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EDITED AND REVIEWED BY
Margaret Grogan,
Chapman University, United States

*CORRESPONDENCE
Vibeke Solbue
✉ vso@hvl.no

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Editorial: Forced migration in education: challenges and opportunities

Vibeke Solbue^{1*}, Ailbhe Kenny² and Yuka Kitayama³

¹Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway, ²Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland, ³Osaka Daigaku, Suita, Japan

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Forced migration in education: challenges and opportunities

Worldwide, people are fleeing war, climate change, political and economic crises, and persecution. Almost half of those seeking refuge, however, have no access to education. While refugees are often included in research on immigrants in education, they hold a unique position that warrants specific attention. The educational policies and practices for refugees vary, reflecting differing approaches to integration, diversity, and inclusiveness. What is clear, however, is that education plays a crucial role in meeting the needs and rights of those seeking asylum and refuge.

This Research Topic is intended to explore and understand educational responses to refugee education. Within educational research on immigration and inclusion, refugees' perspectives are often included, but challenges exist that are different from those of other migrants. Therefore, this Research Topic aims to contribute new knowledge about refugee education from a variety of contexts and from different perspectives in order to provide nuanced understandings for the field. In particular, the Research Topic aims to highlight the transformational opportunities that including refugees can offer that are often missed (or silenced) due to existing educational systems based on contemporary national structures. By gaining increased knowledge about the challenges of refugee education and the opportunities, we hope to collectively challenge the field of education to better accommodate and facilitate educational experiences from both global and local perspectives.

Refugee education as a concept

In their article, [Støren](#) investigates the conceptual shift from “refugees as victim” to “refugees as right-bearers” and discusses the broad adoption of a human-rights-based approach to refugee education. The human-rights-based approach has not only accentuated the link between education provision and the realization of human rights; it has re-framed refugees as right-bearers. They suggest a Kantian perspective to help expand our understanding of duties and duty-bearers in global refugee education. Kantian duty-based ethics is particularly applicable in contexts of protracted emergencies and

forced displacement, as it appeals to our rationality rather than our kindness or sense of charity.

The content of refugee education

Mother tongue education in Norway is provided by the Norwegian Education Act (1998) if considered necessary. [Brossard Børhaug and Manral](#) argue that the vague “if necessary” is confusing and that the quality of education for these minority pupils is impacted by the lack of the theme of sustainable development. Climate change and loss in biodiversity are two of the top 10 existential threats to human survival caused by human activities, and sustainable development is not included in the mother tongue curriculum. Their contribution to the Research Topic reflects theoretically on how to combine “convivalist” education and multilingual education and infers that promoting multilingual education in schools can help mitigate climate change, promote biocultural diversity and build a more “convivalist” society.

Adult refugees in education

The Research Topic contains four articles about adult refugees in education. [Abamossa](#) raises awareness about the exclusion of refugees from knowledge production in a Western destination country. Refugees settled in Western destination countries face several challenges in successfully accessing and participating in higher education and becoming knowledge producers. This is in sharp contrast to uncritical assumptions that refugees settled in these countries are better off in terms of pursuing higher education. The refugee education pipeline is broken and stuffed with various restrictive factors that weaken the refugees’ agency to make informed decisions. [Faye and Ravneberg](#) present a case study of how digital learning activities as a service to refugees, immigrants, senior citizens, and young adults, neither in education, employment, nor training, are delivered by the formal educational system by two libraries and one civic organization in Norway, Denmark, and Belgium. A considerable number of refugees do not have sufficient digital competency to describe their everyday life as digital. The article indicates some key points in how public and civic institutions can make the services more available and valuable for vulnerable populations, such as refugees.

Both [Lyngstad](#) and [Ravneberg](#) present research on using the World Café method in adult education for refugees. [Lyngstad](#) discusses how the use of drama and storytelling in a Norwegian Adult Education Center opens people up to other ways of communication and creation that crosses participants’ cultural backgrounds, which gives the participants more joy and ways to express themselves through nonverbal communication. [Ravneberg](#) analyses teachers’ efforts to prevent negative social control among newly arrived refugees at a Norwegian Adult Education Center. As the teachers realized that micro-aggressive behavior hindered learning, they aimed to improve the learning environment. The World Café method was implemented to change the learning environment positively.

The rights of children seeking asylum

From two different perspectives, [Solbue](#) and [Kalisha](#) focus on refugee children’s rights. [Kalisha’s](#) article explores the historical concept of asylum law from its inception in antiquity and the Roman era and its entanglements with the education of children. It also examines asylum’s relevance to current conflicts over the educational rights of asylum-seeking children and how international conventions have neglected these rights. [Solbue’s](#) research aims to understand more about the consequences for asylum seekers of living without a residence permit in Norway. The article contends with some thoughts about the waiting period for an asylum seeker and asks whether Norway respects and ensures human rights for long-term asylum seekers and contends that the conditions of the waiting period in different reception centers is a form of national abuse of power.

Better conditions for refugees in education

For countries with little prior experience in integration, [Vrdoljak et al.](#) assess the immediate and delayed effects of imagined contact on attitudes toward refugees in elementary school. Imagined contact is a prejudice-reduction intervention that can be particularly useful in this context. To ensure a good start for refugees and children with minority backgrounds, [Lund](#) claims that it is essential for parents and Early Childhood Education professionals to work together to ensure a good start for these children. The article explores the experiences of the interactions and encounters between refugee parents and ECE professionals in a Norwegian ECE setting. By mapping the educational landscape for forced migrants in Norway, Ireland and Japan from a human right perspective, [Solbue et al.](#) raise questions regarding the power and role of human rights in the different countries. The review gives a picture of the current gap in how countries can successfully integrate forced migrants into education.

Conclusion

Refugees have often been seen as powerless, victims or, even worse, as a nameless, faceless mass of “refugees.” As [Storen](#) in their article argues, however, a human-rights-based approach to refugee education underpins the conceptual shift from “refugees as victims” to “refugees as rights-bearers.” The other articles in this Research Topic also adopt a rights-based perspective, shedding light on the agency of refugees as rights-bearers. Refugees often need to acquire a new language and other new knowledge about the host society to fully exercise their rights; therefore, education plays an essential role. The conceptual shift to rights-bearers also suggests the agency of refugees, which is often overlooked in the “refugees as victims” model.

The articles in this volume explore various approaches to providing educational opportunities that aim to reclaim and enhance agency as equal citizens, with full rights and opportunities to participate in society. These articles emphasize the importance of rights-based initiatives at various levels, including among legal

and institutional systems, public spaces such as schools and libraries, and among individuals, including teachers, NPO staff, and researchers.

As this editorial is being written, armed conflicts and the consequences of climate collapse are still ongoing in many parts of the world. While huge numbers of people today are forced to leave their home countries as refugees, the rise of right-wing populism—which exploits fears of demographic and social change due to the influx of migrants, including forced migrants—has been witnessed not only in Europe but also in other regions such as Asia and the United States. In this context, rights-based education will be key not only for the integration of migrants, but also for all members of the host society, including those newly-arrived, to learn to live together.

Author contributions

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Conflict of interest

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