

REFUGEES WELCOME?

Recognition of qualifications held by refugees and their access to higher education in Europe - country analyses

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IMPRINT

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Brussels, April, 2017

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FOREWORD

Dear reader,

I refuse to call it a refugee crisis. I do not think this 'catchphrase' portrays the responsibility, values and solidarity that it should actually carry. Instead, the words refugee crisis has become a symbol of divisions: closed borders on one side, and thousands of local solidarity initiatives refusing to accept this narrative on the other side. We should build a new narrative, based on rights, equality, equal opportunities and inclusion and not based on the fear from different cultures, religions and unfamiliar traditions. Rapid increase of migration has challenged the self-portrayal of the European identity and is questioning long-standing beliefs about our own values on democracy, multiculturalism and tolerance.

This is a humanitarian crisis. This crisis needs to receive proper attention and commitment for action from the governments, social partners and societies across Europe. Education is a human right. It is a driving force for social mobility, societal development and integration. Any person with the desire to learn should be granted the opportunity to do so. Thus, we should open our education institutions to anyone fleeing a situation of conflict, war, terror, hunger, and violations of human rights. This publication reveals some of the struggles in accessing education that refugees face arriving in Europe. With confidence it also shows how to remove obstacles like: undocumented prior learning, unknown qualifications or incomplete recognition instruments.

I hope this publication serves as an advocacy tool for recognition of refugees' and asylum seekers' qualifications for student unions on local, national and international levels. I hope this publication assists other civil society organisations and human rights activists in the area of education, refugees' rights and beyond. Moreover, it should serve as a compass for the governments and state agencies by showcasing existing initiatives and looking for a place for improvement.

On behalf of ESU, I want to sincerely thank the researchers' team for the hard work that has been put into this publication. I wish to also thank all the institutions and organisations that cooperated and made this work possible!

Līva Vikmane

Līva Vikmane

Vice President

European Students' Union



INTRODUCTION

KAROLINA PIETKIEWICZ

We, the European Students' Union (ESU), representing all the students in Europe, call upon all the students, teaching and administrative staff, universities and other education institutions, as well as authorities, policy makers and citizens in general, to welcome and provide assistance and support to students and others who are displaced persons, such as refugees, asylum seekers or persons in a refugee-like situation that might want to pursue their education.

(ESU, 2014a)

Education is and should be treated as public good and human right

(Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948)

This chapter introduces the main objectives of the project that led to this study and marked a milestone in the European Students' Union's (ESU) work on integration of refugees through education in Europe by widening access to higher education institutions and recognition of their qualifications. It presents the European context of the so-called 'refugee crisis', explains why education is a good catalyst for refugees' integration and finally gives background information about the publication – its scope and methodology.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

2015 marked a year when Europe realised that the massive influx of displaced individuals and families coming to the continent with the intention to obtain refugee status was inevitable. More than a million people made the journey to Europe leaving their lives behind to seek political asylum (Eurostat, 2017). In 2017, by March alone, over 40,000 women, children and men have risked their lives making their way to Europe (UNHCR, 2017). Yet despite committing to the adoption of humanitarian values by signing the Geneva Convention on the status of Refugees in 1951, the capacity and willingness to address this issue met with many questions about the respect of human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law across Europe. The signatories of the Geneva Convention have legally bound themselves to introduce the policies aiming at empowering and integrating refugees within their new communities, using education as one of the instruments for this purpose.

What we see at present is a public debate about refugees that is influenced by politicians standing on two opposite sides of the political arena - either welcoming refugees and setting mechanisms in place to help them in integration or trying to cause anxiety among the communities to justify their reluctance to provide help. Empirical observation of the media shows that the arguments used by politicians and the press are not

always based on objective research, which may have resulted in sending unsettling signals to the public and therefore, understandably, may have caused anxiety and reluctance of the communities to help refugees (Berry et al., 2015). For some, the higher influx of refugees became a symbol of European inability to define itself and the term 'refugee crisis' was an excuse for weaknesses of the immigration policies and humanitarian aid systems (ESU, 2014a; Nougayrède, 2016).

However, the debate in general is rather Eurocentric leaving out what is at the core of the issue – helping people rebuild their lives, restore their dignity and awaken a sense of belonging – factors that are central to battling barriers to motivation and participation in new communities (Brar-Josan, 2015). This humanitarian crisis should trigger a search for catalysts for integration to build more inclusive humanitarian systems putting safety, dignity and opportunities of the vulnerable at the centre. Education certainly constitutes an example of such an instrument (ESU, 2014a). It helps them to integrate in local communities, helps them to further their personal development, and provide for their families (ibid.).

This study analyses how selected countries use education as an instrument for inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and persons in refugee-like situation focusing on two main aspects: access and recognition of qualifications. The aim of the research is two-fold. On the one hand to have a better knowledge and understanding about the initiatives already taken by higher education actors or lack thereof with regard to access to higher education for refugees and recognition of their qualifications and on the other to help ideas travel across the contexts and be applicable in other countries by indicating promising practices to foster access to and successful completion of third-level education for student refugees. The following section sheds some light on the state of play of refugees' integration through education in the European context and moves on to presentation of the structure of the report.

2. INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Since the peak in 2015, the numbers of refugees coming to Europe has been decreasing. The recorded applications from the first-time asylum seekers in the EU-28 countries dropped in the fourth quarter of 2016 in comparison to the fourth quarter of 2015 and the third quarter of 2015 by -51% and -43%, respectively. Only in the fourth quarter of 2015, the number of persons seeking asylum amounted to 426,000, most of which were lodged Syrians, Afghans and Iraqis (Eurostat, 2017). According to the estimates, in 2015 refugees under 18 years old constitute 51% of the incoming population and the average time of exile for a refugee amount to 20 years (UNHCR, 2016a). Yet the access to education and higher education in particular is still heavily burdened. The evidence shows that people with a refugee background are five times more likely not to be enrolled in education than their non-refugee peers (UNESCO, 2016). Only 1% of youth with refugee background access tertiary education, compared to an access level of 34% globally among the youth (UNHCR, 2016b). In Europe the secured right to education regardless of migration or residence status is expressed only in 10 out of 28 Member States (PICUM, 2015).

According to findings of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) the main barriers refugees face to enter higher education in Europe are:

- Lack of information,
- Advice and individual guidance,
- Recognition of credits and qualifications, particularly without documents,
- Inadequate language support provisions,
- Lack of adequate financing.

For the purpose of this report, financial support, information provision, guidance will be considered under access and the issue of recognition will be analysed separately.

2.1 ACCESS

Providing access to education, and higher education specifically, for refugees contributes to the country as whole, both economically and societally (Berg S. L. et al., 2016). It helps refugees to integrate in local communities, to further their personal development, and provide for their families (ESU 2014a). In order to guarantee this inherent element of integration, countries and HEIs need to fulfil their commitments regarding the social dimension, which is understood in Europe as "strategies and measures taken to mirror the diversity of society at large within higher education" (EHEA, 2007). Imperfect as the definition may be (Kaiser et al. 2015), the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has a point of reference and some limited guidelines towards a definition of access to higher education, which can be found in the Ministerial Communiqués (EHEA, 2002 – 2015). Despite the evolution of the social dimension that resulted in positive developments, the countries of the EHEA have still not progressed significantly compared to other action lines of the Bologna Process and face many problems regarding access to education for all (Kaiser et al. 2015). Importantly, the Bologna Process was not the first structure to emphasise the meaning of the social dimension and access. Shortly before establishing the EHEA the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE expressed the need for wide and effective participation of all societal groups in higher education, stating that the "socio-economic situation of minorities is very often also an obstacle to their access to higher education" (CoE, 1998).

To put all the above in context, despite almost two decades of work, higher education systems still leave many people behind and refugees, due to their unique socio-economic situation, are a particularly vulnerable group that states should take responsibility for. In this, one of the tasks of higher education is to mirror the makeup of our societies with all its diversity. However, to help overcome obstacles for people at risk it is not enough to use the measures that are already in place, such as lack of tuition fees in HEIs, but a wide range of specific measures need to be implemented targeting specific groups including refugees (ESU, 2014b).

2.2. RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads "Higher Education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit" (UDHR, 1948) yet access to higher education for refugees who come to Europe having

obtained qualifications which ought to allow them to commence or continue their degrees is troublesome due to inefficient or non-existent recognition mechanisms. There are significant barriers of time, lengthy procedures and lack of adequate support and guidance that successfully prevent refugees from pursuing their academic degrees, despite the existing legal basis that guarantees all displaced persons, refugees, asylum seekers or persons in a refugee-like situation the right to education, and adequate support mechanisms to successfully complete it.

The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the Lisbon Recognition Convention) is one of the most ratified of the Council of Europe's Conventions ¹ and its section VII, article VII reads as follows:

SECTION VII - RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS HELD BY REFUGEES, DISPLACED PERSONS AND PERSONS IN A REFUGEE - LIKE SITUATION

Article VII

Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfill the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence. (LRC, 1997)

What this means in practice is that refugees who have prior education, both formal and non-formal, even if not documented, should have the right to have their qualifications assessed and recognised in a fair and transparent manner in all the countries who have signed and ratified the document. Despite a two-decade existence of those provisions, this article is yet to be fully respected and the ENIC² -NARIC ³ centres report numerous problems with regard to a lack of or inefficient recognition procedures resulting in limited access to higher education for potential students from vulnerable backgrounds.

Since 2015, the European Network of Information Centres in the European Region and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (ENIC-NARIC) have faced a significant increase in requests by refugees regarding the recognition of their qualifications. A specific part on the website has therefore been set up indicating how to address this issue.⁴ A first review of the number of applications was held at the end of 2015 to gain a clear understanding of the challenges faced by the different centres. Table 1 presents the numbers of refugees who applied for recognition of qualifications in the countries that answered

¹ See: Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 165: http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/165/signatures?p_auth=qmkBkFXM

² European Network of Information Centres in the European Region

³ National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union

⁴ <http://www.enic-naric.net/recognise-qualifications-held-by-refugees.aspx>

a survey conducted by the Council of Europe (CoE) in October 2015. Importantly, not all the countries could specify the number of refugees due to the limitations in data collection throughout the application process.⁵

Table 1. The number of applicants with refugee background in 2015.

	2014	2015
Belgium Wallonia	-	16
Belgium Flanders	317	317
Czechia	-	2
Denmark	1993	2843
Finland	40	45
Germany	1054	2226
Lithuania	-	20
Norway	-	7547
The Netherlands	665	1095
Romania	-	15
Russia	80	310
Slovenia	-	2
Switzerland	-	5
Sweden	8442	10323

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of data collected by CoE.

Besides collecting the numbers, the ENIC-NARIC centres have indicated the following challenges regarding the recognition process for applicants with refugee backgrounds:⁶

- Lack of information about the education systems and qualifications from countries in conflict;
- Questionable authenticity of the documents provided;
- Lack of documentation;
- Incomplete qualifications;
- Number of applicants.

In addition to the challenges that have to do with the applicants themselves, there is also a set of issues that the centres have to deal with internally, such as staff training, more efficient procedures, or broadening the staff's language base.

Already in 2015 there was a lot of willingness and enthusiasm among the ENIC-NARIC centres to cooperate with both the CoE and the European Commission on tackling those barriers. A number of tools have been implemented on the European level to support staff development and more efficient refugee treatment in the countries, e.g. the EAR (European Area of Recognition) manual for higher education institutions⁷ or the guide

⁵ E.g. In Germany and the Netherlands – there is no specific data on refugees' status or in Sweden and Lithuania – information about the refugee status of the applicant is not compulsory.

⁶ According to data collected in a CoE survey in 2015. Results presented in a meeting of CoE Working group on the Recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugees-like situation Strasbourg, 11th and 12th of February 2016.

⁷ <http://eurorecognition.eu/emanual/Chapter%2012/default.aspx>

for credential evaluators on the ENIC-NARIC website.⁸ To answer to the challenges of the recognition of the qualifications held by refugees, several national ENIC-NARIC centres have developed specific procedures to facilitate the process, e.g. the Norwegian ENIC-NARIC centre, NOKUT, proposed a 'qualifications passport for refugees'.⁹ Several other centres have held conferences on the subject bringing together different stakeholders (e.g. in France). Though some of those instruments were not innovative, as guidelines for recognition of qualifications held by refugees were released in the past, e.g. the guidelines presented by the CoE Working party on Refugees qualifications in 1999¹⁰, the rapid increase in the number of refugees certainly triggered the need for updating documents to fit the current context. It can, however, be concluded that this is a recurring challenge, which proves that Europe has yet to successfully address the issues.

3. STRUCTURE AND AIM OF THIS REPORT

The European Students' Union (ESU) aims at building a common and open Europe, where everyone is welcomed and able to live with dignity, without violation of their rights or freedoms. Having in mind that students and students' unions can play a very important role in welcoming refugees and assisting them through different actions and initiatives, ESU wants to contribute to the discussion on the situation of access of refugees to higher education and recognition of their qualification in Europe, analysing.

The main objective of this final report is to analyse the integration of refugees in European higher education and the recognition of their qualifications in a selected number of countries. With the results presented in this report ESU wants to provide an evidence-based overview of the effectiveness of the existing measures for the integration of refugees and identify challenges that still need to be addressed. Furthermore, this report aims to make initiatives for refugees more visible to other actors throughout Europe, hoping to encourage HEIs, students' unions and other organisation to follow the good examples. ESU believes that this report can help stakeholders to connect to other initiatives, and provide National Students' Unions (NUSes) with examples of country analyses to encourage them to repeat the same exercise in their own contexts to be able to better design measures and propose policy-developments to help fellow students with a refugee background.

The report includes detailed country analyses of Romania, Belgium, Norway and Germany. The chosen countries represent different parts of Europe as well as countries that face specific challenges in coping with the inclusion of refugees into higher education and that have partially found solutions for these problems that might serve as good practice examples. Each country report addresses:

- The background of the country – including a brief description of the higher education system as well as the general situation of refugees in terms of immigration procedures and support;
- Problems and challenges with regard to access to higher education for refugees as well as recognition of qualifications;

8 <http://www.enic-naric.net/recognise-qualifications-held-by-refugees.aspx#>

9 Described in the Norwegian country analysis, see p. 41

10 http://www.aic.lv/ace/WP/Refugees/guid_ref.htm

- Promising practices – initiatives and programs that have been developed either by civil society, the academic community or the governments to solve existing problems and support a better inclusion of refugees into higher education;
- Conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis including considerations for the future, e.g. actions that may travel across different contexts.

Based on the results of the four case studies a final chapter summarises the results and draws conclusions and recommendations that allow an assessment of what has been done, what still can be done and why it would be helpful to implement certain ideas (both short- as well as long-term). Following the overall aim to welcome and provide assistance and support to refugee students, ESU hopes that with this report we can support ongoing efforts for the integration of refugees into higher education in Europe and participate in the discussion about good practices and ways to overcome existing challenges in the future.

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COUNTRY REPORTS



HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFUGEES IN FLANDERS

MARTINA VUKASOVIC¹

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1980s, decision-making competencies concerning higher education in Belgium have been in the hands of the two communities, Flanders and Wallonia. Effectively this means that at present, there are two higher education systems in Belgium - the Walloon and the Flemish one. Thus, this report focuses on existing and planned initiatives concerning the provision of higher education to refugees in Flanders. It is based on the analysis of:

- Reports by different organizations involved, such as the ministry responsible for higher education, state agencies involved in asylum processes, as well as higher education institutions and their associations: Vlaamse Interuniversitaire Raad (VLIR, Flemish Interuniversity Council) and Vlaamse Hogescholenraad (VLHORA, Flemish Council of University Colleges);
- Interviews with individuals working for these organizations (a list of interviewees is at the end of the report); and
- Information provided by said actors, in particular online information in English (given that Dutch is not a language which refugee students are likely to have learned in their home countries).

The report begins with an overview of the overall situation concerning refugees in Flanders, including information on the procedure of seeking asylum, as well as basic information about the Flemish higher education system. This is followed by the description of different initiatives taking place, on the system level concerning recognition of qualifications as well as on the level of higher education institutions and their partners. The concluding section reflects on the key findings, and focuses on the extent to which promising aspects may be transferable to other higher education systems.

2. OVERALL SITUATION CONCERNING REFUGEES IN FLANDERS

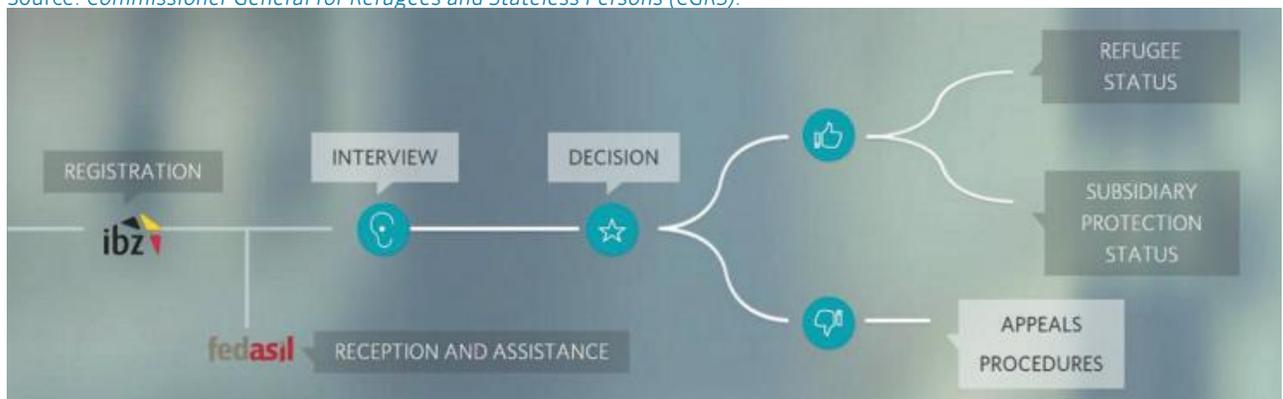
The procedure concerning registration of refugees in Belgium involves several agencies (Figure 1). First, the immigration office (IBZ, federal agency) registers the identity of the asylum applicant, based on the applicant's documentation as well as their finger-printing records. The latter is also used to check whether the same person applied for asylum in another EU country and/or whether the person entered the EU through a country other than Belgium. Applicants can then turn to Fedasil (federal agency) for accommodation in one of

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the approx. 50 reception centres, receive material help, and social, legal and/or medical guidance- including interpreters. Reception centres also organize support for asylum seeking children for attending schools in the neighbourhood (e.g. evening assistance with homework). Current capacity for accommodation provided by Fedasil is over 30,000 people, with 1/3 being available in individual households, and 2/3 in the reception centres. The applicant is then invited for at least one interview by the office of the Commission General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS). The decision is made by the CGRS, which if positive, can either be granting refugee status or granting subsidiary protection status. The latter concerns cases in which all the requirements for refugee status are not fulfilled, but it would nevertheless be unsafe for the applicant to return to the country of origin. CGRS can also decide not to handle the asylum application, e.g. in a case where the application is an EU national, from a country that is considered safe, or is already a recognised refugee in another EU country.

Figure 1. Overview of the procedure concerning asylum seekers².

Source: Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS).



The number of asylum applications varied over the last 6 years (Table 1)³. The peak period was between August and September 2015, when an average of approx. 6,000 persons filed an asylum application per month. This peak corresponds to the more general increase of asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria in 2015, which have been amongst the top-10 countries of origin of asylum seekers throughout this period (Syria only from 2012 onwards). Significant numbers of asylum seekers also came from the Democratic Republic of Congo, China, Guinea, Iran, Russia and the Balkan countries (in particular from Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia in 2010 and 2011). The number of positive decisions taken also varies. Until January 2016, applications and decisions could concern more than one person (e.g. a family), while from January 2016, each individual is considered as a separate applicant for asylum, even when applying together. In the last two years, approximately half of the decisions taken by the CGRS were positive and granted refugee status. The low proportion of positive decisions granted in earlier years is primarily linked to a high number of applicants from the Balkan countries, which, for these purposes, are considered safe countries of origin.

² Full description of the procedure can be found at <http://www.cgra.be/en> (last accessed in April 2017).

³ Given that the agencies involved in decisions concerning asylum status are all federal agencies, the data concerning asylum applications is aggregated for Belgium, i.e. separate data for Flanders and Wallonia are not readily available.

Table 1. Number of asylum applications and decisions.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Jan-Aug 2016
asylum applications	19,941	25,479	21,463	15,840	17,213	35,476	12,316
asylum decisions by CGRS	13,170	16,828	19,731	18,193	13,132	13,381	15,108
... of which positive decisions	2,818	3,955	4,419	4,936	6,146	8,122	8,484
... granted refugee status	2,107	2,861	3,038	2,985	4,805	6,757	7,300*
... granted subsidiary protection status	711	1,094	1,381	1,950	1,341	1,365	2,000*

* Refers to number of people, not decisions.
Source: CGRS.

In 2012, the average time between an asylum seeker registers until the decision of CGRS (i.e. not including the appeals procedure) is reached was 80 calendar days. While there is no concrete data for 2013 and 2014, it seems that due to the sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers in the summer of 2015, the period has now significantly increased. How long this may take at present is not clear.⁴ The Syrian refugees are eligible for a fast track procedure, which may include only one interview and which can be resolved within two weeks.

Given that recognition of refugee status is important for other administrative procedures (e.g. recognition of qualifications or application for a study grant, see below), the time it takes for an asylum seeker to be recognized as a refugee or a person with a subsidiary protection status can significantly increase the time needed to become eligible to enrol into a higher education institution.

3. THE FLEMISH HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM, ENTRY REQUIREMENTS AND PROCEDURES

The Flemish higher education system comprises five universities which provide study programmes in all three cycles, and 15 university colleges which are more focused on professional education in the first and second cycle (Table 2). The 2003 Decree on higher education obliged university colleges to form associations with a university, so as to achieve 'academization' of professional higher education (Huisman & Mampaey, 2016). Five associations have been formed around the universities of Antwerp, Brussels, Ghent, Hasselt and Leuven.

Table 2. Number of institutions and students in the Flemish public higher education system.

Type of HEIs	Number of HEIs	Degrees offered	Enrolled students (2015/2016)
Universities	5	bachelor, master, PhD	114,490*
Universities colleges	15	bachelor, master	118,697

*Does not include those enrolled in PhD programmes.
Source: Vlaamse overheid, 2016.

There are three forms of study arrangements: (1) a diploma contract – which involves class based attendance of courses leading to a bachelor or master degree, (2) a credit contract – which involves class based

⁴ See also: <http://www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/Belgium/asylum-procedure/procedures/regular-procedure> (last accessed April 2017).

attendance of individual courses, not leading to a specific degree, and (3) an examination contract – which foresees only the taking of exams, for the purpose of obtaining a full degree or credits for individual courses. The diploma contract can be a full-time, half-time or part-time one, but for non-EEA students, only the full-time diploma contract is available. Students who are recognized as refugees are considered non-EEA students and, administratively speaking, are registered in information systems of universities as international students (see below).

In order to be a full-time diploma contract student, a person also needs to possess suitable (secondary) or higher education qualifications, and to fulfil language requirements. In the case of students who are refugees, secondary education qualifications are in most cases subject to a recognition procedure (outlined below). Language requirements primarily concern sufficient knowledge of Dutch, given that almost all Bachelor study programmes, and a majority of master programmes are available only in the Dutch language. As will be presented below, there are several initiatives by the universities that are specifically addressing the requirement for a knowledge of the language.

4. RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

In order to enrol into a higher education study programme, refugee students do not necessarily need to have their educational credential recognized by Flemish authorities (i.e. NARIC), given that the universities and university colleges have the authority to decide which credentials are required for admittance into their programmes. However, according to one of the interviewed experts, a formal recognition by NARIC can be helpful when seeking admission into a higher education programme. Belgium has ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) in 2009 and, therefore, the legislation regulating the recognition of degrees in Flanders is in line with the provisions of the LRC. In 2013, a number of changes to the regulation were introduced, in order to facilitate recognition of degrees for refugees.⁵

These include waiving the usual fee for the recognition procedure for asylum seekers, refugees and persons under subsidiary protection. Regular applicants need to pay 90 EUR for an official statement on correspondence of qualification levels, 180 EUR for the recognition of Associate, Bachelor or Master degree and 300 EUR for the recognition of doctoral degrees. It should be noted that, in order to benefit from fee waivers, refugee students need to have proof that they are registered asylum seekers, or to have had their formal refugee status (or status concerning subsidiary protection) approved.

Apart from this, Flemish authorities also allow for adaptations of the procedure to facilitate recognition of qualifications in such cases. First, recognition authorities can decide to base their recognition decision on an advisory statement by an expert- on the basis of an interview with the refugee student. Second, in case the applicants are not able to provide full documentation, an adapted procedure is offered. In September 2016, the Flemish NARIC and the association of Flemish universities (VLIR) launched a pilot project that allows

⁵ The Flemish Education Council (Vlaamse Onderwijsraad, VLOR) published a set of recommendations for the entire education sector in 2015, amongst which are also recommendations for a faster and simplified recognition procedure for higher education qualifications. The recommendations (in Dutch) can be found here: http://www.vlor.be/sites/www.vlor.be/files/ar-ar-adv-1516-002_0.pdf (last accessed April 2017).

refugee students who have incomplete documentation to take an alternative route towards recognition. The route comprises (1) attending a limited number of courses in an English taught master discipline related to their field of study and (2) following a seminar, practical training sessions, or writing a paper. On the basis of this, academic staff involved in the programmes are expected to produce advice concerning recognition to NARIC, which may also include advice on how to pursue a Flemish degree. At present, this alternative route is available for refugee students who apply for recognition of their master degrees in natural sciences, engineering, economy and business studies. This is, on the one hand, a reflection of demand – it appears that the majority of recognition applications from refugee students concern these areas, but on the other hand it reflects the supply of English-language study programmes, which, in the Flemish case, are so far available almost only on the Master level, and in a limited number of fields. The pilot project foresees that the students complete this alternative route in one semester, thus an evaluation is foreseen for February 2017. It should be noted that, according to the interviewed experts, the problem of incomplete documentation is not acute- i.e. most refugee students take extra precautions in reaching Flanders and are able to provide at least degree certificates (or copies thereof). Moreover, some of the universities in the countries with highest numbers of refugees (Iraq, Syria) remain operational, so it is not impossible to obtain relevant documentation from them. The language challenge however remains (see below for institutions' initiatives on the matter).

According to one of the interviewed experts, when it comes to recognition of qualifications, refugees perceive some decisions as inconsistent (e.g. a degree from the same field of study and the same university not being recognized in the same manner) and the procedure as too long. It can take up to nine months for the process to be completed, which, coupled with time to obtain formal refugee or subsidiary protection status which is important for study financing (see below), means that it can take up to two years from the moment that the refugees arrive to Belgium until the moment they can enrol into higher education.

5. TUITION FEES AND STUDY SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES

In Flanders, students pay tuition fees, the level of which was increased in 2014. A full-time Bachelor level student that is an EU/EEA national on a degree or credit study contract who does not receive a fee deduction or waiver is expected to pay up to 890 EUR for 60 ECTS = 230 EUR flat fee and 11 EUR for each study point. There are two other options for students from disadvantaged backgrounds – a student can be granted a fee reduction and pay 4 EUR per study point, i.e. total of 470 EUR for 60 ECTS), or the student can be awarded the full grant and pay 105 EUR = for 60 ECTS. If a student is enrolled under an exam-contract, s/he needs to pay: 105 EUR flat fee, plus 4 ECTS for each study point, plus additional 200 EUR for access to online studying platforms.

Refugee students are eligible for study grants on similar grounds as foreign nationals (1) who are living in Belgium and whose parents are EU nationals which have been or are currently working in Belgium, or (2) who have a permanent residence permit for Belgium. Students formally recognized as refugees or persons under subsidiary protection are eligible for study grants. Refugee students, as Flemish nationals or other students eligible for study grants, also need to fulfil study and financial conditions, i.e. the grants are needs-based. Moreover, the number of grants awarded in Flanders is not predetermined- implying that refugee students effectively do not compete with Flemish students or other non-Flemish nationals for grants.

The study grants are awarded by the Flemish government and administered (in Dutch) by social service units run by the local authorities (public centres for social welfare, Openbaar Centrum voor Maatschappelijk Welzijn – OCMW).⁶ Social services at universities often provide assistance to students in preparing their applications for study grants. For 2016-2017, the scholarships range from approx. 250 EUR to almost 4,000 EUR for a student who rents student accommodation. In addition, refugee students, as other students, are also eligible for subsidized income ('leefloon', provided by OCMW), student accommodation, as well as subsidized food, transport, health care, child care, sport and cultural activities.

Interviewed experts indicate that, given the overall financial and social conditions of refugee students, some of them are likely to fulfil requirements for study grants, and thus pay the lowest tuition fee (105 EUR per 60 ECTS). However, in case they are older than 26, they may be advised by the local authorities to pursue work instead of higher education- given that, as interviewed experts suggest, the advice OCMW gives varies from local community to local community. Furthermore, student accommodation capacities are often not sufficient, even to meet the demand of non-refugee students, and most of the accommodation is suited for single students, not families. By the time of finalizing this report, it was not possible to obtain information on the number of study grants granted to refugee students.

6. INITIATIVES BY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

At present, there is no overall explicit strategy at the system level concerning access to and delivery of higher education of refugees. The initiatives presented have been developed bottom-up. The two associations of higher education institutions (VLIR and VLHORA) have established working groups on the issue to share experience, whilst a system level event dedicated to higher education of refugees will be organized by VLIR in Autumn 2017. Initiatives of individual universities and university colleges are presented below.

6.1. UNIVERSITEIT ANTWERPEN (UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP, UA)

The initiatives are coordinated by a university-wide workgroup, with the International Students Office as the main contact point. It supplies information concerning higher education for refugees. Whilst the main page of the university website does not include visible direct links to information for refugees, there is a page comprising information related to higher education opportunities and procedures that is part of the education section (international subsection).⁷ The information focuses on learning Dutch, bachelor and master study programmes and recognition of degrees. It is clear and generic, and includes also an e-mail address to which prospective students can send more detailed requests.

Bachelor programmes at UA are only available in Dutch, while master programmes are available in Dutch and in some cases also in English. This means that in most cases the students are required to learn Dutch to be able to enrol into a Bachelor programme at UA. The university's language school – Linguapolis - provides a preparatory one-year programme "Dutch as a Foreign Language in an Academic Context" that includes

⁶ As a rule, administrative procedures are conducted in Dutch. In some cases universities and other organizations provide working translations of documents, but one is still required to complete the documentation in Dutch.

⁷ <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/education/international/international-students/refugees/> (last accessed April 2017).

primarily language (academic focus) but also other aspects (culture, how HE operates in Flanders, student life etc.). In terms of workload, it is 60 credits and equal to a full time study programme. The cost of the programme is almost 4,000 EUR per person per year, however UA organized a fund-raising campaign within the university staff and alumni and ensured 10 scholarships for refugee students for the 2016/2017 academic year. In order to receive this scholarship, students have to, amongst other things, be recognized as refugees, have sufficient proficiency in English and a gross family income of less than 2,000 EUR per month.⁸

Last year, students could also attend the “Intensive Dutch preparatory course”, which was offered in cooperation with the city authorities and ATLAS – Antwerp’s office responsible for integration of immigrants.⁹ Refugee students who were registered as residents of the city of Antwerp could attend this course for free. According to the interviewed expert, since early 2016, 122 new immigrants have been enrolled in the course, 32 of which were refugee students, and out of those 32, up till now 12 students have taken the final test that allows them to pursue higher education in Dutch. Most students enrolled in bachelor level programmes, whilst some enrol into English master level programmes. Refugee students are, for administrative purposes, considered as regular international students from within the EER. For this reason, at least at present, it is not possible to systematically monitor their progress in higher education.

In terms of plans for the short-term future, the staff involved in supporting higher education of refugees are keen to (a) publicise one contact person with the specific task to provide tailored guidance and (b) provide comprehensive information on study opportunities and the application procedure via the website, as well as individual guidance in person. In terms of mid-term developments, they will analyse whether the guidance and counselling services that are already available at UA need expansion or specialization in order to support refugee students. They also plan to work with other partners to provide more comprehensive information about study opportunities in Antwerp that include both the courses offered by the university, and the courses offered by university colleges that are part of the Antwerp University Association.¹⁰ According to the interviewed expert, the city of Antwerp is likely to extend the “Intensive Dutch preparatory course” from six months to one year.

6.2. VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL (THE DUTCH SPEAKING FREE UNIVERSITY OF BRUSSELS, VUB)

VUB’s activities concerning higher education for refugees are organized centrally under the label “Welcome student-refugees programme”. The information about the programme is available on the main page of the VUB website¹¹ The page dedicated to the programme includes a list of programmes taught in English (almost

all at master level, with a single bachelor level programme in social sciences organized in cooperation with Ghent University), as well as links towards study offers in Dutch (directing to the Dutch part of the VUB website).

⁸ Complete list of requirements is available here: <https://www.uantwerpen.be/en/centres/linguapolis/academic-dutch-english/one-year-dutch-programme/scholarships-refugees/> (last accessed April 2017).

⁹ <http://www.atlas-antwerpen.be/> (last accessed April 2017).

¹⁰ <http://www.auha.be/> (last accessed April 2017).

¹¹ <http://www.vub.ac.be/en/welcome-student-refugees-programme> (last accessed April 2017).

The 'Welcome Student-refugees Programme' has been explicitly opened to help (Syrian and Iraqi) recognized refugees start or proceed with their academic studies. This initiative allows recognized refugees who had to stop their studies in their country of origin to apply to follow a regular university programme, by means of introducing a separate online registration for student-refugees that is different than the 'normal' direct application for EU students. This 'special' application programme involves a pre-screening of the refugee candidate students.

In this respect, the University conducted a comparative study between the educational systems in Syria and Iraq, and the Belgian educational system. The comparative study indicates the equivalent study levels and the mapping of these levels into the Belgian system. Based on this research, a pre-admission check is performed to analyse the academic credentials of the refugee students. A positive recommendation during these pre-screenings will be given if the student can provide the proof of academic background according to the rules and regulations to enter into a university study programme. Once they receive this positive recommendation, the student can submit an application via the regular application system of the university, as is done for all the prospective students at the VUB.

This initiative, which grew out of activities of VUB staff to collect donations in food and clothes for refugees, became one of the main goals of the university: to offer education and this in an open mind and with respect for each person. It is linked to the central administration of the university but not as a self-standing office or as an integral part of other administrative units of the university. It is coordinated by a recent PhD graduate of VUB (originally from Syria) - Mohammad Salman, who is the first point of contact for student refugees and facilitates their process of admission. Due to such organization, it was possible to obtain an overview of how many refugee students are currently enrolled in study programmes at VUB in 2015/16 (Table 3). In 2016/2017, 45 refugee students have already been enrolled, while additional 70 are waiting for language certificates to complete the enrolment procedure.

Refugees interested in pursuing higher education at VUB should register online, after which they will be contacted by the coordinator of the programme. The website also provides a list of documentation necessary for taking part in the programme and eventually enrolling into study programmes at VUB: confirmation of asylum situation (Belgian ID and decision of the refugee administration), motivation letter, CV, education certificates and academic transcripts (if available). In addition, sufficient proficiency in English or Dutch (depending on the language of the study programmes) is required. Criteria for this are the same for refugee students and for other international students. Information about this can be found in the "Studying at VUB" section of the website¹², which also directs users to the VUB academic language centre which, according to the information available on the website, does not seem to have any special provision for refugee students in terms of Dutch language courses.

¹² <http://www.vub.ac.be/en/studying-at-the-vub/language-requirements> (last accessed April 2017).

Table 3. Number of student-refugees enrolled into VUB in 2015/2016.

Level	Language	Gender	Origin	Field	Total
5 BA	4 Dutch	36 male	30 Syria	21 economic and social sciences	45
			6 Palestine	12 engineering	
40 MA	41 English	9 female	3 Iraq	9 arts and philosophy	45
			2 Afghanistan	2 bio-engineering	
			1 each from Egypt, Iran,	1 medicine and pharmaceutical sciences	
			Rwanda, Yemen		

Source: Mohammad Salman.

It should be noted that most of the refugees are based in Brussels and that, at least thus far, universities based in Brussels have probably been the most targeted institutions. In light of the language requirements, as well as the fact that VUB does not offer courses in all academic disciplines or specializations, some of the refugee students that contacted VUB concerning higher education opportunities were re-directed to Université Libre de Bruxelles (the French-speaking Free University of Brussels, ULB) or other universities in Flanders.

VUB's "Welcome student-refugees programme" cooperates with other, already existing, university services (e.g. social services). Apart from the support that these services offer to students in general (not just refugee students), e.g. concerning guidance and counselling, no additional provisions have been made. This initiative at VUB received attention in the media¹³ and from the higher education community (including European organizations).¹⁴ As VUB is still receiving a lot of application from refugee-students, the initiative will continue for the new academic year 2017-2018.

6.3. UNIVERSITEIT GENT (GHENT UNIVERSITY, UGENT)

The services linked to higher education for refugees by UGent are organizationally part of the Diversity and Gender Policy Unit that is part of the university's central administration. This is essentially an extension of the work already done for students from under-represented groups. The activities organized by the unit are developed by a working group that comprises members of different central administration offices (e.g. admission, student services), established in January 2016. It should be noted that UGent has been cooperating since 2009 with the Flemish Refugee Council on a mentoring project, designed to support students who are newly arrived immigrants. UGent also organizes the "Preparatory higher education programme" which lasts one year and includes additional Dutch language lessons (students are expected to already possess some knowledge of Dutch when they enrol), study skills training, guidance and counselling, as well as optional modules in English, mathematics, research skills etc¹⁵.

¹³ E.g. <http://www.hln.be/hln/nl/1265/Onderwijs/article/detail/2619899/2016/02/17/VUB-biedt-vluchtelingen-kans-om-te-studeren.dhtml> (in Dutch) or <http://www.flanderstoday.eu/education/refugees-head-back-school-brussels-university>, (last accessed April 2017).

¹⁴ <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20160527182707707> (last accessed April 2017).

¹⁵ <https://www.ugent.be/en/ghentuniv/diversity-and-gender/preparatory-higher-education-programme> (last accessed April 2017).

Concerning the information provision, the website of UGent does offer a clear overview of relevant information concerning study opportunities UGent on one single page. However, the page is not accessible directly from the main page of UGent (due to overall UGent communication and information policy), nor can be easily found by looking through different subsections (e.g. 'Education', 'Information for...'). It can be found if one searches the website for the term "refugee". Apart from this, the unit also organised one info session for university staff about the work of the unit concerning higher education refugees and a "Refugees welcome" info day for refugees.

Almost all bachelor level study programmes are available only in Dutch¹⁶, with some master programmes available in English. UGent has its own language centre so refugee students can attend Dutch language courses in the same way that international students and staff can. UGent does not subsidize its language centre and prices vary depending on the status of those attending the course: from 50 EUR (exchange students), through to 195 EUR for UGent students, to 375 EUR for others.¹⁷ However, similar to UA, UGent also cooperates with the city services responsible for immigrant integration (In-Gent)¹⁸, which offers scholarships for the UGent language courses as well as other assistance concerning language training, job opportunities, counselling etc. Apart from the language courses offered by UGent, Dutch language courses organised through an adult-education institution are free of charge¹⁹, if a person commits to an integration programme.

UGent adapted the enrolment procedure for refugees. It does not require official documents (diplomas) to be legalized (to carry an apostille/stamp from the country of origin); instead an official translation by a court-sworn interpreter is sufficient. Moreover, UGent does not require refugee students to have a foreigner ID-card when enrolling, which technically allows refugee students to begin their studies much faster. However, an ID-card is needed for study grants and student accommodation so the actual effect of this measure remains unclear.

Similar to other universities, within the information system of UGent, refugee students are considered as 'international students' and thus it is not possible to track their progress systematically. It was reported in the media that at least 10 students enrolled into a study programme at UGent for the 2016/2017 academic year.²⁰ Moreover, according to the interviewed expert, 25 students were enrolled for the "Preparatory higher education programme" this year. 15 of them have refugee or subsidiary protection status. By comparison, only two refugees were attending this programme the previous academic year (2015/2016).

16 As of 2016/2017 UG and VUG have a joint bachelor programme in social sciences in English.

17 <https://www.ugent.be/lw/uct/en/useful-information/registration/paying/how-much/course-fees-dutch-for-speakers-of-other-languages.htm> (last accessed April 2017).

18 <http://www.in-gent.be/> (last accessed April 2017).

19 <http://www.hetperspectief.net/courses-dutch.html> (last accessed April 2017)..

20 <http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws.english/News/1.2760962> (last accessed April 2017).

6.4. UNIVERSITEIT HASSELT (HASSELT UNIVERSITY, UH)

According to the information available on the English part of the UH website, UH's response to the refugee crisis consists of: fundraising work and distribution of donations, facilitation of volunteer work, participation in the Science4Refugees programme focusing on refugees interested in continuing their research careers in Europe, awareness raising and information events, and provision of an online Arabic-Dutch module. Details related to specific provisions for refugees concerning admission to UH study programmes do not seem to be available on the website (the Dutch version was consulted as well).

The online Arabic-Dutch module is organized by a UH spin-off CommArt²¹, a company specializing in multimedia and communication, most of which are the outcome of research at the UH's Center for Applied Linguistics. After completing the course, a person should be able to communicate in Dutch at level A1 (absolute beginner) of the Common European Framework of Reference in Languages (CEFR).²² It costs 30 EUR and is available for different platforms, but it is free for those with an official refugee status.

6.5. KU LEUVEN (UNIVERSITY OF LEUVEN, KUL)

Analysis of the KUL website did not reveal specific information or initiatives concerning higher education for refugees. The main reason for this is that, according to the interviewed expert, the website containing the information for refugees is under development and is expected to be launched the first two months of 2017.

However, lack of online information does not equal lack of activity. KUL has been organizing various events (e.g. research seminars) on the topic. Moreover, upon request from the Flemish ministry of education issues in late 2015, KUL was involved in providing support for students who may not have documentation necessary for enrolling into higher education entirely in place (see "Recognition of qualifications" section above). However, as suggested by the interviewed expert, not many students are in need of such programmes. A steering committee was set up which coordinates all refugee related initiatives at KUL. Similar to other universities, it includes representatives of various existing offices, e.g. social and student advisory services, internationalization office, individual faculties. It is also the main body responsible for developing the aforementioned website.

The main focus of KUL has been on face-to-face information provision concerning already existing opportunities at KUL- in particular concerning master programmes in English. This is deemed sufficient assistance for refugee students by KUL. According to the interviewed expert, many of the students who have contacted KUL in the past concerning HE opportunities either seem to be more interested in professional education, in which case KUL staff directs them towards the university colleges, or may not fulfil enrolment requirements. Furthermore, additional training of staff dealing with refugee students has been conducted, including language training.

²¹ <http://www.commart.eu/en/nederlands-voor-beginners-lholndy-llmbtdyn-blkml.html> (last accessed April 2017).

²² http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre1_en.asp (last accessed April 2017).

6.6. UNIVERSITY COLLEGES

Some university colleges are involved in activities coordinated by the universities (see above concerning the activities of UA), but there are also self-standing activities. The School of Arts of the university college in Ghent (Hogeschool Gent) organized an Open Design Course for refugees, and also cooperates with the local integration service (In-Gent, see above). Karel de Grote University College (based in Antwerp) cooperated with highly educated refugees on information provision about the asylum procedure. In general, information concerning higher education opportunities for refugees at university colleges is very scarce.

7. REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In general, the Flemish higher education system seems rather open for responding to the refugee crisis by providing higher education for refugee students. Such commitment is presented as integral to fulfilling the role of higher education in a democratic society, as well as an opportunity for both the higher education institutions and the economy and society at large to benefit from highly skilled individuals.

Initiatives concerning the higher education of refugees in Flanders have been, thus far, predominantly bottom-up, though the government did issue a request to higher education institutions to consider options for supporting refugees. Individual institutions and province level authorities appear to have developed their activities independently from each other- i.e. without central coordination. There is no formal national action plan at present. Associations of higher education institutions (VLIR and VLHORA) have set up working groups tasked with coordination, and there is also ongoing coordination with NARIC.

Overall, the initiatives are primarily focused on facilitating access to higher education for refugees, including the provision of language courses. In this, higher education institutions often cooperate with local authorities, including services tasked with facilitating integration of immigrants as well as social welfare services. It should be noted that these services existed before the refugee crisis emerged. It is not possible to provide an authoritative assessment of the impact of the different initiatives for several reasons. First, many of these initiatives have been established rather recently and have not concluded or come to their full outcomes yet, so an evaluation would be premature. Second, as there is no systematic data collection that focuses in particular on refugee students, it is difficult to provide comprehensive data that could be used to monitor success of these programmes.

Two aspects, however, can be identified as challenging. The first concerns recognition of qualifications. While significant adjustments of the procedure have been made in response to the refugee crisis, the key challenge seems to be the length of the procedure for recognition as well as its binary outcome. In case interested refugee students receive a negative response from NARIC, they need to address higher education institutions directly to obtain advice on which courses they can follow in order to obtain a degree. The second issue concerns language requirements. The majority of study programmes are in Dutch, and will likely remain so in the foreseeable future. This issue has indeed been recognized by the universities and local integration offices, and several promising initiatives have been made in this direction- but it remains to be seen whether

such initiatives would be sufficient for the demand for higher education. This is particularly important because the demand for higher education by the refugees in Flanders is likely to increase, given the time it takes to obtain refugee status which is required to access a number of the benefits related to higher education (e.g. study grants, student accommodation etc.).

Overall, it is promising that many higher education institutions, including the largest universities, have taken up various initiatives to support higher education for refugees. In many cases, the embedding of these initiatives into the regular activities of universities, as well as close cooperation with already existing local services, is likely to contribute to better outcomes- in terms of short-term access to higher education, but also in terms of mid- to long-term prospects concerning completion of higher education and transition to the world of work. However, such embeddedness is a challenge when it comes to the transferability of experiences from Flanders into other (higher education) contexts, in which there may not be specific units tasked with supporting non-domestic students and/or contexts in which local services specifically tasked for facilitating integration of immigrants may not exist (or may not be of sufficient capacity).

INTERVIEWED EXPERTS (IN PERSON OR OVER E-MAIL):

- Katrien De Bruyn, *Diversity and Gender Policy Unit, UGent*
- Conny Devolder, *staff member Diversity, VLIR*
- Parul Goel, *International Students Office, UA*
- Mathilde Joos, *Policy Officer, VLHORA*
- Erwin Malfroy, *Department of Higher and Adult Education, Flemish Ministry of Education and Training*
- Isabelle Melis, *VLIR*
- Bie Nielandt, *Diversity Coordinator, UHasselt*
- Jan Raeymaekers, *Organisation of Teaching and Learning Processes, KUL*
- Mohammad Salman, *Policy Advisor, responsible for the "Welcome Student-refugees Programme", VUB*

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'WE CAN DO IT' - REFUGEES AND THE GERMAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

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1. INTRODUCTION

The statement “We can do it” by German chancellor Angela Merkel in August 2015 is a sentence for the history books. She said the sentence at a time when the German public was shocked by images of drowned children in the Mediterranean Sea, and refugees in border-camps – at a time when the German public expected her leadership. In the clear statement that Germany was willing to welcome refugees, Merkel made an attempt to save Europe (Münkler/Münkler 2016: 185). It was a statement that Germany is an immigration country- which was also a further step away from her conservative values towards the political centre, which made way for a new populist right wing party the “Alternative für Deutschland” (AfD; literal translation: Alternative for Germany). Despite harsh criticism, even from within her own party, and a wave of violent attacks on refugee institutions by vigilante groups, (Münkler/Münkler 2016: 195-196) Merkel did not change her belief that Germany can handle the new migration wave.

The term “migration wave to Germany” means that in fact, the number of asylum applications continually increased between 2010 and 2014, but has increased dramatically in 2015, and especially in 2016. In 2010, there were 48,589 applications for asylum, 2013- 127,023, 2014- 202,834, 2015-476,649 and in 2016- 745,545 (BAMF 2016a). In 2015, however, only 282,726 applications were processed and in 2016, only 695,733 (BAMF 2016a). In 2016, it took an average of 6,3 months to decide about one asylum application (Bundesregierung 2016) but “in thousands of cases well over a year” (Morris-Lange/Brands 2016). In addition, Germany has made the asylum law more rigorous, to be able to reject unjustified asylum applications more quickly and easily, and to facilitate deportations of those who have been rejected (Pelzer/Pichel 2016). Furthermore, the Balkan states and Turkey closed their borders, meaning the influx of refugees to Germany was reduced (Wittrock/Elmer 2016).

But “we can do it” is not only a motto to German migration bureaucracy; it also addresses the German public. All in all, “we can do it” means something quite different depending on what part of the German public is addressed. One and a half years after Merkel’s statement, Germany is a divided nation (Münkler/

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Münkler 2016; Volkmann 2016) between two poles and a large group in-between: At the one pole are those who try to live the “Willkommenskultur” (welcoming culture), doing voluntary service and support refugees. At the other pole are the ones who want to close the borders, limit any form of immigration and acceptance of refugees, and want to re-establish a more ethnically and culturally homogenous nation (Volkmann 2016). At the moment, it is not clear in which direction Germany will develop. Among other things, this depends on the integration of refugees being successful and refugees being supported to learn the German language and – at least to a certain extent – integrate and agree to live according to the values and norms that form the basis of the German society.

References to ‘Public’ also means German public institutions like Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), including public and private universities, universities of applied sciences and colleges of art and music. As the third part of the public education system, HEIs are expected to play their part in the process of integrating refugees in the German society. HEIs are also struggling with bureaucratic hurdles arising from the asylum procedure. The asylum status plays a special role, because it has an impact on the access to the higher education system. In this report, we distinguish between four analytical statuses to discuss the possibilities and problems for refugees to attend a HEI in Germany:

1. Asylum seekers: “individuals who intend to file an asylum application but have not yet been registered by the Federal Office as asylum applicants.” (BAMF 2016b: 4)
2. Asylum applicants: “asylum applicants whose asylum proceedings are pending and whose case has not yet been decided on.” (BAMF 2016b: 4)
3. Asylum accepted or tolerated status: “Persons entitled to protection and persons entitled to remain: individuals who receive an entitlement to asylum, refugee protection or subsidiary protection, or who may remain in Germany on the basis of a ban on deportation.” (BAMF 2016b: 4)
4. Asylum rejected: Persons whose application for asylum was rejected.

This difference between the statuses of asylum is relevant for describing the possibility of refugees to get access to the Higher Education System (chapter two). In chapter three we describe further hurdles that exist depending on the status of asylum. It is important to know these procedures to understand which options HEIs have to support refugees. Another major issue is financial support for HEIs to help refugees. How financial support is granted and on which measures HEIs are focusing to help refugees is presented in chapter four. In chapter five, we summarize the actual research about the efforts of HEIs, before we give two good practice examples of how refugees are integrated in chapter six.

To write this country report we first conducted desk research into all the facts and figures given by the government about refugees in Germany, and their possibility to join the Higher Education System. Then we analyzed the available publications on this topic (Hommerich 2015; Schwikal/Vogel 2015; Frank/Sickendiek 2016; Morris-Lange/Brands 2016). However, only three research studies on this topic have been carried out so far, in which interviews (Schammann/Younso 2016) or a questionnaire for survey (Blumenthal von/Beigang 2016; Stifterverband 2016) have been used.

We then analyzed the initiatives of HEIs which are supported by the financial programs of federal government. As little is known about the concrete structure, and the aims of the special programs by the German Länder – Germany is a federal state and HEIs are under the jurisdiction of the Länder –, we sent an e-mail to all ministries responsible for higher education and asked them to provide information about their plans and ongoing projects. In addition, we conducted a comprehensive internet search (see section Support for Higher Education Institutions by the Länder and the Federal Government).

2. ACCESS OF REFUGEES TO HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

To get access to Higher Education Institutions, refugees do not need an asylum accepted or tolerated status. On the webpage www.study-in.de, which was specially set-up by the federal government and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to inform refugees, you can read: “Yes, refugees are allowed to study at German universities. Normally you won’t encounter any problems if your status is recognised (entitled to asylum, granted refugee protection etc.). The same applies if your application for asylum is still being processed or if you only hold a “tolerated” status.”

When enrolling in a study program, refugees are regarded as international students – they do not have a special status – and must have a university entrance qualification and sufficient language skills (www.study-in.de). Usually the language of instruction is German, especially in bachelor’s degree programs (there are only 82 English-instructed bachelor’s degree programs). However, out of the 8,527 master’s degree programs (MA) 1033 are English-instructed: 318 in Engineering, 303 in Mathematics and Natural Sciences, 310 in Economics and Law, 136 in Languages and Cultural Studies, 92 in Social Sciences, 36 in Medicine and Care and 19 in Arts (hochschulkompass.de). To enrol in these English-instructed MAs, refugees need a Bachelor degree, sufficient language skills, and depending on the program, further qualifications.

In order to enrol into degree programs, refugees must overcome two hurdles: First, the recognition of the documents including school leaving qualifications, completed modules of studying or final certificates of Bachelor’s degree programs, and secondly, the actual application at a HEI.

Refugees must first check whether their secondary-school certificate entitles them to study in Germany. There is a central website (<http://anabin.kmk.org> – but only in German) which provides information on whether a secondary-school certificate is “recognised as qualification for general university admission, is recognised only for subject-restricted university admission (i.e. for study in a limited subject area), is recognised only in combination with one or two years of successful university study in your home country or is not recognised as university entrance qualification” (www.study-in.de).

The problem of this process of recognition is that there is no central office which examines the secondary school certificates, as the Länder are in charge of higher education, meaning each of the Länder has its own procedures, what might lead to a bureaucratic confusion for refugees. For instance, in Baden-Württemberg there are different recognition procedures for different types of HEIs: applications for the

Baden-Wuerttemberg's Cooperative State University (Duale Hochschule Baden-Württemberg)³ are centrally coordinated by an office in Stuttgart, whilst applications for studying at a university of applied sciences have to be sent to the Studienkolleg of the University of Konstanz. As there is no centralized application procedure for universities, refugees have to apply to the university of their choice directly. A comparable variation of ways to apply for study programs does exist in other Länder as well. The greatest clarity about application procedures exists in very small states with only few HEIs, like Bremen.

To process the applications of refugees, some HEIs cooperate with uni-assist. Uni-assist is an association that evaluates secondary-school certificates and centrally handles applications of international students to HEIs. It was founded in 2003 (among others by DAAD and HRK) and cooperates currently with 178 HEIs. As application requirements differ – depending on the Länder and the regulations of HEI's – up to three applications to HEIs via uni-assist are free of charge for refugees. For any further application a handling fee of 15 Euro is charged (uni-assist 2016). Some but not all HEIs cover the fees for refugees to apply (uni-assist 2016). For reviewing and recognizing previous academic achievements (for example the Bachelor's degree certificate), only the university at which the refugees want to apply is responsible. So refugees have to search for the contact person at the university and have to meet her or him – which could also be a hurdle because of the resident permit status as we will describe in chapter four (Support for Higher Education Institutions by the Länder and the Federal Government).

If the secondary-school certificate is not recognized, refugees do have the possibility to attend a foundation course ("Studienkolleg") to prepare for the university qualification assessment examination ("Feststellungsprüfung"). The Studienkolleg is a public education institution all over Germany (except Bremen) which offers preparatory courses for studying at a HEI. The courses are free of charge, but students have to pay a semester fee (including a registration fee and a public transportation ticket for the entire duration of the semester). The duration of study at these institutions is two semesters. Students have to pass exams in different subjects and must pass a German language examination (Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang – (DSH)). If they pass the exams they can apply to any of the German HEIs. This is partly a new development, as Studienkollegs did not offer beginner-level German courses but used to expect that applicants already have a basic level of language proficiency (B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). But the courses of Studienkolleg are only available for accepted asylum seekers and tolerated refugees (Hommerich 2015). Apart from this offer, the Federal Government lags behind with the creation and provision of language courses and some estimates expect that up to 200.000 additional places would be necessary to cover the existing demand (Wittrock/Elmer 2016).

If refugees do not have one or all necessary certificates, a university qualification assessment examination is obligatory. To avoid different regulations for the examination in each of the German Länder, the ministers in charge of higher education have taken a common decision at the Standing Conference of the Ministers

3 The dual study concept or cooperative higher education combines academic learning with workplace training. The latter is offered in cooperation with local enterprises (<http://www.dhbw.de/english/home.html>).

of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz, (KMK)⁴ in December 2015 with the resolution “Access and Admission to Institutions of Higher Education for Applicants who are Unable to Provide Evidence of a Higher Education Entrance Qualification Obtained in their Home Country on Account of their Flight”. A three-tier procedure was established with the aim of compensating for the disadvantages caused by the flight. The three steps are (KMK 2015):

1. *“the determination of the personal premises on the basis of the refugee and legal residence categories according to Appendix 1 of this resolution*
2. *a plausibility check of the educational biography with regard to the acquisition of a higher education entrance qualification in the home country, and*
3. *proof of the alleged higher education entrance qualification through an examination and/or assessment procedure based on quality”*

The third step for proving the entrance qualification is not consistent across the sector. The KMK lists a range of possibilities for the assessment, and leaves the selection of an assessment method to the HEI. Accordingly, e.g. the DAAD via study-in.de communicates to refugees (study-in.de 2016):

“Even if you cannot substantiate your past academic achievement because your documents are incomplete or missing, there are ways to study at a German university nonetheless. Each German state and university has different rules regarding this situation: Step-by-step procedure, for example, through personal interviews, Entrance examination and/or qualification assessment examination (Feststellungsprüfung) or placement test, case-by-case examination, affirmation in lieu of oath. Please inquire about the exact rules at the International Office at the university where you wish to study.”

A common assessment is done via TestAS, which was developed in a project funded by BMBF. TestAS “is an assessment test that examines both the general and subject-related abilities for academic studies.” (TestAS 2016) It consists of a core test, which assesses the general ability to study (cognitive skills). In addition, HEIs or the participants can select one out of four subject-specific modules. The test is also used as a plausibility check when certificates of refugees are missing. The test is free of charge for refugee (TestAS 2016). The level of qualifications assessed by TestAS is equivalent to a school degree allowing for studying in an institution at the tertiary level.

Once refugees who want to study have passed the recognition challenges they are subject to general admission requirements for international students, meaning that the usual admission quota for international students includes refugees. Refugees have to apply at the university they want to enrol. Especially for highly regulated study courses like medical science, dentistry, that work under a numerus clausus rule, refugees have only very little chance to get a place to study (Brandenburg 2016). The setup of a special treatment for refugees is not possible due the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG 2006; Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz) which prohibits privileged access for refugees compared to other international students.

4 The KMK, in which the states are represented by their particular minister for higher education, passes the resolutions, which are not obligatory for the parliaments. So, the transfer of such resolutions into the law of a state and the implementation is up to the Länder, while the KMK provides only a framework (Geis/Krausnick 2012: 298).

3. HURDLES EXISTING DUE TO THE STATUS OF REFUGEES

In addition to recognition and application, further hurdles exist depending on the status of refugee. First, as long as the application for asylum is being processed, refugees cannot select their place of residence by themselves. By law the so called obligatory residency (“Residenzpflicht”) (§56 AsylG) binds refugees to stay in a certain area, which is often the location and refugee facility where they were first registered. In addition, asylum seekers can be transferred to other (European) countries, to other Länder, and other German cities depending on the capacity of the first-admission facility. In the area or the city there may or may not be a HEI, however in Germany, most larger cities have at least one university or university of applied science. The German higher education system currently consists of 426 HEI, including 215 universities of applied science, 107 universities, 52 colleges of art and music (HRK 2016: 7). The vast majority of these institutions are public and financed mainly by the Länder. Only 125 mostly (very) small HEIs are private but they are also officially recognized by the state (Buschle/Haider 2016). There are also 16 HEIs financed by the Protestant and Catholic Churches. In total, German HEIs offer 18.044 study programs, of which 8.298 are bachelor’s programs and 8.099 are master programs (HRK 2016). However, not all universities are comprehensive universities. Smaller HEIs tend to be specialized, for example focusing on technical or social subjects, and do not offer all disciplines. Also, the number of HEIs in structurally weak and thinly populated areas, like parts of eastern Germany, is significantly smaller.

The second hurdle is language courses. As already described above, refugees with the status of asylum seekers, and asylum applicants do not have the opportunity to attend preparatory language courses in Studienkollegs. That is why many voluntary projects were initiated in Germany, to enable these refugees to take language courses, however these are usually not a preparatory course for HEIs but important basic courses. To start with their studies at HEIs refugees need language skills at least level C1 of the European Reference Framework either in English or in German.

The final hurdle for refugees to start studying is the question of how to finance their studies. In Germany, refugees whose asylum is accepted have the possibility to apply for a student loan funded by the federation (§8 BAföG) the so called BAföG. A refugee with the status tolerated can also apply for BAföG but only 15 months after the date she or he originally applied for asylum.⁵ And asylum seekers and refugees with the status asylum applicants cannot apply for BAföG (Hommerich 2015). But in most cases, they receive financial support through the Asylum Seeker Benefits Act (AsylbLG) for “Covering the necessary needs” and “meeting the personal needs of everyday life” (AsylbLG). In addition to BaföG, “Various organisations, universities, states and cities offer scholarships specifically for refugees.” (study-in.de) So far there is no database containing all suitable funding opportunities for refugees.

Contrary to other European countries, public HEIs in Germany are not allowed to charge tuition fees, however this is sometimes limited to the first bachelor and master degree obtained by the student. In the state of Baden-Wuerttemberg, for example, tuition fees are charged for the second bachelor and master degree. Students

⁵ This is a new regulation has been in force since 1 January 2016, before the waiting period was 4 years.

will still have to cover some costs, such as their public transportation ticket (Semesterticket), admission fees or examination fees. However, many universities have a waiver policy for refugees or grant them scholarships (Hommerich 2015).

As pointed out, there are some legal and bureaucratic hurdles that refugees need to overcome in order to study in Germany. In order to help refugees to do so, financial resources for HEIs were made available by the Federal Government and the Länder, since it became clear that continuing support of refugees like professional support and study counseling are needed (Schwikal/Vogel 2015: 10).

4. SUPPORT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS BY THE LÄNDER AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)) has launched two programs in cooperation with the DAAD which are funded with 100 million Euro until 2019. The first program is named “Integrating Refugees in Degree Programmes” (Integra). The second program is named “Welcome - Students Helping Refugees” (Welcome). A DAAD website provides all descriptions of the projects funded by Integra and/or Welcome. We analyzed these descriptions to show the different measures HEIs offer to refugees.

The aim of Integra is: “With the “Integra” programme, academically qualified refugees are given the chance to prepare for university study in special programmes offered at German universities and preparatory colleges.” (DAAD 2016a)

To do this, Integra provides financial support to HEIs to install and extend offers of language courses and professional support for refugees.

As our analysis shows, one third of the 86 HEIs which are funded by the Integra program have launched language courses for refugees with university entrance qualification (see table 1). These language courses are often combined with academic offers for refugees. These offers are, for example, guest student programs or bridging courses. Through the Integra program 22 HEIs also expanded the language courses of their Studienkolleg; these are special language courses for refugees without university entrance qualifications. Eight HEIs also offer language courses for beginners, in which it is unclear whether these are for refugees with or without university entrance qualification. Many of the project descriptions also contain information on the fact that support and counselling for refugees is expanded. However, it is unclear whether this is an extension of the counselling centers through the funding of the Integra program. That is why it was not included in the analysis.

Table 1. Measures of the “Integra” program

Measure(s)	Number of HEIs who offer the measure
Language courses (B1-C1) for refugees with university entrance qualification	63
Language courses (B1-C1) for refugees without university entrance qualification (Studienkolleg)	22
Language courses for beginners (A1/A2)	8
Academic offers	44

Source: Own research (January 2017).

The Welcome program sponsors 93 HEIs. The aim of the program is in: “Providing orientation, overcoming barriers, offering assistance” (DAAD 2016b) to refugees admitted to HEIs. “Funding can be used to pay staff in self-organised student projects, as well as those involved in university integration programmes. They can offer tutorials, provide mentoring, produce info materials and help with translations and language courses.” (DAAD 2016b) As table 2 shows, most HEIs use the funding to pay students for support and counsel refugees. Support and counselling offered to the students mainly addresses questions about asylum, study organization, study possibilities, but also general questions about everyday life. These measures are called e.g. study ambassadors, Buddy-program or tandem-program. 35 HEIs used the funding for integration programs e.g. sports and cultural activities, joint cooking, the establishment of regular cafés for informal contact. These integration offers are often combined with low-threshold language programs organized through language tandem-programs, in which everyday-German is practiced. The last funded measures are academic offers for refugees. Here, students are paid to help with the organization of a guest student program, bridging courses or as academic buddies for refugees in the disciplines.

Table 2. Measures of the “Welcome” program

Measure(s) in the area of	Number of HEIs who offer measure(s) in this area
Support and counselling	68
Integration offers	35
Academic offers	28
Low-threshold language programs	22

Source: Own research (January 2017).

In addition to these programs funded by the BMBF, eleven of the sixteen Länder have launched programs to help refugees enter HEIs focusing on similar objectives. If special programs to help refugees are set up by the Länder, the amount of funding differs (depending of the size of the Land), as does the period and the program’s objectives. As table 3 shows, the HEIs had/have the possibility to apply for additional funding for initiatives in the following areas: All funding-programs support language, and counselling and support programs. Nine of the eleven programs enable HEIs to offer additional academic participation. Four Länder fund professional support and coordination efforts, three Länder fund grants for refugees, and two Länder support other student-led initiatives.

Table 3. Funding of the states

State	Period and volume of funding	Language courses	Counselling / supporting	Academic offers	Coordination	Grants	Student initiatives
Baden-Wuerttemberg	2015-2017, €1.65 Million	X	X	X	X	X	-
Bavaria	No funding	-	-	-	-	-	-
Berlin	2016, €1,8 Million	X	X	X	-	-	X
Brandenburg	2016, €280,000	X	X	X	-	-	X
Bremen	No funding	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hamburg	2016-2018, €3,1 Million	X	X	-	X	-	-
Hesse	2016-2017, €2 Million additional costs of fellowships	X	X	X	X	X	-
Mecklenburg-West Pomerania	No funding	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lower Saxony	2016-2018, per year €4,725 Million	X	X	-	-	-	-
North Rhine-Westphalia	From 2017 per year, €30 Million	X	X	X	X	-	-
Rhineland-Palatinate	No funding	-	-	-	-	-	-
Saarland	2016-2017, €415,000	X	X	X	-	X	-
Saxony	No funding	-	-	-	-	-	-
Saxony-Anhalt	2015-2018, €4,7 Million	X	X	-	-	-	-
Schleswig-Holstein	2016, €1,5 Million	X	X	X	-	-	-
Thuringia	2016-2019, €1,8 Million	X	X	-	-	-	-

Source: Own research (January 2017).

5. ACTIVITIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

As shown in the previous sections, the Federal Government and most of the Länder offer financial support to refugees and HEIs, especially for language training but also for counselling and student projects. That seems important as the inclusion of refugees in HEIs can be regarded as an additional task which can surmount the capacities and experiences that German HEIs have with international students.

Admittedly, HEIs have to deal with refugees as students who are still occupied with challenges of social, legal and other issues of everyday life in Germany (Frank/Sieckendik 2016). To support refugee students, HEIs and volunteers have started several initiatives, e.g. addressing social inclusion and how to find employment opportunities. These initiatives are often executed by student volunteers and are financially supported by the “Welcome - Students Helping Refugees” and other similar Länder programs.

A first scientific analysis taking stock of the situation presented by Schammann and Youso (2016: 26f) shows that the initial stage of coping with the challenging situation is over, and HEIs now focus on implementing measures to prepare refugees for regular study programs. This shift to the core business of HEIs is financially supported by the Integra program. Schammann and Youso (2016) point out that all HEI-run projects have common features: First, they are often voluntary initiatives by an individual or a group which are not externally triggered. Second, HEIs which have implemented programs rather early have designated members of staff who are in charge of support for refugees. Third, HEIs that used their own financial resources also tapped into the additional funds provided by the Federal Government and the Länder to expand their programs for refugees.

The study by von Blumenthal and Beigang (2016) surveyed all public HEIs about their support for refugees in detail (86 of 392 HEIs replied) - showing that the commitment of universities for refugees is permanent and that HEIs respond to social challenges and assume responsibility. 35% of the universities have stated to apply different rules for refugees than for study applicants from non-EU countries, meaning the universities strive to meet the complex individual cases. Furthermore, more than half of all HEIs do not require a special status of asylum for admission to study. To support refugees who do not have adequate language skills 89% of universities and 64% of universities of applied sciences offer language courses. The programs range from basic language courses to university preparation courses that last longer than one semester. The study also found that universities are more committed to the integration of refugees than universities of applied sciences (Blumenthal von and Beigang 2016; Stifterverband 2016).

However, the number of refugees actually studying is not known because the question of fleeing is not a criterion that is recorded when enrolling. Thus, refugee students are registered as “ordinary” international students. However, as the Stifterverband (2016) stated, without this information integration measures cannot be purposefully planned. Additional public funding can only be justified in the long term if the number of affected persons is known, and the success of the measures is evaluated (Stifterverband 2016: 36).

6. TWO GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES: HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN BREMEN AND KIRON OPEN HIGHER EDUCATION

In this part we want to present two good practice examples more in detail. Both projects have received awards and gained media interest beyond the borders of Germany. The first example is composed of two projects, IN-Touch and HERE, which are a part of a joint program of all public HEIs in the small city-state of Bremen. The second example is Kiron Open Higher Education, a non-governmental initiative.

6.1. IN-TOUCH AND HERE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS OF BREMEN

In the beginning, IN-Touch was an initiative created by the University of Bremen, however shortly after its creation, the three public universities of applied sciences (Hochschule Bremen, Hochschule für Künste Bremen, Hochschule Bremerhaven) joined the project. IN-Touch started in summer term 2014 with the following aim (EU 2015):

“Refugees with an academic background can visit lectures and seminars at the University of Bremen where they can achieve a certificate - regardless of their refugee status. They get to know the German academic system, can use their time for something meaningful on a reasonable intellectual level and develop new perspectives for their future career. They are also given the chance to make friends and use the facilities (like libraries and computers editor’s note) of the university.”

To participate in IN-Touch, a refugee must have studied before and must have good German or English language skills (at least level B1) (University of Bremen 2016). In 2014 of the 76 registered refugees, only 30 participated on a regular basis. As a reaction to the drop-out of more than half of the participating students, a mentoring program was implemented in 2015. 108 student volunteers supported the IN-Touch participants with organizing studies, dealing with legal requirements and other challenges (EU 2015). Until mid-2016, the number of refugees participating in the program increased to 300 (Karakaşoğlu 2016).

To join IN-Touch, the refugees have to register at the so called HERE office (see below). Accepted students get an IN-Touch Card with which they have access to the internet, can get a student card for the library, can register on the e-learning platform Stud.IP, and sign in for courses at all public HEIs in Bremen. IN-Touch participants can also ask for a study partner from the so called Study-Buddy-Partner-Program by the University of Bremen. During the semester, several meetings are arranged so that refugee students and their student partners can meet and work together. However, it has to be noted that IN-Touch is a separate program, and that participating in the IN-Touch program does not allow refugee students to gain a full higher education degree. Moreover, the refugee students participating in IN-Touch are not registered as ordinary students in any of the participating HEIs (University of Bremen 2016).

IN-Touch started without any funding. The initial work was done by one person in the International Office of the University of Bremen and a large group of student volunteers (Karakaşoğlu 2016). In 2015, a part-time position was established to run IN-Touch, financed by the state of Bremen. The project is now also supported by the Bremer Wertpapierbörse (Bremen stock-market) with a donation of 6.000 Euros (EU 2015). IN-Touch

attracted considerable national and international attention. For example, the EU Commission has listed the project as a good practice example on its websites, and the Austrian Rectors' Conference adopted the IN-Touch project and reproduced it in 2015 with the name MORE (University of Bremen 2016).

The development in Bremen is a good example of the trend in Germany, shown by Schamman and Younso (2010). The most projects started on a voluntary basis and now using additional funds provided by the Federal Government and the Länder. While in its beginnings, IN-Touch was mainly a social project, it has now shifted its focus on core business studies with the newly implemented follow-up project HERE, which was based on the cooperation in the IN-Touch project and started in May 2016. HERE consists of two parts. First, an office that serves as a central contact point for refugees. In this office, refugees are given advice on bureaucratic barriers, such as the assessment of prior qualifications. Second, HERE offers an intensive preparatory program for refugees students. In the 2016 summer semester, 60 students were accepted to the program and in the 2016/17 winter semester, 90 students will begin the program. The participants receive a student ID card, and a public transportation ticket for the entire duration of the semester. Refugee students are enrolled in German language courses, which include, for example, techniques on how to write scientific papers. To be part of the program, the refugees have to register at the HERE office first. Then they have to pass the TestAS test (see above), and have to apply officially at uni-assist (see also above). After the preparation program, the refugees can apply in a Bachelor or Master program. The state of Bremen finances one coordination position and three language teachers to support the activities of HERE. The project also gets financial resources out of the Integra and welcome program, to offer additional language courses, mentoring and welcome activities, which are also part of IN-Touch (University Bremen 2016).

HERE has also been developed because Bremen had not have Studienkolleg and thus, in contrast to other federal states, had no infrastructure to offer language courses and preparatory courses on the study (Karakışoğlu 2016). But to get money out of the Integra program of the federal government, it was necessary to have the infrastructure to offer language courses, meaning the external incentive was also a factor for development.

6.2. KIRON OPEN HIGHER EDUCATION

Contrary to the programs of the HEIs in Bremen, the Kiron Open Higher Education is a civil society initiative. Kiron was founded in Berlin to cushion the impact of the uncertain and long lasting procedures refugees have to complete before gaining regular admission to higher education. As the initiative states on its web site: "Our vision is to provide millions of refugees worldwide with the opportunity to graduate with an accredited university degree, free of charge. No more time, potential, or lives wasted." (Kiron 2016a)

Kiron grants people attending their studies access to MOOCs ("Massive Open Online Courses") offered by renowned universities. These online courses are bundled together to form one of the following study courses: Business and Economics, Computer Science, Engineering, and Social Sciences. The contents are adapted to conventional study paths, and should enable therefore an unobstructed transition to regular degree programs. The programs are run entirely online- until the verifications of the university entrance qualification is acquired, and the required language level is attained so students can enrol in a regular program. Then, the

admission to one of the partner universities is possible. The universities permit the students to join in a higher semester by recognizing the online courses as equivalent to parts of the regular program. After successful completion of the program students are awarded their degree from the HEI that accepted them.

This procedure is in the HEI's interest, because any study places that become vacant after the first semesters due to drop-out, can be filled up with the students from Kiron. Additionally, in some Länder, the government awards budgetary bonuses for students who successfully graduated, which is another incentive for HEIs to participate in Kiron's program (Pauli 2015).

To apply at Kiron, a student has to prove her/his refugee status. A legal residence permit is not necessary, and being tolerated or at the start of one's asylum application is accepted. Even as a refugee in a first-admission facility without any status you have the opportunity to join in the program. After a brief interview in which applicants have to provide information about their motivation, and the verification of the necessary level of English language skills, applicants become preliminary students. To become full students of Kiron, students then have to complete two test MOOCs within one month (Kiron 2016b). If they do not have access to the internet, they receive a laptop with a WiFi dongle to enable them to follow the MOOCs (Pauli 2015). This makes them independent from the availability of internet in the institutions in which they are housed.

In addition, Kiron offers so called "study-hubs". These institutions are offline offers in which HEIs and local initiatives can provide spaces that can be used by the refugees for studying, exchange between students, meetings or language courses (Kiron 2016c). One study-hub in Berlin is, for example, in the library of the Berlin Social Science Centre ("Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung"), where four laptops are provided, giving the opportunity to learn in a quieter place than in asylum-seekers accommodation facility (Agarwala 2016). Besides this, Kiron established buddy programs (where regular students help Kiron's students), as well as counselling services that support students on their way to enter German HEIs. "To date, we have over 1,500 students on the platform, 22 partner universities, and 4 study tracks." (Kiron.ngo)

Kiron is based on voluntary work. The team consists of 250 volunteers, who work a minimum of 15 hours per week. In addition, a small group of 20 full time employees work for Kiron (Agarwala 2016). To finance their activities and the studies of prospective students, a crowd funding campaign was started in 2015 and nearly 550.000 Euros have been collected, which was enough to fund the studies of almost 500 students (startnext 2016). Besides the crowd funding campaign, the BMBF announced to support Kiron and two partner universities, the RWTH Aachen and university of applied sciences Lübeck with 2,1 million Euro from September 2016 to develop further online learning modules (BMBF 2016b). Kiron now also have a lot of sponsors, service and strategic partners and also project partners, whilst in 2016, Kiron also won the "German Founder Award" (Deutscher Gründerpreis).

Following their early success, Kiron's activities will also be subject to quality control, and an independent institute is instructed to examine the quality of the courses and the actual success of refugees. In addition, Kiron plans to hire academic staff to coordinate the course program between Kiron and its partner universities (Henrichs 2016).

7. CONCLUSION

As shown in this report, many different HEIs have programs which exist to support refugees to access HEIs. In doing so, often the HEIs are confronted with bureaucratic hurdles and language barriers. The language courses are a particular bottleneck to access, because refugees need sufficient language skills to be able to study, however, official language courses are only offered to refugees if their asylum application has been accepted or they have the status of being tolerated. At the same time and as a result of the large quantity and insufficient capacities in the BAMF, processing of the asylum application can last up to one year. During this time, refugees have no right to visit an official language course and are condemned to wait. In response to this problem, HEIs and other organizations like Kiron have initially responded with a lot of voluntary commitment (see the best practice examples) and were then supported by extensive programs of the federal government as well as the Länder. The aim of the state support is to put the voluntary measures on a solid permanent basis. As our analysis has shown, HEIs are focusing on the following measures: Establishment and expansion of counselling and support programs, especially through buddy- or tandem-programs; expansion of language courses; implementation of integration offers to get in touch with German students, and the development of academic offers such as a guest student program or bridging courses.

All in all, the German HEIs have received considerable support from the federal and Länder governments in order to develop new structures and measures to help refugees. The question will be whether these structures can exist in the long term and how much impact they can have. So far, partly due to the inability to examine the statistics separately from the data on other international students, little is known about how many refugees really study at German universities and whether they are successful. Therefore, further studies are needed to investigate the success and impact of the different policy initiatives.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DAAD: *German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst)*

BAMF: *Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge)*

BMBF: *Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung)*

HRK: *German Rectors' Conference (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz)*

KMK: *Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Ständige Kultusministerkonferenz)*

REFUGEES IN NORWEGIAN ACADEMIA - ACCESS AND RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

KAROLINA PIETKIEWICZ¹

1. INTRODUCTION

This country report explores how Norway deals with a pressing challenge of incoming refugees through higher education. It provides a brief overview of the general refugee situation, presentation of the alternative methods of recognition designed for refugees, asylum-seekers, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation as well as the situation of access of refugees to higher education institutions and support services. This report presents selected activities and projects run by Norwegian Agency For Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT, Nasjonalt organ for kvalitet i utdanningen), University of Oslo (UiO, Universitetet i Oslo), Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA, Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus) and briefly Skills Norway (Kompetanse Norge – a Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning).

This report constitutes a summary of an extensive desk and web research and interviews with Norwegian experts relevant to the study. The desk and web research included analysis of available literature sources such as reports of various organisations relevant to the study (e.g. NOKUT or the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research), statistical data published by the Norwegian Directorate for Immigration (UDI, Utlendingsdirektoratet) and Statistics Norway (SSB, Statistisk sentralbyrå), meetings' reports, Web articles etc. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the experts selected during the desk research. The interviewees were engaged in designing and implementing policies and projects regarding the access of refugees to higher education and recognition of their qualifications.

2. REFUGEES IN NORWAY

Over the course of the 20th century Norway became a home for many refugees including Jews, Hungarians, Vietnamese, Sri Lankans, Yugoslavians and finally in the 1990s refugees from Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan (Statistics Norway). In 2015, when the record numbers of incoming refugees struck Europe, Norway became a key recipient of refugees with 31,150 persons submitting applications for asylum. The biggest numbers of people arrived from Syria (10,448), Afghanistan (7,000), Eritrea (2,942) and Somalia (563). The issued positive decisions in 2016 amounted to 14,725, which constitutes less than half of the population of refugees that came to Norway in 2015 (47.3%). Table 1 below presents the numbers of asylum applications and asylum decisions taken in Norway between 2010 and 2016.

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Table 1. Asylum applications lodged and asylum decisions in Norway between 2010 and 2016

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Applications lodged	10,064	9,053	9,785	11,983	11,480	31,150	3,460
including from Eritrea	1,711	1,256	1,183	3,258	2,882	2,942	586
including from Syria	119	198	327	856	1,999	10,448	529
including Somalia	1,397	2,216	2,181	1,694	837	563	154
including Afghanistan	979	979	986	726	579	7,000	373
Positive decisions					7,243	8,977	14,725
including asylum		No data			3,588	5,411	11,560
Rejections					2,371	2,103	5,966

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of data published by the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration.

With an unexpected number of refugees, 2015 marked a year of important debate in Norwegian politics as a response to the Syrian ‘refugee crisis’. The society was not questioning whether to help or not, but was rather divided on the question how to help. This debate saw two main camps – resettlement supporters and distant financial aid believers (Reklev, 2016). Norway voluntarily agreed to participate in the EU relocation scheme and consequently accepted 1,500 refugees. However, the policies shaped by the current government still lack the humanitarian aid focus and are predominantly cost-and-capacity led (ibid).

In May 2015 the Government published an analysis of the socio-economic cost of inadequate education offered for asylum seekers and refugees. Mainly focused on primary and secondary level education, the report emphasises the problem of over-qualification² as a factor for widening gaps in the labour market, leading to several socio-economic consequences associated with inadequate education has lost. These consequences took the form of lost resources due to non-participation in the labour market³, reduced rates of welfare and income, lower rate of productivity, poor understanding of democracy, higher rate of criminality and finally higher teaching costs in primary and secondary education. The average cost of inadequate education to the society was estimated between NOK 3,25 mln and NOK 4,4 mln per individual⁴ (Berg et al., 2016). The report recommended the Government to introduce policies ensuring children and young people receive adequate education in the same way as the Norwegian children and young people, to equip them in necessary qualifications to pursue further education, employment and become active citizens (ibid.). The measured socio-economic loss presented in the report had impact on policies and further decisions of the government and university sector to launch programmes allowing for full integration of refugees in higher education.

² The report uses the following definition of over qualification: higher education (one year or more) in occupations that do not require higher education (Berg et al., 2016).

³ Further analyses indicated an 80% probability for a refugee receiving adequate education to have a job that they are suitable for and a 20% chance that a person would be overqualified for their job. In the case of inadequate education, there is a 70% probability of a person having employment corresponding to the level of qualification and 30% chance that inadequate education leads to unemployment (Berg et al., 2016).

⁴ At 2015 prices.

2.1. APPLYING FOR PROTECTION

Every refugee applies for asylum in Norway or at the Norwegian border. The two exceptions to that rule are: resettlement programmes and refugees under the EU quota scheme. Having applied for protection, a person is sent to the arrival centre (Ankomstsenter) and are subsequently (after 1-2 days) moved to the asylum reception centre. Norway has several different procedures for granting protection that may predetermine how long a person will wait for the final decision with three exceptions.⁵ All application will be considered under the ordinary procedure and all applicants will be entitled to stay in Norway during those few months.

Refugees who have applied in 2015 were to be interviewed in 2016 and would receive their decision by the end of the year. Those who applied in 2016 may have to wait up to 10 months to be scheduled for an interview. However, the information available on UDI's website⁶ warn applicants that the average waiting time may be longer if there is a need for further investigation. Waiting times are updated every few months and published on UDI's website . The updates are provided in Norwegian and in English, but general information on different procedures, opportunities, reception centres etc. are also translated into Arabic, Dari, Farsi, Somali, Tigrinya and Pashto. There is a separate brochure specifically for Syrian refugees and stateless persons from Syria available in Norwegian, English and Arabic.

Once a person is granted asylum in Norway, they are located to a municipality according to the Directorate's of Integration and Diversity (IMDi) settlement plan. The residence permit is granted for three years and is a subject to renewal. Various stakeholders have been working with IMDi to ensure that individual backgrounds are taken into consideration to ensure a location offering adequate educational or labour market opportunities.

Once a person is settled in a municipality they can be referred to an introduction programme. This initiative is designed for refugees with granted asylum between the age of 18 and 55 who should obtain basic qualifications to be able to live in Norway. The municipality should provide the start of the programme within three months from the moment a refugee is settled. The programme may run for up to three years. The decision to introduce this programme was taken in the Norwegian Parliament through passing the Introduction Act (2005)⁷ aimed at improving opportunities for newly arrived immigrants through strengthening participation in employment and society and providing financial independence, basic skills in the Norwegian language and basic insight into Norwegian society. The details of every programme depend on individual needs that are assessed before the programme is drafted by the advisors in the municipalities. It usually includes language support⁸ , social studies available in various languages, training to obtain skills for labour market entry, career guidance, and support in pursuing education. Some of the latter initiatives are offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

5 (1) For countries where the inhabitants can get help from their own authorities, the asylum application will be processed and rejected within 48 hours. (2) Applications submitted by asylum seekers from Armenia, Bangladesh, Georgia, Belarus, India, Nepal, Russia (ethnic Russians only) or Kosovo (minorities only) will be processed within three weeks. (3) Under the Dublin procedure, applicants in another European country will be sent back there.

6 www.udi.no

7 Available at: <http://app.uio.no/ub/ujur/oversatte-lover/data/lov-20030704-080-eng.pdf>

8 In Norwegian and English.

Persons under the introduction programme receive financial benefits that amount to a double value of the Basic National Insurance Scheme. For instance, a person that joined the programme after May, 1st 2016 is entitled to receive an annual benefit of total 185,152 NOK (ca. 20,746 EUR) per year. Participants under the age of 25 receive 2/3 of the benefit. The amount of benefit is not influenced by any additional income refugees may receive or the funds or assets they may have (The Introduction Act, 2005).

3. HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN NORWAY

Education in Norway is a right and obligation. Everyone is entitled and obliged to complete primary and secondary education and may pursue with their academic or vocational degrees. There are 44 accredited HEIs across the country, including:

- Universities (8);
- Specialised University Colleges (8);
- University Colleges (26).⁹

Accreditation is regulated by a number of Acts related to Universities and University Colleges as well as NOKUT's regulations and it falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research.

The majority of HEIs are run by the state, which means that most of the study programmes in Norway are free of charge regardless of the applicant's country of origin, academic discipline, institution or language of instruction.¹⁰ Students pay semester fees that guarantee student services. The coverage varies from institution to institution, and so does the amount of the fee (e.g. University of Oslo – 600 NOK, ca. 67 EUR/semester, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences – 840 NOK, ca. 93 EUR/semester¹¹). Domestic students are eligible to receive various grants and loans from the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (Lånekassen) to cover all the costs of living. HEIs usually do not provide any additional financial support to students.

Admission to first-cycle programmes is centrally coordinated by the Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS). The entrance criteria may vary depending on an institution or programme. The range of criteria includes: Higher Education Entrance Qualification (or a corresponding qualification)¹², language proficiency, certain grades, certain subjects, relevant experience or a combination thereof. In regard to language proficiency, for applicants who have obtained Norwegian upper secondary education English language proficiency is proven by completed and passed English course (140 hours per year / 5 hours per week) at the Norwegian upper secondary school.

⁹ See more: <http://www.nokut.no/en/Facts-and-statistics/Surveys-and-databases/Accredited-Institutions/>

¹⁰ It does not apply to private HEIs.

¹¹ Academic year 2016/2017.

¹² Equals the completion of a level 4 in the Norwegian Qualifications Framework. See: <http://www.nokut.no/en/Facts-and-statistics/The-Norwegian-Educational-System/The-Norwegian-qualifications-framework/The-Norwegian-table-of-qualifications/>.

4. REFUGEES IN NORWEGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Refugees may enter Norwegian higher education after being granted asylum by enrolling in a regular study programme complying with the admissions criteria for international students or in a programme designed for refugee students.

4.1. RECOGNITION OF QUALIFICATIONS

Every refugee granted asylum that has an educational background may undergo one of the following procedures of recognition of qualifications:

- General recognition procedure – for refugees who have completed a full level of higher education (e.g. a bachelor degree) and want to evaluate it against the Norwegian qualifications.
- Recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation (UVD-procedure) – an alternative recognition procedure for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation in cases in which the qualifications obtained cannot be proven through required documentation.
- Qualifications assessment for refugees - for refugees who currently cannot be granted general recognition of their higher education (either through the general procedure or the UVD-procedure).

4.1.1. GENERAL RECOGNITION PROCEDURE

NOKUT's general recognition is a voluntary process of recognising higher education acquired abroad to allow a person to pursue an academic degree or enter the labour market in Norway. The institution, where the qualification was obtained, has to be recognised as a HEI in the country of origin. The evaluators compare the educational system in the country where the qualifications were obtained from the Norwegian system. If a programme is recognised as higher education in Norway, a decision is issued that includes: the duration of the programme, equivalent number of credits as well as what level of higher education it corresponds to (bachelor's, master's or PhD), without describing or assessing the curriculum itself (Malgina, Skjerven, 2015).

In order to apply for the General Recognition Procedure a person has to submit required documents to NOKUT by uploading them to their online system. The required documents include: a proof of identity, a proof of completion of level of education that granted access to higher education and a proof of completion of higher education that shall be recognised. In the case of some countries (e.g. Eritrea) the information about the programme has to be sent directly by the institution to NOKUT. Detailed guidance with regard to how and what documentation needs to be submitted can be found on NOKUT's website in Norwegian and English. The Agency provides the information on documentation requirements for certain countries, including e.g. Eritrea, Somalia, and Afghanistan. Syria is not included on the list.¹³ NOKUT's general recognition procedure is free of charge and takes approximately two months when all the necessary documents are provided. The documents have to be submitted in one of the following languages: Norwegian, Danish, Swedish or English. The decision is legally binding and therefore forms a basis to apply for admission to HEIs across Norway.

¹³ <http://www.nokut.no/en/Foreign-education/NOKUTs-general-recognition/Documentation-requirements/>

In 2015 NOKUT received 7,500 applications. It is predicted that 2017 will bring around 1,000 application submitted by Syrians alone and increasing volumes from applicants from other countries that very often have difficulties with documenting their qualifications or documentation provided cannot be verified, e.g. Eritrea (Malgina, Skjerven, 2016).

4.1.2. UVD-PROCEDURE

In 2005 Norway introduced the Refugee Procedure, aiming to recognise qualifications held by refugees in compliance with Section VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which Norway ratified in 1997. The process was designed and run by the HEIs, but fully funded from the Ministry of Education and Research. In 2010, it was concluded that making HEIs responsible for the procedure had led to unequal treatment of applicants and therefore the decision was made to centralise this process. The Ministry commissioned NOKUT to design, implement and run the new process, which resulted in the introduction of the UVD-procedure in 2013.

To undergo this process, a refugee needs to have sufficient language proficiency in English, Norwegian, Danish or Swedish, needs to be granted protection (a residency permit is a requirement) and must have completed a qualification within higher education. First, an application for general recognition needs to be made and upon a rejection due to unverifiable documentation will be then further referred to the UVD-procedure. This starts with a survey that needs to be returned with the following information:

- Documentation on language skills and residence permit (required);
- CV and work testimonials (optional).

The documentation serves as a basis for the decision whether an applicant is eligible to proceed with the recognition. A positive decision triggers the rest of the process that applies diverse assessment methods, including reconstruction, self-instructed tasks and an experts’ panel leading to a report, based on which NOKUT takes a final, legally-binding, decision. The entire procedure was broken down into five stages presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. UVD-procedure in five steps

Step	Action
1	Application for general recognition and referral to recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation.
2	Mapping of applicant’s background and assessment of results
3	NOKUT’s assessment / level placement of qualifications and setting up of a committee of experts
4	Assessment by expert committee appointed by NOKUT
5	Final assessment/NOKUT’s decision on general recognition and filling in archives

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of Skjerven, Malgina, 2015.

Between May 2013 and October 2014, over 70 individuals were recognised in this process. Nearly 50% of the first 25 applicants with a positive decision received in 2013 were able to successfully enter HEIs or the labour market (Malgina, Skjerven, 2015). The majority of applicants came from Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. However, NOKUT saw an increase in applications from Syrian and Eritrean applicants in 2015 and 2016. There are around 200 to 250 applications submitted every year and since the introduction of the procedure, a total of over 350 decisions have been issued.

The UVD-procedure is time and resources consuming creating constraints for both applicants and the administering Agency as carrying out one procedure costs around 50,000 NOK (ca. 5,584 EUR). Even though NOKUT assessed its experience with the procedure positively, over time they started considering possible alternatives that led to a proposal of a Qualifications Passport for Refugees, described in detail in the following chapter of this report (Malgina, Skjerven, 2016).

4.2 .ACCESS

Refugees may enter HEIs in Norway once they have been granted protection, i.e. obtained a residence permit. The admission to HEIs (undergraduate programmes) in Norway is awarded based on the Higher Education Entrance Qualification. The requirements for foreign applicants have been specified in the GSU-list (Higher Education Entrance Qualification for foreign applicants), which includes roughly 200 countries and international qualifications translated into the Norwegian admission to third-level education. It states the name of the qualification in the country of origin in the native language and/or English along with the English language requirement. Selected examples of entry requirements are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Higher education entry requirements for selected countries

Country	Minimum requirements	
	Education	English test required?
Eritrea	Eritrean Secondary Education Certificate (ESEC) with passes in at least 5 subjects including mathematics and English + 1 year university education	Yes
Syria	Al Shahada Al Thanawiya / Baccalauréat (General Secondary School Certificate) + 1 year university education	Yes
Somalia	Secondary School Leaving Certificate + 1 year university education	Yes
Afghanistan	Baccalauria (Secondary School Certificate) + 1 year university education	Yes

Source: GSU-list, http://www.nokut.no/Documents/NOKUT/Artikkelbibliotek/Utenlandsk_utdanning/GSUIlista/2016/GSU_list_English_14112016.pdf

If an applicant has proof of English language proficiency no further tests are required.¹⁴ Otherwise, English language proficiency has to be proven by a completed Cambridge test, TOEFL, IELTS or Pearson PTE Academic test. When it comes to Norwegian, language proficiency is not required in some of the university programmes, but if this requirement exists a person needs to present the documents specified in the regulations regarding the entry to Higher Education in Norway (*Forskrift om opptak til høyere utdanning*¹⁵) proving sufficient knowledge of Norwegian, for instance Norwegian test for adult immigrants from VOX with result B2 in all four parts. Different institutions offer Norwegian and English language courses to refugees already in the asylum reception centres, so that they can learn throughout the period when they are waiting for their applications for asylum to be considered. Those initiatives will be a subject of the following sections of this report.

¹⁴ For instance, completed university education where the subject English is the main component of the course. See: http://www.nokut.no/Documents/NOKUT/Artikkelbibliotek/Utenlandsk_utdanning/GSUIlista/Language_requirements_GSU.pdf

¹⁵ Full text in Norwegian available at: <https://lovdata.no/dokument/SF/forskrift/2017-01-06-13>

4.3. SUPPORT

The support offered for refugees varies from institution to institution. Support services may be provided in the form of counselling, advisory or financial support, aimed at facilitating access of refugees to higher education and completion of courses or degrees. This section focuses only on financial support offered to prospective refugee students to enter third-level education and complete degrees in Norway.

Refugees may learn about the available financial support from a brochure prepared and published by the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund available on the Fund's website in English¹⁶. Advisors who support refugees once they are settled in municipalities also provide the necessary information about the existing opportunities. There are two grants in Norway available for refugees who want to pursue their education: refugee grant and basic grant for full-time education.

4.3.1. REFUGEE GRANT

Refugees granted protection taking up primary, ordinary lower or upper secondary education in Norway are eligible to receive a Refugee grant. It allows refugees to obtain a Higher Education Entry Qualification, but does not provide help for applicants to HEIs. However, it cannot be combined with financial support under the introductory programme. The information about the refugee grant is available on the web site of the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund in English.¹⁷

4.3.2. BASIC GRANT FOR FULL-TIME EDUCATION

Every refugee granted protection in Norway and wants to enter a HEI is entitled to receive financial education support under the same rules as domestic students. The maximum support that they may receive amounts to 51,975 NOK (ca. 5,824 EUR) monthly. The maximum basic grant for full-time education consists of repayable and non-repayable support of 31,185 NOK (ca. 3,494 EUR) and 20,790 NOK (ca. 2,330 EUR), respectively. Information about the application procedure and repayment rules is available on the website of the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund in Norwegian.

5. RESPONSE OF THE NORWEGIAN ACADEMIC SECTOR TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS – SELECTED INITIATIVES

In 2015 the Union of Students in Norway (NSO, Norsk studentorganisasjon) called on HEIs to prioritise organising open lectures, working on recognition of qualification procedures and introducing a course on the Norwegian higher education system to help refugees to better integrate and enter higher education as soon as possible (NSO, 2015). The higher education sector in Norway has been very active. The increasing number of refugees and the public discourse on how to help them triggered action that led to a number of initiatives aiming at a better integration of refugees in academia. For the purpose of this report, several projects have been selected that may be considered as examples of promising practice with regard to access to and completion of higher education for prospective refugee students.

¹⁶ See: <https://lanekassen.no/Global/BrosjyrerNyhetsbrev/BrosjyrerBokmal/Educational%20support%20for%20refugees%202016-2017.pdf>

¹⁷ See: <https://www.lanekassen.no/hvormye>

5.1. QUALIFICATIONS PASSPORT FOR REFUGEES

Noticing the struggle of an increasing group of refugees to fulfil the requirements of the General Recognition Procedure and UVD-procedure, NOKUT has proposed a new approach to qualifications' assessment to offer an alternative for refugees with insufficient documentation and individuals in a refugee-like situation, who have been left without a possibility for a formal recognition process resulting in a legally binding solution. NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees is a standardised document that includes information about a person's qualifications, language proficiency, education and work experience. Additionally, it indicated the steps that need to be taken to be able to formally recognise a person's qualifications in the future.

The pilot project implementing and testing NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees was carried out between February and May 2016. Applicants were selected out of the pool of persons that had applied for General Recognition and UVD-procedure and whose applications were rejected.

The procedure started with an assessment that included:

- Preparation of each case by an assigned officer and evaluation of documentation;
- Carrying-out the interview¹⁸;
- Issuing a Passport with a validity period of three years.

The entire procedure, from the moment when the interview was held, was completed within approximately three days. NOKUT concluded that an average duration of the procedure could be shortened to approximately two business days and the total cost of issuing a Passport amounts to ca. 5,000 NOK (ca. 556 EUR) per applicant. In the case of General Recognition or UVD-procedure, applicants do not have to cover any costs of the proceedings, as it is fully funded by the state.

The evaluation carried out by NOKUT concluded that applicants were generally satisfied with the procedure and confirmed their interest in using the document. However, in the final survey, a few individuals pointed out that they would need to receive detailed explanation on why they were not eligible to get recognition under the UVD-procedure. Those who have been recommended to formally recognise their qualifications once they fulfil the requirements stated that they will come back to NOKUT to undergo the UVD-procedure.

Stakeholders have also expressed their satisfaction with the new proposal and especially the integration sector and organisations representing employers commented that the Passport might help further integration of refugees and their access to the labour market. HEIs pointed out that there is a need to inform applicants that the Qualifications Passport does not grant access to admission to study programmes. However, HEIs admitted that partial qualifications may constitute a ground to enrol in a bachelor's degree.

18 It is worth noting that nine interviews were carried out with the use of the distant communication means.

As the Qualifications Passport's added value lies in its transferability, NOKUT decided to take a step further. Together with the UK-NARIC office NOKUT proposed a European Qualifications Passport to establish a cost-effective fast track for recognition of qualifications held by refugees.¹⁹ The aim of the Passport would be similar to the Norwegian pilot project - facilitating entry to higher education or the labour market. The idea is based on the Nansen Passport introduced in 1922 by the Norwegian first High Commissioner for Refugees - Fridtjof Nansen (UNHCR, 2014). The document could facilitate the movement of refugees across Europe without the need of going through time-consuming competencies' assessment procedures in every country. The proposal includes establishing a pan-European, quality-assured framework for recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in refugee-like situation coordinated by one institution. The centralised recognition model would offer a methodology for recognition procedures for refugees with insufficient or missing documentation (Malgina, Skjerven, 2015).

The project proposing the implementation of the European Qualifications' Passport has been presented to the European Commission and other organisations in 2015, but received financial support from the Council of Europe (CoE) the following year.. The document will be tested among refugees in Greece in 2017 in collaboration with Greek authorities and UNHCR Greece alongside with ENIC-NARIC centres from the UK, Italy and Greece.

5.2. UNIVERISTY OF OSLO (UIO)

5.2.1. AKADEMISK DUGNAD

Akademisk Dugnad is an initiative sparked by staff members of the University of Oslo aimed at addressing the challenges of a high influx of refugees to Norway and Europe. The project was initially joined by Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences. The Rectors' Conference (UHR) has not issued a formal statement on the issue but has addressed the challenge of an increasing number of refugees in one of the meetings, which resulted in more HEIs joining *Akademisk Dugnad*.

Akademisk Dugnad should therefore be considered as a common activity or day-to-day business rather than a project. Every institution that participates funds their activities from their own budget and *Akademisk Dugnad* facilitates knowledge sharing and creation of new ideas. However, the initiative is not meant to last permanently. The principle of *dugnad* is that the outcome is long-lasting, but not the deed itself. An evaluation is planned to be carried out and conclusions along with recommendations will be presented to the Ministry of Education and Research.

During the same period the Rectors' Conference set up a national working group consisting of HEIs and other relevant organisations looking to share experiences. It turned out that most of the universities already have initiatives and cooperate with local stakeholders toward better integration of refugees. For example, UiO has a relatively wide offer for refugees that has been designed and offered in collaboration with other HEIs (mainly

¹⁹ See more here: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168070016d>; accessed on 6 December 2016.

HiOA), NGOs (e.g. House of Diversity) and the local authorities. The institution works mainly in three areas: network programme, academic practice and language support opportunities.

5.2.2. NETWORK PROGRAMME

The network programme is an opportunity run in collaboration with HiOA that matches refugees with students from UiO or HiOA studying a similar academic discipline. It aims at better information provision by building a network of people and it lasts for one semester. There are some groups that have been working for a year successfully fulfilling their objectives. It is estimated that as of January 2016, approximately 30 persons have participated in the programme.

Having evaluated the current form of the programme and researched international activities regarding refugees' integration, a number of changes have been introduced in February 2017 to increase the academic focus to better engage refugees and asylum seekers in the academic life.

This project targets specifically asylum seekers or persons with a recognised status who are willing to participate. The arrangements are made by a person interested in taking part in the programme, which means that they should reach out to the institution themselves. In the interviews it was pointed out that there is a need for better information provision to attract more potential participants, as well as bringing similar ideas into life for refugees waiting for their documents to be processed.

5.2.3. ACADEMIC PRACTICE

Another programme offered by UiO targets students who have completed a degree have been granted protection in Norway and are residents of the Oslo area. They may apply for an internship, i.e. academic practice, as a part of their introduction programme to learn about the background of their academic discipline in Norway to enter the labour market or pursue another academic degree. In UiO there were two persons that started the programme in 2016 and four people that started in the beginning of 2017.

The interns do not receive any salary in addition to the financial support from the introduction programme. The internship generally lasts six months, but the length may vary. 'The matchmaking' of opportunities and demand is made by the HEI, but participants have to be referred to a HEI by their municipal advisors.

There are certain difficulties that have been identified during the roll-out of the programme specifically in regulated professions such as law. For instance, a graduate with a bachelor's degree in law from a Middle Eastern country (e.g. Iraq or Syria) will not be able to practice law in Norway based on this qualification, as law is a regulated profession. However, potential opportunities for such a persona include (e.g. being a legal advisor).

As of now, the programme does not allow for pursuing a degree in a certain discipline following a completion of internship. However, such an opportunity is now being explored.

5.2.4. LANGUAGE SUPPORT

UiO has developed a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) entitled Introduction to Norwegian starting on the 16th of January 2017. The course is open to anyone interested in learning the basics of the language, with a specific focus on refugees in reception centres. The online form of the course constitutes an advantage for those who have not been granted protection and therefore cannot utilise any of the governmental programmes facilitating integration, as the MOOC can be attended by anyone regardless of the location and status.

It is planned to further develop this project in two directions. On the one hand, there will be further levels of the course designed and implemented. On the other hand, for those who are residents of the Oslo area there will be forms of blended learning offered to ensure a balance between the self-instructed learning and contact hours. In the future blended learning opportunities will be carried out also by other HEIs across Norway which depends on their support and interest. According to data provided by UiO, as of January 2017, approximately 18,000 participants joined the Introduction to Norwegian MOOC. However, it cannot be determined how many of them are refugees because the course was open for all interested people.

In addition to its own courses, UiO purchased 1,000 licenses to access the European Commission's Online Language Support (OSL) to offer refugees an opportunity to improve their English. Before taking the course every participant needs to take a test to assess their language skills to further be assigned to an adequate level. One of the interviewed experts has stated that English is equally, if not more, important if a person wants to pursue their academic degree in Norway, but this information is sometimes under communicated to the refugees. The information about the course was disseminated in asylum reception centres through flyers designed by UiO. So far, approximately 50 refugees have taken the entry examination to subsequently start the English language course.

5.2.5. ACADEMIC REFUGE

UiO is also engaged in a project funded under the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership that kicked off in autumn 2016. Along with the University of Ljubljana, the UNICA network and Scholars at Risk, UiO aims at improving the capacity of European universities to assist refugees and threatened academics as well as to promote understanding and respect for higher education values. The project focuses on academic community development to be better prepared to help in the integration of refugees. This will be achieved through staff training, MOOCs and finally an electronic handbook on how to put higher education values in daily practice in universities.

5.3. BRIDGING COURSES AT OSLO AND AKERSHUS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Bridging courses are short-cycle programmes offered to refugees in selected areas that were first developed in Oslo and at HiOA – Norway's largest state university college.

In winter 2016 HiOA came together with the Ministry of Education and Research to discuss potential initiatives to address the issue of a high influx of refugees. Applying the approach of combining the need for further integration of refugees and the possibility of education, as well as the future socio-economic needs of Norway,

the Ministry commissioned HiOA to design two short-cycle programmes for nurses and teachers that will aim at further educating refugees who have completed their education as a teacher or nurse in their home countries. In Norway both of those professions are regulated and in order to be a nurse or a teacher one must obtain professional qualification granted by a specific authority.²⁰ The selection of those areas was based on the analyses of the future demands of the labour market and the fact that HiOA is a leading HEI in the country that offers programmes in nursing and teaching.

The institution started working on the first study programme in teaching from late April 2016. It was prepared in cooperation with relevant stakeholders, such as NOKUT, for accreditation purposes and the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (UDIR – Norwegian: Utdanningsdirektoratet) for awarding the professional qualification required to work as a teacher.

Complementary teacher education (the official name of the programme) was designed in the form of a short cycle programme that would complement the professional education of a person in the same field with a qualification from a non-EU/EEA country to level it up with a corresponding qualification in the same field in Norway and to allow them to obtain necessary qualification to enter the labour market. The program consists of 60 credits and includes courses in the areas of: education, social studies, language education and practice. It runs on full-time basis over two semesters (see: Table 4).

Table 4. Complementary teacher education - programme's content structure

Course	Semester	Points
The Norwegian school system and the teaching profession	First	15
Language and learning	First	15
A diverse school	Second	15
The Norwegian school system and the teaching profession (includes final research thesis)	Second	15

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of <http://www.hioa.no/Studier-og-kurs/LU/Evu/Kompletterende-laererutdanning/Programplan-for-Kompletterende-laererutdanning-2017>.

Supervised practical training is an integral part of the programme and is designed for a total of 70 days. In the first semester, every student attends up to 10 days of observation followed by 30 days of supervised practice. In the second semester, another 30 days of supervised practice should take place. Another integrated part of the programme are two complementary courses: digital competence and first aid. Every student has to complete these courses before handing in the final research thesis. Norwegian is the language of instruction with some parts of the programme being conducted in English.²¹

The entry requirements to the programme are presented in Figure 1²² on the next page.

²⁰ The Norwegian Directorate of Health or the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training.

²¹ More information about the programme can be found here: <http://www.hioa.no/Studier-og-kurs/LU/Evu/Kompletterende-laererutdanning/Programplan-for-Kompletterende-laererutdanning-2017>, in Norwegian only.

²² All the documents have to be submitted either in Norwegian, another Scandinavian language or English.

Figure 1. Entry requirements to Complementary teacher education.

LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

- According to §2-2 of the regulations regarding the entry to Higher Education in Norway (Forskrift om opptak til høyere utdanning) applicant must document their language proficiency in Norwegian and in English on at least on B2 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

RESIDENCE PERMIT

- It means that applicants have to be recognised as refugees/asylum seekers etc. to be able to apply for a place in this programme. Asylum seekers whose status is still being under consideration are welcomed to join in the open lectures and start working on their language, but due to legal implications they cannot be formally enrolled in any of the programmes.

RECOGNITION

- Refugees applying for a place in this programme have to have their qualifications recognised through applicable procedures. HiOA might accept Qualifications' Passports as formal documentation confirming obtained qualifications under the condition of prior acceptance by the authorising authority.

DOCUMENTED ATTEMPT OF RECEIVING APPROVAL TO WORK AS A TEACHER IN NORWAY FROM UDIR

- Every refugee student has to apply for approval to UDIR and produce documentation confirming that the respective authority refuses to grant authorisation due to the lack of qualification according the Norwegian standards. The documentation produced by UDIR will specify what competencies a person is missing and define what they need to do to obtain a full teacher qualification to successfully reapply.

Source: Own elaboration on the basis of the interview.

Students enrolled in the programme do not pay tuition fees, but have to cover the semester fee that amounts to 840 NOK (ca. 93 EUR²³). They are also eligible for other financial support on the same basis as domestic students, as well as national schemes supporting refugees, but HiOA does not offer own financial support structures.

The programme was first opened for admissions from autumn 2016 until mid-December. However, despite of intense organisational efforts and dissemination activities, no applicants fulfilled the admission requirements. According to HiOA there were a number of reasons for this. One of them being insufficient language skills (both Norwegian and English) and another lack of formal qualifications in teaching. The programme was designed for persons who had obtained degrees in teaching in their home countries, whereas candidates applying to enrol in this programme often had experience in teaching with a degree from another discipline (e.g. mathematics), but no educational background in didactic, pedagogy or similar.

Lessons learnt in that experience led to the decision of redesigning the entry requirements. It is being explored now whether it would be possible to admit students with language skills on a level below the one described

23 The benefits of the semester fee have been described above.

by the law and facilitate the improvement throughout the programme to finally carry out the language tests at the very end of the course given existing legislation. This would become an obligatory exam to complete the programme and obtain certification.

The second short-cycle programme for prospective nurses is still in the process of development and consultation with the Norwegian Directorate for Health, which awards medical staff with the final professional qualification that is needed to work in medical jobs. The course will consist of 61 ECTS points and it has already been decided that there will be no opportunity to lower the requirements regarding language proficiency due to potential health risks. As this programme is still being subject to approval, it cannot be covered in this report in greater detail.

It is worth emphasising that aside of the efforts regarding designing curricula, a lot has been done to inform the public about this project. HiOA informed advisors/counsellors of refugees about the newly established programmes. It is difficult to assess what impact the communication activities have, but one interviewee from HiOA stated that the project is getting the attention of advisors, but it is still yet to be disseminated among the refugees themselves. However, information provision will become one of the main priorities for 2017.

5.4. QUALIFICATION REGISTER OF INCOMING REFUGEES

The Norwegian government introduced a system for electronic mapping of the skills of refugees who stay in asylum reception centres. The task of designing and implementing the system was assigned to Skills Norway (Kompetanse Norge), a government agency for Lifelong Learning that operates under the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. From a research perspective, the data collected may have great value for shaping inclusion policies in the country to be able to better address the needs of the incoming refugees and consequently ensure better integration in the society. For refugees it means while their application is being processed they can begin to work on their skills assessment which may speed up the process of undergoing formal recognition procedures and entering education once they have been granted protection. The project will result in creating tailor-made training and integration programmes for refugees.

The system is based on an IT tool. It is essentially a registration form with standardised multiple-choice questions about language, education, work experience, and digital skills etc. It is available in 14 different languages, including Norwegian, English and Arabic. The target group are all refugees above 16 years of age. The project covers the entire country and the information gathered in the database will be available for the municipalities and therefore to the refugee advisors who help refugees plan their further education and training.

The results and impact of the project are yet to be known. The system's testing started only in a few asylum reception centres and the official launch is planned for July 2017.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of the general political debate the response of the Norwegian academic community to the increasing number of refugees was rather active and strong. Thus, facilitating better integration has gained higher priority within HEIs across the country. Interestingly, Norwegian authorities have taken a rather pragmatic approach trying to link the needs of refugees with the socio-economic needs of the country.

Importantly, fair and transparent recognition procedures seem to be at the forefront of the discussion, but there is also an interest in maintaining the basic competition principles. The main goal is to help refugee students to become competitive with Norwegian students and pursue the same programmes as the Norwegian students do over time. It is worth noting that Norway attempts to utilise European tools and funding to improve the integration of refugees even if they do not directly open access to higher education, but help improve skills and knowledge necessary to meet the entry requirements. This along with wide stakeholder consultation and cooperation may be suggested as a good practice to be followed by others.

Another experience from the Norwegian case sheds some light on the challenges. Challenges include bureaucracy, funding, and higher number of volunteers than the participants. The latter one shows that the actions taken by academia drive change in the society, but proves that despite the efforts the number of refugees participating in the programmes is rather limited, which may be a result of multiple reasons.

First, participation in most of the programmes is conditioned by the residence permit meaning that a candidate has had to be granted protection. Second, the relocation scheme does not take into consideration specific skills and knowledge of individuals that may determine their academic or professional needs. Moreover, even if a person or family knows of opportunities in a certain city they cannot choose the municipality where they will be settled. Stakeholders have been advising the Government that it is crucial that the placement system considers academic background of every person and matches it with potential opportunities in an area. Third, the qualification needed to pursue a profession in Norway and in the country of origin of a refugee may differ because partial or full qualification obtained may not be sufficient to fulfil the entry requirements to the Norwegian labour market. Finally, another reason for rather low participation might be insufficient communication.

Additionally, the experts stated that higher education might not be a priority for those coming to Norway. From their experience, young persons (in their early 20s) seek academic opportunities. On the other side, older individuals focus on being able to reunite with their families or provide for them with the means of starting employment as soon as possible. The time needed to be able to fulfil the entry requirements is considered too long. To add, the time needed to complete a course or a degree combined with high degree of wages compression and significantly low diversification of wages across the jobs requiring different levels of education may lead to a decreased interest in education (Clarke et al., 2009). On the other hand, the opportunities in the labour market that are offered within the introduction programme constitute more of an immediate solution. In the case of educated individuals this situation only widens skills mismatch and

results in qualified workforce performing, already limited, low-skilled jobs This results in low-skilled individuals unable to become employed. In a long-run it might lead to deepening inequalities and a slow-down of the socio-economic development.

All in all, it is important for Norway to maintain the national and European dialogue to improve their initiatives, as better integration of refugees is seen in the country as an opportunity not only for the individuals, but for the entire society. The definite impacts of programmes implemented are yet to be determined. Despite some coordination exercises (e.g. UHR's working group, NOKUT's consultation with the stakeholders), most of the activities are centrally planned and commissioned by the Government or organised by HEIs and self-funded, leaving an impression of being independent actions, which may contribute to rather low participation in some of the programmes. It is planned to strengthen the cooperation between the Government, HEIs and relevant agencies to develop more over arching initiatives to continue following the rule that bringing an idea into life is only one step, but implementing and developing it across sectors is a key to success.

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COUNTRY REPORT

ROMANIA

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1. BACKGROUND

1.1. THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM OF ROMANIA – UNIVERSITIES, STUDENT POPULATION AND INTERNATIONAL OPENNESS

The Romanian higher education system is shaped by a massive period of expansion following the 1989 Revolution, and has seen dramatic changes in terms of student numbers over the past 25 years. The transition period saw increases in the size of the student body which is often linked to delayed participation, and a similar rise in the number of institutions – including the emergence of a large private sector.

Romania has a declining student population, and has been blighted by a recent decrease in funding due to funding being linked to the number of enrolled learners. The private sector has been contracting sharply, while the majority of the public sector is now trying to retain prior funding. Smaller universities, in particular, have been struggling.

In terms of internal structure, all Romanian universities follow the Bologna structure of separate Bachelor (usually 3 years, but sometimes 4) and Masters cycles (2 years). Only medicine studies have a different structure (this is common in other European countries). The latter field also has the highest rate of internationalization, attracting numerous foreign students due to the prevalence of numerus clausus in other countries.

In terms of funding, students mostly get the cost of their studies covered by the state. However, there is a distinct stream of fee-paying students. This includes students who do not academically qualify for the state-funded places in university upon admission or those who have grades placing them below the maximum number of students who qualify for said places in subsequent years. State-funded places are only allotted for full time study, and only Romanian and EU/EEA/Swiss students qualify for them. Asylum seekers receiving a positive decision (refugee status or subsidiary protection) on their case qualify for state-funded places and Moldovan and other ethnic Romanian students receive special scholarships covering living costs.

It is important to know that the state provides a series of social services available to students both on and off campus. These are important in ensuring a reduction of costs for those taking part in full time programmes,

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and include subsidized dormitories (with fees often less than €25 per month), subsidized food, scholarships of various types and deductions of the price of train tickets.

1.2. THE SITUATION REGARDING ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

Measuring the number of refugees is problematic, not in the sense of trying to pinpoint the exact number of persons given formal asylum status, but due to the existence of considerable levels of family ties and connections between Romania and some of the Middle Eastern countries recently affected by conflict.

Situated close to the Western Balkan route for irregular migration (which includes a high share of refugees and asylum seekers), Romania has seen inflows mainly originating from the Middle East and Afghanistan. It is important to note that overall numbers remain small when compared to Western European countries and this is probably due to a variety of reasons:

- Recent flows have tended to use a more Southern route for transit from Greece to Western Europe, initially via Hungary but later along the old Bratstvo i jedinstvo highway through the former Yugoslav republics.
- The level of state aid for asylum seekers remains low, and is one of the lowest in any European country even though this is in line with wage levels and general welfare provisions in Romania. At the moment aid is offered for a maximum period of 12 months, and the sum is equivalent to 1.08 of the Social Reference Indicator.² This currently means a monthly allowance of 540 RON (€120), which is slightly over half of net minimum wage.
- Irregular migrants are often turned around at border checkpoints if they come from a safe country. This is usually the case because Romania does not border any active (or “hot”) conflict zones directly. Many refugees and immigrants simply opt for other regions that are closer destinations.

When looking at first time asylum applicants in Romania between the second quarter of 2015 and the second quarter of 2016 we see that a total of 950 asylum applications were lodged in Romania, and 935 decisions were taken.³ Recognition rates stand at about 50%, and the majority of applicants hail from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. The number of refugees in Romania, even considering prior accepted cases, remains rather small. Currently, the main facilities for accommodation remain concentrated in a few cities such as Timisoara and Galati. However, other temporary centres were used across the country when arrival numbers saw temporary spikes. After asylum or subsidiary protection is awarded, there is of course domestic freedom of movement for those receiving protection. Sadly, there seems to have been no systematic mapping of follow-up personal biographies upon asylum or subsidiary protection being awarded such as the extent of covering post-decision interior migration patterns.

² Provisions of the Law 122/2006 on asylum, available online at: <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/71808>

³ Eurostat asylum quarterly report, available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Asylum_quarterly_report

Politically, the idea of welcoming refugees from conflict zones has had at most lukewarm support from the side of public authorities, and there has been considerable hostility from the wider public with many fearing that their eventual integration would be problematic. The Government was initially hostile to the idea of quotas, but once they were agreed upon public declarations by officials tended to defend the importance of having EU-level decision making on the issue. Even after this point, public officials continued to stress that they favour a strengthening of external borders as opposed to compulsory quotas in dealing with the refugee crisis.⁴

2. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY AND DATA USED FOR THE STUDY AND RATIONALE BEHIND THE SELECTION OF GOOD-PRACTICE EXAMPLES.

The main initial research instrument was desk research investigating several possible avenues. Due to the recent nature of refugee intakes in Romania and the fairly low visibility of this topic domestically there is little scientific literature to speak of on the topic that focuses exclusively on Romania. However, there is some attention devoted to it in the media, and the legislative channel has seen some changes to laws, rules and practices which can be investigated. Communiques and other types of literature sources exist (though are reflective of official institutional positions). NGOs improving the plight of refugees in Romania tend to document their activities on their websites or via press communiques partially due to funding requirements demanding that activities be made public.

Due to existing limits in using literature, a key data collection approach was the use of semi-structured interviews for the representatives of institutions dealing with refugees. This included a representative of the main ministerial body dealing with the recognition of foreign degrees and qualifications (Interview 1), a representative of the main university in the city that houses the biggest refugee accommodation center (Interview 2), a student union representative (Interview 3), civil society representatives (Interviews 4, 5) and a representative of the Ministry of Education (Interview 6). The interviewees were selected based either on opportunity (for CNRED - the body in charge of recognizing foreign degrees) or after browsing media reports on policies/activities/incidents related to accommodating refugees after 2014.

It is important to note that Romania has a population of unregistered or “grey” refugees which have fled war zones and settled via family ties as opposed to the formal process of seeking asylum. Syrians in particular have had family and educational ties with Romania dating back to the communist-era cooperation between the Ceausescu regime and the Baathist government in Syria. Even before the flare-up of the refugee crisis in 2014, there were over 4,000 Syrian citizens present in Romania, constituting the 5th largest foreign nationality in the country.⁵ Due to poor documentation of their situation, and given that many are outside the scope of activity for the key NGOs and structures dealing with the provision of aid and support for refugees, they will not be covered in this report.

⁴ TV report on declarations by PM Dacian Cioloș, June 10th 2016, retrieved on December 3rd 2016: <http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/ciolos-despre-problema-refugiatorilor-nu-cred-ca-poate-fi-reglata-prin-cote-de-ce-nu-a-intrat-inca-romania-in-schengen.html>

⁵ As per Eurostat, retrieved on December 7th 2016, data available: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics - Table 6

3. PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES CONCERNING ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR REFUGEES AND CHALLENGES REGARDING RECOGNITION OF THEIR QUALIFICATIONS

Admission and access to higher education is regulated at institutional level and governed by a precise set of rules and regulations that are determined by the Ministry of Education.⁶ Romania is a highly centralized country resulting in no extensive regional plans on dealing with refugees nor leeway for the creation of regional-specific admission paths. However, as the country houses refugees concentrated in a very small number of areas, local institutions and authorities in the respective municipalities have been forced to be more proactive in dealing with issues that might arise. In some cases, NGO activists described the attitude of local authorities as “surprisingly constructive” and ascribe this attitude to “familiarity with multicultural contexts in parts of the country” (Interview 5).

When it comes to higher education on a national level there has been no new strategy issued for dealing with refugee resettlement and integration as of December 2016. This is in part due to the low number of refugees overall and because only a small cohort of refugees are believed to be eligible for or interested in higher education participation (Interview 6). The lack of urgency is to be expected given the overall low number of asylum seekers, as outlined in the previous section.

Individual institutions, especially those in cities that house considerable refugee populations, might take different approaches and display greater pro-activity. An example of this is the West University of Timișoara based in the city housing the largest refugee accommodation centre. The institution has offered refugees free language courses, though initially the offer was not met with particular interest from local refugee populations. There are hopes that recent demand will see the classes activated starting in the next few months (Interview 2). These courses would have been at a somewhat basic level initially, but will hopefully allow progression to the point of accessing formal, regular education. Importantly, the courses had no restriction on asylum seekers (i.e. people without a formal status decision for their case), which would give asylum seekers added value as formal refugees benefiting from access to free language programs as a right (albeit often in a rigid framework).

When facilitating the recognition of prior competencies the national office dealing with recognition is responsible for all degree validation across Romania. Romanian law requires validation for both European and non-European degrees, with the note that degrees and qualifications certified within the EU are fast-tracked, while non-EU qualifications usually require further certification (Interview 1). Crucially, this further certification includes a procedure for verification of the validity of a diploma with the responsible authorities in the foreign student’s country of origin. Of course, this is not applicable for students who are given refugee status or subsidiary protection. As such, the validation/verification requirements are waived *de facto* for admission purposes, as detailed below.

⁶ Law 1/2011 on Education, Art. 142, retrieved on Dec 14th 2016 and available at: <http://legeaz.net/legea-educatiei-nationale-1-2011/art-142>

One last issue when it comes to the integration of refugees to higher education is linguistic immersion. As Romanian is not a major international language, few migrants would be able to speak it from the start. In such conditions, a majority of refugees and migrants need to employ Romanian language courses. These are normally provided for refugees and other foreigners, but are not organized in every municipality that houses refugees (Interview 5).

4. GOOD-PRACTICE EXAMPLES TO FOSTER ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENT REFUGEES

Every few nation-wide policies and programmes exist to aid refugees, and this seems to be unchanged in recent years due to the crisis situations in the Middle East. The number of refugees in Romania remains rather low, and the arrivals of new migrants have not been high enough to alter existing complacency. Nevertheless, increased efforts to accommodate and integrate refugees often come from the side of civil society and most good practice examples for the integration of refugees come from here.

One such national-level example is the Discriminarea Imigrantilor in Domeniul Drepturilor Civile /Immigrant Discrimination in the field of civil rights developed by the Asociația Română pentru Promovarea Sănătății (ARPS)/Romanian Health Promotion Society in cooperation with Societatea Academică din România/The Romanian Academic Society (SAR) and Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării/The National Council for The Prevention of Discrimination. The project was multifold in terms of content, but most activities focused on raising awareness in a country in which reaction to significant immigration from areas that are culturally different is often rather negative. Other than giving information to both refugees and potential agents for integration (such as employers), the SAR project partners prepared a policy brief aimed at altering immigration policies and civil rights provisions for migrants in Romania.

The policy brief called for a series of changes to the legal framework but also to university practices. It detailed changes affecting foreign students in general, in the idea that such measures would help refugees as well. It is important to note that SAR is one of the most influential organizations in Romanian higher education. Some of the specific measures they asked for are detailed below.⁷

- Improve assistance and orientation services related to accommodation for foreign students in each university and inform and train student dorm administrators on the rights of foreign students.
- Have universities adopt new measures and internal sanctions to fight against informal payments (bribes).
- Organize special information and orientation sessions for staff 1-2 weeks before the beginning of the academic year.
- Offer foreign language courses to the administrative staff and professors who do not have an adequate command of the language they teach in (A/N if they teach in foreign languages).

⁷ SAR – Policy Brief #66 - Immigration Policies in Romania: Policy proposals regarding the protection of immigrants' civil rights in Romania, 2015

- Have video or audio recordings of classes and make these recordings available so that foreign students who have difficulties understanding the language and/or the specific terminology can go over the classes again.
- Offer mentorship programmes (which are to be considered as part of the internship requirements for Romanian students) which would pair a Romanian student (mentor) to an interested foreign student throughout the academic year.

Other measures from the policy brief called for better cooperation between the National Alliance of Student Organizations in Romania (ANOSR) and foreign students (including refugees studying in Romania), as well as for greater representation of foreign students in elected bodies for student representation. Crucially, SAR asked for specific guidelines on facilitating the recognition of qualifications and prior degrees even without an explicit certificate.⁸

Today, most of these recommendations have not been formally enacted in law, though some de facto practices mirror some of the proposals including facilitated recognition of prior degrees even when contacting the issuing authority is impossible.

4.1. MULTI-LATERAL INTERVENTION: CARE AND SUPPORT OFFERED BY AIDROM

AIDROM (The Ecumenical Association of Churches from Romania) was established in 1991 and is the result of collaboration between the Orthodox, Calvin Reformed, Lutheran, Evangelical Presbyterian and Armenian Churches.

The group working with projects for refugees was set up in its current form in 2012, and now AIDROM is one of Romania's leading organization in dealing with refugees and offering support in a multitude of capacities, areas and contexts. The organization is largely funded via European Commission grants (which are provided via the General Inspectorate for Migration of Romania) and operates in aiding refugees in roughly half the country. Due to geographic distribution of refugees in places such as Bucharest, Galati and Timisoara, most of the refugees fall under their area of care. AIDROM hosts a safe house for victims of human trafficking and two shelters for asylum seekers, which work in cooperation with the Romanian authorities dealing with migration and refugee issues. Staff composition includes managers, social workers, legal advisers, psychologists, teachers and auxiliary staff.

The organization deals with all types of migrants who are in the process of seeking asylum. They have a strong focus on asylum seekers (i.e. people who have not received refugee status at the point of intervention), but continue their support for refugees and people awarded subsidiary protection. The nature of the intervention is case-specific, so most of AIDROM's projects involve direct personal support. Some of these take the shape of cultural integration programmes or aid in accessing language training. Other forms of aid include direct financial help for refugees whose children go through various stages of education (which is nominally

⁸ Ibid.

free, but includes costs such as meals or school materials). Extraordinary aid is provided in very specific cases (for example an African family was provided with firewood for the entire winter, other families received food aid), so as to guarantee that the dignity of their condition is retained for most refugees. Psychological counselling is provided while general integration measures include the organization of a “migrant Christmas” in which gifts and holiday festivities are organized. The organization tries to interact with authorities to mobilize them in engaging with refugees further. Some of these efforts have been successful in both institutional and interpersonal terms. AIDROM interviewee recalled how “one kindergarten director was literally moved to tears when seeing children who had to survive life in a conflict zone being able to play and learn together with the other children” (Interview 4).

Starting in July 2016, AIDROM expanded activities and renewed funding through the new “Social assistance and complex aid for refugees” initiative. The project envisages support for 600 asylum seekers which will eventually benefit from food and accommodation support, counselling for lodging asylum applications, hygiene packages, and aid with organizing transfers between different asylum centres, etc.

Beyond this basic level of help, the project envisages support activities aimed at helping asylum seekers, migrants and refugees integrate into society at a deeper level. For education, procedures for enrolment in the most appropriate cycle are explained to parents or applicants, with support also being offered in linguistic training or the legal aspects of enrolment.⁹ This is done on a case-by-case basis, with AIDROM volunteers adding individuals and families to make the right choices and even offering occasional support for families with particularly difficult personal circumstances. Note that most of these activities are focused on children and minors accessing pre-tertiary levels of education at this point.

4.2. UNIVERSITIES DIRECTLY OPENING UP TO REFUGEES

Theoretically, refugees with accepted asylum claims (recognized refugees and beneficiaries of subsidiary protection) are eligible for higher education access in similar conditions as Romanian students. However, the implementation of regulations on access to higher education specifically for refugees remains difficult due to several reasons. Firstly, documents needed for formal access are lacking or do not benefit from the possibility of verification with third party ministries (for certification of authenticity). Secondly, the lack of foreign-language programmes is another significant barrier. Some exist, but are often clustered around a few subjects (medicine, business and IT, among others).

In order to facilitate better access to higher education admission, the West University of Timisoara has tabled the idea of teaching Romanian for free to asylum seekers and refugees outside the normal framework of formalized “Romanian language for foreigners” programmes. The latter are rigid and linked to the academic calendar, thus providing a barrier for refugees who receive status recognition after formal admissions deadlines.

⁹ AIDROM project description, retrieved on January 7th 2017 and available online at: <http://www.aidrom.ro/proiecte/asistenta-solicitantii-de-azil/>

4.3. RECOGNITION AND PLACEMENT

The law currently regulates the admission of foreign citizens on a fairly strict basis, with non-EU nationals needing prior validation of their qualifications by the Romanian NARIC centre - CNRED. This validation is done upon submission of original documents and verification of validity with authorities in the issuing country. This is often not applicable to refugees, which de facto creates a legal challenge given that the Law 122/2006 and Ordinance 194/2002 stipulate that upon receiving formal refugee status, access to education [including admission to higher education] takes place in identical conditions as for Romanian citizens (Interview 1).

There are also legally problematic cases, in which foreign students apply to study and are admitted via regular channels only to claim asylum upon arrival. From a recognition and access point of view, these cases are of course less problematic as admission has already taken place at the point of the asylum application being lodged.

The big challenge is the lack of verified documents proving prior qualification. This challenge is solved using Declarations of personal responsibility where the applicant to tertiary education declares if they have the necessary qualifications while under the risk of legal penalties [for false declaration]. These are currently the used procedure to waive the need of document verification in the [often war-torn] country of origin (Interview 1). These declarations are fully equivalent to regular documentation for admission purposes.

This represents only the formal entry issue. Other issues arise with the rigid admission system when it comes to timing, as well as the fixed starting dates for Romanian language courses. The legal obligation for equal treatment for access to education purposes are not extended to issues of cultural-linguistic integration. This is smoother for pre-tertiary refugee students, or people with lower qualification levels because unlike universities primary and secondary education use “second chance” programmes to address functional illiteracy among Romanian citizens. Sometimes refugees are placed in these programmes to recover any learning gaps between their prior formation and their expected age-appropriate level in the formal Romanian education system. No courses provided for recognized refugees and people granted subsidiary protection require fees.

When the refugee crisis picked up, some debate did emerge within civil society on whether the legal and regulatory framework for education concerning refugees and migrants should be changed. However, as of the end of 2016 no changes to primary legislation governing access to higher education had occurred (Interview 6).

4.4. ACCOMMODATION PRACTICES AND RELATED CRITICISM

When the migration spike of 2015 saw inflows increasing far above normal numbers, there was a considerable debate in Romania on the practicalities of accommodating an expected rise in the number of asylum seekers. One proposal at the time was to use dormitories in universities (student accommodation) to provide at least temporary shelter. The Education Ministry at the time requested that universities send a list of available dormitory places that could be used to house refugees. In that context, ANOSR reacted negatively on the

grounds of already existing strains on capacity to house students.¹⁰ At the time, ANOSR looked into existing facilities that could provide accommodation, and came up with alternative proposals. One of the ideas that they tabled was the use of dormitories from pre-tertiary education (secondary cycle), which are often under used (Interview 3). ANOSR noted that it is difficult to talk of spare capacity in higher education dormitory facilities given that the accommodation regime in certain universities is already 4-6 students per room with communal bathroom facilities only.

In the end, the issue did not pose further problems as the migrant influx largely bypassed Romania. The closure of the Hungarian border to further migration saw flows switch to Croatia before the Western Balkan route was closed down altogether in early 2016. As a result very few new migrants moved to Romania, thus creating little pressure for accommodation outside existing centres and infrastructure.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Overall, migrants and refugees in Romania face considerable challenges in any effort to integrate due to a variety of contextual issues and bureaucratic hurdles. Romania is not a country with any significant recent tradition of immigration, and most immigrants tend to be ethnic Romanians coming from Moldova or other neighbouring countries. Legislation exists to facilitate some measure of integration for migrants and refugees, for the latter under the guise of international commitments to which Romania is a signatory party.

Nevertheless, there are some encouraging developments with regard to integrative efforts undertaken both by authorities and civil society. From the side of authorities, the main elements of help for the integration of refugees into formal public education are often represented by leniency in what are otherwise strict requirements in the recognition of foreign degrees and prior qualifications. Most Romanian universities and the bodies responsible for recognition have replaced the necessary documentation with a simple declaration of responsibility, under which the applicants vouch for having the necessary qualifications. Some universities have opened up additional language courses, which can be accessed by refugees who are not students. Here is little evidence that policies of systematic adaptation to the needs of migrants, asylum seekers or refugees exist. It is important to note that the overall number of refugees is very small, hence the lack of a visible or significant presence triggering such changes.

From the side of civil society, there are several initiatives. Some initiatives are directed at improving policy and others focusing on improving conditions “on the ground” and direct, personal aid provided to individual refugees and asylum seekers. These initiatives try to bring down both the legal but also the cultural barriers existing to integration and try to bring the problems that refugees go through to the forefront of public debate. It should be noted that the micro-level interpersonal interventions are likely difficult to replicate should a larger influx of refugees occur in the future.

¹⁰ ANOSR press communique, retrieved on November 28th 2016, and available online at: <http://www.anosr.ro/locurile-de-cazare-pentru-studenti-putine-si-inadecvate/>

In the future, these initiatives need to be better supported should the influx of migrants and refugees increase. At the moment, integration and processing tools are limited and are adapted to low numbers of migrants. Political opposition to higher immigration rates and fairly unattractive economic support for would-be refugees make it uncertain if numbers will rise in the future.

In either a low-intake or increased-intake scenario, facilitating access to higher education remains one of the most valuable tools for integration in Romanian society or one of the best ways in which Romania can contribute to reconstruction efforts upon repatriation through the formation of human capital. In conclusion, reducing barriers by enhanced training and facilitation of recognition should continue and be eased further with continued focus placed on case-by-case support and aid.

INTERVIEWS

- **Interview 1** - Representative of the public body responsible for degree recognition (CNRED)
- **Interview 2** - University representative
- **Interview 3** - Student union representative
- **Interview 4** - NGO representative
- **Interview 5** - NGO representative
- **Interview 6** - Ministry of Education and Research representative

INTEGRATING REFUGEES IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION - A COMPARISON OF FOUR CASE STUDIES

JENS JUNGBLUT¹

1. INTRODUCTION

The necessity to accommodate refugees regarding their educational opportunities is a key challenge for European countries. It is noted that this will have a major influence on not only their integration, but also on providing hope and possibilities to those fleeing dire situations in their home countries. In this process, access to higher education is of central importance, and national higher education systems and the constituting higher education institutions have to respond to this salient issue. However, the somewhat spontaneous arrival and at least in the last four to five decades, the unprecedented number of people that needed to be absorbed by the educational systems represent a serious challenge, both politically but also practically, for all actors in the educational system.

The four case studies presented in this report are examples for how different countries approached the common challenge of integrating refugees into their higher education systems. Obviously, each country's approach is shaped by its specific political context, higher education system and the number of refugees that are in need of integration. Thus, it was to be expected to find varying policy solutions to integrate refugees in higher education. However, comparing the four countries and their approaches also allows for the drawing of some general conclusions about common challenges, similar approaches, lessons learned and good practices. This is the main aim of this concluding chapter.

To provide a more coherent structure to the comparison of the four country case studies, this chapter will be based on a conceptual framework that is composed of four key dimensions. These dimensions are derived from different strands of the public policy literature, and they address central elements of implementation of policy solutions, which can differ between countries. By comparing the four cases along these dimensions, it is possible to highlight attributes of the policy solutions whilst also taking into consideration the specific local situation, which can have a positive effect on an effective implementation. The four dimensions that will be used to structure the comparison of the four country cases addressed are: (1) whether the policy solutions addressing the challenge of integrating refugees into higher education were drafted proactively or reactively; (2) whether the policy solutions have been implemented in a top-down or bottom-up process; (3) whether

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the policy solutions were mainly driven by state / public actors or private actors including non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and (4) whether and how the different solutions have been coordinated.

The following section will describe these four dimensions in greater detail and provide links to the relevant public policy literature. This is followed by a third section, which provides a structured comparison of the four countries' approaches to integrating refugees in higher education. The final chapter will then reflect on the comparison, provide some common conclusions as well as recommendations.

2. FOUR DIMENSIONS OF POLICY-MAKING

Four dimensions of policy-making will be used to construct an analytic framework and provide structure for this comparison. These dimensions should not be understood as the only possible framework or lenses of analysis that could be used. They rather represent areas in which differences in the policy solutions due to the specific local situation can be expected. Moreover, the way in which a country is positioned on the four dimensions can influence how effectively policy solutions can be implemented in a given context.

The first dimension builds on research on different types of policy-making styles introduced first by Richardson (1982), highlighting national approaches with specific ways on how to implement public policies. These differences lead to different policy-making strategies that are usually employed. In this, a government's approach to problem solving can be characterised by two extremes. The first one is proactive policy-making where an encompassing policy is outlined a priori to address a rising policy problem (Peters, Bovens, & Hart, 2001). This represents a situation that is favorable for policy change because there is already a plan at hand and a certain level of agreement among relevant actors has been reached. Even though it is not a given that there will be an outcome that is equivalent to the goal described in the initial policy, due to problems linked with the implementation of policies (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973), there is a high likelihood of some policy solution being realised. Contrary to that, if an issue appears on the agenda that has not been pre-negotiated because there is no prepared policy solution the government has to apply ad-hoc or reactive policy-making (Peters et al., 2001). These situations are often initiated by shocks, as issues demand the attention of the government that have not been foreseen or have been deliberately ignored so far (Peters et al., 2001; Zohlnhöfer, 2009). In such a situation, where there is no agreed upon solution, different policy actors can fall back on their different preferences and promote those instead. This leads to a larger number of veto players (Zohlnhöfer, 2009), which constrains policy-makers and makes coming up with a policy solution more difficult.

The second dimension focuses on the process of how a policy solution² has been implemented. One way of handling this is the classical top-down approach, where one policy-making level makes the decision about a policy solution while a different level, usually lower in the hierarchical chain, has to implement the solution (Knill & Tosun, 2012). In this view, it is often expected that the policy actors on the two levels have differing

² Solution should in this context be understood as a perceived solution to a problem, which does not guarantee that it will also have a matching effect.

preferences which lead to a mismatch between the intended results and the achieved outcomes of a policy as actors on both levels get into some form of conflict (Cairney, 2012). In the second, bottom-up perspective the focus is much more on implementation as a process-oriented approach that abandons the idea of a clear separation of policy formulation and implementation (Cairney, 2012). Policy objectives are not clear benchmarks. Instead it is expected that they may undergo changes during the process of implementation, as implementers have the autonomy to adjust the objectives to their local realities. This can be more responsive without having to follow strict guidelines that have been issued from policy-makers that are higher in the hierarchy.

The third dimension focuses on the type of actors that are involved in implementing the policy solutions. Here the key differentiation is whether solutions are mainly driven by public actors or private non-governmental actors (Knill & Tosun, 2012). Since the 1980s a change in patterns of governance and policy implementation can be observed such that the sole reliance on state actors has been shifted to a more mixed approach combining both public and private actors (Knill & Tosun, 2012). This shift not only meant that certain public services have been provided by private companies, but this movement also led to an increasing importance of non-governmental organisations in policy-making and implementation. However, there have been strong national differences regarding the degree of openness to private actors. For example, the Nordic countries have preserved a high level of reliance on public actors, while Anglo-Saxon countries strongly involve private actors (Peters, 2001).

The fourth and final dimension addresses the level of policy coordination. As policy-making happens in a multi-level and multi-actor environment (Chou, Jungblut, Ravinet, & Vukasovic, 2017) some form of coordination is necessary to ensure that the solution is realised in a more or less coherent way. When differing actors with sometimes contradicting preferences are involved in implementing policy solutions or if policies have to be implemented in multi-level arrangements, there is a potential for implementation to take place unevenly. In these cases access to services or implementation of policy solutions can vary within a state territory, causing problems for those who are supposed to benefit from the policy solution (Hill & Hupe, 2014). In this process, coordination can be reached through different means depending on the specific situation. These means include hierarchy, coordination through market competition, coordination through networks, and collaboration (Peters, 2015). First, hierarchy is based on vertical decision-making processes using rules and internal authority to ensure coordination (Scharpf, 1997). The second option relies on markets and a rational choice approach to coordination. This strategy, which is very much in line with New Public Management ideas, relies on the self-interest of actors in a quasi-market (Peters, 2014). The third option relies on the use of networks to facilitate cooperation between policy actors. In this, networks can be formal or informal structures that link actors, be it individuals or organisations, with the means to reach collective goals (Marsh & Rhodes, 1992). The fourth option is related to the network approach but is based on the attitudes of the participants instead of their structural relationships, and highlights collaboration as a joint activity of multiple policy actors to increase the public value of their tasks (Peters, 2015). Each of these options comes with specific advantages and limitations, which also must fit the context of the country as well as the policy area. These four dimensions will be used to compare the way in which the four countries approach the issue of

inclusion of refugees into higher education. To facilitate the comparison each dimension will be treated as a binary option. Table 1 summarises the four dimensions with the matching binary specification. However, the list should not be understood as a presentation of two ideal types, as the four dimensions do not necessarily correlate and countries can more or less freely position themselves on each dimension.

Table 1. Four dimensions of policy-making

Policy-making style	Proactive policy-making	Reactive policy-making
Implementation approach	Top-down implementation	Bottom-up implementation
Type of actors	Mainly public actors	Both public and private actors
Policy coordination	Yes (different types)	No

3. FOUR APPROACHES TO THE INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION

This section will present a structured comparison of the four country case studies following the four analytical dimensions. The focus will be less on the content of the specific policies and solutions that the countries used but on the characteristics of the implementation process according to the four analytic dimensions.

In general, all four countries had to find methods to tackle a similar set of problems in their attempt to integrate refugees into higher education. However, the complexity of each problem differed according to the specific national situation and environment. Factors like the mere number of refugees that needed to be integrated have a direct influence on how complicated it is for a country to address the issue. Looking at both the situation at a European level and the four detailed country descriptions five key problems for the integration of refugees into higher education can be identified. The first problem is linked to the legal status that refugees have and the rights and obligations that come with this status. On the one side, refugees often need to obtain a certain recognised status before they are allowed to formally enrol in higher education, making integration during the process of obtaining this status more complicated. On the other side, even if refugees obtain a recognised status they sometimes still face limitations in their access to higher education as they are often treated as “regular” students, while not necessarily having similar possibilities to enrol.

A second overarching problem is the question of recognition. This includes both the recognition of complete degrees that have been obtained by the refugees before they had to flee, but also the recognition of credits, courses or prior semesters in higher education. This problem is often exacerbated by missing proper documentation of the degree or prior higher education experience. A third problem concerns the language skills that refugees have. In most European countries, the majority of study programmes are conducted in the local language and English language programmes are still in the minority and often limited to certain disciplines or levels of qualification (e.g. there are often more English language Master programmes compared to Bachelor programmes). Most of the time refugees do not speak the local languages and may not have a level of English which would be sufficient for academic studies. Thus, enabling refugees to obtain necessary language skills and diversifying study offerings in English is a key challenge in the process of integrating

refugees into higher education.

A fourth cluster of problems is linked to the provision of social support. While this is a problem for the integration of refugees, not only with regard to higher education but also in general, the situation becomes somewhat more complex in the context of higher education. Students often receive some kind of social support in the form of the provision of cheaper accommodation, transportation or meals in cafeterias or through direct grants and loans. While this existing structure might make it easier to integrate refugees to higher education it also raises additional problems. On the one hand, in systems with means-tested support structures and limits in the support available, refugees entering higher education can end up competing with “local” students for the support which can have a detrimental effect on the support of the “locals” for the integration. On the other hand, the existing support systems are also geared towards the needs of the “typical local student” and might not offer the necessary support that refugees need. Moreover, refugees are often eligible for non-student state support which in turn might have prerequisites or expectations which are not fitting to their student life. The fifth and final set of problems that countries face in the integration of refugees into higher education is cultural integration. While a part of this is already covered by problems linked to language, cultural integration goes beyond that. Cultural integration also includes integrating refugee students into the local student community, providing social contacts with other students and becoming a part of academic life in the respective higher education institution.

To address these five problem areas the four countries that have been analysed in the previous chapters have developed different policies and instruments. These will now be compared along the four analytical dimensions.

3.1. POLICY-MAKING STYLES

The four countries analysed in the previous chapters used very different policy-making styles to address the challenges regarding the integration of refugees into their higher education systems. On the proactive side of the spectrum the Norwegian policy and matching instruments build on a long tradition from a societal and a political point of view for helping refugees. This approach can be described as proactive since many structures and instruments have been in place already before the significant increase of incoming refugees in the year 2015. An example for these pre-existing structures is the UVD procedure for the recognition of academic qualifications which is in place since 2005. However, a more proactive approach and a longer tradition in specific policy instruments to integrate refugees in higher education do not mean that Norway did not have to modify its existing approaches. As the rise in the number of refugees in 2015 also posed a significant challenge for the Norwegian system, the state had to react to this unforeseen situation. Thus, certain forms of reactive policy-making can also be found in Norway, which are often in line with improving existing instruments due to the increase in the number of refugees or known problems that need to be solved. One example is the commissioned report from May 2015, which investigated the socio-economic costs of inadequate educational provision for refugees and which had a significant impact on the further development of policies.³ Another example for problem solving in existing policy instruments is the development of the

3 See: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/economic-analysis-norway/id2502092/>

qualification passport for refugees specifically aimed to address problems that exist in the recognition processes, which is supposed to facilitate entry into the educational system as well as the labour market. On the level of the individual Norwegian higher education institutions the approach to the challenge of integrating refugees has been more reactive. In this, the local institutions rather responded to needs and problems that existed in their specific environment also relying on initiatives from professors, students or other members of staff.

The German approach can be described as mainly reactive. However, Germany had the advantage of being able to remodel and use existing policy instruments and structures to integrate refugees in higher education. In this, many structures that had been setup to integrate international students into German higher education were additionally tasked with also taking care of refugees. Besides taking advantage of the knowledge of the people working in these structures, another reason for this approach is that refugees entering German higher education are regarded as “ordinary” international students, using structures such as uni-assist to apply for study places. Another pre-existing structure that was used to integrate refugees is the Studienkolleg, which can be found at most German universities. The activities of these institutions that were initially created to facilitate access to German higher education for international students without sufficient language skills have been expanded and used in many places to integrate refugees. A key problem for policy-making in Germany regarding the integration of refugees in higher education is the federal structure of the country. This structure divides responsibilities between the federal level and the Bundesländer. While the legal authority in higher education is shared between the two governance levels the Bundesländer have a lot of autonomy on educational matters. At the same time, the federal level has significantly more room to manoeuvre regarding its fiscal capacity, giving it the power of the purse (Capano, 2015; Griessen & Braun, 2010). As a result, reactive policy-making is more complicated in Germany as 17 governments, 16 Bundesländer and the federal government, have to agree on a common strategy. In light of these complex negotiations, the Integra and Welcome programmes, which are administered by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), and funded by the federal ministry of education and research show that even though policy-making might be reactive and in need of lengthy negotiations the response can still be significant giving the programmes' total value of around 100 million Euros over the coming years.

While there were some policy instruments and reforms that happened before the significant increase in the number of refugees in 2015, the Flemish approach can also be characterised as reactive. One example of the already existing policy activity concerning the integration of refugees in higher education is the reform of the recognition regulations that took place in 2013. While Belgium, like Germany, is a federal country the legal relationship between Flanders and the federal level is characterised by a rather clear-cut separation of tasks and responsibilities making it easier for Flanders to respond to the situation. At the same time, there is no Flemish strategy on how to integrate refugees into higher education and many initiatives are reactive whilst being developed by local higher education institutions. Moreover, Flanders also used existing policy instruments and structures to integrate refugees. This includes opening up the student support systems for recognised refugees, or further developing the recognition procedures to be able to better address the specific problems of refugees. Flanders also relied on structures that are in place for the general (not higher education specific) support for refugees for tackling the social and language support.

The Romanian approach can be described as the most reactive for several reasons. First, as Romania is still mainly a transit country for refugees on their way north-west towards Central Europe, there is only a small number of refugees that remain in Romania. This leads to decreased urgency of the problems linked to the lack of integration of refugees into higher education and in general limited political salience of initiatives to support integration. Second, due to the long-standing informal network-like structures of earlier immigrants, the pressure to proactively engage with the issue is further reduced as they partly absorb the few newly arrived refugees. Finally, since the attitude of public officials is also more critical of integration there is no national strategy for addressing the issue which is especially problematic given the centralised governance structure of the country. In addition, there are also no regional-specific plans, while at the same time those refugees that are in the country and could be integrated into higher education are concentrated in a few cities. This creates specific challenges for these communities.

To summarise the results Table 2 provides an overview of the policy-making styles used in the four countries. Looking at the results, it becomes clear that there was only very limited room for proactive policy-making. To a certain extent this is not surprising given that the significant increase in the number of refugees arriving in the countries could not have been foreseen. At the same time, it is also clear that some countries have been better prepared or were able to quickly react to the situation by using existing structures and policy instruments to support integration.

Table 2. Overview of the policy-making styles

	Policy-making style
Norway	Proactive with reactive reforms to address challenges
Germany	Reactive but using and remodelling existing instruments and structures
Flanders	Reactive with reliance on some existing structures
Romania	Reactive and no significant public structures

3.2. IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

Similar to the differences described above the implementation approach differs between the four countries. However, there are also some similarities. These are mainly visible for top-down decision-making structures on the legal status of refugees. As this is classically an authoritative decision made by a ministry or a state agency (which follows clear legal guidelines) these responsibilities and the implementation of policy instruments addressing this issue is generally managed in a top-down manner to assure coherence in the application of the rules. Besides these issues, the four cases differ regarding their implementation approach

In Norway the overall approach is a mixture between top-down and bottom-up. However, of the four cases Norway can be regarded as the country with the strongest focus on top-down implementation. Besides decisions on the legal status of refugees the recognition of degrees and social support for refugees are centrally coordinated either by state structures or public agencies including UDI or NOKUT. Also national level stakeholder organisations like the National Union of Students (NSO) or the rectors' conference (UHR) are actively involved and take a leading role in the policy dialogue and the provision of information to refugees. Besides these top-down processes there is also a bottom-up movement especially regarding the provision

of additional language courses (besides those that are offered by state structures) as well as the social and cultural integration of refugees into local higher education communities. Some of these local, bottom-up initiatives have created enough momentum to be copied and used also by other higher education institutions, allowing for some peer-learning within the higher education sector. This is additionally facilitated through the creation of a working group at UHR, which is supposed to be a forum for higher education institutions to exchange their practices and challenges.

In Germany the implementation is also mixed between top-down and bottom-up. Besides the legal status of refugees information provision to refugees is coordinated through a federal ministry in cooperation with the DAAD. As the recognition of degrees is within the legal authority of the Bundesländer, there are 16 different procedures and approaches to this issue. However, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder of the Federal Republic of Germany (KMK), an inter-state body whose task it is to facilitate coordination among the Bundesländer (Jungblut & Rexe, 2017), recently made the decision to harmonise the way in which the 16 different Bundesländer deal with recognition in cases without proper documentation of degrees.⁴ The bottom-up component of the implementation approach in Germany relates to initiatives that offer language courses as well as social and cultural integration. Here the local higher education institutions with their Studienkolleg as well as student initiatives are the main actors. Many of these initiatives are supported either through funds from local higher education institutions, the Bundesländer or the Integra and Welcome programmes that the DAAD administers for the federal ministry. The latter two programmes follow a clear bottom-up approach as local initiatives can apply for funding based on their ideas and plans on how to facilitate integration of refugees in the local academic context.

In Flanders the legal status is decided in a top-down process through Belgian federal institutions while the overall implementation approach relies mainly on bottom-up initiatives. The only other area in which there is more of a top-down approach is the recognition of degrees, which is administered by the Flemish NARIC agency. Further development of the procedure to cater to refugees was prepared in cooperation between the NARIC agency and the Association of Flemish Universities (VLIR). In contrast, local institutions are mainly in charge of implementing solutions to most other problem areas. While the social support for refugees is in general provided by the Flemish authorities, this system is administered locally by the different municipalities. In addition, the main drivers behind the provision of language courses are municipal authorities and local universities. The latter ones are also in charge of cultural and social integration. So far there is no national action plan that makes these initiatives more coherent. However, several stakeholder organisations have created working groups to facilitate communication on the issue (e.g. VLIR).

Due to the reluctance towards integration and the lack of salience of the issue Romania relies mainly on bottom-up implementation. Besides the decision on the legal status, governmental authorities also provide the general aid to asylum seekers. In addition, the decisions regarding recognition in higher education are taken by a central governmental agency. However, this agency decided to address the issue of missing

⁴ http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2015/2015_12_03-Hochschulzugang-ohne-Nachweis-der-Hochschulzugangsberechtigung.pdf

documentation of degrees by having the applicants sign declarations, thus effectively delegating the de-facto problem of how to assess the “real” qualifications to the local universities. Admission and access to higher education are regulated by the local higher education institutions, which in combination with the recognition procedure can produce significant challenges for higher education. There are no regional action plans on how to integrate refugees into higher education. Furthermore, the distribution of refugees across the country is very imbalanced with certain cities and universities having comparatively high numbers of refugees. This imbalance forces local municipalities and universities to develop their own initiatives due to the lack of a national top-down strategy. In this context, local higher education institutions offer language courses, some social support and cultural integration. They are supported by a rather active non-governmental organisation sector that fills gaps left by missing state initiatives.

Table 3 provides a summary of the approaches used in the four countries to implement policy solutions to the key challenges regarding the integration of refugees into higher education. No country uses a purely top-down or bottom-up approach and it becomes visible that some countries have a more balanced approach that combines top-down and bottom-up measures.

Table 3. Overview of the implementation approaches

	Implementation approach
Norway	Mixed between top-down and bottom-up
Germany	Mixed between top-down and bottom-up with significant financial support from the top
Flanders	Mainly Bottom-up
Romania	Mainly Bottom-up

3.3. TYPES OF ACTORS

The types of actors that are involved in the implementation of policy solutions to the integration of refugees in higher education vary mainly regarding the dominance of one group over the other as both public and private actors are involved in all four countries.

In Norway the implementation of policy solutions for integrating refugees mainly relies on public actors and key stakeholder groups from the higher education sector such as student unions. This focus on public actors is in line with the Scandinavian idea of the active state which is also visible in the context of Norwegian higher education policy (Christensen, Gornitzka, & Maassen, 2014). Among the main groups of actors are ministries, state agencies such as NOKUT, higher education institutions (which in Norway are public organisations under the ministry of education), national stakeholder organisations such as UHR or NSO, and local authorities. In addition, private actors are mainly active in the numerous bottom-up initiatives, which are often based on cooperation with local NGOs. An example for this is the University of Oslo’s cooperation with the House of Diversity or Scholars at Risk.

In Germany public actors are central for the implementation. This involves the federal ministry for education and research as well as the ministries of the 16 Bundesländer on top of the policy-making hierarchy, but also state agencies and public higher education institutions, which are further down in the chain of delegation.

As somewhat of an intermediary institution the DAAD plays a central role through distributing funds to local initiatives that have been appropriated by the federal ministry. Officially the DAAD is a non-profit association whose members are German higher education institutions and local student union who are public bodies. While formally being a private actor the DAAD can be seen as an executive agency for the ministry in the context of supporting the integration of refugees. Private actors are mainly active in the form of NGOs and private foundations that support and cooperate with specific local initiatives. Among the private actors that are involved on a larger scale are, for example, the Kiron Open Higher Education and the Stifterverband, both of which try with their activities to fill gaps that are left by the activities by public actors.

In the Flemish case public institutions are central for the implementation process. However, as indicated in the previous analysis, there is a focus on bottom-up initiatives reflected in a strong reliance on local institutions such as universities or municipal authorities. These actively cooperate with private actors. Among the public actors from the federal and state level that are relevant for the implementation are the Belgian agencies in charge of determining the refugee status, the Flemish ministry for education and the Flemish NARIC agency. Associations of higher education institutions like VLIR are also relevant actors. The key actors on the local level include higher education institutions, student unions, local authorities (e.g. OCMW), and specific NGOs that cooperate with these actors. An example for this is Ghent University's work with the Flemish Refugee Council. Due to the strong reliance on bottom-up initiatives in Flanders, the degree of involvement of private actors strongly depends on the local situation.

In the Romanian case state agencies and ministries are involved in the determination of the refugee status of a person. However, in the context of the integration of refugees to higher education the implementation mainly involves private actors that often cooperate with local universities. The latter ones are central for the integration of refugees due to two reasons. First, the imbalance of the distribution of refugees between cities in Romania leads to very different problem pressures for local universities. Second, after the process of recognition of qualifications by the national agency (CNRED) local universities have the autonomy to decide about access to higher education. Thus, they have the legal power to actively integrate refugees into higher education, but they lack proper national-level support. Therefore, private actors and especially the active NGO sector become very relevant for the integration of refugees in higher education. In the Romanian case, this also includes student unions such as ANOSR, as they are organised as NGOs.

Overall, it becomes clear that public actors play a key role in implementation in three of the four cases. This is not surprising given that all four countries have a higher education system that mainly relies on public universities, which already calls for public actors to be active participants in integration activities. At the same time, it is also clear that cooperation with private actors is necessary as they often complement the activities of public actors or, in the case of Romania, can be seen as key drivers behind integration. Table 4 summarises the results of the comparison on this dimension.

Table 4. Overview of the types of actors

	Types of actors
Norway	Mainly public actors
Germany	Mainly public actors with private actors addressing gaps in public provision
Flanders	Mainly public actors, but reliance on local actors
Romania	Mainly private actors sometimes in cooperation with local universities

3.4. POLICY COORDINATION

Policy coordination, meaning some mechanism to assure consistent implementation of solutions, is a central issue in the integration of refugees in higher education. The four countries analysed show differing levels of policy coordination, and rely on different approaches to coordination.

In Norway, also due to the focus on public actors and national solutions, coordination is mainly achieved through hierarchy. In this, rules and processes about how to deal with the integration of refugees into higher education are defined on a national level, which are then executed by local authorities. This includes the process of distributing refugees throughout the country as well as regulations concerning access to social support. Furthermore, key decisions regarding higher education are centrally decided by several national agencies. This includes the recognition of degrees, access to higher education, and the access to state loans and student support. In addition, network-based coordination is used to link initiatives by local higher education institutions, and facilitate the exchange of information and experience. This happens mainly in the context of national level stakeholder organisations such as UHR or NSO.

In Germany hierarchical coordination is used in areas where a consistent implementation of federal or state laws is required. This includes questions about the legal status of refugees, recognition of degrees or access to social support. Network-based coordination can also be found among governments of the Bundesländer in the context of the KMK regarding issues like defining procedures for the administration of refugees who cannot provide proper documentation of their qualifications. The two key programmes that fund many of the local initiatives for the integration of refugees, the DAAD-administered Integra and Welcome programmes, can be regarded as a mixture between market-based and network coordination. The market element comes from the competitive application process in which the most suitable local projects get selected to receive funding. However, once a project is funded, the programme lines have characteristics of network coordination, since they share a common public relations work and provide the possibility for exchanges between single projects and peer-learning.

The Flemish case only shows signs of limited coordination activities. While the central issue of determining the refugee status is coordinated hierarchically through Belgian state agencies, coordination regarding the integration in higher education is limited. There is some network coordination taking place through the work of stakeholder organisations such as VLIR and the working groups that these organisations created to provide a forum for their members to discuss the integration of refugees. This is very important, as universities have a central role in the integration, not only due to their autonomy in deciding about admission to higher education. However, the lack of a national action plan and the strong reliance on bottom-up activities would actually demand more coordination to ensure greater consistency of integration initiatives.

Integration of refugees to higher education is barely coordinated in Romania. The reason behind this lack of coordination is linked to some of the already mentioned characteristics: there is no national action plan and refugees are distributed unevenly between the cities leading to very imbalanced pressure to act. In addition, as universities have the autonomy to decide on their own about admission of students, there is a strong decentralisation of integration. Moreover, since undocumented qualifications are handled through signing declarations and not through some form of assessment of qualifications, universities are left with a substantial amount of uncertainty when accepting refugees as students. As there is also no substantial state support for integration initiatives and universities often rely on the work of NGOs for additional support for integration, the experience of refugees and the integration practice can differ strongly between universities.

All in all, the four countries use different approaches to ensure coordination, which is in line with their style of policy-making and implementation approach. However, in general it can be said that limited or no coordination of policy implementation creates problems as it leads to inconsistencies in the system and possibly differing integration experiences by refugees. Table 5 provides an overview of the form of policy coordination used in the four countries.

Table 5. Overview of policy coordination

	Policy coordination
Norway	Coordination based on hierarchy and to a certain extent networks
Germany	Coordination through networks, hierarchy but also market competition
Flanders	Limited coordination mainly through networks
Romania	No real coordination

4. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The main aim of this concluding chapter was to compare the four previously analysed countries and their approaches concerning the integration of refugees into higher education. Based on this comparison, general conclusions about common challenges, similar approaches, lessons-learned and good practices have been drawn. To provide a more coherent structure to the comparison four dimensions have been used that address central elements of implementation of policy solutions, which can differ between countries.

In a first step of the cross-case analysis, five problem areas have been identified that are common challenges in all countries for the integration of refugees into higher education. These problem areas concern: (1) the legal status of refugees, (2) recognition of academic degrees and study periods, (3) language skills, (4) appropriate social support, and (5) cultural integration into the (local) academic community. While these problem areas are common to all the four countries, the salience of these problems in a specific context differs and so do the policy solutions and instruments used by the countries to address these challenges.

When reviewing how the four countries implemented policy solutions using the four analytic dimensions it becomes clear that the policy-making style has been mainly reactive. Norway was the only country that was proactive with a head start to address problems in more pre-emptive ways and develop policy instruments

for application in other contexts like the qualification passport.⁵ Where remodelling existing instruments and structures was possible, those countries have been more successful in providing consistent solutions for the integration of refugees. Germany is an example of this. It is not surprising that those countries that use reactive policy-making with no option to remodel existing instruments struggle when addressing the diverse challenges that the integration of refugees into higher education poses. The cross-case analysis also showed that providing access to higher education for refugees and supporting their integration into academic communities needs both support from the top of the policy-making structures, as well as openness to support bottom-up initiatives. The top-down elements are important for tackling problems that need coherent implementation to limit inconsistencies in the application of rules. This includes questions concerning the legal status of refugees, social support, or the recognition of degrees. However, to tackle problems concerning language skills, social and cultural integration bottom-up initiatives, are important as these issues need to be tailored to specific local needs.

The analysis highlighted that integration of refugees in higher education even in state-centred countries, such as Norway, needs some form of cooperation with private actors, including both stakeholders from the higher education sector and NGOs that have experience working with refugees in general. At the same time, these initiatives often rely on public funding to enable them to do their work. Thus, public and private actors can fruitfully interact and support one another, also since private actors are often helpful to fill gaps in the integration that public actors did not or cannot address. Finally, coordination of policy-making and implementation can be identified to be very important for the integration initiatives as it ensures a consistent experience for the refugees. In this, a combination of hierarchical and network coordination seems to be the best way, also in light of the interaction of top-down and bottom-up initiatives as well as public and private actors. Based on these considerations it can be said that having clear rules and regulations for the more formal problem areas, such as recognition or the legal status of refugees, while also creating working groups or other forums for local actors to exchange experiences, good-practices and problem solutions emerge as a good approach for policy coordination for the integration of refugees in higher education.

Looking at the four case studies as well as the cross-case analysis, it can be said that the higher education sector in Europe is accepting its responsibility to aide in the integration of refugees in higher education. Many higher education institutions cooperate with their students, student unions, professors and other local partner organisations in their work to better the integration of refugees in their local communities. The level of preparedness and willingness of governments to support these initiatives differs between. However, even in cases where there is very limited support higher education institutions are actively working to improve integration with the limited possibilities that they have as seen in the case of Romania. To ensure the long-term success of the work of local higher education institutions they need public support for what they do, both fiscally and in the form of acknowledgement of the fact that higher education is fulfilling an important function for society at this point.

5 See: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications>

Another key area where universities need support and tools from governments concerns the recognition of degrees of refugees especially in situations where proper documentation is missing. As recognition of degrees is often legally regulated, even in cases where there is no central agency that administers recognition, higher education institutions need some legal flexibility to adjust the standard procedures to the special situation of refugees to prevent bureaucratic obstacles to their integration into higher education. Thus, the higher education sector has to develop tools that allow assessing qualifications also without documentation. This additional work sees higher education institutions needing additional support from the state. More common European solutions and peer-learning are especially helpful in relation to recognition given that there is already a legal basis with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and an organisational structure for information exchange with the ENIC NARIC network. As a result, initiatives like the qualification passports can be very useful also because they would assure the transferability of recognition decisions across European countries.⁶

In addition, many countries and higher education institutions have developed innovative policy instruments to tackle the challenges that refugees face when attempting to enter higher education also outside of the area of recognition and it would be a waste of resources if these would not be shared among European countries to enable peer-learning and prevent repetition of policy failures. The local and national networks which have been (or will be) created for the integration of refugees provide a chance for improving integration of other international students in the future. Thus, they hold the potential to significantly foster internationalisation of higher education in Europe as several of the challenges that refugees face are to a certain degree also common for other international students.

Overall, the integration of refugees into higher education poses several serious challenges. The examples described in this report show that these are not insurmountable and that higher education institutions, their staff and students, governments and NGOs come together to jointly tackle the different problem areas. While it is true that there is still room for improvement in each of the analysed countries, there are also good practice examples in each context that deserve highlighting. These initiatives and the solutions that they found to improve the integration of refugees into higher education provide the opportunity for exchanges and learning across the different contexts. We hope that with this report, the country analyses and the structured comparison provided in this chapter, we can contribute to the on-going work to improve the integration of refugees into European higher education and show that even in contexts where governmental support for these activities might be limited, local initiatives can make a difference.

⁶ See: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications>

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