Funding could be covered by inter-ministerial agreements (e.g. Ministry of Education, Ministry of Universities, Ministry of External Affairs, Ministry of Work and Social

³ See, amongst others, the “Jobs Make the Difference: Expanding Economic Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities” report, published by UNPD, ILO and WFO, available at: <https://www.jobsmakethedifference.org/full-report>

Security), by waivers on campus services, by student and staff levies (e.g. one euro per year) and fundraising actions organized amongst students, staff, refugees, former refugees and the local community. The models followed by the Global Refugee Sponsorship Initiative in Canada ⁴ and the Student Refugee Program delivered by the World University Services also in Canada⁵ , should be considered here for guidance.

As mentioned by the co-chair of panel two in the thematic discussion three taking place on the past 14th of November in Geneva, the design and implementation of resettlement programs holds a lot of possibilities and can be a highly creative process. Inspired by such view, I propose then two suggestions for the program of action of the Global Compacts on Refugees:

A. Expanding resettlement through the creation of resettlement programs at university campuses. The expansion and strengthening of resettlement policy should contemplate university campuses. A pilot-project could be designed and implemented to test this possibility ⁶ and a Global Network of Sanctuary Campuses could be envisaged.

(Such proposal is in line with the concept paper from thematic discussion four, panel two, and feeds into the call for expanding resettlement and the quality of resettlement responses, as well as partnerships with other actors).

B. Granting a more practical role to the proposed “refugee academic alliance” ⁷, in what comes to resettlement initiatives. Universities could expand their welcoming capabilities and networks, to non-student and non-academic refugees, and become partners in campus resettlement programs.

(Such proposal is in line with the concept paper from thematic discussion five, panel two, and feeds into the call for the participations of universities and academic networks).

⁴ See: <http://www.refugeesponsorship.org/>

⁵ See: <https://150.wusc.ca/>

⁶ A pilot-project is currently being envisaged by the author, predicting the participation of two universities in Europe (one in Portugal and the other in the U.K.).

⁷ See concept paper and summary from thematic discussion five, panel two, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/thematic-discussions-for-the-global-compact-on-refugees.html#november>

Please quote as

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