

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of East London (UEL)		
Unit of Assessment: 21 Sociology		
Title of case study: School of hard knocks; Building inclusion for refugees and forced migrants in Higher Education (HE)		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000 – 2020 (ongoing)		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
1. Cigdem Esin 2. Giorgia Dona 3. Aura Lounasmaa 4. Corrine Squire 5. Afaf Jabiri	1. Senior Lecturer 2. Professor 3. Lecturer 4. Professor 5. Senior Lecturer	1. 2004 – present 2. 2000 – present 3. 2014 – present 4. 1996 – present 5. 2017 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015 – 2020 (ongoing)		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

UEL research has generated an influential model for refugee higher education access and progression, OMNI - Open and free; Multiple-modality and holistic; Narrative; Inclusive and gender-sensitive – which is refugee-centred, starting from refugees' own stories. UEL higher education preparation programmes following this model, resulted in 750 women and men from refugee backgrounds accessing and progressing in higher education in the UK, France and the Middle East. The programmes increased participants' other overall wellbeing and helped them generate cultural self-representations. UEL research on refugees accessing higher education underpins best-practice models for many educational institutions, NGOs, policy-makers and cultural producers nationally and internationally.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

UEL's Centre for Narrative Research (CNR) and Centre for Refugees, Migration and Belonging (CRMB) have brought together their findings from forced migration and narrative research to provide a new and powerful 'OMNI' model for programmes to combat refugees' exclusion from higher education.

Only 3% of refugees access higher education worldwide and refugee women are half as likely to enter HE. Tertiary education is fundamental to refugees' development and achievement, wellbeing, social belonging and contributions to the wider society. Interconnected barriers to refugees' HE participation include:

1. direct and indirect costs;
2. difficulties in transferring qualifications;
3. learning academic English;
4. regularising citizenship status;
5. unfamiliar learning cultures;
6. oppression and migration histories;
7. and gender inequalities.

The research findings indicate how to break down those barriers.

Since the 1990s, CNR's and CMRB's research has demonstrated how marginalised communities of people living with HIV (**R1**), young people in low-resourced areas (**R2**), and forced migrants (**R3**), can improve self-esteem and strengthen collective identities by generating their own narratives. Research on the early stages of UEL's preparation programmes for inclusion of HIV-positive refugees demonstrated that curriculum focused on narrative agency fosters high levels of retention for participants from forced migrant backgrounds (**R4, R5**).

CNR and CMRB research (**R2, R3, R4, R5**) has indicated that participants' narrative projects benefit from choosing modalities that fit with their skills and interests, strengthening their public voice. The research revealed that refugee HE inclusion programmes that work multimodally by supporting creativity in education attract students from a wider range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds (**R2, R4**).

Research with refugees and other marginalised groups has found that participatory structures generate sustained engagement and reach a wider range of participants (**R2, R3, R4, R5**). Responding to participants' own demands for holistic provision, the evaluation highlights the importance of offering a range of services that support free and open educational access by meeting transport and materials costs, providing food, legal advice, IT training and resources, and being psychosocially aware and gender sensitive (**R4, R5**). The results demonstrate that these factors constitute the necessary context within which successful refugee HE inclusion can happen (**R4, R5**).

Finally, our research has foregrounded the gendered inequalities that shape refugee experiences of services such as HE, in Jordan, France and the UK (**R6, R4**). These inequalities, differently articulated in each national context, affect access, involvement and progression. Preparation programmes directed at refugee HE inclusion work best if they adopt a holistic, multimodal and creative approach, centred on narrative agency, as well as attending to gender-equitable recruitment, curriculum, assessment and retention structures, that enable women students' educational achievement.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. Squire, C. 2013. Living with HIV and ART. Palgrave.

R2. Esin, C. and Squire, C. 2013. Visual autobiographies in East London: narratives of still images, interpersonal exchanges, and intrapersonal dialogues. FQS 14 (2). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-14.2.1971>

R3. Doná, G. 2007. The microphysics of participation in refugee research. Journal of Refugee Studies, 20(2), 210-229. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/fem013>

R4. Esin, C. and Lounasmaa, A. 2020. Narrative and ethical (in) action: creating spaces of resistance with refugee-storytellers in the Calais 'Jungle' camp. International Journal of Social Research Methodology, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2020.1723202>

R5. Squire, C. and Zaman, T. 2020. The 'Jungle' is here; the jungle is outside: university for all in the Calais refugee camp, in J. Bhabha, W. Giles and F. Mahomed (eds) A better future: the role of higher education for displaced and marginalized people. Cambridge University Press, 427-450. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108655101.020>

R6. Jabiri, A. 2016. Gendered politics and law in Jordan. Palgrave.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Impact case study (REF3)

CNR and CMRB research developed the OMNI – open and free, multiple-modality and holistic, narrative and refugee-centred, inclusive and gender-sensitive – model of refugee HE accessibility and progression. As a result, two free refugee programmes were founded. *Life Stories* is a validated ‘gateway’ short course, taught in the Calais ‘Jungle’, Manchester, London, Jordan and Lebanon (**S1a, S2a**). The Open Learning Initiative, *OLive*, is a London-based HE ‘bridging’ programme, with UEL Foundation degree places for three students annually (**S1b, S2b**). These programmes have resulted in many organisations such as York, Manchester and Leicester Universities and Birkbeck’s Compass programme using the OMNI model (**S2, S3**).

Isabelle Habib, Senior Access Officer for Forced Migrants, Birkbeck, University of London states that:

“Colleagues at the University of East London were helpful in offering guidance to Birkbeck staff who were establishing a university access project with the forced migrant community...Students who (participate) in OLive start university with more confidence and preparedness for study”. (**S3a**)

Internationally, MOSAIK Jordan and Lebanon’s pre-HE programmes for refugees use the Life Stories ‘toolkit’ and a psychosocial/gender-aware approach. (**R6**)

1. Refugee HE engagement, attainment, and wellbeing

OLive and *Life Stories* overcame inclusion barriers bringing 750 forced migrants into first or renewed contact with HE institutions. The programmes delivered gender-balanced recruitment, gender-sensitive content and opportunities. They resulted in refugees’ preparation for and further HE progression (**S1, S2**). *Life Stories* won the Guardian 2017 Universities Student Diversity and Widening Participation award in recognition of the success and innovation of the programme offering an accredited course in the Calais refugee camp. (**S4**)

In *OLive*, 311 completed some and 152 all the Weekend course. 12 completed the *OLive-Up* Foundation year through fee-waived UEL studentships. Over 100 students have taken *Life Stories*; a further 150 attended *Life Stories* HE workshops. 300 alumni remain active in the programmes’ social media. *OLive* students write that the programme ‘made me focus and believe in myself’, that they found ‘beautiful ways of relaxing and loving myself’. One said simply: ‘I love to be here’ (**S2d**).

OMNI’s participatory emphasis developed *Life Stories* and *OLive* participants’ own teaching and research capacity. For instance, *OLive* students and staff co-authored a paper on education and displacement for Forced Migration Review in 2019. (**S5**) Five *OLive* students run an academic writing group contributing to conferences like Social Scientists Against the Hostile Environment’s 2020 ‘Higher education, the hostile environment and Covid-19’, with 150 academic, NGO and policymaker attenders. Ten ex-students have taught OMNI and other HE classes; one co-founded and runs HopeTowns, a uniquely refugee-led English learning programme. (**S6**)

The transferrable skills, referrals and psychosocial support the programmes provide have helped students find full-time employment or progress to other trainings including coding and drama. Students use creative writing, performance and art skills developed to represent refugees publicly. For example, twenty-two *Life Stories* students wrote the book (**S7a**) *Voices from the ‘Jungle’*: stories from the Calais refugee camp, a collection of individual testimonies written by a number of people residing in the so-termed Calais ‘Jungle’, the refugee camp in Northern France. The stories from the book inspired volunteers to help (**S7b**) and a two-hour radio documentary on the Calais ‘Jungle’ and *Life Stories* that features Lounasmaa throughout. (**S7c**)

OLive and *Life Stories* students gained online audiences for their oral, poetic and visual narratives on the ‘Living refugee archive’ and ‘Displaces’ websites and exhibited photographic work with large audiences at the Barbican in the Papers festival and at the Centre Pompidou in Calais – *testimonies de la ‘jungle’*. One student, an animator, has made a series of short films

Impact case study (REF3)

that have been powerful forms of refugee advocacy, including - for Help Refugees - 'The journey'. OMNI's work led to students collaborating with established artists and broadcasters to produce films, photo exhibits, a book by award-winning photographer Gideon Mendel. (S8)

3. Refugee HE inclusion policy and practice beyond HEIs

The OMNI model reached 300 education and other ministers through Lounasmaa's 2018 address to the World Education Forum. OMNI team members made key contributions to NARIC's 'recognition of prior learning' toolkits. They workshopped with Student Action for Refugees, enabling STAR to provide HE preparation which recognised refugees' specific needs nationwide, and to set up the nationwide Universities of Sanctuary list. OMNI's influence led to a similar emphasis on supporting refugee cultural production in other organisations, and for the Refugee Council and Refugee Support Network to signpost Higher Education preparation as essential.

The Refugee Support Network reports OLIVE "has had such a positive impact in the lives of some of the young asylum seekers we've worked with...we've seen numerous young people grow in knowledge and confidence". (S9c)

The OMNI team also established the London Refugee Higher Education network of 60 cross-UK organisations including local councils, trade unions, refugee led organisations, international NGOs and community groups as well as universities, which disseminated the OMNI model as best practice. (S9)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

S1a. <https://educatingwithoutborders.wordpress.com/university-for-all-2/>

S1b. <https://olivecourseuel.wordpress.com>

S2a. *Life Stories* external examiner report, June 2016, Professor Olivia Sagan, St Mary's University.

S2b. *OLIVE* independent course evaluation, 2018, Dr Mastoureh Fathi, University College Dublin.

S2c. Final reports for Erasmus+ on the Refugee Education Initiative which implemented the *OLIVE* programme in test European universities with at the University of Vienna with UEL. 2019.

S2d. Student testimonials and evaluations from the courses.

S3a. Testimonial letter from Isabelle Habib, Senior Access Officer for Forced Migrants, Compass Project, Birkbeck, University of London.

S3b. Testimonial letter from Aleks Palanac, English Language Teaching Unit, the University of Sanctuary Facilitator, University of Leicester.

S3c. Testimonial letter from Dr. Mark Doidge, Principal Research Fellow, School of Sport and Service Management, Centre for Arts and Wellbeing. Cities, Injustice and Resistance Research and Enterprise Group, and Centre of Resilience for Social Justice.

S3d. Testimonial letter from Liberty Oberlander, Head of Business and Programme Development, Association of Commonwealth Universities.

S4. <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/mar/30/student-diversity-and-widening-participation-award-winner-and-runners-up>

S5. *OLIVE* course students, IT trainer and director. 2019. "Education is key to life": the importance of education from the perspective of displaced learners. *Forced Migration Review*, March 2019. <https://www.fmreview.org/education-displacement/OLIVE>

S6a. <https://acssmigration.wordpress.com/2020/11/23/higher-education-hostile-environment-and-covid-19-perspectives-on-displacement-and-decolonising-14-december-webinar/>

Impact case study (REF3)

S6b. <https://peacefulborders.org/hopetowns/>.

S7a. Godin, M., Møller Hansen, K., Lounasmaa, A., Squire, C. and Zaman, T. (eds). 2017. *Voices from the 'Jungle': stories from the Calais refugee camp*. Pluto Press. Translated into French [Guillotine 2020].

S7b. Tia Bush. 2020. Here in Calais' refugee camps, coronavirus is making lives even harder. *Huffington Post*. https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/calais-refugee-coronavirus_uk_5ee3a01cc5b639dabca9bb29

S7c. Canadian Broadcasting Company. 2016. *No man's land, part one and two*. Ideas programme.

Part one aired 25 May 2016. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/no-man-s-land-part-1-1.3597999>

Part two aired 31 August 2016. <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/no-man-s-land-part-2-1.3624468>

This programme won the Gold Award in its category at the 2017 New York Festival International Radio Competition.

S8. Notable examples include:

S8a. The Refugee Council's *Living refugee archive* is housed at the University of East London. <https://en.we-refugees-archive.org/network/living-refugee-archiv/>

S8b. Displaces blog: <https://displacesblog.wordpress.com/about/>

S8c. Exhibition *Calais – testimonies de la 'jungle'* of Displaces artists at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (. <https://www.artrefuge.org.uk/post/16th-october-witnessing-the-jungle-exhibition-at-centre-pompidou-paris>

S8d. Work by artists drawing on the project. Gideon Mendel, DZHANGAL, Autograph Gallery, January – 11 February 2017. <https://autograph.org.uk/exhibitions/dzhangal>

S8e. *Papers*. Barbican Centre, London. A day-long festival celebrating the art, culture and architecture of the refugee crisis, 12 June 2016. <https://www.architecturefoundation.org.uk/papers-festival/>

S8f. Bhavesh Hindocha. 2016. *Who opens a school*. <https://vimeo.com/171770509>

S8g. Majid Adin. 2017. *The journey*. <https://helprefugees.org/news/majid-adin-the-journey/>

S9a. Testimonial letter from Emily Crowley Chief Executive of STAR (Student Action for Refugees)

S9b. Testimonial letter from Dr Mark Doidge, Brighton Migrant and Refugee Solidarity.

S9c. Testimonial letter from Emily Bowerman, Head of Programmes RSN (Refugee Support Network)