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The Role of Higher Education Systems and Policymakers in the Integration of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the European Union from a Gender Perspective

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Abstract

In recent years, the European Commission has promoted initiatives to support the integration of refugees and asylum seekers into the education systems of Member States. Despite the growing presence of women in migration flows—representing 37% in Sweden and 39.5% in Poland in 2021—studies addressing their integration from a gender perspective remain scarce. This chapter examines the role of higher education and policymakers in the integration of this population, with a gender-sensitive approach, through a systematic literature review based on the PRISMA framework. This review examined 39 studies out of 1,369 references, with 89.6% conducted in the EU or US. Publications on refugee access to higher education increased between 2018 and 2021, peaking in 2019, with 72% authored by women. Refugee students face barriers including language, finances, digital literacy, and credential recognition. Common policy responses include scholarships, inclusive admissions, and credential validation, though mentoring and broader recognition are still needed. While 38.5% of studies addressed public policies, only 10% included a gender perspective. Refugees are often seen as economic burdens, despite their value to the labor market and SDG goals. Barriers such as limited resources, poor coordination, and lack of transparency persist. The review highlights the need for long-term, gender-sensitive strategies and stronger interdisciplinary collaboration among education, migration, and gender studies to ensure effective refugee inclusion in higher education.

Keywords: Higher Education; Public Policies; Refugee Women; Social Inclusion; Systematic Review