# Refugee Higher Education and Employability

Documentation

**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

# Refugee Higher Education and Employability

Documentation

# Contents

## Acronyms

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| BHER | Borderless Higher Education for Refugees |
| CLCC | Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium |
| GIZ | Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IT | Information Technology |
| JWL | Jesuit Worldwide Learning |
| LMS | Learning Management System |
| MENA | Middle East and North Africa |
| MLW | Mobile Learning Week |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |

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# Executive summary

This report provides a contribution to the topic of employability within technology-supported refugee higher education. It is intended to facilitate dialogue regarding an important and rapidly evolving area of concern within the sector. The report is based on a phased research process which included a review of relevant programmes, a workshop with 40 participants, and 12 interviews.

There is a well-established and important global debate regarding whether higher education should primarily be justified as an end in and of itself or whether it should primarily be justified because of its contribution towards external goals, such as individual employability or macro-level economic growth. This report does not adopt a particular position on the issue, recognising that refugee students have varied and multiple valid reasons for wanting to pursue higher education: some are driven by the desire to enhance their future employability and others have different motivations.

The three analytical themes of the research were identified in conversation with key stakeholders. The three themes are 1) overcoming barriers to

labour market integration, 2) collaboration with employers, and 3) curriculum design for employability. Each theme engages with the interviews, highlights noteworthy examples from programmes and projects, and provides a lens for exploring the overall topic of technology-supported refugee higher education and employment.

The diverse operating contexts of the different higher education programmes mean that there is no universally applicable strategy for **overcoming legal barriers for refugee students**. Designing and implementing appropriate interventions is a highly complex task but there are many examples of programmes that are seeking to do this. This chapter begins by considering legal barriers and the right-to-work for refugees in different contexts and how various higher education programmes are engaging with them. It then focuses on how programmes can help graduates overcome legal barriers to workplace integration by building particular skill-sets within their curriculum. Following this it engages with the various strategies that are used for circumventing the barriers faced, concentrating on the way in which entrepreneurship and remote working may

be potential employment routes for refugee graduates. Finally, it identifies the way in which some programmes engage in advocacy work, seeking to instigate changes in policy in order to make it easier for refugee students to gain employment.

**Collaborating with potential employers** during the design of refugee higher education programmes can lead to pathways to employment for students following graduation. This chapter considers the way in which programmes can promote mentorships, often with potential employers, so that students can acquire skills directly applicable to the workplace after they have graduated. It then focuses on internships and the way these provide opportunity for students to gain valuable experience and also provide opportunity for employers to gain a first-hand understanding of the skills and expertise of refugee students. Finally, it engages with the sustainability and scalability of collaborations between higher education programmes and potential employers, noting that despite the various pilot programmes there are thus far very few instances of lasting initiatives operating at significant scale.

In regard to **curriculum design for employability**, the report explores the different pedagogical approaches and course design within technology-enabled higher education programmes and the way in which these can be tailored for future employability. It then emphasises the importance of widespread stakeholder engagement in course design, adopting a demand-driven approach that reflects both students' and employers' aspirations. The report also highlights the need to embed the development of soft-skills and personal formation within higher education programmes, emphasising the positive impact these may have on employability, especially within a context of significant uncertainty regarding student futures.

The report closes by drawing the themes together and highlights five significant cross-cutting issues. First it emphasises how all decisions regarding refugee higher education and employability should be situated within an understanding that refugees have multiple possible employment futures and programmes should be designed accordingly. Second it asserts the validity of programmes having varied approaches and motivations regarding the link between higher education and employment, and the importance of clear expectation setting with students regarding this. Third it discusses the difficulty of collaborating with potential private sector employers at significant scale. Fourth it identifies Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as an under-explored area for refugee higher education and argues that higher education that is effective for employment should recognise the importance of TVET. Fifth it highlights the lack of understanding regarding the long-term impact of higher education on refugee employability and the need to address this and build a systematic evidence base to inform good practice.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose of the report

This report provides a contribution to the topic of employability within technology-supported refugee higher education. It is intended to facilitate dialogue and is part of an on-going conversation between the programmes operating in the sector. It is not a comprehensive study but rather an early-stage engagement with an important and rapidly evolving focal area within refugee higher education.

## 1.2. Structure of the report

The report begins by explaining the methodology and highlighting introductory points. The analysis is structured into three themes, identified as pertinent in conversation with key stakeholders and through the interviews. The three analytical themes are: 1) overcoming barriers to labour market integration, 2) collaboration with employers, and 3) curriculum design for employability. Each of these themes draws on the interviews, identifies good practice and highlights noteworthy examples from programmes. The report closes by offering concluding remarks for further reflection. The annexes of the report provide additional resources for the reader, a summary of the Mobile Learning Week (MLW) workshop, guiding questions for the interviews, and a list of interviewees and programmes cited.

## 1.3. Methodology

A phased research process was used that began with a review of relevant programmes followed by a series of consultations with key stakeholders. This led to the design and delivery of a workshop at the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) MLW, 2017. The workshop, titled *ICT-based higher education and employability for refugees*, involved approximately 40 participants and had high quality presentations from Kiron, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) project 'New perspectives through academic education and training for young Syrians and Jordanians' (JOSY), and Kepler/Southern New Hampshire University. The workshop presentations and subsequent break-out conversations were documented and provided val-

uable data for the research. After this, 12 interviews were conducted with a range of individuals who work in the sector and have a focus on technology-supported higher education for refugees (a list of interviewees is included in Annex D).

## 1.4. Broader context

This study contributes to the area of work defined by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as *'connected learning'. This is defined as work 'connecting refugees to accredited academic institutions and mentors using information communication technologies'* (UNHCR 2017). There are a large number of organisations contributing to this area of work. Within higher education this is led by the Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium (CLCC), which brings together several members that each has its own way of engaging with the theme of 'connected learning'. The research is also situated within the broader debates regarding refugee employment and their right-to-work (see, for example, Betts and Collier 2017).

As in any population group, refugee students have varied and multiple valid reasons for wanting to pursue higher education: not all are driven primarily by the desire to enhance their future employability. Within those studying in order to enhance their future employability there is also significant diversity. Some have a particular professional future in mind and others are focused on broader skill development and the pursuit of knowledge. This is true on an individual student level and is also reflected in the varied motivations of different programmes wanting to provide higher education for refugees. For some programmes future employability is the main focus while for others it is considered to be of secondary or limited importance. This issue is illustrated in a global study of refugee higher education:

*"There are multi-faceted reasons why refugee students pursue higher education, including its role in promoting their long-term employability, the way it increases their potential to engage as leaders and change-makers in their communities, equipping them with specific skills and knowledge, and growing their confidence and personal development. Within the multiple rationales identified above, it is important to understand the significance of the employability agenda within the provision of higher education for refugees. The significance of this should not be underestimated. However, it is also equally important to note that employability is not always the sole or primary motivating factor for a student wishing to participate in higher education"*
*(Jigsaw Consult 2016, p. 82).*

There is a well-established and important ongoing global debate regarding whether higher education should primarily be justified as an end in and of itself or whether it should primarily be justified because of its contribution towards an external goal, such as individual employability or macro-level economic growth. This report does not seek to take a position within the debate and recognises the need for a range of approaches. It is based on a recognition that employability for refugee students is a highly significant topic and that varied motivations of students and programmes can co-exist, if clearly articulated and understood by all stakeholders.

It is also worth noting at the outset that conversations regarding the link between refugee higher education and employability are rapidly evolving. All programmes and projects are engaging in various ways with the issues discussed in the report, but are also each developing their approaches in an on-going manner. In this way, the report should be read as a contribution to the continuing formation of policy and practice, situated within a larger context of how higher education is best designed and delivered for refugee populations. Three examples of resources from the broader context that can contribute to good practice are the quality standards for connected learning developed by the CLCC (2017), good practice guidelines regarding higher education for refugees from UNHCR (2015) and research from Jigsaw Consult specific to refugee higher education (2016, 2016a). Each of these is briefly summarised below.

Firstly, the CLCC quality standards (2017) are based on the experiences of programmes that have been delivering higher education for refugees using technology since 2004. They provide a valuable resource that serves as a guide for all those wanting to design and implement effective connected learning programmes. The 51 quality standards are detailed and organised under the four following categories: access to higher education, learning pathway design, connected learning pedagogies, and academic support.

Secondly, focused specifically on refugees linked to the crises in Syria and Iraq, but also of wider relevance, UNHCR (2015) explains that all higher education initiatives should: ensure they do not jeopardize legal status, protection or psychosocial wellbeing of refugees and to carefully manage their expectations; be durable and solutions-driven and lead to economic and social empowerment of refugees and communities; negotiate with the relevant government ministry or department, to ensure participation in the education programme

does not negatively affect legal status or protection space for refugees; take into account social cohesion, including assessment of any forms of additional support needed for effective integration into an academic environment; establish clear communication strategies on the parameters of the opportunities as it is vital to responsibly manage young people's expectations and allow them to make informed decisions.

Finally, Jigsaw Consult (2016) provides a summary of good practice focused specifically on refugees engaging in connected learning programmes that is also relevant for all employability related considerations. They note the importance of programmes: having a clear identity and rationale, being realistic regarding anticipated outcomes within a challenging sector, being designed according to the context rather than importing a model from elsewhere, recognising the multiple reasons why refugees choose to engage in higher education, investing in systematic learning and evidence building, and proactively engaging with humanitarian principles of protection.

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# 2. Theme A: Overcoming barriers to labour market integration

## 2.1. Overview

This theme considers the issue of different labour market access and integration challenges facing refugee graduates, as well as the role of programmes in advocating for the rights of their students. It discusses hiring and integration barriers, and explores entrepreneurship and remote working as possible ways to circumvent these barriers. The diverse operating contexts of the different higher education programmes mean that there is no universally applicable strategy for overcoming legal barriers for refugee students.

## 2.2. Legal barriers

Legal barriers for accessing employment are substantively different according to the host country context. For example, in Jordan, refugees do not have the right-to-work and so rely on informal means of accessing the labour market or on Royal non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which

are affiliated with the royal court and have received exceptions for Syrian refugees to obtain work permits. In Kenya, most encamped refugees are only able to access very low-paying positions within the camp environment. In Rwanda, where refugees have the legal right-to-work, there remains confusion of the labour rights from both employers and refugees themselves. While legal barriers range from country to country, it is clear that refugee students face significant additional barriers compared to mainstream students when seeking employment, whether or not it is linked to their particular programme of study.

Various programmes reported, in interviews and the workshop discussion, that there is often a lack of knowledge regarding the specific details of a refugee's right-to-work within a certain context. For example, Kepler explained that while refugees do have the legal right-to-work in Rwanda, there is a need to ensure a better understanding of the policies and regulations. In addition, *"many refugees seem to be unaware of their right-to-work,*

*and have often communicated the necessity of having a national identification card [which refugees do not have] when seeking employment"* (Director of Refugee Education Programs, Kepler/Southern New Hampshire University). This uncertainty demonstrates the importance of programmes understanding the legal situation of their operating context to ascertain the future employment opportunities of graduates. Actively communicating this to prospective students is crucial for realistic management of expectations.

## 2.3. Barriers to integration in the workplace

There are many integration barriers that exist for refugee workers navigating new workplaces, including soft skills, communication and language barriers. Tahdir for Syria is a programme that targets Syrian professionals primarily in Syria and those who are refugees in neighbouring countries, but is also open to participants in other locations worldwide. The programme aim is to build the capacity of participants to become agents of change within their professional fields and local communities. To contribute to this aim, and in order for their graduates to integrate into both local and global labour markets more easily, the programme focuses on strengthening soft skills by giving lectures and readings in Arabic on topics such as transparency, good governance and sustainable reconstruction – key issues in any transition or reconstruction process (Programme Director, Tahdir for Syria). These are particularly important skills for the participants to develop as many have previously worked in more authoritative environments where soft skills were less emphasised. The Founder and Director of the Jamiya Project describes how many of their refugee students have not previously had access to an independent learning experience. The Jamiya Project aims to account for this in their curriculum through encouraging students and tutors to self-reflect on their learning experience, as well as collaborating with potential employers regarding which soft skills they would look for, such as time-management and leadership. Kepler and Kiron similarly have a significant focus on soft skills for the workplace with Kepler's inclusion of workplace readiness and professional competencies in their curriculum and Kiron's preparatory courses that specifically aim to enhance skills relevant to academic studies as well as labour market integration. Refugee Code Week, a joint initiative by SAP, UNHCR and The Galway Education Centre, which provides coding workshops and boot camps

for young people predominantly inside refugee camps, similarly describes the focus on communication and interpersonal skills as integral to the rapid employment of the graduates, such as ReBootKAMP (Director of Corporate Social Responsibility Middle East and North Africa region [MENA], Refugee Code Week Global Lead, SAP).

One of Kiron's preparatory courses focuses on communication in the 21st century workplace, which prepares students for both online and face-to-face communication. This can help students overcome many communication barriers for integrating into the workplace such as writing e-mails, approaching others for help, and engaging in the social nuances of office cultures.

Language barriers may impede the hiring of refugee graduates, but also provide a significant barrier to integration if the employee cannot effectively communicate with their colleagues. Higher education programmes should consider offering accredited language qualifications wherever possible. It is helpful when this is a separate offering within programmes so that students can demonstrate their language skills to potential or current employers, in addition to the specific subject qualification.

The issue of how to design a course that removes barriers to integrate in the workplace is further complicated by the fact there are multiple possible labour markets that students could be prepared for. At the most basic level



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this includes the markets in their current host country, the markets within a resettlement country, and the markets within their country of origin if they are able to return. Tahdir for Syria originally designed its curriculum expecting participants to be able to operate in Syria within a short-term time frame, but then needed to adapt to the situation on the ground when this turned out to be unrealistic. The programme has thus focused more on building the capacity of participants as individuals so they can use their acquired skills in their local communities and labour markets. Several courses were also added in parallel to the three core courses in order to introduce issues relevant to current circumstance, such as psycho-social support, gender and peacebuilding, cultural heritage, and local community engagement (Programme Director, Tahdir for Syria). Through these courses, the programme has encouraged participants to interact directly with people in their community, using their cultural heritage as a tool for approaching others, which has strengthened participants' confidence, communication and language skills.

## 2.4. Strategies for circumventing barriers

The restrictions on right-to-work for refugee graduates means that there are many informal means of accessing labour markets. Various examples exist, but two areas in particular were referenced by most interviewees as ways legal barriers to employment are circumvented: entrepreneurship and remote working. The international focus on entrepreneurship is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.3 (United Nations 2015) which emphasises the importance of providing opportunities for innovation through entrepreneurship and enterprise growth.

Elements of entrepreneurship and enterprising self-hood have been woven throughout the larger landscape of higher education programmes globally to encourage not only hard skills for starting and running a business, but also soft skills such as lifelong learning and critical thinking that build self-sufficiency and understanding of self-hood. These soft skills can equip refugee graduates to self-advocate more effectively, navigate supply chains, and push for improved working conditions.

One example of promoting entrepreneurship is seen with the Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) programme. Their Diploma in Liberal Studies offers students the opportunity to take the Business



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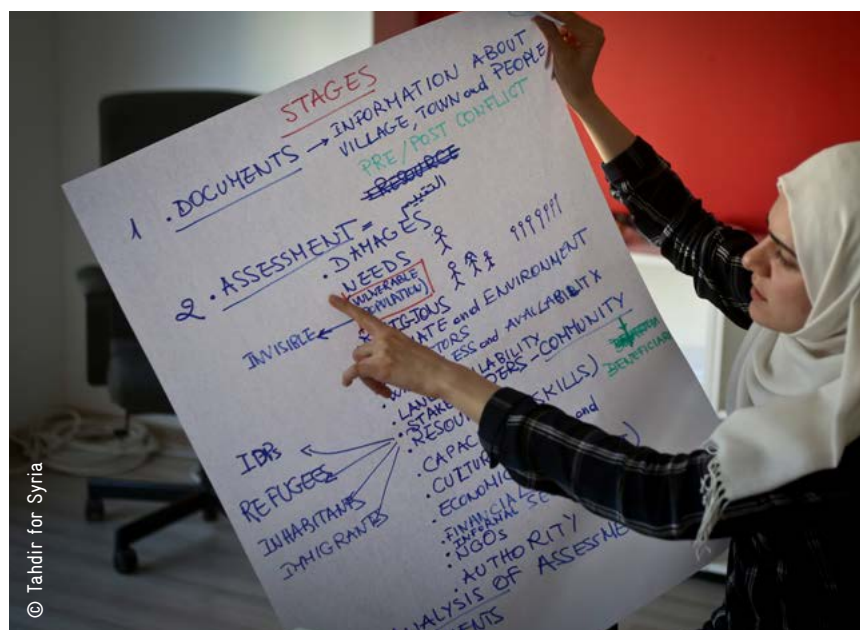
Concentration course, and the Professional Vocational Certificate Programme offers students a course in Community and Development Business. JWL describes examples of entrepreneurial graduates:

> *"In Dzaleka, one former student learned software languages like Python and set up a computer centre to teach others; one started with a grocery shop but after JWL, expanded to a mini-supermarket; community gardening helps some of them to work in plots allotted for the individuals using permaculture and organic farming" (Vice President, Global Academics and Research, JWL).*

JWL also focuses on strengthening the type of reflective skills needed for community leadership, where the graduate may advocate for social responsibility and change. If the legal barrier was lifted, JWL hopes that their graduates would not only job seek, but also job-create (as entrepreneurs with social responsibility). This, however, begs the question whether or not a programme should be designed assuming that one day the legal barrier will no longer be there. Kiron also aims to support self-employment, network creation and navigation, as demonstrated through their recent Europe-focused partnership in the MEnt programme where migrant entrepreneurs team up with mentors. Kiron sees the benefit of balancing this emphasis with traditional pathways to employment, noting that *"no one should see entrepreneurship as an excuse for not providing access to traditional job markets"* (Head of Product, Kiron).

It is important to distinguish between remote work and the form of entrepreneurship articulated above. Remote working in this context is often referred to as 'impact sourcing' and is the focus of some current academic analysis (for example, Graham et al 2015). Used primarily in the information technology (IT) industry, remote working widens labour markets globally and can be used to outsource business services to disadvantaged people in low-resource environments, including refugee students and graduates. Von Zallinger (2017) notes that the major skill shortages in the IT industry in Northern Europe and the United States of America will translate to continued and significant increased demand for impact sourcing from new locations, including low-resource contexts. This has the potential to benefit refugee graduates who desire to be self-employed but are contending with legal restrictions in their host countries to start and run a business. This growth area is exemplified by the numerous coding programmes offered to refugee students, including Refugee Code Week and ReBootKAMP.

Remote working provides a potentially transformative way to evade legal barriers to employment. However most programmes specific to refugees, including the coding programmes noted above, are in their infancy and therefore it is not possible to yet understand their actual impact on refugee employability prospects at scale. There are also significant risks associated with promoting remote working for refugee employability. These include the way in which remote working positions are only relevant for certain programmes of study (predominantly those related to IT), which may in turn deter students from selecting liberal arts programmes. In addition, this type of outsourced IT work may become automated in the near future, meaning that gains are short-lived. Finally, there is currently no regulatory body or clear, relevant labour laws, which means that remote workers are at significant risk of exploitation and discrimination. As a way to mitigate for these risks, programmes that focus on developing self-advocacy and democratic citizenship are valuable in equipping students with the knowledge and soft-skills to be able to navigate the remote workforce effectively, and collectively bargaining for fair wages and working conditions.

## 2.5. Advocacy

Advocacy is used within the refugee higher education sector as a means by which learners, communities, educators, businesses, NGOs and governmental agencies can highlight inequalities and influence decisions to create positive change.

This advocacy can have many focal areas, including employability. This is aligned with SDG 8.8 (UN 2015) which states:

> "Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment".

Advocacy is a tool used to lobby for all challenges noted above with legal barriers to access, integration, remote working challenges, and navigating the labour market as a foreign worker. While recognising the importance of advocacy from all bodies, and particularly the strength of combined interventions, this report focuses particularly on the supportive form of advocacy provided by some programmes in order to lobby for right-to-work and anti-discriminatory practices for labour market integration.

Various programme providers adopt an active role in advocating for their students' right-to-work. Kepler, as an example, has developed an advocacy strategy directed towards employers in particular, in order to raise awareness of refugees' right-to-work and to demonstrate the valuable skills and capacities of refugee graduates as employees. Programmes choose to advocate in numerous ways and at different levels, such as Kiron which has a continued presence at local Chambers of Commerce, Kepler which engages an employer advisory board to understand key barriers for labour market integration, and JOSY which recommends advocacy to multiple high level stakeholders in order to instigate policy change.

It is noteworthy that not all refugee higher education providers choose to engage in advocacy work regarding student employability. One example of this is the Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) project, which facilitates the delivery of academic programmes by universities that are members of the BHER consortium. As such they consider that advocacy remains outside the mandate of their project focus and maintain a neutral position because of the sensitive political context within which they work (Program Administrator, BHER). Similarly, interviewees from Capgemini and Refugee Code Week indicated a concern that focusing on advocacy for refugee employability may compromise the neutrality of the educational programme in question, with the potential to risk the foundational humanitarian principle of 'do no harm' by being overly vocal on complex issues that

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are not fully understood. It is clear that most programmes providing higher education for refugees are rarely also specialists in advocacy for changes in employment law. There is a potential role for higher education programmes in being vocal advocates for change if working in partnership with specialists. This is one area where bodies such as the CLCC have increased potential to instigate substantive change than when programmes operate in isolation.

Finally, it is noteworthy that some programmes also engage with advocacy through building the ability of students to advocate for themselves. This involves placing prominence within the curriculum on issues such as enterprising self-hood, critical self-reflection and lifelong learning, as explored in the previous section. The workshop and interviews each highlighted the importance of refugee higher education programmes building student self-advocacy, both for employability and more broadly. This is exemplified well by both JWL, with highly motivated students able to continue their studies abroad (e.g. UK, USA, Australia, Canada), and BHER, which includes a coursework activity where students are required to write to an organisation and advocate on behalf of themselves for an issue or cause of their choosing (Vice President, Global Academics and Research, JWL; Program Administrator, BHER).

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# 3.  Theme B: Collaboration with employers

## 3.1. Overview

This theme highlights relevant examples of good practice as well as common challenges within programmes relating to mentorship opportunities, internships, and sustainability and scalability. This is relevant for all prospective employers including private sector, public sector, and NGOs. Collaboration between refugee higher education programmes and employers is taking place in various ways and there appears to be significant appetite for engagement from the private sector.

## 3.2. Approaches to mentorship

For the context of this report, mentorship refers to the relationship between a student and a community or business role model for the purpose of strengthening a specified skill-set. Mentorship models look differently for each programme, but all interviewees who had mentorship as an element of their programme understood it to be a powerful tool for their students, as well as offering various benefits to the mentor and their organisation.

Kiron express the benefits of mentorship to both mentees and mentors on their website:

> *"Mentees are able to work on their academic as well as professional goals while employees gain new perspectives and contribute positively to society. Participating companies offer employees modern corporate volunteering opportunities".*

Programmes undertake a range of approaches to build mentoring relationships and these typically involve initial student assessments, mentor training, a matching process and a schedule of visits to take place, either online or face-to-face. This is illustrated by Kiron's mentorship programme where mentors are trained in online webinars, mentors and mentees are matched using an algorithm that their website explains is *"based on shared personality traits and goals"*, and the mentoring takes place via video-chat in a digital learning platform. Tahdir for Syria has incorporated mentorship into the end of their programme, whereby participants have the opportunity to be matched with mentors through

their course leaders via platform-level or face-to-face correspondence, depending on the location of the participant. These mentors include experts in the field the course participants are focusing on. JWL offers face-to-face mentorship opportunities through community learning tutors. The Vice President of Global Academics and Research at JWL explains that while coursework and content equip students with academic knowledge, it is the mentoring and tutoring that has the most significant transformative impact on individual student formation, helps students prepare to face daily challenges in the labour market, and contributes to the Ubuntu concept of collective empowering.

The precise role of the mentor varies according to the context. Some programmes anticipate that mentorships will contribute to student personal development and self-confidence, others focus on building student insights into a particular field, and some for both. It is therefore important to ensure that mentees are informed about what a mentor is capable of and understand his or her limitations, and the mentors are sensitised and trained for the unique operating context of the programme (Head of Programme, JOSY). The design of the mentorship as well as an understanding of the limitations of the model within the programme context may prove critical to its success. For example, BHER found that virtual academic mentorship opportunities were somewhat unpopular with students and it was considered that there was a preference for face-to-face mentoring.

## 3.3. Approaches to internships

Internships provide a different avenue of access into the labour market, as a way to incorporate the student into the workplace and an opportunity to be perceived by colleagues, the organisation and themselves as an active resource (Director of Corporate Social Responsibility MENA, Refugee Code Week Global Lead, SAP). Internships may also provide a risk-reduced platform for companies to see the individual expertise of refugee students and build relationships (Manager, Capgemini). However, employer collaboration like this is often highly complicated because of both camp-specific regulations and the need to comply with host-country regulations regarding refugee right-to-work.

In those contexts where programmes have been able to offer internships as a core component of their curriculum, there has been a necessary focus on building strong relationships with local businesses. From their experience with their first pilot campus

in Kigali, Rwanda, which has both non-refugee and refugee students, Kepler found that significant support for internships came from expatriate employers who perceived the value of the soft skills taught within the Kepler curriculum. These results are currently being replicated at Kepler's newer Kiziba refugee campus with an all refugee student body, where students are required to complete internships as part of their degrees.

> "Students completing internships work with coaches at Kepler to monitor their experiences, while the employer relations team checks in with employers and completes in-ternship evaluations. In many cases, these internships have developed into full-time job offers for students, even before graduation. In addition, many students become involved in work-study positions at Kepler during their first two years of the degree program, which helps them develop skills and work experience – while also contributing to Kepler's growth and development" (Director of Refugee Education Programs, Kepler/Southern New Hampshire University).

The Capgemini research highlights the importance of including and integrating companies from the outset in order to make internships effective (Manager, Capgemini). While they have not yet actively engaged with this kind of company integration in their programme, the Jamiya Project agrees that this is important in order to help convince a company of the benefits of internships and ensure they feel accountability for student success (Founder and Director, the Jamiya Project). Kiron notes that the most significant factor is to integrate internships in the study programme and to make them obviously valuable to the learning process. They also explained the need to balance the business development perspective, which emphasises the number of internships and connections made, with the education programme perspective, which emphasises the quality of internships.

Both BHER and JWL explain that the challenges for internships include limitations of funding for incorporating private partnerships for employment opportunities, the difficulty students may have in traveling to both school and their post, and complications for students who may have to give up a paid position in order to take on an unpaid internship, which may not ultimately lead to full-time work (Project Manager, BHER; Vice President, Global Academics and Research, JWL). Alongside this is the challenge of ensuring that organisations which provide internships do then offer a plausible pathway into possible employment for gradu-

ating refugee students, rather than simply offering internships as a stand-alone input to promote their organisational corporate social responsibility.

## 3.4. Sustainability and scalability

The final consideration regarding collaborating with employers relates to sustainability and scalability. Engaging potential employers from the outset enhances the probability that the programme content will actually meet the practical employment needs of students and address real skills-gaps and therefore have maximum potential to operate sustainably. Programmes seek to do this in multiple ways. JWL, Kiron and the Jamiya Project actively consult with private organisations and NGOs, and Kepler use employer advisory boards to ensure that curricula are aligned with skills that are in demand. This type of activity provides insight into the types of skills that matter most to both students and future employers, builds connections and creates a more substantial network of potential employers, and ultimately can help to enhance sustainability and impact.

However, while there is significant interest from the private sector to collaborate in building pathways to employment for refugee higher education graduates, it is noteworthy that this interest has so far not translated into many examples of scaled and sustained partnerships. As noted by an interviewee from UNHCR:

*"Collaborations have been so under-utilised across the board. The private sector is keen on engaging but does not know how and their inputs are normally small scale. The sector needs to focus on how to make these connections practical, large scale and sustainable beyond pilots"* **(Learn Lab Manager, UNHCR).**

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# 4.  Theme C: Curriculum design for employability

## 4.1. Overview

This theme focuses on the way in which student employment prospects can be enhanced through purposeful curriculum design within refugee higher education programmes. This considers the appropriateness of different pedagogical models, highlights desirable skills to enhance employability within the curriculum, and considers good practice for the involvement of stakeholders within the design process.

## 4.2. Pedagogy and course design

There are currently pilots underway to test different pedagogies within blended learning models of higher education for refugees. Notable among these is the Kiron model which prioritises a curriculum that is proactively outcome-oriented and the choice of subject areas takes job market considerations into account. The degree programme is divided into units, based on learning outcomes that each are

designed to potentially have a specific 'value' for the labour market. The importance of contextualised curriculum was a significant theme at the MLW workshop, emphasised by numerous contributors. One example of the practical outworking of this is the way Kepler makes an active effort to translate its curriculum for the Rwandan and broader East African contexts to enhance its local relevance.

Employment-sensitive curriculum and pedagogy is one area in which the refugee higher education context reflects and can contribute to the development of global trends in higher education. Higher education students and programmes all need to be able to navigate different pedagogical models if they are going to be successful in contributing to future employment requirements. This provides an opportunity for refugee higher education programmes to be practice leaders for the wider higher education sector. As noted by UNHCR:

*"All the refugee higher education programmes are contrib-uting to pushing the envelope in regard to traditional higher education systems – they are showing there can be a lot more that works within the higher education space … we need to create spaces and see what can be adapted one place to another to help them all grow"*
*(Learn Lab Manager, UNHCR).*

## 4.3. Involvement of key stake-holders

Engaging in widespread conversation with prospective students and other community members in addition to employers provides an effective foundation for appropriate curriculum design. The Jamiya Project, for example, made the decision that they would offer a programme in IT on the basis of a survey that they conducted with prospective students and in consultation with their partner NGOs. This demand-driven approach is commendable and worth seeking to replicate. Similarly, InZone's curriculum in Kakuma was described in the MLW workshop as being designed in a participatory manner with refugees working alongside partners to contextualize the content effectively. In addition, the employability impact of programmes may also be enhanced by engaging with prospective employers, both locally and internationally (as outlined in theme B), and undertaking a labour market analysis to assess how the prospective curriculum may address skills-gaps and emerging market demands.

## 4.4. Designing for soft-skills

Alongside the hard-skills specific to the subject being studied, curriculum can be designed to enhance employability by embedding the development of soft-skills within it as well. The development of soft-skills such as lifelong learning, self-advocacy, and self-reflection are each significant assets for future employability. Indeed, Tahdir for Syria has found that this is particularly significant because of the fact that most of the previous education that participants had engaged in was 'authoritative' in nature and did not focus much beyond specific subjects. They therefore found benefit in designing a curriculum that emphasises soft skills strengthening, where participants can develop the relevant skills

This ethos is also reflected in the curriculum design of JWL which is based on an Ignatian pedagogical approach that emphasises the impartation of transformational skills that equip learners to be changemakers in every area of life, including their future employment. Research from Jigsaw Consult (2016) demonstrates the way in which this curriculum design is particularly effective in helping participating students to develop critical thinking, social awareness and leadership skills – each of which are significant attributes for potential employers.

The importance of curriculum design that includes soft-skills is particularly apparent for refugee students with uncertain futures. Legal barriers often prevent graduates from gaining formal employment specific to their qualification. Forced relocation may mean having to seek work in an environment where there is no demand for work specific to their qualification. In addition, it is difficult to anticipate which skills will be the most important for the future in helping to secure employment. These and many other factors emphasise the place of higher education in creating adaptable and responsive curricula, and in providing refugee students with transferable skills – equipping them to contribute in a range of different settings – rather than simply qualifying them for one specific job.

*"for becoming change-makers in their professional fields and in their communities, while concurrently contributing to their individual capacity development"*
*(Programme Director, Tahdir for Syria).*
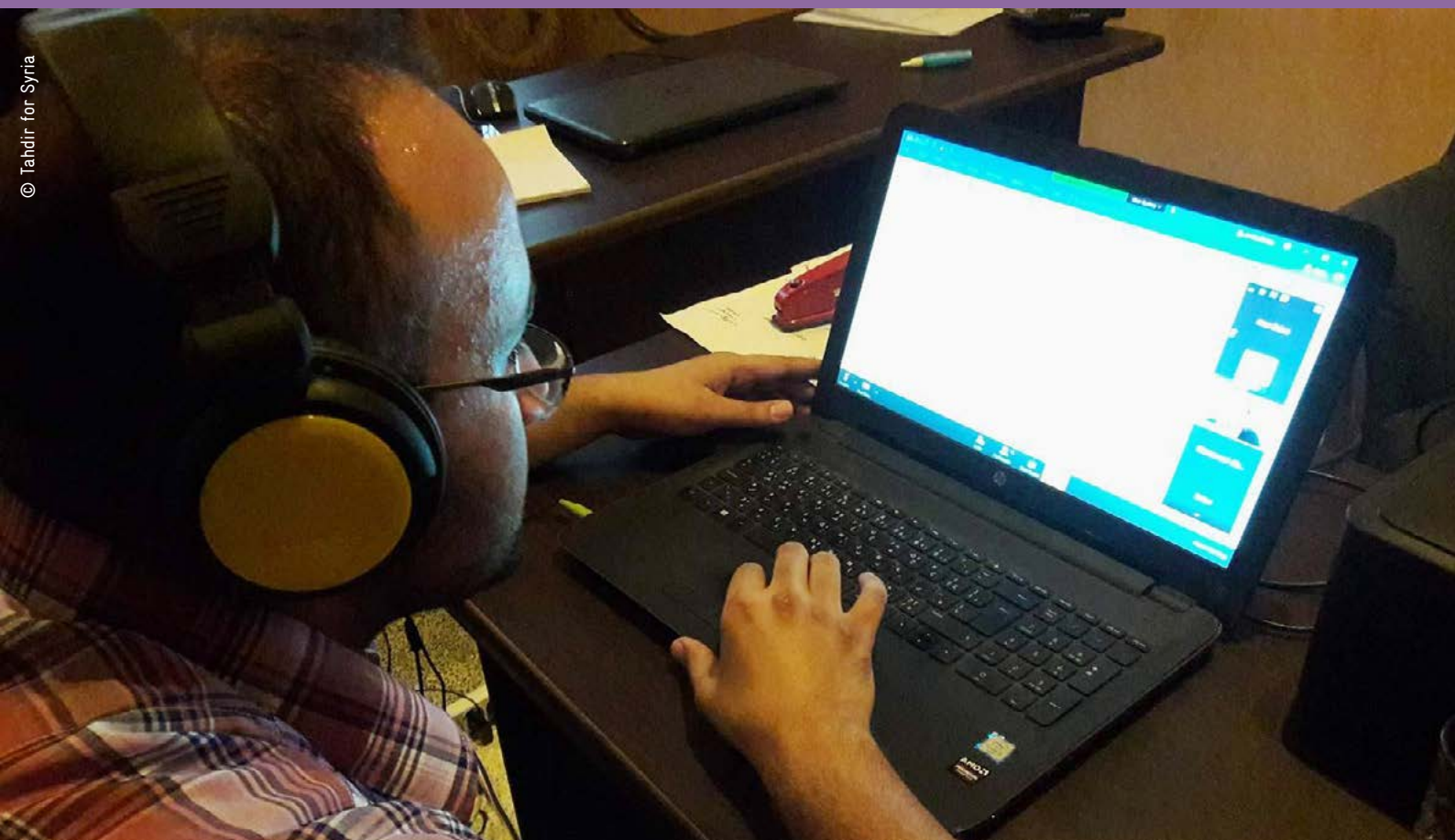
# 5. Concluding remarks

The three analytical themes provide different lenses for considering the complex issue of employability within refugee higher education. The report closes by drawing these together and identifying five significant topics for further exploration. They are not fully-formed recommendations, rather topics that are worthy of on-going reflection from programmes and other relevant stakeholders.

rating and accrediting both TVET and language learning alongside conventional higher education. Alongside this, enhancing refugee employability through higher education is dependent on both subject-specific skills and the soft skills that are required to make informed decisions and effectively navigate and excel in the labour market, whether in formal employment or engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

## 5.1. Multiple possible employment futures for students

Any dialogue regarding refugee higher education and employability needs to be situated within an understanding that refugees have multiple possible employment futures. It is of primary importance that any effort to use higher education to enhance employability recognises this and is designed accordingly. Refugee higher education will have the biggest contribution to employability when defined broadly, recognising the significance of incorpo-

## 5.2. Programme clarity regarding employment objectives

Higher education programmes should not be justified solely on their ability to equip refugee students for future employability. However, the centrality of the employability agenda can legitimately vary between higher education providers: it is not necessary for all programmes to agree on the extent to which their educational activities are justified because of their employability impact. Higher

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education for refugees can be focused on specific jobs where there are skills gaps, or can be focused on preparation for an unknown future: both are important. Realising the transformative benefit of each is dependent on programmes understanding their raison d'être and then applying this to their curriculum and pedagogy. Finally, programmes should communicate clearly with prospective students regarding the link between the programme in question and potential future employment.

## 5.3. Scalability of employability partnerships

The study has highlighted the difficulty of taking collaboration with potential private sector employers beyond small pilots towards practical implementation at significant scale. There are multiple contributing reasons for this, including a lack of understanding from much of the private sector regarding how to actually deliver employment initiatives in practice within the complex refugee environment, combined with the lack of incentives for making the necessary long-term commitments to refugee students. In light of this it is important for the sector to actively share the good practice that does exist: ensuring that programmes meet real employer needs and are designed in close collaboration with them. The stated desire of the private sector to find appropriate pathways to refugee employability should be applauded. However, if

this is to translate into scalable and sustainable partnerships it will require the input of significant additional commitment and resources.

## 5.4. Design for vocational training

It is clear that higher education that is effective for employment also needs to adopt a flexible approach that recognises the importance of TVET. Several interviewees noted that this is currently under-explored, with one anonymous interviewee noting that TVET has

> "huge potential but has not yet been leveraged — there is very little really in terms of vocational education for employability — we have barely scratched the surface".

An example of encouraging practice for TVET is the UN Women's Virtual Skills School, which has started a pilot programme with a curriculum designed to target the skills gaps pertinent to potential employers. The programme provides a free online school and blended learning model designed for poor, rural, disabled, refugee and out-of-school women and girls to acquire skills that were not available to them within their formal education.

JWL also offers professional certificate courses such as Teacher Training, Sustainable Agriculture, Community Nutrition, etc. This is a complex area and it is not possible here to summarise the full discussion regarding TVET for refugees. However, the intersection between conventional higher education and TVET is worthy of further investigation.

## 5.5. Evidence for higher education employability

There is a lack of data regarding what happens to refugee graduates in terms of their future employment. While there are many programmes seeking to enhance employability through higher education, and many anecdotes regarding the positive consequences this has, it is difficult to gather the data required to form a rigorous and quantitative evidence base. Various factors combine to make this a particularly challenging area. One is the length of time required to track a student's journey from enrolment in a higher education programme through the transition to employment. Another is the understandable reluctance of students to be tracked after programme completion, leading to difficulties in determining the employment they are engaged in. A final challenge relates to the difficulty of forming an appropriate control group and determining causality, understanding whether the student in question would have secured employment regardless of their higher education. None of these issues will be resolved easily. They are highlighted here because of the need for programmes to engage seriously with their implications. At present, the emphasis within programmes is primarily on anecdotal evidence. If significant financial resources are to be allocated to refugee higher education for employability in future, then it will be necessary to build a more systematic evidence base in order to demonstrate impact and learn from effective practice.

# 6.  Annexes

## Annex A – Resources

### Refugee higher education

**Connected Learning Consortium (2017).** Quality Standards http://www.connectedlearning4refugees.org/what-we-do/#standards

**Jigsaw Consult (2016).** Higher education for refugees in low-resource environments: landscape review. Jigsaw Consult, United Kingdom. www.jigsawconsult.com/sites/default/files/files/Jigsaw%20landscape%20review.pdf

**Jigsaw Consult (2016a).** Higher education for refugees in low-resource environments: research study. Jigsaw Consult, United Kingdom. www.jigsawconsult.com/sites/default/files/files/Jigsaw%20research%20study.pdf

**UNHCR (2015).** Higher Education Considerations for Refugees in Countries Affected by the Syria and Iraq crises. Education Brief. July 2015. Geneva. http://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/operations/568bc5279/higher-education-considerations-refugees-countries-affected-syria-iraq.html

**UNHCR Connected Learning (2017).** http://www.unhcr.org/innovation/labs_post/connected-learning/

### Remote working in low-resource environments

**De Stefano, V. (2016).** The rise of the just-in-time workforce: On-demand work, crowdwork and labour protection in the gig-economy. Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 71. International Labour Organisation, Geneva. http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---travail/documents/publication/wcms_443267.pdf

**Graham, M. (2015).** Digital work signals a global race to the bottom. Sci Dev Net. http://www.scidev.net/global/icts/opinion/digital-work-signals-global-race-bottom.html

**Ojanpera, S. (2016).** Mapping the availability of online labour. Geonet, Oxford Internet Institute. http://geonet.oii.ox.ac.uk/blog/mapping-the-availability-of-online-labour

**Ong, J.C. (2016).** Digital sweatshops in disaster zones: Who pays the real price for innovation? The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2016/oct/11/digital-sweatshops-in-disaster-zones-who-pays-the-real-price-for-innovation

### Entrepreneurship and self-hood

**Chadderton, C., & Edmonds, C. (2015).** Refugees and access to vocational education and training across Europe: a case of protection of white privilege? Journal of Vocational Education and Training, 67(2), 136-152. doi: 10.1080/13636820.2014.922114.

**Costea, B., Amiridis, K., & Crump, N. (2012).** Graduate employability and the principle of potentiality: An aspect of the ethics of HRM. Journal of Business Ethics, 111(1), 25-36.

**Standing, G. (2011).** The precariat: The new dangerous class. London: Bloomsbury Academic. doi: 10.5040/9781849664554

### Other resources cited

**Betts and Collier (2017).** Refuge: transforming a broken refugee system.

**United Nations (2015).** Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication

**von Zallinger (2017).** Promotion of Employment and Entrepreneurship for Refugees in the Digital Industry in Turkey. Unpublished draft. GIZ. Capgemini Consulting.

# Annex B – Workshop summary

Mobile Learning Week, 2017 – Paris, France, UNESCO headquarters
Workshop title: ICT-based higher education and employability for refugees
Facilitated by Dr. David Hollow, Jigsaw Consult

## Workshop structure

1. Introduction by David Hollow, Jigsaw Consult
   - Explanation of purpose and structure of session
   - Results from Jigsaw Consult refugee higher education landscape review
   - Introduction of presenters

2. Presentations by JOSY, Kiron and Kepler

3. Break-out discussion sessions facilitated by the presenting organisations

4. Feedback from each break-out discussion group

5. Conclusions and next steps

## Presentations

There were three presentations from relevant refugee higher education programmes – JOSY, Kiron and Kepler -, which explored successes and common challenges for creating education-to-employment pathways within their programmes.

**Presentation 1: JOSY**
*Facilitated by Amina Steinhilber*
- Introduction to JOSY – objectives and intervention areas
- Scholarship holders – demographics, perceived stressors and attitudes
- Activities – measures of psycho-social support and promotion of employability (barriers, direct activities, and efforts)
- Kiron and JOSY collaborative model: summer school and mentoring providing a combination of psycho-social support and promotion of employability

**Presentation 2: Kiron**
*Facilitated by Nora Hauptmann, Project Manager*
- Key activities – online learning platform, modularised curricula
- Outcomes and impacts
- Employability activities within the Turkey and Jordan programmes
- Partnerships with private sector institutions – goals and activities

**Presentation 3: Kepler/Southern New Hampshire University**
*Facilitated by Nina Weaver, Director of Refugee Education Programs*
- Description of model
- Opportunities for employment and internship programmes
- Building employment pathways – ingredients for success
- Challenges

## Break-out sessions

Discussion groups were formed to explore the three main themes further. The discussion groups included all participants as well as presenting partners. Note-takers were nominated in order to capture and incorporate ideas into the final report.

Group 1 – Overcoming legal barriers to employability: The focus of this break-out group was on how to overcome the legal barriers facing refugees (and their potential employers) in regard to their employment.

Group 2 – Effective cooperation with the private sector: The focus of this break-out group was on how programmes can work well with private sector stakeholders in order to build effective flexible links to local and global labour markets.

Group 3 – Curriculum design for employability: The focus of this break-out group was on how enhancing current and future employment prospects can be incorporated into each aspect of curriculum design within a programme of study.
[UNESCO summary: http://www.unesco.org/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/ED/pdf/MLW2017_ws_GIZ.pdf ]

# Annex C – Guiding questions for the interviews

[These questions were tailored in the research interactions according to the context of the programme in question.]

## Overcoming barriers to labour market integration (theme A)

1. What are the most significant challenges regarding the employment of connected learning graduates?

2. How is blended learning perceived by employers compared to traditional face-to-face degrees?

3. What is the role of the programme in advocating for legal aspects like working permits for refugee learners?

4. What are the most promising examples of overcoming the legal barriers to employment?

5. What should be done when there is no legal access to labour markets within the host-country?

## Collaboration with employers (theme B)

1. What education-to-employment support is currently offered by programmes? What support should they offer? Please describe any discrepancy between the two answers.

2. How does mentoring and coaching help build effective links to local and global labour markets?

3. What are the current employment opportunities for connected learning graduates? (e.g. private sector, NGOs, etc.)

4. What are the most significant barriers preventing effective programme collaboration with employers?

5. How can the private sector be more innovative when it comes to overcoming barriers to work?

## Curriculum design for employability (theme C)

1. How should curriculum design be structured in order to promote employability and help students prepare for the labour market? What challenges exist?
2. Are there any distinct differences with regard to integrating employment into the curriculum of different subjects? (e.g. engineering vs. business)
3. What are best practices and common challenges for integrating internships and other practical experiences within the curriculum?

## Annex D – List of interviewees

Note that there are a total of 18 individuals listed as interviewees. A total of 12 interviews were conducted, four of which had two participants and one of which had three participants.

| Programme name or organisation | Interviewee | Title |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) | Aida Orgocka | Project Manager |
| | Emily Antze | Program Administrator |
| Capgemini | Lucas von Zallinger | Manager |
| Jamiya Project | Ben Webster | Founder and Director |
| Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) | Fr Francis P Xavier, SJ | Vice President, Global Academics and Research |
| GIZ / New Perspectives through Academic Education and Training for young Syrians and Jordanians (JOSY) | Amina Steinhilber | Junior Advisor |
| | Henner Kirchner | Head of Programme |
| Kepler/Southern New Hampshire University | Ashley Haywood | Academic Leadership Coach (Kepler) |
| | Carolyn Tarr | Director of Academic Programs (Kepler) |
| | Nina Weaver | Director of Refugee Education Programs (Kepler/Southern New Hampshire University) |
| Kiron | Florian Rampelt | Head of Product |
| | Nora Hauptmann | Head, NGO Relations |
| Open Society Foundations | Geneviève Barrons | Programme Specialist |
| Refugee Code Week | Batoul Husseini | Director of Corporate Social Responsibility MENA, Refugee Code Week Global Lead, SAP |
| Tahdir for Syria, Arab Reform Initiative | Marianne Boqvist | Programme Director |
| United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) | Jacqueline Strecker | Learn Lab Manager |
| Virtual Skills School, UN Women | Diana Rusu | Knowledge Management Analyst |
| | Meral Guzel | Regional Coordinator for Europe and Central Asia Knowledge Gateway for Women's Economic Empowerment |

## Annex E – Programmes cited in the report

Note that there are a total of 18 individuals listed as interviewees. A total of 12 interviews were conducted, four of which had two participants and one of which had three participants.

| Programme | Website |
| --- | --- |
| Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER) | www.bher.org |
| Connected Learning Consortium | www.connectedlearning4refugees.org |
| Jamiya project | www.jamiya.org |
| Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) | www.jwl.org |
| GIZ / New Perspectives through Academic Education and Training for young Syrians and Jordanians (JOSY) | https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/37925.html |
| Kepler | www.kepler.org |
| Kiron | www.kiron.ngo |
|  | www.mentproject.eu |
| ReBootKAMP | www.rbk.org |
| Refugee Code Week (SAP, UNHCR, The Galway Education Centre) | www.refugeecodeweek.org |
| Tahdir for Syria | www.arab-reform.net/en/node/828 |
| UN Women Virtual Skills School | https://welearn.unwomen.org/ |