

2nd International Conference on
SOCIAL SCIENCES, HUMANITIES & EDUCATION

21 - 23 JUNE 2019

VIENNA, AUSTRIA

**Enabling pathways: refugee background students in
higher education**

Author: Dr Snjezana Bilic

UniSA College, University of South Australia

Abstract

Research on students from refugee backgrounds in higher education (HE) is scarce. Few studies identified academic integration of students who studied at TAFE and Monash University, Deakin University and RMIT in Victoria, and Curtin University of Technology in Western Australia (Earnest et al. 2010) as well as in South Australia at UNISA (Zufferey et al., 2013), however student experiences in the transitional pathway programs is undocumented.

The existing research indicates that the educational institutions act as safe places where students of refugee backgrounds are able to reconcile the trauma of forced migration and transition to belonging and building relationships, developing cohesion and becoming socially responsible in a multiracial Australia (Cassity and Gow, 2005; Earnest, Housen and Gillieatt, 2007; Woods, 2009). Educational institutions are the settings in which many of the hopes of students from refugee backgrounds materialise. Given the central role educational institutions play, gaining better understanding of students' experiences of social and academic integration in HE is essential.

This paper reports on a pilot study on experiences of ten students from refugee backgrounds studying at UNISA College to transition into university. It addresses the following questions: How students from refugee backgrounds negotiate university pathways program? What are their experiences of academic integration? If students from refugee backgrounds feel sense of belonging to the College? How significant is this to their academic and social development? Finally, this paper concludes with an exploration of how these understandings can be used to improve student engagement, academic integration and outcomes of students from CALD backgrounds.

Key words: students of refugee backgrounds; enabling pathways; higher education; sense of belonging; engagement