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# Editorial: Education, forced migration, and disability

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## Editorial on the Research Topic Education, forced migration, and disability

The Research Topic, “*Education, forced migration, and disability*”, focuses on human rights issues and persistent and systemic problems in educational sectors throughout Europe and beyond. When the call for this paper series was published, almost 68 million persons were displaced as a result of war, economic and ecological disasters. In the intervening time, underlying political conflicts persist and national and global economic inequalities continue to surge. Thus, the number of displaced persons continues to increase, generating ongoing educational challenges and possibilities. In particular, the provision of education for persons with a forced migration background simultaneously presents the educational systems of host countries with new opportunities to reimagine and reengage with inclusive practices. Nevertheless, the diversity of both the backgrounds and the needs of those arriving means that unsupported and underfunded educational systems are all too likely to be overwhelmed. Indeed, the impact of global crises, such as war and environmental degradation, have a highly negative impact on the lives of vulnerable groups, such as those from precarious socio-economic backgrounds and those with disabilities. War, of course, inevitably and inexorably increases the number of disabled people, even as it escalates general societal imbalances, deepens already existing exclusionary tendencies, and leads to the need for people to flee for their very lives. All this makes it imperative that intersecting layers of diversity are addressed in research that addresses forced migration and education. Specifically, the intersecting lines of forced migration and disability point to the particular challenges that people with disabilities can encounter as they take flight from the places that were once their homes and seek sanctuary in new lands.

This Research Topic brings particular attention to the multitude of challenges faced by disabled young people with forced migration backgrounds. This matters because their problems are largely absent in discourses about forced migration, and the nexus of forced migration and disability remains a minority concern in both education and migration studies. The educational backgrounds of persons with disabilities vary significantly in accordance with the education policies and opportunities within their countries of origin. Moreover, these young people have often endured long periods of educational exclusion before, during, and after their journeys to safety, sometimes incorporating experiences of segregation in special schools.

This Research Topic brings together experiences from countries with a variety of education systems, each with their own distinct set of challenges. All articles are listed as original research involving both theoretical positions, as well as good practice reports, based on empirical data. This journal opens with an article on inclusive education for refugee children with disabilities (Steigmann), which uses the example of Berlin to illustrate the difficulties of how the educational system has to find appropriate solutions for the inclusion of children with disabilities in the school system. The data emerged from expert interviews with social workers, who support both institutions and parents. The article illustrates the crucial role of parents, especially when institutional service provisions are insufficient. Throughout the article, the author advances the critical case for low-threshold support systems in education.

The article on refugee families with children with disabilities (Bešić and Hochgatterer) is based on research in Austria. Like the paper from Berlin, this study focuses on the experiences of parents and caregivers. The article reveals the complexity of support needs and shows the differing ways caregivers navigate difficult situations, and how supporting structures can facilitate these processes. The coping strategies of caregivers, as well as problems in the legal structures of education and care institutions, are illustrated by three illuminating case studies. This article, based on empirical data, can also be regarded as a good practice report.

The contribution on the education of disabled refugees in Sub-Saharan Africa (Walton et al.) demonstrates the global dimensions of educational inequalities and exclusions and, in particular, the study brings into sharp focus the ways poverty of resources can generate extraordinary challenges. The article's authors present case studies from South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Uganda. In all three countries there is a lack of necessary education opportunities for all students with disabilities, as well for those with refugee background. In this way the article reveals the structural similarity in the educational experiences of disabled and displaced young people.

The call for this paper series was published before the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, which affected the schooling situation of all children, with and without disabilities, and with and without a forced migration background. The paper on school closure and returning to school (Castro-Kemp and Mahmud) has a focus on children with disabilities, but not on the specific situation of those with a forced migration background. As those children with a forced migration background are an invisible part of this group, this paper can be seen within the scope of this Research Topic.

## Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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