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# The Issue of Platformisation, Philanthropy and Sovereignty: Guarantee to Refugee Access to Higher Education

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This article describes the results from the second stage of a research conducted from 2022 to 2024 using descriptive, exploratory and analytical methodologies in a social action and formation programme of a Dutch university and of a startup acting in Germany. Both support refugees undergoing a process of recognition and integration by promoting access to higher education. The paper aims to analyse concepts derived from a research focusing on governance production from the notion of GovTech, platformisation, philanthropy, sovereignty in education, with refugees as key actors facing violations of basic human rights. The socioeducational besides judicialisation perspective, provides an approach to understanding the subject complexity. Two academic visits were conducted to explore the university inclusion program and the startup initiatives, complemented by reflections from two leaders engaged in collaborative interventions with refugees. The findings indicate that while digital platforms enhance access to educational resources, inadequate technological infrastructure hampers refugee participation. Continued investment and philanthropy in these platforms can cultivate a diverse and innovative educational environment. In alignment with the post-COVID-19 movement and e-governance, promoting local-global access and citizenship by collaboration among stakeholders is vital. The conclusions underscore the need for policies that ensure equal access and ongoing support for keeping refugees, the most vulnerable group, in higher education.

Keywords: refugee, higher education - access and permanence, virtual cultural circle, platformisation, philanthropy, sovereignty

#### INTRODUCTION

# Higher education and violation of rights

This article describes the results from the second stage of the researches, regarding refugees undergoing a recognition and social integration process through higher education. Actions have been performed with digital platforms, Apps, and partly supported by philanthropy. Descriptive, exploratory and analytical methodologies in a social action and formation programme of a Dutch university and also of a startup acting in Germany were used in researches conducted from 2022 to 2024.

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From this study, founded on the documental and bibliographic sources consulted, the descriptive and exploratory research methodologies used were integrated in this second stage of the research with article reviews. At the first stage of the research (2019-2021, Cf. Gomez, 2022), the main themes were public policies and actions of a Brazilian university to admit people with a refugee status: international agreements, legal and academic devices aiming at an open chair.

At the present stage, the research has elaborated considerations about the covenants and implications in the access and online learning initiatives with refugees during the COVID-19.

In the first phase, 205 universities in Brazil were identified, of which 90 were private institutions (MEC/INEP, 2023). As part of a strategic decision, some of these universities signed the Term of Reference for the UNHCR/CSVM Sérgio Vieira de Mello Chair (2003/04). This cooperation agreement establishes objectives, responsibilities and criteria for joining the initiative, which focuses on three main lines of action: teaching, research and extension. This chair promotes advocacy of scholarships offer at institutions that develop research, science and technology, and Portuguese language learning for refugees, creating a welcoming experience for language acquisition. (Cf. United Nations, 2019, s.p.) This UNHCR/CSVM project is funded by contributions from UN funds (UNHCR, 2023a), donors, volunteers, and philanthropists from various sectors. However, in 2024, donations decreased by approximately 70% (Cf. Monitor de donations ABCR, 2024).

The increase of people in a forced displacement situation post COVID-19, along with anti-immigration policies, securitisation policies, expansion of Bigtechs/Bigdata and new wars, question sovereignty (Cf. Jackson & Sorensen, 2018; Bosio & De Wit, 2024; Carron et al., 2023). Despite the war scenarios and retreats, the continuation towards the UN Goals (SDGs) is still in the agenda (Cf. Matijascic, 2024), with financial alliances of the UN for conducting some actions: eradicating poverty, managing to provide a dignified life to the next generations, ensuring dignified work, gender equality, reducing inequalities and the climate crisis, facilitating migration and mobility, access to free education, to connectivity and to artificial intelligence. It is evident that the goals of the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015) plan of action move increasingly away from their purpose of taking care of people, of the planet and of prosperity for universal peace.

Countries have the right to implement and to conduct the most adequate actions to meet the SDGs; however, international cooperation plus global and local partnerships are required. Forced displacement has transnational dimensions; therefore, sovereignty in the context of global interdependency and of collective responsibility is understood to be charged with ensuring a sustainable future for refugees, too.

In the initial research (Cf. Gomez, 2022), transversal themes re-signifying social-inclusive perspectives emerged and are analysed:

Human rights: significance of the university autonomy/sovereignty to develop this project with those whose right has been suspended and who seek to access basic

services; the aim is to see how human rights inform and guide educational policies and practices supported on the dignity of individuals.

Access to/permanence in Higher Education: examining barriers, challenges, and opportunities for refugees seeking access, and the right to Virtual Education: technologies and online learning platforms can be leveraged beyond the pandemic-related context, and human mobility.

*People in a refugee context*: those who have been forced to flee their home countries due to conflict, persecution, or other crises.

*Open Education*: considers digital resources, flexible learning models, and strategies that contribute with access and inclusivity in higher education for refugees as a commitment of universities to cultural diversity.

*Emancipatory perspective on education*: constructive and multimodal, rhizomatic, this perspective views education not only as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills, but also as a tool for empowerment and social transformation in several dimensions.

*Palliative policies*: the study acknowledges the role of palliative/mitigations policies, philanthropy, donors and volunteers' initiatives. These likely serve as immediate and temporary measures to address urgent needs, providing support to refugees while broader, more sustainable changes are pursued. The question is: Is there a new way for the state and educational governance?

#### **METHOD**

A descriptive research aims to portray the characteristics of a phenomenon without manipulating variables, providing a detailed account of the situation. It addresses what is happening in the social and educational context and examines the features of a group.

Exploratory research focuses on generating ideas rather than testing hypotheses, allowing for flexibility and openness in adapting methods as knowledge deepens. Also, the stages of research on the method involve activities, such as conducting interviews with people in refugee situation and agents that work with access to higher education, to understand perspectives, exploring covenants, cultural and language barriers, and identifying hidden aspects. This permits a comprehensive examination of the issues that may guide future interventions.

The methodological data triangulation integrated various theoretical perspectives to analyse how the dynamics of GovTech, platformisation, philanthropy, and sovereignty impact refugees' access to and retention in higher education. Academic visits and interviews with leaders added an empirical dimension to the research.

The consultation with reports and statistics from UNESCO, the World Bank and other specialised references and narratives from those who work with migrants were carried out between 2022-2024, besides two academic visits and an interview with two leaders (ILA; ILB). Additionally, there was a walking tour game with permanent and temporary students of the university. For this, anonymity was granted to the two leaders aforementioned and their institutions in the Netherlands and Germany, which are not

mentioned here by name for protecting their privacy, ensuring security, and maintaining confidentiality in sensitive matters.

The integration of descriptive and exploratory research methodologies provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the complexities surrounding refugee access to higher education. By merging theoretical aspects with practical insights gathered from the literature and reports, this integrated method offers a rhizomatic and multiple understanding of the issue. It allows researchers to explore the nuances of the challenges and opportunities faced by refugees in accessing higher education, thereby contributing valuable insights to the field. Additionally, it addresses the educational situation of refugees and consults on and experiences shared over the world.

#### **FINDINGS**

#### **Inclusion programme at the university**

Europe provides shelter to a portion of the hundreds of thousands of migrants arriving at Shelter City (2024), accommodating them in refugee camps throughout the Netherlands, with an equitable distribution across Member States. The Inclusion Programme of a Dutch university focuses on three pillars: education, work experience and community (ILA, 2024). The Program, which began in 2015, during the Syrian refugee asylum crisis, began with two doctoral students, one manager, one project leader and volunteers. It will be completed in 2024 with the possibility of being continued.

The head of the training (ILA), of Indonesian ascendancy, considers that the challenges of the initiative are related to the process for those 'just-arrived' at the Netherlands to access higher education. The Inclusion Programme of the university emphasises education, work experience and integration to the community for refugees and asylum applicants, allowing them to request access to academic courses, despite recognising the difficulties they face, such as linguistic barriers and the long processes for having their residence approved. The waiting period for their situation to be recognised and for obtaining a residence permit may take months or years and is a 'waste of time', according to the immigrants. However, according to article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the **Asylum seeker** allows them to live in some of the Asylum Centres.

Access to university: The Inclusion Programme of the university offers access to bachelor courses to refugees and to asylum applicants, also to those with higher academic degrees. The barriers faced by applicants to enrol in a 4-year free course include validating diplomas, fluency in English or in the local language, among other specific requirements. The admission process involves revising the documentation, the applicants' motivation and a faculty member's decision to allow them to occupy a 'desk in the classroom' or one of the 'remaining' places. If accepted, they are considered temporary students in the classes, which resumed the presential mode after the pandemic. This allows them to return to the academic environment. The programme also offers a 2-day preparatory course to help students to adapt to the academic life and to the cultural differences.

There can be up to 200 enrolments, but acceptance depends on subsidies, permitting the inclusion of up to 40 students per block, totalling about 200 students per year. This also includes 1. a mentorship program, pairing a student from the programme with another university student to facilitate academic and social integration; 2. a walking tour game, both for temporary and permanent students, aims to foster a sense of belonging for refugees by experiential learning. It begins with an intercultural urban tour that promotes citizenship beyond mere reception. This sensory and emotional experience involves discovering local places, history, and heritage sites while engaging with other students. Each group receives a set of twenty cards and a city map, with rules to ensure they do not disturb the public or break traffic laws. Groups can use smartphones for navigation and communication with map tool/gps; camera with selfie feature, App messages. The designated area on the map serves as the game playground, where participants can find unique buildings, statues, and art, taking photos along the way. Groups of 5 or 6 participants have 75 minutes to locate treasures in the city and return to the classroom.

The participation of stakeholders in these actions aims to strengthen ties with academia, seeking not only temporary inclusion in courses but also enrolment in full bachelor's or master's programmes. However, the procedures for making student admissions more inclusive, democratic, and humanitarian may be revised.

The programme seeks to benefit from **digital platforms and Apps** that speed the enrolment and admission processes for refugees, facilitating their navigation along the bureaucratic barriers. Technologies that provide resources for cultural integration and online learning are also used to increase educational accessibility, especially to those that can have difficulty in attending in person due to different restrictions, such as living in asylum centres.

**Philanthropy** plays a crucial role in financing these educational initiatives, complementing the budged provided by the university. The programme depends on donations and on volunteers' support to supply the necessary resources, such as laptops and travel expenses for students. Philanthropic efforts help to support and to expand this programme, ensuring that more refugees may access higher education and contribute to both the local and to their home societies.

Regarding **sovereignty**, the programme emphasises the need for a more inclusive approach in the national policies context that often restrict the access of refugees to education and to the resources. By offering education for refugees to become active agents of change, the programme challenges the notion of refugees as mere help receivers, promoting a narrative of integration and contribution to the hosting country.

The **main challenge** is to find new donors to promote inclusion through training and work experiences, as well as to raise awareness among staff, faculty, and students about the university's social action. Cooperation between departments and with the municipality is also essential to provide benefits to refugees. To secure funding, a change in attitude is necessary to transform immigrants from mere receivers into active agents of change, especially in a context of conservative governments that tighten borders and limit budgets.

#### **Learning beyond limits - startup**

The startup created in Berlin in 2015 was an organisation with a not-for-profit startup Platform at a time when the flow was of about 900,000 or 1 million Syrians in Germany, at a favourable political time during Angela Merkel's term. The startup underwent changes in name and in goals. Providing an official name is currently one of the greatest problems regarding the official register. The startup employs about 38 individuals in a coworking space and, along its existence, has sought partnerships for obtaining **philanthropy** and with universities to develop educational programmes that included 2-year online courses, with emphasis on German language learning and on reskilling.

The head of the training (ILB, 2024) of this startup is a Latin-American migrant that underwent the recognition and admission process at a European university. According to the head of the programmes, **the challenge of integrating refugees in German universities** is significant, partly due to the curricular differences and to the language complexity. The English language turns to be less important, differently from Latin America, where foreign language means the English language. Moreover, many refugees seek work, economic independence, and education, realizing that obtaining a diploma can be uncertain, especially for those over 35 years of age.

The company already provided free online learning opportunities for refugees and underserved communities. After 9 years, the startup business model will be phased out in 2024, and will proceed as a sort of a limited liability company, focusing on the work market for migrants and refugees, rather than on access to higher education.

The Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) (Aljaraideh, 2019; Akdağ Kurnaz & Arı, 2024; Yaşar & Atay, 2023) offered by the startup are of the most diverse content providers. They emit certification, which is more recognised by the demonstration of skills acquired than by the teaching mode, which makes these certifications important for employers. This approach reflects fitting the needs of the work market and the refugees' reality. A large number of the refugees are over 30 years old when they arrive, with diverse academic backgrounds and professional experience.

ILB (2024) observes that the COVID-19 pandemic had a double impact on online studies, especially for refugees in asylum camps, increasing the demand for virtual education, but also revealing the lack of access to devices and to connectivity.

During the World Refugee Day in June 2020, the startup gathered participants from Berlin, Beirut and Amman, all focused on learning English to facilitate access to higher education. The startup also recognised the importance of technical courses, such as nursing and building, which allow refugees to acquire practical skills while contributing to society in a qualified way.

The **digital platform** of the startup remains active but now focuses on helping users secure jobs and facilitate access to university. As a result, the initial million people who arrived in Germany have decreased, with some integrating through higher education; however, due to the high propaganda within these numbers, it is difficult to know the exact figures. Some statistics indicate that over 40% are currently employed.

The startup has partnered with the LinkedIn network to create economic and employment opportunities using technology to realign training programmes for reskilling and upskilling. For example, a person with a chemistry degree, unable to work in the industry, could enter the job market by other sought-after professions, such as data analysis, cybersecurity, or artificial intelligence.

As regards **GovTech and sovereignty**, now with platform regulation and artificial intelligence, one of the goals is to connect project participants with potential employers. The startup organised a networking event financed by the JP Morgan Bank, whereby an employee acted as a mentor, engaging in conversations grouped according to similar themes. The startup facilitates this connection by collaborating with companies offering Sensitive Training workshops to debunk certain biases and increase awareness that employers are not inherently 'evil.' However, an employer may reject qualified candidates based on their German language proficiency or be biased against race, religion (e.g., hijab-wearing women), or the Arabic name of an individual.

Posture and culture play a significant role in an employer's affirmative decision-making process, in which thoughts such as "I won't do this" or "this is good publicity for my company" come into play. This contrasts with a university department focused on inclusion and diversity, which may advocate affirmatively for hiring decisions.

Over the years and due to the **decrease in philanthropic support**, the startup faced financial difficulties for its sustainability, lacking support to pay salaries and to keep the online platform, which is the highest expense. The political, legal and migratory situation has changed in Europe to a more conservative perspective, which added to the problems caused by COVID-19. After nine years of work, the startup managed to place around 200 individuals in higher education. They came from Syria, Turkey, the Middle East, Asia, and Northern and Eastern Africa, including Lebanon, Jordan, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Eritrea.

In the current scenario, the **main challenge** of the startup is to reinvent itself in the long term, thinking of the social business with great creativity, organisation, enthusiasm and resilience to attract funds and to include the most vulnerable through work.



Figure 1 Topics in the interviews (ILA; ILB, 2024) - guidelines for analyzing

#### National integration: Higher education and jobs

According to the analyses of experience and of the literature, the presence and strengthening of certain actors and actions towards education for immigrants are perceived to be coherent with the economic change in the Eastern dystopia and reveals the importance of raising awareness to start over. This means recovering suspended rights whether for accessing higher education or for the democratisation of innovations, with responsible digital uses (Jonas, 1985; Gomez, 2009). All of this should be consonant with the responsibility for environmental conservation, for the care with identification and for the datafication of individuals.

Raising awareness of the situation of those that intend to study shows to be a human requirement as one of the paths towards citizenship practice (Freire, 2016), recognition and problematisation of the hindrances faced by refugees and institutions in planning/designing more inclusive educational policies (Villa, 2021).

To make the pedagogical work more inclusive, some European countries have a specific complementary budget for public policies and actions (Cf. Unangst, 2019), in public-private partnerships, to deal with the arrival and national integration of refugees. For this, they stimulate philanthropy, volunteering, and solidarity for national integration via secondary, technical or higher education. The act of educating in social, scientific and digital market uncertainties implies inserting individuals and their circumstances in the learning process, since the exponential growth of forced migrants makes it difficult to think of a project without their collaboration.

National integration involves a veiled aspect of the internationalisation of Education (De Wit et al., 2020; Bosio & De Wit, 2024; Carron et al., 2023) with refugees, which may seem to be an exception action. When forcibly displaced, individuals, as historical subjects, significantly impact the access to higher education in the host country, be it for the cultural, linguistic or academic barriers imposed, even if universities adopt an international teaching and research perspective besides community service.

As per Schcriewer (2011), internationalisation is a twin term for globalisation that, in the dynamics of the interconnected and interdependent society, follows the narratives of IOs and of other international actors that influence the fate of countries, their citizens, education and of migratory pressures. *Internationalisation emerged as a term of international Right. It has been employed as from the XIX century to refer to the limitations of a State sovereignty over the totality or part of its national territory ...in favour of other states or of the whole of the international Society* (Cf. Schcriewer, 2011, p. 41 - free translation).

The strong influence of the IOs standards and guidelines in the international society affect identities, interests (Cf. Finnemore, 2017) and regional and international cooperation. UNESCO, the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015) and SDG 4 seek to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education [...] and ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university".

During the COVID-19, UNESCO (2020) launched the Global Coalition for Education with significant corporate services to poorer countries, in the remote mode with high, low and without technology. This initiative did not prosper as expected in long-lasting actions due to the severe infrastructure and budgetary restrictions in weak, or quite weak states, countries that face long-lasting crises and from where the majority seeks refuge (Jackson & Sorensen, 2018).

In the ambit of its possibilities, the university follows this movement and, by proceeding with the SDGs, opens to these global guidelines. It views national integration actions by the fair access of those seeking asylum; with a refugee status; receiving humanitarian protection; with temporary residence; with a visa to reunite with the family or that is a member of a certain family; or is even part of the family of someone that received humanitarian protection (Cf. UNESCO, 2019; Gomez, 2022; SDSN Australia/Pacific, 2017).

However, due to the lack of equitable opportunities in some countries, in the international right, justice is ensured to advocate these rights and humanitarian and/or financial aid to refugees, and access to education, to those still living in refugee camps, "outside the legal system" (Cf. Agamben, 1998). National integration by enrolment in education, scholarship or research grant should ensure that right, recognise the migrant status and the previous professional knowledge-certifications of those that have specialized in a specific area, besides facilitating the revalidation of diplomas.

## The university and the State way of existing in digital platforms

According to the findings of this study, governance has been produced by using digital technology to modernise the public sector. It thus observes the guidelines of the World Bank, from a perspective of education as a service or good. In the current digital economy, the World Bank Group (WBG, 2022; WB, 2022) and partners of the UN family, among others, provide financing and technical assistance to support the digital transformation of governments. They also support the access and quality of the service for citizens and for the communication organisations to increase transparency and reduce corrupt practices in the society institutions.

The Brazilian State modernisation of the management system, e.gov.br (Federal law 14,129, March 2021), for example, aims to offer digital products and public services structured on databases and on information obtained from users. The partnering Bigtechs (Apple, Microsoft, Facebook, Amazon etc) are key for defining personal and institutional profiles and for obtaining sensitive data. With the participation of users, decision-making allows attaining digital governance and improving public services. For example, it contributes to access the migratory process (sisconare.mdasj.gov.br), higher education (e.mec) or to jobs. This innovation mode seeks to recover the State reliability, safety and transparency. (Cf. Brasil, 2024; Gomez, 2022) For this, it uses platforms with stable, efficient, safe and fast 5G connectivity, to provide the population with access until 2030, according to the agreements celebrated.

Alauzen (2019) states that the State modernisation or "State Platform", seeks to reduce the "administrative costs" for citizens/users; a simplification policy for registering new

accounts for users; facilitating their procedures with data already registered by management systems; producing individuals identity for the state (or a regime to verify users' identity in public services online); exchanging data; adopting identification technologies; platform strategy (policies for developing electronic management; opening public data); aligning with the digital platform industries (Facebook, GitHub, Google); design work should focus on accessibility, comfort, traceability, and the conflicting nature of changes, while recognising technical issues as political. It should also incorporate digital sovereignty and the ergonomics of public services. (Weller, 1998; Gélédan, 2016 in Alauzen, 2019, p.1) [free translation].

The State modernisation process for Agamben (1998, p. 7) implies the decline of the political system of the modern state-nation [that] occurs when the nexus between a certain location (the territory) and a certain ordainment (the State)" "[...] mediatised by automatic rules of life inscription (birth, or the nation), enters a lasting crisis, and the State decides to directly take on the cure of the biological life of the nation." (Agamben, 2010, p. 128)].

A question can be raised: Does the state count on know-how, critical mass and technology to be sovereign? Bound migration and education are inevitably affected and legislated by extraterritorial instances when technological packets are bought from the Bigtechs; the state agrees and does not regulate the uses and reaches of access to connectivity. This goes beyond the democracy and sovereignty of a country, since in the use for public management and for rendering services, the constant delivery of sensitive data in the worst conditions and with social inequality is 'normal', even outside this system, be it for a personal choice, or for the social-economic or cultural conditions. Big data will undoubtedly plays a significant role as an important political actor in this new order. From a humanistic and inclusive perspective, the protection of sensitive data, education, migration, and the right to life are inalienable rights.

The possibility of the national State (mis)aligning globally to a way of being to 'simplify processes', debureaucratise and cheapen the services for millions of extremely vulnerable people, thus exposes two fundamental qualities that challenge the statenation: a digital sovereignty and the ergonomics of services in digital public spaces. (Linhardt, 2018 apud Alauzen, 2019).

## Modernisation vs sovereignty

State modernisation is partly supported by how much the population stands the pressure of precariousness, social-economic and digital economy inequalities, making it a hostage of this movement. The State loses its sovereignty and the ergonomics of the digital space to the Bigtechs, (Cf. Linhardt, 2018 apud Alauzen 2019; Zuboff, 2019). Bigtechs are present in the most intimate space of life and in the educational practices and become inefficient when guiding projects and installing virtual borders, with a corporate bias without promoting citizenship.

In a humanistic and inclusive perspective, protection of sensitive data, education, migration and life are inalienable rights, interdependent with the State responsibility (Jackson & Sorensen, 2018) and, as per Agamben (2010), non-privatisable and

irrevocable beyond the migratory or circumstantial condition. Nevertheless, the decision power of the state, by privatising rights, by securitising refugees, turn them into a threat or enemies, by judicialising rights, by the technological hypersurveillance of the borders and of life. As an exception, disconnects the individual from the citizen, thus delegitimising the State-Nation (Cf. Agamben, 2010 apud Gomez, 2022).

The State new way of being derives from the boundless ability of Bigtech organisations to treat and to manage information, taking on social and political functions that traditionally belong to the States-Nation (Cf. Levy apud Hermoso, 2021, s.p.). From this perspective, it is worth asking "how to balance the power of the State-platforms?" (Idem). For Tim O'Reilly (2010), the Platform Government with global reach to a massive public privilege those most favoured by the freedom of choice and by the quality of connectivity.

The question is whether the regulation of the global educational governance, in an interplay between profit and philanthropy, extraterritorially legislated around the platforms, becomes efficacious for citizenship at any moment. That is, when operating by selection, exception and exclusion, it no longer cares about the subject's sovereignty or, therefore, about the social bonds.

A competitive pace alongside the global economy is increasingly imposed on public universities and startups (UE, 1999; Amin,1988; Ryabova & Cherkasova, 2020), besides the dynamics of access to digital education on multiple platforms and devices, in public/private hybridisation. During the COVID-19, personal data was disclosed because it was necessary, but this cannot be considered a normal situation. (Cf. Suoranta, 2019). In the case of refugees, the maximum expression of vulnerability is especially very important to ensure the right to confidentiality, avoiding the control and tracking of data.

As stated by Villa (2021), the issue is "how to make that the norms of governance in education do not solely include part of the population, how to ban the elitist character of these norms." He also says that, "in times of deep technological transformations, norms eventually further deepen the inequalities among Latin-American people, among the poor peoples of the developing world." (Cf. Villa, 2021).

Some pedagogical considerations emerging from this scenario raise awareness of the importance of emancipatory education beyond palliative policies. (Linklater, 2004). The growing use of social networks and Bigtech platforms in education calls into question the autonomy, responsibility and innovation possible for providing education with some sovereignty.

The issue is to find a way of educating and living (Cf. Guattari, 2009), of making the university exist. The 'universality and totality' of the 'universitas,ātis' is questioned by the governance of data and educational cooperation in multi-platforms, at multilevel, managed by corporative global actors. The international global dimension is also managed by numerical algorithms, generative artificial intelligence (GAI) but still by hybrid learning modes. The act of educating via platforms is being questioned beyond

the agreements, since it implies the sovereignty of subjects that hand in their data to learn and to produce knowledge.

#### Sovereignty as the ability to educate and to decide

"The refugees' category is defined as a reference to the State and would not exist without the concept of sovereignty and the relationship among State, citizenship and territory. On the one hand, the existence of the state-run system, founded on sovereignty, is what makes the refugees' category understandable. On the other hand, the practice of protecting, solving, including and excluding refugees is what contributes to reassert sovereignty and the state-run system, reproducing this relationship. (Cf. Haddad apud Bertino, 2014, p. 86) [free translation].

The production of educational governance implies sovereignty of the state, popular and digital sovereignty, sovereignty of the subjects that learn and become able to decide as a political act, with the possibility of destituting the colonialist and elitist character. For Agamben (2010), sovereignty, exception and biopower are closely bonded; sovereignty is thus the capacity to decide on life and on death; on who to include/exclude from the political order. The access and permanence of the most vulnerable to public services, to sovereign education that gives rise to criticism, to creativity and to the transformation that leads certain countries to decide/accept, expel/host people in a forced migration situation. The mutual interests among their conflicts does not exempt states from their responsibilities. (Cf. Jackson & Sorensen, 2018).

#### Social, responsible and strategic philanthropy

International students may exceptionally request/receive a BAföG (Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz) loan online, or private loans to study in Germany. These are available due to the financial situation of the parents or tutors, and to their needs to afford the cost of higher education. As with the Federal Training Assistance Act (BAföG) interests are not charged on the value that could reach 861 EUR per month in 2019 (Cf. Unangst, 2019). This applies only to those without parental support, who meet the requirements, count on academic acceptance and a residence permit, or the possibility to remain in Germany, with a savings or a private account, or an account receiving transfer from the parents with which to support themselves. The Expatrio scholarship, for example, is another possibility in Germany.

The access and permanence in education count on the transfers and subsidies of governments, institutions, donors, voluntaries and IOs that seek to develop policies and public actions that are reliable, transparent and innovative to facilitate national access and inclusion for refugees (Cf.UNHCR, 2023a). For protection and inclusion, refugees may resort to collaboration, to exchange between institutions, faculty members and students, and to philanthropy with programmes working on global or regional themes. Refugee participation occurs beyond the walls of the university programme and the startup when candidates as stakeholders act in research groups, sport, cultural activities and students' organisations (Araujo, 2016).

The main global sponsors are in Indonesia, in the United States, in the United Kingdom, and in Germany. Among them are the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Open Society

Foundation, Foundation Centre - Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA), Ikea; Ford Foundation; MasterCard Foundation to establish the SDGs Philanthropy Platform (SDGsfunders.org); J. P. Morgan Private Bank; google.org; and others that may be consulted in the Global Philanthropy Forum (wwwphilanthropyforum.org) or in the World Giving Index/CAFonline.org.

Strategic philanthropy or philanthrocapitalism, of the IOs, of national and international NGOs and of corporate actors, when responding to SDG4 goals (Matijascic, 2024), decide to reserve the value of their taxes to direct them to certain causes. When they make use of their 'riches', financial resources and influence, to combine philanthropy with capitalist practices that seek to contribute to solving simple or complex social problems, the concept is philanthrocapitalism (Cf. The economist, 2006, p. 9; Kunrath & Oliven, 2020).



Figure 2 e.g. The CLCC Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium - composed of institutional partners: foundations, corporate philanthropy, academic institutions, and community organizations, all committed to expanding access to higher Ed. for refugees. Source: https://connectedlearning4refugees.org/ Dec.2024

Philanthropy and higher education are 'inter-logged', that is, integrated in a system and, by registering their names and passwords, can have access to organisations and individuals that provide and receive human, financial and support resources. This is made through programmes that facilitate the access of the most vulnerable to public services, counting on mediation and intervention to decide on the destination of the funds.

Responsible philanthropy can develop algorithms to identify foundation grants and overseas development assistance for projects or communities to overcome social inequality. This means that philanthropy is welcome when the university or the startups generate citizen inclusion and social justice towards sovereign education to emancipate people. In favour of personal development, this education raises awareness, promotes

skills and knowledge for better living conditions, so that refugees can contribute to their hosting communities and to their country of origin.

#### DISCUSSION AND REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

For analysing how the dynamics of platformisation, philanthropy, and sovereignty affect refugees' access to and retention in higher education, I present tables and analyses along with a list of key facts derived from interviews with educational leaders. This highlights the actions, challenges, and stakeholders involved in both the positive and negative implications of access and retention for refugees in higher education in the current context

The literature considers that education is one of the last aspirations of refugees, presenting immense challenges and, especially, with the potential for individual and social transformation when they incorporate the refugees' situation into the learning process. The campus of the university, the service of the startup providers or the intuitive platforms, such as the UNHCR ones, are socialisation territories and mobilise stories of life, methodologies, risk mapping, personal and institutional decision records, often extraterritorial.

The challenge is to promote mutual, intercultural education with social quality, with adequate methodologies, infrastructure, pertinent didactic material and responsive teachers. This implies taking care of refugees' health (mental, fears, displacement traumas etc) and of the spaces to learn and to culturally and linguistically integrate. The best educational governance practices imply responsibility, care with the learning contents, with the methodology and with assessments.

In the current context, it will be necessary to take care of datafication, since it 'reduces' the discourse and the scope of complex concepts, such as teaching and learning (Jarke & Breiter, 2019; Knox et al. 2020; Mirrlees & Alvi, 2020). From this perspective, education view and practices tend to turn lecturers and students into 'data' likely to be digitised. In digital environments, it is about seeing a way for inclusion, collaboration, autonomy and sovereignty in the educational system. The emancipatory, constructive/rhizomatic perspective of education sees education not only as a means of acquiring knowledge, but also as a tool for social transformation.

Education as a genuinely human activity, is a *cultural action for freedom* (Freire, 2016; Gadotti et.al. 2003) and an enormous challenge. In the algorithmic capitalist society of control and surveillance, it is thought of as an asset [or data] negotiable among countries (WTO,1995; OMC, 1999), by multilateral agreements with content and information providers. Freire coined the term *banking education* to criticise an instrumental and antidialogical education; education that generates silencing and oppression for the people.

The sovereignty of the university cannot be compromised by the influence of Bigtechs that force sovereign States to give up control and even the ergonomics of digital educational spaces, causing social fragility, thus compromising education that responds to this economic model of digitalisation/algorithmisation of services. It is very important to invest in these areas of research, opening up several paths for

multidisciplinary, complex, rhizomatic education in the sense of non-linearity, interconnectedness, multiplicity, decentralisation, adaptability that allow finding forms of inclusion and citizenship through education.

Raising the debate on the economic, political factors and adherence to the guidelines of international actors also facilitates thinking of integration by higher education. The university and the startup adhere to the SDGs/UN. The startup focuses on training for work, and the university focuses on academic training.

Table 1 Inclusion programme at the university

Theme/Category	Summary of findings
Context	Europe - Shelter City (2024), equitable distribution of refugees in camps across
Context	the Netherlands and Member States.
Programme Start	Started in 2015 during the Syrian refugee crisis, with 2 PhD students, 1
i iograninie Statt	
T 1 ' T'''	manager, 1 project leader, and volunteers.
Inclusion Initiative	Focused on education, work experience, and community integration.
	Recognises barriers such as language and documentation.
Access	Offers bachelor's courses to refugees, requiring diploma validation and fluency
	in the local language/English.
Enrolments	Up to 200 places/year, with 40 students per block, depending on subsidies.
	Includes mentorship and a 2-day preparatory course.
Urban Tours	Intercultural walking game for integration, fostering belonging through
	experiential learning in city group activities.
Digital Platform	Use of digital platforms and apps to speed up admission processes and to
Č	facilitate online learning.
Philanthropy	Crucial for funding, providing resources such as laptops and travel expenses
	through donations.
Sovereignty	Promotes inclusive policies for refugees, encouraging them to become agents of
	change rather than passive recipients.
Main Challenge	Finding donors, raising awareness of social action within the university, and
· ·	strengthening cooperation amid conservative governments.

Source: Data collected by author on the interview-visit with Leader (Cf. ILA, May, 2023).

The tables present a list of key facts derived from the interviews with educational leaders, highlighting the actions, challenges, and stakeholders involved in the access and retention of refugees in higher education in the current context.

Yet both consider the influence of the norms and guidelines of global actors that affect life and cultural identity interests, and regional and international cooperation in education. Both at the university social action and at the startup, subsidies for projects last 5 years, and are linked to partnerships with Bigtechs and philanthropists (Cf. ILB, 2024). One of the risks of philanthropists is to divert the purpose of education according to their interests or quality with adherence to neoliberalism. However, the open question is "Is government as a platform the epistome of a neoliberal concept? (Cf. Favier-Baron; Ortiz; Woillet, 2021; Woillet, 2021).

The 'end' of the university sovereignty is inserted in the agenda by the startup, which follows a social business model. The startup uses a sensitive workshop as a training methodology, maybe in the sense of Kurt Lewin and Carl Roger, trying to deconstruct some certainties and increase awareness of their not being 'evil employers'. In turn, the public university seeks openness to inclusion and diversity for newcomers, which does

not prevent thinking 'exceptionally' about a business model. This is one of the issues when thinking about a job perspective. This 'end' and this 'exception' open questions about the end of the university (Bonevecchio, 2002). From a global perspective, the non-use of the word 'university' indicates that this is just another type of higher education. This is a narrative that requires studies and continuous assessment.

Table 2 Learning beyond limits – Startup

Learning beyond in	1
Theme/Category	Summary of findings
Context	The startup emerged during a favourable time, amid the influx of approximately 900,000 to 1 million Syrians into Germany under Angela Merkel's leadership.
Programme Start	Started in 2015 in Berlin, offering free online educational courses aimed at refugees, focusing on German language learning and professional reskilling.
Startup Profile	Initially a non-profit organisation focused on access to higher education, it is now transitioning into a limited liability company focused on labour market integration
Integration	Significant challenges arise from curricular differences and the complexity of the German language; many refugees prioritise economic independence and professional integration. The startup had placed around 200 individuals in higher education.
Digital Platform	Offers a range of MOOCs with certifications that emphasise practical skills aligned with labour market demands.
Philanthropy	The startup faced financial difficulties due to declining philanthropic support, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and political changes in Europe.
Sovereignty	Facilitates connections between participants and employers, addressing biases through workshops and events, while promoting sovereignty by fostering autonomy and economic independence.
Main challenge	Reinventing itself as a sustainable social enterprise, attracting funding and ensuring professional inclusion for the most vulnerable in a conservative context.

Source: Data collected by author on the interview-visit with Leader (Cf. ILB, May, 2023).

The relevance of a university degree (Cf. ILA, 2024) in comparison with vocational training and micro certifications of startups (Cf. ILB, 2024), in a scenario of rapid technological evolution and the demands of the job market is a reality. The startup uses its own platform and aligns itself with technology companies exploring new forms of training that can be more accessible and adapted to the specific needs of groups, such as refugees. From this perspective, microcertifications and short-term professional training programmes, as opposed to diplomas, are their alternative to offer practical skills, allowing individuals to quickly qualify for the positions available. Additionally, it provides an alternative for those who face barriers to enter higher education institutions.

Resilience is manifested in both cases, pointing to the need of recovering refugees' suspended rights. In this movement of forced displacement, guidance from public policies is essential for migrants not to take on the responsibility for facing crises along with sociopolitical and digital changes alone. State policies can learn from the situation

and from the university and vice-versa. The principle of sovereignty and collaboration between different actors needs to be strengthened without distorting the social and plural character of education.

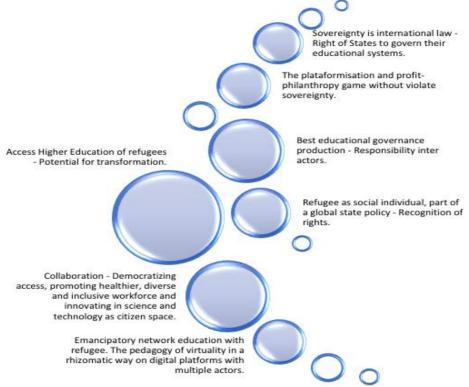


Figure 3
Research results for the process of collaboration inter actors

#### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The analysis of the notions emerging from this research highlights the complexity of opening higher education institutions to refugees, especially in the contexts of research and educational initiatives. Recognising vulnerability as a potential to transform higher education access for migrants and refugees is crucial. However, macro solutions often fail to address the individualised yet globally interconnected challenges faced by refugees, whose situations are shaped by the dynamics of sovereignty, platformisation, philanthropy, and the denial of rights.

It is fundamental to consider the interplay of Govtech, digital platforms, sovereignty, and philanthropy in the governance of forced migration. This approach establishes a framework for global jurisdiction, strategically leveraging the concepts of digital platforms and the principles of sovereignty, the mobilisation of free protocols and the supervision of databases and traceability records.

National Sovereignty appears as a subversive issue or a utopia in the third millennium when the interference of the decision-making power of international actors affects cultural and educational policies in contexts of inequalities, judicialisation and securitisation of life. The profit-philanthropy game can violate sovereignty, people's life and freedom, along with democratic institutions.

This undermines the democratic character of education, when government responsibility is relegated to companies that prioritise profit, strengthen philanthropy and postpone the inclusion and redistribution of 'wealth,' using emergency and mitigation policies. This disturbs citizenship. The experience with policies to mitigate states of emergency is confirmed to be inefficient. When the precariousness of people to access different platforms inhibits communication and dialogue, it strengthens the culture of silence, generating a network or multiplicities of oppressions as per Angela Davis.

This movement promoted a kind of society that is alert to ethics in the digital space. Considering the issues of inequalities, racism, bullying and the epistemicide of exiled knowledge, these topics have gone viral in this space. Thus, epistemic and algorithmic justice must be a priority in higher formation, whether academic or professionalizing.

In the State and in universities, the rule "who to include or exclude from education through selection" is increasingly strengthened. The autonomy of academic and professional work becomes vulnerable when micro certifications are able 'to place' 'more' people in the digital job market than a university. Undoubtedly, education on platforms and applications has become viable with the right to disconnect from values, from instrumental ethics to connective reason.

The university and the startup experience carried out with migrants seek to deconstruct some certainties and increase awareness beyond the educational situation. The greater paradox is accepting the challenge of knowing that they will be blocked from accessing university or work, but resilient by observing the requirements to be followed for this; to know the 'toughening' of humanitarian policies. To mitigate the 'severity of the crisis' is a moderation that suspends and does not open up to problematisation. In the case of forced migration, the challenge is finding more inclusive forms to educate within and with the community beyond technology. To educate for solidarity, sovereignty, creativity, critical thinking and awareness, for complexity and contemporary uncertainties.

The challenge may be to reinvent education in an emancipatory network and the pedagogy of virtuality - beyond the constructive or constructivist perspective - in a rhizomatic way, in different dimensions, also on digital and virtual platforms with multiple actors. The Virtual Cultural Circle (Gomez, 2004) as methodology and the collaboration among different actors can improve access and opportunities for learning and for supporting refugees.

Philanthropy plays a significant role in this framework, as charitable organisations and foundations can provide essential funding and resources to support educational initiatives for refugees. They often fill gaps left by government efforts and can drive

innovative solutions with other partners, tailored to the specific needs of displaced individuals.

Sovereignty in education refers to the right of States to govern their educational systems. It is a fundamental principle in international law and needs to be often discussed in the context of global governance, human rights and conflict between nations. However, in the context of refugees, this concept becomes complex, as displaced individuals may not have access to the same educational resources as those available to native citizens. An emancipatory perspective can emphasise the importance of refugees as active participants in their education, also ensuring that refugees have to have a voice in shaping their educational experiences.

Finally, this paradigm shift supported by the action of GovTech, philanthropists and sovereign platforms can be beneficial in different aspects: democratizing access to education and employment, promoting a healthier, more diverse, and inclusive workforce, and fostering innovation in science and technology from the path taken.

Digital educational governance may contribute to inclusion, equal opportunities and equity in refugees' access and permanence, using hybridisation and pedagogical innovations.

The conclusions underscore the risk that the educational proposal emphasises the global government of Bigtechs instead of autonomy, plurality, epistemic, pedagogical and algorithmic fairness, cultural diversity and self-determination in its various dimensions. The difficulties faced by refugees in education require a multifaceted approach that considers the roles of various stakeholders and of human rights policies that ensure equal access and ongoing support for the retention of refugees, one the most vulnerable groups, in higher education.

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