Foundations for All Toolkit

Introduction to the foundations for all (FFA) project

Funded by the Mastercard Foundation and running from 2019-2022, the Foundations for All (FFA) project was designed to provide insights on how to effectively facilitate access to and future success in higher education for displaced and refugee young people in resource-poor environments through contextualised blended bridging programs. Specifically, the project focused on:

1) developing and demonstrating the use of a shareable toolkit that includes:

- a Scoping Tool for effective assessment of the needs and capacities of refugees and displaced young people in relation to accessing and succeeding in higher education, including existing pathways, requirements, and obstacles;
- a Design Framework for the development of supported blended learning interventions for and with displaced youth that take into account the relevant barriers and facilitators in the local context as well as the specific psycho-social support needs of the target population;
- a case study of a blended bridging program in Lebanon; and
- a case study of a blended bridging program in Uganda (which will be piloted as part of the action research); and

2) piloting and assessing a blended learning bridging program, 'Foundations for All', for refugees and displaced youth with the goal of enabling their subsequent access to and success in tertiary education in Uganda. Foundations for All is a 30-week curriculum in core subjects necessary to success in higher education in Uganda: English, Maths, Digital Skills and Study Skills. Understanding Myself and Others is the core module for Foundations for All, designed to provide psychosocial support to all students in the programme. This bridging programme ran in two sites: Kampala as well as the Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement. Each location was staffed by a team of tutors from the Refugee Law Project and was taught to a total of 40 refugee students.

The toolkit (Literature Review, Case Studies, Scoping Tool, and Design Framework) that is presented on this site is an output of this Foundations for All project.

This Toolkit was made possible through the collaborative efforts of the following researchers in particular:

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1: Introduction to the FFA Toolkit

In this Toolkit we provide an accessible and clear guide to designing and implementing a blended bridging programme for refugees and disadvantaged host community students in low resource contexts.

The Toolkit is designed for those who are interested in:

- **Learning more about the barriers and facilitators experienced by refugees seeking to access higher education** through an introductory literature review on blended bridging programmes and how they might look to address these challenges and opportunities
- **Exploring the possibility of setting up a bridging programme** for refugees and marginalised learners. It provides a set of ideas, and more importantly questions, about how to decide whether a bridging programme is the right approach for students in that context
- **Designing a bridging programme** for refugees and marginalised learners. It offers a Design Framework that details the various conceptual and practical components that we considered central for developing and implementing bridging programmes in low resource environments, with examples from our team's experience of how we approached these different dimensions
- **Access to higher education for refugees in Lebanon and Uganda.** We provide detailed case studies and reflections on two bridging programmes that our teams implemented in 2018-2021 in Lebanon (PADILEIA) and in 2021 in Uganda (Foundations for All)

It is based on a participatory action research project that was established in 2018 between the Refugee Law Project in Uganda, the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, and the University of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom. In partnership also with the Mastercard Foundation, the project aimed to design and implement a blended bridging programme across two sites in Uganda to support refugee and disadvantaged host community students wishing to study at University. In brief, its aims were as follows, with further information on how these aims were established.

1. To enable students to access and thrive in higher education, to become leaders and advocates for their communities, and to feel empowered to enact broader change in systems of higher education
2. To design assets-based educational programmes for refugee and host community learners built on mutual respect that celebrate diversity
3. To provide spaces for refugee and host community learners that are inclusive, transformative, and effective
4. To evidence collaboratively-developed, holistic and contextually relevant higher education programmes

5. To support calls for structural change in how institutions of higher education and host governments respond to refugee learners

Our findings and reflections from this project are shared throughout the Toolkit, with a detailed background about the project to be found here.

Alongside the main sections of the Toolkit, this introductory section also contains brief notes on the key principles underpinning the broader FFA methodology.

Methodological Principles of FFA

All aspects of the project have been informed by the following overarching approaches:

Participatory Action Research

Participatory action research aims to understand and take action to address a specific societal challenge by engaging people or communities most impacted by the challenge as equal partners in the process.

We are committed as a team to ensuring that both our research and practice (manifested in the FFA program) are informed by key stakeholders and especially by perspectives that are often left out -- those of students from disadvantaged and refugee backgrounds, and the front-line practitioners and educators who work with them. Participatory engagement of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars and refugees has been at the heart of our action research processes, including through capacity building to equip these young people as researchers and contributors to the overall project.

Assets-Based

An assets based approach to research and program design looks for and aims to leverage capacities instead of focusing on deficits. We have explicitly adopted an assets-based approach which focuses first on the strengths and potential of refugee learners, frontline educators and practitioners who work with them, and their communities.

Holistic and Contextualized

A holistic understanding of learners, educational challenges faced, and educational programs within their larger socio-economic, political, and historical context is essential. FFA aimed to engage refugee learners with dynamic socially and politically-relevant pedagogy.

'Thick' Collaboration

The overall ethos of the partnership has been collaboration, mutual respect, and mutual support. Engaging in equal and participatory collaboration with team members in different roles across the three institutions -- including tutors, Mastercard Foundation and refugee Scholars, faculty members, FFA programme participants, and staff administrators has been fundamental to our approach. We have developed close working relationships through continuous communication and creative use of digital tools to facilitate collaboration and deliberation. We have recognised the complementary strengths and resources that individuals within each team can bring, in particular given varying access to a reliable internet connection and to teaching and academic resources, and have drawn upon these to support each other through every aspect of the project. Team members have always tried to work with humility and an open attitude to learning and improvement, rotating roles as learners and capacity-builders depending on the need.

Flexible and Intentional Use of Technology and Connectivity

The Foundations for All project team took a flexible and intentional approach to the use of technology grounded in the project's aims and specific contexts. The role that technology played in the blended bridging programme was largely a supporting one, providing a means by which the distributed project and course teams could develop and disseminate teaching content. We routinely dropped technologies that were not proving suitable for the context, and pivoted to others as need and opportunity arose, maintaining our focus on what would best facilitate the learning of these particular students at this particular moment. This flexibility was necessary to overcome technological barriers and the effect of those on student motivation, as well as the impacts of Covid-19-related closures. One impact of this was extensive communication through what are often seen as 'personal' social media platforms (particularly Whatsapp), thus challenging some of the orthodoxies, particularly within Global North Universities, about which spaces are 'appropriate' and professional' to teach through.

2: The Scoping Tool

This section is provided as a guide for others (e.g. higher education institutions, development organisations and donors, education ministries and related government departments, etc.) considering whether to establish a blended bridging program for refugee learners. The guide can assist in assessing if there is interest, need, and potential for a blended bridging program to support refugees in a particular context in accessing and succeeding in higher education. The information gathered and contacts developed through the scoping tool process can then serve as the initial building blocks for the design of the blended bridging program (for which we have provided an additional tool, the Design Framework).

The Scoping Tool is intended to do three main things:

1. To highlight areas that are important to explore in more depth, particularly those identified as possible barriers and facilitators in the Literature Review.
2. To explain **how and where that information can be found, which key stakeholders you might engage with throughout the scoping process and what questions you might find useful to ask them**
3. To provide examples from Foundations for All (FFA) in Uganda and the Partnership for Digital Learning and Increased Access (PADILEIA) in Lebanon to **highlight why these questions/areas of research are important.**

The main sections of the scoping tool are based on a research study conducted by the three partners in FFA (Center for Civic Engagement and Community Service at AUB, Refugee Law Project at Makerere University, and University of Edinburgh) and the Mastercard Foundation Scholars in a first phase in 2019, and CCESC Staff Members and the Mastercard Foundation Scholars (with the support of other partners) in a second phase in 2020-2021 to evaluate the design history of the PADILEIA project. This process is described below.

Development of the Scoping Tool

The Scoping Tool was conceived as a resource for effectively assessing displaced learners' capacities, needs, opportunities, and barriers in relation to accessing and succeeding in higher education in crisis-affected environments with limited financial resources. Its development formed a key strand of the Foundations for All participatory action research project, which is described in more detail here.

It started with research undertaken in Lebanon in the summer of 2019 that explored how stakeholders who were involved in establishing AUB's University bridging programme, PADILEIA, would recommend establishing similar initiatives elsewhere. Over two weeks of field research, a

29-member team of Mastercard Foundation Scholars (some of whom are refugees), refugee alumni of PADILEIA, and faculty and staff representing the three partner institutions conducted 15 interviews and six participatory focus groups (FGDs) with 46 participants across Beirut and Bekaa, Lebanon. At the same time, small group discussions and interviews were also conducted by the Mastercard Foundation Scholars, refugee AUB bridge program alumni, and 1-2 faculty/staff members with key informants from universities, UN agencies, scholarship providers, educational NGOs serving refugee youth, AUB Mastercard Foundation Scholars, as well as current and former refugee learners and instructors from AUB's university bridge program.

The Scoping Tool relies on three main sources and streams of work. The most important is (1) the analysis conducted following that 2019 field research, which was complemented with (2) reflections and insights from setting up FFA, and (3) the literature review and the expert knowledge of the team members, most of whom have decade(s)-long experience working with refugees:

1. The 2019 data went through multiple phases of participatory analytical coding, revealing initial insights and providing ample opportunities for capacity-building and engagement of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars who were tasked with coding all the transcripts. Qualitative researchers at the University of Edinburgh provided initial teaching and ongoing support on qualitative data analysis techniques. The timeline for this phase of the research was extended due to the impact of Lebanon's popular uprising, which started in October 2019 and resulted in widespread school closures and work disruptions through the winter of 2019, and then by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and related closures from March 2020. Positively, the extended timeline and adoption of virtual tools enabled deeper involvement of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars in the process.

Collaborative data analysis began during and immediately after the conclusion of the field work in Lebanon in August 2019. At the end of each day of field work, the small groups would present their initial insights from the interviews or FGDs to the rest of the research team for collective reflection. Following the conclusion of data collection in the field, the research team spent an additional three days in a hands-on qualitative data documentation and analysis workshop led by UoE faculty where the student researchers worked in small groups, with staff from Refugee Law Project and the American University of Beirut as guides, to begin to establish the codes to be used in the data analysis phase.

Proceeding to the next phase in the data analysis – qualitative coding – required transcription and solidifying initial codes. In Autumn 2019, the interview and FGD recordings were transcribed, and, when necessary, translated from Arabic to English by Scholars and Bridge program alumni. Meanwhile, the AUB staff team produced a set of codes for the qualitative coding through first referring back to a long list of potential codes derived by the Mastercard Foundation Scholars at the end of the Lebanon field work, which had been synthesised by one of the AUB Mastercard

Foundation Scholars as part of a research internship on the project. AUB staff refined this list of codes based on their own participation in the summer 2019 field work as well as drawing on team members' experiences in managing PADILEIA and the AUB Mastercard Foundation Scholars program. With feedback from the University of Edinburgh (UoE) team, a set of codes was selected that was originally divided into three main categories to comprehensively cover the societal, institutional and individual levels. These codes represented the staff's initial hypothesis of what information users of the scoping tool should be encouraged to gather in their own future scoping processes. At the same time, coders had the option to propose new codes along the way if new understandings emerged as they engaged more closely with the data.

In line with the major project aim of engaging the Mastercard Foundation Scholars in the research process, 10 Mastercard Foundation Scholars completed the first round of qualitative coding virtually in late spring 2020, creatively using a variety of online tools. To build Scholars' capacity to undertake this task, the project team organized two webinars, weekly online calls, and a WhatsApp group to train coders in qualitative data coding and how to use an online qualitative data analysis tool (Dedoose), as well as providing them with ongoing support to ensure that any substantive, technical, or procedural questions were answered swiftly. The research process was intensely participatory with AUB coordinating the Mastercard Foundation Scholars and PADILEIA alumni involvement through collaborative research sessions and capacity-building opportunities.

2. In addition to the Lebanon-based process described above, the Scoping Tool also draws from the process of setting up a bridging programme in Uganda, Foundations for All (FFA). This process was parallel to the Lebanon-based Scoping Tool research, and took place in 2019-2021. Further details on FFA are provided in a separate Case Study as well as throughout the Design Framework. The set up of FFA relied on discussions with the AUB team and the Scholars involved in the development of the Scoping Tool, but it also raised key insights and areas for reflection, which heavily influenced the development of this Tool.

3. Finally, the scoping tool was informed by the academic and operational research conducted by the team members in different settings. Such knowledge and analytical lenses came both at the very onset of the research, when defining the interview guides in Lebanon for instance, and at the time of writing this Scoping Tool, when trying to articulate the findings in reflections that go beyond our two cases. A member of the academic team from the University of Edinburgh (UoE) was also responsible for integrating all insights from the coded data into this final document.

The Scoping Tool is split into the following sections:

1. Who are the refugees?
2. What is the legal, policy and socio-economic context?
3. What are the options for refugees in higher education?

Who are the Refugees?

Refugee populations are never homogeneous: there may be huge differences across class, ethnicity, educational history, nationality, economic situation, etc. within any singular 'caseload' as well as between different refugee situations. The same can be said about the populations hosting them. Within the same refugee camps, cities and countries, different refugee populations will also co-exist. It is crucial for educational bridging programmes to get a full understanding of this heterogeneity, including of the socio-economic realities, journeys, and histories of the populations they intend to work with. This section provides some questions to consider when seeking to understand relevant host community and refugee demographics.

Refugee Demographics

It goes without saying that the demographics, history and circumstances of the refugees in the country of asylum should inform the design of the bridging programme. This includes an understanding of the ways in which - or extent to which - the refugee populations differ from the communities that they live in. Some of the questions that are most central to address here are:

- How many refugees are present in the country? What is their breakdown by age (noting that the age range of individuals attending University is likely to be much greater in contexts where the pipeline from secondary to tertiary education is less clearly and strongly promoted), gender, nationality, language, place of origin, religion, occupation, etc.?
- Where are the refugees physically located? How are they geographically dispersed?
- What differences is it critical to be aware of between/within different populations of refugees e.g. different religions, ethnic or national backgrounds? To what extent should these differences factor into programme design and delivery, and how (e.g. individuals might be displaced from the different religious/political communities that form the warring factions in the conflict they fled, causing tensions within the group)?
- What educational initiatives have they already had access to, and is there any information on the success of these?
- What proportion/number of refugees are enrolled in higher education? How does this differ from primary and secondary education? And what might explain the drop-off in these numbers?
- Is there evidence of local demand for access to higher education and/or bridging programmes (e.g. scholarship applicants, feedback from secondary educators and NGOs who work with refugees, etc.)? Is access and success in higher education a priority for the displaced populations in your target area?

- How are you going to establish the perspectives of refugee learners to inform the design of any programme? Do established refugee-led organisations exist that can be consulted, or will the initiative have to first invest in establishing a consultative network?
- What is the socio-economic situation of displaced populations in your target area? And what budgetary implications might this have in terms of providing a stipend, providing basic amenities such as meals at the study hubs, compensation for forfeited income, etc.?
- How should personal and group characteristics such as religion (particularly in terms of observing religious holidays and preparing for them e.g. increasing working hours to support major religious occasions) and profession (e.g. in terms of seasonal fluctuations in labour demands) be accommodated and supported within the design of any programme?
- How long have these different populations been displaced for?
- Is there likely to be any change in different groups' asylum statuses soon e.g. is there likely to be substantial repatriation soon? Has there been cessation of their refugee statuses? Are there plans for any mass resettlement operation for any/all of them? Are there naturalisation campaigns planned? Is there any possibility of refugees being internally relocated soon?
- Given refugees' socio-economic profiles, what would be an appropriate and feasible location for a learning centre?

There are of course many more possible dimensions that could matter [See also 'Understand who your students are' in the Design Framework for further discussion]. Our point is not to provide an exhaustive list of relevant refugee demographics, but to point to a series of elements that are expected to matter regardless of the context. Well-informed background research on the topic should be iterative and combine an effort to gather general statistics with more in-depth qualitative information from experts on the ground, including the displaced populations themselves. It is by talking to refugees that more elements will also come to appear important and this, in turn, should lead to more investigation and documentation of key demographics. This includes establishing how, when and why refugees need to be treated differently to host communities. Ramsay and Baker (2019: 69) raise the issue around not assuming refugees' distinct position or needs but instead empirically ''consider[ing] whether students from refugee backgrounds should be approached as a distinct equity group", particularly if this is primarily the "result of such problematisations of their experiences." Put differently, the demographics we discuss in this section may well matter but the extent to which they matter is something that has to be understood through careful discussions with refugees themselves.

In terms of resources, UNHCR and its data portal typically provide a wealth of information on refugee populations and so do NGOs and INGOs working with refugee organisations. States sometimes also collect publicly available data on refugee groups. Educational institutions rarely have reliable statistics on refugees enrolled within them, however, as refugee applicants are often registered as 'international students', with attendant implications for their fee status. Refugee demographics do not normally require primary data collection – although, just to reiterate this point, the interpretation of such data does require talking to refugees.

The table below summarizes the situation in Lebanon and Uganda, pointing out the impossibility of "one size fits all" types of approaches for designing bridging programmes for refugee learners given the variety of conditions and demographics.

	Lebanon	Uganda
Refugee population	1.7 million (UNHCR, 2022)	1.5 million (UNHCR, 2022)
Location	No camps Across the territory, with large settlements in the South (Palestinians) and Beqaa valley (Syrians)	Settlements across Uganda (including: 15% in Adjumani; 15% in Yumbe; 13% in Madi Okollo and Terego; 10% in Isingiro) Urban populations in Kampala and other urban areas
Duration	Since 2012 (Syrians) Since 1948 (Palestinians)	Major arrivals of South Sudanese from 2013, but has always been a significant host country for populations displaced from the East/Horn of Africa
Sub-groups	Syrians (839,086) Palestinians (479,000) Iraqis (8,739) Others (± 5,000)	South Sudanese (927,823) Congolese (DRC) (440,365) Somalians (59,197) Burundians (41,624) Rwandans (26,108) Eritreans (24,621) Ethiopians (4,896)

		Others (± 4,500)

References

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Host community demographics

Refugees do not live in a vacuum and it is essential to understand the societies in which they reside. This is particularly important when these communities may also be struggling to access higher education. One must indeed not forget that inequalities in accessing higher education remain important in many countries for nationals of those places, and often intersect with broader personal and community-level vulnerabilities (for a review of the literature, see Reinders, Dekker and Falisse 2021). An important principle that has been implemented across refugee support activities in many countries is therefore to ensure that members of the host community also benefit from aid interventions, including bridging programmes. This is not least intended to reduce any animosity between host communities and refugees caused by the former group feeling that they have access to fewer resources than displaced communities. One way of achieving this has been to set a quota of non-refugees in all humanitarian programmes, including bridging and skills development programmes.

Host community demographics do not normally require primary data collection, although the interpretation of such data should be discussed with higher education key informants. This is particularly important in contexts where political authorities may be unwilling or unable to present accurate data on the socio-economic situation of citizens, such as when they wish to downplay or exaggerate levels of relative poverty and socio-economic deprivation. In terms of data on relevant indicators, UNESCO, UNDP and the World Bank provide a lot of country-level statistics that could be useful for understanding these host community demographics, even though they too should be considered carefully. Sub-national data are typically harder to find but national statistics offices can be useful here.

Key informants from the host community - such as heads of university departments and admissions services, government bodies regulating HEIs, students associations, and educational NGOs working in higher education - will be able to provide valuable information on access to HEIs in their particular context, as well as guidance on the key questions to ask when determining how to include host communities in developing bridging programmes primarily for refugee learners.

Some of the questions that our informants considered to be important are:

- What do we know of the proportion of the 'host' population enrolled in higher education? How does this differ from primary and secondary education? And what might explain the drop-off in these numbers?
- What are the main barriers for citizens in the host country that prevent them accessing higher education? And how do these vary among different citizens based on class, geographical location, religion, ethnicity, etc.?
- What are the key axes of inequality within nationals in the relevant contexts? Which groups are most marginalised or excluded, and why? What support, if any, exists for them? Have any interventions proven particularly effective in supporting them to enter higher education? How might these be relevant to supporting refugee learners too?
- Are there any stipulations in that context around the inclusion of host communities in any humanitarian programme? If necessary/advised/desired/appropriate, how would key informants recommend that you fairly identify and recruit members of the host community into any educational programme?

In terms of refugee-host community dynamics, the following questions are also critical to answer for considering the appropriateness, structure and design of a bridging programme for refugees and host community learners:

- What are the refugee-host community dynamics in the target area? Does this differ within the target area? Would it be appropriate and safe to establish a co-educational programme there?
- Would it be safe and appropriate to establish physical learning centres for an educational programme in that context (in terms of attention and visibility), or would fully online be more appropriate?
- How could the construction/development of any additional support for refugees be designed to also be used/repurposed for citizens? Who would you need to involve in this design and development process to ensure the maximum utility of your infrastructure for the broader host population?
- What are appropriate and effective ways to discuss any new programme for refugees with host populations to mitigate against future animosity or discontent? Are there previous initiatives to learn from?

The financial situation of the Host Community: Lebanon

As is the case in many countries hosting large numbers of refugees, in part because of the economic and political disruption in neighbouring countries that caused refugees to cross into their territories, the job market in Lebanon is generally struggling. Young Lebanese nationals are chronically un- and underemployed, which in recent years has been compounded by the issues discussed elsewhere in this Toolkit [section on context in Lebanon].

Some of the Lebanese students registered on PADILEIA were thus noted by interviewees for this project to be in some ways financially worse off than the Syrian refugees enrolled in the programme. This is because while refugees can turn to UNHCR for additional support, albeit support that is hard to access and largely unreliable, the Lebanese state has almost no ability to support a social security safety net for its citizens. As one PADILEIA coordinator stated, “the Syrians can register with the UNHCR, can have access to food vouchers, can have the diesel vouchers, can have some support in education. But the Lebanese will not be able to register with the UNHCR because he is not a refugee.” One Lebanese student on PADILEIA further said that while scholarships for Syrians took into account their financial situation, scholarships for Lebanese students generally focused on academic attainment and not the relative financial need of applicants. They noted the lack of means-tested support for Lebanese students, and the frustrations that caused.

It is nonetheless extremely challenging to find reliable baseline statistics on citizens' socio-economic status in Lebanon given the politicisation of basic demographic data within the country, which has cascading negative effects on the social protection accorded to both host and refugee communities (see Cowling, 2020).

References

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Reinders, S., Dekker, M. and Falisse, J.B. (2021) ‘Inequalities in higher education in low- and middle-income countries: A scoping review of the literature’, *Development Policy Review*, *39*(5): 865-889.

Refugee rights in host countries are buttressed, and sadly often undermined, by the legal and policy frameworks in operation there. While most states around the world are signatories to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, they may still hold various reservations against key articles in the Convention, such as around the rights to education, employment and healthcare (for a full list of reservations, see https://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/convention/5d9ed32b4/states-parties-including-reservations-declarations-1951-refugee-convention.html). Awareness of these frameworks is paramount for understanding the socio-economic context that refugees are embedded within and, thus, in comprehending what the enablers and barriers are for refugees accessing bridging programmes to HE. It is also critical for designing advocacy efforts into any bridging programmes by providing a clear indication of where key rights could be extended or strengthened, or indeed where workarounds are needed given the improbability of host states budging on issues that are seen to directly impinge on territorial or financial sovereignty.

Laws and Policies affecting Refugee Education

There are currently 27.1 million refugees in the world, half of whom are under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2022),[1] out of which 84% seek refuge in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where refugee children in these settings represent some of the most marginalized youth in the world (Dryden-Peterson, 2015). The protracted nature of conflicts today, estimated to last between 10-25 years, is affecting the futures of entire generations of children (Devictor & Do, 2016; Milner & Loescher, 2011). Accordingly, education is an essential component of any humanitarian response, where access to quality schooling can provide children with physical, emotional, and cognitive protection.

Education as a key component of any humanitarian support of refugees also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on the delivery of inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning. Legal and policy frameworks to support this have been put in place in most refugee host countries, following the Incheon Declaration (2015), the UN Declaration of Refugees and Migrants (UNDRM) (2016), the Djibouti Declaration (2017), options for integration through the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) (2016) and the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) (2018). Refugee hosting countries adhering to such frameworks has, unevenly, led to key changes including: (i) a potential opening-up of freedom of movement for refugees, (ii) a liberalisation of the right to work for refugees, (iii) more assurances regarding the provision of services to refugees, including education, and (iv) liberalising the asylum application process (Niguisie and Carver, 2019: 7).

[1] See: https://www.unhcr.org/uk/children.html; https://www.unhcr.org/uk/figures-at-a-glance.html

The assertions of the Global Framework for Refugee Education (Global Refugee Forum Education Co-Sponsorship Alliance, 2019) enhanced efforts globally to include refugee children within national education systems.[2] Inclusion poses several benefits for refugee children such as access to host-country curriculum and certification, trained teachers, and already existing and robust school infrastructure (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019). However, even when inclusion is authorized by policy, access can often be limited when national systems are grappling to meet nationals' needs or when refugees live in educationally marginalized areas of host countries (Dryden-Peterson et al, 2018). Moreover, in cases when refugee children do access education, it is in public learning systems that tend to be under-resourced and unable to offer quality education to its national students, let alone refugees (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2019).

Those hoping to set up bridging programmes to HE with refugee communities need to know to what extent these frameworks are being complied with; particularly around the provision of education services to refugees. Focusing specifically on access to HE, key legal and policy frameworks concern whether asylum seekers/refugees can enter HEIs in the host countries, and then whether a refugee is regarded as a 'home' or 'foreign/international' student. This is paramount as universities often have enrolment quotas and scholarships that give priority to nationals (Tamrat, 2020). Thus, initial investigations must scope:

- Whether both refugees and asylum seekers are able to access HEIs, given asylum seekers are often denied access to particular services because it is not yet clear that they will be granted refugee status and the legal right to remain in the host country,
- Whether a refugee is regarded as a 'home' or 'foreign' student,
- Whether it is possible for them to register at HEIs given the documentation they have access to, namely refugee IDs but potentially no national IDs from their country of origin,
- Whether or not refugees will be able to access travel documentation that may be needed in order for them to take up educational opportunities outside of their country of asylum,
- What quota of places are available in the university where the refugee wishes to study,
- Whether refugees have permission to study at campuses that would involve them living in student accommodation or outside of specified camp/settlement contexts,
- What scholarships or financing options are available, and are they accessible to refugee candidates?
- The entrance criteria for HEIs in that country to determine the minimum requirements for a potentially successful application. This includes minimum qualifications and proficiency in the language of instruction, and

[2] Ensuring inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning" (Sustainable Development Goal 4). SDG 4 necessitates urgent attention and action regarding refugee education further ensuring progress towards the SDGs.

- What support is available and will need to be provided for students who must apply for new documentation, such as residency permits, in order to be admitted into HEIs.
- Are there laws or policies in place that would enable online/blended/distance learning programmes to be recognised and accredited in the host country? If so, what quality assurance mechanisms would any programme need to follow to become accredited? If not, what scope is there for developing mechanisms that would enable eventual recognition/accreditation?

Bridging programmes should offer each refugee a clear path to achieving these minimum requirements. If asylum seekers, for example, are precluded from entering universities in the host country because of their legal status, this lack of opportunities for formal further education needs to be designed into the delivery of the project, such as through an explicit focus on building subsequent education through online, distance learning options.

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Socio-Economic Context

People's socio-economic situation affects both their practical abilities to engage in particular spaces and with particular opportunities, as well as the extent to which they can identify with education pathways and foster new ambitions. Economic stress, for example, can significantly shape people's relationship to the future, encouraging the prioritisation of short-term goals over longer-term planning and investments, with higher education largely falling into the latter category. Socio-cultural norms are also known to affect access to higher education: some groups put more emphasis and prestige on (higher) education than others, and would be more likely to encourage and support members to pursue their studies. The factors are numerous and their interplay complex (see Reinders, Dekker and Falisse 2021 for a possible analytical framework).

The following questions can guide some early identification of relevant influences:

- Given the socio-economic situation of the broader refugee population, is it likely that individuals will be willing and able to invest time in educational initiatives (which may entail sacrificing employment income)?
- What socio-economic pressures are refugees under in that particular setting (e.g. commitment to send remittances to their country of origin or displaced relatives/friends in other asylum contexts)? And how might this affect the design and delivery of any teaching programme?
- Even if higher education/the bridging programme is free, what other costs will students be expected to pay e.g. travel, airtime, equipment, etc.? What opportunities are there for refugees or other organisations to pay for these?
- What indirect financial barriers do refugees face in accessing HEIs [see box below]?
- Is there any possibility of linking bridging programme attendance with cash assistance, including through partnerships with other humanitarian/development initiatives? When would it be appropriate to create a conditional cash transfer programme around higher education enrolment/attendance in that context?

- What are the broader social and cultural expectations that surround higher education? In what ways might these present opportunities and challenges for any bridging/online initiative, such as around gendered or age-based expectations of student identities and experiences?
- If there is limited trust/belief in the benefits of online learning programmes, how can these be addressed?
- Will sensitisation be required in advance of any bridging programme to prepare communities and families for the initiative? If so, what key issues/questions will need to be addressed?
- What additional support might certain groups (e.g. young, single, female refugees, or lower-class male breadwinners) need to be able to equally engage with the programme? And how should these be embedded within its design?
- In what ways might the bridging programme exacerbate existing socio-economic inequalities within a population? And what measures can be adopted from the start to mitigate against this?

In many ways, the most relevant socio-economic factors for considering whether to establish a bridging programme are also relational: how does the situation of refugees differ from host country nationals, and how should these differences (or similarities) inform the design and delivery of any bridging programme. National HEIs will be experienced in delivering education in low-resource environments, and form a critical resource to consult on what appropriate models might look like.

In/direct financial barriers to accessing HEIs in Lebanon

Interlocutors interviewed about barriers to refugees accessing higher education in Lebanon cited the content of education within the refugee settlements as a major issue. Part of this, they suggested, was that educational programmes in refugee camps, particularly for learners over the age of 16, focused heavily on vocational training in order to quickly and efficiently boost the ‘employability’ of refugees. While for many this form of assistance is undoubtedly highly valued, vocational certificates are rarely accepted as relevant qualifications for admission into universities. Some refugees therefore complained that the overwhelming focus on this form of skills development created a path dependence whereby it was very hard for them to step out of vocational pathways into colleges or universities to pursue other degrees. This aligns with work that has been done on refugees in resettlement contexts whereby the strong focus on getting individuals into paid employment ends up restricting their opportunities long-term for re- or upskilling through HEIs.

Many involved in the provision of HE to refugees in Lebanon also spoke of seemingly technical barriers to refugees entering higher education that in reality were much more economic in nature. Chief among these is the Lebanese government's requirement that Syrian students show proof of their completion of grades 10, 11 and 12 within the Lebanese schooling system in order to gain admission to University. The results that matter for successful completion of high school in Lebanon are nonetheless just those obtained in grades 9 and 12, and many Syrians will only sit those exams because they cannot afford all the years of schooling in between. This is widely known, and yet the Lebanese government has not softened its stance on this requirement.

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Work regulations

Article 17 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees states that "[t]he Contracting State shall accord to refugees lawfully staying in their territory the most favourable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country in the same circumstances, as regards the right to engage in wage-earning employment." Article 18 extends this to self-employment and Article 19 to the liberal professions. A few countries tabled reservations when accessing the treaty, limiting the scope of the articles on their territories, but in theory many refugees should have access to the job market.

In practice, though, most countries have taken measures that restrict the effectiveness of refugees' rights to work out of fears about labour market competition and what effects this would have on wages, working conditions and voter satisfaction among their national electorate –despite research showing that refugees can generate new employment and market opportunities when faced with favourable policy environments (Betts et al, 2020). Even when refugees and asylum seekers are allowed to work, states can make it very hard for them to access the work permits required to do so legally. The costs of these work permits may be prohibitively expensive, or it may be too administratively challenging to get the paperwork approved (see the Lebanon case study in this Toolkit). As a result, individuals either face extreme financial hardship as they rely exclusively on humanitarian support and remittances, or they work illegally, which carries the attendant risks of exploitation and other poor working conditions.

Educational programmes geared towards stimulating employment among displaced populations, such as through vocational skills training, need to be cognisant of the nature of these regulations, not least for securing governmental approval. Marketing a programme as being targeted towards refugee employability in a country that fiercely defends its labour market may significantly reduce its chances of gaining governmental support; conversely, orienting it when appropriate towards employment opportunities in the country of origin, which places an emphasis on eventual repatriation, could have the opposite effect and assist with accessing funds through 'Return of Qualified Diaspora' programmes.

It is also important not to raise anyones' expectations about a pathway to employment that may not exist in the country they are in, even if there are other good reasons for learning particular trades or skills. The context, as well as the demographics of the population, will thus guide whether general skills for employment (accounting, business management, marketing, communications, CV writing, developing their professional English language skills to capitalise on international labour market opportunities, etc.) may be more appropriate and useful than vocational training opportunities.

Whether or not refugees can be employed may also affect who you could employ to work on the bridging programme. While it may be preferable to employ displaced educators and researchers on the project, not least to show the refugee students that the skills and experiences within their community are noticed, valued and paid for, it may not always be possible to do so if there are restrictions on who can work in which sectors.

Work Restrictions - Lebanon

A major issue that those involved with the design of PADILEIA had to contend with was how to create a programme that worked around the significant restrictions imposed on refugees in Lebanon. Refugees are restricted from entering most sectors of the Lebanese labour market (they have historically been restricted to working on construction and agricultural labour), which affected what degrees staff at PADILEIA felt that they could encourage refugees to go into, and opportunities for doing internships and work experience as part of the programme. Difficulties with paying refugees, given their lack of access to bank accounts, in particular disrupted the latter as even if opportunities could be found for students, such as online internships with international employers, it was a real struggle to figure out how to pay students for their time.

It is also important to recognise that in Lebanon, like many countries hosting large numbers of refugees, the job market is generally struggling. Young Lebanese nationals are chronically un- and underemployed, which in recent years has been compounded by the issues discussed in [section on context in Lebanon]. Some of the Lebanese registered on PADILEIA were also in some ways worse off financially than the Syrian refugees because of their lack of recourse to any institutional support.

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Nature of Displacement

While it may be impossible to accurately predict the duration for which refugees will be in exile, humanitarian organisations nonetheless attempt to assess this to inform the scope and types of programmes and support that they will provide to refugees. Acute episodes of violence may cause major but short-term upheaval for populations who are forced to temporarily cross borders, but who may then begin to return after a relatively short period in exile. This necessitates emergency programming but often, in part due to the unavailability of funds, less investment in long-term psycho-social, educational, health and employment needs. Displaced populations whose situation is likely to become protracted (over ten year in UNHCR's definition) elicit a different response from humanitarian organisations, which recognise the need for meeting a broader set of refugees' economic, social and political needs. Programmes in these contexts can then be designed to be medium or long-term, pending funding, because these refugees are likely to be in camps, settlements or cities for the foreseeable future.

Educational programmes must be designed for, and adapt to, these different and constantly evolving scenarios. It does not, for example, make sense to design an 18 month teaching programme if there is credible evidence to suggest that individuals will likely return to their country of origin if elections in 6 months time are peaceful. In such a scenario, it may be more appropriate to design shorter units of teaching or to follow a hybrid model so that as students move back and forth between the country of origin and asylum, they can still access the teaching materials and sessions remotely online. The latter approach also ensures that populations that it might be assumed would return sooner - but for which there is no guarantee of this happening - are not discriminated against in terms of entry to training programmes. There has been evidence in the past, for example, of refugee students being denied access to international scholarships or educational programmes because of assumptions that they would soon be returning to their country of origin (Cole, 2016). If students are likely to return to a country with a well-developed tertiary education system, the curriculum may need to focus on skills and practical advice that are relevant to that context as well as that in the country of asylum.

The degree of trauma experienced by students will also depend on why and when they were displaced, with implications for the provision of appropriate psycho-social support and the content of any curriculum. Any experiences of displacement will cause a sense of loss, but some may also be accompanied by more extreme mental and physical trauma caused by direct violence and persecution. This will have impacts on students' concentration, emotional regulation, aspirations, etc., all of which should be considered in terms of the programme content, delivery, timetable and structure.

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Access to technology, Connectivity and Learning Infrastructures

Discussed further in the Design Framework, the role that technology plays in the design and delivery of any educational programme is one that needs to be critically considered, and revisited throughout the delivery of any programme. While there is a large body of literature on what learning technology can and cannot afford, it is important to foreground that technology should not drive the bridging programme, but rather be used as and when available and appropriate (Facer & Selwyn, 2021). That appropriate use is often less directly educational and more for social support, or as Leung (2018) suggests a way to 'maintain their tenuous and fragile relationships with the world outside refugee camps' (p. 49). When used educationally it is important to note that lower-tech strategies can lead to more effective learning outcomes (Leung, 2018, p. 45) within refugee education initiatives. However, the use of technology in refugee education contexts presents opportunities for broadening both the range of education available and the range of actors who are able to contribute to that education.

While there are definitely opportunities for expanding connectivity to learning sites that may lack appropriate internet and technology, such as through the provision of mobile phones or tablets that can connect to a 4G or 5G network, a reliable, affordable and fast connection undoubtedly changes how any educational programme can be designed. It opens the possibility of hybrid and blended teaching, utilising capacity and skills from outside of that context, and the ability to use a whole range of pre-designed, interactive online materials. It may therefore be worth considering locating any programme in a site that can benefit from online opportunities, provided this is equally accessible, or can be made equally accessible e.g. through providing larger stipends for those who may have to travel further to reach it, to all potential learners.

Questions to consider about technology and connectivity when preparing to design any blended, bridging programme therefore include:

- What technologies are the potential learners already familiar with? And what technologies will it be realistic to expect them to familiarise themselves with during the programme?
- What are the most appropriate technologies to promote given the particular characteristics of the learners, teachers, and study locations?

- Are there ways in which the existing technologies/connectivity are exacerbating inequalities within the target student group? How might you ensure that the admissions process for your programme does not reinforce these inequalities (such as through making sure that it is not just advertised through digital mediums that not everyone is able to access)? And how do you ensure that these same dynamics are not reinforced through the delivery of the broader programme?
- How connected are the possible learning sites? And would it be possible for the programme to provide/upgrade to a more secure connection, which might be of benefit to the wider refugee and host community?
- Alongside connectivity, what access do your learners have to electricity to support these technologies?
- If students have access to digital technologies, what balance do they want between utilising online resources/distance learning and more traditional, classroom-based teaching? What does a successful and engaging 'hybrid' education look like to them?
- Similarly, if students have the ability to work from home, what is it realistic to expect them to achieve in these contexts? For students who do not have this option, is 'mobile learning' something that they want?

In terms of learning infrastructure, the big questions are obviously whether or not it is possible or appropriate to repurpose existing structures or whether it is necessary or preferable to establish your own facilities. The former may be determined by factors including the political sensitivity of using existing educational buildings, or basic geographical/size constraints. The section on 'Location and Space' in the Design Framework provides an extended discussion on key considerations for this dimension of any bridging programme.

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Any bridging programme needs to be able to answer the question of 'bridging to what?'. There needs to be a shared sense among staff and students of where the cohort currently is, and where they would like to be at the end of the programme. The answer may not be singular - for some it may be a specific undergraduate programme at a certain University, while for others it might be the requisite skills to apply for particular jobs - but programmes that are explicitly marketed as being to 'bridge' something should be structured to support a clear and feasible pathway from a certain point to that outcome. The ability to do so rests on consulting your 'target applicants' on the following points prior to and throughout the bridging programme.

Pathways for Entry to HE

It seems important to begin by having a clear overview of the HEI landscape in the area, country or even region in which the programme is operating. Particularly if displaced populations are able and likely to be relatively mobile, including in terms of returning to their countries of origin, it may be important to design programmes with an eye to the opportunities and pathways available there. If the aim of the programme is to assist students in entering HEIs through making their applications competitive at this level, it is important to start by mapping what universities and technical colleges admit displaced candidates and through which channels. Such a task is perhaps easier said than done when admissions websites either do not exist or are incomplete. It may require calling up admissions teams, or even instigating a process in which a policy around refugee admissions is first formulated. Contacting HEIs is nonetheless also a way to build rapport with their admission teams and to establish what their criteria for successful entry are, which can help in streamlining the programme.

Important questions to consider include:

- What opportunities exist for refugee scholars to enter HEIs in the country of asylum?
- Are these equally accessible to all refugees, or are they limited by age, gender, nationality, residency status, etc. [see box below]?
- What documentation and/or qualifications do HEIs require refugees to have to gain admission through these pathways [see case study box below]? And is there scope for early advocacy on this to expand opportunities for refugees into HEIs?
- Is there a big discrepancy in the quality of programmes that they can enter through different channels e.g. are some programmes more accessible but less highly respected domestically and internationally? And if so, how should your programme accommodate this fact?
- Will refugee learners require particular skills e.g IELTS/TOEFL qualifications, to enter HEIs in the country of origin? Can this be accommodated within a bridging programme or does it require building partnerships with other organisations/bodies in order to provide that more targeted support?

- Can a bridging programme support students whose degrees have been disrupted to enter into the second/third year of University rather being a new degree programme? What would the programme need to consist of in order to facilitate this type of entry into HE?
- What are the differences between private and public HEIs in terms of subjects, quality, fees, scholarship provision, etc.?
- Is it feasible (e.g. will refugee learners have reliable access to technologies and internet) for refugees to pursue online opportunities to access HEIs? What are the other requirements for enrolment into these programmes?
- Are there opportunities to establish partnerships with institutions outside of the country of asylum that may provide supported pathways for refugee learners into HE?
- Is there data on success rates for refugees in the country of origin in terms of accessing HE? Are there any particularly successful 'routes in', or approaches that have historically proved less successful? What can be learned from previous initiatives that have supported refugees to access HE in that context?
- How will students be supported to choose their degree programmes? And to what extent should this be connected to a broader assessment of the labour market opportunities in their country of origin or asylum versus a broader international context [see box below]?

A bridging programme also provides a space for mature learners to enter higher education without requiring them to repeat secondary school or necessarily to sit national high school exams. For individuals who may be in their late 20s or 30s before they have enough stability in exile to contemplate resuming their educations, and who may be married and/or with children, having to enrol in a high school with individuals a decade or more younger than you can compound the humiliation, frustrations and frequent infantilization of displacement. Providing pathways that enable people to avoid this experience is critical.

The relationship between HE and the job market in Lebanon

Specialists in HE in Lebanon discussed the challenges that displaced Syrians face when trying to decide which degrees to pursue in the country. Restrictions on what jobs Syrians can do in Lebanon, such as working as pharmacists, renders certain University degrees largely pointless if there are no opportunities for Syrians to repatriate or to move on elsewhere. Students then have to decide whether to pursue a degree that will lead to possible employment in Lebanon and/or to establish the likelihood of their returning to Syria upon completion of their degree programme and thus pursuing a course that would have greater utility there. This raises the importance of recognising and supporting both the pragmatic compromises that students might be making when deciding on HE in a displacement context, as well as how these decisions coalesce with broader concerns about ongoing conflict, family separation, and individual's projected futures.

For those whose job it is to advise students, it can be particularly challenging to work around these dynamics. Inevitably these discussions touch on domestic political policies but also long held personal aspirations of students. As one student advisor interviewed by PADILEIA discussed in 2019, there is also the issue that there are “the top jobs and cultural things that people basically want to study and do afterwards…to be a lawyer, a doctor or an engineer” but those labour markets have become saturated in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria and so they are also pushed to encourage people away from these prestigious jobs towards degrees that are more ‘future-proof’. This may also involve encouraging students into vocational training programmes rather than University degrees, which may require pushing against the strong cultural position, seen the world over, that a University education is more prestigious and lucrative than some more applied alternatives. Educators also have to be careful, as discussed above, not to prioritise short-term economic gains through vocational skills training over possible long-term upskilling through a degree programme, given the enormous social and economic mobility that the latter can provide graduates.

One way in which the Malala School team in Lebanon has attempted to balance these different demands is by being clear to students that their programme is designed to equip them with the English and IT skills to independently develop the requisite skills for finding the right course for them and applying for scholarships, rather than suggesting that this endpoint will be a core part of their programmes. They recognise that the course is not long enough to support students to find and apply for HEI opportunities, but rather it is to signpost them in the direction of courses and development opportunities that will enable them to do this on their own after the programme has ended.

Barriers to Entry: Degree Equivalency in Lebanon

In Lebanon, degree equivalence is done by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Students must travel there to get official recognition of their previous qualifications from Syria, though the terms and conditions for this equivalence to be recognised are in constant - and frustrating - flux. Without this, students can be forced to repeat years of programmes that they have already completed the equivalent of in Syria, with major financial and psychological implications as it contributes to a sense that people’s lives in exile are not moving forward. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has become increasingly slow at processing these requests for equivalence, which further delays students’ admissions to HEIs, and causes refugees to undertake unnecessary and expensive journeys to travel to Beirut to check repeatedly on the status of their documents. As one PADILEIA student summarised: "I honestly went to get my degree equivalence a year ago, I got it stamped by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and I took it for the equivalence process. They told me to come back after a month and it will be done. But because it [the Ministry] was in Beirut, honestly, it's far. I need transportation money. I need to pay $30, a small amount of money but I didn't have it."

Barriers to Entry: Residency and Citizenship Requirements

Uganda National Exams Board (UNEB): In Uganda, it is only possible to register for the standardised national exams, which are a necessary precursor to entering public Universities through the 'normal' route, if you are a Ugandan national. This means that refugees either cannot sit these national exams or they have to go down the risky and often expensive route of procuring fake Ugandan identity. The situation is worsened by the fact that while refugees can naturalise in Uganda, the route to doing so is prohibitively complex and the Ugandan government has long made it difficult for refugees to access citizenship, including through denying that such a right exists (Cole, 2020).

Residency requirements in Lebanon: Many scholarship programmes and Universities in Lebanon require applicants to be Lebanese citizens or legal residents in the country. It is impossible, however, for most refugees to gain legal residency papers because the Lebanese government refuses this documentation to individuals who have previously entered the country illegally. As there are no longer any legal routes through which Syrian refugees can enter the country legally, which is the case in many countries (hence the non-penalisation clause in the 1951 Convention to ensure that refugees are not punished for entering a country illegally to claim asylum when this is often the only option available to them), they therefore struggle to access residents' permits, and thus are disqualified from applying for most educational opportunities.

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To promote student success in higher education, it is necessary first to define the term 'success'. As with other broad phrases such as 'interest', 'success' includes a range of connotations both within and outside the area of education. Student performance can be measured using outcomes such as attendance, self-efficacy, and grades. Success in postsecondary education is often seen as requiring a mix of low-cost access, persistence, completion, and a seamless transfer to the job sector. Additionally, a college degree may act as a passport out of poverty for refugees and disadvantaged youths, which may ultimately be seen as where 'success' lies.

There can be significant differences, however, in how faculty and students define success (Dean, 1998; Brauer et al, 2021), as well as how minority students (refugees and disadvantaged youth) define the term in comparison to their majority counterparts (Tierney, 1992; Goyette and Xie, 1999; Oh and Kim, 2016; O'Shea and Delahunty, 2018). Success may also be measured over different timelines: universities and donors may be looking to measure metrics that might signal immediate success, such as successful completion of a course or immediate employment in the labour market, whereas refugees may be assessing success in more holistic and long-term ways. As Streitwieser et al (2019: 487) state in their review of various educational programmes, "many of the interventions reviewed were also one-offs that appeared to have a short-term focus." Refugees may have successfully completed short online courses, but these did not necessarily provide any clear entry point into HEIs or the labour market.

Ways to establish what success could consist of in any particular context include: focus groups with prospective applicants about what they would want to achieve through any bridging programme; and interviews with HEI providers and educational NGOs about what an achievable, contextually appropriate but aspirational definition of 'success' would consist of. We also suggest that this question is discussed during the design phase of the programme [see Design Framework] as it closely relates to the question of the aims and outcomes of the programme. At that stage, it may also be important to establish that various actors, including government institutions, support the measures of success identified as important by the programme; if there is active and ongoing institutional resistance against refugee students achieving those goals, then it may not be realistic to propose them. Having an unrealistic measure of success can be disempowering for all staff and students engaged in implementing the programme.

Despite the difficulty of reducing success to any singular metrics prior to establishing a bridging programme, however, any application for donor funding necessitates some reckoning with what 'success' *might* look like. This may include:

- 'Success' within the programme through a range of quantitative measures e.g. attendance rates, course satisfaction scores, improvements in test results from the start to finish of a

course, successful programme completion rates (including by gender, age, nationality, etc.), the number of students admitted into HEIs, etc. or qualitative metrics e.g. student testimonials, informal feedback from staff and tutors, etc.
- Key research outputs e.g. journal articles, policy reports, blogs, etc.
- Affecting policy change e.g. using data from the bridging programme to advocate for broader shifts in admissions policies, scholarship provision, access to HEIs, etc.

In that final sense then, it is also important for bridging programmes to focus on 'success' as well as numerical 'access', through preparing students to also succeed upon entry into HE or the workforce and to succeed in challenging and changing the structures of power that continue to exclude them (Machika, 2007). Hay and Morals (2004: 60) acknowledge the critique of bridging programmes in that they tend to focus on accessibility rather than access, as the 'institutional barriers to change rather than the social dynamics of change and cultural resistance become the objects of policy and strategy, while educational innovation is made possible without disturbing traditional categories and contents'.

Success in PADILEIA

Success in PADILEIA has been defined on two levels: *academic completion* and *acquired capacities for life beyond graduation*, including the ability to use intellectual, practical, and interpersonal knowledge and skills for work, social participation, and future education. The PADILEIA project provided two forms of student support: the King's College London (KCL) model (blended learning, online study, and mentoring from KCL mentors) and the Kiron model. The KCL student assistance approach enables students to succeed in higher education by enhancing their English, maths, science, and digital abilities, among other things. Kiron assists students by guiding them through the country's opportunities and actively ensuring their participation and sense of community through the Kiron online Forum, email, Facebook, WhatsApp, and face-to-face interactions, as well as by providing them with the guidance necessary to make the best possible university and scholarship applications.

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Identifying Scholarships

Literature shows that refugees entering HE in host countries face numerous challenges, but it is often sparse on what supports – including financial – are available (Unangst & Crea, 2020). Between one and three percent of all refugees worldwide are estimated to be enrolled in HE (UNHCR, 2019; Fert, 2020). In 2020, UNHCR UK launched their *Aiming Higher* campaign - part of their *Refugee Scholarships Programme* – to enable 'gifted young refugee students to pursue a university degree or similar higher education.' This campaign estimates there is still a £23 million gap in funding that needs to be bridged to ensure that 'refugee scholars are not left behind' (ibid).

Host country HEIs typically offer small numbers of scholarships for refugee students, but this varies across such countries (UNHCR, 2012). There are also several international programmes that offer such scholarships, but they often have specific eligibility criteria, i.e. the Windle Trust International only offers scholarships to citizens of countries in East, Central or the Horn of Africa living in Kenya, Uganda, Sudan, Egypt or Ethiopia. The general advice from the UNHCR is that refugees, and organisations working on their behalf, contact the universities of interest directly about the availability of scholarships for refugees.

However, it's not just about finding scholarship opportunities but also about identifying with them; thus, after picking one, programme staff should take a step back and analyze the scholarship and scholarship organisation's missions to determine whether refugees and disadvantaged youngsters identify with them. By comprehending these missions, programme personnel demonstrate a solid "match" between the scholarship and the type of individual the scholarship selection committee seeks, and can also ensure that any bridging programme is designed to support students in applying for scholarships that are accessible and available. To ensure refugees better identify with scholarships, program staff should start with the following actions;

Networks

- Staff members should contact donors to become acquainted with the details of the scholarship.
- An effort should be made to Identify local donors; scholarships are occasionally available through local donors who do not have a large online presence. The program should make an effort to identify such opportunities and communicate them to applicants.
- Invite scholarship donors to lead presentations on what they want to see in applications and how students should go about them.
- Establish whether there are any new scholarships planned for the next few years, and who they might be designed to capture (this may also provide an opportunity for advocating for more scholarships for displaced students).

It may also be relevant and important to design dimensions of the programme around criteria that particular scholarships are known to be looking for. In Lebanon, for example, those in charge of awarding the DAFI scholarship encourage students to enrol on PADILEIA because the programme contains elements that made students more competitive in applying for their funding, particularly in terms of the medium of instruction being largely English. Relationship building with DAFI was particularly important for PADILEIA, resulting in their students being seen as ‘prime potential candidates for that program.’ A very similar story happened with FFA as WUSC (informally) redirected some of its unsuccessful applicants to the programme in order for them to be better prepared for the next selection round.

Conversations may need to be had with scholarship providers, however, to alert them to the unique challenges that refugee learners face. It is especially the case for scholarship providers who are not used to having refugees. For instance, many scholarships have age cut offs, or are designed for younger applicants without dependents, which may make them inappropriate or inaccessible for older refugee applicants. These discussions may also provide an opportunity to advocate for slightly different assessment criteria for refugee learners compared to their peers. A recurrent issue brought up by students in PADILEIA was a concern that their grades are assessed against the same criteria as students who may not have experienced major disruptions to their studies through being displaced and while familiarising themselves with an entirely new country and potentially very different educational systems. Young male breadwinners in particular said that their sometimes lower GPAs, resulting from them being in part-time education as they attempted to hold down employment on the 'side', were not being fairly interpreted in context.

Should the availability of scholarships determine the number of places on a bridging programme?

Some students on the PADILEIA programme felt that it would be better if the programme admitted fewer students but assured their access to scholarships rather than admitting more students who would not all be offered funding for further education. This relates to a broader ethical issue around raising students' expectations about what opportunities a programme *might* offer, while being aware that these are unlikely to extend to cover all the students. On the one hand, it is unlikely that all those enrolled on a bridging programme will decide at the end of it that they want to enter HE immediately and there is a hope that the general skills acquired through the programme will support them to access other opportunities. On the other hand, humanitarian initiatives chronically over-promise and under-deliver, and every initiative should avoid contributing to this dynamic as much as possible.

During FFA, we certainly had this 'chicken and egg' conundrum. We prioritised designing a programme that would make students competitive for university admissions and scholarships, with a commitment to finding scholarships when/if students were granted a place in a HEI. We did not want to line up scholarships for students when we did not know whether or not they would be needed, not least because the goodwill and support of scholarship providers is essential but quite fragile. Students, however, felt demotivated at various points because they worried that even if they might be admitted to University, it was not clear how this would be funded. A lack of commitment to lining up scholarships almost looked like a lack of confidence in their ability to pass the mature age entry exam.

One educational NGO in Lebanon also notes the importance of having clear opportunities available for maintaining student's motivation, even if there is no promise that these will fully cover the demand. They suggest having automatic scholarships for the top three students graduating in the class, for example, in order to incentivise student engagement by assuring them from the start that at least some students will be able to continue into fully funded degree programmes.

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Opportunities outside of HE

A single bridging programme cannot be all things to all people. Inevitably, through prioritising a bridge to certain outcomes, it will provide less tailored support to those individuals who do not wish to pursue those goals. From the outset, transparency about what the purpose of the programme is can obviously go some way towards mitigating this, though expectation management is notoriously difficult. Designing the course with a focus on broader skills development, beyond simply those required to succeed at University and in academic contexts, is another common strategy that promotes and 'follows a holistic approach towards learner development' (Hay and Morals, 2004). Adopting this approach, however, raises a risk that the programme will lack focus and any 'educational identity', which may in turn affect student motivation and engagement. The Programme Design document goes back to some of these issues.

As the course progresses, there will also be those who decide that further education is not for them. Signposting to opportunities that lie outside of HEI, and that seem more immediately relevant to learners, may be really important for keeping them engaged in the programme and feeling like they are getting something valuable from their time on it. It may also be necessary to minimise their potentially disruptive effects on the learning of others if they have checked out of a more academic curriculum.

As noted above, however, in many countries there are restrictions on refugees' rights to work that may make it impossible to support them into formal, legal employment while they remain displaced. Should there be opportunities for paid employment and the legal right to work, however, there are at least two possible routes to supporting students through a bridging programme into these opportunities. The first is through exposing them to particular occupations, and connecting them with organisations that provide vocational training in these professions. One concern to flag here is that vocational training programmes for refugees can often promote jobs that present limited and gendered opportunities for social mobility, particularly among more highly educated individuals, such as hairdressing, mechanics, food preparation and IT repair.

A second option for supporting and encouraging opportunities outside of HE, with broader relevance to all students, is to focus on developing transferable skills that would help in any employment situation, including within the online marketplace. These skills might include business economics, marketing, interview and CV writing workshops, time and personnel management, and problem solving, as well as where and how to go about locating jobs. The value of this approach is that it does not pigeon-hole displaced scholars into prescribed, often low-paid, occupations, but instead equips them with the means to search for and apply for jobs that fit their skill set.

It may be important to also support this process through arranging networking events and key speakers, who can provide a realistic sense of what opportunities exist for individuals in specific labour markets and sectors. With displacement can also come reductions in the size of people's social networks and social capital, which are a key way through which people gain knowledge on available jobs and, often, a foot in the door. These networking events can thus provide a way for students to meet possible employers and begin to build links that may later translate into offers of employment, or at least to increase their confidence interacting with strangers in a professional context. It may therefore be important early on in the design of any bridging programme to begin investing in links with industry/professional bodies, who may also be able to provide advice on the sorts of skills and characteristics that they would be looking for in potential hires.

When thinking about introducing any bridging programme then, it might be useful to:

- Familiarise yourself first with employment laws in the host country to establish whether refugees can be legally employed, including whether or not it will be possible for them to get

paid for this work (especially for online jobs where their employer might be based in another country),
- Research what the general employment context is in the country of asylum and in refugees' country of origin so that any skills are relevant and applicable to this landscape,
- Establish whether or not there are apprenticeship schemes or vocational training institutes that refugees can be supported to enrol in,
- Contact major employers who are located close to the learning sites to establish what employment opportunities they might have available and what type of skills profile they are looking for,
- Establish whether there are other organisations working on employability and job schemes to partner with to support learners' entry into the labour market, either within the curriculum of your bridging programme or that students can be signposted to.

References

Hay, H. and Morals, F. (2004) 'Bridging programmes: gain, pain or all in vain: perspectives on higher education', *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *18*(2): 59-75.

3: The Design Framework

The design framework we used to design the Foundations for All programme was informed by current research on best practices for designing educational bridging programmes working with displaced populations, as well as the practical experience gleaned from both PADILEIA and the ongoing work of the Refugee Law Project (see our *scoping tool* and *supporting literature review* for more details). Further, some of what is presented here is a post-hoc reflection on what we failed to account for while designing the programme. This is presented to ensure that others looking to design their own bridging programmes learn from the available research, the practical and invaluable guidance of those on the ground and in similar initiatives, and our mistakes.

Understand who your students are: Student Capacities

At the inception of any educational design project, the first question should be 'who are our learners?' There is no point having designed a brilliant programme for an abstract situation that is pitched at a level that students cannot or do not want to engage with or benefit from. It is instead critical to have clear learner profiles in mind to ensure that you are constructing a programme that aligns with these individual's needs, strengths and ambitions.

Relevant questions, some of which are explained in more depth later in this toolkit, include:

- What are the students' ambitions, goals, strengths and weaknesses?
- Where do students stand in relation to meeting higher education entry requirements in the specific context?
- What are the learners' pre-existing skills and qualifications?
- What are the students' expectations for any educational programme?
- What is a student's typical day, and how does this impact their studies?
- How much time can they and will they commit to learning? And does this vary by location, age, gender, familial circumstances, etc.?
- Will all the students be joining the programme with roughly the same level of understanding of the core subjects, or will additional teaching need to be provided to some in the first few weeks e.g. core computing skills or maths review?
- Do the students have the access to technology/internet and skills to do independent study on their own mobile or personal computing devices, and/or appropriate home environments for this? Or will learning have to be largely done in designated and appropriately equipped learning spaces, and/or with the support of tutors?

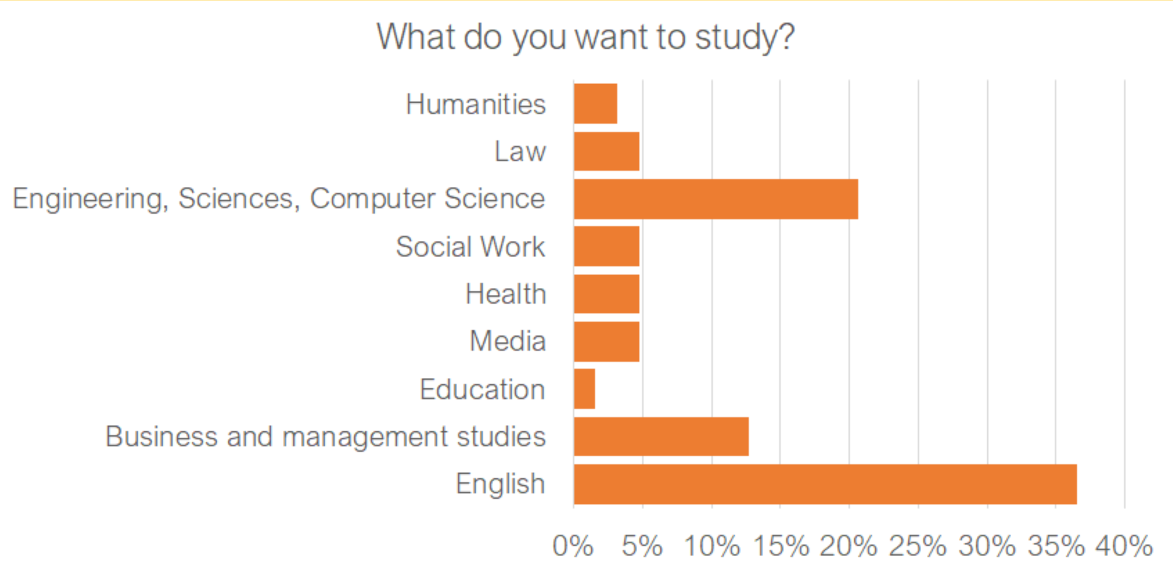
Developing tools to understand the situation of (prospective) students, such as surveys and conversations with the students, is essential for the different phases of setting up and implementing bridging programmes, from identifying objectives to refining design and fine-tuning teaching schedules. However, not everything that is potentially useful can necessarily be discovered through discussions, workshops, surveys, or other dedicated instruments and thus efforts should be made throughout the programme to ensure that the assumed learner profiles remain accurate. This requires open lines of communication between program management, teaching staff, and students, which rest on building respectful and trusting relationships.

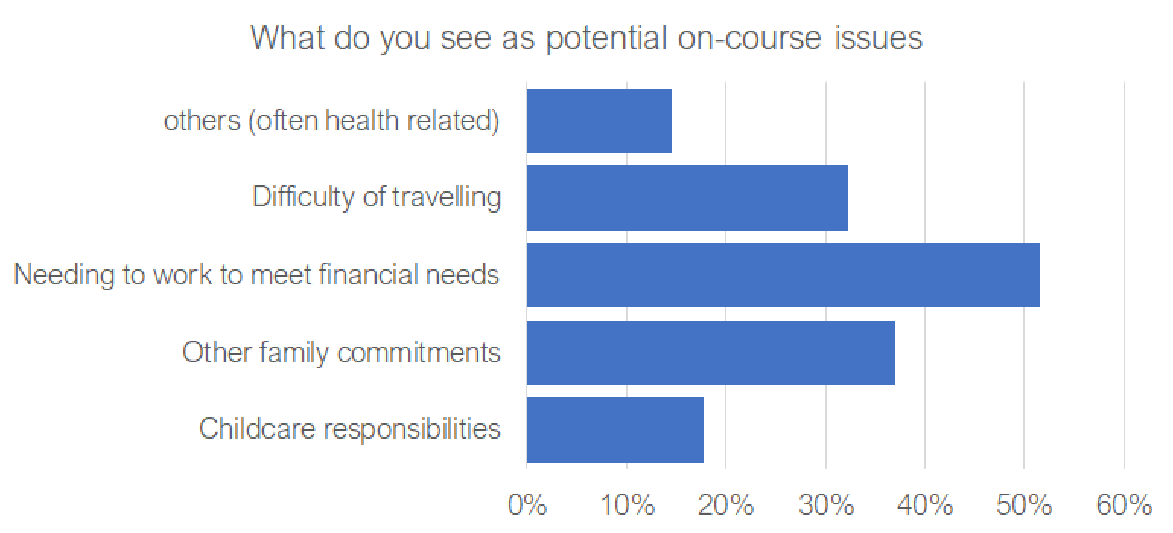
Identifying Student Capacities in FFA

Considering the design of FFA, there are at least three key steps that took place even before the programme and helped identify student capacities.

1. *Exploratory phase*. As part of the design process for the FFA programme, team members

met in Kampala in 2019. The initial meeting included the implementation of an exploratory survey with potential students for FFA –mostly current students of RLP's EFA programmes [see next section, *languages*]. The main findings of the survey highlighted, among others, the following:





2. *Initial consultation*. These initial findings were used to develop a set of broad proposals. In February 2020, FFA teams members met again in Kampala to run a workshop with key

stakeholders involved in refugee education and refugee students enrolled in Refugee Law Project's English for Adults Level 5 programme, which was envisaged as the 'feeder programme' for Foundations for All. The workshop was the moment when key decisions about the general direction of the FFA programme would be taken (see *Getting started* and *Curriculum and course design* sections). The inclusion of potential students in the workshop allowed for an open discussion of the needs and circumstances of the students – this ad hoc 'mixed methods' approach helped to re-analyse the big trends of the survey and better understand the stories behind them, and how the different items link to each other.

This, in turn, helped ensure that the curriculum was subsequently designed and developed in a way that matched the learner profiles of possible students, and responded to the students' desires in terms of what skills and support they felt they would need to excel. From these interactions, representative student personas were further developed to be used as part of online curriculum development workshops in mid-2020 (see the *Curriculum and course design* section for more details) so that course designers had accurate profiles of learners in mind.

3. *Fine tuning*. As the main general structure of the programme was being firmed up, the team started advertising the programme and received a first set of applicants (see *Student selection process*). A short questionnaire was circulated among applicants, and then another, more extensive one was conducted with the students who had been selected. The main modules of this questionnaire cover the socio-economic situation of the student (including access to IT and income), which provide essential information for the practical organisation of the programme, including the schedule and stipend (see *Programme delivery*).

Languages

It is important to determine the language(s) of instruction, as well as what measures can be taken to ensure that both the language(s) of instruction and students' home languages will be supported in the classroom (whether physical or virtual). With displaced learners from multiple different origins, it is important that the primary medium of instruction is a shared language and that all of the students and staff feel confident learning and communicating in that. At the same time students' home languages are core to their identities and serve as assets in their academic pursuits and thus respecting and even creating space for some use of home languages even in teaching and learning environments that include diverse language backgrounds is a key strategy in culturally relevant education.

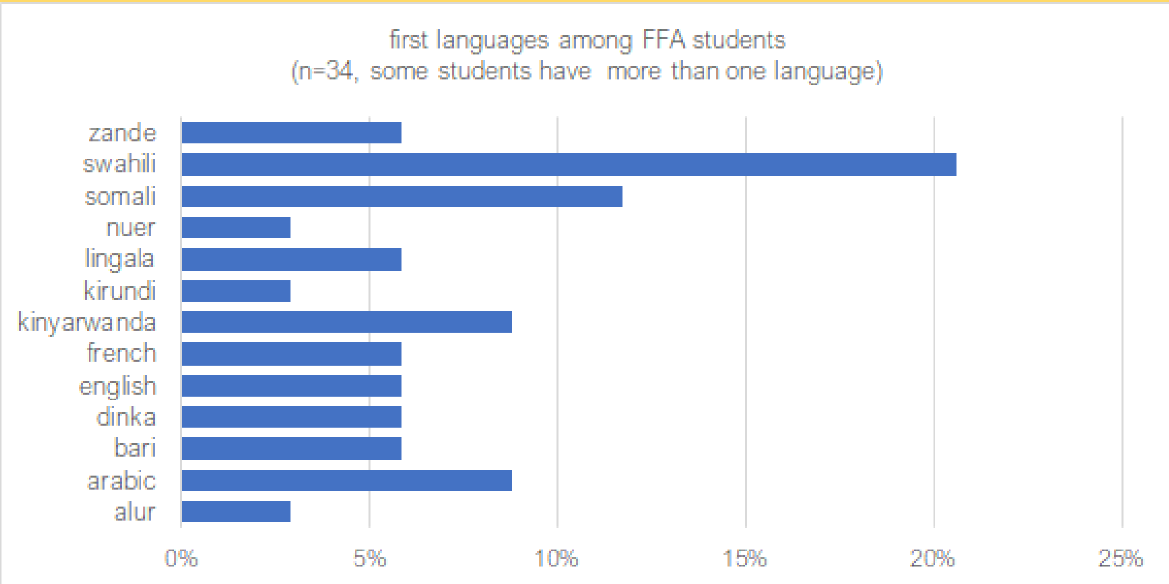
Bridging programmes typically seek to ensure that all prospective students stand a chance to thrive and, for this reason, will set minimum language requirements for admission. The choice of what to set as the minimum may not be easy: on the one hand, bridging programmes, which are almost never longer than one year, are not meant to provide comprehensive language training for people with very limited language proficiency in the language of instruction but, on the other hand, bridging programmes also often have at their core the ambition to improve language skills. There are multiple ways to assess language proficiency and, for reasons that we explain in the next section (*Pre-existing skills, qualifications, and educational levels*), it may be unreasonable that prospective students provide paperwork; ad hoc language tests may be the most appropriate option.

Refugees who have completed their primary and secondary school education in a different language of instruction will require additional classes and support. Research has demonstrated (Asiimwe and Ssentanda, 2020; Abu-Amsha and Armstrong, 2018), not having full language proficiency in primary, secondary or transitioning into tertiary education can increase drop-out rates. Recruiting students from among graduates of language programs offered by local NGOs and secondary schools that teach in the language of instruction is one strategy to increase the baseline language skills of entering students. In cases where the language of instruction is a language that is being actively promoted by INGOs and/or national and international cultural institutes (e.g. the British Council for English, Institut Français for French, Instituto Cervantes for Spanish, Confucius Institute for Mandarin, etc.), working in partnership with such INGOs to arrange additional language provision for bridging programme students can be a protective factor to combat drop-out. It is, however, important to ensure that the courses are adapted to the pedagogical goals of the bridging programme For instance, the English language components provided by external parties may be geared towards passing a specific test (e.g. IELTS/TOEFL) that may or may not be relevant for bridging programme students.

In the case of bridging programmes that are designed to equip students to pass particular (not language) exams, it is critical that they are being educated in the same language as the exams they will sit. This is to ensure that they are picking up key skills in vocabulary, grammar and expression. Discussions and assessments then provide further opportunities to develop and refine language skills. For activities where the goal is to build students' self-confidence and pride, however, it may be important for students to communicate in the language(s) they feel most confident in (and, possibly, to arrange translation or identify multi-lingual teaching staff). This can be a way to celebrate the diverse histories and cultures of students in the classroom.

Language in FFA

The student demographics that the Foundations for All programme were drawing from naturally introduced a range of languages that needed to be accounted for in the curriculum, even if the language of instruction, and the language of the exams these students were to sit, was English. The FFA students were from South Sudan, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, and Somalia, as well as disadvantaged members of the host communities. They spoke a range of languages, including French and English.



It was necessary to gauge their English language abilities during the selection phase and to tailor the curriculum, particularly the English for Academic Purposes course. The Refugee Law Project has significant expertise in teaching English to displaced communities through its English for Adults (EFA) programme. Prior to the establishment of FFA, this programme extended to EFA Level 5. The English component of FFA was originally designed to provide EFA Level 6 and many of the students who successfully applied to join FFA were individuals who had successfully completed EFA Level 5, and thus through this could prove sufficient fluency in English.

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Abu-Amsha, O. & Armstrong, J. (2018). Pathways to Resilience in Risk-Laden Environments: A Case Study of Syrian Refugee Education in Lebanon. *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, 4(1), 45-73.

Pre-existing skills, Qualifications and Educational levels

The extent to which the pre-existing educational level of students matters for their admission to the course depends on the course's goals. For programmes that are not focused on acquiring academic skills, and that will not require students to communicate fluently in oral and written form, it may not make sense to filter based on educational qualifications. Certain training may instead require people to be of a particular gender, age, or skill profile (e.g. to have existing knowledge of business management, electronics, web design, etc.).

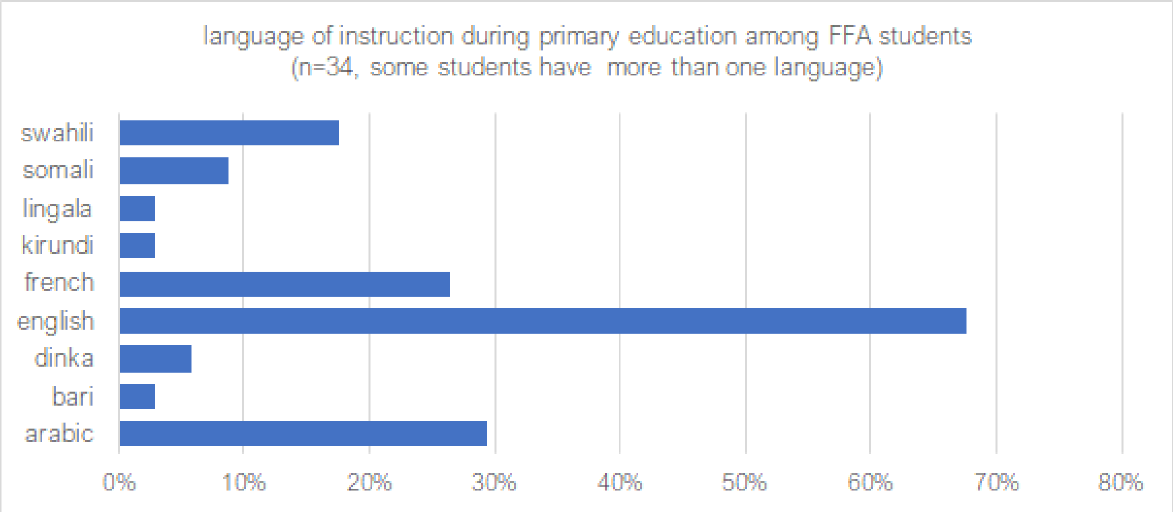
The general qualification level of prospective students for an academic course will, however, determine realistic learning objectives and programme level outcomes. Once these are decided, the course then has to admit students who will be able to engage with the teaching and learning environment. As discussed in further detail in the section *Student selection process*, this may mean that students are required to sit short aptitude tests as part of the admissions process to confirm that they will be able to learn in a particular language or at a particular level. The nature of the course objectives will also determine which subjects are relevant: while a student hoping for admission to a Social Work degree may not require advanced mathematical skills, if the entrance process for that degree programme involves a mathematics exam then it will still be necessary to ensure that students are adequately prepared to sit this.

One difficulty with assessing whether displaced students have the required qualifications for selection onto an educational programme is equating qualifications from their country of origin with qualifications from the host country. It can be unclear what a grade in one country translates into in another, which has much wider implications for professionals who struggle to have their qualifications recognised in countries of asylum. Organisations with experience of working with refugee learners have often built up a knowledge base on this, but learners should also be supported where possible to access documentation that vouches for their qualification level.

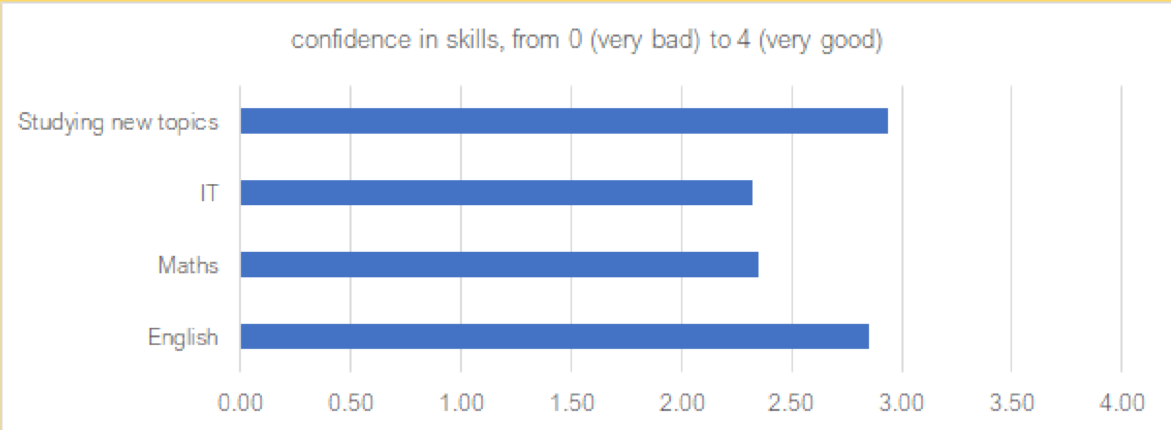
For bridging programmes that are aimed at supporting students to enter higher education, it is appropriate to assess students' motivations for joining the course and their expectations of it. If their goals and skills do not align with the course learning outcomes, it could quickly become a disempowering learning environment for them and cause disruption for their peers.

Pre-existing skills in FFA

FFA students presented a wide range of qualifications which were not always easily understood by the teaching team. For instance, when asked about their schooling level, we had the following situation: 47.06% had completed high school, of which 43% had their certificate at hand (a further 12.5% had it but at home and 19% had lost it), delivered by their home countries of Burundi, DRC, Rwanda, Somalia Sudan, and Uganda. The chart below indicates the language(s) of instruction of FFA students at primary level, which added difficulty both in terms of understanding transcript and in organising teaching. Additionally, it is interesting to note that a quarter of the students had already applied to university before joining FFA, with two of them even attending some courses.



Formal qualifications do not, however, necessarily match actual skills and it was interesting to see that of all the topics that would eventually be introduced in FFA, students felt the least comfortable with mathematics – which is perhaps the most ‘universal’ of all.



Financial considerations

Any bridging programme engaging with teen-aged and/or adult learners needs to acknowledge that the time students invest in the programme may directly compete with wage-earning activities. In order to make sure that finances are not a barrier to inclusion in the programme, it is important to understand what financial support potential students will need (See *Stipends* section below). If they are required to travel to a learning centre for the course, you may wish to provide them with daily travel costs or actual transportation. If they need a smart phone or personal computer to engage with the learning and teaching from home, these may need to be provided on either a permanent or loan basis. If students are being encouraged to do independent study using online resources, they may need financial support to cover data costs. One-off expenses – such as the cost of exam enrolment, or travelling to test centres – may also need to be covered directly, with students informed of this support as soon as possible so they do not self-*un*select from the programme out of concerns about not being able to afford it.

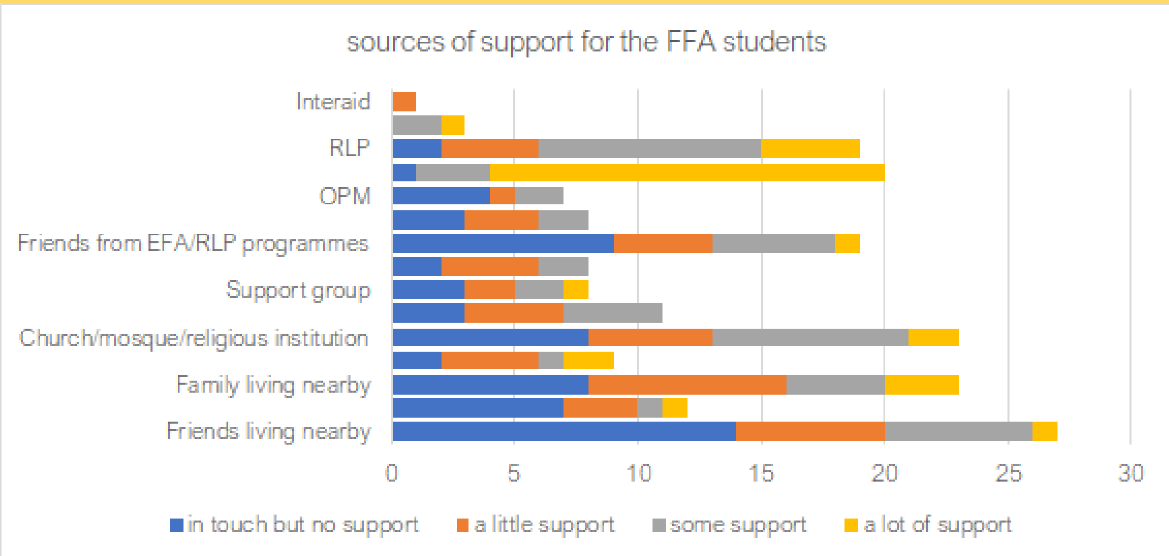
Depending on the nature of the programme, it may also be appropriate to consider providing additional payments for childcare, or to provide childcare on site/baby-friendly classrooms for when individuals attend teaching sessions. This has obvious implications for gender equity, as women in particular may struggle to commit to full- or even part-time programmes without additional support.

There may be ways to structure the delivery of the programme that also minimise its financial impacts. Rather than developing a full-time course, which would require students to commit the majority of their time to classes or independent study, students may prefer a longer, less disruptive part-time course that enables them to continue work around it. Clustering teaching into two or three days a week can allow students to work the other days, or condensing all teaching into intense morning/evening sessions with the rest of the time for independent study provides people with more flexibility to work. Providing lesson outlines and material for self-study online enables students to continue their learning even if they are unable to physically attend the sessions, while potentially minimising any stigma they might feel around falling behind because of financial challenges.

It is also worth noting that people's financial situations, and the stresses and anxieties that accompany this, may affect their ability to engage with the learning environment (Mangan, 2017). RLP colleagues in particular stressed the importance of tutors and staff being aware of this and any particular patterns/trigger points related to financial pressures e.g. before they are given monthly/quarterly rations in refugee settlements, at the end of the month before their prepaid cards are topped up, around major holidays when there is an expectation that people will be able to send money home to relatives or provide more for their own families, and more.

Financial Considerations in FFA

The baseline survey provided a good sense of the variety of situations students found themselves in. 32.35% said they had a regular job and 23% said that they felt financially dependent on someone else. A third said that they were skipping meals on a daily basis to save money, 82% said they were doing this at least once a week. They were often part of complex networks of mutual networks of support as the figure below suggests.



The choice was then to provide students with a monthly stipend, which was meant to cover some of the basic costs of living and commuting –and make up for the potential loss of income due to attending the course. The question of the amount of the stipend remained a slightly complicated one until the end of the programme, with many students suggesting that it was not enough, which is possible (see the *stipend* section below for details).

Location and space

As explained in the scoping tool (see sections A and B), location matters: different locations (e.g. within a city, a region, or a country) afford different opportunities. The advantages and limitations of potential teaching locations, and the impact students' locations have upon their ability to engage in an educational program, need to be fully understood by programme designers. At least four different lenses for consideration can be identified:

First, at a basic level it is ideal to locate the bridging program so that it is conveniently and inexpensively accessible from where the targeted student population resides. For university-affiliated bridging programs, this may mean operating the program away from the university campus.

Second, education provision is shaped by the local socio-economic and cultural context; for instance, some sites are more desirable for qualified teaching staff to live in than others and attract the best teachers. Due to more reliable access to services and amenities, capital cities are often preferred locations for teachers and NGO workers than remote, rural locations with all the challenges associated with them. In contexts of inter-communal tension or conflict, certain locations may be associated with certain social groups making them less accessible to students from other social groups. It is critical to ensure that such dynamics have as limited possible impact on refugee populations who may already be hampered by a lack of opportunities in their settlement location.

Third, different locations also allow different teaching infrastructures – including the physical classroom as well as access to technology and internet. A key question is whether a suitable infrastructure exists and, if not, whether one can be built. In areas such as densely populated refugee camps, it may be hard to find a building suitable for 20-30 adult learners, so budget may need to be kept aside for constructing a dedicated space (see examples from FFA and PADILEIA below) or the programme may have to be adapted in terms of structure/timings to enable students to reach a suitable location that may be some distance away. There might be a good rationale for creating a new infrastructure regardless of the actual constraints, in order to break away from places and dynamics associated with memories of struggle and hardship, or just to ensure that the space is free from interference from other actors – services 'hubs' for refugees can, for instance, be very busy places that would prove a constant sources of distraction for students.

Ultimately, the teaching site needs to be made equally accessible for all populations, which may require stipends to be 'tiered' depending on the actual costs incurred for students to reach classrooms or for sessions to be simultaneously online and in person. Transportation costs for teaching staff may also need to be factored into their compensation.

Seasonal weather patterns may also impact students' ability to be comfortable in the learning environment or to even get to class (e.g. heavy rains or snow, extreme heat). Appropriate structural design as well as potential heating or cooling measures are significant learning space considerations. When expected weather patterns may prevent students from getting to the classroom, preparing contingency plans ahead of time such as home learning or make-up days is helpful. In these times of pandemic, spatial considerations (e.g. ventilation, social distancing) for illness prevention and contingency plans for mandated closures and extended student absences are necessary.

Other place-based factors affecting students' ability to engage in an educational program also cannot be addressed through choice of location or spatial arrangements, rather they require contextualised adaptations and flexibility in program design and academic policies. Students have different levels of relative stability in terms of access to employment and accommodation depending on where they live, which has direct implications for their ability to engage in a focused way with their studies. Displaced populations in refugee camps, for instance, may have their studies interrupted by requirements to confirm their presence in the camp, or to collect rations when eligible to them (as we found in Uganda) while students in the private rental market in cities have to contend with the instability of this arrangement. These contextual factors need to be taken into account in the program design (for example, the timing of breaks in teaching, or flexibility for deadlines with a student facing housing crisis).

Finally, students' access to electricity and internet away from the programme site will likely vary, which needs to be addressed in curriculum design; e.g. if students cannot easily charge their phones, synchronous online teaching should be kept short to conserve the students' phone batteries.

FFA: city and settlements

The students in the FFA programme were split across two different locations: one was a refugee settlement in rural Uganda, Kiryandongo, and the other was the capital city, Kampala. This meant that each cohort had very different access to employment, humanitarian infrastructures, and learning opportunities. In both cases, the students accessed a teaching infrastructure that pre-existed FFA and was set up for the English for Adult (EFA) courses developed by RLP over the years [see Languages section].

Kiryandongo has far less reliable internet and electricity supplies than Kampala, meaning that students struggled to continue learning remotely when Covid-19 forced a shutdown of the learning centres and also that they struggled to engage with online resources in general (including those emailed to them from tutors and mentees in the UK). The students in Kiryandongo also had, in general, lower levels of IT, English and Maths literacy than their peers in Kampala, which meant that their courses progressed at a slower pace. They also had more family responsibilities, meaning that their attendance was more frequently disrupted by obligations elsewhere.

Students in Kampala nonetheless had to contend with high travel costs to reach the learning centres at RLP, the higher cost of living in general in Kampala coupled with the lack of humanitarian support provided to urban refugees in Uganda, and more extreme lockdowns in response to Covid-19 and political/terrorist incidents. They were nonetheless much closer to Makerere University and benefited from both a campus tour provided by a Congolese Masters student who was based there, and from in person discussions with faculty from the University. Students at Kiryandongo were able to engage with the Masters student online for a Q&A, but did not have the opportunity to visit the University until the entrance exam.

PADILEIA: building the teaching space

The AUB team also wanted to establish their bridging programme close to where refugees were physically located in Lebanon, not least because of the expense and mobility challenges of expecting individuals to relocate to Beirut to access educational opportunities. They wanted the study hubs to be very physically accessible for Syrian students and so they located them in the Bekaa Valley where significant populations of Syrians are located. They also recognised the higher number of other NGOs in the Bekaa Valley who could provide complementary services and support to individuals enrolled on PADILEIA, which would make it easier for the students to pursue their studies. Finally, the specific location chosen within the Bekaa region is a community known to be more tolerant than others towards the refugee population. That supportive infrastructure, as well as the perceived availability and proximity of the study hubs, was critical to the success of the programme.

A central scalability feature of AUB's foundation certificate design and delivery was its use of the AUB-CCECS "Ghata" school structures. These low-cost structures, which can be assembled (and disassembled) in hours by unskilled volunteers using locally-sourced materials, can serve as a model replicable study hub/computer lab, which embodies (a) economic efficiency and endurance, (b) simplicity and portability, (c) adaptability and scalability, and (d) climatic responsiveness. PADILEIA Bekaa campus was thus built by AUB and operated by a local educational

NGO partner, the Kayany Foundation, who served as a key local partner and source of participants.

LIFE COMMITMENTS

With adult learners, it is important to acknowledge and accommodate their other life commitments if you want students to be able to engage and feel seen and fulfilled on the course. See the section on **Finances** for one such example of this. Awareness of the gendered aspects of how these commitments impact students in the program's particular context is crucial. People often have commitments to employers, families and communities that it is unrealistic to expect them to shed for the duration of an extended educational programme; people will still need to earn money and to look after the families. Even pragmatically, they will not be able to focus properly on their studies if either of these is seriously threatened or suffering as a result of the programme. Certain groups, for example working age men with large numbers of dependents, also may not enrol on the programme if they feel like there is no way within the design of the programme to accommodate their needs. As a coordinator at PADILEIA stated, 'most of our students are females; few of them are males. And this is…especially for the Syrians, the man will work more than the woman so he is responsible for supporting his family. Yes, men have the interest in entering into higher education. They would love to but they have less opportunity and less time to do it so most of our students are females. I think this year I have 80 percent of my students being females and 20 percent males."

Teaching must therefore be delivered in a way that is sympathetic towards and inclusive of other life commitments. This may mean clustering teaching into a few days a week, or only mornings, so that students have flexible study time during which they can either do further study, paid employment, or fulfil domestic duties such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for children or siblings. Finding ways to connect the curriculum to students' daily lives and communities is also essential, such as identifying the ways that they use maths outside of class or connecting language learning to employment skills. PADILEIA curriculum included a personal photo essay in the English course; and the Science course included a survey of local vegetation; both assignments were popular with students.

Students should be reassured that life commitments are legitimate, and will be taken seriously in the classroom; that it is better that teaching staff know people's situation and can begin to find ways to support them than that individual's studies are being slowly undermined and there are no systems being put in place to support them.

With displaced populations, there is always the possibility that individuals will be resettled during any programme, or that they will choose or be forced back to their country of origin/another country of asylum. This is a condition of being in exile. It may be possible to continue to provide remote tuition to refugees who have to temporarily return to their country of origin, or to offer them an opportunity to resume their studies the following year if the programme is running again.

If attendance of students is likely to be very erratic due to diverse commitments and the instability of the learning environment, it might be worth considering a curriculum with discrete topics rather than a progressive structure. This means that if students miss a week, they will still be able to fully engage with the next.

Making PADILEA work for students

A key role that the PADILEIA student coordinator played was individually coaching students on managing their time and juggling their multiple commitments as well as ensuring that teaching staff were aware of challenges specific students were facing. Furthermore, hosting open houses or other community events that welcome students' families can help students to gain crucial support from partners, children, siblings and/or parents.

Technology

There is a wealth of literature on what learning technology can and cannot afford, but a key point to bear in mind from decades of research on the topic is that technology should not drive the design and delivery of the bridging programme, but rather technology should be used as and when available and appropriate (Facer & Selwyn, 2021). There is no perfect solution when setting up a bridging programme, only circumstances and objectives that need to be consistently revisited. In the real world of educating displaced and financially disadvantaged learners in Global South contexts, ready-made 'plug and play' approaches are inadequate. An assessment of the technological needs across learning centres and for prospective students, and the ongoing challenges, is essential and needs to come well ahead of the beginning of teaching. The following questions were central in our thinking:

- Is technology absolutely necessary? How do the resources required and potential limitations compare to the potential benefits to students of its use? Programme teams should be clear about this as many subsequent decisions will be predicated on it. If it is possible to deliver the bridging programme without technology, or if the IT skills students would acquire aren't as critical as other skills, then consider going without technology.
- Is there sufficient electricity available for any technological implementation? If not, consider an advocacy effort or alternative electricity sources ahead of any programme or technological implementation.

- Is there existing hardware (laptops, mobile devices) that can be used both within the staff and student groups?
- Are there open-source alternatives to common software and applications that can be used to mitigate cost?
- If considering providing devices to be taken home, does this put recipients at risk in any way? If a learning centre will be equipped with technology, what is needed to secure and maintain it?
- Is there sufficient connectivity available within the learning centres and within the larger community? What is the cost of connectivity?
- What is the level of familiarity with technology in both the student and tutor groups? What additional skills are needed before and throughout teaching this blended model?

The answers to these questions will ultimately determine the technological model that the bridging programme employs with impacts on budget requirements and curriculum and teaching. In the case of FFA (see box below for details), we opted for a blended learning model, one that emphasised the face to face instruction taking place in the learning centres, with the technology supporting that face to face instruction with open educational resources (OER) embedded within a curriculum designed by the project team. We also relied on technology and connectivity in order to collaborate in program design and management across three continents, which increased the collective capacity of the team, but also carried disadvantages in terms of unequal access to technology, connectivity, and related skills resulting in uneven participation in different aspects of the program among participants based in Uganda, Lebanon, and the UK.

It is important to also factor the tutors and teachers in this phase of the design. In FFA, it became apparent that tutors needed time to prepare for classes, support in getting acclimated to using the classroom technology, and processes to request laptops, or loan laptops for a night. Safety concerns, particularly in Kampala, made loaning laptops problematic. The costs associated with longer training periods should be built into future grant proposal budgets, as well as the recognition that tutors will also need ongoing support using technology during the execution of the programme itself.

Technology in FFA

Summary

On the basis of a needs assessments, the following was created or procured:

- Two purpose-built furnished learning centres
- Twenty laptops and one printer per learning centre
- Wifi connectivity for each learning centre

- Mobile devices and mobile data packages

In addition to this, we used or created the following

- Kolibri, an open source Learning Management System (LMS) that allowed us to work on the curriculum in a distributed nature, and to maximise existing connectivity by seeding laptops via a local area network (LAN).
- A training programme for tutors that allowed them to learn about the technology and how to teach with it. In future, we would either significantly extend this training and compensate teachers for the time spent engaged in training, as well as more explicitly provide it to students, as it proved critical for the programme overall.
- As events dictated, there was an abrupt move to mobile devices, WhatsApp groups for courses, Zoom for live sessions, and Google Drive as a content repository.

Rationale

As the project team was distributed across three institutions and continents, and the learning centres themselves were located in Kampala and Kiryandongo, the role that technology would play in the overall design and delivery of the programme was explicit.

As a result of the technological assessment, two purpose built learning centres were created in Kampala and Kiryandongo, respectively, each able to accommodate twenty learners in keeping with Covid protocols. Each learning centre was equipped with chairs and tables and 20 laptops per learning centre were procured. Each learning centre was fitted for both wired and wireless connectivity and a printer was available in each learning centre to print copies of the study materials. A generator and fuel was provided for each learning centre in case of power outages.

It was determined that staff training on the core technological systems to be used in the programme would be necessary to prepare tutors for working with the technology in their teaching, particularly on the learning management system (LMS). We began the project and the initial instruction with Kolibri, a LMS that allowed the teaching teams in the learning centres to use Local Area Networks (LAN) to seed the laptops with the course content. Kolibri proved suitable for the distributed nature of the project team, and for any connectivity issues that might arise in the learning centres. Some course teams created weekly lessons, loaded these to Kolibri and once a week the LAN seeded the laptops in the learning centres with the content. This allowed the teaching to take place without undue concern over whether the connectivity at the time of the course was sufficient. This weekly update also enabled course teams to modify teaching plans from week to week informed by students' and tutors' ongoing experiences and feedback. It is important to note that not all course teams used Kolibri, or technology in general.

Training was provided on Kolibri and Zoom for tutors, yet this was uneven between the two learning centres. As such, the learning centres were not proceeding through the Kolibri content at the same pace; Kiryandongo in particular was several weeks behind Kampala in the delivery of aspects of the overall curriculum. Hardware issues at times led to a lack of tutor access to the technology. It was noted that some of the students were using laptops for the first time and that in future iterations of the programme, students will need more initial technology training than was provided during the program orientation to acclimate themselves to the programme and the technology used therein. It was further noted that some students were more comfortable with the technology and these students might be used to mentor tutors and other students. We feel it is important to note the need for a dedicated role, trained and supported, in each learning centre for a technologist, someone responsible for seeing to the logistics of supporting course teams, tutors, and students.

However, the technological landscape shifted often during the design and delivery of the bridging programme due to unforeseen events, necessitating a flexible approach. Due to a nationwide lockdown in the summer of 2021, the learning centres were closed. The project team determined that a viable way forward to continue with the bridging programme was to purchase mobile devices for the students, use student stipends partly to buy mobile data to facilitate the courses, and to use WhatsApp, Google Drive, and Zoom as the technologies of instruction. All course content was hosted on Google Drive, ongoing asynchronous discussions were held in WhatsApp with each course having their own WhatsApp group, and Zoom was used for a weekly teaching session. Yet, even this switch to mobile technology was problematic as on occasion SIM cards were lost or stolen, thus requiring the student to begin the process of accessing programme spaces anew through the purchase of a new SIM card, and/or through the process of logging in to their learning spaces on Google Drive and WhatsApp.

References

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Clarifying the nature of your project

Bridging programmes are often new for institutions and may provide unique opportunities for learning. Before getting started, it is important to define the nature of the bridging programme: is it solely an access project or does it have broader goals? Action-research whereby research feeds into activities and activities feeds into research can be a fruitful way of ensuring that knowledge is generated and reflected upon during the process. Similarly, bridging programmes can offer important possibilities for students on 'regular' programmes to contribute to an exciting and meaningful project –there might also be pedagogical reasons for this given what is known about high value added of peer mentoring and learning (Boud and Cohen, 2014; Terrion and Leonard, 2017).

The FFA action research

FFA was keen to engage with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars hosted at each of the three universities (Makerere, AUB, Edinburgh). Alongside their formal programmes of study, these Mastercard Foundation Scholars are provided additional support that focuses on developing them as leaders who are transformative, and encourages them to be active contributors in their communities. It was the programme team's desire to incorporate them meaningfully into FFA. As such, early questions asked included:

- Could the Mastercard Foundation scholars and potential FFA students join the course development groups and provide feedback?
- Could they possibly perform other assignments too (e.g. research)?
- Could this be a leadership/ development opportunity for the Mastercard Foundation scholars with stipends, and potentially paid 'internship' positions for FFA students and the Mastercard Foundation online scholars without stipends?

From the onset of FFA, these scholars were involved in the development of the programme, including acting as student researchers during the visit to Lebanon in 2019 to learn from the experiences of AUB's PADILEIA. These Mastercard Foundation Scholars conducted field research in Lebanon, transcribed and coded the collected data, and reviewed literature on refugee education. As such, they performed a vital role in the research efforts associated with FFA.

As for the design and teaching itself, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars were embedded on course teams and contributed to the overall development of the course content. They assisted the tutors in the teaching of the course. They offered insights and provided feedback routinely. Incorporating these scholars into the fabric of FFA in both research and teaching proved impactful both for the programme and for the development of these scholars.

References

Boud, D., & Cohen, R. (2014). *Peer learning in higher education: Learning from and with each other*. London: Routledge.

Terrion, J. L., & Leonard, D. (2007). A taxonomy of the characteristics of student peer mentors in higher education: Findings from a literature review. *Mentoring & Tutoring*, 15(2), 149-164.

Identifying key partners

Given the significant resource demands of any bridging programme, as well as the importance of pooling knowledge, experience and resources rather than re-inventing processes and structures each time, the right partners are critical. This might entail identifying existing organisations or projects that may use the **same educational model** as the one you are proposing, or ones that **provide similar or complimentary services** in the same geographical area, and thus might be able to provide further opportunities for your students. There may be other initiatives that help refugees to enter higher education by providing, for example, CV writing workshops, information on scholarships, or information sessions on what to expect in university. Consider educational programmes that **develop similar skills**, such as advanced English classes, leadership training, business management skills, and more.

It is important to also establish which:

- **Funder to approach:** The nature of the funder will obviously influence the contours of any project, from how it is designed to how it runs. Certain funders, for example, require precise data on how successful the project is, which requires setting clear benchmarks (e.g. How many students attend class? How well they do in interim assessments?) and the continuous collection of quantitative metrics on how students are progressing. Accommodating these demands require alignment of programme goals, teaching approaches and student engagement in very different ways to a funder who is content with narrative reporting.
- **Governmental departments to engage:** it might be useful to partner with governmental departments, particularly when trying to accredit a new educational programme or advocate for changes in the existing system of qualifications. This also reduces the likelihood of any unexpected bureaucratic hurdles preventing the programme from proceeding further down the line.
- **Parts of the university to work with**: Power and expertise is not evenly distributed within universities, and there is no guarantee that the different parts of any institution will be ideologically aligned in terms of approaches and priorities. It is therefore important to

establish which parts of any university will be useful and agile allies - it may make more sense to work with individuals or small teams rather than large departments or schools, which have more rigid rules and longer timeframes. Be sure to include both academic and administrative and professional staff in this scoping.

- **Features you are prioritising.** Large funders may bring more money to the project, but this may be relatively time-consuming to access as procurement can take months. Smaller partners may be much more agile and cost-effective to partner with, because they have reduced overheads and criterion about the conditions/locations in which they can work. They may also be better networked with communities on the ground, and possess significant knowledge about localised and domestic dynamics, which may be critical for programme design and assist with certain activities e.g. outreach for recruitment purposes. There are also ethical questions about recognising and paying for regional expertise, and ensuring that money is going to local organisations and their staff rather than being cycled back through multilateral actors.

An important consideration that needs to accompany discussions about key partners is whose time will be 'paid for'. Depending on the possible budget available for the project, it may not be possible to 'buy out' all the individuals involved in the design and implementation of the programme. In such a situation, decisions might reflect institutional need (including whether or not partners depend on project funding for core salaries) and the planned division of labour and responsibility amongst the partners and project team members.

Once partners have been identified and these questions answered, have an inception meeting to ensure that all partners have clear expectations about what is to come, a platform to air ideas or concerns, and a visible understanding of the larger team of partners working towards the same goal. In many cases, multiple inception meetings are warranted, one at a very high level to ensure political and institutional support; potentially one at a lower, more operational level, to think about pathways and pressure points for the project.

PADILEIA/AUB as a partner for FFA

Partner organisations do not have to be geographically proximate, as was the case with the FFA programme where the key partner organisation for the project in Uganda was PADILEIA, which is based in Lebanon. Its tried and tested approach to blended, bridging programmes with refugees, and wealth of institutional knowledge about higher education and civic engagement, nonetheless made it an ideal partner for realising this project's aims. While the FFA team has always recognised the importance of designing contextually relevant educational programmes, AUB's work on the Case Study produced a set of questions and recommendations that could be used to inform the development of FFA.

PLANNING

The curriculum planning needs to be informed by a series of discrete yet interrelated activities. These activities were designed to ensure that the curriculum would both be informed by the research on learning design frameworks and be responsive to the particular needs of any students. It is necessary to cohere the project team around a shared vision of the bridging programme, what values would inform it, and what learning objectives might be engendered. Such activity is necessary for maintaining cohesion amongst the distributed project teams across the programme's lifecycle. As our experience with FFA shows, it is also crucial for the resilience of the programme in times like the starts and interruptions of the pandemic years of 2020-2021.

The following are activities that we found useful for FFA. They need to be adapted to your context but can, hopefully, provide inspiration.

Initial curriculum design workshop: representatives from the project team participate in a multi-day curriculum design workshop to begin to map out the curriculum and identify the values and principles that would inform the pedagogy, alongside the learning objectives hoped to engender in students.

On-site design workshop: in this follow up design workshop, core project team members meet for further design activity, to cohere the beginnings of the curriculum that emerged from the curriculum design workshop, and to embed that in the practical realities of refugee education observed in practice. It is useful that this second workshop is on site or close to the proposed teaching site to best take into account those practical realities.

These initial workshops (more than two can be organised) provide a space to answer questions that might have otherwise gone unnoticed in a project lifecycle: What are our values? What do we believe in? How do we act? What do we promote? Why do we teach? Who are our (intended and likely) students?

Survey with students: surveys are administered to potential students to inform the curriculum design, to surface which courses and learning objectives were most relevant to their needs, and to ensure these were designed into the bridging programme.

Feedback from students and tutors: the curriculum itself is never truly fixed in the sense that it was considered to be done. Rather, ongoing feedback from tutors and students as to what 'worked' and what could be improved informs ongoing iterations to the curriculum and course design.

Confirming scope, budget & schedules

The process of confirming scope budgets and schedules is an area where sufficient resources and reasonable timelines are needed to navigate any of the structural and/or administrative processes that might be in place within the different actors involved. Each organisation has their own processes and work culture and our basic advice is to make sure that you understand those, and understand what the peculiarities of your institution might be vis-à-vis partner institutions.

We found that five areas in particular were important in the case of FFA:

Official and real timelines: check the 'real' timelines of all processes before starting any of them. Some institutions, among which many universities, tend to be slow moving and checks and approval always take longer than expected. For instance, some of the processes, such as accreditation, may have a *political* dimension, meaning that it is not only about pressing ahead with paperwork but also about advocating and networking.

Authorisations, budgets, procurements: although seemingly an administrative example, it is important to note that universities have specific processes that need to be adhered to, particularly in terms of the checks involved in procurement, and the authorisations needed to fully realise the vision of the programme. A large amount of time is needed to fully explain why this activity is necessary as it is not usual university practice.

Generating contextually relevant content: making contextually relevant content takes time. In FFA, we found through our follow-up workshop in February 2020 [see previous section] that the students would be best-served by bespoke content where possible. This finding likely applies to any bridging programme and means that developing course materials and an appropriate learning platform takes long (repurposing material, as we will cover it later, is often re-writing content).

Workload challenges: bridging programmes tend to generate a lot of excitement and our experience with FFA and PADILEIA is that attracting collaborators is not a key issue. Rather the key issue is for them to deliver on an agreed timeline –academia is notorious for heavy workloads and overcommitments. Minor and more substantial disruptions, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, worsen the situation. Having substantial commitments pro bono (a clear weakness in the case of FFA) makes the enforcement of deadlines harder. Two advices are, therefore, (1) to make sure that the core of the programme, including the design and production of new teaching content, is mostly done "in-house" and (2) to limit the use of pro bono work to more peripheral activities (in order words, to make sure that people's work is fully accounted for in their job description).

Offline and online: offline and online have different temporalities that most people have started to understand with the Covid pandemic. These need to be accounted for in any bridging programme. In FFA, for instance, we were unable to conduct in-person development with colleagues in Kampala from March 2020, resulting in having to reconfigure programme design processes for online workshops, which delayed the process as we had to redesign several workshops, and conduct them over a longer timescale virtually.

Accrediting the programme, or not?

FFA

As originally conceived, FFA was to be accredited at the University of Edinburgh. Yet, administrative challenges at the university resulted in a lack of internal clarity over which department would accredit the programme, or whether accreditation was even possible. Accreditation, we learned, takes significant time, human resources, as well as a compelling case for why the university should accredit what was essentially a non-traditional course design. Delays, and the eventual discarding, of the programme goal of accreditation had significant knock-on effects in other areas.

PADILEIA

In Lebanon there are other initiatives that provide students with 'credits', which can later be used to assist with their transferral into HEIs. KARION is one example of this, offering students an ability to acquire credits through online courses, which can then help with their admission to universities in Lebanon. As they stress though, it is critical to establish the local value of accreditation: "We had the tendencies especially when we come from Europe or may be the west, as we call it, to tend to think that if we are accredited from whatever university in Europe the countries around are going to love it or take it and everything. Obviously that is a prestige thing but at the end of the day, if it is not accredited to satisfy local organisations, then it has almost no value for the students. So the local accreditation part is important, not only relying on whatever that university can offer from Europe".

Staff recruitment - who can do what?

Any educational programme involves a team of teaching and administrative staff, some of whom may need to be recruited specifically to fill certain roles, particularly where there is a need for specific professional skills and qualifications. Existing staff members may also not have the time to provide the programme or students with the support they need, or they may be too skilled to provide critical but basic parts of the programme delivery. In international projects, there is often an assumption that partners in the countries where the projects run will be able to practically implement the work even if their skills would be better used in more strategic or managerial positions.

Key considerations include:

- Do you need staff to design the curriculum and produce the teaching materials, or are these pre-designed/easily repurposed from other sources?
- What staff do you need to teach the programme, and what specific skills do they need? Do you need teaching assistants, and what qualifications will they require?
- Who will oversee the administration of the course e.g. paying student stipends and staff salaries, producing contracts, procuring laptops and other necessary equipment, etc.?
- Who will be monitoring student progress and course level outcomes? Who will design a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning framework, and who will ensure that relevant data is being collected over the lifespan of the course?
- What will the contracts for the employed staff consist of in terms of preparation time, teaching time, sick leave, paid holidays, training opportunities, etc.?

FFA Staff Recruitment

FFA was designed to be at its very core a highly involved learning experience requiring significant time from its tutors, administrators, and larger course and project teams. No member of the core project team was fully allocated to FFA, but rather were managing other duties in parallel to FFA. Members of the RLP team, in particular, had to be responsive to developments within Uganda that impacted the communities they served. Members from AUB at times had to attend to developments within Lebanon. All of us were impacted in some way by Covid-19 and our duties to our 'home' institutions in that respect. Other commitments at times drew us away from FFA. Having a clear understanding of where capacity exists in the project team was challenging, but necessary.

The project had a budget for the following staff roles:

- From Edinburgh: project coordinator
- From AUB, Lebanon: project coordinator, project officer
- From RLP, Uganda: project coordinator, lead tutor (x2), tutor (x2 for each course),

psycho-social support officers

In addition to this, we recruited for the following positions to ensure that appropriately trained staff were available:

- Maths Tutors
- Digital Skills Tutors
- IELTS Tutors from the University of Edinburgh: As none of the RLP staff had provided IELTS-specific training before, we provided the students with a four week training course delivered by trained tutors from the English Language Education Centre at Edinburgh University. This included one-to-one sessions to feedback on written work, and to practice oral presentation skills. In future, we would either significantly extend this training and/or instead provide training to RLP tutors so that they can lead on IELTS training for displaced learners.

PADILEIA: Family Values

Many of the tutors hired to provide in-person teaching for PADILEIA were themselves Syrian refugees in the 24-30 age bracket who were living in the same communities as the students. The aim of this was to show the students that they too could excel in higher education if they worked hard, as evidenced by the qualified Syrians working with them, and so that the students could trust that their tutors understood the specific challenges that they faced. There are clear risks to this strategy - not least that students feel less confident disclosing personal circumstances to tutors who may live in the same communities as them - but feedback from the students suggests that they appreciated a less hierarchical classroom and saw these tutors as examples of what they too could achieve.

As one person interviewed by the PADILEIA team stated: “First of all, the thing about PADILEIA, it's not like a regular school or university. It's like something in between. The students used to come here. I used to feel that they saw PADILEIA as an escape, as an escape from some hard realities. They were living and also it was good for them because they were getting educated. So when someone gets an education, it suddenly boosts their confidence…And also they got to meet new friends. They formed so many groups and they got to work together on so many projects...And also, they were getting nice treatment from the instructors. It was like we were bonding. It wasn't so formal as it was at school or as, you know, you do in university. Yes. So it was kind of nice. At the end of the day, they felt very comfortable coming here.”

Staff training and ongoing support

Staff training and ongoing support are critical components of any educational programme, particularly one working with refugee students, in blended formats, and potentially with unfamiliar technologies. Projects looking to undertake this work will need to determine the specific needs of their teaching staff and develop training and ongoing support to accommodate those needs. This training and ongoing support can or should be holistic in nature and attempt to build capacity on multiple fronts: pedagogically, technologically, professionally, and in terms of subject-matter expertise. We echo the idea that tutors need an understanding of participatory methods of instruction and learning processes that respect the dignity of the learner, and the ability to create a safe and inclusive learning environment (INEE, 2022). This training and ongoing support helps tutors leverage existing resources and to create their own and to work with the existing curriculum to make it relevant and meaningful to their students (Mendenhall et al., 2015).

In the training and ongoing support provided to tutors, there is a need to emphasise this adaptability and creativity of teaching itself in order to develop praxis, or the development of teaching practices that are 'morally committed, oriented and informed by traditions in the field' (Kemmis and Smith, 2008). Training and ongoing support can plug tutors into the research-informed practices of the professional domain of the teaching field.

Key considerations and suggestions for the further development of this staff training and ongoing support include

- Training itself should not be seen as an isolated singular activity but rather a body of work running the lifespan of the programme. In this way, training and ongoing support are never done.
- It is critical to determine existing staff skills and teaching experience before the development of any training programme. Subsequent training should provide ample opportunity to engage with the technology and the concepts in safe and supportive ways.
- The earlier, the better: training for staff should begin as soon as is reasonably possible but certainly well ahead of the beginning of programme instruction.
- Practically, it is critical to determine tutor availability for staff training and teaching, and their existing working commitments and arrangements; timetabling again is a critical component of training and supporting staff. When people are available can become as important a consideration as to what they know.
- Insofar as possible, make participation in staff training mandatory for any tutors participating in the programme. Due to the distributed nature of programme teams and existing professional and personal commitments, attendance and participation in staff training can be minimal without some institutional encouragement to participate.

- Explore possible accreditation: is there an accreditation that tutors can obtain as a result of their participation in the teacher training programme and in the actual teaching of the course?

FFA Staff Training

Throughout the span of the project, there was a recognised need for staff training in terms of developing digital skills (particularly in Kolibri and Zoom), enhancing tutor skills around psychological support, and professional development for the instructors around learner-centred pedagogy responsive to refugee students' experiences and needs (Mendenhall et al, 2015). It was agreed that course tutors would receive dedicated training on the core concepts of blended learning and teaching, pedagogy, and the Foundations for All programme. The following training was created and provided in the months prior to the beginning of the pilot Foundations for All programme:

- Routine meetings with the programme and course teams to discuss curriculum and course design, as well as teaching in student-centred approaches.
- A short online course was developed to provide instruction on the core concepts of blended learning, a pedagogical model for FFA, and instruction on using Kolibri, the Learning Management System adopted for the programme.
- Additional manuals and training materials were developed to demonstrate technological processes (how to access Kolibri, for example).
- Although poorly attended, workshops and drop-in sessions were provided to supplement this training and to answer any questions tutors had.

Our experiences with FFA highlighted the following:

- Determining tutor's existing capacity: it proved especially challenging to identify the existing skills of the tutors in the two learning centres. Tutors held a diverse range of technological skills and teaching experiences.
- Determining tutor availability: it was challenging to determine the tutor's availability to participate in the training being offered. Many of the tutors were onboarded to the programme at different times, making the coordination of training challenging.
- Participation in training was minimal: largely due to the competing work demands of the tutors and communication around the availability of training, participation in the training being offered was minimal, ultimately falling well below what would prove necessary in ensuring that both learning centres were confident in their ability to deliver the curriculum in a blended learning format.

- Specialised subjects and formats: there was no specific focus on upskilling the tutors to deliver the IELTS training themselves, which would be a long-term goal and something to potentially integrate into the project.
- Ongoing and flexible support: In 2021, the nationwide Covid-related lockdown disrupted access to the learning centres and instruction moved into mobile devices, WhatsApp, and Zoom, additional training materials were developed and sessions conducted for the tutors to discuss how to transform their face to face instruction in the learning centres to a mixture of asynchronous and synchronous activity in weekly blocks of activity.
- Service provision: it was difficult to determine, and subsequently provide training for, the ‘correct’ service provider, such as the LMS.
- It was difficult as a small project to meaningfully engage with initiatives to provide connectivity, such as RENU (RENU is the National Roaming Operator (NRO) for eduroam in Uganda).

Risk management and project management tools

Bridging programmes are often new for their organisers and, therefore, typically riskier than more established projects and programmes. There are many more unknowns and many things can go wrong –assessments need to be conducted with respect to the local context and should follow some of the basic principles of risk assessment matrices, namely ensure that risks are identified by level of severity and likelihood and that contingency measures have been identified and can be easily activated. Risk matrices need to be reviewed periodically. It is hard to have a comprehensive list of risks out of context, but some of the main categories may include: (1) issues with timeline, budget, and staff management that we have already discussed; (2) technology and communication breakdown; (3) student well-being and expectations.

From a human resources management point of view, one of the best way to mitigate risk is to set clear expectations and responsibilities that are agreed upon by everyone Contracts are a typical way of setting up an clarifying those point, but they need to be adapted to national ‘business’ and ‘cultural’ practices (formal contracts do not have the same value everywhere).

So-called learning contracts can also be powerful tools to manage risks with the students. They follow the basic idea, which is now common practice in teaching around the world, to jointly agree on course objectives and course etiquette but also on what students can expect from the programme and what staff expect to see from the students. They are even more important if a financial or material benefit comes with the programme, as they define the limits of such support [see stipend].

In FFA, student contracts were instrumental to resolve tensions as there was a common document everyone could refer to.

The FFA contract with course organisers - key tasks and duties

General Course Management

1. Checking that sufficient tutors have been allocated to teach the course and know what their duties and responsibilities are in regard to the course
2. Ensuring staff (including technical staff and demonstrators) know their commitments and that proper communication channels are in place
3. Chairing meetings of the course team
4. Encouraging and supporting the course team in a variety of approaches to teaching
5. Liaising with RLP to ensure appropriate facilities (learning centre, IT facilities etc) are in place at the correct times to deliver the course
6. Ensuring that the organisation of the course, and the materials given to students, take account of accessibility or disability issues
7. Ensuring the production and distribution of course documentation and materials, including the course handbook (the document which sets out the teaching methods, assessment, topics and regulations, if any, governing the course)
8. Ensuring the required readings are available (liaising with Edinburgh/ Makerere library services if necessary)
9. Overseeing course web page and virtual learning environment, Learn, etc. if appropriate.

Assessment and Feedback

1. Co-ordinating the load and timing of assessments across the course and liaising with other FfA course organisers to take into account other deadlines and assessments
2. Informing students about the structure of assessments, expected standard of presentation, marking criteria, timescales and arrangements for feedback on assessments, and an individual assessment's contribution to the overall course mark
3. Advising students of the need to avoid plagiarism and drawing their attention to the University guidelines on good academic practice
4. Ensuring that assessments are set and returned within the stipulated timeframe
5. Working with other course organisers to design procedures for marking and moderation
6. Co-ordinating marking in accordance with agreed procedures for moderation and standard-setting, and ensuring that accurate records are maintained

7. Agreeing with other course organisers procedures around late submission of assignments (in line with FfA values)

Advising and Supporting Students

1. Dealing with queries from students on the course, and from tutors
2. Advising students on course matters
3. Ensuring that students are aware (normally through the initial course information) of the action they should take in case of difficulties, whom to consult, or what guidance material they should look at
4. Working with FFA tutors to monitor student engagement, contacting defaulting students, informing other course organisers (if appropriate) about students who are absent or experiencing academic or other difficulties, and working with the FfA team to provide appropriate support for the student.

Monitoring and Reviewing Courses

1. Working with FfA colleagues to design appropriate feedback mechanisms to understand students views on the course (including interim feedback as the course progresses)
2. Implement and monitor changes made as a result of previous feedback
3. Approving minor changes to existing course as appropriate

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Curriculum & course design

This chapter details the different steps that were followed in the curriculum and course design, namely (1) setting the core principles of the bridging programme curriculum and pedagogy (what is good curriculum and what needs to be done to get there); (2) defining the curriculum and course general model –for instance whether it should be online or hybrid or in person, the role of tutors, etc.; and (3) the process to decide on the actual content and framing (course and curriculum design process). We also dedicate a separate section to the difficult question of assessment and conclude with the question of the student selection process.

Setting Outcomes and Impact

A good curriculum is underpinned by a clear set of outcomes and a clear vision of what an impactful programme would or should look like. Programmes typically end up in such an envious position after a delicate act of carefully balancing *ambition*, which is central to driving bridge programmes (especially when they are being launched), on the one hand, and *pragmatism and realism* on the other hand. This equilibrium may not be easy to reach and would often require repeated and open conversations between key stakeholders at the beginning of the programme, inputs from course designers, course implementers, students, and even policy-makers are valuable and the previous section provides some ideas for developing constructive discussions. The conversations set and moderate expectations. Both outcomes that are too ambitious and outcomes that are too easy to reach will create frustrations. It is useful to distinguish between the values and high-level impact (e.g. advocacy, institutional change, student sense of wellbeing) that will drive the programme throughout its life and are not expected to be modified, and more discrete and easily achievable outputs and intermediary outcomes that may need to be revised during the programme (see the section on monitoring and evaluation).

Bridging programmes often find themselves in an uneasy position that is summed up in the question “a bridge to what?”. As most educational programmes, they have the very high level goal of making their students good and happy citizens who will be able to affect their own lives and the lives of others for the better. Such a goal is, however, too vague to fully drive programme design and bridging programmes are typically motivated by more practical objectives such as ensuring access to higher education or equipping students for the job market. In practice, resource constraints will mean that programmes cannot do everything at the same time, hard choices need to be made. Such choices are especially difficult in contexts where deciding for one objective means that students are unlikely to find an alternative for reaching other competing objectives that were left out; for instance focussing on access to higher education (or even to access to a specific institution) may mean that, in practice, there will not be vocational training because that offering does not exist for refugees in that context. This hard choice has further consequences that need to be considered from the onset of the programme (also see the example in the box below): is there a risk that the programme ends up enrolling students whose goals do not match with the programme’s only because the programme is the main option available to them? What are the possible routes for students whose goals end up diverging from the programme as they progress (e.g. decide that university is not for them)? What does a narrower focus mean for the general idea of strengthening 'social' skills that may help communities?

The following questions may help setting impact and outcomes:

Setting the vision/high-level impact of the curriculum

- What is the main problem the curriculum is trying to address: "accessing higher education" is a broad problem, but what was learnt through the scoping exercise? Does everyone agree about the main learning/action points?
- It will often be the case that there are a few entangled problems, but can they be disentangled? What should be prioritised?
- Besides the 'endpoint' where we want to go, what do we need to be careful about and preserve during the journey and in the curriculum? What are the values and what is acceptable to do and not.

Setting the outcomes

- How would we know whether the main problem has been overcome? What is the theory of change of the programme? What are the different steps that will lead to achieving high level impact? Laying out the different steps, and sharing them with critical friends will be key to ensuring that the balance described above has been reached.
- An inherent tension in bridge programmes relates to the *beginning* and *end* points of the bridge (the curriculum), which do need to be agreed upon by all parties involved, and explicit. In terms of the endpoint, questions that curricula typically diverge on is the expected next step for graduates –there are numerous options from entering a specific programme to simply being better equipped to face whatever comes next. Would a good job, without further education, be a possible outcome of the programme and if so, should there be specific outcomes/steps in the curriculum pertaining to it? Does the programme limit its ambition to access or is it also about success?
- In terms of the starting point and the process, there are also many questions that need to be considered carefully: after the enrolment is sorted out, how much will the programme care about potential heterogeneity in the group?

These are all very practical questions to which we found that there was no blanket answer but rather many possible answers, and in fact choices to make, in our context. The case below explains some of these choices.

FFA Outcomes

While FFA was specifically advertised as a blended bridging programme for refugee learners hoping to enter HE, our initial aspirations for the programme did include a more general focus on transferable skills and general knowledge. It took the FFA partners a substantial amount of time to agree on the final intended outcomes of the programme. An in-person meeting over three days in Kampala was hugely beneficial to this process, although conversations about these outcomes carried across regular meetings, workshops, and through our programme WhatsApp groups.

It was decided that, for the pilot version of the programme, *the intended main outcome would be admission to university, and more specifically Makerere University which already had a possible entry point we could prepare students for: the Mature Age Entry Exam*. Other options included keeping as an outcome that students may (re)enter the job market after the programme, with tailored professional skills. However tempting, this proved too ambitious a goal for FFA and we decided to focus on what we knew better, and what we could reasonably provide considering our own expertise. Such an emphasis on the MAEE clearly has limitations in terms of what can meaningfully be achieved on the programme (and entails the risk of having a whole programme that "teaches for the exam", which we tried to avoid), but we felt too broad a scope in stated outcomes would ultimately dilute the overall impact. It is hard to judge whether this was the 'right' or the 'wrong' choice in hindsight, all depends on the assessment of what the key issues for refugees are.

In conversation with English Language Education colleagues at the University of Edinburgh, we also realised that it was too ambitious to expect students to sit the IELTS exam as part of FFA given the level of support we could afford to provide. We had hoped to make this a key component of the programme, not least because it is often a prerequisite for students to gain admission and scholarships in HEIs, but there was neither the funds nor the time to dedicate towards the specialised teaching needed to pass the IELTS. This was a source of disappointment for FFA staff and students, and for future iterations of the programme we recognise the benefits of providing opportunities for students to acquire at least some accredited outcome.

… and their consequences

After the FFA team decided to support the students specifically to target the Makerere Mature Entry Exam, the focus of the whole programme significantly narrowed. It is highly likely that through actively participating in a bridging programme for University, certain students decided that further education was not for them, even if they wished to continue to generally upskill themselves in digital skills, English and maths; the courses dominant focus on entering HE may nonetheless have been alienating or discouraging for those who found themselves in this situation. The last minute preparation for the Mature Entry Exam was also highly stressful for all those involved, which may have done little to dispel students' concerns about the intensity and challenges of pursuing a University degree, and for those who were not sitting the exam, there was inevitably a reduction in the amount of teaching that was available and relevant to them

Setting Principles to Guide Curriculum & Pedagogy

Besides setting clear outcomes, programmes also need a set of principles that guide the way in which such outcomes will be reached. The process of deliberation and agreement upon such principles [see the planning section above, as well as the section below on curriculum design] helps to (1) clarify and synthesise the program teams' vision for the program and (2) ensure that there is continuity and coherence for learners as they engage in specific program courses and components led by different team members. This process should be informed by what has been learned about students profile, the general context [see scoping too], and the programme outcomes.

While reviewing the literature, discussing PADILEIA and planning the design of FFA, a set of core principles emerged, which can be useful for bridging programme designers:

Curriculum design and development

- Curriculums must be culturally and socio-politically-relevant and gender-responsive, designed for and with students
- Curriculums must be developed in contextualised and collaborative ways that are responsive to learners' strengths, aspirations, and agency.
- Curriculums must understand students' migration experiences and their expectations for and realistic outcomes of education, and be honest about what they can deliver
- Curriculums must enable learner and teacher autonomy and responsibility creatively utilizing available and accessible tools and resources, including digital tools
- Curriculums must support learners and educational staff to identify and challenge practices and norms that marginalise refugee and other disadvantaged learners
- Curriculums must foreground psycho-social support as both a taught set of skills for supporting oneself and one's community, and as a service available to students
- Curriculums should include experiential learning opportunities to also aid community engagement and mutual learning with formal and informal avenues for reciprocal learning between families/communities and the program

Teaching and Learning Environment

- Educators should engage with students as co-participants in learning. Peer learning should be encouraged and learners must be recognised as expert knowledge-holders too, with student diversity seen as a key strength
- Classroom environments must provide a safe and supportive space where all students and educators are genuinely valued and respected, and where the roles and responsibilities of each group are clearly articulated
- Gender-based differences in access to and experiences of education must be recognized (including a mix of female and male teachers for trust and as role models)
- Recognition should be given to the ways in which the material conditions and external support mechanisms of students and their families will impact upon their learning experience
- Educators must be furnished with the information and support (including appropriate financial remuneration and professional development) necessary to enable them to engender a supportive and effective learning environment that is sensitive to the distinct needs of refugee learners

FFA Student Level Aims and Principles

As an example, these are the aims and principles developed by the FFA team prior to course development. They come in addition to the main outcome, the Mature Age Entry Exam. We arrived at these aims and principles through iterative conversations primarily among program staff and educators with input from potential FFA participants and Mastercard Scholarship students engaged as interns in the project. They also seek alignment with the general principles mentioned above. Our thinking was informed by the experiences of everyone engaged in the process and the literature review that undergirds this project.

Aims and Principles

- Enhance students' self-confidence and transferable skills that they can use to thrive across different situations in education, work and life including, but not limited to, self-directed learning, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, healthy communication, conflict resolution, collaboration, leadership, digital literacy, and character skills such as perseverance, coping, empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation.
- Prepare students to apply for and succeed in securing scholarships and admission to university, as well as providing a foundation for academic success in university studies.

- Enable students to achieve subject-specific learning outcomes for English, Mathematics, Digital Skills, Study Skills and Understanding Myself and Others (according to each course syllabus).
- By the end of the programme students should feel empowered to effectively and confidently express their knowledge, needs and skills in less familiar professional and personal environments, and should be prepared for development as ethical leaders committed to removing barriers faced by refugees and the betterment of their societies.
- Support positive interaction between refugees and host communities.

Course Models

As in the case of our discussion on technology, there is no magic bullet when it comes to course models. Course models respond to contexts, constraints, and course objectives. Many different course models exist and the box below presents the rationale behind the models that were adopted in FFA and PADILEIA. Some key considerations to consider when determining the course delivery model included:

- What skills do teachers and supporting staff need to deliver this curriculum? Have training programmes been prepared to allow these skills to be obtained?
- How distributed are the learning centres and the course teams? What models exist to overcome distance and to allow the distributed teams to communicate often and design a coherent curriculum?
- What availability do both the tutors and the students have to participate in the programme in terms of hours per week, and overall in terms of the number of weeks?
- How to timetable the courses in such a way that provided a clear indication that psychosocial support was critical to the programme, and that allowed for each course the time needed to satisfy the learning outcomes?
- Is it possible to ask students to do work around the core contact hours given commitments to work, families, communities, etc.? Do they have a conducive environment in which they could do this work?

In the case of FFA, several models for course delivery were considered, but due to the distributed nature of the course teams across three institutions, a key constraint, we opted for a blended learning model which emphasised the face to face classroom experience and the interaction with the tutors drawn from the Refugee Law Project. The blended aspects of the course delivery involved the creation of teaching material by the course teams, the uploading of this material to the Kolibri platform, and the use of this material to supplement in-class instruction by the tutors in the two learning centres. The case study below provides more details.

FFA Course Delivery Model

After much deliberation, the programme team determined that the model would

- Allow for collaboration across the three institutions in creating the curriculum and course content
- Emphasise the face to face instruction and in particular the psychosocial components of that instruction
- Use blended learning models to supplement that face to face instruction
- Require considerable attention to the availability of all involved and the subsequent timetabling of courses in a weekly schedule

The curriculum itself involved two 15-week semesters of instruction in the core courses of the Foundations for All programme: Understanding Myself and Others, English for Academic Purposes, Maths, Study Skills, and Digital Skills. Each course organised its lessons as weekly blocks of activity consisting of direct instruction to be delivered during the scheduled class time, along with supplemental, largely optional self-study that could be done in the afternoons in the learning centres; this material was hosted on Kolibri.

It is important to note that the psychosocial support and instruction were considered core to the overall curriculum and as such bookended each week at both the learning centres. The course teams negotiated how many hours of instruction per week were necessary to achieve the learning outcomes and these hours, in some cases, were distributed across the week, rather than in single blocks of activity.

As such, timetables for the courses for each week in each learning centre proved especially important both in terms of the curriculum being taught, and the availability of the tutors in keeping with their other duties at the Refugee Law Project. Devising a weekly schedule for each of the learning centres was challenging, but ultimately surfaced as a key consideration for any subsequent project attempting a similar initiative.

Considerations for blended learning

The potential impact of blended learning on achieving programme aims and outcomes is not self-evident, but rather requires deliberate and sustained effort to communicate why it has been chosen and what value it provides. There is a need to sensitise the wider community to the advantages of blended learning as many will be unfamiliar or sceptical about its value. Many of these reservations reflect broader cultural perspectives about the value of digital or blended education, and its ability to provide a commensurate experience of studying specific subjects in comparison to their solely face to face counterparts (Reinprecht et al., 2021). As such, a blended bridging programme team will need to communicate the value of these approaches, and how they may complement and even expand on what is available in a traditional face to face classroom.

The scepticism surrounding blended learning is not merely the product of a cultural perspective on what constitutes 'proper' education, but carries with it a set of tangible barriers that can inform this scepticism. The research is clear that refugee students face additional technological, cultural and linguistic barriers to successful participation in digital education (Moser-Mercer, 2014, 2016), including technological access, ownership, connectivity, and electricity constraints (Nicolle and Owuor, 2021); time constraints; the lack of open educational resources (OER) available in specific languages and the disempowerment that often occurs as a result (Karakaya and Karakaya, 2020), and a general lack of technological capacity. Merely communicating the value of blended learning is not enough; this must be accompanied by a body of work to mitigate or overcome each of these barriers.

Preparing students for blended learning is important because they are not used to the format nor the pedagogy behind it. There is a need to present how blended learning engages with different temporal modalities as it moves between synchronous (direct instruction) and asynchronous (self-study, reflection, or discovery activities) modes of learning. As such, it is important for any bridging programme to provide capacity for students to learn independently, particularly for the largely online asynchronous activity tha blended learning will expect of them. This capacity for independent learning is crucial for students preparing for entrance examinations, or for after finishing the bridging programme when they are expected to continue to develop their own skills for university study or for employment.

The programme team will need to prepare the broader communities in which these students are situated on what blended learning is and its value through deliberate communication and, when possible, sustained advocacy. This might include engaging with parents, or advocating to government agencies or formal educational bodies to recognise and/or fully accredit such programmes.

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Course & Curriculum Design Process

The ***curriculum design*** process necessarily builds on the exploratory research of the scoping tool. It will usually take a few workshops and meetings to make progress, and this may take a few months, especially if more information needs to be collected about what others may have done in the same space or about the students and their contexts (see scoping tool and the earlier sections of this design framework). The process is important to help articulate programme values, beliefs, actions, teaching ethos, and the more values-oriented orientations of the programme.

A formal curriculum design workshop (as opposed to more general discussions on the direction of travel of the bridging programme) is important and different models exist. Such workshops should be designed to be a team-based approach to learning design and prioritises the student learning experience, where student feedback and assessment literacies are given top priority, and a shared vision of the programme is developed between team members. In the case of FFA, this workshop lasted 3 days, was online, and was informed by the model of curriculum development largely in use at the University of Edinburgh (McCune and Hounsell, 2005).

The formal curriculum design workshop is important in cohering the programme team's understanding of what the bridging programme is set to do, and to share the values of why the team is setting out to do it. In the case of FFA, it led to phrasing clear statements: "we act with integrity", "we believe in building communities of learners", "we are participatory", "we believe that education is one of the available durable solutions to refugee problems", and so forth. They reveal and reinforce the reasons why people are invested in the programme, and illustrate the commitment to students' and their experiences is embedded and explicit from the start.

The actual ***course design*** can take different shapes and there are different methods but, based on our experience with FFA, we recommend working from the ABC learning design model and the six learning types concept from the 'Conversational Framework' (Laurillard, 2012), whereby sequences of learning types are arranged in weekly blocks of activity.

There is not one way of doing things but the case of FFA can provide ideas. Course teams were defined, met to determine their learning outcomes, to storyboard and design their weekly blocks of activity, to develop the teaching materials to support that activity, and to create weekly folders and load material into the learning management system. The process took a few months of weekly meetings. The challenges were largely around coordination of both the course teams working towards their individual courses, but also in terms of coordinating a coherence with the larger curriculum. The larger programme team met regularly to discuss how these course activities would intersect and support the overall learning outcomes for the programme.

An important point while designing the course is to ensure that they can be adapted easily. Bridging programmes take a lot of fine tuning and, in our experience, the course teams were routinely called on to adapt based on how the content was being engaged with by the students; and to react to broader circumstances (disruptions caused by the pandemic, closures of the learning centres, and more).

Finally, the following points are worth checking to ensure the quality of the course and curriculum design processes:

- Has the larger programme team discussed and agreed to the vision of the programme and its values-orientation? Has it defined a programme level approach shared by all?
- Has an appropriate course design framework been identified? Has the programme and course teams been briefed on its structure, its rationale, and what types of learning activity it is designed to enact? Is this framework flexible enough to account for the diversity of the students that the programme is being designed to serve?
- Have course teams been clearly defined and empowered to begin creating course content? Are those course teams empowered to be responsive to the diversity of the student cohort, and flexible enough to respond to circumstance?
- Has a reporting and communication system been put in place to ensure that what is being created at the course team level is fed into the larger programme team routinely? It is difficult to coordinate this communication into a predictable, accountable structure so care must be applied to ensure that the courses are speaking to a coherent programme curriculum.

FFA Curriculum and Course Design Models

The curriculum and course design model that Foundations for All followed involved a series of activities spanning 2019-2020, which included:

- Initial discussions in the programme team about the Foundations for All curriculum, and gathering the experiences of both the Refugee Law Project and the American University of Beirut in their respective refugee focused programmes.

- These discussions were supplemented with desk research into similar refugee facing initiatives.
- Courses to be included in the FFA programme were identified: English for Academic Purpose (EFA Level 6); Maths (as a foundational skill; to support entrance exam; to teach this way of thinking for other subjects; as a business/life skill); Digital skills (for online learning; for digital literacy (beyond their current experience); using the Internet; critical digital literacy; key software packages); Psychosocial (education; self-care; support of other); and Study skills (for use for FFA; to support independent study; for success in future university studies)
- Course teams were developed, course curricula were defined, and weekly blocks of activity were developed loosely modelled on a learning design framework.
- Routine meetings amongst the course teams and the larger programme team was designed to ensure that there was coherence amongst the courses and the larger curriculum. Course teams developed teaching activity, course content, and organised this in Kolibri.

There were also courses that the students had asked for that we were unable to provide, such as introductions on refugee studies, gender studies and African literature. While at the initial stages of formulating the curriculums we had hoped to be able to provide short modules on these dimensions, or at least to be able to integrate more content on these topics within the existing courses (e.g. we used a short article on MHPSS in refugee camps for a mock university seminar discussion), we realised that this was challenging given the amount of specific topics we needed to cover for the Mature Entry Exam.

Localisation in Lebanon

The extent to which curriculums also need to be 'localised' will depend on their content. An online educational NGO operating in Lebanon stated, for example, that while the science curriculums that had been developed by partner Universities in Europe were generally transferable to the Lebanese context, courses within the social and political sciences did not translate as well to that context. Preparatory courses in social work, for example, could not be as easily transferred because the legal and political context for this work is so different in the Middle East to in Western Europe.

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The Psycho-social component

Throughout our literature review and experience, it became very clear that bridging programmes must integrate and foreground psychosocial education at all stages and all levels in order to support learners' well-being and enable them to focus on learning, while also receiving counselling and developing personal strategies for overcoming trauma and grief. Refugee populations tend to be extremely vulnerable and mental health can be a key impediment to meaningful learning. Developing a psycho-social component is not optional for bridging courses.

Such support can take many forms. The previous section has highlighted how in FFA we included a 'course', as well as direct mentoring and counselling. The appropriate approach will depend on the refugee population and the way it engages with mental health, but also on the availability of psycho-social professionals such as psychologists and counsellors.

Such an approach is resource intensive - to be done well, it requires time building trusting relationships - and emotionally intensive, with that emotional energy largely being provided by tutors and staff who are closest to the students and whose investment in supporting students is not always accounted for in budgets and contracts. In hindsight, FFA should have budgeted more for providing this kind of support so that the limited number of FFA tutors were not required to either stretch themselves thin or to do so much unremunerated work.

Assessment

Deciding on the approach to assessment within any bridging programme is obviously closely related to the overarching programme outcomes and curriculum design. Some programmes will choose not to include any form of assessment for, of or as learning, while others, and particularly accredited programmes, may have a very rigid approach to assessment to ensure that institutional standards have been met. If the aim of the programme is to provide students with a certificate to testify that their skills have developed to a certain level, which can be used in professional contexts, then there has to be a way to assess that this is the case.

For non-accredited programmes, however, it can be hard to determine an appropriate assessment strategy or whether one is even necessary. You have to determine whether there is a threshold of learning and engagement that you would wish students to reach in the different dimensions of the programme and then establish what would be the most appropriate way to test their attainment of those standards. You also need to determine whether students need to 'learn' how to do assessment by doing them (assessments may have a pedagogical value in and of themselves as they show students how they may be evaluated at university). This opens up questions about:

- What modes of assessment are appropriate for each course?
- Do these forms of assessment measure learning, facilitate learning, or provide feedback on how successful teaching has been?
- How do the teaching staff and students feel about assessment? Is this something they would find beneficial, or is there resistance/ambivalence towards assessment?
- If they want assessment, do staff and students prefer regular assessment or singular forms of assessment at the end of courses?
- Does the approach to assessment need to be consistent across all the courses e.g. does it make sense for all assessments to be clustered in mid-terms and in a week at the end of term so that students can relax in between?
- What forms of assessment are culturally and contextually relevant for the students?
- What forms of assessment will best prepare students for the assessments that they may face when entering University, or once they are there?
- Are there standardised forms of assessment that you could integrate into the project e.g. IELTS modules? Nationally certified past papers?
- How will marking be done and do partners have the resources for that?
- Is moderation and external examination required?

FFA: Too little assessment?

In designing FFA, the teams at AUB and Edinburgh were particularly worried about over-assessing the students on the programme. They reflected on the drive within their institutions to move away from quantifying student progress through regular assessment, and instead to focus on formative assignments and unassessed forms of participation and student engagement. There was also an assumption, based on literature that emphasises the need to design low-stress educational experiences for displaced learners, that exams would be a trigger for increased stress among refugee learners. This informed a strong conviction that a low stress and supportive educational environment was one that contained minimal assessment.

Feedback from students on FFA, however, made clear that the quantification of their progress at regular intervals was important for both their engagement in, and enjoyment of, their courses. Without regular assessment they felt that they could not evaluate their own learning, and particularly get that sense of progress or positive validation from having successfully understood something. Relatively regular testing was also seen as a way to reduce the stress associated with any big exams in the future, such as the Makerere Mature Entry Exam, because students were more used to the experience of being assessed. It is not clear to what extent the UMO course contributed to this positive attitude towards assessment too as students felt more confident and resilient on the course.

We therefore rethought the assessment component of the courses to include more short quizzes that students could be given a numerical grade for (including quizzes created through the Kolibri platform), and integrated tasks like the general knowledge quiz that students were scored on each week they participated.

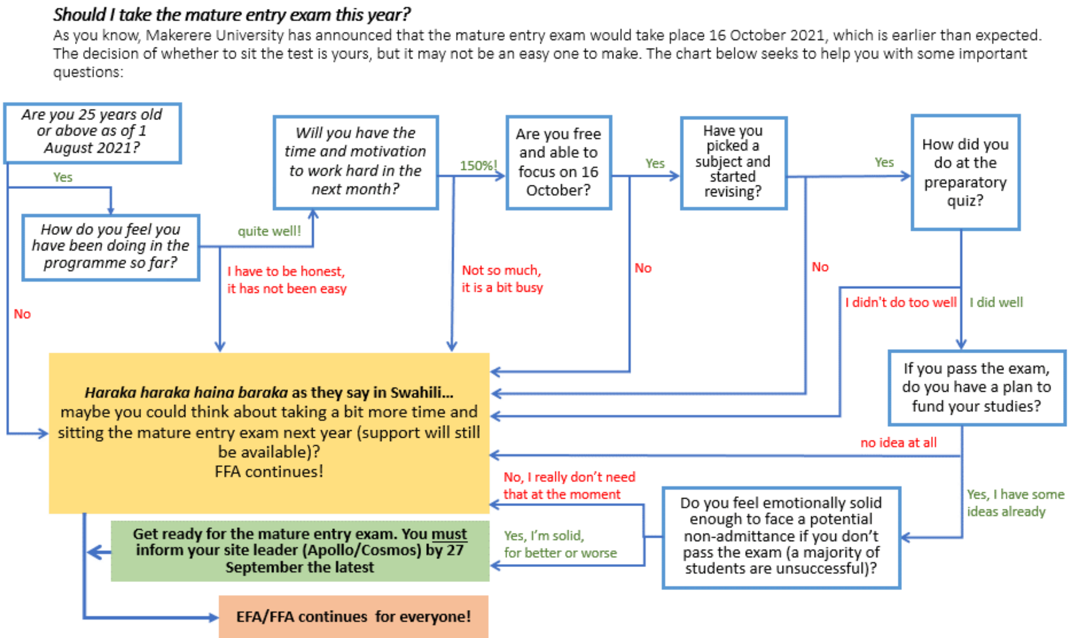
Further learning indicated that there is merit in introducing the Mature Entry Exam much earlier in the programme, even potentially beginning with an introduction to the exam at the onset of study. This would potentially more clearly frame the trajectory that the students were about to undertake.

Mature Age Entry Examination: Shifting Programme Focus

Given the Refugee Law Project's status as part of the Law School at Makerere University, a decision was made that FFA would target Makerere's mature age entry exam as a pathway for the refugee learners into tertiary education within the country. The exam is designed for all students over the age of 25 at the start of the calendar year who seek admission to the University. This exam is one of very few routes into University in Uganda that is open to individuals who either have not finished secondary school, or who have no documentation to prove this. In place of these grades, the admissions process invites students to sit two separate papers; the first is a complex series of aptitude tests and the second is an essay-based paper. The students who achieve the highest grades in these tests are then admitted into the University.

In the second semester of FFA, classes were thus largely oriented towards supporting students to master the skills needed to pass these exams, with a focus on the English language and comprehension, General Knowledge, and Mathematics sections, which compose the first part of the admissions test [for a discussion on the shortcomings of this exam see 'Advocacy' section of Toolkit]. The second part of the admissions exam requires students to write short essays on the subjects that they wish to study at University. These essay scripts are not marked, however, unless the student has received a high enough score in the first part of the test.

While prior to 2019 this exam was usually held in December, in 2021 the exam was unexpectedly announced for the 16th October, leaving tutors and students with two months less time to prepare. The team nonetheless decided to support students who wished to sit the exam in 2021 to do so while being clear that not all the key material had yet been covered. Roughly 75% of the students wished to sit it, but all the students were assured that they would also be supported to either resit or sit it for the first time in 2022. The students were provided with the flowchart below to support their decision-making:



Alongside the pedagogical challenges of re-orienting FFA on short notice to accommodate the October date for the entrance exam, the amended timetable also threw up significant logistical and financial challenges. Given Makerere's insistence that students needed to register for the mature age entry exam in person, all the students had to travel to the campus in Kampala to register their intent to sit the exam, which for students from Kiryandongo involved three days of travel, food and accommodation arranged by RLP at very late notice. The students also needed to receive individual approval from the Settlement Commander in Kiryandongo to allow their travel to Kampala given restrictions on refugees' unauthorised freedom of movement in Uganda. To then sit the exam a few weeks later, students from Kiryandongo had to once again be supported to travel to Kampala for two days, and provided hostel accommodation and financial support for this period. RLP staff also wanted to be on hand to accompany them throughout this trip and to escort them around the Makerere campus to make sure they were in the right places at the right times for their exams.

For those students who did not wish to sit the MAEE in October 2021, it was also a challenge to figure out how to keep them engaged with a curriculum that had largely pivoted to focusing on the skills and knowledge tested in the MAEE. Though almost all the students will eventually sit the exam in 2022, no student is going to be engaged on the specifics of a test that is over a year away.

Student selection process

After deciding the general profiles of the students that would be most likely to engage with and benefit from the planned educational format, and assuming that more students would wish to enrol on any programme than most initiatives have the capacity to admit, you must then decide on how to recruit and select students.

Key to the recruitment process is publicising the programme and to whom. This involves asking whether you want to make the publicity as widespread and accessible as possible to reach a wide and broad population, or whether you want to recruit people individually to build a particular cohort. Graphics and posts that can be sent round on Whatsapp, Facebook and other social media sites, posters, radio announcements, and fliers can be effective mediums for publicising new programmes, as can word of mouth through existing networks, spaces and organisations, particularly in relatively closed environments like refugee settlements.

The nature of the selection process is determined by questions including:

- **Time**: how long do you have for the application and selection process?
- **Human resources**: Do you have enough staff to conduct individual interviews with prospective students or to read lengthy examples of written work? Do you have enough staff to provide one-on-one support to students who are less qualified if you decide to admit them to the programme?
- **Key prerequisites given the project's goals**: Will you require that students have already achieved a certain level of education, particularly in key subjects such as Maths and English, to ensure that they will be able to participate fully in classes? Do you want students to all be at roughly the same level, so that your teaching staff are not managing extremely diverse learner profiles, or does the nature of the courses you are teaching make this less relevant? Is there a reason to admit only those students who are over/under a particular age?
- **Emphasise community**: alongside more formal language testing, you can use whatever evidence is at your disposal, including what these students have done in their communities.

What have they applied within communities around language? Have they worked as a paralegal, or translator? Such questions emphasise communities and community integration.

- **Transparency:** Can you publish a checklist of absolute requirements or desired skills that students require for admission to the programme, or is the selection process less categorical than that?
- **Equity**: Does it make sense to go on a first come, first served basis for students who apply and have the required qualifications? What criteria will encourage equity in the selection process?

Student selection process for FFA

FFA was advertised through posters, radio, word of mouth and the Refugee Law Project's social media in Kampala and Kiryandongo, with students required to pick up deliver the hard copies of the application letters to the RLP offices or send emails for those with access to internet to RLPs official email. Due to some students having to cover longer distances to deliver their applications, the application window was kept open for 30 days to increase the likelihood that interested parties would have time to apply.

The selection process was done through a short admissions form and then a panel interview with staff members from RLP. The interviewers were looking for the following key attributes: [basic level of English since the assumption from the beginning was that students had at least gone through some form of English for Adults course], commitment to the course, motivation for applying for the course, family background, and any foreseen challenges that may pose a problem to the learner. This was in part determined by the opportunities that FFA was designed to equip students for. The Makerere Mature Entry Exam, since it is only open to students who are over 25 years of age and above at the time of sitting it, and so admitting students into the programme who would have been unable to sit the exam would have been a potential source of disappointment. *This was an extremely time intensive process but RLP staff have reflected that it was a necessary one.* Feedback received also indicates information sessions which allow for face to face interaction between the potential learners and the project teams. This promotes an environment where potential learners can ask questions and seek clarifications.

In terms of who to admit, we debated the tension between wanting to have an inclusive selection criteria, and being pragmatic about the time and human resources available to support students through FFA and in applying for degree programmes. The Mature Entry Exam for Makerere University has sections that require advanced English and Maths skills, which the FFA programme would not have been able to support students to develop without them already possessing reasonably developed skills in these areas from the start.

Based on the feedback from the students, the future of the programme must look into growing the science subjects for those learners who may want to join the University to do science related courses. This was not well catered for from the beginning of the course. The course focused on foundational subjects.

In the case of Uganda, where 30% of places on any programme for displaced populations should be awarded to members of the host community, we also had to determine criteria for selection of applications from this population. In the pilot, however, we did not attract many more applicants from the host community especially in Kampala than we could offer places to and thus we did not have to establish a robust framework for selecting students with this background. In future though, criteria will have to be established, particularly to determine admission amongst this population according to a 'needs-based' formula. Key to achieving this is also accompanying sensitization to encourage the hosts to take interest in applying for such programmes as they have been known to promote peaceful co-existence amongst hosts and refugees. In the Kampala cohort especially, the host learners admit they learnt a lot about refugees which they had no idea about before.

PADILEIA: Determining students' 'best interests'?

Given major restrictions on their right to work in the Lebanese labour market, Syrian refugees in the country often find themselves in a precarious financial position. The selection team at PADILEIA may therefore advise some applicants, particularly those who are the sole wage-earner for an extended network of friends and family, not to enrol on the programme because of the financial implications of this. Staff at PADILEIA also recognise that students experiencing prolonged economic stress are less likely to engage consistently with the programme, and are at a higher risk of dropping out, an experience that may actually compound their stress and anxiety. While it is not up to staff to definitively rule out students based on their economic backgrounds, particularly because the programme wishes to assist the most marginalised and vulnerable, it is nonetheless important to have this discussion with potential applicants to save further distress upon enrolment in the course. As a representative of a blended bridging programme closely aligned with Padiliea summarised: "We need to look into…the interest of our beneficiaries or our students. In specific for the community we are working in. The needs may be…the needs of the community we are working in, and the future they also believe in or they also look forward to…. Some things we look at are the market needs, but it isn't always what the students want. So sometimes there are also problems in certain opposing ideas between the market needs and what the students' need or what they want; where do they see themselves. So, these are things that also need to be looked at and maybe we have to look at what the priority of our programme is; is it the students' interest or the market needs? Is it where they want to be working after university or is it what they want to do in the university?"

For PADILEIA, they also had to decide whether to accept students onto the programme who did not have (proof of) the qualifications, or legal permits, that they would need to be accepted into HEI in Lebanon. They were aware that even if somebody successfully completed their programme, they would never be admitted into University without those minimum qualifications or if they were not legally resident in Lebanon (something that has been increasingly hard since 2015 when the Lebanese government stopped registering Syrian arrivals. This, again, relates to how to manage expectations: if as the programme organisers you are aware that students will not be able to progress on from the programme because of broader national restrictions, is it ethical to admit people onto particular courses in the first place?

One of the major findings from the first year of PADILEIA was indeed that many students did not have access to their official educational certificates, and that it would be almost impossible for them to get copies given the destruction of so much civil infrastructure in Syria. However well they did in PADILEIA then, they were unable to access university places or scholarships to study in Lebanon without this documentation.

Programme delivery, monitoring and evaluation

Induction/opening of programme

The successful opening of any bridging programme is predicated on a body of activity designed to do several things. First, there is the need to address the pragmatic details of enrolling students and providing them access to the different systems they will need to use on the programme (setting up an email account, for example).

Further, it is necessary to develop an induction programme that provides students a clear understanding of what to expect in the programme, and a full reassurance that they will be positively supported throughout this process. Questions that we considered when developing this induction were:

- How would psychosocial support be surfaced and made available in this induction?
- What needs to be included in this? What pre-sessional activities, if any, would there be?
- How will those materials be distributed (before inductions)?
- Who registers the students? They will need access to digital platforms and a programme email account.
- Are there any ‘gateway’ skills or capacities that need to be identified and/or developed ahead of the beginning of formal instruction? For example, an introduction to or tour of the learning centre to acclimate students to the space, the equipment, and any specific access requirements that are necessary.

There is further need to engage the broader communities in which this education is enacted, particularly in terms of engaging the families of these refugee students to ensure they are aware of what is being taught, how that might help their family members in their studies or employment, and what they can do to support them. This is necessarily partly due to the familiarity with the level of education being targeted in many bridging programmes: universities. For example, the fact that with primary and secondary schools, refugee parents in Syria knew the educational environment that their children would enter - or had more familiarity with it - whereas they feel less sure about what universities in Lebanon would entail, and thus may be more reluctant to support their children (particularly female children) to enrol. Such activity to familiarise families with the bridging programme and universities in general might involve hosting open houses or other community events that welcome students’ families and help students gain crucial support from partners, children, siblings and/or parents.

FFA - Implementing the Programme ‘Contract’

In the design and teaching of the Foundations for All programme, it became clear that learners must understand the programme goals, and what pathways are available after taking the courses. The academic content must give students a reasonable chance of passing relevant higher education exams, the most relevant in this case being the Mature Entry Exam, which focuses on literacy, numeracy and specialist subject areas. While the FFA pilot is unaccredited, students consulted during programme development reported that they would like to see further iterations to carry internationally recognised credit. Before starting the course, all the successful learners were given admission letters and asked to sign a contract that clearly detailed what the course would offer. This was designed to ensure that student expectations were aligned with those producing and implementing the programme.

Stipends

A stipend that covers the basic costs of attending an educational programme, including transport and internet phone costs, as well as potentially other expenses should probably at least be considered in the case of most bridging programmes. Whether this stipend becomes effective, and, if so, the exact amount, depend on at least two core elements. The first one is the assessment of the socio-economic situation of the student: how much can they realistically cover? Students from displacement backgrounds are often unable to work legally in their country of asylum and the assistance they receive (in cash or in kind but often traded for cash) almost never allows covering anything beyond the basics. Students should not have to choose between feeding their families (or simply themselves) and attending a course. Even students who work, legally or illegally, the course may present an opportunity cost that is unreasonable –they would have to give up on some work that is essential or work unreasonable times to afford the course. The second reason has to do with equalising the level playing field between students –it seems unreasonable that a bridging programme is effectively only accessible to better off students who are probably those who need it least. It would be equally disturbing that only better off students have the means to succeed (because others cannot afford an internet connection, for instance).

Questions to consider when determining the appropriateness and form of a stipend are:

- What are the basic costs of enrolling on and attending the programme, and what is it reasonable to ask students themselves to contribute?
- Will the stipend be conditional i.e. based on an individual's attendance record, or will all students get the same amount regardless of participation?
- Will the stipend need to vary by gender/age profile?
- When and in what form will you provide it to students? Who will administer the payments, and do you want to keep it as an administrative task away from the teaching responsibilities?
- If the budget cannot cover a 'cost of living' stipend, will you need to design the programme to ensure that people can work jobs around it e.g. condense all teaching into a half day or only 3 or 4 full days of teaching a week?

It is likely that the stipend is a point of contention in the context of high inequalities where most people live in poverty. It may create envy from others and may make the programme something attractive mostly because it guarantees an income –a typical pitfall of any 'development' intervention. Some of those issues can be addressed through the selection process and the student contract.

Stipends in FFA

About midway through the FFA programme, teaching staff noticed that students were very distracted by the stipend issue, which was a recurrent topic of conversation in class. Students challenged tutors on the fact that each student was paid a different stipend depending on their attendance, which the tutors - who were hired by RLP, but not core organisational staff - were not in a position to comment on or respond to. Experience from PADILEIA suggested that one way to reduce classroom disruption about stipends was to release payment at the end of the day or on a non-class day, and to have transparent records of class attendance to justify the different amounts given to each student.

When classes went fully online, the stipend continued at the same amount to be used for buying airtime for online learning where previously it had been designed to cover transport costs. A member of each class from Kiryandongo and Kampala was tasked with keeping an attendance record of each online session on which to calculate the stipend.

Due to administrative delays in processing the stipends, the students also did not receive a stipend for almost 3 months. This was understandably distressing and in future versions of the programme, we would look to hold the money somewhere that was more easily accessible.

Scholarships

Many educational programmes adopt the position that after directing students towards possible scholarship opportunities, it is then largely up to the individual students to research and apply for them by themselves. While this may be appropriate in particular contexts, and is used by some to gauge student's 'initiative' and actual commitment to further education, this approach often rests on students having institutional or personal support (such as through Careers' services, academic mentors, previous experience from previous education/jobs, etc.) to provide additional guidance on this process. For displaced learners who may have no previous experience of researching educational opportunities, or applying for any roles or funding, this 'light touch' direction is often insufficient.

Searching and applying for scholarships needs to instead be introduced early on in the programme and taught throughout the course, for example through using searching for scholarships as an activity in Digital Skills for developing web-based search skills, and provision should be made for individualised support for students who do decide to pursue higher education. Programme staff should nonetheless be open and realistic with students about the likelihood of attaining scholarships so as not to raise false expectations.

The team at PADILEIA compiled the following 'best practice' list for educators hoping to support students in accessing scholarships:

Scholarship filtering

- Program staff, prior to sharing scholarships with students, should sort them by study field. Certain scholarship types may not be beneficial to some students, thus should avoid wasting their time pursuing them.

Information sessions

- Information sessions about each scholarship type should be organised for the benefit of students. Occasionally, scholarship donors host online sessions; these links should be shared with students.
- If the scholarship program does not organise such sessions, program staff should invite a diverse group of alumni who have previously benefited from such scholarships and schedule an informative session.
- Additionally, students should be informed of the importance of visiting online sites such as YouTube in their spare time to watch informative sessions about the scholarship application process.

Documents/Reminders

- Program staff should compile a list of documents that applicants should have on hand before beginning their application (academic transcripts, English language proficiency test score, etcetera). This should be accompanied by information on how to obtain them and the possible costs to local residents and refugees.
- Applicants should be informed of such requirements in advance; for example, informing students at the end of a semester that they must remember to bring the necessary financial aid application documents the following semester would be beneficial.
- Program staff should provide students with simple-to-follow guidelines for scholarship applications. Following up with prospective students – reminding them of application deadlines, inquiring about their progress, and so forth.

Good Grades/Timing

- Visits to high schools should be made to instil in students the value of always doing their best on all of their coursework; academic honour rolls should be a goal for all students. Students should always strive for A's and B's in their coursework and on standardised tests such as the SAT.

- Scholarship options should be discussed with students early enough to provide them the time to pursue them. Additionally, program staff should cooperate with other departments to ensure that scholarship applications are introduced during periods of reduced student activity.

Award/honour certificates

- Remind applicants to keep copies of any certificates or honours they have received, as this information will come in handy when applying for scholarships. Typically, scholarship applications include sections in which students are questioned about any awards they have received.

Remedial Classes

- Provide remedial essay writing classes, instructing scholars on how to write a proper scholarship application essay.
- The program should offer remedial classes for standardised tests such as the SAT, TOEFL, and GRE when possible.

Volunteering

- Volunteering is beneficial for both students and the people they assist; it is also ideal for scholarship applications. Most organisations that award college scholarships want to know how many hours a student has worked in community service and how it has impacted their lives. Volunteering and developing meaningful relationships with people who may one day write detailed and personal letters of recommendation for their students should be encouraged by program staff.

Mentors

- Program staff should contact previous recipients via social media, or email to encourage them to act as mentors for current applicants. Mentors should be assigned in accordance with applicants’ career interests. Additionally, mentors should be encouraged to assist applicants in revising their essays and elucidating their specific concerns.

Progress Report

- Supervising the application process to ensure that applicants adhere to the scholarship guidelines
- Keep track of scholarship recipients, their majors, universities, and countries they are studying at.

- Elicit information from students who did not apply regarding their reasons for not applying
- Create a WhatsApp group for easy follow-up with students

Partnership coordination

Many bridging programmes are ambitious partnerships between institutions. If it is your case, coordination may end up being a significant task –especially if the collaboration spans across countries and involves partners of different types (e.g. academic institutions, civil society organisations, national ministries, private foundations, etc.). As for all complex international collaborations, it is important to (1) ensure a shared understanding of the values and practices of equal and equitable collaboration from the onset of the process (in our case, during the different design workshops); (2) consider and properly factor in coordination costs, complex collaborations are inherently time and resource intensive endeavours; (3) prepare everyone for significant flexibility to account for other partner's different working cultures and workflows.

Our experience surfaced two additional points:

The importance of identifying leads and ensuring collaboration: How were leads designated for each project? How was collaboration continually fostered? It is important to consider how projects are to be managed and pushed forward in ways that ensure that all involved can collaborate.

Data sensitivity and management: there were sensitivities around the sharing of student data and maintaining confidentiality. A data management plan is recommended at the onset to ensure that all partners are working with the same sensitivities towards student data. In that data management plan, it is critical to identify who is in charge, who can access the data, and how the data is protected. Questions that arose in terms of student data included:

- Can we share the information (age, gender, nationality etc.) with partners without sharing student's names or other private information?
- Can asking for voluntary access to the system to get around the issue of confidentiality for learning systems?
- Who is responsible for the data management plan (DMP)? Who can access the data as per the DMP? How is the data protected?

The FFA partnership
The working arrangements within the overall FFA partnership between RLP, AUB, and Edinburgh were guided by clear principles around equal representation and voice, but also around common

sense approaches to availability, available resources, and pragmatic constraints around data sensitivity.

Identifying leads. For FFA, leads were often identified due to available capacity, and/or willingness. Project teams were intentionally representative with members from AUB, RLP, and Edinburgh. AUB and Edinburgh took lead roles when not doing so would prove taxing to RLP in the execution of their duties and FFA teaching.

Data sensitivity. While slightly less problematic for the core programme team, the sharing of student data became problematic when it was needed to engage with the IELTS instruction provided by the Centre of Open Learning, a partner within the University of Edinburgh, or when it was needed in getting students access to university systems at Edinburgh.

Working group model. To manage the complex project with multiple deliverables, we created a system of working groups, focussed on different aspects of the project, in order to ensure expertise and time is spent most effectively as well as ensuring each aspect of the project could be developed deeply and fully. This also facilitated the meaningful involvement of the Mastercard Foundation scholars in the working groups. Furthermore this approach to team work enabled partners to leverage their particular strengths, while delegating tasks to others when they did not have the capacity or expertise for leading on it themselves.

Communication

For projects that are partnerships, the larger and the more diverse the partnership, the more likely communication is to be an issue. Communicating across geographically disparate institutions, across cultures and communicative practices, and across time zones and schedules is difficult to manage yet a critical component of any successful programme. What we present here is largely the result of considerable amounts of time, effort, and experimentation, as well as a reflection of the belief that we held that providing equitable means of communication for all involved was critical to our success.

With intercultural teams, communication improves as deeper trust is built within teams and across the larger programme. This takes considerable amounts of time and that time needs to be included in any planning for and timelines that emerge from the project. Repeated and routine interaction, transparency, and empathy positively influence trust in intercultural communication contexts (Yu et al. 2021) and opportunities for this must be built into any project planning. For FFA, this trust was developed over a period of years, through routine meetings across the larger programme and within smaller working groups, at face-to-face events in Lebanon (2019) and Uganda (2020), and through a series of WhatsApp groups for ongoing discussion.

It was clear that technology would play a role in managing the communication of such a large and disparate group. However, technology provides the false impression that this communication is immediate, yet we would argue that communication predominantly through technology takes longer. Even without the time needed to learn the communicative practices of all involved, and to develop a collective response to them predicated on respect, empathy, and inclusion, technological communication is ephemeral. Hardware fails, connectivity is at times unstable, dedicated power might be in short supply, internet data might not be available, or the immediate reality of professional or personal responsibility might call people away.

For FFA, technologically this meant a flexibility was needed in how we approached communication and through which applications we would funnel that communication through. We used Doodle polls to find availability to schedule meetings, Google Docs for sharing ideas collaboratively, Zoom for longer meetings and project planning, WhatsApp groups for each programme and course team, and also for the wider team to share quick updates via text, voice notes, and photos. Even within that use, there needs to be consideration for whether team members have unfettered access to internet data and how that access could necessitate adaptations (e.g. video calls on different platforms are tricky to manage).

Misaligned expectations in coordinating partners in FFA

A more fundamental point that discussions around the provision of IELTS material to the FFA learners raised, however, related to who defines 'success' and 'appropriateness' in programmes with international partners based in different cultural contexts and educational traditions. For the team providing the IELTS training from the UK, they saw the scheme as a failure because the material had not all been covered and felt uncomfortable as educators from/based in Europe providing input on English language education to refugees in Uganda.

Tutors at RLP, however, saw the IELTS provision as a success despite it being incomplete because 1) they had not been professionally trained to deliver IELTS teaching and thus appreciated the need to bring in experts to do this, 2) they observed that students felt inspired by the fact that the programme had included such an advanced training programme, which they saw as a reflection of the standard at which FFA thought they were performing/could easily reach and 3) for many students it provided an opportunity for them to speak one-to-one with somebody entirely new and from such a different context to their own.

The fact that it was not comprehensive was for them less important than the fact that it had been arranged, which pointed to a mismatch between what those in the UK and in Uganda felt was important. While the UK team therefore felt that they had been made to feel like 'white saviours' because of the model of remote content delivery, the team in Uganda saw it as a necessary division of labour. In future iterations of the programme, however, it was agreed that a budget should be allocated to train the tutors in Uganda to deliver IELTS training as a development opportunity for them and so that RLP can provide this teaching to students who are not enrolled on FFA.

Course Delivery

Overall, the teaching of the individual courses on FFA presented learning opportunities, and, at times, significant setbacks and challenges. What is presented in the following is meant to distil some of the larger learnings around course delivery that subsequent bridging programmes might find instructive.

Classroom focus: The programme at times was very classroom based and not focused enough on knowing who the students were outside the classroom, and how we might support them in their daily lives and their ongoing civic participation. This was possibly a necessary compromise once we had settled on the Mature Entry Exam and access to HE as being the overriding goal.

Multiple sites may lead to divergence in progressing through the curriculum: this was more readily pronounced in some courses than others, but there was a diversity in the range of skills amongst the student cohorts in Kampala and Kiryandongo that ultimately impacted how they were progressing through the curriculum. For example, the digital skills of the cohorts in Kampala and Kiryandongo were considerably divergent and as such progress through the Digital Skills curriculum was uneven between the two centres.

Dedicated tutors in each site made this divergence less than it could have been: it was noted that without dedicated tutors in both sites that this progress through the curriculum, if not impossible, would have become even more divergent. This divergence had resource implications for FFA overall, but more specifically for RLP who at times had tutors moving between the two locations. See the section **Contextualised and 'thick' approaches have a cost** for further discussion of these resource implications.

Some skills are gateways to the larger curriculum: changing circumstances and in particular the repeated closures that the pandemic brought, alongside the fact that the entire FFA curriculum was framed around blended learning, foregrounded digital skills as a mechanism for engaging with the rest of the curriculum. As such, future iterations of the programme would likely try to frontload at least some of the skills instruction as a gateway to the remainder of the curriculum, and make every effort to ensure that the learning centres advanced through the curriculum with some measure of close approximation.

Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is central to running (bridging) programmes effectively, especially when routines are not established and in the first year(s). Monitoring and evaluation processes need to be sensitive to the need to always protect students, who are often vulnerable, and to ensure that monitoring and evaluation does not impinge (too much) on core activities. For both monitoring and evaluation, it is important to refer to the theory of change of the programme and the outcomes and impact that need to be evaluated, and how they are structured (what is instrumental, final, etc.) and to then consider different levels:

- What is happening at the level of the students? Are all the processes running as they should be? Many different indicators are possible here, including academic achievement and well-being (e.g. confidence, self-efficacy, relationships, enhanced transformative leadership skills for student researchers).
- What is happening with teachers and teaching practices?
- What is happening in terms of external engagement and contact with other stakeholders?

Similarly, it is useful to bear in mind that monitoring and evaluation tend to shape programmes and the way certain key issues are being approached. For instance, if the language around psychosocial impact starts from a position of deficiency – with questions addressed to students using that lens– it locks students in a certain position.

Evaluation principles are fully applicable to bridging programmes, including the usefulness of establishing a strong baseline/reference point and a “control” group of students who are not enrolled in the bridge programme. With many programmes having many times more applicants than seats and having to operate with a waiting list, it is technically possible to have a solid control group throughout the programme. As with many other projects and programmes, we found that mixed-methods evaluations looking at different levels of the programme are most useful (for instance, on drop-outs, this would include having a clear rate, but also narratives from students and teachers’ perspectives on why people dropped out). Following Burde et al (2015), it is important to point to the value of more rigorous longitudinal research: interventions are often assessed at the end of the programme or soon after the programme ending. Since they are evaluated for their short-term effects, we do not know if the effects are retained over time.

Monitoring should be focused on ensuring that the programme is running as expected, providing enough space and depth for rapidly adjusting and re-aligning the programme. For programmes whose funding is uncertain, building in strong data collection and monitoring mechanisms will be central to making a strong business case and fundraising. In our experience, monitoring at student-level works best when fully integrated in course design and academic assessment (and, therefore, learning outcomes). It is, however, important to bear in mind that the information that is helpful for making the case with funders or justify the programme with the funder may be different from the points that learners and especially teachers will find useful –for instance on the pace of the course or the level of understanding of key issues.

In FFA, we have conducted the monitoring of our programme in light of both what we can learn for the immediate improvement of the programme, but also for what we can learn for future practices. We have conducted several evaluations prior to starting the project, including a survey at the outset to evaluate the topics we proposed offering and in-depth research with students in Uganda where we engaged over three days and discussed all facets of the proposed taught FFA programme. This was followed by an anonymous survey of students and control group students (who were keen to get on the course but had not yet completed RLP's English courses) on a wide range of issues, from self-efficacy and confidence to learning environments and family situations. The survey was repeated at the end of the programme. On-course formal and informal feedback in our courses (study skills, digital skills, English and maths) meant that students could continue to shape the programme as it is taught. Feedback channels included end-of-semester course surveys and one-to-ones near the end of the semesters. Defining and attributing responsibilities for each of these monitoring items is absolutely essential and a balance needs to be found between asking "frontline" staff to collect data they do not immediately need and sending monitors/evaluators who may also disturb the work.

Monitoring is (also) there to serve the students and staff and they also need to have channels to voice any concerns. Inspired by the PADILEIA experience, we tried to set up an "open-door policy": students and instructors know they can talk to the team anytime if they have any issues or concerns. The site leader was such a person and would also discuss with the programme manager on a regular basis. A set of meetings were established for the different staff members to meet and exchange –while paying attention not to over-burden staff with meetings. Possibly the most important of these meetings was at the end of the semester when program administrators, relevant staff, and all teachers met to evaluate how the semester went – with a focus on student engagement and curriculum – noting successes, solving problems, and identifying actions for improvement for revisions to curriculum.

FFA monitoring and evaluation plan

Objectives

- adjust and fine-tune the programme, as it is being implemented.
- provide first-hand material for the Uganda case study.
- provide rigorous evidence that can be used to develop FFA further/ fundraise

Challenges

- All teams are already quite busy: limited human resources.
- Short timeline
- No clear indicators defined in the project / limited review of the literature.

Set up at the course-level

- Students. Format to the discretion of the course organiser. Data collected by course organiser:
    - Record expectations of students at the beginning of the course, as well as evaluations mid-way
    - Individual meetings with students
    - Course tests and academic progress in fields where it is relevant and possible (English, Math)
- Tutors and staff. Data collected by site manager and/or programme administrator
    - Record expectations of staff at the beginning of the course, as well as evaluations mid-way

Set up at the Programme-level

- Collected by programme administrators:
    - profile of applications
    - admissions and attendance indicators
    - attendance to courses
    - drop out and completion
    - applications to scholarships and unis
    - admission to university and other prospects after 6 months

- Collected via surveys and qualitative research (interviews)
    - profile of students
    - self-efficacy (as part of understanding myself and others)
    - mental well-being (as part of understanding myself and others)
    - leadership and confidence
    - social network

- skills and economic connections/initiatives
- overall programme experience

Reference

Burde, D., Guven, O., Kelcey, J., Lahmann, H., & Al-Abbadi, K. (2015). What works to promote children's educational access, quality of learning, and wellbeing in crisis-affected contexts. Education Rigorous Literature Review, Department for International Development. London: Department for International Development.

Mentorship and Career Guidance

Due to frequent disruptions to their education, as well as schools and educational programmes for displaced populations being generally under-resourced and under-capacitated, refugees may have lacked some of the coaching or advice that students in more stable educational systems may receive. This includes in terms of the development of study skills and learning strategies, which students are formally taught but also develop through the routine of a reliable school experience, as well as advice on the next steps in life. With higher student: teacher ratios in refugee settlements because of split shifts in schools, and fewer teachers whose qualifications are recognised, displaced learners may also have fewer opportunities to get advice on what opportunities for further study are available and appropriate for them. When teachers are also from the same background as their students, and have been displaced to the new host country too, they may lack knowledge about what the tertiary education system or labour market consists of in that new environment.

This represents a gap that we felt a dedicated mentorship programme might be able to fill. Towards this end, points to consider are:

- What sort of mentorship might students and teaching staff benefit from or want? What topics would like they covered?
- Where does it make sense to recruit mentors from?
- What knowledge is important that the mentors have? Does this mean recruiting mentors from the same country as displaced people are in, or perhaps from their country of origin if people intend to repatriate soon?
- Who will coordinate the mentorship programme, including recruitment, training (for both mentors but also mentees, who may not be clear on what role mentors intend to fill), oversight, and responding to any issues?
- Do you need to establish clear parameters for the programme i.e. the time over which it will run, the number of meetings per week, formal check-ins with mentors and mentees?

- How will the contributions of mentors be recognised? Will they be given a small stipend, or a certificate to acknowledge their voluntary contribution to the scheme?
- Will the mentorship end when the programme ends or is there a reason/demand for continuing it?
- How will you balance confidentiality within the mentorship scheme, with a mentor's duty to disclose particular forms of information that the mentee might share with them?

It may also be useful for the students and teaching staff on bridging programmes to arrange for specialist speakers to come in. These may be career talks, where individuals speak about how they got to where they are now and provide advice to students on similar trajectories, or motivational speakers. If the majority of teaching on the programme has been delivered by just a few members of staff, this can provide some fresh perspectives and voices on the programme.

A representative from AUB put the need for mentorship in the following words, highlighting the psychological importance for students' confidence in them being reliable and tailored support: "I advise also working on career guidance program Because this is what really helps the institution, the students, and the community to be able to understand the pathways and to be able to take decisions on their pathways and this will minimise the number of dropouts because if they understand they have different options to continue their education and different opportunities to get either a semi professional ah education and get to the labour market as a technician, it's better than dropping out and saying, I cannot do anything, am not good."

FFA Mentorship and Career Support

Based on experience from PADILEIA, and feedback from the Mastercard Foundation Scholars at AUB and the Universities of Makerere and Edinburgh, a Mentorship Coordination team was created to establish a mentorship programme for students on FFA. This team, led by the Mastercard Foundation Scholars and supported by experienced colleagues at AUB, was tasked with designing and implementing a mentorship programme, including recruitment, mentor-mentee matching, induction and supervision. This also responded to demand from students within FFA who were insistent in their requests for mentors as a source of support for deciding on the right university degree programme for them, and then in supporting them to find and apply for scholarships. Some students wanted course-specific support, and thus to be paired with a mentor who had very similar disciplinary interests to them, while some wanted help through more generic and transferable skills. The peer mentors were also seen as being a key source of support for preparing students for the Mature Entry Exam by assisting them in accessing materials that were specific to their chosen subject area.

The Mentorship programme was launched in August to mixed success, in part because of the disruption caused around this time by contextual factors. Without easy access to the learning centres and support with emails due to rolling lockdowns in Uganda, mentors and FFA students struggled to connect, and when the Mature Entry Exam was unexpectedly brought forward, the focus of the programme overwhelmingly swung towards facilitating that process.

During the second semester of FFA, when students were deciding which degree programmes they might like to apply for, FFA also welcomed a variety of speakers to talk through their experiences of selecting and completing different degrees. Speakers included a Lecturer in Social Work from MUK, a university counsellor, and an Economics Professor, to name a few examples. RLP hosted an open day for FFA which included an Assistant Registrar at Makerere University, a Mastercard Foundation Scholar manager, a representative from Windle Trust, a representative from the Office of the Prime Minister, and support group leadership.

Project close

The end of any educational programme marks a major achievement for the students who have completed it, the staff who taught it, and all those involved in administering it behind the scenes. It is thus important that alongside the administrative dimensions of closing up a project (such as doing endline surveys, completing the final budgets, writing up findings and lessons learned, etc. - see below) that thought, budget and time is given to how to mark the occasion. This might be particularly important if students have not yet received any feedback on admissions exams or scholarships. They may then need another event or moment to mark the closure of the education project, which can serve a dual function of also managing expectations about the level of support that they will be provided after the programme concludes.

As part of the closing period, an opportunity to reflect and feed back on the programme has value beyond monitoring and evaluation purposes, helping students to feel like respected stakeholders and experts in the project. Certificates and a ceremony provide a way of formally and publicly acknowledging the students' achievements, while providing them with physical proof of their enrollment on the project.

More administrative considerations for the project closing include **what to do with the technology purchased for the project**: if students have been given laptops, smartphones or other tech for the duration of the programme, are they expected to now return them? If so, what happens if some students no longer have theirs or if they wish to buy them off the project? If learning centres have been established, can they be repurposed or do they need to be sold on?

FFA Closing

Preparation is needed to determine collectively how the project will end. For a number of reasons, FFA stopped abruptly. As we write this toolkit (first half of 2022), we are only now beginning to reflect on lessons learned from the project overall and in particular the taught elements of the curriculum which ran in 2021. Such large and long projects need closure meetings, or open days where there is more listening to the accounts of tutors, students, project teams, administrators, and the larger host community.

Lessons learned

Scaling up?

One of the main questions that accompanies the successful implementation of any humanitarian programme is 'how or can it be scaled? Streitweiser et al (2019: 18) indeed say that a key question that needs to be asked about any educational intervention is 'Can services that seem to be working be scaled up to have a greater impact?' Rarely is the question of whether services *should* be scaled up asked, even if they *could* be, and yet we believe that this is a critical question to consider first.

Reflections from FFA

Much of the success of FFA can be attributed to the fact that the programme was designed in a deliberative and bespoke way following research into the demographics of the potential student population and drawing upon the enormous expertise of RLP, which has spent decades delivering education to learners with refugee backgrounds. The successes that the project had were down to the personal commitment and personalised support provided by dedicated staff members who have enormous familiarity with the challenges and opportunities for displaced populations in Uganda. Many of the challenges the students and programme faced (such as the initial inability for refugees to register for the Makerere Mature Entry Exam without formal refugee ID cards) were only addressed because of the established networks and experiences of RLP staff members, and others were only identified and mitigated against because of RLP's extensive knowledge about the situation of refugees in Uganda.

The psychosocial support element of FFA, which was critical to most student's positive experience of the programme, was also made possible because the cohort was small enough for tutors and staff members to identify students who were struggling and to respond to their needs personally. Emphasis on this part of the programme emerged from learning on the PADILEIA and from RLP's experience, both of which pointed to the need for any educational curriculum to embed psycho-social support for displaced learners in all aspects of programme design and delivery given the impact that trauma has on students' ability to learn and engage with their studies. The history and experience of the main partners was thus critical for the co-design and implementation of a successful programme of this nature.

We were also increasingly committed to FFA being a contextualised blended bridging programme, designed in response to the specific needs of refugee learners in Uganda and the higher education sector within the country. This meant that the curriculums had to be designed in response to baseline assessments of the students selected for the programmes, and delivered through platforms that suited the specific conditions of the learning centres in Kiryandongo and Kampala. We wanted to design curricula that were engaging because they were relevant to student's experiences, such as through allocating seminar readings related to the Great Lakes context, related to their surroundings, such as through organising talks from Makerere University, and accommodated site-specific considerations, such as food distribution days. While the principles underpinning this programme design can thus be scaled, the specific details of the programme must be considered afresh each time.

The purpose of the Scoping Tool and Design Framework is thus to outline how similar blended bridging programmes might be successfully designed in other contexts, but not to imply that FFA either *can* or *should* necessarily be scaled up significantly itself. Features and approaches that it has adopted may have utility in other contexts, while others may be completely irrelevant or poorly suited to student's backgrounds and aspirations in another location, even within Uganda. We believe that the model of small-scale, student-centred, targeted programmes like FFA should be encouraged, not necessarily a quantitative increase in the number of students in each initiative.

References

Streitwieser, B., Loo, B., Ohorodnik, M., & Jeong, J. (2019). Access for refugees into higher education: A review of interventions in North America and Europe. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 23(4): 473-496.

Training for staff

Bridging programmes offer significant opportunities for students but they also are a novelty for staff, including teachers and administrators. The **curriculum and course design section** has already emphasised the need for them to be not only onboard from early on in the process of setting up the process but also the fact that specific needs may emerge: the skills required to properly run bridging courses may not exist locally if no such programme has ever been set up, or may need to be sharpened. In many contexts, participatory bridging programmes can be a unique opportunity to improve teaching, and in particular foster new relationships between teachers and students that are based on respect, role modelling, and discussion rather than hierarchy. This, however, requires an investment in teachers' training. Similarly, the international nature of many bridging programmes provides unique opportunities for international exchange and upskilling based on the different parties' interest. It is easy to forget the professional development of staff members, as our example in the box below highlight, yet it might prove a central element for the durability of bridging programmes.

Staff training in FFA

Largely as a result of the significant disruption caused by Covid-19 in 2020, and the recognition that much of the content for FFA would need to be designed from scratch in order to be contextually relevant and engaging for the learners, the period directly preceding the initiation of the programme, and the 9 months over which it was run, were extremely frenetic, to say the least. The focus was on the smooth running of the programme, not least guaranteeing that there were materials ready and lessons planned for when students turned up each day at the learning centres, which resulted in some other programme commitments being deprioritised.

One of these was providing training to staff members, particularly at RLP, who wished, for example, to be given training in how they could deliver IELTS training themselves so that it did not always need to be 'bought in' by external professionals. This was clearly a professional development opportunity for them, which could have opened up opportunities both within and outside RLP for career progression. In the context of the second semester of FFA, however, it became challenging to schedule course meetings given people's availability, let alone an intensive block of staff training. Every humanitarian programme, however, has its excuse for why often the goals that would contribute to long-term structural change end up not being possible, be it funding, time, capacity, etc. Ultimately these opportunities for professional development were not adequately budgeted for and the time was not ring fenced within the project timelines from the start, leading to it being perceived as a positive extra and not a core project deliverable. For future iterations of FFA, CPD opportunities will be included at the design and budgeting stage.

Contextualised and 'thick' approaches have a cost

Educational programmes for refugees have to function differently to courses that can assume a great degree of similarity in educational attainment levels across the student body. Refugee learners are coming from extremely diverse educational contexts and may have had their formal learning suspended at very different points in their learning (see ‘understanding who your students are’ for more details). Some of our students, for example, had high levels of digital literacy whereas others were starting almost from complete scratch; the same could be seen across topics. The need is, therefore, to invest in skills and knowledge-based training at all levels to enable students to both engage with courses and feel confident to take up opportunities that become available to them.

Involving refugee learners and other students (e.g. the Mastercard Foundation Scholars in the case of FFA) throughout the process can help build a socially, politically and culturally relevant pedagogy. It can take many different forms and shapes; the **curriculum and course design** and **getting started** sections provide some examples of student participation in the planning, delivery, and assessment of the courses (these three steps are, incidentally, key to achieving a form of participation that is genuine rather than merely tokenistic, as highlighted in a dense and relatively old literature already; e.g. Paul, 1987). We could add to such engagement the careful psycho-social support that allows the surfacing of key issues throughout the programme or the development of a literature review process with the learners. All are crucial to making the idea of refugee-centred design and implementation more than a buzzwork.

In FFA for instance, staff and faculty members have offered their skills and experience while also embodying a stance of co-learning with the refugee students and other supporting students, who bring their own skills and experience to the team as we collaboratively engage in mutual efforts to deepen our understanding of our action research focus. As a result, the students (including the Mastercard Foundation scholars) were engaged in all stages of the research from research design, to data collection, to data analysis; and the project has been enhanced by their unique and experiential knowledge about access to higher education for marginalised and displaced youth. The thoughtful questions, reflections, and ideas posed by the researchers from their varying personal and academic backgrounds is increasing the relevance and depth of the programme’s endeavour.

A key implication of such a ‘thick’ approach is that it requires additional resources. The solution, however, is rarely as simple as an increased attention at the planning and budgeting phase; thick approaches are often iterative and require flexible funding to be effective. This is a substantial issue as many funding models require projects to be fully pitched before the detailed work can be done.

Thickening the approach, and the resources, during FFA

In the case of FFA, the Mastercard Foundation and refugee scholars, faculty members, tutors and other staff were all involved in various dimensions of this project as researchers, teachers and learners. We sought to embrace a creative and iterative research methodology with collaboration as a central pillar that would increase the capacities of all team members to contribute to the research, while prioritising the skill-building for the Mastercard Foundation and refugee scholars. This capacity-building was ongoing as a full team, in small groups, and in one-to-one sessions between peers and scholars/faculty. The timing and expectations for Scholars' engagement was differentiated and calibrated to accommodate other circumstances in their lives including pressures related to studies, family responsibilities, work, and disruptions like the pandemic.

… and its costs

Prioritising the scholars' involvement over preconceived deadlines did in many cases extend the timeline for project activities, but it has been instrumental in sustaining scholars' engagement in the project. Our initial failure to recognise the resource-implication of a genuinely thick approach at the time of budgeting for FFA (before the workshops in Lebanon and meetings with potential students in Uganda) resulted in vastly underestimating how much time it would take to produce content for FFA. The team had assumed that resources would be available through the University of Edinburgh, AUB and RLP that could be very simply repurposed for learners on FFA to work through. We quickly realised, however, that the content might be inappropriate or irrelevant for refugee learners, pitched at the wrong level, and potentially not very engaging or inspiring as the central part of any educational programme, as opposed to as supplementary materials in a complete learning environment. Much of the easily available content was material for students to work through independently, whereas we knew we wanted interactive and participatory teaching to create productive and inclusive learning environments. We thus used some existing resources as templates or ideas for designing FFA-specific classes, but the class outlines and teaching structures were largely new.

Digital promises and the question of the 'digital framing'

There is a growing trend for advancing techno-optimist 'solutions' for refugees and presenting 'digital proficiency' as game changer for the most vulnerable (Rushworth and Hackl, 2021). Without entering the details of the debates on the shortcomings and potential of such an approach, it is important to note that many funders and education entrepreneurs will also likely put (or ask for) an emphasis on 'the digital'. In both FFA and PADILEIA, the programme teams believed at the onset of this programme, and still believe, that the digital skills developed as a result of specific instruction on digital technologies, and more broadly whilst engaging with a blended learning curriculum, would be beneficial for these students in both their academic and professional lives. In retrospect, the digital skills developed did benefit students in their daily lives: while the cohorts had fairly divergent past experiences with digital technologies (including between the Kampala and Kiryandongo learning centres within Uganda), early indications are that those who completed the curriculum did benefit in terms of the development of digital skills. In Lebanon, we found examples of students starting businesses and services that heavily rely on digital skills.

It is, however, important to bear in mind that substantial work needs to accompany such ‘education to the digital’ and ‘digital education’. In other words, digital should not be conflated with cost-savings. Time and again, we found that supposedly ready-made solutions and approaches would not work smoothly in the context where we were operating and there was an acute need to localise the solutions and draw up on additional resources, both material and in terms of support. It also emerged, and this point is discussed in more detail in sections devoted to the psycho-social and pedagogical approaches of the programme, that not everything can be digital or done remotely. The costs and value-add of digital tools and approaches needs to be frequently re-evaluated: is this the best allocation of finite programme resources? Our experience shows that there are times when (non-digital) activities focussing on non-digital skills, such as psycho-social support, should take precedence.

The digital in FFA

The conceptualization of the digital in the Foundations for All curriculum at the onset both as a dedicated course (Digital Skills) and as a mode of instruction and delivery (blended learning) created a series of cascading decisions as the FFA team responded to a series of evolving contexts. First, after a preliminary engagement to determine the general availability of digital technology amongst the groups from which the student cohort would be drawn from, it was determined that there would be a need to have dedicated technologies available in the two locations (Kampala and Kiryandongo). Dedicated learning centres were created and equipped with laptops, connectivity was acquired, and additional equipment was procured (printer, projector). At the onset of the pandemic when the learning centres became unavailable, additional resources were used to purchase mobile phones for students to continue their studies through an approximation of remote learning developed by the FFA team in response.

Considerable amounts of time was spent attempting to use existing university technologies for work on FFA to ensure some degree of sustainability; an example of this is the aborted attempt to use the Learning Management System (LMS) at the University of Edinburgh before moving to Kolibri, a LMS more responsive to intermittent connectivity. Further, the digital skills developed as part of FFA weren’t part of the Mature Entry Examination, so as the students drew closer to the examination this digital work proved potentially distracting. Overall, significant programme resources were dedicated to the digital aspects of the overall programme, resources that might have been better spent on additional tutors or dedicated administrative support on the ground in the two learning centres.

References

Rushworth, P., & Hackl, A. (2021). Writing code, decoding culture: Digital skills and the promise of a fast lane to decent work among refugees and migrants in Berlin. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* 48 (11). Available: https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1893159

Ethical design has moving goal posts

As we already pointed out in the 'curriculum and course design' section, expectation management is important for any teaching and crucial for bridging programmes. Sticking to such initially defined (and agreed upon) expectations is, however, tricky. This is for at least two reasons. Firstly, good bridging programmes are in great part about unlocking the confidence of students: they too can do it. It means that new ideas, hopes, and expectations may flourish along the way; in fact, if nothing new emerged in this field from a bridging programme it should probably be a concern. Secondly, many bridging programmes give students a substantial voice in shaping the programme not only at its onset but also throughout the delivery (see the 'curriculum and course design' and 'getting started' sections.

In practice, expectations will grow and students will want to push the programme in new directions –and legitimately so. This could also be the desire of the teaching staff who sees the potential of students being unlocked and thinks of new directions. There is no definitive answer in terms of what to do. Returning to the initially defined expectations but also to educational pathways that exist (or have been developed) is useful to avoid disappointment. There will also be, within each programme, room for adjusting the curriculum and room for modules and activities that may meet some of the newly defined expectations (stressing that those are changes that go beyond the originally jointly defined ones). However, growing expectations is ultimately where bridging programmes may collide with the hard realities of access to jobs and careers for refugees –advocacy for refugee rights may become necessary and something that can be done with students (see the section, considering advocacy.

Getting accepted to university and beyond: moving the goalpost in FFA

When we began the FFA programme, we were clear that the team would not be able to provide the learners with scholarships for studying at University and that our engagement with the learners would largely be time-limited. Over time, however, students' expectations of the support that the programme would provide shifted and the team members' sense of responsibility towards helping students after the programme also increased. Though we engaged in ongoing efforts to explore and advocate for opportunities for refugee scholarships, we remained very aware of the difficulties that students would face in obtaining funded places. Simply being enrolled on the programme, however, with its connection to wealthy institutions in the Global North nonetheless clearly and understandably lifted the hopes of learners that if they were admitted to a University, they would be financially supported to attend.

This raises a central conundrum, however: should the programme in future only admit the number of students that could realistically be funded to pursue a University-level degree? In the process of doing the programme, some students will undoubtedly drop out, others will decide not to pursue a degree, and some will not pass the exam required to enter University. Without knowing this in advance, restricting the numbers preemptively deprives students of the other opportunities that any blended, bridging programme opens up to them. However, should a large number of students be successful in their applications to University, they would understandably be frustrated at not being able to take up the position because there was no funding available to them. No amount of expectation management would be likely to offset the disempowerment experienced by a scholar who found themselves in this position. This has all further highlighted the importance of developing a learner-centred, fully accredited bridging programme with a realistic and funded pathway to higher education in the future.

Considering advocacy

In the process of implementing any educational programme with and for refugees, it is likely that the learners and tutors will come up against many structural and contingent barriers to refugees' engagement with and access to higher education. It may be important as a team to discuss your capacity and will to respond to these, including whether or not it is politically appropriate to get involved in various advocacy efforts and what resources and capacity members will wish to commit to this. Advocacy is a time intensive and mostly unquantifiable activity, which in the context of much more time-bound commitments and deliverables can get materially deprioritised even as it remains ideologically central to a project.

As Strydom (1997) notes in recommendations for the South African context, rather than focus on *bridging* the gap, we should perhaps instead focus on *closing* it. This might take the form, for example, of the option of a two year 'first year' course, whereby students are supported through increased tutoring and key skill development, unlike peers who might participate in an 'accelerated' first year. One advantage of this is that in being integrated within existing University systems, it would not necessarily require a separate funding source.

There may be a need to influence the progression routes for students graduating from bridging programmes into higher education to ensure that the need for particular approaches (e.g. towards psychosocial support) are recognised within universities. Are the traumas experienced by refugee learners and their impacts on educational experiences understood by partner universities, for example? Is further training needed for universities to increase sensitivity towards learner-centred needs? As Hay and Marais (2004: 61) state, 'effective access is not so much at the entry to the higher education system, but in the throughput'.

There is also a hope that through showing Universities how successful bridging candidates can be within their institutions, that this can be used to leverage for greater recognition of these programmes as meeting key entry requirements. In Lebanon, where the Syrian baccalaureate is not accepted by Lebanon Universities as a relevant qualification to enable admission to University, various bridging programmes hope that over time, they will be able to prove the track record of their programmes in assisting students to access and succeed in higher education, which will also pave the way for possible accreditation.

Turning first to the need for policy and institutional change in Uganda, Lebanon and beyond, we note that refugee education was hugely impacted by Covid-19. Even though schools and universities in Uganda and Lebanon have reopened following closures earlier in 2020, many refugee learners have still not been able to access education because their livelihoods were heavily affected. This has highlighted further the importance of an accessible, flexible and blended learning approach for refugees in resource constrained settings. For example, in Lebanon where educational institutions have adopted online learning during the pandemic, many refugees' ability to engage has been limited due to limited digital skills, lack of appropriate devices, and the high cost of internet access. High level advocacy with policymakers and practitioners is needed to ensure that higher education for refugees is provided for in national structures in Uganda and Lebanon, since policies and practice on higher education do not ensure equitable access for refugees nor has either country fully recognized blended and online higher education programs. Above all, there is a need for resources to be allocated towards higher education within the current refugee responses in settings hosting refugees, and for the prioritisation of creative approaches to the attainment of higher education for refugees. We see this clearly in Uganda and Lebanon but also consider that policy changes to support refugee education are relevant beyond this context.

Enhancing Refugees' Access to Tertiary Education through University Admissions Reform

Through supporting students to sit the Makerere Mature Entry Exam, it became clear that these regularly disadvantage refugee applicants, including through: admissions tests that are biased towards Ugandan nationals; the need to register for admissions exams in person when refugees cannot travel freely; and a lack of understanding amongst University staff about barriers to refugees' entry.The refugee learners' eventual ability to register for and sit the mature entry exam at Makerere was contingent on a series of administrative exceptions being made, following sustained lobbying and support from RLP colleagues. Refugee applicants outside of FFA would not have similarly benefited from these efforts in 2021, and there is no evidence that these exceptions have translated into structural change to enable refugees' applications in the future. We have thus established a project in 2022 to work with institutions of higher education in Uganda to adapt admissions pathways to refugees' needs.

References

Hay, H. R., & Morals, F. (2004). Bridging programmes: gain, pain or all in vain: perspectives on higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 18(2), 59-75.

The need for institutional change

Advocacy may also need to be in-house, calling for institutional change. There is much evidence to suggest that Bridging Programmes benefit from being clearly nested within Universities, rather than being provided by other organisations or kept at arm's length. Part of this relates to the psycho-social impacts of these programmes being run by committed universities on their campuses. As Shaw (2010, cited in O'Rourke, 2011) outlines, university-based bridging programmes supports refugees to develop the 'ontology' of the university student through affirming to them that they belong in spaces of higher education, and through helping them to build social capital and learning the unspoken cultural rules of a campus environment. Achieving such nesting can, however, be a challenge. In our case, FFA was being run by RLP at some distance from Makerere University and was somehow disconnected from the Universities of Edinburgh or AUB as institutions. We note three key issues:

A first, more structural, reason is that the timeframe and model of the bridging programme may be more akin to civil society and private sector endeavours, at least in their pilot phases: relatively fast paced, reactive, and self-discovering. This does not tend to easily align with the slower, cautious, risk-averse, and procedure-heavy way many academic institutions operate. The accreditation of programmes, for instance, tends to be a long process. While there are valid reasons for this, particularly around ensuring academic rigour and quality of the learning experience, waiting years is not an option for bridging programmes that seek to provide a relatively rapid solution and have in their core constitution a measure of ongoing reflection and adjustment. Yet, the lack of accreditation in FFA's case and, for many years in PADILEIA's case, affect the career opportunities of students and devalues the work of academic staff involved in those processes.

A second, still structural, issue is that universities do not always have a natural "space" to host bridging programmes. Which faculty or department should 'own' it? Who should be responsible for these bridging programmes and ensure coordination amongst the range of actors involved? Who is responsible for maintaining and updating it to ensure its topicality? This problem is often compounded by the fact that pilot phases may be spearheaded by academics (as it was partly the case with FFA at the University of Edinburgh) who are well-placed for action-research but may not be the ones in the best position to offer a long-term home for a bridging programme.

Thirdly, it is useful to note that the Anglo-American model of universities that dominates the world today typically works with new programmes having to demonstrate they are financially viable while still meeting stated social goals. Bridging programmes are unlikely to be able to demonstrate such viability in the short run, and as such may then fall out of core university strategies. In the medium run, though, it is possible to think of funding strategies that do not solely rely on 'aid' money, for instance through cross-subsidies from fee paying students enrolled in the bridging programme.

Institutional barriers in FFA (and, in particular, accreditation)

At every stage in the implementation of FFA we hit institutional and structural barriers. A key learning for the programme has been that programmes such as FFA require support from within institutions of higher education to be successful. Areas including accreditation and student registry, e-learning and development, IT and technology, scholarships and funding, online library access, plus all of the different teaching departments involved in delivering the courses must work together to ensure a coherent teaching programme that is recognised as providing access to, and preparing students for, higher education. In turn, this finding relates to the importance of involving universities in developing and advocating for improved policies on refugee education through access and bridging programs like FFA but also through becoming more inclusive institutions for refugee and other underrepresented students throughout their student journey.

For various reasons, this support was not always easily accessed. The timescales over which FFA had to operate did not, for example, match the timescales over which accreditation would have been possible through the University of Edinburgh and how courses were structured and delivered to suit refugee learners in Uganda was on occasion very different to how similar initiatives would have been developed in Edinburgh. These differences in operating models, expectations and timelines translated into fewer opportunities for collaboration between FFA programme members and experienced colleagues within the University, as did the flexibility required to deliver the first pilot of FFA, which was relatively incompatible with the organisational structures and procedures of a large University bureaucracy. Future versions of FFA would likely have more lead-time for discussions about accreditation and course delivery, which would facilitate this collaboration. Nonetheless, if Universities are committed to supporting responsive educational programmes for marginalised groups, there needs to be further recognition of the flexibility and increased resources that are needed to effectively deliver these.

Accreditation in the Ugandan context was also impeded by the FFA programme not meeting the quite rigid guidelines upheld by the Ugandan Business and Technical Examinations Board. Within UBTEB's existing structure for accrediting programmes, there was limited opportunity for recognising a blended bridging programme in the form of FFA, or knowledge of how to accommodate refugee learners without Ugandan nationality or evidence of previous educational levels within existing qualification structures.

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