



## POLICY BRIEF

### *Understanding The Formation of Marginalised Migrant Youth's Higher Education Aspirations in Disadvantaged Contexts*

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#### Introduction

Discussions about Africa's development have taken place through various platforms and movements such as Agenda 2063, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) and Pan Africanism. The goal is that African development sustainably ends poverty and enhances freedom for all on the continent. One of the ways to work towards the achievement of these goals is by enabling access to higher education, including for marginalised groups, some of whom are migrant youth. This raises the challenge of youth migration and the realisation of their educational aspirations – which is the focus of this brief.

#### About this brief

South Africa has, through its Constitution, provided extensive rights for migrants, and through subsequent amendments of migration laws, has shown a continuous engagement with the changing migration environment. However, little is known about marginalised migrant youth's aspirations to access higher education. Drawing from conversations with a group of marginalised migrant youth in South Africa, this policy brief illustrates how the interaction of structural and personal environments shape marginalised migrant youths' possible pathways into higher education. It summarizes a qualitative research study on marginalised migrant youth and their access to education in Johannesburg, conducted between 2014 and 2016. The brief suggests plans of action that can be adapted by organisation(s) or government department(s) with an interest in human development.

#### Methods

For the research, data was collected through in-depth narrative interviews with 26 migrant youth who had accessed refugee services at the Central Methodist Church in Johannesburg. A focus group was conducted to probe further some of the issues that emerged from the individual interviews. Two additional interviews were conducted with representatives from the Methodist run refugee centre. The data showed that challenges such as migration status, individual circumstances which are a result of personal, economic, social and institutional conditions affect how marginalised migrant youth experience educational opportunities and their aspirations for both schooling and higher education.

## Challenges to higher educational aspirations

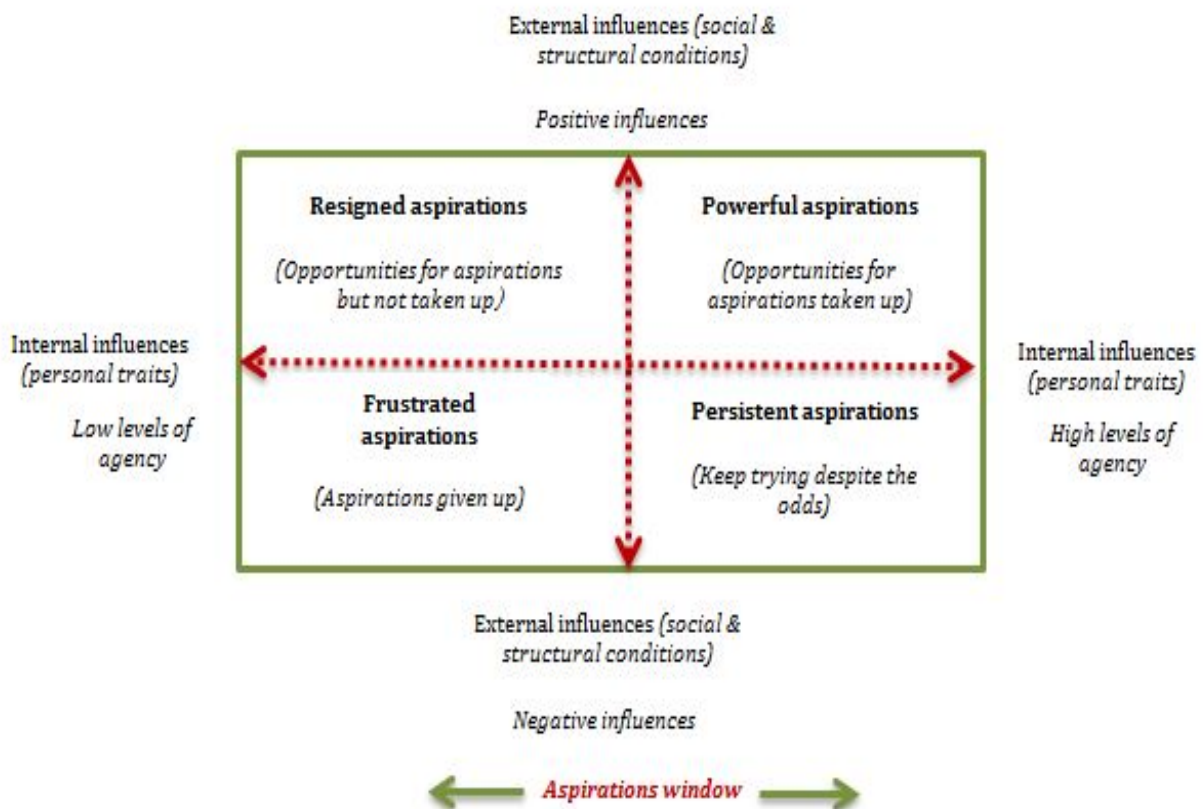
**Social factors-** these included living conditions, affiliation and belonging, exposure, networks and gender. Living conditions were identified as not conducive for study by some of the youth and this ultimately influenced one's aspirations.

**Economic factors-** negatively impacted on migrants' lives and educational aspirations. Economic factors included unemployment, family responsibilities, and limited access to bursaries. Finance was viewed as the core challenge as lack of income meant that one cannot access basic necessities such as food and clothing. As such, it was difficult to think about pursuing education while immediate needs were difficult to meet.

**Institutional factors-** the identified institutional factors comprised of legality of status of the youth (legal documentation). In relation to broader policy, the identified limitation was that it was difficult to obtain legal status in the country. Lack of documentation was seen to influence the economic condition of the youth as it limited opportunities to access decent employment, bursaries and scholarships.

**Personal factors-** individual background, age and level of education make up personal factors. Factors such as parents' education also made a significant contribution to enhancing or constraining one's educational aspirations. Negative influences came from a lack of parental and emotional support, as well as experiences of a lack in various other aspects of the migrant youth lives which then impacted on the motivation for schooling.

Based on the manner in which these challenges affected the youth's aspirations for higher education, I conceptualised four different types of aspirations (*resigned, powerful, persistent and frustrated*) to illustrate the interaction of the diverse challenges.



**Figure 1:** Formation of the four aspirations

### **Powerful aspirations**

Powerful aspirations are clear and impactful in a person's life, and occur when the individual has control in different aspects of life including emotional, physical and psychological, accompanied by flexible social and structural conditions in terms of policies and schooling access. These clear and powerful aspirations are formed when there is a positive relationship between the actions one takes and the structural conditions within which one lives.

### **Persistent aspirations**

Aspirations can be viewed as persistent when an individual continues to take action towards what is valuable to him/her (their aspirations), despite social and structural factors which make it very difficult to realise these aspirations. This type of aspiration is influenced by intrinsic motivation more than extrinsic motivation, although there may be instrumental values tied to the achievement of the aspiration, for example one may value the satisfaction of achieving a certain aspiration (self-actualisation), yet the achievement of that aspiration also enhances opportunities such as for employment.

### **Frustrated aspirations**

Frustrated aspirations are characterised by low levels of individual action and negative influences of social and structural conditions such that there seems to be no room for opportunities or aspirations. The combination and interaction of these contexts has the potential to lead to a situation where an individual resigns their aspirations and this resignation is accompanied by lack of belief in oneself and in the social and structural conditions present. Such frustration of aspirations can create poverty traps.

### **Resigned Aspirations**

Resigned aspirations are characterised by loss of confidence in achieving one's valued aspirations and resulted from the absence of the minimum resources needed to live a decent life. The interaction of factors leading to aspirations resignation is complex as it can involve personal, economic, social and cultural influences. Thus, the decision by marginalised migrant youth to resign a valued aspiration should be understood in terms of the extent to which basic needs are met, and the uniqueness of such a decision as a result of individual varied experiences.

### **Points for policy consideration**

The Human Development Reports have, since 1990, been concerned with the removal of disadvantage and the creation of opportunities to lead worthwhile lives. However, the above interaction of both structural and personal factors in the formation of educational aspirations highlights some of the limitations to the creation of these opportunities. Such effects of poverty can manifest in form of other social challenges such as a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS, higher rates of substance abuse, and higher rates of criminal and violent behaviour. Thus, migrants' experiences of disadvantage go far beyond the articulation of educational aspirations and this requires an urgent understanding of how their lives could be improved.

To help in this, some of the points to consider are:

- (i) *Creation of opportunities focused on helping migrant youth to both express and realise their educational aspirations such as education related youth development programmes. These could be designed by stakeholders working with marginalised migrant youth.*
- (ii) *While host governments may have limited tangible resources to afford marginalised migrants opportunities to pursue higher educational aspirations, opening channels, such as less stringent access to public institutions and colleges maybe one way to address the potential of systematic*

*poverty. This would include, for example, placing a waiver on the requirements of study permits for all asylum seekers permit holders.*

*(ii) Without being over simplistic about unemployment and the financial implications of accessing higher education for citizens in a host country like South Africa, financial aid in form of loans could be made available to exceptionally achieving marginalised migrant youth interested in accessing university and/or TVET's to pursuing studies in fields identified as scarce skills by the government.*

## **Conclusion**

The potential long-term contribution of education for marginalised migrants for human development is significant, not only in efforts directed towards alleviating poverty, but also in encompassing both intrinsic and instrumental contributions in a transnational sphere. Another potential contribution of education is that it can equip marginalised migrant youth for the multiple possible futures they face. In doing so, various areas of marginalised migrant's wellbeing become advanced thereby contributing to Africa's development.

## **Useful References**

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