

O.M.A.H.A.I

is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization that is dedicated to fostering the processes of universal education among all people, with the goal of encouraging women and children to contribute their talents to the peace, security and well-being of humanity.



Ongoing Opportunity for Growth

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Advancing Education

Needs-based Improvements

Building Capacity

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Human Rights Sustainability

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Investigating the Past
Evaluating the Present
Planning for the Future



DRAFT REPORT

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The City of Reykjavik's Human Rights Policy

Article 9. Origin and nationality:¹

9.2: The City of Reykjavík as an employer: "The knowledge and qualifications of immigrants and persons of foreign origin shall be assessed on its own merit"

9.2.2: "Persons of foreign origin applying to work for or already employed by the City shall benefit from guidance for recognition of the educational qualifications which they possess."

9.3.1: "Variety and diversity in the community is reflected in daily activities with children and youth. They shall be given opportunities to maintain their mother tongue and present their cultural heritage."

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into 4 major parts:

First section: Questions related to general information, such as information on age, marital status and ethnicity.

Second section: Questions related to their status prior of arriving in Iceland, such as education, employment, sports and recreational activities.

Third section: Questions related to their status after arriving to Iceland, such as education, Icelandic courses, employment, sports and recreational activities.

Fourth section: Questions related to the mother tongue education for children after arriving in Iceland.

The Participants

Þátttakendur rannsóknarinnar voru 40, 16 karlmenn og 24 konur. Þau eru öll búsett á Íslandi og hafa arabísku eða dari að móðurmáli og koma frá miðausturlöndum og norður-Afríku. Flest þeirra eða 85% komu til Íslands 2016 eða síðar.

Consent

All participants signed a written consent prior to answering the questionnaire. Also, it was emphasized at the beginning of the process that participation is entirely voluntary, and that non-participation is not going to adverse practical consequences for the participants.

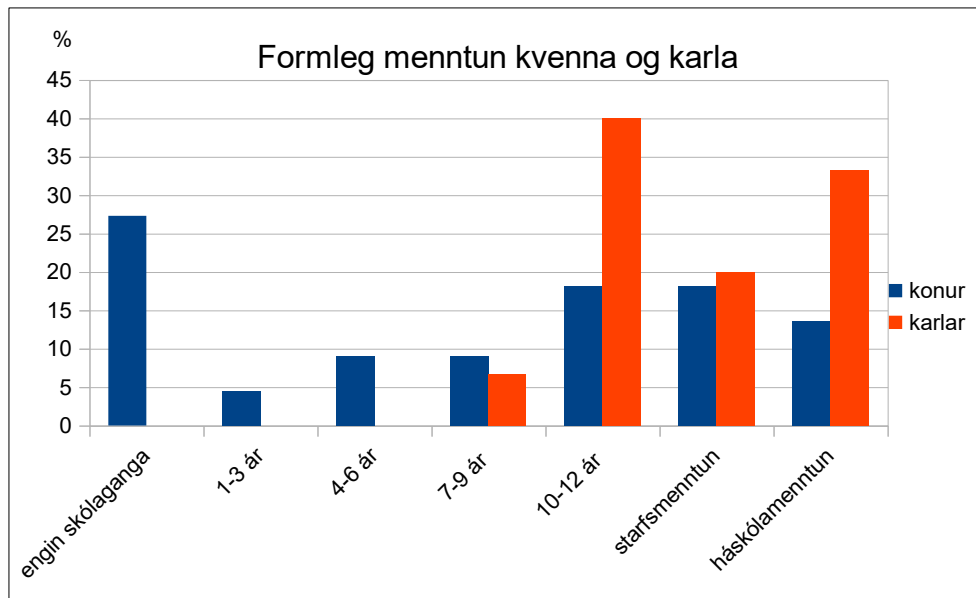
¹ <https://reykjavik.is/en/city-of-reykjaviks-human-rights-policy#9.%20Origin%20and%20nationality>



Niðurstöður

Menntun

Spurt var um skólagöngu og menntun þátttakenda. Af þeim höfðu 16,2% ekki gengið í skóla, 2,7% gengið í grunnskóla í 1-3 ár, 5,4% í 4-6 ár, 8,1% í 7-9 ár, 27% hafði fengið 10-12 ára skólagöngu, 18,9% lokið starfsmenntun og 21,6% háskólagráðu. Af þeim körlum sem svöruðu höfðu allir gengið í skóla. Þá höfðu 6,7% karla 7-9 ára skólagöngu, 40% þeirra 10-12 ára skólagöngu, 20% hafði lokið starfsnámi og 33% var með háskólapróf. Hins vegar hafði rúmur fjórðungur eða 27% þeirra kvenna sem svöruðu ekki hlotið neina skólagöngu, tæp 14% hafði gengið í skóla í 1-6 ár, 9% í 7-9 ár, 14% í 10-12 ár, 18% var með einhvers konar starfsmenntun og rúm 13% háskólamenntun. Á mynd 1 má sjá samanburð á menntunarstigi kvenna og karla.

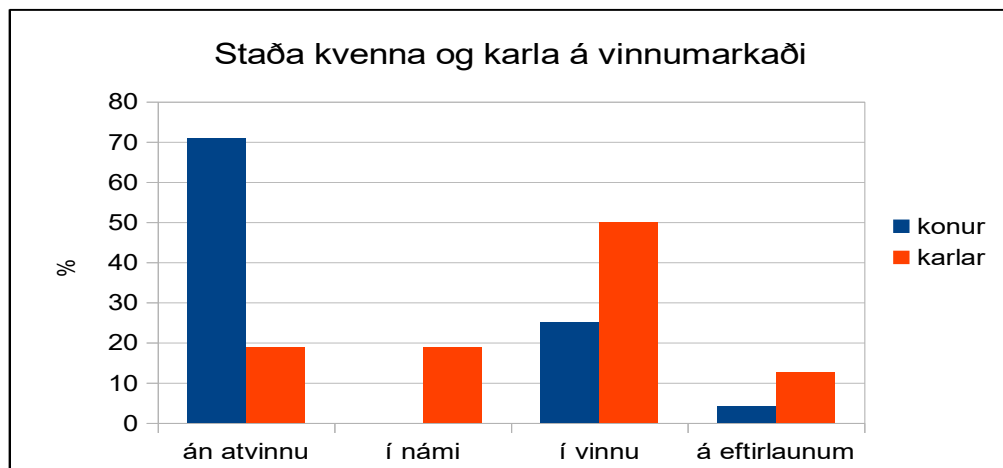


Mynd 1. Skólaganga og menntun kvenna og karla



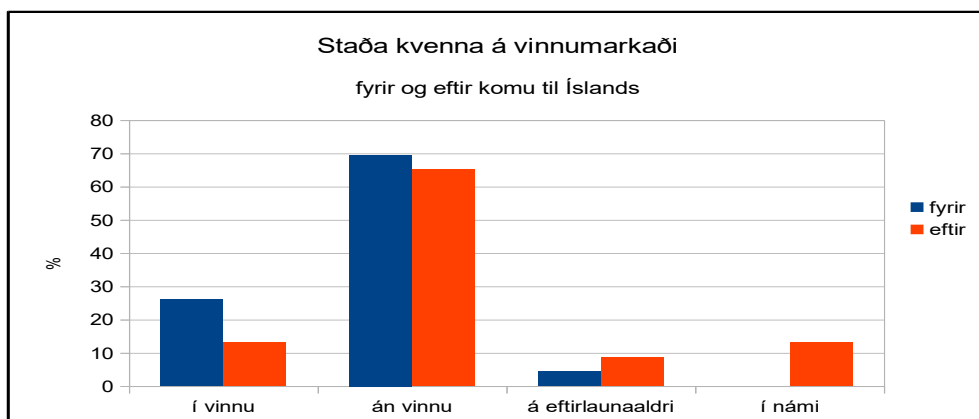
Undirkaflí Staða á vinnumarkaði

Helmingur hópsins stundaði ekki í vinnu á þeim tíma sem gagnaöflun fór fram, 7,5% voru í námi, 35% í vinnu og 7,5% á eftirlaunum. Þegar þessir þættir eru skoðaðir eftir kynjum kemur fram að 18,8% karlanna voru án atvinnu og sama hlutfall þeirra í námi. Helmingur þeirra stundaði einhverja atvinnu og 12,5% var á eftirlaunum. Meðal kvennanna voru um 71% án atvinnu, fjórðungur þeirra stunduðu einhverja atvinnu og rúm 4% þeirra voru komnar á eftirlaun. Engin kvennanna í úrtakinu var í námi.



Mynd 2. Staða kvenna og karla á vinnumarkaði

Spurt var um stöðu á vinnumarkaði. Meðal kvenna voru rúmur fjórðungur eða 26% sem stunduðu atvinnu fyrir komuna til Íslands en eftir komu til landsins voru 13% með atvinnu. Þá voru um 70% án vinnu fyrir komu til lands en 65% án atvinnu á Íslandi. Konum á eftirlaunaaldri fjölgaði úr rúmum 4 í tæp 9%. Engin kvennanna var í námi fyrir komu til Íslands en 13% voru í námi á Íslandi þegar gagnasöfnun fór fram.

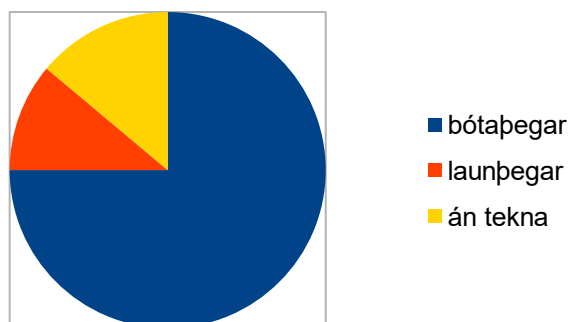


Mynd 3. Staða kvenna á vinnumarkaði



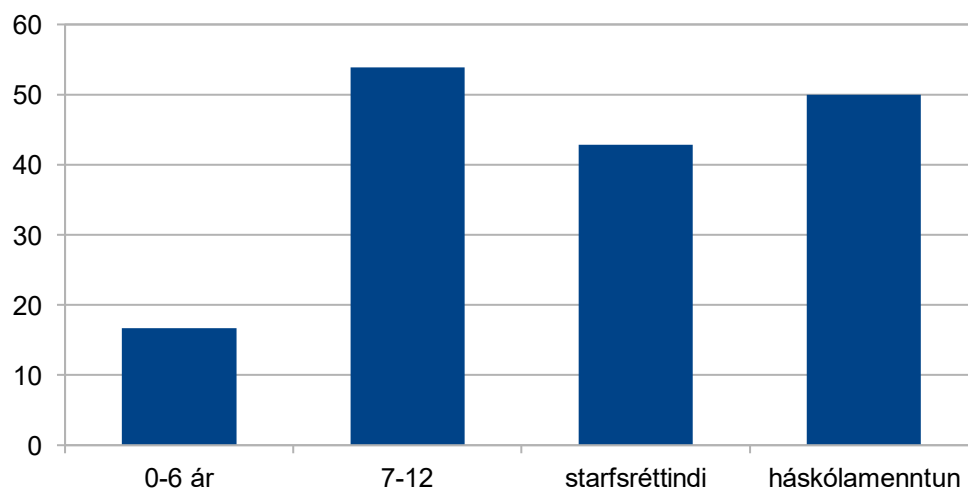
Efnahagsleg staða

Þátttakendur voru spurðir um efnahagslega stöðu. Þrír af hverjum fjórum þátttakendur fengu bætur frá hinu opinbera, félagslegar bætur eða atvinnuleysisbætur og 13% voru án tekna. Einungis 11,1% voru launþegar á þeim tíma sem gagnasöfnunin fór fram.



Mynd 4. Efnahagsleg staða, hlutfall bótaþega, launþega og þeirra sem voru án tekna

Skoðuð voru áhrif menntunar á virkni á vinnumarkaði og í námi. Meðal þeirra sem höfðu sex ára skólagöngu eða styttri voru tæp 17% í vinnu eða námi. Rúmur helmingur þeirra sem höfðu 7-12 ára skólagöngu var í vinnu eða námi og 43% þeirra sem höfðu starfsréttindi. Helmingur þeirra sem hafði lokið háskólaprófi var virkur í vinnu eða námi.



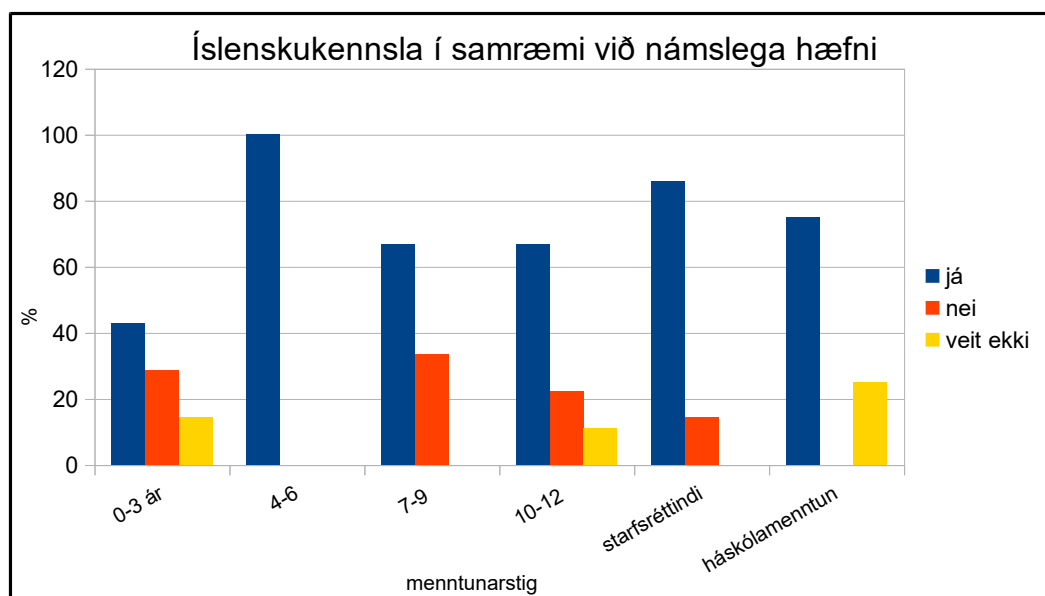
Mynd 5. Hlutfall þeirra sem eru í á vinnumarkaði og/eða námi út frá skólagöngu og menntun



Íslenskukennsla

Um 90% þátttakenda höfðu sótt a.m.k. 1 námskeið í íslensku. Tæpur helmingur hafði sótt 2-4 íslenskunámskeið en rúm 7% hafði sótt yfir 10 íslenskunámskeið. Þá var spurt hvort námskeiðin hefðu verið hæfilega þung og í samræmi við kunnáttu og námshæfni þáttakenda. Rúm 68% af þeim sem svöruðu töldu íslenskunámskeiðin vera hæfilega þung, tæp 16% töldu námskeiðin ekki vera í samræmi við kunnáttu þeirra, og önnur 16% voru ekki viss um hvort námskeiðin væru í samræmi við kunnáttu þeirra. Hér var ekki spurt ítarlegar, þ.e. hvort fólki þættu námskeiðin of krefjandi eða of auðveld.

Þátttakendur sem höfðu fengið íslenskukennslu voru spurðir hvort sú kennsla hefði verið í samræmi við námslega hæfni þeirra. Af þeim sem höfðu enga eða 1-3 ára skólagöngu svöruðu rúm 40% játandi, tæp 30% neitandi og 14% voru ekki viss. Þeir sem höfðu gengið 4-6 ár í skóla svöruðu allir játandi, að íslenskukennslan hefði verið í samræmi við námslega hæfni þeirra. Meðal þeirra sem höfðu gengið í skóla í 7-9 ár voru flestir eða þriðjungur sem svaraði að íslenskukennslan væri ekki í samræmi við þeirra námsgetu en tveir þriðju að kennslan hefði verið í samræmi við getu þeirra. Rúm 80% þeirra sem höfðu starfsréttindi taldi íslenskukennsluna vera í samræmi við eigin námsgetu. Þrír af hverjum fjórum háskólamenntuðum taldi íslenskukennsluna vera í samræmi við námslega hæfni þeirra. Á mynd ... má sjá samband menntunarstigs þátttakenda og hvort þeir töldu íslenskukennsluna vera í samræmi við námslega hæfni sína.



Mynd 6. Íslenskukennsla í samræmi við námslega hæfni



Áhugi á námskeiðium á móðurmáli

Spurt var hvort þátttakendur hefðu áhuga á að sækja einhvers konar námskeið á sínu móðurmáli. Um 92% svöruðu þeirri spurningu játandi. Engum þátttakendanna hafði boðist að sækja námskeið á móðurmáli sínu.

Börn og móðurmálskennsla

Þátttakendur voru spurðir um fjölda barna og hvort og hvar þau fengju kennslu í móðurmáli sínu. Börn þátttakenda voru 68 talsins. Tæpur helmingur þeirra eða 31 höfðu fengið móðurmálskennslu. Flest þeirra sem höfðu fengið móðurmálskennslu höfðu fengið hana í skólanum sínum, hluti þeirra höfðu fengið kennslu í mosku, sum fengu kennslu á heimilinu og önnur frá frjálsum félagasamtökum. Rúmur helmingur barna þátttakendana, eða 54% þeirra höfðu ekki fengið neina móðurmálskennslu á Íslandi.

Móðurmálskennsla fyrir börn	
heimili	6
skóli	16
moska	7
félagasamtök	2

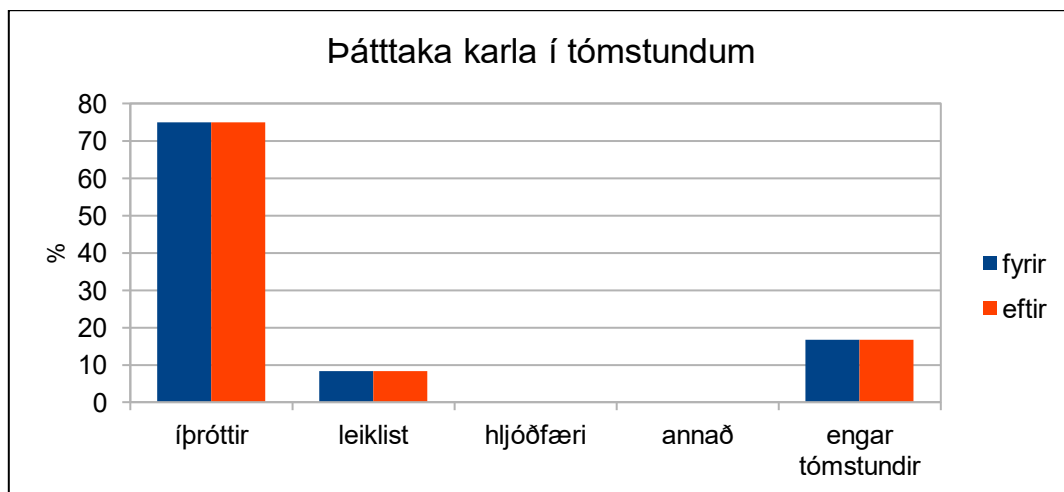
Tafla 1. Móðurmálskennsla fyrir börn

Fyrir þau börn sem fá móðurmálskennslu á arabísku, eru það skóli, moska, heimili eða félagasamtök sem veita þeim kennsluna.

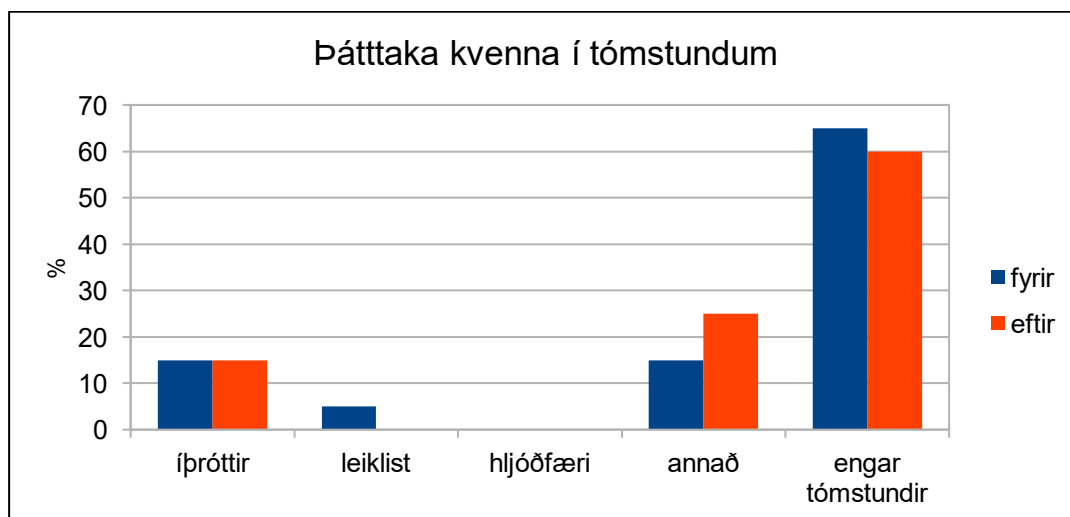


Virkni í tómstundum

Spurt var um virkni í tómstundum fyrir og eftir komuna til Íslands. Það var ekki mikla breytingu að sjá á virkni í tómstundum fyrir og eftir komuna til Íslands. Mun fleiri karlar en konur tóku þátt í íþróttum. Af þeim sem svöruðu tóku 75% karla þátt í íþróttastarfi en einungis 15% kvenna. Tæp 17% karla stunduðu engar tómstundir en 60-65% kvenna stunduðu engar tómstundir. Á myndum 5 og 6 má sjá þátttöku kvenna og karla í tómstunum fyrir og eftir komuna til Íslands. Myndirnar sýna hlutfall þátttakenda sem stunduðu íþróttir, leiklist, spiluðu á hljóðfæri, áttu önnur áhugamál eða stunduðu engar tómstundir.



Mynd 7. Þátttaka karla í tómstundum fyrir og eftir komuna til Íslands



Mynd 8. Þátttaka kvenna í tómstundum fyrir og eftir komuna til Íslands



Literature Review

The Afghan Population

Afghanistan is a poor country and the Afghan population is deprived of sufficient employment opportunities. Records show that Afghans have been migrating to Iran and Pakistan for many centuries. In the nineteenth century, thousands of Hazara people fled to Iran (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2006)². As a result, the oil boom in 1973 attracted many Afghan labor migrants to Pakistan, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries (Kronenfeld, 2008)³. When increasing numbers of workers from Pakistan migrated to the oil-rich Gulf States, this provided opportunities for Afghans to take up the jobs in Pakistan (International Crisis Group, 2009)⁴. During the oil boom, Afghans migrated to Iran and Pakistan legally. They were welcomed by both Iran and Pakistan. Both governments benefited from the cheap labor force. In Iran, Afghans worked in construction and on farms. They received very low wages (Ashrafi and Moghissi, 2002)⁵. Due to wars and conflict for more than thirty years, the educational system in Afghanistan became very fragile. In its 2016 report, NUFFIC states that “less than a quarter of the pupils complete the first 9 years of education while less than 10 percent pursue education until [grade] 12.” The report also addresses gender inequality in the educational system in Afghanistan. In its 2016 annual publication on Afghanistan, UNICEF states that 40 percent of schoolchildren did not go to school. It reports that between the years 2010 to 2011, 66 percent of Afghan girls who were younger than 12 to 15, did not attend schools, while only 40 percent of Afghan boys who were younger than 12 to 15, did not attend schools. Mostly, the Afghan refugees “have access to a range of schools that are largely outside the public domain”. These schools include private madrasas that are free and provide food and boarding; community-based schools; and non-formal schools. Moreover, a research study by Abaseen (2016) states that, in Afghanistan, illiteracy affects almost 57 million adults, most of them women; gender parity and equality are still elusive; and further improvements in the quality of education are needed to accompany increasing access.

The Syrian population

There are 1.5 million school-aged Syrian refugee children living in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon but approximately half of them do not have access to formal education. Unfortunately “many of these displacements lack solutions to this day” and particularly the issue of “education is inextricably tied up with the politics of how long the Syrians will remain in these countries”⁶. In its 2017 report, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) states that “more than 530,000 Syrian schoolchildren in those three countries were still out of school at the end of the 2016-2017 school year”⁷.

Therefore, it is an urgent call to acknowledge that the “futures of individual Syrian children, as

2 <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/21/1/43/1513931?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

3 <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/175-afghanistan-what-now-for-refugees.pdf>

4 <https://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10315/6314/CRS0004.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

5 https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR800/RR859/RAND_RR859.pdf

6 https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/crdsyrianrefugees0917_web.pdf

7 https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR800/RR859/RAND_RR859.pdf



well as the stability and prosperity of the region, will depend on ensuring that school-age children receive the education they need⁸ to be resilient to the circumstances they face and to develop the capability to provide for themselves and their families.

Introduction

Fundamental information is missing from the Icelandic records on the background education of the immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. Reykjavik is known for its efforts to welcome immigrants and refugees in their second/third home: Iceland. However, in order for the governmental and civic organizations to plan accurately their present and future sustainable programs of growth, thorough knowledge and understanding is needed of each and every individual's educational background. This is important because the foundation of any successful program of growth lies in acknowledging the educational background of each and every individual whether it was high, middle or low.

There are no studies or statistics available on the background education that those who are living in Iceland as immigrants, asylum seekers or refugees have had obtained before they come to Iceland. There are no studies or statistics available on the number of illiterate individuals who are arriving in Iceland as immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. There are no studies or statistics available on the level of institutional education that the children of immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees have had possessed before they arrive in Iceland. Henceforth, the aim of this survey was to research the educational background that the Arabic-speaking and Afghan population have had before their arrival in Iceland.

The research objectives

- To generate original data on the educational background of Arab-speaking and Afghan Adults (male, females).
- To understand the ways in which the educational background of Arab-speaking and Afghan Adults (male, females) has an impact on shaping their present.
- To analyze the extent to which the Icelandic educational system equips Arab-speaking and Afghan Adults (male, females) with the knowledge and skills they need, drawing on insights from this population's educational background.
- To examine the ways in which the educational system in Iceland addresses the needs of Arab-speaking and Afghan children to maintain their mother tongue through mother-tongue literacy programs.

8 https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR800/RR859/RAND_RR859.pdf



The significance of the study

This study was motivated by the ongoing challenge of the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals in Iceland and their educational progress, particularly the education of the Arab and Afghan women and children. Research about the Arab and Afghan women and children and their literacy levels or their educational experiences is scarce, and none is pertaining, specifically to the Icelandic context. Mapping women's former education has a significant role in assessing their needs for further support, and in designing educational programs that help them integrate successfully and to construct their position in society. The Afghan and the Arabic speaking women are a particularly vulnerable group in society; access to education is the key to help them to acquire the needed knowledge and skills to be empowered.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "Holistic" means "dealing with or treating the whole of something or someone and not just a part"⁹. There is a growing recognition of the need to develop researched-based integration programs for refugees in Iceland in which their growth is addressed through a holistic approach. However, it must be acknowledged that research-based programs are not always implemented or respected in practice, based on an understanding that the governmental and non-governmental civic organizations have not always been able to respond consistently and adequately to this need.

Challenges

The main challenge in conducting this research was accessing data on the educational background of the Arabic speaking and Afghan population. No formal data is available, whether in government institutions or in civic organizations in Iceland. No information on education is available on the Statistics Iceland for the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals to this date. Although educational institutions continue receiving funds for offering Icelandic courses to this group of refugees and immigrants, there is neither specific database on the background education or on the number of people who are illiterate and attend the language courses in Icelandic for immigrants, nor data which shows assessments on the literacy levels. As a result, Icelandic courses are offered in isolation to the information about the background education of the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals and in isolation to their literacy levels. It is noteworthy to take into consideration that "OECD defines literacy across six levels. People with Level 1 or below literacy skills are considered to have very poor literacy skills, while Level 3 is considered the minimum literacy skills required for coping with everyday life"¹⁰

The second challenge in this research was accessing this population of Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals. To reach the potential participants for this study, the research team contacted few key organizations that are in direct contact with the Arabic speaking people, such as the social service departments of the municipality of Reykjavik and the Red Cross. Also, members of the mosques were contacted and asked to help to reach the participants. Unfortunately, it was not possible to get the questionnaire to this population through those channels, i.e social service departments of the municipality of Reykjavik, the Red Cross, and the mosques.

It was only through the support of few individual participants who agreed to participate and who were contacted by one of the researchers in the team, that it became possible to identify

9 <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/holistic>

10 <https://literacytrust.org.uk/parents-and-families/adult-literacy/what-do-adult-literacy-levels-mean/>



more participants who agreed to answer the questionnaire. However, it proved difficult to get more participants on board and to negotiate trust. Although the participants were assured that the results of this study will be published anonymously, many have rejected to answer the questionnaire in fear of losing their social benefits or harming their status as refugees. Psychology research shows that “populations of people with refugee backgrounds in the resettlement context, particularly those with limited knowledge of and experience with the research process, may have particular concerns about how research findings will be used. They may fear they will be used to highlight community deficiencies”¹¹.

Also, there were many other potential participants who declined offers to answer the questionnaire because according to them, they had “lost their trust in the system”. They said that they had “participated in other studies similar to this one but no change had happened to their situation in Iceland regarding education and employment” and therefore, they will “refuse to participate in any more scientific research before witnessing the results of the previous studies”.

Methodology

The research team included the three researchers who are experts in their respective fields (Education and Social Work). The research engaged a quantitative (survey questionnaire) method. The survey was designed to be completed by the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals, aged 18+ years, to capture information relating to areas such as Level of education, Occupation, Recreational activities, Mother-tongue and Icelandic language programs. Participants were recruited by using a purposive sampling method; a snowball sampling strategy, a non-random sampling technique. The researcher contacted potential survey respondents, who then provided additional names. However, it is important to realize that “persecuted groups like refugees may not understand that participation in research is voluntary. In particular, written informed consent may not be the most appropriate tool when working with groups with less power such as resettled refugees (Lykes, 1989)”¹² Therefore, in order to help overcome this barrier, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked participants if they would be willing to participate.

Although the researcher ensured that participants understand clearly that participation would in no way impact them or their families, many refugees declined participation. Therefore, having a population of 40 participants for this research is a great achievement, taking into consideration the impossibility of finding ways to reach this population in isolation from receiving support from the governmental and non-governmental civic organizations. A key element for the success of our data collection was having each participant connect through open communication channels with the researcher who could provide them with culturally and linguistically relevant information.

Our experience highlights the importance of building rapport and trust, cross-organizational collaboration, and recognizing contributions. This outline of our study may add to the growing efforts on guiding principles for developing researched-based integration programs for refugees in Iceland, in which their background educational and literacy levels are taken into consideration and their growth is addressed through a holistic approach.

11 <https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/1392a970-fdb3-4a4a-a667-eb3f992a58be/Ziaian-et-al-ACP-Vol-29-2-2018.pdf>

12 https://www.academia.edu/27009612/Dialogue_with_Guatemalan_Indian_Women_Critical_Perspectives_on_Constructing



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

Goal 4: Quality education ¹³



*"Achieving inclusive and quality education for all reaffirms the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development."*¹⁴

1 The research outputs

- To understand the ways in which the educational background of the Arab-speaking and Afghan Adults (male, females) has an impact on shaping their present state.
- To analyze the extent to which the Educational systems in Iceland equip the Arab-speaking and Afghan Adults (male, females) with the knowledge and skills they need to participate actively in the market.

The significance of this study is that it is motivated to understand the ongoing integration challenges that the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals are facing in Iceland, through analyzing their educational backgrounds, with a particular emphasis on the educational backgrounds of the Arab and Afghan women, for the purpose of proposing solutions. Generally speaking, information about the Arabic speaking an Afghan national's educational background is very little, almost none. Obtaining information about the refugees' former educational background has a significant role in designing educational programs that help them to integrate and to construct their position in the Icelandic society. Providing them with sustainable educational programs is the key for them to progress and integrate.

The growing and urgent need for refugee education at all levels remain not addressed. A major obstacle in providing education for refugees in Iceland is the lack of refugee-literacy information database. Without full information on the refugee population literacy levels, planning sustainable educational programs of growth is challenging. With not knowing the exact number of literate and illiterate refugees in Iceland, primary access to refugees' education background is largely unavailable.

¹³ <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-4-quality-education.html>

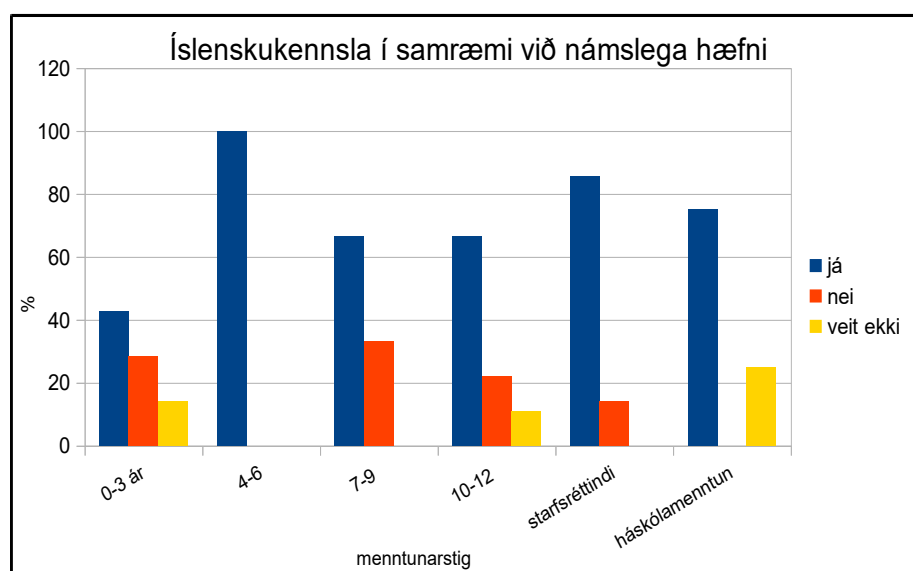
¹⁴ <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-4-quality-education.html>



Therefore, it is proposed to systematically monitor and evaluate all educational solutions that will be adopted in order to have valid data at hand for designing the refugee-education plan. A fundamental prerequisite for the implementation of the refugee-education program is the creation of a special department that would organize and support its work in the field of refugee education. Regulation, standardization and enhanced coordination is needed to improve education systems for refugees in Iceland. Care should also be taken to deliver teaching that is responsive to refugees' needs rather than shaped according to Iceland's requirements.

The questionnaire was designed in three languages: English, Arabic and Persian/Dari. The universe of this investigation is the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals residing in Iceland whether in the Greater area of Reykjavik or outside the Greater area of Reykjavik. The research aimed to investigate the integration programs that are provided to the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals in Iceland from a holistic approach. What is meant by a holistic approach in this context is to address the whole refugee persona and to investigate the various areas that one individual needs to develop in order to progress personally, intellectually and financially.

Therefore, the areas that this research cover include the development of refugees in both their individual and collective personalities. The individual development of the refugees is investigated through variables related to their education, recreational activities and institutional skills prior to and after arriving in Iceland. The analysis of the collective personalities is investigated through correlating between the various variables in the refugee's individual development data. Because the majority of these individuals are in coexisting with other individuals through various family relationships such as marriage or parenthood, any individual development or lack of development, shall affect the process of collective development as per se. To elaborate, for example, empowering a female Afghan refugee intellectually and financially will impact positively on her parenthood skills and this will lead to further development and well-being of her children and vice versa.



Owing to the wide variety of formal and non-formal educational initiatives available in Iceland, there is a recurring need to expand knowledge and understanding in the area of refugee education as there is a strong demand for all types of education among the refugee community in Iceland. When refugees first arrive, it can be challenging to adjust to an unfamiliar environment. Their routine of attending school is often disrupted for a variety of environmental, social, physical and emotional reasons, which can have negative effects on their well-being.



2 The Progressive Knowledge

Offering intellectual, social developmental and educational programs to Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals in their own language (Progressive Knowledge)

*"Refugee and migrant education has been given a prominent place on the agendas of UNESCO, GPE, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP, WHO, ILO and various other specialized organisations."*¹⁵

For a refugee to develop intellectually, he/she needs constant access to knowledge. It is beyond the linguistic capacity of the newcomers to grasp the fundamental aspects of the progressive knowledge in a language that is alien to them and which they have not mastered yet (Icelandic). Also, it is beyond the linguistic capacity of the newcomers to grasp the fundamental aspects of the progressive knowledge available in the world, if they are initially illiterate in their mother tongue (Arabic or Dari).

The World Bank research on the status of education in the MENA region (the Middle East and North Africa, which covers an extensive region stretching from Morocco to Iran) shows that "MENA's learning crisis is apparent across primary and secondary grades and across different subject areas. No MENA country came close to the international medians of the percentage of students reaching the low international benchmarks of the Recent Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)"¹⁶.

It is not the intention of this research to evaluate the process of developing a critical thinking skills through the educational programs that are offered to the Afghan and Arabic-speaking nationals in Iceland, a skill which is considered as one of the main pillars in developing an intellectual persona; rather in this study we are just touching the surface. The research is aimed to investigate the first step than an individual requires to develop intellectually, which is only possible once the person is getting access to progressive knowledge, especially if he/she is low educated, semi-illiterate or illiterate. In general, "adult migrants who have had limited schooling in their mother tongue (in general, less than 5 years) can be described as 'semi-literate'"¹⁷.

When a refugee arrives in Iceland, he/she is displaced into an alien cultural, environmental, ideological, institutional, lingual and social constructions. Offering a place for a refugee on the shores of Iceland is not as offering him/her home. It is another stage of displacement for this refugee, and he/she needs many many long years to feel that he/she is not any more displaced, rather he/she is finally home. In those many many long years, it is a fundamental human right basic for this displaced individual to progress in a holistic approach. While the Icelandic language is the key to integrate into what is hoped to become his/her home, opening wide the gates of progressive knowledge for helping a displaced persona to progress and develop to the full of his/her capacity should not be limited or conditioned to learning the Icelandic language.

The key to empowering a displaced person is to empower him/her through education. "Since 1948, education has been recognized as a basic human right, highlighting its role as a safeguard

15 https://www.ki.is/images/Skrar/KI/Skolamal/Skyrslur_og_onnur_rit/FINAL_2016_Refugee_Conference_Reader_EN.pdf

16 "World Bank. 2018. World Development Report 2018 : Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28340> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."

17 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/literacy-profiles>



for human dignity and a foundation of freedom, justice, and peace"¹⁸. In Iceland, refugees are deprived of receiving progressive knowledge in their own language. This is happening due to a pre-decided understanding that accessing knowledge in Iceland is and must be conditioned with learning Icelandic. Because of this pre-decided understanding of the means for a refugee to access knowledge in Iceland, the refugees are deprived of one of their fundamental human rights to progress.

In the process of introducing the concept of home to a displaced persona, he/she needs a bridge to cross over and to integrate. By displacing a displaced persona into an alien, foreign and unknown world to him/her without building bridges for him/her to cross over, he/she remains displaced and fails to integrate. Hence, the aim of this study is to propose those bridges that shall help the displaced refugees to cross over to reach home. It is only then when refugees succeed in crossing over the bridge that they succeed in integrating into the Icelandic society, and it is only then that they truly feel they are finally have arrived home.

For example, the progressive knowledge about raising-children, children's well-being, and children's education is considered as one of the fundamental knowledge bridges that the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals must be provided with through series of holistic sustainable programs of growth which are delivered to them in their own languages. Another knowledge bridge that the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals must receive through series of holistic sustainable programs of growth which are delivered to them in their own languages is the universal human rights concepts about equality, freedom and the concepts of respecting the Other unconditionally.

The key to building a bridge for a displaced Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals to cross over and integrate is to speak their language and culture. For a displaced persona to progress, he/she needs to find the bridge, relate to the bridge and develops a safe feeling that the bridge is not alien to him/her, then to feel safe enough to walk towards the bridge, to receive encouragement to step forward, and to be accompanied throughout the entire journey of crossing the bridge towards home. It is then, and only then that this displaced refugee will integrate successfully into the Icelandic society. Because "integration of migrants into societies is not only a moral obligation, but it is also a tremendous potential benefit for host societies as it brings new cultures, perspectives, skills, and talented people into the citizenry of nations"¹⁹, accompanying displaced refugees in their journey towards home, empowers them to accompany others during their bridge journey to find their home. To achieve this goal, "schools are the key institutions" in making this process faster.

18 "World Bank. 2018. World Development Report 2018 : Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28340> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."

19 https://www.ki.is/images/Skrar/KI/Skolamal/Skyrslur_og_onnur_rit/FINAL_2016_Refugee_Conference_Reader_EN.pdf



3 Formal and Informal Education

Questions on the level of formal institutional education prior to arriving to Iceland.

“The global schooling expansion hides another statistic: for millions, schooling is not producing enough learning. Learning outcomes in basic education are so low, in so many contexts, that the developing world is facing a learning crisis. In many low-income countries, learning levels are low in an absolute sense, while in many middle-income countries average learning levels remain far behind those in high income countries. The learning crisis disproportionately affects children from poor households: they are far more likely to leave school without acquiring basic skills like literacy or numeracy. Ultimately, the learning crisis translates into severe shortcomings in the skills of the workforce.”²⁰

In order to evaluate the impacts of the programs that are offered in Iceland to refugees for the purpose of integrating them into the Icelandic society, it is necessary to find accurate information about the educational background of those refugees who are placed in the integration programs that have been designed for them by Iceland. Their level of education plays a fundamental role in advancing or delaying the integration process. It is worth noting that many of the Arabic speaking and Afghan refugees are low educated, semi-illiterate or illiterate individuals. It is important to realize that “when the number of actual years of schooling is adjusted for learning, the effective years of schooling in MENA is on average 2.9 less than the number of actual years of schooling. In other words, the poor quality of education in MENA is equivalent to approximately three lost years of education”.²¹ The school systems in the origin countries of these refugees continue to fail in providing the basis for intellectual and literacy developments. It is important to note that in the MENA region “primary education is often not of sufficient quality to ensure that all children can learn the basics.” For example, in “Tunisia, almost 3 out of every 4 children make it to grade four but still cannot count”.²² Also, there is a gender gap in the level of school education between boys and girls. “Fewer girls than boys are in school. Alongside sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States has the widest gender gap”.²³

For a refugee to get empowered, a high level of literacy, especially reading is required; reading and writing are inseparable. In order to empower an illiterate person, he/she needs to learn to access knowledge independently. For example, the slaves in America were deprived of reading and writing because then they would become empowered.” A wide range of factors are associated with educational exclusion in MENA. These include disability, child labor, low maternal education, exposure to conflict, child marriage, migrant status, living in a rural or isolated area, and belonging to a nomadic group or a group that prevents children from attending school for cultural or religious reasons”.²⁴

20 “World Bank. 2018. World Development Report 2018 : Learning to Realize Education’s Promise. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28340> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.”

21 World Bank. 2018. Expectations and Aspirations : A New Framework for Education in the Middle East and North Africa (English). Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/527931542039352771/Expectations-and-Aspirations-A-New-Framework-for-Education-in-the-Middle-East-and-North-Africa>

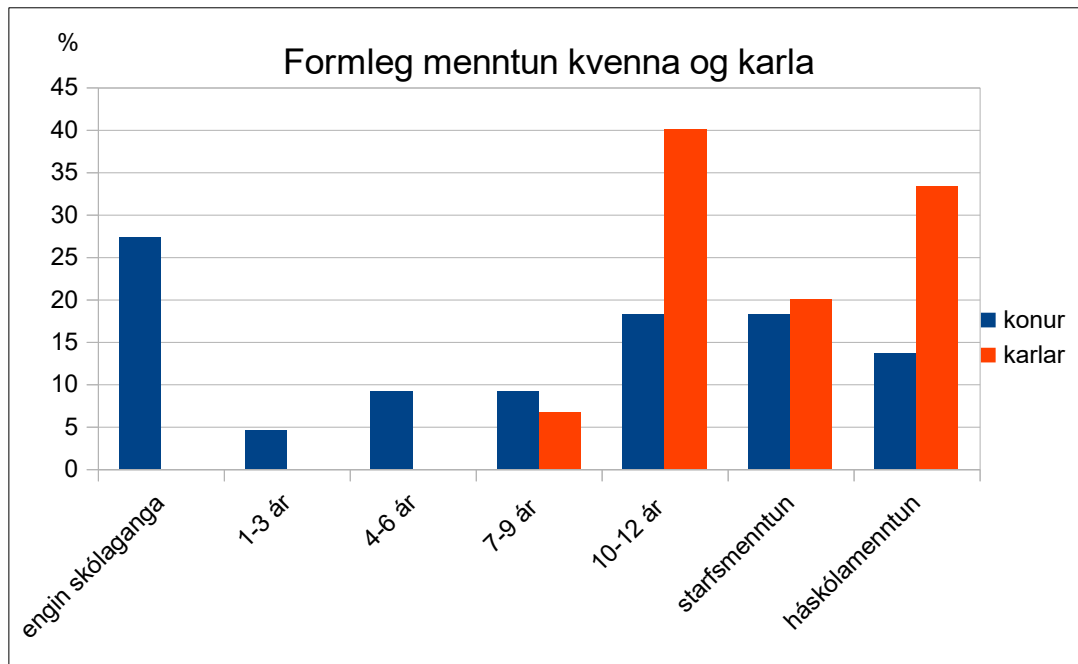
22 <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/219170e.pdf>

23 <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/219170e.pdf>

24 “World Bank. 2018. World Development Report 2018 : Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28340> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.”



The mother tongue literacy is crucial because some of these refugees have never learned to, hold a pen, read and write in their own language. Both Arabic and Dari are languages that are read and written from right to left, while Icelandic like all the other Western languages are read and written from left to right. These low educated, semi-illiterate and illiterate refugees who have arrived in Iceland, were deprived to develop and progress in their own lands, they were deprived of accessing knowledge, they were deprived of accessing the job market, they were left in the dark, their capacities as a human being were limited. In its report on the spread of illiteracy in the MENA region, UNESCO states that “over 50 million adults are illiterate in the region, more than two-thirds of whom are women.”²⁵



25 <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/sites/gem-report/files/219170e.pdf>



4 Mother tongue Education for Children

Teaching the Mother-tongue to the refugee children

“Children learn to read most effectively in the language they speak at home—their mother tongue... Beyond its direct learning impacts on them, students receiving instruction in their mother tongue are more likely to attend and persist in school... The increased skill from learning to read in mother tongue can translate into greater skill in a second language”²⁶.

Taking into consideration the low-levels of literacy that the parents, especially the mothers possess in their own language; it becomes obvious that teaching the mother-tongue to their children is an impossible task. These mothers, during their childhood period, were considered illiterate according to the World Bank report which states “many children in MENA remain illiterate and innumerate after two or three years of schooling”.²⁷

Additionally, these displaced parents lack the needed intellectual understanding and the skills to educate their children because in most MENA schools, “no skills or critical thinking are taught, and students often ignore most classes and tests”. As a result, and because of their belief that the educational systems in their countries have failed them, they mirror these beliefs in neglecting the great impacts of mother tongue education on the future progress of their children. It is noteworthy that “lacking the protective environment of education, development of critical thinking skills, and the opportunities that result from education” can result in making “more youth vulnerable to recruitment to radical groups”.

Because there is a need to alleviate the situation of refugees with innovative educational strategies to coordinate efforts, share knowledge, make evidence-based decisions, improve efficiency or effectiveness, and solicit resources we propose creating educational programs that address the refugees’ needs in a holistic approach. One of the proposals to empower the refugees in their parenthood skills is to offer them literacy education to master their mother tongue because mastering their mother tongue will empower them to transfer the knowledge to their children.

On a wider scale, it is important for the refugee children from the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals to master their mother tongues because these children are to become Iceland’s ambassadors to their families, tribes, nations, countries and the entire region. In their future role as Iceland’s ambassadors, they channel the universal concepts of equality, unity, peace, and freedom which they have learned in Iceland in their mother tongue to millions of people who speak Arabic/Persian and Dari. It shall be a great victory for the world if Iceland succeeds in building the capacities of its ambassadors of peace, and it shall be a great loss for our world if Iceland loses its ambassadors of peace. Those ambassadors of peace need full mastery of their mother tongue to instill the universal concepts of equality and freedom into the hearts and minds of their people. As it is stated in the World Development Report, the “prospects for peace and stability in MENA will be shaped by its citizens’ ability to coexist with people of different nationalities, ethnicities, and

26 “World Bank. 2018. World Development Report 2018 : Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28340> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.”

27 “World Bank. 2018. World Development Report 2018 : Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28340> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.”

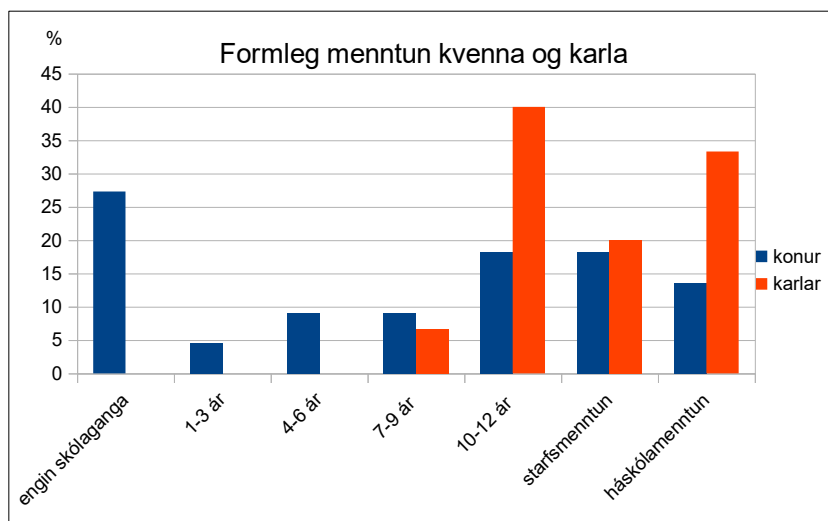


religions. Education is one of the principal means of building a culture of peace".²⁸

These children if empowered can become a bridge between their origin culture and their Icelandic-culture. Being placed in both cultures, they are in a strong position to convey to their culture, their people, their nation, their tribe, their family about the concepts of human rights, freedom, equality, and many other aspects of humans nobility. These children are Iceland's bridges towards these cultures, in far faraway places. Cultures that are beyond the oceans and beyond the actual capacity of Iceland to reach without the capacities of these children refugees. These refugee children need their mother tongue to introduce what Iceland has taught them about Human Rights, Respect, Freedom and Gender Equality. If they lose their mother tongue, they lose their access to their people. If Iceland fails to empower them as leaders and agents of change, then, as a result, Iceland also loses access to have an impact on the peace process in that region. If Iceland fails in empowering these refugee children from the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals, then Iceland is burning its bridges towards their cultures instead of building one.

Móðurmálskennsla fyrir börn	
heimili	6
skóli	16
moska	7
félagasamtök	2

Rúmur helmingur barna þátttakendana, eða 54% þeirra höfðu ekki fengið neina móðurmálskennslu á Íslandi.



28 "World Bank. 2018. World Development Report 2018 : Learning to Realize Education's Promise. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28340> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."



5 Employment Status

Question on occupation status prior to arriving to Iceland

"The under performance of MENA's boys is a phenomenon on a scale not seen elsewhere in the world. Education systems in MENA are clearly not meeting the learning needs of boys. And yet although girls are outperforming boys in education, MENA has the lowest female labour force participation rates among all regions in the world, according to the World Bank's World Development Indicators database. On average, across all MENA countries only 20 percent of women aged 15 and older participate in the labour force".²⁹.

In order to successfully help the refugee females to enter the job market, it is important to understand the cultural variables that control these displaced females on employment issues. One of those cultural variables is that women from this region "still tend to work in the traditionally feminized areas".³⁰ Therefore it is crucial to notice the many social, cultural, financial and religious factors that impact the process of placing the refugee females into the job market. For example, throughout "many Arab societies, once women marry out of the family, they no longer have a financial obligation to their family. This means that the family is no longer expected to support them financially, but in turn, the woman has no obligation to support her family either. The woman becomes dependent and bound to her husband's family instead".³¹

The key to building bridges for the displaced refugee females to integrate into the Icelandic job market is to introduce them to the universal concepts of gender equality, financial prosperity, and freedom through series of holistic sustainable programs of growth which are delivered to them in their own languages. For example, in many cultures throughout the MENA region, female education is seen as a mean that can confer a higher social status for her because then she is more likely to marry an educated man with a job that can support them both.

To design holistic sustainable programs of growth, it is crucial to establish an accurate understanding of the number of refugee women who were working prior to arriving in Iceland. It is worth noting that the result of this research mirrors the World Bank statement in its 2017 report that, "approximately four in every five women in the MENA region are not in the labor force, and unemployment among women is more severe than among men".³²

On another scale, it is also interesting to notice the number of men who were working prior to arriving in Iceland and compare these statistics to their current unemployment statistics after arriving in Iceland.

Spurt var um stöðu á vinnumarkaði. Meðal kvenna voru rúmur fjórðunugur eða 26% sem stunduðu atvinnu fyrir komuna til Íslands en eftir komu til landsins voru 13% með atvinnu. Þá voru um 70% án vinnu fyrir komu til lands en 65% án atvinnu á Íslandi. Konum á eftirlaunaaldri fjölgaði úr rúmum 4 í tæp 9%. Engin kvennanna var í námi fyrir komu til Íslands en 13% voru í námi á Íslandi þegar gagnasöfnun fór fram.

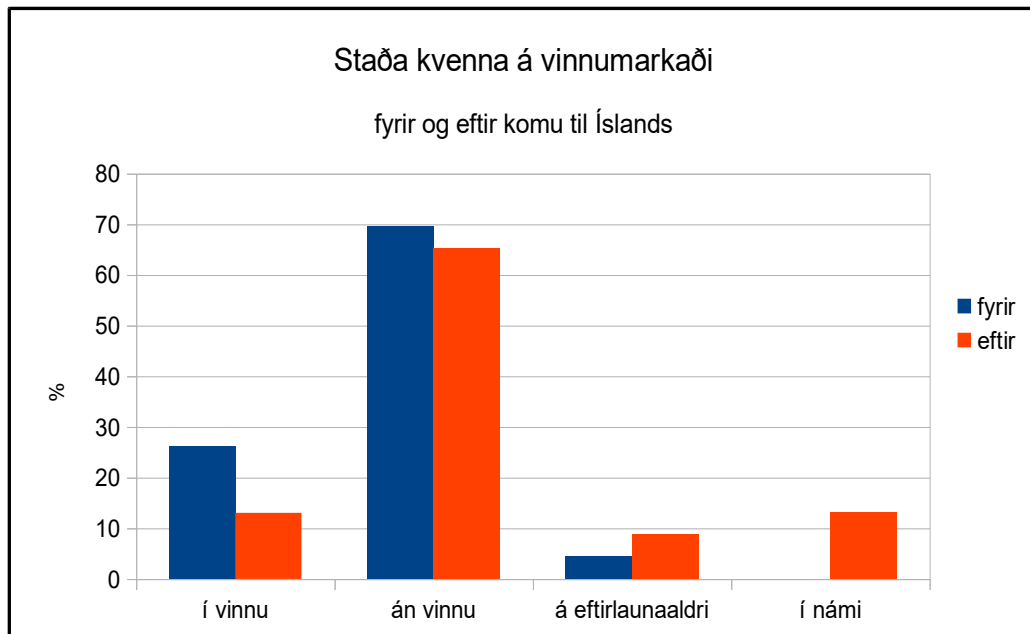
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30 <https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/women-in-public-life-mena-brochure.pdf>

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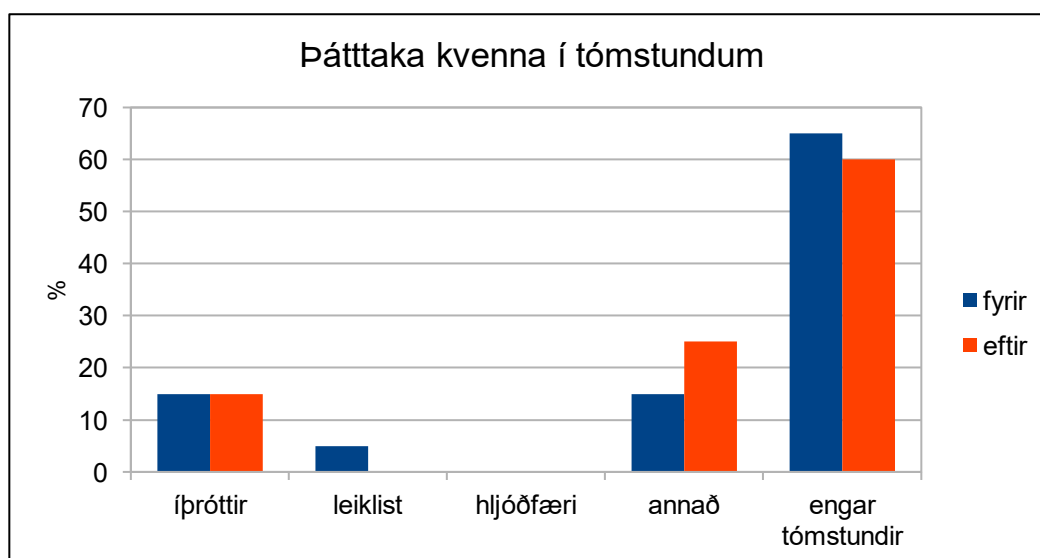
32 "World Bank. 2017. Progress Towards Gender Equality in the Middle East and North Africa Region. Washington, DC. © World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28965> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO."





6 Sports and Recreational Activities

To evaluate the current state of participation of the Arabic speaking and Afghan women in sports and recreational activities in Iceland it is crucial to explore their state of participation in sports and recreational activities in their countries of origin. It is important to realize that in “many Islamic countries, women’s sport is confronted with numerous concrete difficulties, ranging from the lack of girls’ physical education at school and the limited opportunities which women have of practising sports, of training and competing. The law of the segregation of the sexes and a scarcity of sports facilities often leads to the exclusion of women from opportunities to engage in sporting activities and especially sports competitions”.³³ In general they “lack resources and facilities and face resistance based on religion, tradition, and culture”.³⁴ There are compelling reasons to consider that “participating in sport and physical recreation enhances social inclusion as well as health and well-being”.³⁵ Under those circumstances, it is important to examine the barriers that affect Arabic speaking and Afghan women’s participation in sports and recreational activities in Iceland. For example “a range of barriers that women may confront, including language barriers, a lack of information about opportunities” and “lack of culturally appropriate facilities, high costs, family responsibilities or a lack of transport”.³⁶ Moreover, “refugee women and girls hardly find any role-models in sports in their countries of origin, in some of which sports are not normally supposed to be part of their lives; as a consequence, they have made no or hardly any experiences in this area”.³⁷



33 <https://dergipark.org.tr/download/article-file/151318>

34 <https://dergipark.org.tr/download/article-file/151318>

35 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/final_report.pdf

36 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/final_report.pdf

37 https://sportinclusion.net/fileadmin/mediapool/pdf/spin/2017_SWR-Camino_Sports-for-refugees_Challenges-for-instructors-and-their-needs.pdf



7 Recommendations and Conclusion

To design holistic and durable integration programs for the Arabic speaking and Afghan nationals, it is recommended to:

1. Get accurate information on the status of education they possessed prior to arriving in Iceland to evaluate the suitability of Icelandic language courses they are offered, foster their possibilities to enter the job market by acknowledging their education and address the issue of women empowerment through offering proper educational projects.
2. Get accurate information on their employment status prior to arriving in Iceland to, fasten the possibilities to enter the job market by acknowledging their education and to design culturally appropriate courses that encourage them to enter the job market. And also to understand the cultural differences in their culture of origins and the Icelandic culture. For example, in some cultures, women pride themselves for not having to work because having to work is considered a degrading status; it means her husband can't support her and it also means that she is poor.
3. Get accurate information on the status of the recreational activities of females prior to arriving in Iceland and after arriving in Iceland, to understand the cultural differences between their cultures and the Icelandic culture. In many cultures, women do not participate in activities such as sports, playing music and singing.
4. Offering progressive developmental courses in their own language.
5. Adding the mother tongue education for the children into the school syllables.

The common purpose of the immigration and integration policies of Iceland is to offer tools so that immigrants can be active members of Icelandic society. The curriculum for teaching Icelandic for immigrants greatly emphasizes Icelandic skills, language, and culture. However, there is a lack of long-term educational infrastructures and policies to create sustainable programs of growth for refugees for the coming decades. To design holistic and durable integration programs, the aim of this research was to investigate those factors which have impacts on the Afghan and Arabic-speaking refugees migrants' opportunities in the Icelandic labor market, recreation activities and educational activities, to determine their situation with relation to work, leisure activities, social and financial aspects.

The results indicate that their background education has the greatest impact on their ability in learning the Icelandic language, their limited opportunities in the Icelandic labor market and educational activities. It is noteworthy that 92% of the interviewees placed particular emphasis on their need to receive sustainable educational programs in their mother tongue.

Furthermore, the study outcome suggests an urgent humanistic need for the Afghan and the Arabic speaking refugees to receive additional sustainable and holistic parallel educational programs to their current formal education and the Icelandic language courses. To answer this humanistic need, this study suggests initiating the process of developing "strategies to coordinate efforts, share knowledge, make evidence-based decisions, improve efficiency or effectiveness".³⁸



In many consultation dialogues related to integrating the Arabic speaking and Afghan women into the Icelandic community, the point that is often overlooked is to investigate how the unemployed female from this region is mingling with the Icelandic community. Generally speaking, she would be spending most of her time being at home. With this in mind, it is important to realize that the unemployed female from this region, who basically stays home and doesn't participate in sports or leisure activities, is literally losing fundamental opportunities to mingle with the Icelandic community and integrate into the wider society.

This outline of our study may add to the growing efforts on guiding principles for developing researched-based integration programs for refugees in Iceland, in which their background educational and literacy levels are taken into consideration and their growth is addressed through a holistic approach.



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