

## **Love Thy Neighbor: Current and Potential Responses to Young, Male, Syrian, Refugee Students in the European Union Higher Education Sector**

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### **Abstract**

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Since the start of the Syrian civil war, the media has been flooded with images of Syrian refugees fleeing their war torn nation. All over the world, receiving countries and their higher education sectors have responded in a variety of ways. Via a quantitative, website analysis, this report investigates whether and how institutes of higher education (HEIs) in the European Union (EU) are providing support for their young, male, Syrian, refugee population. I discuss existing strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of Syrian refugee support efforts on the part of the top three HEIs in seven EU nations that have received the most Syrian, asylum applications of all EU nations. With this analysis in mind, I make specific policy recommendations to assist HEI policy-makers in improving their Syrian refugee support mechanisms. While integration of young, male, Syrian refugees into their host nation's society is certainly important, EU policy-makers have largely ignored support of this particular population in the way of cultural and developmental sensitivity. This report fills that gap in order to support a safer future for all those residing in the EU.

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**Keywords:** Syria, refugee, higher education, European Union

Cologne, Germany made headlines world-wide just days after the New Year's Eve 2016 celebrations when more than 516 cases of assault and robbery were reported to the city police (British Broadcasting Company, 2016). According to Cologne Police Chief Wolfgang Albers, the majority of the assailants were males "of Arab or North African appearance" (British Broadcasting Company, 2016).

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The attacks were reported amidst growing fears surrounding the recent influx of migrants from the Arab world after German Chancellor Angela Merkel announced an open door policy that would allow millions of unregistered migrants into Germany (Hill, 2015).

German nationals have responded to these recent, political developments in a variety of ways. Thousands of German-nationals have joined the political movement Pegida, or Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West, which claims to be anti-Islamist and opposes the record levels of migrants that have crossed into the European Union (EU). Similar numbers represent those who support Chancellor Merkel's open door policy. In one instance, thousands of German men and women blocked Pegida members from protesting along their planned route in Berlin in order to demonstrate their solidarity with the refugee community (British Broadcasting Company, 2015).

Germany is not the only EU member state that has seen and reacted in both positive and negative ways to record increases in migrants, especially those seeking asylum. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, 561,625 first time, asylum applications were received in the 28 EU member states in 2014 (Eurostat, 2015). An individual who applies for asylum is requesting to become a refugee in order to live legally in a country other than their own. The 1951 Refugee Convention states that a refugee is someone who "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.).

Syrians accounted for 20% of all asylum applicants in the EU during the 2014 year (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015). According to Alexandros Bitoulas (2015) of Eurostat, one out of five asylum applications in the EU were from Syria in 2014, which accounted for a 72,000 refugee increase from 2013-2014. Of all the Syrian, asylum applicants in the EU in 2014, just over 30% were males between the ages of 14 and 34 (Eurostat, 2015). These statistics paint an alarming picture of the swiftly shifting patterns of refugee immigration to the EU.

Some EU citizens may respond to these recent changes by joining Pegida and parallel movements in fear of similar situations to those that occurred on New Year's Eve; others may choose to find ways to support the growing population of refugees within their own nations. As the Syrian crisis is not likely to end any time soon, EU member states must consider now more than ever how they will respond to the population of Syrian asylum-seekers. Should they choose to support this group of people, they must consider how they can most effectively do so. As a large percentage of Syrian asylum-seekers are males between the ages of 14 and 34, understanding young, male, Syrian refugees- their culture, their beliefs, and their experiences- is vital to any supportive endeavor.

This report focuses on the education sector of the EU and more specifically, how institutes of higher education (HEIs) in the EU can best support young, male, Syrian, refugee students (YMSRSs). Specifically, this article addresses three research questions:

RQ1: How do HEIs in the EU currently provide support for their YMSRSs?

RQ2: What are the strengths and/or weakness of these HEIs in relation to their support of YMSRSs?

RQ3: How can policies encourage the creation and/or strengthening of programs and initiatives that support YMSRSs?

To that end, I conducted a quantitative, website analysis in order to determine whether and how HEIs in the EU are providing support for their YMSRSs. Based on these findings, I discuss the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges that exist within the EU system of HE in order to determine how these institutes can improve their student support services with the growing YMSRS population in mind.

This report concludes with policy recommendations that address the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges discussed. It is important to note that while integration of YMSRSs is certainly important, EU policy-makers have largely ignored support of this particular population in the way of cultural and developmental sensitivity. This report aims to fill that gap in order to ensure a safer future for all those residing in the EU.

## 1. Literature Review

The review of literature provided various insights into the EU's response to the influx of Syrian refugees. Many recognized that these guests will not be returning to their home country any time soon and that resettlement in the EU is the best option for many asylum-seekers (European Commission 2015; Fargues, 2014; Fargues & Fandrich 2012; Guild & Moreno Lax, 2013; Ostrand 2015). Phillippe Fargues (2014), Director of the Migration Policy Center, posited that the conditions in Syria will continue to deteriorate and that as new refugees continue to cross into EU borders, tensions in host countries will grow.

Phillippe Fargues and Christine Fandrich's (2012) report suggested that the EU should consider creating a Regional Protection Programme (RRP) that requires an increase in Syrian refugee resettlement. Nicole Ostrand (2015) of Mahidal University recommended resettlement as a means to protect Syrian refugees' fundamental rights. The purpose of the European Commission's (2015) piece was to identify short term and long term, priority actions that will establish an enduring support system for resettled, Syrian refugees.

Another topic commonly addressed in the literature is security. The European Commission (2015) suggested increasing overall, EU-border security by utilizing Migration Management Support Teams who would deploy to over-burdened areas and aid in identifying, screening, and registering asylum-seekers. They believed that this method would assist overburdened countries to quickly determine whether applicants should stay or should be sent back to Syria. Some nations, like Greece, have much higher rates of applicant rejections than other EU member countries because they fear that their population and security would be overwhelmed by the influx of migrant refugees (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012).

Finally, the nature of violent conflict is an issue that is often addressed in the literature. Daniel Byman (2015) of the Brookings Institute and Johannes Hahn (2015) from the European Commission discussed the risk of letting Syrian refugees into the EU due to their possible affiliation with the terrorist organization, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).

Burden-sharing, or sharing the responsibility of refugee support between states, is also a popular topic in the literature (European Commission, 2015; Katrovil et al., 2015; Ostrand, 2015). Katrovil et al. (2015) called for “a fair and equitable distribution of refugees over the [EU] member states,” citing Germany and Sweden as having reached their absorption capacity while many countries in Central Europe reject quotas and do not offer alternative solutions to the problem of their overburdened neighbors (p. 3). Ostrand (2015) described the burden that is placed on EU member states closest to Syria, such as Greece and Bulgaria, who are seeing a rise in refugees who have been smuggled by sea. The European Commission (2015) asserted that burden-sharing amongst EU member states is the most pressing need and should be a top priority.

The literature agrees that maintaining and improving existing, refugee support programs, policies, and initiatives is important given the recent influx of Syrian refugees. However, two topics were almost entirely left out of the discussion: meeting the unique needs of YMSRSs and providing access to and support within host nations’ HE systems. This report addresses the main concerns of the existing literature as well as the needs of YMSRSs and higher education.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Case Selection**

In 2014, the countries in the EU that received the most Syrian, asylum applications included Germany and Sweden with 54% of the total applications, followed by Hungary, Austria, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, and Denmark with 31% of the total applications (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2015). The HEIs examined in this analysis included the top, three HEIs in each of these countries. The top, three HEIs were chosen based on the Times Higher Education World Rankings- an online, global, HE ranking system (Hazelkorn, 2015). In addition to having more information on their websites about their programs and initiatives, these HEIs were more likely to have web pages in English than their lesser ranked counterparts (Ongus et al., 2006). To maintain consistency in the research, only web pages in English were used.

The level of education examined- post-secondary, higher education- was chosen based on two factors. First, HEIs “can act quickly and independently in many ways. They can cut red tape relating to the admissions process, open study places for refugee students, and provide counseling and other services to traumatized students and their families” (De Witt & Altbach, 2016). Policies and programs at the national level can take years in the development phase alone, which could result in the loss of a great opportunity to integrate YMSRSs in the early stages of their migration. HEIs have the ability to move swiftly and engage with this population much sooner than other agencies and institutions. Second, refugees from Syria are generally well-educated, and therefore easier to integrate into their host country’s society while bringing new talent to their host country’s economy (De Witt & Altbach, 2016). These two factors combined provide ideal conditions for integration of YMSRSs.

## 2.2 Data Collection

Relevant data for this report was collected via coding for the presence of seven variables on the official websites associated with each of the HEIs as listed above. These variables are based on the needs of refugees and the predominant Sunni beliefs and customs of YMSRSs (Abukar, 2015, Ali & Bagheri, 2009, Asmar, 2006, Federation of Student Islamic Societies, 2005, Nasir & Al-Amin, 2006).

In order to ascertain whether or not these variables were present on the HEIs website, I compiled terms associated with these each of the variables and compared them with terms that were commonly found during a preliminary search on 10 websites. I used the Google search engine to search for the finalized list of terms using Google search operators in order to narrow the results (Google, n.d.). The specific terms and search operators are listed under “Search Terms and Search Operators” in Appendix A. I inspected the first, two pages of results from each search. I visited the listed, web-page only; I did not view sub-pages within the listed web-page from the list of results.

Appendix A shows the presence of these variables on each website. Under each country, the top, three HEIs are listed as I1, I2, and I3. If the search terms associated with the variable were present on the website, the HEI received a score of one. If the search terms associated with the variable were not present on the website, the HEI received a score of zero.

The last row includes the total score for each HEI, and the last column includes the average presence of each variable on all of the websites.

### **2.3 Limitations**

A few limitations are worth mentioning. If a website did not include the search terms associated with a variable that does not necessarily mean that that variable does not exist. The terms may be included on the website in the country's native language. If the terms do not exist in either English or the country's native language, the variable may still exist at the HEI even though it is not included on the website. Nonetheless, this quantitative, website analysis provides valuable insight into the frequency with which top, EU HEIs advertise their methods of support for YMSRSs. If anything, this study could aid these HEIs in improving their websites to include this information.

## **3. Analysis**

RQ1: How do HEIs in the EU currently provide support for their YMSRSs?

RQ2: What are the strengths and/or weakness of these HEIs in relation to their support of YMSRSs?

### **3.1 Strengths**

Approximately 16% of the HEIs in this study exhibited the presence of variables related to YMSRSs support on their websites. Events and/or speakers about Islam were the most common of all the variables. Prayer rooms and refugee student support services were also common.

Germany's Ludwig Maximilians University of Munchen and the University of Heidelberg presented the highest number of variables. Eight of the HEIs exhibited at least one variable. This data demonstrates that many HEIs in the EU currently consider and engage with at least some of the needs of YMSRSs. Descriptions and data from the study for each of the variables are discussed in detail below.

### **3.1.1 Refugee Student Support Services**

Refugee, student support services are vital to the positive development of YMSRSs. Refugee student perceptions of achievement and self-confidence are directly impacted by the amount of support they receive from the educational institutes (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Stermac et al., 2008). Refugee, student support services may include staff who are trained in a variety of refugee-related topics such as the psychology of youth from war zones, cultural and religious sensitivity, and academic assessment and planning.

Four of the HEIs in this study exhibited presence of terms related to refugee support services. Three of these HEIs reside in Germany, including Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich which has an excellent preparatory program for refugees. This program is designed specifically for asylum-seekers who have attended university elsewhere and wish to continue their studies. The program offers the following services: an orientation review with a Guidance Counselor from the university's International Office to in order to explore academic options, participation in free German classes, temporary registration at the university, and a certificate of completion that enables refugees to take up full-time study at the university (Ludwig-Maximilians University Munich, n.d.).

### **3.1.2 Muslim Student Groups**

There is a substantial body of research that supports the relationship between co-curricular activities, such as involvement in campus groups, and positive educational outcomes (Gellin, 2003; Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). HEIs that offer opportunities for minority students, including YMSRSs, to engage with one another and with their majority classmates are more likely to witness positive educational outcomes such as a greater sense of belonging and significant cognitive development (Quaye & Harper, 2014).

Two of the HEIs in this study exhibited presence of terms related to Muslim student groups. Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich's Islamic University Association was established by a group of students who wished to create opportunities for Muslim students to have contact with each other.



They have four, main objectives: representing Muslim student's interests, responding to the university community's questions about Islam, making connections with other cultures, religions, and perspectives, and creating a network to support social and career networking (IHV Munich, n.d.). Students at Wageningen University created the Wageningen Muslim Students Association (WMSA). This organization aims to create and support *silaturrahim* (familial relationships) between Muslim students who attend the university (Wageningen Muslim Students Association, n.d.).

### **3.1.3 Prayer Rooms**

Muslims are instructed to pray five times daily based on the position of the sun. Each prayer takes between five and ten minutes and should be conducted in the direction of the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Each prayer requires a combination of standing, kneeling, and bowing with one's head to the ground (Carter, et al., 2008; Umar, 2011). Prayer rooms on campus provide a private and safe space for Muslim students to conduct their daily prayers.

Four of the HEIs in this study exhibited presence of terms related to prayer rooms. These spaces are called a variety of names, but all of them offer privacy specifically for religious activities. Wageningen University offers 10 "spaces for contemplation" throughout the campus that can be reserved for private use (Wageningen University, n.d.). Utrecht University offers a "meditation center" that provides space for worship, prayer, contemplation, and is open to followers of any religion (Utrecht University, n.d.). Karolinska Institute has two rooms specifically for meditation and prayer on two of their campuses. These rooms are open to all students, researchers, and staff (Karolinska Institute, n.d.). Uppsala University's "Serenity Room" is a room for prayer and meditation open to students every day of the week (Uppsala University, n.d.).

### **3.1.4 Exam Schedule Flexibility for Religious Holidays**

HE administrators and faculty must be sensitive to non-Christian holidays. There are two, major holidays in Islam: Eid-ul-Fitr (Eid of fast-breaking) and Eid-ul-Adha (Eid of sacrifice). YMSRSs usually spend these holidays with their families and in religious services and ceremonies (Carter et al., 2008; The Council of Islamic Organizations of Greater Chicago, n.d.).

None of the HEIs in this study exhibited presence of terms related to exam schedule flexibility for religious holidays specifically, although many offered flexibility for situations beyond the control of their students. It is possible that YMSRSs may request a change of exam time in order to spend major, Islamic holidays outside of the classroom.

### **3.1.5 Single-Sex Housing**

Generally, Syrian youth do not spend time alone with the opposite gender before marriage. Young couples that meet with each other are often supervised by a male member of the woman's family, and living together before marriage is extremely discouraged (Carter et al., 2008). For these reasons, it is important for HEIs to provide single-sex housing options in order to accommodate the cultural and religious needs of YMSRSs.

One of the HEIs in this study exhibited presence of terms related to single-sex housing for males. Heidelberg University offers single sex floors, apartments, and/or suites in most of their dormitories (Heidelberg University, n.d.). This is extremely generous considering the large presence of YMSRSs in Germany.

### **3.1.6 Halal Food Options**

Food plays a very important role in the daily lives of YMSRSs. In addition to being central in the culture in the Middle East, food is also an important aspect of the Islamic customs and traditions. Many YMSRSs follow Quranic, dietary restrictions, such as consumption of halal meat- animals slaughtered in a certain manner, in the name of God- and prohibition against eating pork (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Carter et al., 2008).

One of the HEIs in this study exhibited presence of terms related to halal food options on campus. The student canteen at the Technical University of Denmark advertises the availability of halal food options on their Ballerup Campus. The University's website states that "here you will always find a varied salad bar, fish at least once a week and often halal-slaughtered meat" (Technical University of Denmark, n.d.).

### **3.1.7 Events and/or Speakers about Islam**

In order to discourage harmful stereotypes that foster fear towards YMSRSs, HEIs can inform the non-Muslim population about Islam and its followers. HEIs can educate non-Muslims about Islam through presentations by scholars in Islamic studies, panels by Muslim students, and holiday celebrations. These types of student events can also encourage relationships between Muslim and non-Muslim students (Ali & Bagheri, 2009).

Half of the HEIs in this study exhibited presence of terms related to events and/or speakers about Islam. This variable was the most present of all the variables in this study. Scholars in Islamic studies are often asked to discuss topics related to Islam with the student body. American University in Bulgaria hosted Yasmin Hussein from the Young Leaders Program of the U.S.-based Muslim Public Affairs Council to perform a lecture concerning Muslims' place in the West in 2011 (American University in Bulgaria, 2011).

Conferences related to Islam are also hosted by many HEIs in the EU. Humboldt University of Berlin organized the Young Islam Conference in 2013. Their focus was on "the young peoples' subjective perceptions, narrations and terminology in regard to the construction of belonging and identity, and on how these underwent changes in the course of the Young Islam Conference" (Berliner Institut für empirische integrations, n.d.). Some HEIs host panels and debates concerning Islam, such as the University of Sophia's public debate on "Religion, Politics, and the Public Sphere in Bulgaria," which included followers of various religions, to include Islam (Sophia University, 2013).

### **3.2 Weaknesses**

Although the strengths discussed illustrate that many EU HEIs are providing some support for YMSRSs, the numbers show that there is room for vast improvement. The average presence of all seven variables related to YMSRS support on EU HEI websites was a dismal 16%. Other than events and/or speakers about Islam, no variable had a percentage of presence greater than 20%. No, single HEI exhibited presence of all seven variables, nor did any single nation.

Of all the countries in this study, five out of seven had three or less variables present, and only two had six or more. One nation and six HEIs total presented none of the variables at all. The variables themselves also had noticeable gaps, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Overall, the HEIs that presented terms related to refugee support services were not comprehensive. Two of the five HEIs offered language classes only, and one HEI offered ten tuition waivers for one, single semester of coursework. None of the websites advertised services beyond academics such as access to mental health services. All HEIs in this study offered student-led groups and associations, but only two had groups specifically for Muslim students. HEIs that lack opportunities for minority students to engage with one another and with their majority classmates may encourage the development feelings of exclusion and lack of support (Quaye & Harper, 2014). While four HEIs did offer prayer rooms or private spaces, there were many barriers in terms of access.

Utrecht University's "Meditation Center" and Uppsala University's "Serenity Room" are only open during certain hours during the week. The latter does not allow the room to be reserved, and the former requires a reservation and a key to gain access. Other than Wageningen University which offers 10 "spaces for contemplation" throughout the campus, all other HEIs with prayer spaces had two or less designated spaces on campus. These private spaces are vital to YMSRSs who need to conduct their daily prayers in safe areas without disruptions. In terms of flexibility for exams for religious holidays, none of the HEIs in this study made allowances for YMSRSs to observe their major holidays by rearranging their exam schedules.

Some HEIs like Denmark University of Copenhagen and Technical University of Denmark require a medical certificate for illness or a certification for disability (Technical University of Denmark, n.d.; University of Copenhagen, n.d.). It is not likely that holidays like Ramadan qualify as an illness or disability. Furthermore, all the HEIs in this study required students to submit an application to change the time of their exams. Even if flexibility for exams for religious holidays was included in a HEIs exam policy, the student's application may still be rejected. YMSRSs should not be forced to choose between their religion and academic success. Only one university offered single-sex, housing accommodations to their students.

Heidelberg University, which offers male-only rooms, is a good example of how HEIs can accommodate the religious and cultural sensitivities of others. However, YMSRSs may still be required to share bathrooms and other communal spaces with the opposite gender even if they are allotted their own bedrooms. As with single-sex, housing accommodations, only one HEI demonstrated availability of halal food on campus. The Technical University of Denmark does offer halal options, but not at all times and only in one campus location (Technical University of Denmark, n.d.). For YMSRSs who follow Quranic, dietary restrictions, having halal options readily available is extremely important to the development of their sense of belonging and support (Ali & Bagheri, 2009; Carter et al., 2008). More than half of all the HEIs in this study offered opportunities for faculty, students, and staff to attend events and/or engage with speakers about Islam. Unfortunately, many of these events and presentations focused on the role of terrorism in Islam, which, while an important topic, may also foster fear in the HE community towards YMSRSs. There should be more opportunities to discuss and hear about Islam in a positive light in order to create a more supportive and educated atmosphere for YMSRSs.

### **3.3 Challenges**

There are three, big challenges beyond the weaknesses discussed above. Supporting YMSRSs in the HE sector is important, but first, HEIs must reconsider existing structures and inequalities. Altbach, Reisberg, and Rumbley (2010) state that “providing higher education to all sectors of a nation’s population means confronting social inequalities deeply rooted in history, culture, and economic structure that affect an individual’s ability to compete” (p. 43). In terms of the general, EU system of HE, Christianity played and continues to play a central role in the HE system, which, as Tariq Modood (2005) asserts, protects an inequitable status quo between Christians and non-Christians. The needs of YMSRSs will continue to be ignored as long as these inequalities rule the EU system of HE.

Second, while support is vital to the successful and respectful integration of YMSRSs into their host nations’ societies, there is also the risk of brain drain. Brain drain is the migration of highly skilled individuals from their native, developing countries into wealthier countries (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, n.d.). While YMSRSs are fleeing their home country for fear of their safety, brain drain becomes an issue if and when the situation in Syria stabilizes, but YMSRSs do not return home.

As the literature suggests, the EU is preparing for long term, resettlement of all Syrian refugees (European Commission, 2015; Fargues 2014; Fargues & Fandrich 2012; Guild & Moreno Lax, 2013; Ostrand 2015). While preparations for this possibility are certainly important, Altbach (2013) asserts that the loss of intellectual capital in developing countries, like Syria, would be huge if their internationally educated, student population does not return.

Finally, the security of all persons in the EU must be maintained. Situations like those that occurred around Germany on New Year's Eve 2016 are unacceptable. The literature suggested improving national security in the way of maintaining control of their nation's territory, balancing a nation's resources and the inward flow of migrants, and avoiding violent conditions fueled by migration (Adamson, 2006). In the section that follows, I will offer further, policy-recommendations for balancing these concerns with the needs of YMSRSs.

#### **4. Policy Recommendations**

RQ3: How can policies encourage the creation and/or strengthening of programs and initiatives that support YMSRSs?

According to Stephen Walt (2005), theory can contribute to policy in four directions: diagnosing the type of phenomenon that policy-makers are seeking to address; predicting and preventing unwanted developments that are the result of policy; prescribing and evaluating desirability and feasibility of objectives and the steps to achieving those objectives; and evaluating whether a policy is achieving the desired result. With regards to YMSRS-support, policies at the national HE and individual, HEI level should be informed by student development theory. Per Nancy Evans, Deanna Forney, Florence Guido, Lori Patton, and Kristen Renn (2010), student development theory "explains and suggests action for working with students, guiding practice in advising, teaching, programming, and facilitating student learning both in and outside the classroom" (p. 26). This is especially important when addressing the unique needs and backgrounds of YMSRSs. Per Nevitt Sanford (1966), "the amount of challenge a student can tolerate is a function of the amount of support available" (p. 36). YMSRSs have experienced a plethora of challenges before they have set foot in the EU, including, but not limited to lost homes, lost family members, fear, anger, and sadness.

Considering the added confusion of adapting to a new culture, unfamiliar language, and alien customs, host, EU nations are faced with the enormous hurdle of providing adequate support to YMSRSs. Furthermore, YMSRSs are developing an understanding of who they are, who they can become, and how they relate to others. The challenges and support these young men receive during their youth have the potential to mold their identities either in a positive or negative way (Erikson, 1994). Vincent Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure posits that negative social interactions and experiences isolate individuals from the institute's academic and social communities, which reduces their commitment to the institution and may ultimately lead to their withdrawal.

If a surplus of challenges exist in the lives of YMSRSs and little support is provided by their host nation's HE system, these individuals are more likely to join movements and engage in activities that provide them with the support they need. Extremist groups, like ISIS, prey on these young men by offering them commiseration and purpose (Allen, 2016). In order to prevent the isolation and ultimate withdrawal of YMSRSs, host, EU nations must find ways to balance the challenges these men face with an adequate support system. With these theories in mind, I will provide concrete suggestions for how policies at the national and individual, HEI level can plan and implement effective support for YMSRSs.

## **4.1 Practice**

This section provides practical suggestions for policy-makers on creating new or improving existing programs, initiatives, and support services directed towards YMSRSs. With college student development theory in mind, I suggest that every HEI in the EU should have:

### **4.1.1. A refugee student support system**

This support system should include three elements. First, following in the footsteps of Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, every HEI should have a preparatory program for their refugee student body. This program should provide an orientation session with an academic advisor to review prior and potential educational experiences, free language classes based on the language most used at the HEI, and resources about the campus, student body, and host nation.

Second, refugee student support services should have an in-house counselor or contact information for an on-campus counselor with experience in refugee, mental health. There are numerous studies that relate refugee students' psychosocial development with educational success (Driver & Beltran, 1998). HEIs can assist YMSRSs in their educational achievement by providing them with adequate, mental health services.

Finally, refugee student support services must keep brain drain in mind. De Witt and Altbach (2016) asserted that the longer Syrian refugees stay away from their home nation, the less likely they are to return. YMSRSs should not be pushed to stay nor should they be pushed to go back to Syria once the conflict has subsided. However, refugee student support services should encourage YMSRSs to seriously consider both possibilities in order to assist in the rebuilding of Syria. For YMSRSs seeking to return home, refugee student services should provide resources concerning property restitution/compensation, reintegration and rehabilitation, options for reuniting with families, and protection/rights (United States Institute of Peace, n.d.).

#### **4.1.2. At least one, Muslim, student group/association**

Campus groups build a greater sense of belonging (Gellin, 2003; Kuh, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Given their difficult circumstances and tendency to be isolated, YMSRSs need the opportunity to engage with one another. Muslim, student groups and associations bring YMSRSs together through events and programs. These groups should be supervised by a culture-sensitive staff member so that safety and compliance with the HEI's policies are maintained.

HEIs may consider encouraging these student groups to explore their cultural and religious beliefs and practices through self-authorship exercises. Per Marcia B. Baxter Magolda (2008), self-authorship is characterized by three elements: trusting the internal voice while realizing you can't always control things beyond self, building an internal foundation/personal philosophy, and securing internal commitments, which leads to a sense of freedom to live life authentically (Magolda, 2008). Muslim student groups should aim to introduce their members, including YMSRSs, to different ideas and perspectives and subsequently encourage them to reflect on their cultural beliefs and practices through activities such as journaling, group discussions, and interviews.



### **4.1.3. Flexibility with Islamic holidays, events, and practices**

Every HEI in the EU should provide accommodations for YMSRSs in the way of on-campus prayer rooms, on-campus, males-only housing, males-only and alcohol-free events, on-campus halal food options, and flexibility in class schedules, exams, and mandatory events. Spaces such as classrooms, study rooms, and conference rooms should be reserved during prayer times in any building wherein YMSRSs take classes and attend events. Furthermore, each HEI campus should have at least one, on-campus housing option for males-only, so as to enable YMSRSs comfortable proximity to members of the opposite gender.

This could include an entire building or an entire floor, but bathrooms should not be shared within these designated housing spaces. There should be an effort to host males-only and/or alcohol-free events. In addition to providing support for single-sex activities, HEIs should be sensitive about the presence of alcohol during student events. As Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol, YMSRSs may feel socially isolated if they are not provided an alcohol-free, social outlet (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). HEIs should also evaluate their dining options to ensure that food and meal-timing are accommodating of dietary restrictions, prayer times, and fasting holidays. For example, during the month of Ramadan, YMSRSs will likely fast from sunrise to sunset, so dining halls should be sensitive to this in their hours of operation.

Finally, HEI faculty and staff must be flexible in scheduling classes, mandatory events, and exams by accommodating prayer times, religious holidays—especially Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha— and important life events, such as funerals. There are two methods for encouraging this practice in HEI policies. First, HEIs should include Islamic religious holidays on the academic calendar so that faculty and staff are aware of when those holidays take place. Second, HEIs should include clauses in their policies that accommodate daily prayers, religious holidays, and important events. YMSRSs should be supported in performing their daily prayers during classes and exams. These students may need to perform their prayers outside of the classroom so as to not distract their classmates, so faculty should be made aware of which students need this accommodation. This is also true of religious events and holidays, which may cause a student to arrive late, leave early, and/or miss classes and exams. Faculty and staff must be educated, aware, and accommodating of Islamic practices.

#### **4.1.4. Consideration for amending existing inequalities and opportunities for engagement with Islam**

The media is profuse with images of hatred, extremism and terrorism in relation to Islam. Stereotypes that stem from these images- like those created by the media in relation to the attacks on New Year's Eve in Germany- create a sense of fear towards Islam and its followers (Federation of Student Islamic Societies, 2005). HEIs have a difficult task at hand in terms of reorienting the campus environment into one that is supportive of YMSRSs. In the classroom, YMSRSs may feel isolated from their non-Muslim peers, especially if they are the only Muslim in the class (Ali & Bagheri, 2009). They may also feel obligated to be representatives in defense of their religion, which can be daunting (Nasir and Al-Amin, 2006). Faculty and staff should be trained to manage sensitive discussions and disagreements in the classroom so that YMSRSs are not put in difficult situations due to their religious orientation. Sensitivity and awareness training with a unit on Muslim students should be required of any faculty or staff member who has regular contact with students.

Outside of the classroom, faculty and staff should consider organizing educational events. These events could encourage non-Muslim students, faculty, and staff to learn about Islam through first-hand experiences of Islamic customs and traditions. For example, Ali and Bagheri (2009) suggest hosting a "fast for a day" event during the month of Ramadan during which students are encouraged to refrain from drinking and eating from sunrise to sunset for one day.

#### **4.1.5. A comprehensive prevention and safety plan with regards to violent, extremist groups**

Per the literature review, security of all persons in the EU must be a priority. Non-Muslim and Muslims alike need protection from violent, extremist groups. Basic, physical safety plans are not enough given the recent influx of refugees and potential extremists from the Middle East. HEIs must create in-depth, prevention and safety plans to assist in undermining the message of radical Islam. In addition to the challenges that they have already experienced as refugees, YMSRSs who experience isolation and Islamophobia in their HEIs may be susceptible to extremist messages that offer empathy and a sense of belonging (Allen, 2016).

Parveen Akhtar (2005) suggested that extremist groups are utilizing the disenchantment of politically active, young Muslims by asserting that extremism is the only way to make a real difference in the world. HEIs must actively plan to combat and prevent this reality.

The UK Prevent Strategy is an excellent example of a prevention plan. The objectives of the Prevent Strategy are threefold: 1. Challenge extremist ideologies and those who promote them; 2. Prevent vulnerable individuals from joining violent, extremist groups; and 3. Support sectors where there is a risk of radicalization (HM government, 2011). To challenge extremist ideologies and those who promote them, the Prevent Strategy suggests more projects in education, such as consulting an expert, that enable an understanding of extremist ideologies in order to challenge them. In order to prevent vulnerable individuals from joining violent, extremist groups, the Prevent Strategy encourages the creation of organizations and programs that provide support to people who are particularly vulnerable to extremist messages. Finally, supporting sectors where there is a risk of radicalization can be implemented by delivering online prevention programs tailored to the needs and characteristics of that sector (HM government, 2011). HEIs should adopt objectives like these and coordinate with local law enforcement to create comprehensive plans that support YMSRSs while undermining the temptation of an extremist message for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

## **5. Conclusion**

Using a quantitative, website analysis, this report examined whether and how HEIs in the EU provide support to YMSRSs in seven areas. A discussion of the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges based on the results of the study provided a foundation for five policy recommendations. This study and associated policy recommendations are a first step towards providing an inclusive, support network for YMSRSs. YMSRSs who feel engaged with their host nation's community are less likely to participate in harmful activities like those that occurred in Germany on New Year's Eve. Furthermore, YMSRSs have the great potential of adding new ideas and innovations to their host communities as well as contributing to the rebuilding of their home nation if and when they return. Further studies are needed to determine whether lower levels of education and other sectors within host, EU nations are providing adequate support to YMSRSs. Host nations should use this information to determine what they can do to improve the experiences of YMSRSs during their stay.

How the EU responds to the influx of YMSRSs will determine whether their time together is disorderly and destructive or peaceful and productive.

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Appendix A

Table 1 Presence of Variables Related to YMSRS Support on EU HEI Websites	Germany			Sweden			Hungary			Austria			Netherlands			Bulgaria			Denmark			Average Presence of Variables	
	I1	I2	I3	I1	I2	I3	I1	I2	I3	I1	I2	I3	I1	I2	I3	I1	I2	I3	I1	I2	I3	n/a	
Refugee student support services	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19.05%
Muslim student groups	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9.52%
Prayer rooms	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19.05%
Exam schedule flexibility for religious holidays	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Single-sex housing	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4.76%
Halal food options	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4.76%
Events and/or speakers about Islam	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	57.14%
<b>Total Score</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>16.33%</b>

Key: I# = Institute of Higher Education, ranking 1 = the variable was present on the institute's website 0 = the variable was not present on the institute's website

<p>Search Terms and Search Operators:</p> <p>site: = search terms on a specific website  OR = search for either word/phrase  AND = search for both words/phrases</p> <p>-Refugee, Student Support Services = Refugee AND department OR program OR initiative  -Muslim, Student Groups = Muslim OR Islam AND student OR association  -Prayer Rooms = Prayer AND space OR room  -Exam Schedule Flexibility for Religious Holidays = Test OR exam OR examination  -Single-Sex Housing = Housing OR dorm AND males OR men OR single-sex  -Halal Food Options = Halal  -Events and/or Speakers about Islam = Muslim OR Islam AND events OR speaker</p>	<p>HEI Websites:</p> <p>Germany: Ludwig Maximilians University of München (uni-muenchen.de), University of Heidelberg (heidelberg.edu), Humboldt University of Berlin (hu-berlin.de)</p> <p>Sweden: Korlinska Institutet (ki.se), Uppsala University (uu.se), Lund University (lunduniversity.lu.se)</p> <p>Hungary: Semmelweis University (semmelweis.hu), Budapest University of Technology and Economics (bme.hu), University of Debrecen (unideb.hu)</p> <p>Austria: University of Vienna (univie.ac.at), Medical University of Vienna (meduniwien.ac.at), Vienna University of Technology (tuwien.ac.at)</p> <p>The Netherlands: Wageningen University and Research Center (wageningenur.nl), University of Amsterdam (uva.nl), Utrecht University (uu.nl)</p> <p>Bulgaria: Sophia University (uni-sofia.bg), American University in Bulgaria (aubg.edu), New Bulgarian University (nbu.bg) *</p> <p>Denmark: University of Copenhagen (ku.dk), Aarhus University (au.dk), Technical University of Denmark (dtu.dk)</p> <p>*In 2016, no universities in Bulgaria made it into the top 400 universities according to Times Higher Education, so first results in Google search engine were used instead as these are the results that have been searched for the most.</p>
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