

# Hiba Salem

## Schools as Fragile Worlds: Exploring the Experiences of Syrian Refugee Students in Jordan

*"If I can't transfer schools, I have no future."* Syrian refugee student, 14.

Forced migration destabilises economic, political, and social securities within a refugee-hosting nation, inflicting uncertainty upon both refugees and hosting citizens. Educational systems are paramount in responding to contexts of uncertainty and instability. However, within these challenging structures, educational systems are liable to wield constructive or deconstructive power. Education as a response to conflict is deemed fundamental to displaced students, providing learning, stability, and protection. Equally, educational systems may also reproduce or deepen intolerance and conflict. There exists a strong argument that educational structures and spaces may even reproduce and compound marginalisation and social instability.

This paper argues that an educational response to uncertainty must advance beyond cognitive assessment; it must adapt to context and respond to the emotional needs and well-being of all students. Based on preliminary results of my PhD research, conducted with Syrian refugee students across four secondary schools in Jordan, this paper discusses the protective and comprehensive role education must take as a response to conflict and instability. The qualitative multiple case study explores students' perceptions of well-being using visual-based methods. It portrays the experiences of 80 Syrian refugee students, ages 13-16, attending the segregated evening school shift in Jordan. Five teacher interviews, together with classroom observations, were also conducted to develop an enriched description of these contexts.

At present stage, emerging themes reveal the ways in which these four school spaces appear to reproduce social injustice and discrimination: harming students, hindering cognitive learning, and heightening tensions between the two communities. Additionally, the study delves into the challenges students face around and outside school, and argues that educational structures must not only be aware of these challenges, but also seek to respond to them. These challenges hinder learning, expose students to harm and marginalisation, and reduce students' likelihood of continuing education, leading to grave repercussions worldwide. Finally, the research process shows that understanding the voices and experiences of students is a vital part of responding to the challenges faced within the society.