

Smile

# Obstacles and challenges for students with a migrant or refugee background and opportunities for Higher Education Institutions

SMILE

Cati Jerez

Coordinator of the University of Barcelona Support Programme  
for Refugees and People from Conflict Zones

Smile Symposium, 16 November 2023

Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union



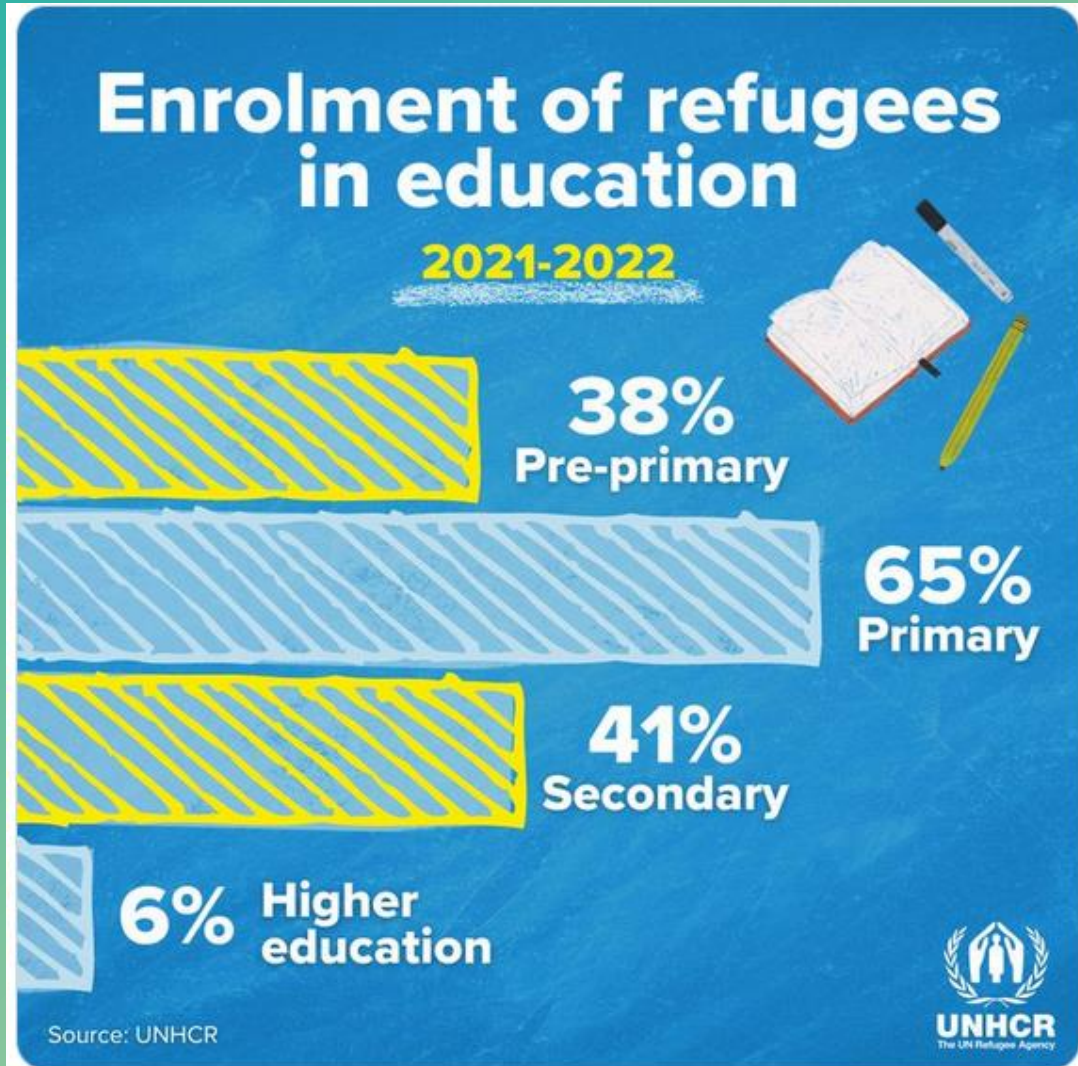
Erasmus+ KA3 Social inclusion and common values | 621433-EPP-1-2020-1-BE-EPPKA3-IPI-SOC-IN

*The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*



Smile

# Some data and international context. Students with refugee background



# What are the biggest obstacles to accessing higher education?

These are just examples of obstacles (non exhaustive list)

- Information about access and support measures
- Recognition of prior studies
- Language barriers
- Legal status: access to residence and work permits?
- Administrative process of enrolment
- Bridging courses
- Funding/economic support
- Family and individual expectations. A different future? An economically sustainable future? Uncertainty
- New socio-educational system. New roles and cultural codes, expectations
- Social discrimination, micro-racism at University
- Mental health
- **Intersectionality: multiple and overlapping inequalities**

# 3 critical moments and possibilities for action by universities



## Pre-Access to Higher Education Institutions (IES)

- How to reach out to “target groups”? Communication and coordination with key stakeholders
- Mentoring, academic and financial Support, Academic guidance, close work with families and secondary schools, networking (public administrations, NGOs, Universities)

## Access to university and support during studies?

- Scholarships: rethink and redesign
- Mentoring, peer-to-peer Support, Academic Support, Access to social capital

## Transition into the labor market

- Promoting Access to internships
- Access to social capital and job opportunities

## What can Universities do?

Develop inclusive and sustainable policies, strategies and actions, with proper resources, and:

- Human rights approach including accountability
- Involvement of refugee and migrant background students/staff in the design, implementation and/or evaluation of policies/strategies/actions
- Particular internal mechanisms (internal administrative process, Social Council agreements for free tuition fees, Protocol for the recognition of prior learnings,...)
- Holistic approach (academic, psychosocial, legal, social and labour integration,...)
- Flexibility, resilience and adaptation to a wide range of situations
- Setting up collaborations/coordination with key stakeholders (public administrations and civil society)
- Carrying out awareness campaigns on inclusion and the value of diversity and training courses addressed to students and staff regarding diversity, intersectionality and social cohesion/inclusion

## To promote access to HE for refugee and migrant background students it's not charity, it's not a fashionable issue,

- It's the implementation of the University's social commitment / responsibility: Third mission of the University
- It's to re-think and co-think locally and globally
- It's to start a change: re-think the syllabus, re-think teaching strategies, ....
- It's an opportunity to enrich the university environment and community with new life experiences, perspectives, ... that contribute to the scientific and social discussion and progress.
- It is to contribute actively to social inclusion and social cohesion: it's a contribution to a fairer world

## Access to University changes lives. Some testimonies

”

I came to Barcelona as part of the scholarship to support refugees, and to be honest, I was waiting for this opportunity and was afraid to miss it, especially after all the racism, sexual abuse, and exploitation I experienced in Lebanon.

I lived in Lebanon for more than seven years, there were difficult years.

”

The higher education at a master level was not a guarantee to improve our lives while living in a refugee camp.

Thanks to the Refugee Support Program of the University of Barcelona, I am now in Barcelona, a city where I feel that my rights are respected as a human being and having an opportunity at the same time to study at the University.

Smile

**Thank you for your attention**

**Contact details**

Cati Jerez

[cjerez@ub.edu](mailto:cjerez@ub.edu)