

Guidance and Access to Higher Education: Perspectives of Refugee Youth

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Higher Education for Refugees

Globally, over four million refugees are aged 18 to 24 (14% of the global refugee population) (UNHCR, 2025)

Only 9% of youth access higher education, compared to a global average of 42% (UNHCR, 2025).

UNHCR's 15by30 goal aims that 15% of refugee youth have access to higher education by 2030.

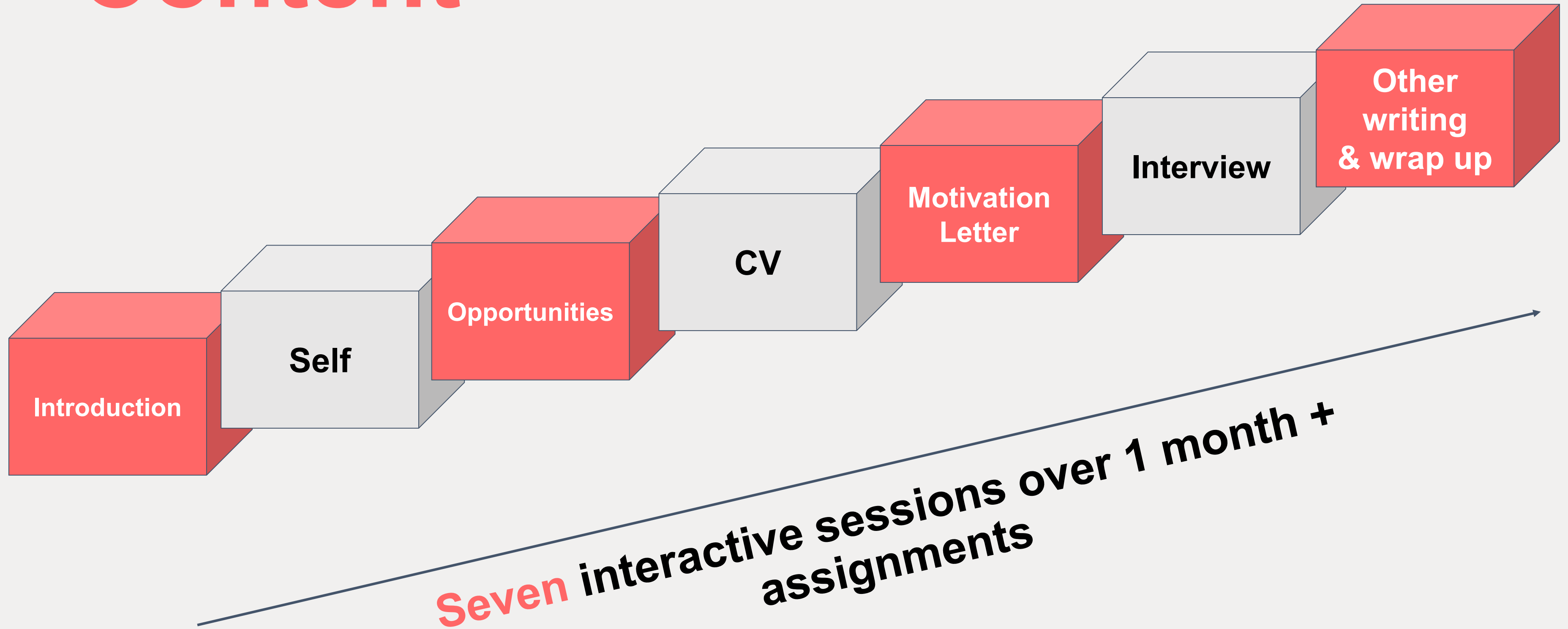


Mosaik Guidance Programme

- Provides knowledge and skills needed to access higher education through in person and online workshops
- Content is designed with youth and delivered with local stakeholders – most programmes in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, as well as Uganda and Egypt
- Mosaik trains refugee facilitators with the skills to effectively deliver the Guidance Programme while adapting sessions to suit local contexts.
- In 2024, 2,947 young people (38% male, 62% female) participated.



Content



Purpose of the Tracer Study

The tracer study explores the long-term impact of both formal and informal guidance on refugee and displaced youth's access to Higher Education.

Research Questions

- What types of guidance did participants receive, and through which channels?
- How did guidance influence their decision to pursue Higher Education?
- What barriers remained despite receiving guidance, and how were they navigated or mitigated?
- What recommendations do participants have for improving future guidance initiatives?



Pathways and Possibilities:

A Tracer Study on the Long-Term Impact of Educational Guidance on Refugee Youth's Access to Tertiary Education and Beyond

Methodology

- **Target Group:** Graduates of the Guidance Programme (2019–2023) in Jordan, Lebanon, Uganda, and Turkey
- **Mixed Methods Data Sources:**
 - Mosaik’s existing outcome and impact surveys (2019–2023)
 - Online survey sent to 179 alumni who had reported accessing tertiary education
 - 32 responses received (3 reminders sent)
 - Explored education access, employment, guidance use, barriers, and community engagement
 - 5 semi-structured interviews with a diverse subset of participants (out of 11 invited)
 - Selected based on trajectory, nationality, and type of guidance received
 - 1-hour interviews conducted via Zoom
- **Theoretical Framework:** Capability Approach (Sen, 1999)
- **Timeframe:** Data collected and analysed between February–April 2025

Challenges Accessing HE

88% of respondents had attempted to access HE **before receiving any form of guidance**; the top reported barriers were:

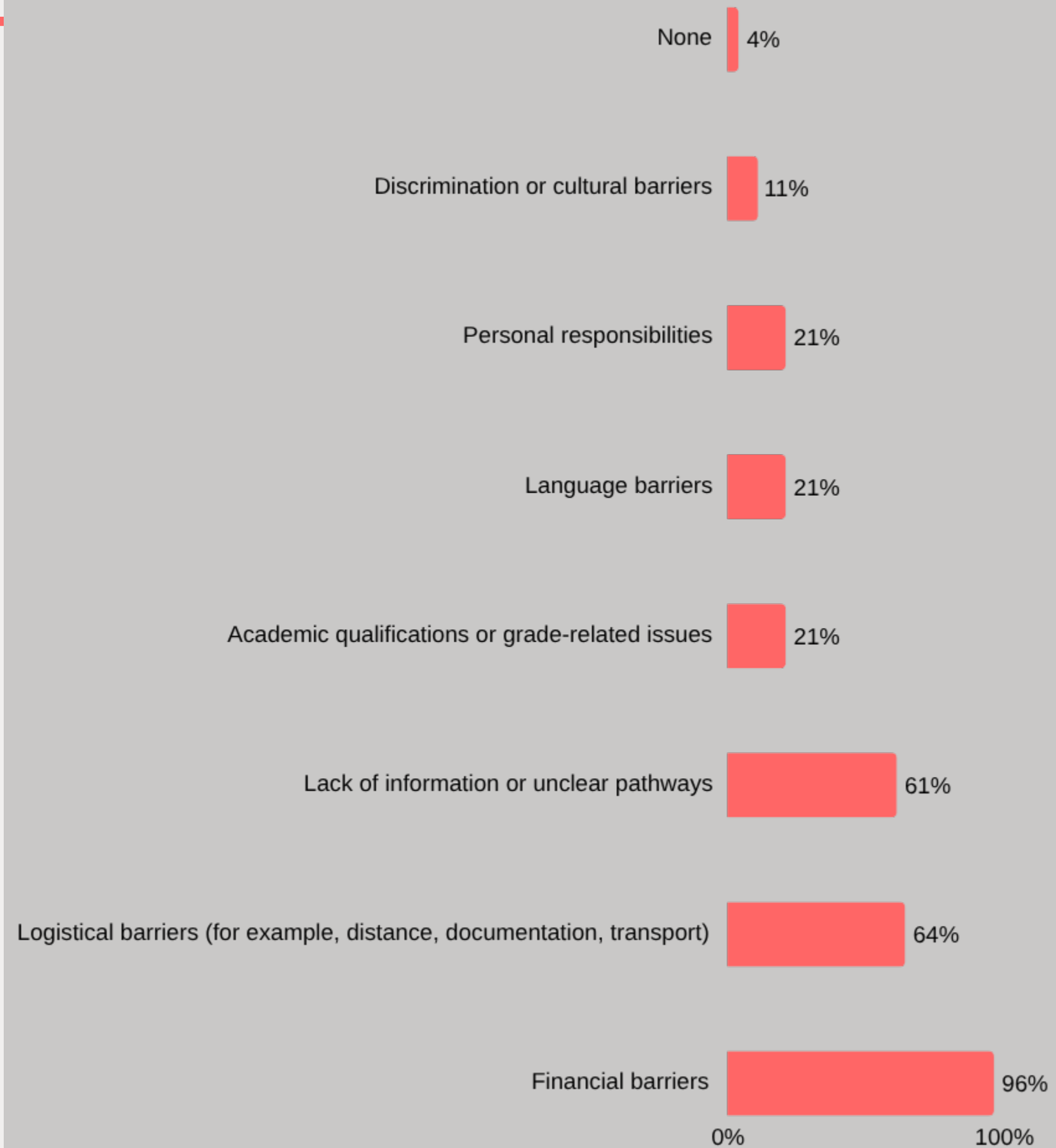
- Financial (including lack of awareness of scholarships), Logistical (documentation, transport, displacement), Lack of Information/Pathways

Limited understanding of HE access before guidance:

- 34% rated their knowledge as low or very low
- 16% considered their knowledge “high,” but still lacked key information to take action.
- Only 3% of respondents felt they had “very high” knowledge.

“I didn’t even know what the first step is.” Female, 22, Syrian

Top challenges faced in previous attempts of accessing tertiary education



Sources of Guidance

53% of participants reported receiving additional guidance from sources other than Mosaik's Guidance Programme, through:

- NGO-led initiatives (e.g. Multi-Aid Programs (MAPS), Southern New Hampshire University)
- Peer-led spaces and school-based sessions
- Informal advice from family, friends, and mentors

These findings underscore the need to understand guidance as an **ecosystem**, where **different actors and touchpoints** together influence success and access, not just a single intervention.

“Peer support played a significant role, as I exchanged experiences and advice with classmates. It helped me make more informed decisions about my academic path.” – Female, 25, Syrian

Access to HE after Guidance

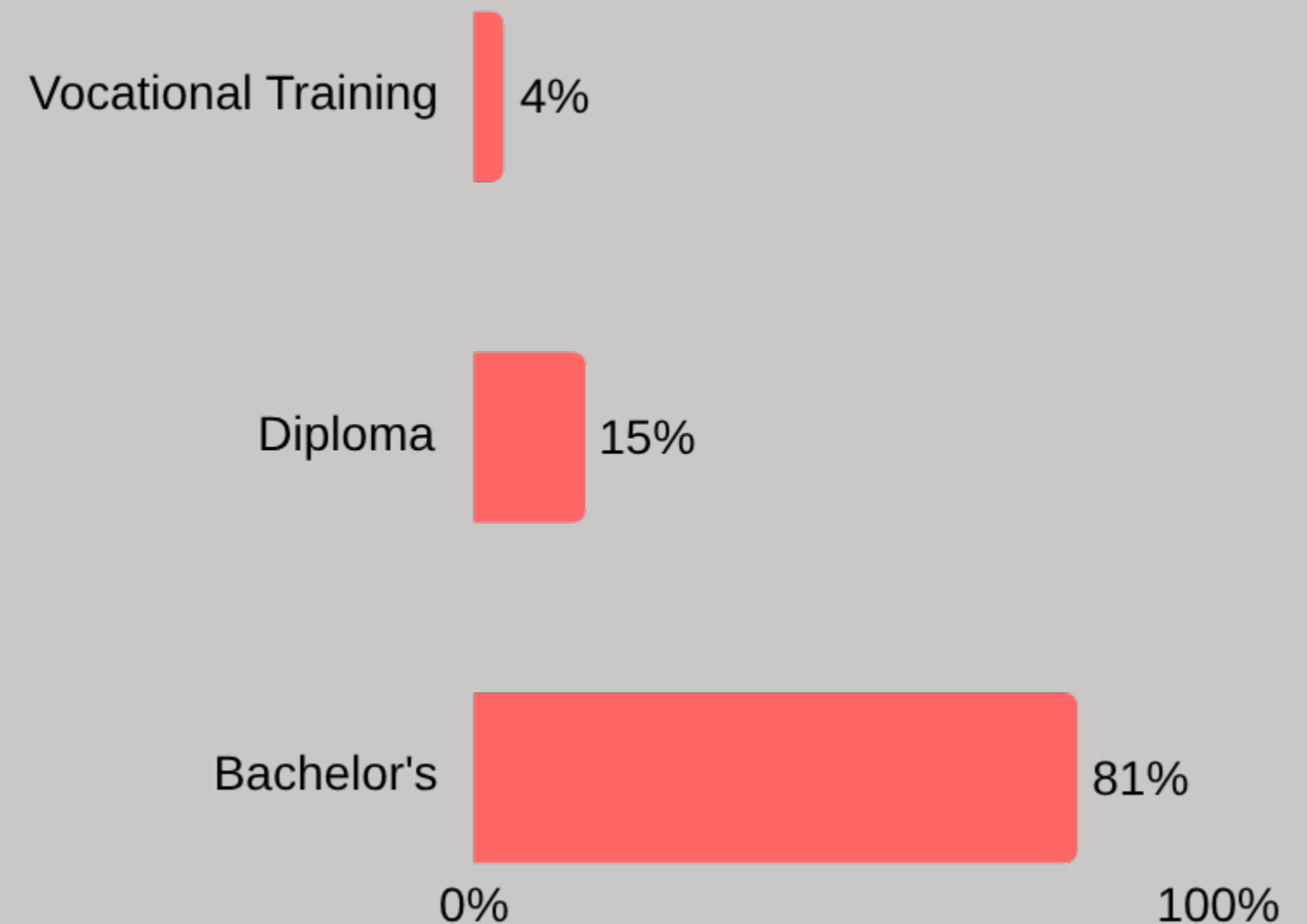
84% of participants enrolled in higher education after receiving guidance

- For the 16% who did not, the key barriers were financial constraints or limited available opportunities
- Fields of study included: Business Administration, English Translation, Medical Science, Engineering, and Social Sciences

70% received financial assistance to support their studies

- Most common providers: MAPs/SNHU, DAFI, WUSC, Jusoor, War Child Canada

Type of educational programme accessed



Personal Growth and Confidence

- 79% of respondents reported moderate or significant improvement in **confidence, motivation, and communication**.
- Interviews revealed how this personal development helped participants **improve self-belief, take on new challenges, speak up in professional spaces, and build social networks**.
- 78% of respondents reported **contributing to the community** as the most strongly impacted area.

“Receiving guidance really impacted my social skills in a positive way. It taught me how to say yes to opportunities that come my way and motivated me to go out of my way to find them.” – Female, 21, Sudanese

Sharing Guidance with Others

- 75% of respondents **shared the guidance they received with others** to help them pursue HE
- 63% connected others directly with scholarship or HE opportunities
- 54% of those who shared guidance reached more than 20 people
- Ways of sharing guidance with others:
 - Informal advice to friends, family, or peers (88%)
 - Helping others with university or scholarship applications (75%)
 - Mentoring or advising (58%) (e.g. by becoming a GP facilitator)
 - Online knowledge sharing (46%)
 - Sharing education resources (42%)
 - Study groups and learning circles (38%)

“I really struggled when I thought about my future and whether I’d be able to study, so I wanted to help other people with this. I love seeing others’ dreams come true.” – Female, 22, Syrian.

Further Guidance & Support Needs

- 91% cited financial aid or scholarships as the most critical additional support needed.
- Strong demand for language support (56%) and flexible learning (56%), such as online courses.
- Greater transparency around the realities of scholarship opportunities, e.g. clearer expectations and eligibility constraints.
- A few respondents emphasized the importance of equipping universities with guidance on how to support refugee students.

“The only thing missing was the English language support. We practiced everything in Arabic, but the scholarship interview was in English.” – Male, 27, Iraqi.



Recommendations

- Strengthen post-guidance support
- Scale peer mentorship and open knowledge-sharing
- Tailor guidance to local realities
- Embed language and mental health support
- Adapt MEL tools to monitor refugee-specific access barriers
- Drive systems-level advocacy
- Expand employment readiness content

Conclusion

Many participants were driven by a deep, intrinsic value of learning.

Based on the Capability Approach, **guidance acts a conversion factor** to enable refugees to turn available personal, social and institutional resources into a HE opportunity that they value, to enable them to pursue desired functionings.

Guidance is not just about helping individuals to complete HE applications, it is about **transforming perceptions of what is possible**.

The **ripple effects of the support** received extend beyond each student's academic journey: they are visible in peer mentoring, community initiatives, and growing networks of opportunity.

“Love for learning is the main reason. But also, learning is a weapon, especially for women - to enable them to be educated, build their future, and be independent.” – Female



Thank you!



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