

ca who denied his prophethood and attacked him and his companions. Prophet Muhammad and a group of his followers, the Muhajirs, were warmly welcomed in Medina by the local population, the Ansars. This displacement is considered to be a sacred journey by Muslims, who believe that the Prophet and his followers were forced into exile due to their Islamic belief and were protected by God during their journey and their arrival in welcoming Medina.

In March 2019, a cabinet minister declared that Turkey had spent almost US\$40 billion to cover the needs of Syrian refugees in Turkey. Not surprisingly, increasing nationalism and economic instability in Turkey have led to a societal resistance against sharing limited public resources with Syrian refugees. With this in mind, the Hegira has repeatedly been used as a reminder by the Turkish government to justify the access of Syrian refugees into higher education. President Erdogan has defined Syrian refugees as “today’s Muhajirs” and Turkish society as “today’s Ansars.” Helping Syrian refugees, he argues, is a requirement for Muslim brother- and sisterhood, and he has ordered the CoHE to facilitate their access to universities. In a press release, the president of the CoHE shared his belief that being Ansars for Syrian refugees is a “divine will of God,” and he has promised to expand their access to universities in Turkey.

In a country with a conservative majority in power, ongoing economic recession, and highly competitive university admission, religion is thus a tailor-made driver that secures people’s understanding of the privileges granted to refugees with regard to access to higher education. This has successfully been implemented in Turkey and resulted in thousands of Syrian refugees enrolling in universities. The ruling party has performed in accordance with its conservative identity and Turkish society is behaving like Ansars, for the sake of Muslim brother- and sisterhood, in line with Islamic teaching.

#### CONCLUSION

In Europe, the emergence of nation-states transformed scholars from “cosmopolitan wanderers” into “citizens.” In the era of globalization, some scholars have become “global citizens,” while the fate of others is to be stateless refugees. The number of stateless refugees is increasing every day and these struggle to gain access to higher education in their host countries. It is obvious that their unintended inclusion among incoming international students will continue forcing policy- and decision-makers to walk a fine line between giving them access to higher education, and closely monitoring and managing the impact of this policy on public opinion.

## What Works to Reduce Inequality in Higher Education?

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*The full working paper on which this article is based can be accessed at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/31497>*

Graduating from college remains one of the best routes out of poverty. Recent research from Dr. Harry Patrinos (World Bank) shows that in most countries today, returns to higher education are now higher than those to lower levels of education. Women tend to have higher rates of return than men, and there is even some evidence (from the United States) that children from poor families benefit the most from higher education. So the question for policy makers is not *whether*, but *how* to help children from disadvantaged families get into higher education, and how to help them graduate.

The bad news is that in most countries today, large groups of disadvantaged students (e.g., low income, first generation, belonging to a racial or ethnic minority, as well as intersections between these groups) are unable to access higher education, even when they have the ability to do so. Another piece of bad news is that governments around the world do not seem to have very effective policies in place to target such groups (see Salmi, *IHE* #98). But there is good news as well: there is now a sizeable and high-quality body of literature that analyzes interventions and policies aiming to support disadvantaged students in higher education. In our new paper (World Bank Working Paper 8802), we rigorously selected, gathered, and compared over 200 causal estimates, from 75 (quasi-)experimental studies, of the effects of such interventions around the world. Four main lessons from this review can be applied by policy makers around the world.

#### POLICY MAKERS SHOULD TARGET SEVERAL MECHANISMS OF EXCLUSION

The first lesson is that there are different mechanisms driving exclusion and each of these can be targeted by different types of policies. One is that disadvantaged students have unmet financial needs to pay for college tuition (especially now that private higher education has soared), but they

also need to defer wages to pay for their living expenses, or have credit constraints in accessing support such as student loans. A second mechanism is the lack of academic readiness, since disadvantaged children (on average) have a less stimulating home environment, have access to schools of poorer quality, and do not have much academic support outside school. A lower level of academic readiness prevents students from being admitted to, or succeeding in, higher education. Thirdly, disadvantaged students lack information about the cost of college education, about its benefits in the labor market, and about existing financial aid schemes. Finally, students have various forms of cognitive bias that keep them away from college, such as present bias, cognitive overload, and routine or status quo bias. These biases may be more common among disadvantaged students who may not have a parent who keeps reminding them to read through college brochures, helps them to make strategic choices when applying to college, or takes them on campus visits. Identifying the mechanisms that cause underrepresentation among disadvantaged students is important, because different types of interventions may (and should) target different kinds of mechanisms.

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**POLICY MAKERS SHOULD CONSIDER IMPLEMENTING MORE OUTREACH POLICIES**

A second result of the review is that well-designed outreach interventions have large effects on enrollment rates of disadvantaged students. Outreach activities typically provide information and/or counseling to children in high school. A government may hire counsellors who strategically communicate with high school seniors about the returns to college, help them find the right degree program in the right subject, and keep them motivated all the way through graduation. These policies can target their lack of academic preparation, raise their aspirations, or just smoothen the transition from high school to university. We find that outreach policies are broadly effective in increasing access for disadvantaged students when they include active counseling or simplify the university application process, but not when they only provide general information on higher education. In other words, providing a video about the returns to college education is probably not enough to substantially help disadvantaged students. That being said, one paper

from China did find that information alone may be effective, so perhaps there is still more to understand about this, depending on the national context.

**POLICY MAKERS SHOULD USE FINANCIAL AID MORE EFFICIENTLY**

The third lesson is that there exists a wide variety of financial instruments to address unmet financial needs in higher education, including universal grants, targeted need-based grants, merit-based grants, performance-based grants, student loans, and tax exemption policies. We find that these policies are not equally successful at helping students. The good news is that we found that sizeable need-based aid shows very large and consistent effects on helping students to access and graduate from college. In contrast, we did not find consistent positive effects for small-scale need-based aid, merit-based aid, and tax exemption policies.

Another interesting finding is that a number of recent studies have shown that an early commitment for grant aid (when already known to students during high school) seems to be very effective at raising enrollment. Thus, the timing of the grant notification should be considered when designing financial aid schemes. Finally, we note that we still know very little about the effectiveness of loans, and thus this should be a priority for future research as loans are popular in policy making circles. While further evidence is being built, we would caution policy makers against creating complex loan schemes, as even current evidence about these is mixed.

**RESEARCHERS SHOULD PRODUCE MORE EVIDENCE FROM DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

And, finally, there are many extremely impressive studies available and we expect the literature to continue to grow rapidly on this topic. An important caveat is that we found only five studies from low- and middle-income countries. This may have to do with our strict inclusion criteria (or human oversight). We are somewhat concerned about the external validity of our findings, although the broad mechanisms of exclusion are usually similar across countries. But low- and middle-income countries have some common peculiarities. For instance, in many countries, high schools are still concentrated in urban areas, and there are strong social norms that keep girls (and sometimes ethnic minorities) out of school. Together with other researchers, we hope to study these phenomena in the future to address this gap. Policy makers around the world will be keen to learn more about equity in higher education, particularly as demand is rising worldwide, with more children in school than ever before.