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INTEGRATION OF REFUGEE STUDENTS IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION COMPARATIVE COUNTRY CASES

Germany, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain, United Kingdom, Turkey

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Foreword

According to UNHCR, an estimated 68.5 million individuals are today forcibly displaced worldwide. Around half of the world's refugees are children and young people under the age of 35. While many students are forced to abandon their studies in their home countries, only one percent of refugee youth is able to access and continue higher education. Evidence shows that despite a fundamental right to education, refugees and similar at-risk populations encounter significant challenges barring access to higher education.

The situation also prevails in Europe. When confronted with dramatic increases of mass migration in 2015 and 2016, European countries did little to adjust access to higher education for refugees. With very few exceptions, there are still no specific national policy approaches among European countries. Higher education institutions are mostly left to their own practices to handle the issue. Emergency responses generally focus on providing limited numbers of competitive scholarships, linguistic support, and counseling services. However, large-scale, sustainable broad-based internationalization policies and frameworks are utterly lacking. While effective response to refugees' higher education needs is a responsibility for all higher education institutions, rather than taking the lead to push for inclusive societies, universities have curbed their activities within the restricted legislative frameworks that create status-related obstacles for refugees.

Accordingly, this report provides an overview and descriptive analysis of how selected countries (Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Norway, UK and Turkey) have responded to the massive inflow of refugees, as well as the policy practices they have developed concerning refugee students' integration into higher education. Seeking to encourage sustainable policy responses and national frameworks, this report highlights these selected countries' procedures to ensure access to higher education and also approaches to recognize foreign qualifications. It also examines particular challenges in the case of each country. The report limits its scope exclusively to refugee students, excluding practices developed for refugee academics/university staff.

This report offers a contribution to the existing literature on educational policy for refugees and encourages higher education institutions to remember their central role as a driving force for social development and integration.

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We hope the report will support and motivate all the parties to ensure successful integration of all refugees in education for a peaceful, developed and inclusive society.

Chapter 1

ACCESS AND INTEGRATION OF REFUGEES IN EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION



Ayselin YILDIZ¹

1.1 Legal framework

The right to education is fundamental for everyone, including refugees and refugee-like populations. As a basic human right, it is codified in many international laws and declarations such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1951 Refugee Convention, the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Bill of Human Rights.

1951 Refugee Convention refers to the right of education in its Article 22:

“The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees treatment as favorable as possible, and, in any event, not less favorable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education other than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships”.

Unlike primary education (since higher education is not explicitly addressed by the Convention), higher education remains squarely in the domain of national practices. States are merely recommended to provide as favorable and equitable treatment as possible for refugees, vis-a-vis equal treatment that applied to all other international students. Referring to the fact that access to higher education is not universally guaranteed, refugees encounter significant challenges and obstacles in practice. The structural context of education and labor market policies in host countries, as well as their integration policies (if they exist), strongly affects countries' practices to integration of refugees into higher education.

Recognition of prior learning and qualifications gained abroad constitutes another challenging field. Recognition of qualifications is key to building inclusive societies and reducing the risk of social alienation. The Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and the Global Compact on Refugees which is adopted by the end of 2018 dedicates one of its 23 objectives to the facilitation of mutual recognition of skills, qualifications and competences.

The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in European Region (Lisbon Convention) provides a legal framework for the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons, and persons in a refugee-like situation. It is ratified by 54 countries including seven outside Europe (Australia, Canada, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, New Zealand and Tajikistan). Accordingly, Article VII states:

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“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”.

However, the article has not been consistently implemented way by all signatories, and in some countries appropriate recognition procedures for refugees, displaced persons, and persons in a refugee-like situations do not exist (European Commission, 2019). According to a survey by the Council of Europe (2016) covering 50 countries, 70 percent of the respondents indicated that they have not implemented Article VII, and consequently have no regulations at any level concerning qualification recognition of refugees and displaced persons. Despite all these legislation and initiatives at international level, as UNESCO (2018a) underscored recognition mechanisms to meet refugees’ needs are often patchy or complex, which makes their talents and potential go largely underutilized. As a result, while waiting for their skills and credentials to be recognized, most of the highly educated refugees are employed at a level lower their qualifications or they remain unemployed.

1.2 How has Europe responded to the humanitarian crisis? What are the main challenges?

In 2017, approximately half a million third country nationals received “international protection,” or “refugee” status in the EU (European Commission, 2019). There are no specific statistics on how many of them were enrolled to higher education before emigrating Europe. However, approximately 50 percent of them are aged between 18 and 34. This provides a general picture of the potential group that might be associated with higher education. In this vein, as indicated by UNESCO (2018a), there is a lack of systemic data on the education status of migrants/refugees, which further precludes the development of targeted, effective policy responses.

Following the mass refugee flow to Europe, particularly that between 2015 and 2016, higher education institutions (HEIs) in Europe have articulated practices to help refugee students in continuing or beginning their studies. The European University Association (EUA) has called upon EU universities and governments to facilitate refugee access and integration to higher education, in order to prevent “resignation, failure, and social marginalization” of current and future generations (CEU, 2015).

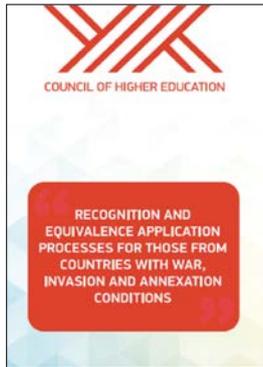
However, as highlighted in many studies and reports, refugees have encountered several challenges in accessing higher education (Jungblut et al. 2018; UNESCO 2018a; Soberon et al. 2017; Streitwieser et al., 2016; Gladwell et al., 2016; GRYC 2016). Obstacles concerning refugee students’ access to higher education mostly stem from the status related legislative frameworks and technical barriers. Some countries leave the refugee students in limbo by pushing them into long processes that requires confirmation of their refugee status as a pre-condition to proceed education. In some other countries, the admission requirements for the recognized refugees are the same as those for international students who are voluntarily mobile with completely different motivations to study in another country. Refugees are asked to present evidence of their qualifications such as diplomas, certificates, transcripts to be admitted at higher education institutions. Needless to say, the displaced people might have not be able to carry their documents with them while they flee the conflict. Receiving an official response or correspondence with the institutions back in country of origin might be impossible or very difficult due to the impacts of the conflict. However, access to higher education in many countries requires providing original documents or validation of copied documents. The procedures and legislation that shape these categorizations, irrespective of humanitarian responsibilities, constitute the biggest barriers against fast, effective, and solution-oriented actions that would ensure refugees’ access to higher education.

The other challenging area is the recognition of qualifications. The report on Global Education Monitoring 2019 noted that one out of eight migrants in Europe identify the lack of recognition of their professional qualifications as the greatest challenge they face (UNESCO 2018a). They rate it even above the challenges of “inadequate language skills, discrimination, visa restrictions or limited social networks”. Recognition systems often require complex, time-consuming and costly processes (UNESCO 2018b; CEDEFOP 2016). UNESCO has been working for a “Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications” that will be put forward for adoption in 2019. It aims to reduce the obstacles faced by refugee students, ensure mutual recognition of qualifications in a fair and transparent manner and highlights the right of people without proper documentation to apply for the recognition of their qualifications (UNESCO, 2019).

Challenges created by the states on recognition of qualifications should be examined within the broader context of “**automatic recognition**” debate. Despite the divergent implementation of Bologna reforms and lack of transparent quality assurance processes (Skjerven and Meier, 2018), by 2025, EU targets to achieve automatic recognition of higher education diplomas. In November 2018, the Council of the European Union made a remarkable decision and unanimously adopted a recommendation to promote automatic mutual recognition (Council of the EU 2018). However, some countries need to follow different approaches in recognizing professional recognitions due to their divergent policies on whether a higher education diploma provides direct and automatic access to labour market as well. This also varies according to the nature of the profession being regulated or not in that country. Thus, agreeing on automatic recognition of diplomas in some countries have a direct impact on providing automatic recognition for professional qualifications as well. Accordingly, some countries continue to implement Lisbon Convention with its “substantial difference” clause. Secondly, concerning countries such as Turkey, that are in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and receives recognition applications mostly from non-EHEA countries has to be more cautious in assessing and deciding about these applications. Equivalency given for the higher education diploma in Turkey not only provides direct access to labour market for many professions (since the “higher education diploma” offers direct access to the labour market in Turkey) but also opens the path to refugees who might continue their career in European countries after they receive their recognition in Turkey as the “first country of recognition” in the EHEA.

All in all, some of the challenges concerning the integration of refugees in higher education can be summarized as:

- As a prior condition, obtaining legal recognition and waiting long for getting relevant documents to confirm status such as asylum seeker, refugee or international protection
- Lack of information about the admission and recognition procedures of various HEIs
- Need for advice, guidance and career counseling
- Lack of fair recognition procedures (credits, prior learning, existing qualifications etc.)
- Difficulties in providing documents such as school diplomas, transcripts, exam results, certificates
- Validation of documents
- Submitting proof of professional qualifications
- Need for language support
- Need for psychological support
- Need for cultural orientation
- Lack of financial means
- Reluctance of donors in general to support higher education for refugees



Turkey's facilitated "transfer student" and "special student status" legislation have helped those refugee students who have interrupted their education due to violent conflict in their home countries. These procedures have ensured those students' direct access HEIs without pushing them in long waiting procedures or creating technical barriers. Currently, almost 28,000 Syrians are enrolled as regular degree student to higher education in Turkey. Turkish HEIs' great efforts to process such high number of enrollments in line with the new procedures deserves appreciation. Additionally, another law entitled "Recognition and Equivalence Application Processes for Those from Countries with War, Invasion and Annexation" has facilitated the recognition procedures for the ones without documents as well. <https://denklik.yok.gov.tr/multeciler>

Syrians are also waived tuition fees and treated in the same way as Turkish citizens. Since 2012, around 16.000 Syrian students have benefited from "Türkiye Scholarships", a government funded scholarship program administered by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). In 2019, YTB covered the tuition fees of over 5,000 Syrian student.



Turkey initiated the project "Preservation of the Academic Heritage in the Middle East" which aims to support students and scientists who were forced to flee their countries due to war and conflict. With a desire to protect the academic heritage which has been destroyed in different parts of Middle East, the project aims to maintain the academic environment, ensure the continuation of studies and support the reconstruction of ruined regions.

<http://www.akademikmiras.org/en/anasayfa>



The interactive map project initiated by EUA aims to document the commitment of higher education institutions and organisations to supporting refugees. The map is continuously updated and involves organizations linked to tertiary education around the world. The map also provides a unique platform to share experience and information among the institutions. It also provides a source of information for refugees to learn more about opportunities offered by universities.

<https://www.eua.eu/101-projects/541-refugees-welcome-map.html>

- University of Glasgow, University of Edinburgh, University of Sussex, University of Warwick provide scholarships for refugee students.
- University of Sheffield supports refugees in finding work opportunities after graduation. The University of Edinburgh offers free English courses for refugee students.
- Bielefeld University launched free courses in sciences and mathematics to refugee students. Students are also provided the opportunity to attend German language courses. Students from Syria were guaranteed fee waivers.
- University of Gothenburg provides support to refugees searching for jobs in the Swedish labor market.

- University of Bremen with its IN-Touch initiative welcomed refugees with an academic background as visiting students and enables them to use university facilities free of charge.
- Gaziantep University offers degree programmes in Arabic for Syrian and Palestinian students. These include civil engineering, business administration, theology, primary education. 1,986 Syrian students are enrolled at Gaziantep University (in its entire academic degree programmes)

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Chapter 2

GERMANY



Dilaver Arıkan AÇAR¹

2.1 Introduction

Germany has a relatively long history of accommodating immigrants, particularly economic migrants. In the late 1950s to 1970s, many economic migrants were officially invited under the “guest worker” (Gastarbeiter) programme to help ease the labour shortage in the country. Many immigrants from this period stayed on, building their lives in Germany. However, lack of clarity of their role and status became a challenge for both them and German society over time.

The post-Cold War conflicts in the Balkans created a wave of forced migration to Europe in the 1990s. It was the largest involuntary mass movement of refugees in Europe since World War II. As a newly reunified country, Germany could shoulder some of the burden and hosted many refugees fleeing these conflicts. Since 2011, a new surge of refugees began heading for Europe from Syria following the outbreak of bitter civil war. Germany proved to be a popular choice among many Syrians and the German Government allowed the refugees who had reached the country to stay. Germany’s reaction bucked the trend as almost all other EU countries considered the refugee influx to be a national emergency; a response that was spurred on by the general public’s increasingly negative sentiments directed at all refugees and immigrants.

One important aspect of population movement, particularly that involving refugees and asylum seekers fleeing conflict, is the unexpected and incalculable nature of who arrives at a destination country. Education and/or training of the new arrivals (children, young people and adults) is essential and has to be addressed by the receiving country. This is particularly challenging in higher education (HE) due to the complex and specific requirements necessary to take up courses. It is further complicated by the status of refugees and asylum seekers trying to access higher education. Many factors, both institutional and personal, can affect a refugee’s or asylum seeker’s access to higher education in the countries that receive them. Germany is no exception. At the height of the Syrian conflict, the country faced an unprecedented number of requests from refugees arriving in the country and wanting to access higher education. This posed challenges both for the German higher education institutions (HEIs) and the refugees. Some of the main challenges seem to be in identifying issues that hinder their integration in German higher education; creating short-term or ad hoc solutions to place them on HE courses; and/or developing longer-term strategies to ensure their access to higher education.

The German Government’s response to the refugee crisis, particularly the mass movement of refugees heading to Europe from 2014 onwards fleeing civil war in Syria, was seen as a positive reaction. German Chancellor Angela Merkel was famously quoted as saying: “We can manage” (“Wir schaffen das” also translated as “We can do it” as stated by Steinhardt and Eckhardt 2017) reflecting the government’s commitment to welcome people escaping civil war and open-door policy for refugees.

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Despite accepting many more asylum seekers than any other EU Member State, this was no guarantee of a free pass for refugees or migrants. In this vein Germany did not hesitate to temporarily suspend the Dublin Regulation and introduced border controls to stem the flow of migrants using various migration routes during the height of the crisis (Rietig and Müller 2016). To this day, Syrians continue to seek asylum in Germany and have become the country's largest group of first-time asylum applicants (International Organization for Migration 2016). A significant number of asylum seekers in Germany are young people aged 18-35 who are eligible for higher education, although age is not a prerequisite but qualifications are.

Table 1. Asylum and first-time asylum applicants by citizenship, age and sex. Annual aggregated data (rounded).

Time	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
GEO										
European Union (Current composition)	225,150	263,835	259,630	309,040	335,290	431,095	626,960	1,322,845	1,260,910	712,235
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	26,845	32,910	48,475	53,235	77,485	126,705	202,645	476,510	745,155	222,560

Source: Eurostat (October 24, 2018)

Table 2 . Asylum and first-time asylum applicants by citizenship, age from 18 to 35 and sex. Annual aggregated data (rounded).

Time	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
GEO										
European Union (Current composition)	136,230	147,100	133,545	171,155	170,430	222,460	335,795	697,205	644,150	365,145
Germany (until 1990 former territory of the FRG)	14,460	16,785	22,740	24,710	33,355	57,615	97,680	236,560	360,875	87,985

Source: Eurostat (October 24, 2018)

2.2 Legislative framework on asylum seeking in Germany

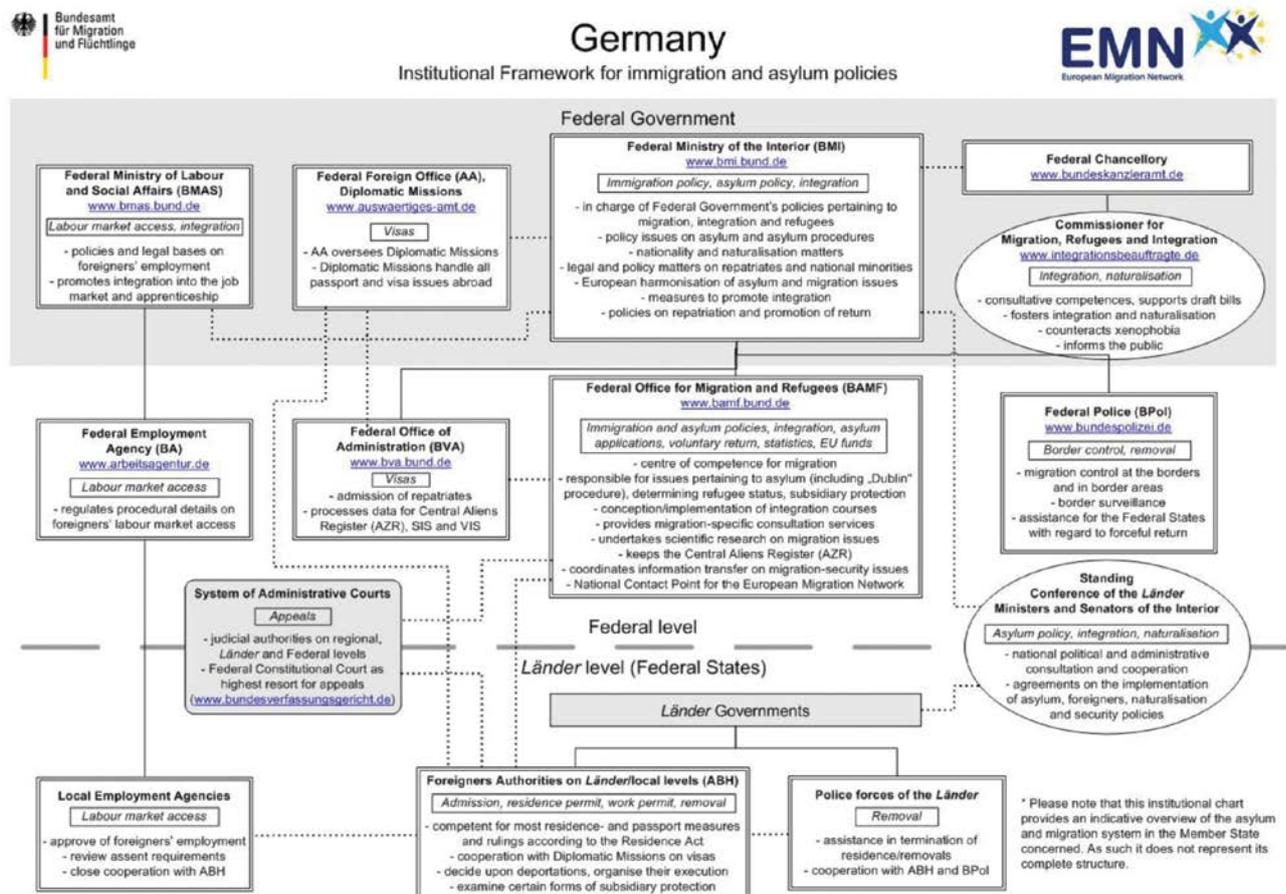
The right of asylum in Germany is directly included in the Basic Law (1949) of Germany (Article 16a, paragraph 1) which defines the persons who have the right to asylum as; "Persons persecuted on political grounds shall have the right of asylum". The right of asylum is a fundamental right (BMI, Asylum and Refugee Protection 2018) and it is included in the Basic Law with a direct reference to the "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees" by making it in line with international legal framework.

The legal scope of the right to asylum is defined in the Asylum Act (Federal Asylum Act 2008); whereas matters relating to residence, economic activity, employment and integration of foreigners are regulated by the Residence Act (Aufenthaltsgesetz AufenthG). Procedures for asylum seekers' residency in Germany are covered by Article 55 of the Asylum Act, which is primarily the Asylum Procedure Law (Asylverfahrensgesetz AsylVfG). Residency status for asylum seekers is defined as "leave to remain" in Article 55 (Paragraph 1) of the Asylum Procedure Law; "special leave to remain" in Article 60a (Paragraph 4) of the Residence Act; and "stay related to humanitarian or political reasons" in Articles 22-26 of the Residence Act in the German law.

The Federal Republic of Germany functions by dividing legislative and executive responsibilities among the federal government and the 16 federal states (Bundesländer or Länder). The German Federal Ministry of the Interior (Bundesministerium des Innern, für Bau und Heimat -BMI) is the primary state institution

responsible for migration affairs including asylum and refugee matters. The Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge – BAMF) within the German Federal Ministry of the Interior is the institution tasked with the operative duties of migration and refugee issues. BAMF is a centre of competence on all matters relating to immigration and asylum policies, asylum applications, refugee status, integration, voluntary return and statistics. Other institutions at federal state level such as the Federal Police, Diplomatic Missions, the Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, State Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Authorities along with institutions at the Länder level like Police Forces of the Federal States also carry out various functions relating to migration and asylum as part of the division of labour among federal government and the 16 states (Schneider 2012, pp.13-15).

Figure 1. Institutional chart on Germany's immigration and asylum policies.



Source: Reprinted from the European Commission and European Migration Network (EMN), The Organisation of Asylum and Migration Policies Factsheet: Germany.

The asylum process starts when an asylum seeker arrives in Germany. However, and it is not possible to apply for an entry visa for this specific purpose before heading to Germany. Upon arrival, asylum seekers expected to report to a state organization (e.g. border authority or police). The competent authority then sends the asylum seekers to the closest initial reception centre, where they receive proof of arrival (Ankunftsnachweis). The reception facility (Anlaufbescheinigung) provides the necessary documentation for the asylum seeker to be entitled to reside in Germany, access social benefits and obtain the necessary state support such as accommodation, health services and food. Asylum seekers can stay for up to six months at the reception centre depending on their country of origin, economic conditions or until they receive a decision on their application. The certificate allowing permission to reside (Aufenthaltsgestattung), which is proof of lawful residence in Germany, restricts asylum seekers to stay in where their reception facility is located.

All asylum applicants go through a personal interview at the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees to be considered for refugee status. Each application is examined within the framework of the Asylum Act and granted either one of four forms of protection including, entitlement to asylum, refugee protection, subsidiary protection or a ban on deportation; or the asylum application is rejected. Decisions for rejection are open for appeal. Applicants granted asylum and “refugee” status receive a residence permit for three years from their immigration authority. Applicants granted subsidiary protection obtain a residence permit for one year. While applicants who are granted a ban on deportation receive a residence permit for at least for one year, which may be extended (Federal Office for Migration and Refugees 2016).

2.3 Access to higher education in Germany

2.3.1 Main institutions responsible for higher education

In Germany, higher education falls under the remit of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung – BMBF). The types of higher education institutions include universities, universities/colleges of applied science, technical colleges, music and art colleges, teacher training colleges, and business management schools.

The German Rector’s Conference (Die Hochschulrektorenkonferenz – HRK) is one of the main important association in the sector that comprises public and state-recognised universities. The HRK develops principles and standards for higher education that often also cover the integration and participation of refugees. The association advises universities and prospective refugee students on the matters related to admissions, preparation for studying at university, financial support and refugee projects in various universities. (HRK Study for Refugees).

Issues relating to international students and scientists are administered by a specific organisation – the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst – DAAD). As one of the key institutions, DAAD supports international exchange students and scientists to find places in higher education and, in doing so, contributes to the internationalisation of HE in Germany. DAAD describes one of its most important areas of responsibility as “the integration and support of foreign students” and in this context states that it has been helping higher education institutions to integrate academically qualified refugees (DAAD and DZHW 2017). Since students with refugee status are regarded as international students, DAAD also helps them to enrol in the HE system.

2.3.2 Admission of refugees to higher education institutions

The right of refugees to education is internationally recognised as part of the universal human rights and refugee rights (Dryden-Peterson and Giles 2010). Asylum seekers who are granted protection in Germany, and those whose asylum applications are in the process, have a legal right to access to enrol in higher education without restriction (Jungblut, Vukasovic and Steinhardt 2018, p. 7). Beyond being eligible to apply for German higher education programmes, asylum seekers and refugees are also entitled to fulfil the regular entrance qualifications same as any other international or domestic students. They are regarded as international students without any special status. HEIs can decide on the specific admissions policies and application requirements for their enrolment to undergraduate and graduate programmes. Previous qualifications; secondary school-leaving certificate or a Bachelor’s degree certificate are generally required along with language profession in German or English for any “university entrance qualification” (Hochschulzugangsberechtigung – HZB) or application to HE (Study in Germany, 2019).

Language proficiency is very important for the HE admission process. Proficiency in either German (for the majority of HE programmes) or English (for international degree programmes) depending the teaching methods is generally required for admission to a university programme. For refugees with no prior experience of the German education system, proficiency in the German language is particularly important

and seems to be a deciding factor in a candidate's competency to study at university level. All students are generally expected to have an intermediate level of German and/or English to be admitted on a university course but HE institutions can set language proficiency in accordance with their own requirements. Two assessment methods for German language proficiency are the TestDaF (Test Deutsch als Fremdsprache – Test of German as a Foreign Language) and the DSH (Deutsche Sprachprüfung für den Hochschulzugang – German Language University Entrance Examination for Foreign Applicants). Language proficiency in the TestDaF and the DSH are graded differently but most universities look for intermediate level German (TDN 4 for TestDaF or DSH-2 for DSH), which is equivalent to level B1 of the European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (study-in.de German Skills).

In addition to language proficiency tests, a standardised assessment method or Test for Academic Studies (Test für Ausländische Studierende – TestAS) is also used. This test examines a candidate's general and subject-related cognitive ability, including language skills, to evaluate their suitability for academic studies regardless of their country of origin or any grading systems. Although not a prerequisite for admission to all programmes, TestAS certificates are recognised, albeit with varying degrees of influence, by German universities in the admission's process. Refugees can receive support from the DAAD to pay the EUR 80 fee for one TestAs only. The test can be taken in German, English or Arabic languages, which increases the chances for the Arabic-speaking refugees.

In order to facilitate and improve the refugees' integration to the higher education system through “support and counselling required for access to higher education, improvement of the ability to start academic studies and enhancement of integration at universities”, the BMBF granted the DAAD a sum of EUR 100 million for a four-year programme that started in 2016 (DAAD 2015). As part of this programme, two initiatives specifically prepare refugees for university education:

1. The “**Welcome – Students Helping Refugees Program**” supports student organisations in helping qualified refugees to prepare for degree programmes, and to integrate into HE and their respective cities (DAAD Welcome).
2. The “**Integra Program**” funds colleges and HE institutions that offer language instruction and subject-specific preparatory courses to refugees.

Additionally, the BMBF provided one-off funding to the DAAD to help set up “uni-assist”, which processes HE applications from international students for 180 participating German universities. Uni-assist is an online source that evaluates foreign school and university certificates and determines their equivalence to German educational standards. It is also a portal for processing the specific entry requirements for the participating universities (Uni-assist Profile). The international academic offices of HEIs (Akademische Auslandsämter) generally decide on how credits from another country are counted or which conditions are required for admission. Uni-assist provides a special service for refugees in Germany to assist them with their applications and evaluation of certificates for the institutions that are linked to uni-assist. The service is free of charge. An applicant can even proceed with their application if they miss certain documents usually required for the “university entrance qualification” and opportunities to apply special study programs for refugees. This is in line with the exception provided by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (Ständige Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Kultusministerkonferenz - KMK) (KMK Resolution 3 December 2015).

Along with these initiatives, DAAD also promoted the inclusion of the website “Information for Refugees” into the “study-in.de” portal aimed at international students. This new website helps to directing refugee applications to HE institutions and provide information on eligibility for admission to higher education, funding opportunities or language courses (Study-in.de Refugees). The Youth Migration Services (Jugendmigrationsdienste – JMD) organised under the auspices of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend –

BMFSFJ) also “assist(s) young people with a migration background aged between 12 and 27 with their integration process specifically in linguistic, educational, professional and social integration in Germany” and services are free of charge and include onsite and online advice and support, and education services (BMFSFJ, 2019).

2.4 Recognition of qualifications

The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany is one of the leading body formed among the Länder to address “educational, higher education, research and cultural policy issues of supraregional significance with the aim of forming a joint view and intention and of providing representation for common objectives” (KMK Standing Conference). The KMK also has the responsibility in the evaluation process of foreign qualifications in Germany. The Central Office for Foreign Education (Zentralstelle für ausländisches Bildungswesen – ZAB) serves underneath the KMK. It functions as the Centre of Excellence of the federal states for the assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications and their comparability to German qualifications.

Germany is a signatory to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (The Lisbon Recognition Convention) which entered into force in October 2007. With a declaration included on March 2013, the ZAB is identified as the specific institution functioning as the national information centre within the federal system of the country that would be responsible to assess foreign diplomas giving access to higher education, recognition of unit credits obtained in studies and examinations, and assessment of foreign qualifications (Council of Europe The Lisbon Convention Germany Declaration 1 October 2013). The ZAB evaluates “qualifications from all countries worldwide and all levels of education including school-leaving certificates, entrance qualifications to higher education, study and exam credits, academic degrees and vocational qualifications” (ZAB Expert Assessment). The ZAB is the central office for the evaluation of foreign qualifications in Germany working same as the national information centres of the member states of the European Union (European Network of Information Centres in the European Region – NARIC).

The KMK also with the funding from the Federal Foreign Office (Auswärtige Amt) maintains an infoportal “anabin” (Anerkennung und Bewertung ausländischer Bildungsnachweise – Das Infoportal zu ausländischer Bildungsnachlässen) for the “recognition and evaluation of foreign educational qualifications” since 2000 (2017 Report on Recognition Act 2017, p. 26). The “anabin” database documents information on the foreign educational systems of 180 countries including Syria and Iraq. The database comprises primary, secondary and higher institutions and their grading systems in the various countries, and provides information for evaluating foreign school qualifications to access university. It is updated twice a year (Anabin Schulabschlüsse mit Hochschulzugang).

The Federal Ministry of Education and Research has another online recognition mechanism – the “Recognition in Germany” portal (Portal Anerkennung in Deutschland – AiD). This portal is provided by the German government specifically for assessing and recognising foreign professional qualifications and is available to professionals and students wanting to gain recognition for their degrees, work or further study (Anerkennung Recognition). The website is multilingual and available in German, English, Spanish, Italian, Romanian, Polish, Greek, Turkish and Arabic.

2.5 Challenges refugees face in accessing German higher education

Germany is a particular state within the European Union both in terms of the high numbers of asylum seekers come into the country and the government’s open policy of welcoming refugees at the height of the crisis, particularly when compared to other EU Member States. Asylum seekers arriving in Germany had, and still do have, a number of significant needs that have to be addressed in the short and long term, among them is education. In terms of education, access to higher education is perhaps the greatest challenge and can have a long-term impact on a person’s integration, welfare, social status and their contribution to German society.

What Germany has faced in dealing with the sudden inflow of people into the country who require higher education now or in the future is no different from the situations in other countries. A lack of preparation or contingency for such events results in a reactive approach that forces state institutions to develop ad hoc and short-term solutions. In Germany, providing higher education is a state response that involves both the Federal Government and Länder, and those actors and organisations responsible for higher education policy and practices. Identifying the issues and responding with the relevant policies is essential in the short term; but more longer term sustainable solutions that ensure the successful integration of refugees is vital in the long run. The German Government, education administration, higher education institutions and civil society have all had to adapt and respond to the circumstances brought about by the inflow of refugees. To date, the country's approach has been "solution driven" rather than a "fully state coordinated" policy (Jungblut, Vukasovic and Steinhardt 2018, p.9). The lack of central coordination could have led to inefficiencies (e.g. lack of attention in certain areas, duplication of efforts, waste of limited resources) when helping refugees.

The exact number of refugee students within the German HE system and their country of origins are difficult to ascertain as they are included in the total number of international students. Just to have an estimate number, by the end of 2018 a total of around 25,000 refugees have been prepared at German universities as part of the DAAD refugee programs (DAAD 2018). Assessing the number of young people among the newly arrived asylum seekers could be one way to establish how many refugees are eligible to study at the country's HE institutions.

Analysing the initial years at the height of the crisis and the mass inflow of refugees, particularly those fleeing conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, it is clear that the issues regarding access to German HE institutions were mostly associated with applications to local HE programmes. Barriers hampering access included recognition of previous studies, language proficiency and funding to pay for the course. Issues relating to application, recognition and language are all interlinked and dependent on procedures, administration and bureaucratic practices. The German HE system's general procedural complexities and different application rules among institutions have complicated the application process. HE institutions are free to determine their own admission criteria so there is no conformity in the application processes. Refugees, who are not familiar with the complex rules, procedures, time schemes, phases and prerequisites of application for different institutions, find it hard to follow and harder still to meet the requirements to submit a successful application. Their attempts are further compounded by the difficulties in obtaining the relevant information (Berg 2018, p. 226). In one of the limited available research, a number of applicants stated that they were unable to meet the specific application criteria due to limited access to information or because they had not understood a particular HE institution's specific application procedures (Schneider 2018, p. 467). Other studies in this field shed light on additional challenges relating to the recognition of qualifications, which are sometimes linked to problems of inability to recognise already existing academic competencies and lack of capacity to categorise certain experiences such as, foreign language skills (Schammann and Younsou 2016). These are important hurdles that refugees have to tackle at the start of their applications to higher education. Frustration and desperation could at times lead them to give up all together on their aspirations to study.

An important part of the HE application process is the assessment of a candidate's qualifications and the refugees are bound by the same regulations as international students in Germany in order to be eligible to study in the higher education institutions. Germany has proceeded in processing the recognition process firstly through the ZAB's institutional efforts particularly through its "anabin" database and the "Recognition in Germany" portal. As there is no central recognition authority, these have been serving as important reference sources for determining the status of qualifications for refugee applicants and institutions. Secondly, the KMK's resolution dated 3 December 2015 and titled "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" (KMK 2015) provided the necessary flexibility for the refugee applicants who could not provide required documents. This decision had paved the way for a procedure that work in three consecutive stages; the clarification of the residence status, a plausibility check of the educational biography, and assessment of the alleged higher education entrance qualification

through an examination assessment procedure (Jungblut, Vukasovic and Steinhardt 2018, p.8). This three-step approach helped clear some of the applications from refugees in challenging cases. Refugee applicants who do not fulfil the specific qualification requirements are given the opportunity to improve and achieve the expected level by taking a foundation course (Studienkellog). These courses are provided free of charge by HEIs and are open to asylum seekers and refugees. The DAAD-funded “Welcome – Students Helping Refugees Program” serves this purpose and also provides counselling for refugee students (Steinhardt and Eckhardt 2017, pp. 31-32). Student assistance services are considered to be efficient and helpful for the refugees and their integration into university life (Streitwieser, Brueck, Moody and Taylor 2017, p. 246). TestAs is also used by various institutions as a plausibility check on the refugee’s eligibility to start their chosen programmes.

Language proficiency is another important criteria for admission to higher education. As stated German is the main language for many of the country’s HE courses, and to a lesser extent, English. All international students without exception must prove their language proficiency. Mandatory language courses are an integral part of the German Government’s refugee integration course (Integrationskurse), which is managed by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. In addition to the integration course, refugees also have access to various online learning services although efficiency of these for academic requirements might be questionable. However, the DAAD-funded “Integra Programme”, is the main German language course designed to help students improve their language skills to the level required to start their studies., In 2016, 6,806 refugees were supported through Integra and the number of beneficiaries increased to 10,404 in 2017 (DAAD 2018). Despite the various possibilities to improve German language skills in readiness for higher education, it is recognised that some refugees still experience hardship in accessing language programmes. Although there are various ways to improve German language skills for higher education indeed the C1 German language proficiency which is the minimum required level for most of HE programs is considered to be a high obstacle that leads to prevention of refugee students from accessing studies in their degree programmes of their choice (Unangst and Streitwieser 2018, p. 282-283).

An important aspect when considering higher education is having the necessary financial means to start and continue the studies. This in itself is a challenge for the majority of refugees who have lost most of their possessions and fled their countries. Although state universities in Germany do not charge tuition fees, application fees and other necessary expenses such as transport, accommodation, food and other subsistence costs can sometimes also be obstacles. Many of Germany’s HEIs waiver the application and administrative fees for refugees. Applications submitted via “uni-assist.de” and the “Portal for Cost Exemption” are also free for refugees for up to three universities per semester. Refugee status is also recognised in Article 6 of the Federal Education Assistance Act (Bundesausbildungsförderungsgesetz – BaföG), which states that refugees are entitled to apply for the government-funded student loan.

Despite the existence of various sources of funding to cover higher education expenses, access to information can sometimes be problematic especially in the processes of studying for language profession, pre-application preparation and applying to the programs. Paying for transport to get to a language class or to travel to various places to apply for certain programmes or to cover administration fees can also be costly for refugees (Schneider 2018, p. 468). Refugees who would like to continue their education but live in precarious circumstances are often prevented from even starting their studies because they have to work continuously to earn enough money just to live.

2.6 Concluding remarks

Along with other countries, Germany has been very much affected by the mass inflow of refugees fleeing conflict in recent years. Dealing with the urgent problems of refugees in time evolves into the necessity to taking care of more long-term challenges of those people who have started a new life in a new country. Access to education for refugees, particularly higher education, is on the agendas of most countries but Germany has been actively working to enable refugees to access higher education for some time. The unexpected state and sheer scale of the refugee crisis caught many countries off-guard forcing them to develop and implement ad hoc solutions in a range of areas (including higher education) to meet the emerging needs of refugees. Germany is no exception. Procedures for processing applications, and recognising qualifications and language skills are central to enabling refugees' access to German higher education institutions.

Integrating the high number of young people recently arriving in Germany as refugees could be better achieved by creating more access to education, particularly higher education. So far Germany has done some institutional arrangements at the Federal, Länder and higher education institution levels to provide refugees access to higher education. Such actions are a good start but in no way sufficient to meet the requirements of the refugees nor satisfy the supporters of their integration into German society. Integration of refugees is a long path to be taken and there is little doubt that providing opportunity for higher education is one of the most effective ways for a refugee to fully integrate and contribute to society.

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Chapter 3

THE NETHERLANDS



Elif ÇETİN¹

3.1 Recent asylum-seeker arrivals to the Netherlands

In an era of international population movement driven by various economic, environmental, political and cultural developments, migration has become a highly salient political issue throughout Europe. The arrival of over one million migrants to Europe in 2015 (IOM 2015), triggered fresh debate throughout the European Union and its Member States. In particular, the number of refugees, fleeing the worsening conflict in Syria, who came via the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) by various sea and land routes, reached a peak in 2015. The EU response to these new arrivals revealed the shortcomings of its immigration policy.

In September 2015, EU Member States, for example, agreed to introduce a relocation and resettlement plan in which: “asylum seekers with a high chance of having their applications successfully processed are relocated from Greece and Italy, where they have arrived, to other Member States where they will have their asylum applications processed” (EU Commission 2017b). Although Member States initially agreed to relocate 120,000 applicants due to resistance from some countries the plan proved difficult to implement. As of November 2017, around 31,500 people had been relocated from Greece and Italy, which falls significantly short of the target (EU Commission 2017a).

The Netherlands is among the EU countries that have been receiving different groups of migrants, including refugees, from various departure points such as Eritrea, Syria, Iraq, Cuba, Iran and Afghanistan (IND 2017). In line with the EU resettlement and relocation scheme, the Netherlands agreed a legal commitment to host 5,947 refugees before the end of September 2017. However, as of 14 November 2017, the Netherlands had only accepted 2,551 constituting less than half the agreed number (EU Commission 2017a).

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Table 1. Total number of asylum applications in the Netherlands (December 2017; Top ten non-EU Nationalities)

Country	Number of applications
Eritrea	540
Syria	532
Iraq	130
Cuba	121
Iran	114
Algeria	90
Morocco	89
Unknown	62
Stateless	60
Afghanistan	57

Source: Reprinted from the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice, Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND)

Available at https://ind.nl/en/Documents/AT_December_2017.pdf
(Accessed 5 January 2019)

Between 1 January 2014 and 1 July 2016, just under 70,000 people were granted asylum in the Netherlands, of which two thirds (44,000) were Syrians (Dagevos et al. 2018). By 2017, Syrians together with Eritreans constituted the two main groups of asylum applicants. When considering first-time asylum applicants, Syrians constitute the largest group followed by Cubans and Algerians as of December 2017. In terms of gender, in 2017, 12,255 males sought asylum in the Netherlands compared with 4,530 applications from women (Eurostat 2017, cited in IND 2019).

Table 2. Number of First-time Asylum Applications in the Netherlands (December 2017; Top ten non-EU Nationalities)

Country	Number of applications
Syria	232
Cuba	121
Algeria	89
Morocco	80
Eritrea	77
Iran	69
Turkey	54
Iraq	52
Unknown	41
Libya	40

Source: Reprinted from the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice, Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND).

Retrieved from https://ind.nl/en/Documents/AT_December_2017.pdf
(Accessed 5 January 2019)

Table 3. Total number of asylum applicants in 2017

	Number	Percentage
Total	16,785	-
Men	12,255	73%
Women	4,530	27%
Children	3,775	22.5%
Unaccompanied children	1,181	1%

Source: IND Asylum Trends, cited in AIDA (2019).

Retrieved from www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/netherlands/statistics (Accessed 5 January 2019).

The most vulnerable group of asylum claimants in the Netherlands are the unaccompanied minor asylum seekers (UMAs), whose numbers increased rapidly in 2015 following the higher influx of asylum seekers in general. According to a recent report by the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security (2018), the 2015 cohort of UMAs in the Netherlands mostly originated from Syria, Eritrea and Afghanistan. The majority (83 percent) were boys and 59 percent were aged between 16 and 17 years old (Ministry of Justice 2018:8); only 12 percent were younger than 14. The total number of UMAs in 2016 dropped, but the numbers of Syrian, Eritrean and Afghan minors still remained among the top three nationalities, with Eritreans forming the largest group (Ministry of Justice and Security 2018:8). Although all children under the age of 18 must have a legal guardian in the Netherlands, only the asylum applications of the under 12s have to be submitted by an adult. If UMAs are granted asylum, they receive help while preparing to integrate into Dutch society (Ingleby et al. 2013:35-36).

3.2 Legislative framework

The Aliens Act 2000, which came into force on 1 April 2001 and has since undergone various amendments, is the key piece of legislation regulating asylum applications (Ingleby et al. 2013).

Two different ways of applying for asylum exist in the Netherlands depending on how an asylum seeker arrives in the country. When arriving by plane at Amsterdam Airport Schiphol, for example, asylum seekers must report to the Royal Netherlands Marechaussee, which is responsible for performing border control tasks, security and surveillance, international and military police tasks. Asylum seekers are registered and taken to the Schiphol Registration Centre (IND 2019) where they often sign their applications for asylum. As asylum seekers from a non-Schengen country arriving in the Netherlands by plane or boat are refused entry and detained, it is crucial that they apply for asylum at the Schiphol Registration Centre immediately before crossing the Dutch (Schengen) external border (AIDA 2017: 14).

Asylum seekers who arrive by land, must register and sign their asylum applications at the Central Reception Centre (*Centraal Opvanglocatie*, COL). Based in the northern town of Ter Apel, COL is the country's largest reception centre and can accommodate up to 2,000 asylum seekers (DeZwarteHond 2019). Following registration, an appointment is given for an interview with a staff member from the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice, Immigration and Naturalisation Service. This date marks the start of the eight-day General Asylum Procedure (AA) (IND 2019). On the fifth day following the interview, it is decided whether or not the applicant can receive an asylum residence permit. If the IND needs more time for a particular application, the claimant moves from the AA process to the Extended Asylum Procedure (VA) (ibid.).

After consulting Eurodac (European Asylum Dactyloscopy Database) and the Visa Information System (VIS), the IND may conclude that another Member State is responsible for examining the asylum application under the Dublin Regulation.²

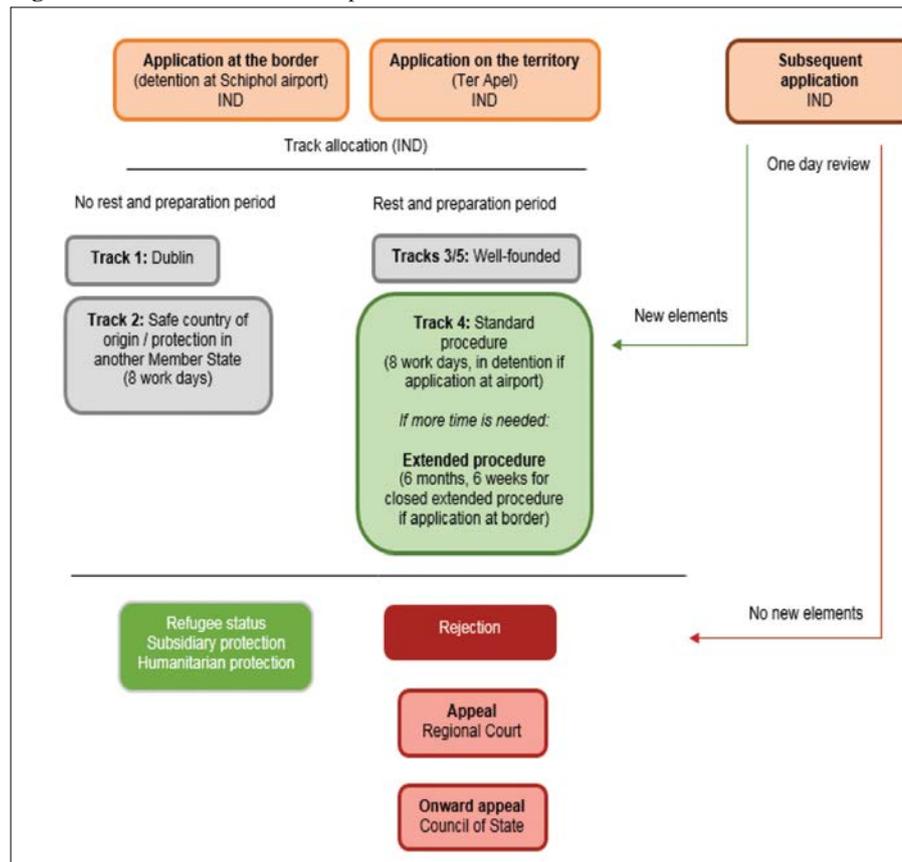
Although only one asylum status exists in the Netherlands, there are two different grounds (besides family reunification) on which it may be granted: refugee status (A-status); and subsidiary protection (B-status) (AIDA 2017: 15). If the asylum seeker does not qualify for refugee status under Article 1A of the Refugee Convention, they may qualify for B-status, which entitles them to the same rights regarding social security.

On its website, IND (2019) lists the conditions under which claimants will be granted an asylum residence permit as:

- having real reasons to fear persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political convictions or because they belong to a particular social group in their country of origin;
- having real reasons to fear the death penalty or execution, torture or other inhuman or humiliating treatment in their country of origin;
- having real reasons to fear that they will be a victim of random violence due to an armed conflict in their country of origin;
- their husband/wife, partner, father, mother or minor child has recently received an asylum residence permit in the Netherlands.

Once an individual is granted a temporary residence permit, valid for five years, they need to register with the Municipal Personal Records Database (BRP) in the town where they live. When the five years have expired, the individual can apply for a permanent residence permit. Asylum seekers whose applications are rejected can appeal against the decision at a Regional Court (Rechtbank), in accordance with Article 69(2) (c) of Aliens Act, within one week following the negative decision.

² *The Dublin Regulation determines the Member State responsible for the examination of the asylum application and sets the criteria for establishing responsibility which include, “in hierarchical order, family considerations, recent possession of visa or residence permit in a Member State, to whether the applicant has entered EU irregularly, or regularly” (European Commission 2019).*

Figure 1. Flow chart of admission procedure in the Netherlands

Source: Reprinted from Asylum in Europe.

Retrieved from www.asylumineurope.org/reports/country/netherlands/asylum-procedure/general/flow-chart (Accessed 8 January 2019).

In the Netherlands, various bureaucratic procedures exist to evaluate asylum applications, all involving staff from different services, such as the IND, Royal Military Police, Foreigners' Police, Regional Court, Council of State, and Service Return and Departure, that take part at different stages of the process.

Table 4: List of authorities involved in different stages of the asylum-seeking procedure in the Netherlands

Stage of the Procedure	Competent Authority
Registration at the border	Royal Military Police (KMar)
Registration on the territory	Foreigners' Police
Application at the border	Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND)
Application on the territory	Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND)
Dublin (responsibility assessment)	Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND)
Refugee status determination	Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND)
Appeal	Regional Court
Onward appeal	Council of State
Subsequent application (admissibility)	Regional Court Council of State
Repatriation and return	Service Return and Departure

Source: List of authorities involved in different stages of the asylum-seeking procedure in the Netherlands. Reprinted from Asylum in Europe.

Retrieved from www.asylumineurope.org/sites/default/files/report-download/aida_nl_2017update.pdf (Accessed 8 January 2019).

3.3 Procedures for asylum seekers and refugees to access to higher education in the Netherlands

In the Dutch higher education system, the procedures that apply to refugees and asylum seekers are different from other international students. A higher education (HE) institution can ask the advice of the Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (Nuffic) when evaluating diplomas of international students. However, the HE institution makes the final decision, which can sometimes clash with Nuffic's evaluation (Study in Holland 2018). By comparison, refugee applicants need to go through the evaluation procedure conducted by Nuffic and the SBB (Samenwerkingsorganisatie Beroepsonderwijs Bedrijfsleven), which is the expertise centre for foreign diplomas at the levels of preparatory vocational secondary education and training (VMBO) and senior secondary vocational education and training (MBO) (IDW 2017). Similar to the case of international students, each HE institution has the final say on a refugee student's admission and does not have to accept the Nuffic and SBB evaluation.

For foreign diplomas and certificates to be evaluated by Nuffic and SBB, a student must have completed at least one school year (1,000 hours) within regular education at an institute accredited by the government (IDW 2017). If applicants have not completed their education but finished at least one school year, then this year will be evaluated and subsequently they will receive an Opleidingswaardering (evaluation of uncompleted study) (ibid.). Due to the urgency and extraordinary circumstances that force asylum seekers to flee their homes, they are often not in possession of any proof (diploma and/or transcript) of their school or university degree. If it is not safe for asylum seekers and refugees to request the necessary documentation from their countries of origin they can receive an Indicatie onderwijsniveau (level of education indicator). However, if asylum seekers completed courses or educations that were shorter than 1,000 hours, in other words shorter than one school year before having to flee their countries or if certificates were awarded by schools that are outside of regular education that does not receive any government funding (e.g. private school), then asylum seekers cannot apply for a credential evaluation (ibid. 2017). This factor can be a barrier for those wishing to access higher education, integrate into Dutch society and eventually enter the labour market (Study in Holland 2018). If the applicant is doing (or about to do) the "Orientation on the Dutch Labour Market" course for their civil integration (inburgering), naturalisation process or application for permanent residence, then they are eligible for one Diplomawaardering (evaluation of diploma) or level of education indicator free of charge (ibid.).

3.4 Challenges faced by refugees in Dutch higher education

3.4.1 Access to financial support for education

Without a residence permit, asylum seekers cannot apply for scholarships or student grants to support them in paying tuition fees, which can prevent them from accessing higher education all together. The charity, Foundation for Refugee Students, known by its Dutch acronym, UAF, is an exception as it "provides financial support and guidance to refugees and asylum seekers who wish to undertake higher education in the Netherlands" (Ingleby et al. 2013: 44). While asylum seekers face such limitations, refugees have access to student loans provided by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (DUO; Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs) The loans can cover tuition fees, travel costs and other related expenses (University of Amsterdam 2018).

Table 5. Minimum and maximum prices of a degree course in the Netherlands 2018-19 Academic Year, in Euro

Tuition Fees (per year, in euro)	For EU Students	For non-EU Students
Preparatory courses (1-12 months)	6,000-12,000	6,000-12,000
Bachelor's programmes (3-4 years)	2,060	6,000-10,000
Master's programmes (1-2 years)	2,060	7,000-20,000
MBA's	40,000-50,000	

Source: Eurogates (2018)

Retrieved from www.eurogates.nl/en_cost_education_Netherlands/
(Accessed 11 January 2019)

3.4.2 Language Barrier

Arriving in a different country at a young age has certain advantages especially when it comes to learning a foreign language. However, for those young refugees arriving in the Netherlands in the middle of their university education, entering the Dutch educational system can be particularly challenging. Many refugees lack the necessary Dutch language skills and have very limited knowledge of Dutch culture, society or educational systems, which puts the youngsters at a disadvantage when trying to access higher education (Zorlu and Hartog 2001).

In addition, Dutch higher education comprises different tracks (e.g. vocational training, higher professional education, research-based university education), which tend to be chosen early on in a child's education. This fact, combined with the time needed for newcomers to acquire Dutch language skills can delay education and create a situation in which refugees are "late developers" (Ingleby et al. 2013: 39). Youngsters can attend introductory Dutch language classes when they and their parents have applied for asylum. Once the asylum residence permit is granted, refugee children can start attending regular schools. If they did not receive introductory language classes when they were applying for asylum or if their Dutch is still poor, then they would be advised to spend the first year in an introductory class (ibid.: 40). It is unclear, however, to what extent other opportunities are provided to help refugee children to overcome this disadvantage, particularly as it could hamper their access to higher education.

To address the challenges faced by refugees in Dutch higher education, a Refugees in Higher Education Task Force has been established as a consortium involving the Foundation for Refugee Students (UAF), EP-Nuffic, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, ECHO (The Expertise Centre for Ethnic Minorities in Higher Education), the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (VH) and the Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU) (VSNU 2019). The Task Force pays particular attention to the "facilitation of language and language-preparatory programmes for refugees" (ibid.). More still needs to be done to identify the barriers preventing refugees from accessing higher education in the Netherlands and question how these can be resolved.

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Chapter 4

NORWAY



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4.1 Introduction

Education is a human right and a driving force for social mobility. The proportion of immigrants and persons with refugee background in higher education is generally seen as quite a reliable indicator for integration in society. Higher education has multiple purposes in a society; it helps to nurture future generations to make a difference in their communities, prepares students for active citizenship, contribute to their employability, and support their personal development. However, according to the UNHCR data, there is only 1 per cent of eligible refugees have access to higher education (HE), compared to 36 per cent of global youth (UNHCR 2018). Moreover, the majority of asylum seekers are under the age of 25. Many of the newcomers have attended or planned to attend university before they had to flee their home countries (Morris-Lange and Brands 2016, 11).

This chapter deals with the refugee challenge in the higher education system and the Norwegian response to the issue. Accordingly, it focuses on application process for seeking asylum in Norway and the responsible authorities to implement the process. The chapter also touches upon the application procedures to access Norwegian higher education and the refugees' access to Norwegian HEIs. It introduces three main procedures for refugees' recognition of qualifications in Norway; general recognition procedure, UVD-Procedure, and qualifications assessment for refugees. The chapter also gives information about financial support system for refugees in Norway.

Although the top-down, centralised approach is important for tackling challenges for a coherent implementation concerning the integration of refugees in HEIs, bottom-up initiatives focusing on local needs provide significant tailor-made paths to overcome the challenges concerning language skills, social and cultural integration. The chapter examines Norwegian case as a state-centered top-down process and briefly touch upon some selected good practices.

4.2 Application process for seeking asylum in Norway

In 2018, totally 228,000 people with a refugee background are living in Norway which constitute 4.3 percent of Norwegian population² (the total population in Norway is 5.2 million). A total of 166,584 have refugee status, 44,589 have come through family reunification, and 16,941 through the establishment of a family with a refugee (Statistics Norway 2018a). The 228,000 refugees come from a total of 169 different countries, mostly from Somalia, Iraq and Iran.

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² Of the more than 10 000 decisions on asylum applications made by Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI) up to the end of November 2015, almost 20 percent were refusals and more than 20 percent did not receive a substantive decision, either because another country was responsible for the application under the terms of the Dublin Regulation or the applicant could be returned to a safe third country. 55 percent of those who applied were successful. One in four applications from Syria did not receive a substantive decision in Norway, and the remainder were permitted to stay in Norway. More than 90 percent of applications from Eritrea had a positive response, while a third from Afghanistan did not receive a substantive decision in Norway.

Of the 228,000 with refugee status, approximately 90,000 are asylum seekers whose applications were successful, 35,513 are resettlement refugees, and almost 20,000 fall under the category “Other” or “Unspecified” (Statistics Norway 2018a). The refugees constitute a significant share of the immigrants in Norway (30.6 per cent), and make up 4.3 per cent of the total 5.2 million population (Østby 2016; Statistics Norway 2018a).

Norwegian Directorate of Immigration UDI (Utlendingsdirektorat) is the main implementation body responsible for both processing applications from foreign nationals and running asylum reception centres. All refugee related information, forms and brochures are available online and updated regularly in Norwegian and English. They are also translated into Arabic, Somali, Farsi, Dari, Tigrinya and Pashto.

Every person has the right to apply for asylum in Norway. The resettlement programmes and refugees under the EU quota scheme are the only exceptions, as they do not have to apply for protection status when they get to Norway. After applying for protection status, a person is sent to an arrival centre (Ankomstsenter) and within 1-2 days the applicant is moved to an asylum reception centre. Norway has several different procedures for granting protection:

- Asylum applicants, who can get help from their own authorities, are processed and rejected within 48 hours.
- Asylum seekers from Georgia, Russia, Armenia, Bangladesh, Belarus, India, Nepal, or Kosovo are processed within three weeks.
- If the applicant has been in another European country before coming to Norway, they are sent back to that country, which is responsible for considering their case under the Dublin Regulation. In this case UDI does not interview the applicant.

All other applicants can stay in Norway while UDI processes their application, and the applicant normally receives an answer after a few months. If the applicant commits a crime or does not need protection, UDI processes and rejects their asylum application. After a person is granted asylum and settled in a municipality they have to follow an introduction programme, which was introduced and accepted by the Norwegian Parliament in 2005. Participation to the Introduction Programme is stated as a right and obligation for refugees between 18 and 55 years of age in the Act. The introduction programme is designed for persons who need to obtain basic qualifications. The introduction programme aims to:

- Provide basic Norwegian language skills,
- Provide basic insight into Norwegian social conditions,
- Prepare for participation in working life.

The programme runs for a full year on a full-time basis and comprise:

- Norwegian language training,
- Social studies,
- Measures that prepare the participant for further education or access to working life.

The programme includes a total of 600 hours of Norwegian language and social studies courses and the refugees receive certifications upon completion of the programme. During the introduction programme each participant receives an introduction benefit of twice the basic amount from the National Insurance Scheme (ca. 20,746 EUR per year) (The Introduction Act 2005).

Anyone who is entitled to receive training in accordance with the Introduction Act is registered in the National Introduction Register (NIR). Municipalities are responsible for implementing the introduction programme and the courses. This funding is calculated based on how many eligible people are resident in the municipality, and municipalities receive additional contributions if refugees also pass a Norwegian exam (Country Governor 2018). In addition, municipalities hosting refugee reception centres receive funding to provide Norwegian language courses for adults seeking asylum.

4.3 Higher education system in Norway

Education in Norway is a right and obligation (Arnesen and Lundahl 2006, 286). Accreditation to the higher education system in Norway is regulated by a number of Acts related to universities and university colleges as well as the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) regulations, and it falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Research. The Act of 1 April 2005 relating to universities and university colleges (U&UC Act) regulates all Norwegian higher education institutions (HEIs). It guarantees their institutional autonomy and regulates how institutions are governed. The Act also covers students' rights, obligations and representation, student admission, teaching, examinations, appeals procedures and the appointment of staff. There are 46 accredited HEIs in Norway (NOKUT 2018a) hosting 293,123 students including (Statistics Norway 2018b): universities (11), specialised university colleges (9), university colleges (26).

In Norway, all public universities are tuition-free for all international students, regardless of their nationality; that means, unlike in other European countries, not only EU/EEA students benefit from free or lower fees in Norway universities. However, some programmes/courses may charge fees, such as those related to business and management, but only in a few schools and universities. Students pay a semester fee that guarantees student services. The payment, which varies from institution to institution (e.g. University of Oslo– ca. 67 EUR/semester, OsloMet (previous name was Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences – ca. 93 EUR/semester), goes to welfare services, which facilitate students' everyday life. The Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (Lånekassen) covers all living costs for domestic students in Norway and therefore HEIs usually do not provide any additional financial support to students.

Table 1. Students in different fields of education in higher education

Fields of Education	Total			Percent woman 2017
	2000	2010	2017	
Humanities and Arts	28,945	26,339	27,696	60.3
Education	30,682	33,342	45,214	72.6
Social Sciences and Law	24,504	31,150	35,047	62.6
Business and administration	26,584	42,000	52,792	53.8
Natural sciences, vocational and technical subjects	36,173	37,712	49,489	33.3
Health, welfare and sport	33,540	48,648	54,743	78.7
Primary industries	1,594	1,178	1,487	48.1
Transport and communications, safety and security and other services	2,860	4,055	8,820	35.2
Other	1,120	3,323	2,349	55.8
Total	186,002	227,747	273,637	59.3

Notes:

1. Students higher education abroad are not included.
2. Other: Consists of unspecified field of education and general programmes.

More information: <http://www.ssb.no/en/utuvh/>

Source: Reprinted from Statistics Norway (2018b);
Facts about Education in Norway 2019: – Key Figures 2017,16

Admission to universities and university colleges in Norway is based on the Higher Education Entrance Qualification. Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service (NUCAS, Samordna Opptak) is a Norwegian government agency responsible for application and admission to all public universities and university colleges in Norway in the first cycle, and certain postgraduate level programmes. The agency is subordinate to the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research and is managed by the University of Oslo. Applicants have to meet general admission requirements and document proficiency in the Norwegian language in order to be eligible for admission. Applicants can find information on general requirements and send them in before 15th April, which is the application deadline for applicants with secondary education from non-Nordic countries. Applicants with foreign secondary education are assessed individually and the assessment is amongst other things based on grades or a grade point average from upper secondary school or high school; documented English language proficiency; grade or points in the Norwegian language examination. If the applicants do not meet the general entry requirements, they are required to pass some basic subjects in Norwegian upper secondary school to be eligible to apply again.

4.4 Refugees' access to Norwegian higher education system

There are various public bodies, private organisations, and institutions in the Norwegian Higher Education system that work for access and integration of refugees in higher education:

- The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (Kunnskapsdepartementet)
- Norwegian Directorate for Immigration (UDI, Utlendingsdirektoratet)
- Norwegian Agency For Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT, Nasjonalt Organ for Kvalitet i Utdanningen),
- University of Oslo (UiO, Universitetet i Oslo),
- OsloMet (OsloMet, previous name Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus)
- Skills Norway (Kompetanse Norge, Norwegian Agency for Lifelong Learning)

Refugees have to be granted asylum in order to enter Norwegian higher education. The admission to HEIs (undergraduate programmes) in Norway is granted on the basis of the Higher Education Entrance Qualification. The requirements for foreign applicants (refugees are also included in this group) have been specified in the Higher Education Entrance Qualification for Foreign Applicants list, which includes roughly 200 countries and international qualifications translated for Norwegian admission to third-level education. Applicants need to provide proof of English language proficiency (Cambridge test, TOEFL, IELTS or Pearson PTE Academic test) and proof of Norwegian language proficiency (B2 level). Different institutions offer Norwegian and English language courses to refugees in the asylum reception centres, where they can enroll in courses while waiting for their asylum claims to be considered.

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, NOKUT, is the public body for the recognition of prior qualifications through higher education in Norway. It was established as an independent expert body, which works under the Ministry of Education and Research and its areas of responsibility include quality assessment of Norwegian universities and foreign higher education. The board of NOKUT is the agency's supreme governing body. Every year around 900 experts are involved in various evaluation and accreditation processes in NOKUT. NOKUT received 8,613 applications for recognition of foreign higher education in 2017, an increase of 12 percent from 2016 (NOKUT, 2018b). The top three countries were Syria, Poland and the United Kingdom. According to NOKUT, the number of applications from Syria and the United Kingdom both increased by 25 percent from 2016 to 2017.

Another crucial institution concerning the registration of qualifications for incoming refugees is **Skills Norway (Kompetanse Norge)**. It is a public body, a competence centre and an advisory body for the Ministry of Education and Research and the Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). It advocates for the development of content and pedagogical approaches related to teaching of the Norwegian language and social studies to adult immigrants. The public agency works to improve basic skills in the adult population in the areas of literacy, numeracy, oral communication and use of ICT. Skills Norway is responsible for the development and implementation of tests in Norwegian language and social studies for immigrants. The main objective of their work is to increase the quality of teaching to adults and ensure that individuals get an education that is adapted to their needs, so that every adult can attain the level of basic competence that enables them to meet the increased demands of today's work and everyday life.

4.5 Recognition of refugees' qualifications

As stated in Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, recognising refugees' higher education and educational qualifications is the most important point to solve the refugee exodus. Although the Convention was signed 20 years ago very little has been done in practice, with the exception of Norway and a few other countries (ESU 2017).

In Norway, there are three procedures for recognition of qualifications that every refugee and asylum seeker³ may undergo, according to their educational background:

- 1) General recognition procedure: It is open to any applicant with higher education qualifications from abroad.
- 2) UVD-Procedure: It is an alternative, interview-based recognition procedure for refugees and other displaced persons without verifiable documentation. This process is applied if qualifications obtained cannot be proven through required documentation.
- 3) Qualifications assessment for refugees: It is for refugees who currently cannot be granted general recognition of their higher education either through the general procedure or the UVD-procedure.

4.5.1 General recognition procedure

“General Recognition” from NOKUT is legally binding and an important document equal to a diploma. It compares foreign education with the corresponding Norwegian degree and credit system. The main criteria for getting a General Recognition from NOKUT are related to the status of the higher education institution, as it has to be officially recognized in the country of origin. The recognition document is a final decision, which includes the equivalent educational degree in Norway. The recognition document includes the following information: 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 and Skjerven 2016).

A person has to apply to NOKUT’s General Recognition by submitting the required documents to an online application system, which includes proof of identity and proof of completion for the relevant level of education. There are also some country specific documentation requirements mentioned in NOKUT’s website in Norwegian and English. This process takes a few months and is free of charge.

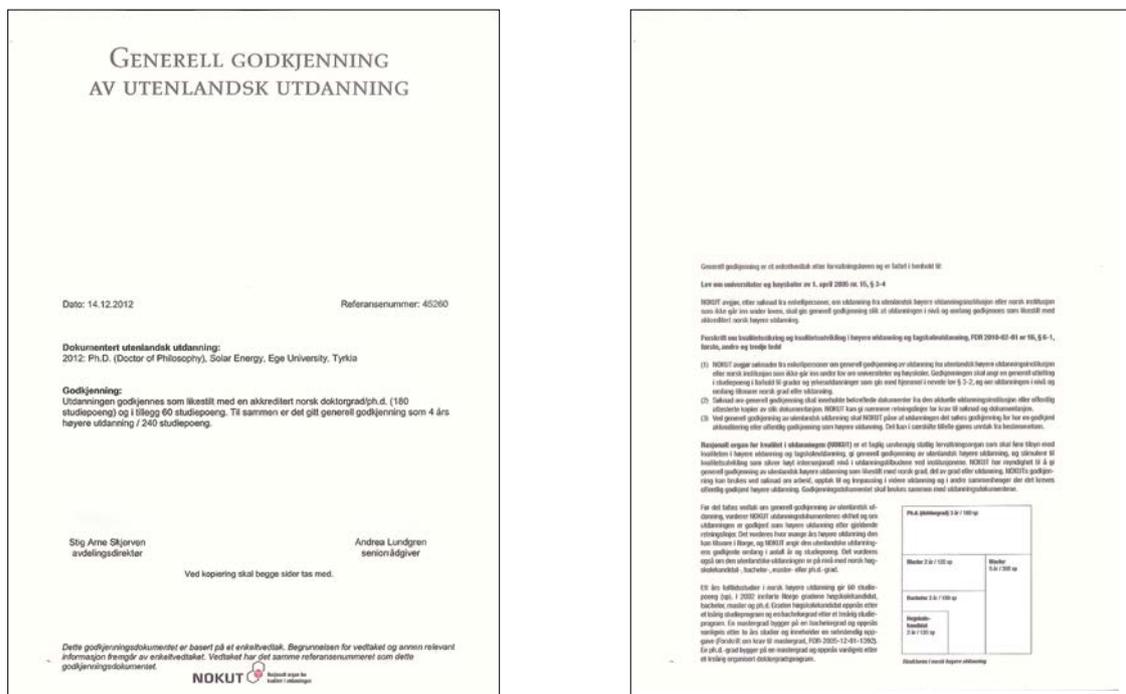


Image 1. NOKUT's Recognition Document for Foreign Education

³ There is no requirement to have asylum status in order to be able to apply for NOKUT's recognition. Anyone, even people outside Norway, can apply for NOKUT's general recognition.

NOKUT received 7,500 individual applications for General Recognition of Foreign Higher Education in 2015 (Malgina and Skjerven 2016) and 8,613 in 2017 (NOKUT 2018b). Verification and authenticity check of the documentation can be challenging for the following reasons:

- Archives no longer exist
- Archives are not available
- Management systems do not function properly
- The quality of the exchange of information is uncertain
- It is difficult to connect identity documents and educational documents

In cases when NOKUT's general recognition cannot be granted based on the documentation evaluation, the applicants are referred to recognition procedure for applicants without verifiable documentation (UVD). The UVD-procedure was established by NOKUT in 2013, as a centralised and standardised procedure. The outcome of the UVD-procedure is also a legally binding decision.

4.5.2 The UVD procedure

The UVD-procedure is conducted in cases when candidates' applications cannot be processed in the ordinary document-based evaluation procedure. The UVD-procedure includes the use of expert evaluations and testing in order to substitute the requirement to provide sufficient documentation and credible verification from the issuing authority. The procedure presupposes the following three requirements:

1. The applicant must possess sufficient language proficiency in English, Norwegian or another Scandinavian language;
2. The applicant must have permanent residency in Norway;
3. The applicant must possess a completed qualification within higher education.

The entire procedure was broken down into five stages presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. UVD Procedure of NOKUT

Steps	Action
1	Application for general recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation
2	Mapping of applicant's background and assessment of results
3	NOKUT's assessment 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 of the application

Source: Malgina and Skjerven (2016)

NOKUT uses internal and European sources of information and databases in the evaluation procedure during the preparation phase before the interview with experts⁴. The evaluation committee has three members: two professors and one representative from NOKUT. The evaluation includes both written and oral parts and is summed up in a final report from the committee. This report provides the basis of NOKUT's decision on recognition.

4.5.3 Qualification passport for refugees

Even though the UVD-procedure may seem like an ideal recognition solution for the Norwegian context, increasing the number of applications makes this time consuming process difficult to apply. The Qualifications Passport for Refugees scheme was piloted by NOKUT in 2016. The final outcome includes information about a person's highest achieved qualification, language proficiency, education and work experience, as well as advice for the future. The document is not legally binding but has the status of an advisory statement, which is valid for three years (Mørland and Skjerven 2016). The method includes evaluation of available documentation, and a structured interview in the applicant's mother tongue by experienced case officers/credential evaluators. Since the applicants can use their mother tongue, the scheme allows faster process for recognition also for the newly arrived migrants.

NOKUTs kvalifikasjonspass for flyktninger	
UVD 423/KP 1 ¹	
Uttstedt:	24.02.2016
Gyldig til:	24.02.2019
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div> <p>Navn:</p> <p>Født: 13.12.1985</p> <p>Country of origin, place of birth: Irak, Erbil</p> <p>Høyeste oppnådde kvalifikasjon: 2008: Bachelor of Science, Salahaddin University, Erbil</p> <p><i>Nivåplassering i Norge:</i></p> <p>Nivå 6 i Kvalifikasjonsrammeverket, Bachelor²</p> <p>Fagområde: Matematikk</p> <p>Språk:</p> <p>Morsmål: Kurdisk</p> <p>Undervisningsspråk: Arabisk, engelsk</p> <p>Norsk: B1 (muntlig)</p> <p>Råd om veien videre: Fortsette med språkkurs, oppnå nødvendig språkkompetanse i norsk (B1 skriftlig) og søke om vurdering i NOKUTs UVD-ordning</p> </div> <div style="text-align: right;">  </div> </div>	
Vurderingen gjennomført av:	Marina Malgina seksjonssjef
	Sara Eitungerde konsulent
Dato: 24.02.2016	Sted: Lysaker
<p>¹ Det er viktig at mottakere av passet og myndigheter er klare over at dette er ikke erstatning for formell godkjenning eller autorisasjon, men fungerer som en supplement til eksisterende godkjennings- og autorisasjonsordninger.</p> <p>² Vurderingen av kvalifikasjon er ikke et juridisk bindende vedtak, men en uttalelse som skal være til hjelp i</p>	

Image 2. NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees

Source: (Malgina and Skjerven 2016)

⁴ These sources of information and databases include UK NARIC, AEI, ANABIN databases, NOKUT's own database, NOKUT's archive, NOKUT's library, and assistance from ENIC-NARIC offices.

NOKUT's Qualifications Passport for Refugees contains the following information (including information about the documentation that has formed the basis for evaluation):

- The person's name and date of birth
- Picture
- Name of the highest qualification completed
- Subject field
- Relevant work experience
- Language experience/proficiency
- Advice about future possibilities (authorization, NOKUT's General Recognition, evaluation through the UVD-procedure, possibility for admission to further studies, supplementary studies).

A pilot project was carried out in the period February–May 2016. A total of 20 qualifications passports were issued during this period. Participants were chosen from a pool of active applications to NOKUT, which were not able to continue with UVD-procedure due to lack of language proficiency, permanent residency permit or unfinished qualifications.

The procedure includes three main phases:

- Evaluation of available documentation and description of the qualification,
- Carrying out a semi-structured interview with experienced credential evaluators – in different languages (English, Norwegian, Farsi, Arabic etc),
- Issuing a Passport with a validity period of three years.

The scheme is fast and efficient. The process of issuing a passport can be completed in 3 days after the interview has been conducted. Although the Qualifications Passport is not a guarantee for admission to study programmes or employment it might help further integration of refugees and their access to the labour market.

After the successful implementation of Qualifications Passport in Norway, NOKUT proposed a European Qualifications Passport in collaboration with the UK-NARIC office as a centralised model for recognition procedures for refugees without sufficient documentation (Malgina and Skjerven 2016). Piloting of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees started in 2017 in Greece and the project is coordinated by Council of Europe. NOKUT's Qualification Passport is also tested in Turkey with eight applicants as part of the research project titled "Integrating Syrians into Turkish higher education through recognition of qualifications" which is conducted within HOPES/MADAD Programme.

Implementation of the European Qualifications Passport have the following limitations:

- The document is not legally binding, but a statement intended to aid connections with applications for employment/internship and studies. The evaluation is based on available documentation and a structured interview with experienced case officers.
- The document is not a replacement for formal recognitions or authorizations, only a supplement to existing recognition procedures.

4.6 Financial support for refugees in Norway

Every refugee granted protection in Norway who wants to enrol a HEI is entitled to receive financial education support under the same rules as domestic students. The Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund (Lånekassen) is the governmental body responsible for receiving applications. A person can receive a refugee grant if they hold foreign nationality and have been granted asylum in Norway; and entitled to take grant for ordinary upper secondary education in Norway. A person is also entitled to receive a refugee grant for primary and lower secondary education if they need it and do not qualify for admission to upper secondary education. According to the Norwegian Education Act, the grant will be calculated in the same way as it is for Norwegian students. The only difference is that the refugee applicant will receive the full amount as a grant, apart from the additional loan to cover tuition fees. The Norwegian ordinary students pay back some part of their grants, therefore calculated two parts as loan and grant. Entitlement to the refugee grant ceases if the person starts to receive the introduction benefit instead (ESU 2017).

The financial support for refugee students amounts to 152,640 NOK per year. The maximum support that they can 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 (ESU, 2017). If the student drops out before completing their education, they have to pay back the money received. Information about the application procedure and repayment rules is available on the website of the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund. Information about the application procedure and repayment rules is available on the website of the Norwegian State Educational Loan Fund⁵.

Concerning the duration of receiving refugee grants, it should be noted that the sooner the applicant starts education after arriving in Norway, the longer they are entitled to receive the refugee grant. The length of time is counted from the date asylum was granted (Lånekassen 2018):

- If the applicant starts education within three years of arriving in Norway, they can receive the grant for up to three years.
- If the applicant starts education within four years of arriving in Norway, they can receive the grant for up to two years.
- If the applicant starts education within five years of arriving in Norway, they can receive the grant for up to one year.

The deadline is extended by two years if the applicant:

- already has children or has a child during the time they would normally have been entitled to receive the refugee grant. The applicant must then start their education before the child reaches the age of ten.
- has the right to take primary and lower secondary education before beginning ordinary upper secondary education.

⁵ It should also be noted that the average cost of inadequate education to Norwegian society was estimated between 3.25-4.4 million Norwegian kroner per individual in 2015 (Berg et.al 2016).

4.7 Response of Norwegian academic initiatives to the refugee flow: Selected good practices

4.7.1 Norwegian Student Organisation (NSO, Norsk Student Organisation)



Apart from governmental bodies and their institutionalized efforts on qualification recognition procedures for refugees, the Norwegian Student Organisation (NSO) called the HEIs to action to integrate refugees in universities in 2015. Norwegian universities and academics organised open lectures, academic solidarity activities called Academic Solidarity “Akademisk Dugnad”, organised network programmes, On the Run “Pa Flukt” open lectures for the refugees in Norwegian higher education (NSO 2017; Buverud 2016; Costello 2016). The Norwegian Student Organisation made clear in its 2017-18 action plan that the refugee flow requires national solidarity and that NSO will be an engager to achieve measures and arrangements to ensure that refugees and asylum seekers quickly get into education in HEIs.

4.7.2 Oslo University (UIO, University of Oslo)

4.7.2.1 Academic Solidarity (Akademisk Dugnad)



The Academic Dugnad (Akademisk Dugnad)⁶ is part of Norwegian tradition of doing “Dugnad” which is an initiative started by staff at Oslo University as a civic response to the sudden refugee flow to Norway. The term was introduced by University of Oslo (UiO 2016) as an effort to welcome refugees and asylum seekers into Norwegian society. University of Oslo and Oslo Met along with NOKUT held the first Academic Dugnad on December 2015. It was a joint project together with OsloMet. The partner universities facilitate activities financed by the institution’s own budget. Academic Dugnad is an opportunity for knowledge sharing and creation of new ideas. The event offered a used book and textbook library available for attendees to take home to continue their study of Norwegian or of their specific fields. The University of Oslo leveraged social media to advertise the event.

4.7.2.2 Network Programme

The network programme is a volunteer networkbuilding activity. Refugees and asylum seekers get to know local students with a similar academic background, which can help them build networks in Norway. It aims to give better information about admission to HEIs, especially for asylum seekers or persons with a recognised status. The programme lasts for one semester.

⁶ Dugnad derives from the Old Norse “dugnad”, meaning help, good deed. The dugnad spirit is considered an important part of Norwegian culture. It describes a group of people doing voluntary work together for a common good, as an extraordinary effort to create something of lasting value.

4.7.2.3 Academic Practice



The University of Oslo and the Municipality of Oslo have developed an internship scheme for refugees with an academic background called “Academic Practice”. Academic Practice combines government-supported language and social studies classes with an internship for refugees within the Norwegian work culture. The program’s goal is to give refugees a headstart on the Norwegian job market. Refugees with at least one higher degree may apply for an internship in an academic environment similar to the one they have left, as part of the introduction programme offered to all newly settled refugees in Norway. In UiO two people started the programme in 2016 and four people worked within the programme at the beginning of 2017.

4.7.2.4 On the Run Open Lectures (“PA FLUKT” Open Lectures)

Through the lecture and discussion series called “On the run” researchers at the University of Oslo invite knowledge sharing and dialogue on the refugee situation.

4.7.3 OsloMet University



Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA), now Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet) established bridging courses for teachers, nurses and engineers with a refugee background in 2017. The programme consists of 60 credits (two semesters) and includes courses in social studies, Norwegian language training as well as practice.

4.7 Concluding remarks

The Syrian refugee flow is not just about the recent movement of the masses to the West, it is also a part of the migration debate in the world. It should be perceived as a humanitarian crisis. This crisis needs to gather all stakeholders across Europe. In this reality education should be accepted as a human right and a driving force for integration into the host society. Regardless of the political debates, the Norwegian academic community’s response to the increasing number of refugees was rather active and strong. Thus, facilitating better integration has gained higher priority within HEIs across the country. Norwegian authorities have taken a rather pragmatic approach in trying to link the needs of refugees with the socio-economic needs of the country.

It is evident that the problem with identifying the legal status of refugees has been solved in Norway through the Introduction Act which regulates refugees’ rights and responsibilities. As the chapter already discussed, the policy-making style has been both proactive and reactive regarding the refugee issue in Norway. Norway was the only country that acted proactively to get a head start in addressing problems and developing policy instruments for application in other contexts like the qualification passport. Although a top-down process is crucial for the policy making process, it has proved important to be open to bottom-up initiatives with regards to providing access to higher education for refugees and supporting their integration into academic communities. The top-down elements are important for tackling problems the need for coherent implementation and limit inconsistencies in application of rules, such as legal status of refugees, social support, or recognition of degrees. These issues have been successfully handled in Norway. Bottom-up initiatives can be crucial to tackle problems concerning language skills, social and cultural integration, as solutions need to be tailored to specific local needs. The integration of refugees is a state-centered top-down process in Norway. However, cooperation with private actors, including both stakeholders from the higher education sector and NGOs that have experience of working with refugees in general, has proved to be successful. A well-functioning recognition procedure for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation is advantageous both for the receiving

countries and the individual. The national and international efforts of NOKUT in setting up well-functioning procedures for the recognition of foreign education as identified UVD procedure (The Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation) and Qualifications Passport for Refugees are important contribution to the European context.

Overall, the integration of refugees into higher education have several serious challenges and need all stakeholders come together to tackle the different problem areas. The lack of coordination and harmonisation to deal with recognition in cases without proper documentation of degrees was also highlighted during German Rector Conferences (KMK) and the recommendations of Flemish Education Council. The simplification and transparency in recognition decisions were the main issue to enable the access of refugees in higher education in Europe. In that respect, Norway constitutes one of the inspiring good practices to highlight. These innovative policy instruments, good practices, initiatives and solutions might lead to new initiatives in a European framework to improve the integration of refugees into higher education.

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Chapter 5

SPAIN



Selin SIVIŞ¹

5.1 A closer look at recent asylum inflow in Spain

The European Union, its Member States and other countries around the world are influenced by globalisation, demographic change and societal transformation; as a result, migration is inevitably at the top of the European Union's political agenda, especially considering of 40 million internally displaced people, 25.4 million refugees and another 3.1 million asylum seekers worldwide (UNHCR 2018). Spain, a country of immigration that is bordering the Mediterranean, has become new destination for not only migrants, but also asylum seekers and refugees. The nature of refugee flows to Spain is characterized by complex and mixed departure points. One may presume that arrivals to Spain are mainly from African countries, however; people, fleeing from conflict-ridden countries such as Venezuela, Syria, Colombia, Ukraine, and El Salvador, also aim to make their way to Spain, as illustrated by Table 1 (Eurostat 2018).

Table 1. Main citizenships of (non-EU) asylum applicants, 2017
(number of first-time applicants, rounded figures)

Nationality	Number of applicants
Venezuela	10,350
Syria	4,225
Colombia	2,460
Ukraine	2,265
Algeria	1,165
Palestine	1,165
El Salvador	1,120
Honduras	970
Cameroon	750
Morocco	525

Source: Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado

In Summer 2015, several thousands of those seeking asylum arrived at the shores of Mediterranean via Greece, Italy and Spain. When the EU has experienced a period of unexpected mass inflows, the only response that they provided was to raise the external border of the EU Member States against those fleeing. According to the EU's relocation and resettlement plan which came into force in September 2015, the hundreds of thousands of migrants arriving in Europe and sheltering in refugee camps in Italy and Greece are promised to equitably be distributed across Member States (European Commission 2015). Similarly, the EU-Turkey Statement came into effect on 18 March 2016 which agreed by EU Heads of State and/or Government and Turkey with the aim of ending irregular migration flows from Turkey to the EU, assuring the protection of several hundred thousand fleeing the Syrian War, and creating safer conditions and legal channels to Europe for them (European Commission 2018). In the light of the EU's relocation and resettlement plan, Spain pledged to host 17,337 refugees from the European relocation and resettlement quotas. However, as of summer 2017 Spain only took in 11 per cent of the number agreed especially considering that the agreement ended in September 2017.

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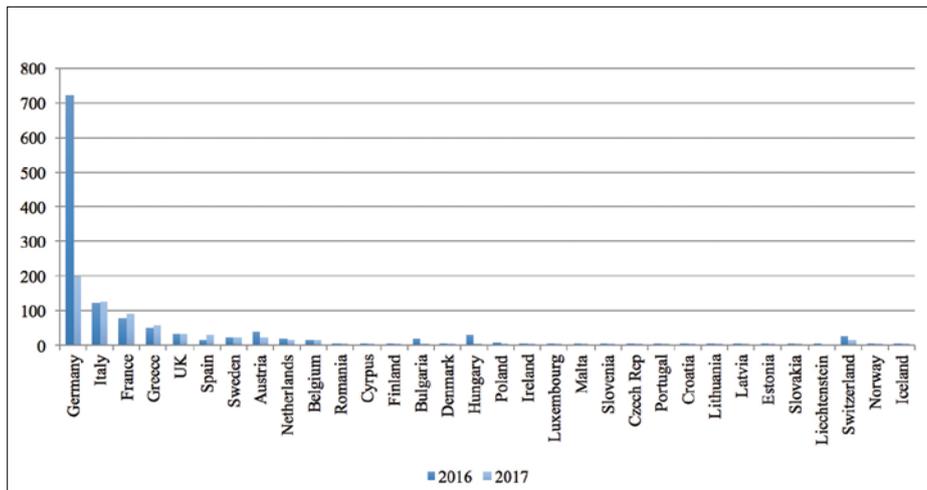


Figure 1. Number of (non-EU) Asylum Seekers in the EU and EFTA Member States, 2016 and 2017 (thousands of first-time applicants)
Source: Eurostat (2018)

It is clear that cooperation on migration with neighbouring countries or so called “safe third countries” have had an impact in terms of decrease in the number of arrivals at EU borders. For instance, the downward trend was seen in the Central Mediterranean route with arrival figures. In the same vein, the number of arrivals from Turkey to the Greek islands and the land border dramatically decreased in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially after the EU-Turkey Statement (Seventh Report on the Progress made in the implementation of the EU-Turkey Statement 2017). Despite fall in arrivals in Italy and Greece, only Spain has witnessed to the upward trend in terms of a significant number of arrivals. After the closure of the Western Balkan route and reinforcing borders between Greece and Turkey, migrants might have shifted their overseas route to the Western Mediterranean which has made Spain a new target for migrants. Since January 2018, Spanish coasts have recorded 6,623 arrivals which is 22 per cent higher than in the first months of 2017 (European Commission 2018). A similar trend was observed concerning that the number of asylum requests in Spain doubled from in 2017 compared to the previous year. In 2017, Spain received 31,120 asylum requests whereas it recorded 15,755 applications in 2016. In terms of gender breakdown, 17,965 male applicants sought asylum in Spain in 2017 while 13,155 of asylum claims made by women (CEAR 2017). It is also important to highlight the fact that more than 8,500 people among asylum and refugee applicants were aged between 18 and 34 in Spain according to 2016 data (CEAR 2017).

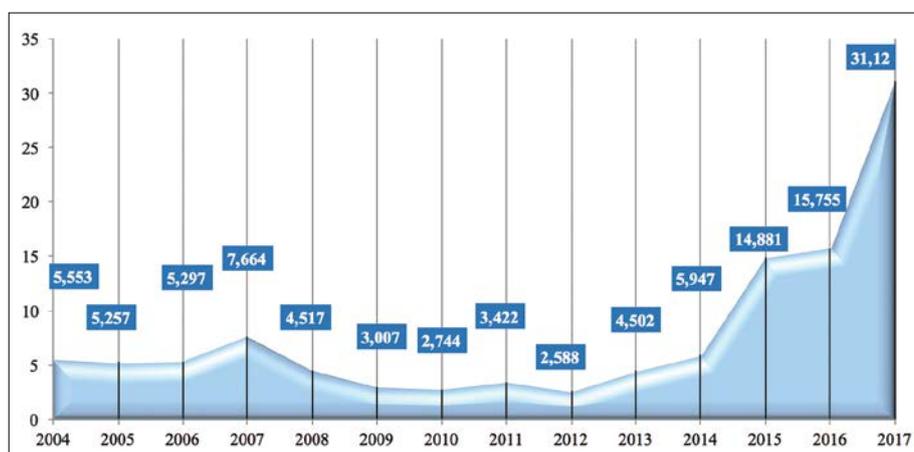


Figure 2. Number of asylum applications in Spain between 2004 and 2017
Source: CEAR (2017)

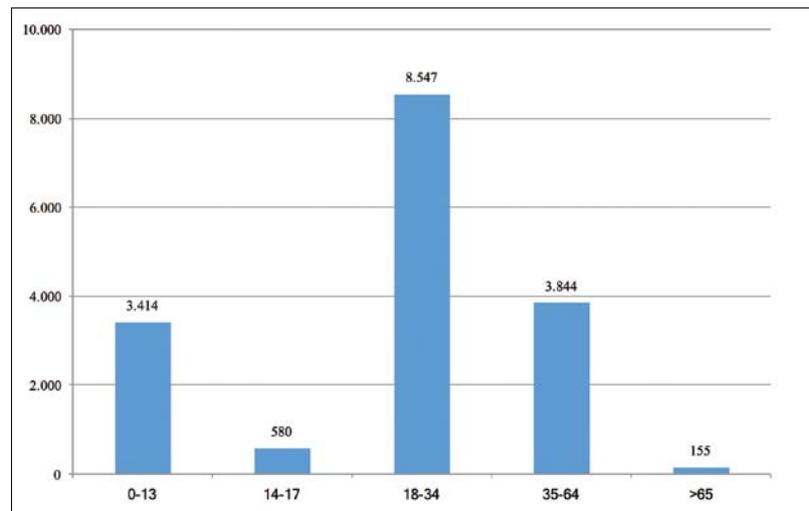


Figure 3. Asylum applications by age in Spain in 2016
 Source: CEAR and Statista (2017)

5.2 Legislative framework on asylum seeking in Spain

The right to asylum in Spain is guaranteed by the Constitution of Spain. Article 13.4 ensures the terms under which citizens from other countries and stateless persons may enjoy the right to asylum in Spain (Spanish Const. art. 13). In addition to the constitutional framework, Spain signed the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to Status of Refugees and 1967 Protocol in 1978 (*Instrumento de adhesión de España a la Convención sobre el estatuto de los refugiados 1978*). Following this, Law 5/1984 was enacted with the aim of governing the right to asylum and refugee status and adapting it to constitutional provisions which is mandated by Article 13.4 of the Constitution (Law 5/1984). Law 9/1994 was amended which established the basic principles of regulation of the law of asylum and criteria for refugees (Law 9/1994). Fifteen years later, Law 12/2009 *Regulating the Right of Asylum and Subsidiary Protection (LRASP)* was passed and ensured the legal framework relating to refugees and stateless persons seeking asylum in Spain is in line with EU legislation. This new law introduces the uniform international protection status: “asylum” and “subsidiary protection”. Sexual orientation or gender as ground of persecution was also recognized under LRASP (LRASP, 12/2009).

Regarding asylum application process, asylum claim must be made through a formal application to the component authorities in Spain by being present either in the Spanish territory or at the border controls. Although Asylum Act (2009) foresees the possibility of making asylum claim outside the Spanish territory via embassies or consular representations, these kinds of claims are not accepted by Spanish authorities in practice. Therefore, a formal application to the border control authority must be presented if the asylum seeker is outside of the Spanish territory (Asylum in Europe 2017). In case the asylum seeker is already in the Spanish territory, component authorities – the Office of Asylum and Refuge (OAR), any Foreigners’ Office, Detention Centre for foreigners (CIE) or police station- are in charge of dealing with asylum claim process (AIDA 2017).

There are two different admission procedures concerning making asylum application. The first one is a “**regular procedure**” which requires applicants who are inside the Spanish territory to send their application to the OAR which is the main responsible administrative body of the Ministry of Interior for deciding whether the request is admissible or inadmissible. It usually takes a month to examine asylum claim request. However, if the decision is not made by the OAR within a month period of time, it is understood that the application has been successful according to Spanish asylum law (under positive silence) (Asylum in Europe 2017). The application is declared inadmissible by the OAR if the applicant fails to comply with the formal requirements or lacks jurisdiction for the examination of the application. In the case of inadmissibility of the application, applicant has the right to appeal for reversal. If the application is issued as admissible by the

OAR, the request is investigated by the Ministry of Interior for a period of six months, but the actual waiting period usually lasts longer than six months. In the meanwhile, a red card (*tarjeta roja*) referring to asylum seeker's status is certified to the applicant (Asylum in Europe 2017). The Inter-Ministerial Commission of Asylum (CIAR) is the main authority to decide on the application. If the decision is not made by the deadline of six months, it is presumed that the request has not been accepted. If the application is rejected, the applicant is obliged to leave the Spanish territory or will be transferred to the territory of the State responsible for examining the asylum application. In the case of acceptance, CIAR makes decision based upon following options: (1) granting the status of refugee; (2) granting subsidiary protection; (3) denying the status of refugee or subsidiary protection and granting a residence permit based on humanitarian grounds; (4) refusing protection (Ministry of Interior of Spain).

The second application procedure is called “**urgent procedure**” (*el procedimiento de urgencia*). In the case of application is made outside the Spanish territory or claimed from CIE, the urgent procedure shall be followed concerning assessment of the request. If this is the case, the OAR shall decide on whether the request is admissible or not within 72 hours; or 4 days if application is made from CIE. If the OAR declares the request as admissible, the applicant will be authorised to enter Spanish territory to continue under the urgent procedure. If the request is rejected, then the applicant has the right to ask for re-examination of the request within two days. In the case of being rejected for the second time, the person can follow judicial procedure by lodging an appeal to administrative court (Asylum in Europe 2017).

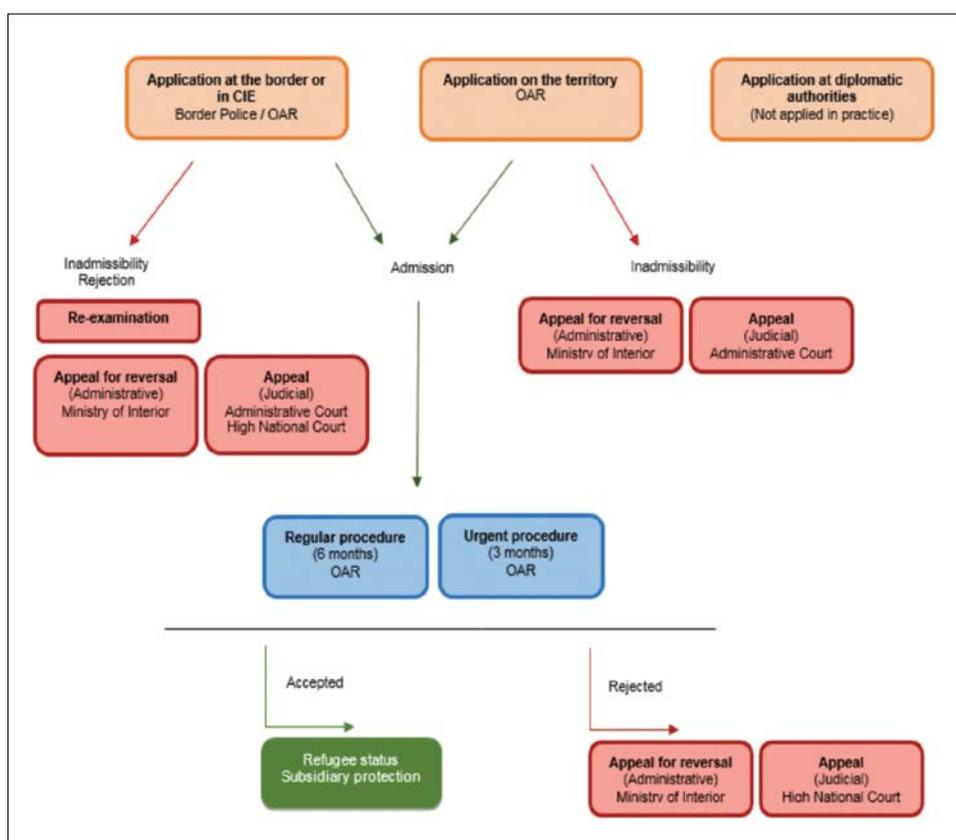


Figure 4. Flow chart of admission procedure in Spain

Source: Asylum in Europe (2018)

As the Figure 4. illustrates, the system of refugee asylum application in Spain is not straightforward, but rather composed of several bureaucratic procedures. After making a formal application, both the applicant's documentation and finger-printing records firstly are provided, and then the identity of the asylum applicant is registered with the immigration office. There are two reasons behind of this practice: (1) to check whether any other asylum application is having made by the same person in any other EU country rather than Spain, and (2) whether the person entered the EU through a country other than Spain. Secondly, after the registration with the immigration office, applicants are eligible to ask for accommodation in one of the Refugee Reception Centres (CAR) managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security where they

can receive material help, social and legal advice, medical guidance and interpretation support (Asylum in Europe 2017). Also, a special support is provided asylum-seeking children in reception centres in order to facilitate their schooling process in a respective neighbourhood. Moreover, basic training that foresees to facilitate their integration within the Spanish society in the following six months is provided to applicants (AIDA 2017). Thirdly, the OAR invites an applicant for an interview which can happen any time during the procedure once the asylum claim is stated admissible. The interview takes place in private offices which ensures privacy and confidentiality of the interview; however, standards of private interview offices can differ from one region to another. While the case examiners are responsible for preparing documents for the interview, the auxiliary personnel conduct the interview. In case of inadequate information, a second interview may be carried out with the applicant by the caseworker (AIDA 2017).

5.3 Asylum seekers' and refugees' access to higher education system in Spain

The right to education is not explicitly set forth in Asylum Act; however, the Organic Law 4/11, introduced in January 2000, guarantees the access of foreigners to the rights and freedoms and their integration process in Spain. In other words, refugees are treated in the same way with other foreigners and immigrants in Spain in term of accessing the higher education system. According to Spanish Educational Law, all asylum-seeking and refugee children are eligible to freely enjoy accessing to compulsory education in Spain which is from age 6 to 16. However, access to higher education is more challenging because law is not well equipped to deal with articulating on access to higher education within the case of refugees and asylum seekers. Instead, Spanish higher education institutions require applicants to comply with specific access requirements like other foreigners and immigrants who reside in Spain. Yet, clear definition of the set of rules, rights, and obligations of refugees and asylum seekers concerning access to higher education in Spain has remained absent. Therefore, refugees and asylum seekers are required go through the same procedures just like all foreign students in Spain in order to meet requirements for higher education.

A closer look at the access requirements to Spanish higher education system, regulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport, brings forward two important and challenging factors for refugees in Spain:

1. Applicants are required to submit official undergraduate degree and/or diploma as an evidence of previous degree and academic transcript with a record of the official training completed at the accredited institution and the average degree. And, all foreign applicants must provide the equivalent qualification awarded by an accredited higher education institution.
2. Second, applicants ensure that their studies of the country of origin are validated or homologated according to criteria established by Council of Universities.

The education administrations of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport are responsible for carrying out the process of homologation and validation of previous studies. The request is initiated by an applicant, and application is made in the Spanish Ministry of Education registries or in the places established in the regulations (art. 38.4 of Law 30/1992, of November 26, on *Régimen Jurídico de las Administraciones Públicas y del Procedimiento Administrativo Común*) or Spanish embassies or consulates. The application may also be submitted electronically in the Electronic Register of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, in accordance with the provisions of the regulations that regulate the electronic access of citizens to public services. Once application is submitted, it is carried out by Sub-directorate General for Qualifications and Recognition of Qualifications (*Subdirección General de Títulos y Reconocimiento de Cualificaciones*), corresponding to provisions of Law 30/1992. It is a rather long and complicated process because previous studies in the country of origin are to be accredited and certified which is an essential condition to be able to continue with further studies in higher education or access to job market in respective field (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport). Highlighting challenges and difficulties in the process of homologation faced by refugees and asylum seekers regarding access to higher education is an important task but it is very difficult to analyse as there is no available database dealing with homologation requests or the reception of refugee students in Spain (Marcu 2018).

Table 2. Total number of international students enrolled, by nationality between 2012 and 2018

	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16	2014-14	2013-14	2012-13
TOTAL GRADO Y 1 CICLO (BACHELOR'S DEGREE QUALIFICATION) AND 2 CICLO (MASTER'S DEGREE QUALIFICATIONS)						
TOTAL	1,291,144	1,303,252	1,321,698	1,364,023	1,416,827	1,434,729
Spain	1,227,020	1,245,567	1,267,770	1,311,453	1,365,564	1,384,934
EU (28)	29,695	27,374	24,995	23,594	22,155	21,032
The rest of Europe	5,616	5,208	4,960	4,764	4,595	4,393
USA and Canada	619	501	441	432	448	498
Latin America and Caribbean	14,521	12,383	11,981	12,615	13,427	12,962
North Africa	5,197	4,644	4,376	4,427	4,427	4,418
The rest of Africa	1,475	1,305	1,323	1,360	1,414	1,435
Asia and Australia	7,003	6,270	5,852	5,378	4,797	4,057
MASTER'S DEGREE						
TOTAL	205,049	190,143	171,043	142,156	122,882	113,805
Spain	162,411	151,385	136,741	116,131	100,255	92,458
EU (28)	7,429	7,448	6,443	5,559	4,710	4,631
The rest of Europe	1,544	1,447	1,318	1,161	1,154	1,069
USA and Canada	1,272	1,161	925	798	808	796
Latin America and Caribbean	25,658	23,106	20,754	13,912	11,718	11,110
North Africa	737	614	559	523	492	475
The rest of Africa	558	458	424	445	360	333
Asia and Australia	5,440	4,524	3,879	3,627	11,718	2,933
PHD DEGREE						
TOTAL	79,386	71,548	55,628	32,062		
Spain	59,478	53,691	41,918	24,089		
EU (28)	4,639	4,353	3,282	1,900		
The rest of Europe	711	659	496	336		
USA and Canada	312	304	224	128		
Latin America and Caribbean	10,966	9,709	7,550	4,242		
North Africa	645	556	413	251		
The rest of Africa	297	237	206	138		
Asia and Australia	2,338	2,039	1,539	978		

Source: Spain, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport.

5.4 Challenges faced by refugees in Spanish higher education

There are currently 84 universities in Spain, and 52 universities are public while 32 of them are private universities (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport). Although access of asylum seekers and refugees to some fundamental rights are guaranteed through national and international legal regulations, Spain still faces many challenges with regards to higher education such as lack of information and guidance, recognition of credits and qualifications, language barrier, and financial hardship to cover education-related costs (Marcu 2018, 7). Besides, Spain struggles with effective flow of information and coordination between the central government, autonomous communities, provinces and municipalities concerning access to higher education. Currently, autonomous communities and provinces receive information regarding the profiles and needs of asylum seekers and refugees through accredited NGOs (Red Cross, CEAR, ACCEM, CEPAIM, Red Acoge, Fundación la Merced Migraciones and Dianova); yet, the central government has not developed a more centralized approach or attempted to establish a more binding protocol about university programs and enrolment processes to facilitate access to the university and the rest of educational levels across the country (Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security).

5.4.1 Economic support for education

5.4.1.1 The Spanish economic support programme

Once the asylum request is declared admissible by the OAR, asylum seekers benefit from the Spanish economic support program, as so provided to refugees, for a maximum of 18 months whereas it is extended to 24 months within the case of vulnerable groups. However, the Spanish economic support programme does not cover costs concerning university studies (European Commission 2016). This creates new hurdles for refugees as they are expected to cover their higher education related costs by themselves (Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security). Even though Spanish education system has been restructured according to the European Higher Education Area, it is characterized by heterogeneity regarding tuition fees. The modification of the university tuition fee system was introduced by the Real Decree Law 14/2012 (*Real Decreto Ley 14/2012*) which in fact triggers this heterogeneity by paying the way for an unequal breakdown of tuition fees across different autonomous communities. The registration fees of university degrees are established by the autonomous communities, corresponding to the limits set by the Organic Law of Universities, introduced by the Royal Decree Law 14/2012 that sets forth percentages of “the costs of providing the service” (*los costes de prestación del servicio*). Accordingly, the fee of degree may vary between 15 percent and 25 percent in terms of the costs of providing the service during the first enrolment in a course. The same rule is also applied to master’s degrees. As for the rest of master’s degrees at different enrolment stages, the fee varies from 40 percent to 100 percent (Royal Decree Law 14/2012). In the light of this information, the consequential fee in all autonomous regions is set by annual decrees. In most cases, decrees establish a scale of fees by installments. Master’s degree fee segment is more likely to be more expensive than degrees. In the case of doctoral studies, there is a single annual tuition fee for tutoring. As the figure shows below, Catalonia is the autonomous community with the most expensive degree enrollment (2,372 euros) whereas Andalucía and Galicia seem the least expensive autonomous communities to pursue higher education degree in Spain. Catalonia is followed by Castilla y Leon (1,815 euros), the Community of Madrid (1,693 euros) and the Community of Valencia (1,493 euros) (Observatorio Sistema Universitario 2016).

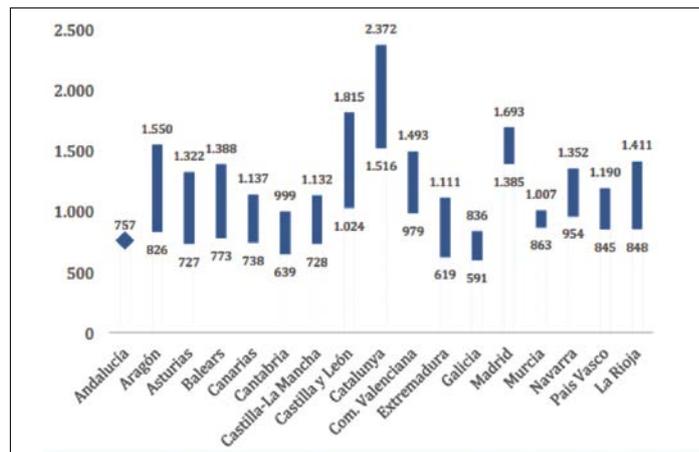


Figure 5. Minimum and maximum fees of a degree course in 2016-2017 academic years (in EUR)

Source: Observatorio Sistema Universitario (2017)

As for foreign students, Article 81 of the Organic Law of Universities states “Public prices may cover up to 100 percent of the costs of undergraduate and master’s degree courses when foreign students are over eighteen years and who do not have the status of residents in Spain, excluding nationals of Member States of the European Union and those to whom the Community regime applies”. In the case of undergraduate and master’s degree studies qualifying the exercise of regulated professional activities, the prices for non-resident foreign students and non-EU students could be between 4 and 6.7 times higher than those who are residents or EU nationals. The fees for residents and EU nationals for non-qualifying university master’s degrees are set at between 40 and 50 per cent of the cost of education whereas it could be between 2 and 2.5 higher for non-resident and non-EU students. The tuition fees set by decrees for 2016-2017 academic years greatly vary from one autonomous community to another within the case of non-resident foreign students and non-EU members. For instance, eight autonomous communities do not establish differentiated prices (Andalucía, Canarias, Cantabria, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y León, Comunidad Valenciana, Extremadura, País Vasco); five of them are given autonomy to fix university fees by themselves (Asturias, Catalonia, Galicia, Murcia, Navarra); and, only four of them are fixed in decrees (Aragón, Baleares, Madrid and La Rioja). In these four communities, the multiplying coefficients that determine the fees for the first enrolment degree vary between 1.3 (Balearic Islands) and 4.9 (Madrid) (Observatorio Sistema Universitario 2016).

Studying in the private university costs much more compared to public universities in Spain. The registration fee for undergraduate studies is around 9,500 euros per academic year depending on the field of study and higher education institution chosen. Hence, the cost of tuition fees in private universities is set by each university and can vary greatly from one to the other. However, universities can take initiatives to either reduce tuition fees or lift registration fees for asylum seekers and refugees. To illustrate, the University of the Basque Country (UPV), one of the public universities, offers free registration for “asylum seekers and stateless persons”. According to the Official Gazette of the Basque Country, dated 2 July 2018, applicants for asylum whose application has been admitted for processing, beneficiaries of international protection and stateless persons are eligible for the exemption of fees for the academic year 2018-2019 if “they do not have any university degree of the same level before and, they are able to provide a red card (*tarjeta roja*) and registration certificate with respective municipality for degree enrolment” (Boletín Oficial del País Vasco del día 2018).

5.4.1.2 Scholarships

Unfortunately, scholarship options provided by the Ministry of Education in Spain are very limited for refugees, and denial of scholarship requests are also common. In some cases, either scholarships are only available for national students, or refugees are required to submit documents which they lack of. Limited scholarship options and request for documentation create additional financial hurdles for those who keen on further higher education in Spain (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation).

5.4.2 Recognition of documents and qualifications

Bureaucratic processes to enrol in degree programs are very complex in the sense that refugees are treated in the same as any other foreigner who is a legal resident in Spain. Firstly, Spanish higher education institutions require applicants to support their applications with original, official evidence of their previous studies. However, refugees most of the times fail to provide required documents such as transcripts, diplomas or final certificates of respective degrees due to inability to issue in and/or obtain from higher education institutions in their country of origin. Secondly, the enrolment process to higher education institutions in Spain is quite different from other EU countries (Marcu 2018, 8). Applicants ensure that their studies of the country of origin are validated or homologated because previous studies in the country of origin are to be accredited and certified. This is an essential condition for applicants in order to continue with further studies in higher education or access to job market in respective field. The education administrations are responsible for carrying out the process of homologation and validation of previous studies. It is a rather lengthy and complicated process because: (1) it may last more than 2-3 years; (2) applicants' documentation is required for homologation process such as identification document (passport and residence permit), certified photocopy of academic certification of the studies, certified photocopy of the accrediting certification of the courses taken etc.; (3) applicants need to pay service cost fee which is 160 euro; (4) complying with all requirements does not guarantee that applicants will be granted homologation (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport).

5.4.3 Language barrier

Spanish universities do not have a long tradition of offering bilingual degrees. The instruction language is mainly in Spanish and co-official language of the autonomous community which are Basque, Catalan and Galician. The instruction language also depends on which level of academic degree students are enrolled in. Although a few universities have recently made a very strong commitment to offer bilingual degrees such as University of Pompeu Fabra and the Carlos III University of Madrid, most of universities' instruction language is still in Spanish. However, the situation is different within the case of private universities. For example, IE Business School offers most of its programs in English and more than 50 percent of its students are international students. Regarding that Spain receives asylum seekers and refugees not only from Spanish-speaking countries, but also non-Spanish speaking countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq or Ukraine, lack of language skills also poses challenges for those seeking higher education opportunities in terms of not only access to education, but also access to information. Some universities' support programs such as the University of Barcelona and the Complutense University of Madrid also aim at providing language learning as a part of social integration, yet, it still creates hurdles for those either seeking asylum or refugees in Spain since these academic support programs are university-based initiatives which are not available in every university and city. Put it differently, refugees and asylum seekers in Spain either remain uninformed about their rights to access to higher education institutions; or face with difficulties understanding requirements for recognition of qualifications and documents because of language barrier. Therefore, language remains an obstacle for their better integration to university.

5.4.4 Lack of coordination mechanisms between administrative bodies

Due to lack of a comprehensive and common state plan, the Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE) urged Spanish universities in September 2015 to develop the possible short, medium- and long-term actions with the aim of facilitating access to higher education for refugee students who were university students in their countries of origin, facilitating collaboration with Spanish universities of refugees who were university lecturers in their country of origin, and promoting volunteer actions among students (European Commission). Following this, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport has set up a Coordination Group for the Educational Integration of Refugees (CIER), coordinated by the Secretary of State for Education, Vocational Training and Universities in order to integrate refugees into the Spanish education system. CIER is constituted by autonomous communities, universities, student representatives and NGOs. Likewise, an Internal Commission of CRUE was established in response to difficulties to access to higher education faced by refugees in Spain (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport). Accordingly, some action plans have been developed such as Spanish courses for foreigners, linguistic and cultural mediation services, scholarships to attend university studies, coordinating awareness campaigns among the university population, psychological support, legal assistance for refugees and their families, and offering accommodation in residences, colleges and private homes. Yet, there is no comprehensive available data on which higher education centres and institutions have taken initiatives on their own (CRUE).

In other words, the universities themselves have remained as main responsible body both financially and administratively to develop their own programmes for reception of refugees. Some universities have already created their own programmes through the “Student-refugees Welcome Program” initiated by the European University Association (EUA). This campaign serves as instrumental tool which documents initiatives of higher education institutions and organizations concerning access of refugees to higher education. This platform is designed for the purpose of allowing refugees to start or continue with their academic studies in the host countries via a regular university program. In doing so, universities which are part of EUA network introduced separate procedure for registration of refugee students which is rather different from usual admission procedures.

There are 11 universities in Spain being engaged with this program: *Complutense University of Madrid, Camilo José Cela University, University of Carlos III of Madrid, University of Santiago de Compostela, University of A Coruña, University of Almería, University of Sevilla, University of Alicante, University of Barcelona, University of Lleida and Public University of Navarre* (European University Association).

5.5 Selected Good Practices



UNIVERSITAT DE
BARCELONA

The University Barcelona (UB): The University of Barcelona (UB) created a refugee support programme facilitating integration process into higher education of those fleeing from Syrian civil war. It is an institutional and international driven programme that the University fosters cooperation actions, based on collaboration and solidarity, together with Arab countries, the Barcelona City Council and the Catalan Association for Solidarity and Assistance of Refugees (ACSAR). The programme capacity is designed up to one hundred refugees and there are currently 69 refugee students.

The programme aims at offering (1) academic and educational support, accommodation, social integration, legal and psychological assistance; (2) scholarships covering full tuition fees; (3) preparatory courses for university access; (4) cooperating with various countries within the framework of access to higher education for refugees; (5) organizing and coordination raise-awareness programmes; (6) being part of EU funded research projects; and (6) promoting the notion of ‘coexistence’ which is one of main principles of integration policies in Catalonia (University of Barcelona).



Complutense University of Madrid (UCM): The Complutense University of Madrid has been the first Spanish public university to have a reception program for refugees. In this initiative, the UCM Office for Welcoming Refugees (la Oficina UCM de Acogida a Personas Refugiadas) has collaborated with different centres and services, staff, interns and volunteers. The Complutense University of Madrid has been carrying out an initiative, so called the “UCM Refugees Welcome Plan.” This institutional plan is composed of four main lines of action: (1) social and educational reception of refugees; (2) development of values, attitudes, and solidarity actions between UCM Community and Madrid’s society; (3) promoting a conscious, critical and committed society; and (4) financial support for refugee students. Hence, UCM provides an individual support for refugee students that includes bureaucratic requirements for recognition process of studies, prior learning, and temporal integration as listeners or visitors till they complete full enrolment. The University also set up a special system which facilitates management of volunteer activities, communication mechanisms, organization of trainings, monitoring and recognition of credits. Recently, UCM has started to offer an internship programme for refugee students (InHere Project). During the 2016-2017 academic year, it received 16 students from 10 countries from Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Palestine, Colombia, Venezuela, Guatemala, Equatorial Guinea, Sudan, Ukraine. More specifically, the university has received 11 undergraduate students, two master’s and three doctoral students.



Camilo José Cela University (UCJC): UCJC has developed an institutional and international oriented initiative through taking part in “Integra Project,” which is a grant scheme for ten international students who come from conflict-torn countries and currently study different degrees at the university. It is important to highlight that UCJC is the first Spanish university which accepted refugee students. The project strives for facilitating access to refugee students who were studying at university in their country of origin, promoting collaboration between Spanish universities and refugees who were university professors in their country of origin, promoting volunteer activities and programs among students, offering six-month language course and training in Spanish culture and values and financial aid (Camilo José Cela University).



University of Sevilla (US): University of Sevilla’s institutional initiative shapes around two dimensions: financial support and integration measures. Furthermore, US provides training and awareness in linguistic and cultural immersion, psychological support, advice on legal compliances and support for finding housing. In relation to that, the University for the first time opened the call for study for not only refugees and asylum seekers, but also nationals from developing countries during the 2016-2017 academic year. 24 grants have been awarded so far and students come from nine different countries which are Venezuela, Honduras, Yemen, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Palestine, Syria and Ukraine (University of Sevilla).



University of Santiago de Compostela (USC): Support Programme for refugees was initiated by USC with the aim of supporting the continuation of their studies. According to the scheme of the Support Programme, a full coverage of tuition, accommodation in residence hall, subsistence allowance, and courses on Spanish language are provided to scholarship holders. Applicants are eligible to apply for the scholarship programme on condition that they possess or have requested a refugee status in

Spain and, either they are registered in the academic year or be able to formalize their registration. Priority is given to those coming from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Iraq or Yemen because of established links through cooperation projects. 6 students have benefited from the university's scholarship programme so far. Hence, University of Santiago de Compostela coordinates UNINTEGRA project aiming at analysing how to efficiently manage immigrants populations while responding to the needs of those in need protection. And, one of work packages particularly focuses on creating a protocol of validation of competences and credentials of third country nationals replicable at European level (University of Santiago de Compostela).

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Chapter 6

UNITED KINGDOM



Zeynep Özde ATEŞOK¹

6.1 An overview of asylum flows in the United Kingdom

The increase in asylum applications in the United Kingdom since the late 1990's has prompted the development of a more restrictive legal framework that has affected both the employment and education opportunities for asylum seekers and refugees (Bloch 2007; Doyle and O'Toole, 2013; Gateley 2015; Morrice 2009; Spicer 2008; Stevenson and Willott, 2007; Verma and Darby, 2002). Measures vary from dispersal regulations to the introduction of temporary leave rather than a permanent refugee status, which pose challenges for refugees in accessing education and employment hampering their eventual integration and participation in the community. The UK Home Office is responsible for considering asylum applications, and the status and rights afforded to the applicants. Among the various humanitarian statuses in the UK, asylum seekers who have been removed from the social security system without access to legal employment are also the most disadvantaged when trying to access higher education. Although some forms of humanitarian protection and discretionary leave are provided with wider entitlements, the temporary leave status for refugees, in particular, and the interim renewal of this status result in financial and legal precariousness, and uncertainty which in turn lead to exclusion and marginalisation.

The UK Home Office received 27,966 asylum applications in the year ending September 2018 which makes the country 6th highest in recipient of asylum applications within the EU (Home Office 2018). Since the peak in 2015-2016, a reduced but continued trend prevail the pressing challenge of integration of refugees into education and higher education in particular considering the majority (82 percent) of the asylum applicants having less than 35 years old and those being in the age range 18-34 years accounting for almost the half (EUROSTAT 2018). Despite the growing need to support asylum seekers and refugees², there is not any higher education policy or strategy addressing refugees nor any available data on their access to higher education and enrolment rates. Varying regulations published by the governments of the four countries of the UK further complicate the access to higher education for refugees. Not only access to higher education but also providing scholarships and support programmes are complicated. There are efforts by individual higher education institutions (HEIs) in the form of scholarship opportunities and support programs³, however, they are mostly uneven and scattered in the lack of a national level organization coordinating efforts for refugees' access to higher education.

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² Despite the pressing needs and multiple disadvantages, asylum seeker and refugees are not subject to targeted policies and strategies for widening participation. Although the Office for Fair Access to higher education (OFFA) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) support under-represented groups in higher education with the aim of widening participation, their documents and policy papers do not refer specifically to asylum seekers and refugees. The Welsh and Scottish Governments, however, not only refer to asylum seekers and refugees in their strategy documents but also prioritise their access to further and higher education (Bowen, 2014).

³ For a full list of available scholarship opportunities in the UK, please visit Student Action for Refugees website: http://www.star-network.org.uk/index.php/resources/access_to_university.

6.2 Legislative framework for refugees' access to higher education in the UK and challenges in practice

Rules and procedures for access and entitlement to higher education and tuition in the UK are complex and vary among England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (Doyle & O'Toole, 2013). Different humanitarian statuses, their varying entitlements to higher education fees and funding schemes, further hinder asylum seekers and refugees access to and participation in higher education (Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Although there is no explicit legal barrier, high tuition fees present the biggest challenge for asylum seekers and refugees wanting to access higher education in the UK. The regulations, maintaining different provisions for "home" and "overseas" students, enable higher education institutions to charge more for overseas students. While the regulations do not compel universities to charge these higher fees, the government subsidy is only paid for home students and so for financial reasons universities charge higher fees. Overseas fees, depending on the institution and the courses can range from GBP 3,500 to 18,000 per year which can be excessive to afford in refugee context.

Humanitarian protection and indefinite leave to remain statuses for refugees are afforded home fees and are eligible for student support in England⁴, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Whereas people with discretionary leave to remain are subject to overseas fees in England⁵, but home fees in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Except Scotland, they cannot access student finance (loans) to cover the cost of tuition fees or living costs until the fulfilment of three years of ordinary residence⁶.

Asylum seekers with temporary status are once again the most disadvantaged as they are categorised as international students in England and Wales, but as home students with partial student support⁷ in Scotland and Northern Ireland (AIDA 2017). Their participation in higher education is further hampered by dispersal regulations, and restricted access to mainstream social benefits and employment. Given that asylum seekers are classified as international students but do not have the right to work, the burden of tuition fees is more than prohibitive and often identified by young asylum seekers themselves as the main barrier to accessing higher education (Stevenson and Willott, 2007).

Apart from eligibility to pay home fees, current regulations stipulate that prospective students qualify for additional support according to the country where they have been living, not where the education institution is. A student could, for example, be a home fee payer if studying in Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales, but if ordinarily resident⁸ in England he or she would not be eligible for any student support at all. Considering the limited financial resources and legal precariousness, higher education can be a costly option among other priorities (Bloch 2007; Houghton and Morrice, 2008).

⁴ In England, young people with refugee status and those with indefinite leave to remain or humanitarian protection status who have been ordinarily resident in the UK for three years are eligible to pay home tuition fees.

⁵ Students with discretionary leave to remain became subject to international fees in England following the amendment to the Education (Student Fees, Awards and Support) Regulations in 2011. However as of June 2016, a small number of people with discretionary leave to remain are eligible for student finance, under "long residence" category for those who have lived in the UK for half their life.

⁶ For further and updated details on eligibility throughout the UK please visit: www.star-network.org.uk/index.php/resources/equal_access_scholarships.

⁷ In Scotland, children of asylum seekers or a young asylum seeker (under 25) are treated as home students if they meet a set of criteria including three years' residence (The Higher Education (Fees) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 SI 389 Reg. 4 and Schedule 1), but this is a very small number. There are a few opportunities for asylum seekers and those with discretionary leave to remain to enrol in certain higher education institutions at the "home student" fee rate. However, even if they are enrolled at this lower rate, they are still not eligible to access the necessary student finance.

⁸ Please see Home Office website for the definition and the factors determining ordinary residence in the UK: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/655489/Nationality-policy-assessing-ordinary-residence-v2.0EXT.pdf

Lack of language proficiency also acts as a key barrier for asylum seekers and refugees in accessing higher education and language support provisions are also subject to different statuses. English courses, for example, are available for asylum seekers as home students in Scotland (AIDA 2017) while they are not in other regions.

Regulations affecting fee status and support entitlements are not only complex but also subject to frequent change, which causes general confusion over eligibility even among higher education admission staff and advisers (Elwyn, Gladwell, and Lyall, 2012). Access to accurate information and educational advice can therefore be frustrating and complicated for asylum seekers and refugees (Rutter, Cooley, Reynolds, and Sheldon, 2007; Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Inadequate information, advice and guidance is even accepted by advisers providing support to refugees and immigrants (RAGU 2007, 91-93).

Apart from a complex legal and regulatory framework of eligibility for student fee status and funding, asylum seekers and refugees face multiple and diverse barriers in their endeavours to access higher education in the UK. Non-recognition of prior qualifications, for example, is frequently listed and documented among these key challenges.

6.3 Assessment and recognition of overseas qualifications in the UK

Under the current regulatory framework, the UK has witnessed an increased number of overseas applications for both higher education and employment, which has meant its policy for assessment and recognition of qualifications is evolving. However, the sheer volume of applicants and increasing variety of different qualifications to be assessed has placed considerable strain on the existing system and methods (Ellis, Myer, Reynolds, and Upadhyay, 2016). The main qualifications assessment tools in higher education are the guidelines provided by the UK-National Academic Recognition Centre (UK-NARIC), Universities Central Admission Service (UCAS) and British Council in addition to the information and systems developed by the specific HEIs. Established in 2014, UK-NARIC is the official source of information and recognition on international qualifications, and is open to the general public and organisations. As a commercial organization UK-NARIC offer regularly updated international qualifications database to admittance bodies and recognition and evaluation service to individuals. UK-NARIC provides information and advice only; its decisions are not final. HEIs and other admittance bodies can build on this advice and use their expertise to decide as ultimately they have the final word (RAGU 2007). UCAS, on the other hand publishes a general booklet with information gathered from a variety of sources including the British Council, the Ministries of Education and other related bodies. British Council also provides information services about overseas education systems, reports and background information. This information is merely a baseline for higher education institutions as it contains only, for example, a list of recognised institutions and maps of education systems, however it lacks specifics such as course content and grade boundaries.

HEIs which are struggling to cope with assessing the increasing and diversified list of qualifications, employ a variety of methods and practices to assess and recognise the international qualifications of prospective students. Institutional response to this challenge is of particular importance in the UK higher education context. Despite a common approach, the process varies significantly among the HEIs (RAGU 2007). During this process HEIs mainly use UK NARIC, as a basis to develop guidelines and systems for their admission process. In addition to the UK-NARIC services, the British Council and the University and College Admission Services (UCAS) also provide information to aid qualifications recognition and assessment. Based on these sources, HEIs tend to develop their own in-house guidelines in the form of databases and handbooks for assessing international qualifications and identifying equivalences with their own programmes and courses. This process falls under the remit of the admissions departments and/or international offices and is sometimes carried out in collaboration with administrative and academic staff. Despite there being no central body for assessment, transcript interpretation and decision-making, a tendency towards administrative centralization within the higher education institution is observed due to increasing international recruitment and necessary expertise (RAGU 2007).

Complex and changing education systems, inadequate and/or inaccurate information, lack of translation, forged documentation or fraudulent cases are among the some of the challenges during the process. Despite the acquired knowledge and expertise in qualifications assessment, given the ad hoc de-centralised approach the policies and practices are not consistent among institutions.

Considering the financial and human resources involved in developing, setting up and managing such systems, duplication is inevitable and with limited sharing of knowledge and best practice precious resources are wasted. This situation brings to the fore the question of a national database for international qualifications specific to higher education (RAGU 2007). The current system is further burdened by the assessment and recognition of the prior learning of asylum seekers and refugees who often come from less familiar academic systems with missing documents and insufficient language proficiency.

6.3.1 Recognition of prior qualifications for asylum seekers and refugees

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that higher education shall be equally accessible to all on basis of merit. The Lisbon Recognition Convention further indicates that refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee like situation have the right to have their prior qualifications assessed and recognised in a fair and expeditious manner even if these qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence (Section 7, Article 7).

Since 2015, with the climax of the refugee inflows to Europe, the European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility in Europe (ENIC)⁹ and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (ENIC-NARIC) have been to trying to respond to increasing demand for their service (Jungblut and Pietkiewicz, 2017). Despite the expanding legal framework,¹⁰ recognition of prior learning remains a challenge for refugees wishing to access higher education and employment not only in the UK but throughout Europe.

⁹ ENIC was created by the Council of Europe in collaboration with UNESCO in 1994 and its counterpart, NARIC, founded by the European Commission was adopted by joint charter in 2004.

¹⁰ The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) aims to facilitate the recognition of qualifications and the Bologna Process with the ultimate aim of establishing a European Higher Education Area, and also envisages a unified system of recognition.

According to the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention, 70 percent of participating countries failed to implement procedures for recognising the qualifications of refugees and displaced people without documentary evidence (LRCC 2016, 47-51). The UK was listed among these countries for reportedly having no formal procedures at national or any other level. When questioned by the European Migration Network (EMN)¹¹ on the process for recognising the academic and professional qualifications of people under international protection without documentation the UK-NARIC responded that no such recognition procedure was available¹². And yet the UK-NARIC was highlighted as being experienced in providing qualifications assessment and recognition support to organisations and refugees even those applicants without documentation; and that it had also launched guidelines on the subject (EMN 2016).

6.3.2 Challenges on recognition of prior qualifications

In addition to increased asylum applications, there is a growing diversity among asylum seekers and refugees in language proficiency, qualifications and skills (Bloch 2007) in the UK. Additional focus on the recognition of qualifications is therefore necessary to provide greater access to and participation in higher education and employment. Research carried out in 2007 indicate that interviewees who left their countries of origin had completed compulsory education and half of them had undertaken some sort of higher education. Many of them, however, found that their existing skills and experiences could not be easily transferred (Rutter et al. 2007). Other research demonstrated that while only a minority (15 percent) of interviewed refugees with qualifications had been through a recognition process, only 16 percent of those people had successfully managed to transfer their qualifications to the UK (Bloch 2007). These figures imply a problem of non-recognition of qualifications and perception of temporariness among the asylum seekers and refugees. Another report on post-16 learning among refugees and asylum seekers in the UK found that while there is confusion among learning providers concerning the needs and support for students, young asylum seekers and refugees are also frustrated that education institutions do not recognise or value their prior education and qualifications (Doyle and O’Toole, 2013).

Apart from low employment rates and enrolment in education among refugees, those working are predominantly employed in low-skilled jobs that are not in line with their skills and qualifications (Bloch 2007; Rutter et al. 2007). “Underemployment” (the situation of people employed in jobs below their skill set) is very common among refugees. The result can be loss of skills and eventual downward social mobility, presenting challenges to integration and wellbeing in host countries (Andersson and Fejes, 2010; Guo 2007, 2009; Jungblut and Pietkiewicz, 2017; Morrice 2013; Pietkiewicz 2017). High unemployment rates and over-qualification among refugees signal a systematic problem concerning skills recognition rather than a problem of unskilled refugees. This issue will be further exacerbated and will place additional strain on the existing systems with the resettlement of Syrian refugees, given the high enrolment rates in Syria’s education institutions prior to the civil war (Ellis et al, 2016). As many qualifications are not transferable at the equivalent level in the host countries, refugees need to re-qualify (Bloch 2007) and in that regard access to higher education is a key strategy among refugees (Morrice 2009; Rutter et al. 2007).

¹¹ EMN is a EU network which is legally established under Council Decision 2008/381/EC and coordinated by the European Commission (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs) consisting of migration asylum experts with the aim of providing objective, comparable, policy-relevant and up-to-date information and knowledge on emerging issues relating to asylum and migration in Europe

¹² In addition to publishing reports and policy briefs, the EMN responds proactively to the immediate information needs of EU and national-level policy makers through ad-hoc queries. EMN National Contact Points -which are established in all member states -except Denmark- and Norway and appointed by the relevant national governments- and the European Commission together use ad-hoc query procedure in order to collect comparative information in a relatively short time on a wide range of asylum and migration related issues. According to that procedure, in January 2016 the EMN required members to give an account of alternative recognition procedures employed on national level for refugees without documentation. UK was among the total countries responded to the query. For a detailed account of responses please visit https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/reports/docs/ad-hoc-queries/ad-hoc-queries-2016.1016_ahq_on_the_recognition_of_academic_and_professional_qualification.pdf.

However, providing evidence, documentation of previous qualifications pose their own specific challenges for asylum seekers and refugees, particularly as the required translation, registration and examination fees are very high and mostly prohibitive considering the financial precariousness of their situation and status (Doyle and O'Toole, 2013). Additionally, as mentioned above information and guidance on the recognition of prior qualifications is limited. It is widely accepted by those responsible for providing support to asylum seekers and refugees that their knowledge is inadequate and obtaining accurate information is both complex and time consuming. There is, therefore, an urgent need for an easy, flexible and comprehensive system (Doyle and O'Toole, 2013; Ellis et al. 2016; RAGU 2007).

UK-NARIC advice on UK equivalent qualifications is also considered very rigid and conservative especially concerning refugees from countries such as Somalia and Sudan (RAGU 2007, 54-55). While their assessment methods are often perceived as opaque, under valuing qualifications is a source of frustration and disappointment for applicants (RAGU 2007, 104-105). Considering the financial constraints that asylum seekers and refugees face, the cost of UK-NARIC's assessment services are excessive and in many cases not affordable for individual applicants and small organisations (RAGU 2007, 102-105). On the other hand, the difference between the NARIC assessment and those of HEIs demonstrate the important role institutions play in the assessment process. According to the research carried out by the RAGU, applying direct to a higher education institution appeared to be more satisfactory for refugees with international qualifications (RAGU 2007).

Furthermore, the ENIC-NARIC brochure entitled "Recognition of Qualification Holders without Documentation", published in 2016, addresses HEIs rather than national ENIC-NARIC offices. It even suggests that HEIs should allow refugees, who lack the required documentation, to submit a background paper together with their application indicating their academic qualifications and achievements. These could then be evaluated by entrance examinations and interviews (Ellis et al. 2016, 14-15).

Accreditation of prior learning (APL) during admission to UK higher education is an established procedure based on assessment and evaluation through certifications and interviews (RAGU 2007). The process could therefore be adapted to provide more flexibility by allowing, for example, the inclusion of personal statements from asylum seekers and refugees without proper documentation, which could be followed up with interviews. However, it is not yet part of the mainstream curriculum and not widely accepted nor implemented across the country. With clear policy and guidelines, the process could be developed into a credible assessment instrument for asylum seekers and refugees without documentation. Outsourcing the qualifications assessment process to ENIC NARIC, and UK NARIC in particular is still a solution for HEIs that lack the resources or expertise to do it themselves (Ellis et al. 2016).

Inability to respond to the increasing demand and requests still persists. Under the current system, a common issue such as missing documentation, which is specific to refugee applicants, is further compounded by the different policies and practices on qualification assessment and recognition throughout the UK (Ellis et al. 2016). Since the closure of the Refugee Integration and Employment Service (RIES) in 2011, there is no national programme supporting the recognition of refugees' qualifications. Although there are different organisations such as the Refugee Council, which offers assistance to refugees, there is no government body or central authority.

6.4 Concluding remarks

Overall, asylum seekers and refugees face considerable challenges in trying to access and participate in higher education in the UK. Recognition and transfer of prior qualifications is an important tool for widening participation of underrepresented groups in higher education (Wulz, Gasteiger, and Ruland, 2018) and employment; but it is also among the biggest challenges for asylum seekers and refugees. Recognising qualifications, improving rights and providing access to services that meet the needs and demands not only of highly skilled and professional asylum seekers and refugees but also young people wanting to attend higher education are recommended to increase enrolment, employability and gradual integration.

The current system is failing them as it is unable to provide equal access to higher education even for those with the right documentation let alone those without. There is an urgent need to offer inclusive, flexible but credible assessment tools and systems designed specifically to assess the qualifications of asylum seekers and refugees. Key infrastructure and systems designed to assess and recognise international qualifications should be adapted to keep pace with the increasing number of asylum applications and demand for UK higher education. Doing so would boost the participation of refugees in both higher education and employment. Despite being a pioneer country in internationalization, the number of overseas students in the UK is stagnating according to the latest statistics (HESA 2018). Providing increased access to asylum seekers and refugees will not only facilitate their integration but will also contribute to internationalization of higher education which comes with countless benefits.

Although, the UK-NARIC as the central organization is taking part in joint efforts supporting the recognition of refugees' qualifications¹³, there is a definite need to evaluate the current system according to the diverse needs of asylum seekers, refugees and HEIs. While the decentralised nature of higher education in the UK presents a lot of challenges, it also offers many opportunities to increase access. In the lack of a governing body, higher education institutions are the main actors for assessing and recognising prior qualifications of the asylum seekers and refugees. Although many HEIs in the UK are supporting asylum seekers and refugees access through scholarship opportunities and other forms of support, they can further design flexible recognition procedures based on APL described above for prospective students who lack requisite documents.

Accordingly, further research should draw upon institutional responses that include mapping, dissemination of best practice and, perhaps, most importantly share the experiences of asylum seekers so that HE institutions can adequately respond to those in similar situations.

¹³ UK-NARIC participate both in the development and piloting of "European Qualifications Passport for Refugees" and "Refugee Qualifications Toolkit" projects.

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Chapter 7

TURKEY



*Ayselín YILDIZ*¹

7.1 Introduction

Securing the right of refugees to education, providing recognition of their qualifications and supporting their transition into working life are crucial issues that lie within the responsibility of all refugee hosting countries. Despite being highlighted and promoted in many international agreements as key common principles of rights-based approaches, like many other migration related issues, nation states keep the authority to manage access and enforcement of these rights. How countries approach these issues is also highly influential in terms of migrants' decisions to further their journey to another country for better opportunities where they can be granted these rights. Moreover, host countries' approach to refugees' skills maintenance and improvement has a significant impact on the reconstruction of origin countries and regions once conflict and displacement end.

Turkey hosts the world's largest number of refugees: more than 3.5 million Syrians and additionally 365,000 refugees and asylum-seekers of various nationalities (DGMM 2019a, UNHCR 2019a). As a "transit" and an attractive "destination country" for many migrants and refugees, Turkey's migration governance plays a crucial role concerning the dynamics in the region. In that respect, Turkey's inclusive approach to refugees in terms of maintaining not only their access to higher education but also opening paths for their labour market integration deserves special attention.

Turkey grants the right to education to all refugees under temporary or international protection. Being a signatory to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which is the legal framework for mutual recognition of qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), Turkey offers a constructive approach to ensure all refugees' and refugee like populations' access and engagement in the Turkish higher education system. Turkey's policies on managing the integration of refugees into higher education is critical on three points: First, integration into higher education is an indispensable part of socio-economic integration of refugees who intend to reside long-term in Turkey. A higher education degree can determine refugees' future social status, certainly reduces risks of social and economic alienation and contributes to refugees' future paths and might also lead to naturalization. Second, in Turkey most professions only require a "graduation diploma" without any additional proficiency exams, membership of an association or additional ratification processes, which means integration into Turkish higher education brings direct access to the labour market. This requires careful analysis to ensure a fair approach for everyone where the acquired knowledge, skills and competences for professional qualifications are carefully compared and examined. Third, being a country in the EHEA that offers comparable degree structures, Turkey acts as a transit "first country of admission and recognition" for refugees coming from non-member EHEA countries. Recognition of skills, gained knowledge and integration into the Turkish higher education system can open pathways for refugees on their journey to Europe by providing them with recognition of equivalent degrees and qualifications previously gained in a non-EHEA country. In these areas, Turkey's approach and practices on the integration of refugees into higher education matter greatly and have wider profound implications beyond its borders.

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This chapter will first provide some brief descriptive information about the legislation, procedures and current context concerning the admission of refugees into the Turkish higher education system, and recognition of their qualifications compared to local and international students. The comparative perspective is provided in order to better understand the dynamics of challenges encountered. The chapter will further elaborate on the challenges and present some suggestions for future action.

7.2 Access to higher education for local and international students

Turkey's current structure of higher education is based on the Higher Education Law No. 2547 which was issued in 1981 and has had various amendments over time. As indicated in the law, Turkey's higher education system consists of three levels: associate degrees (at least two years); undergraduate degrees (at least four years); and graduate degrees (master's degree, doctorate degree, expertise in arts and proficiency in art). The central and autonomous public body is the "Council of Higher Education" (CoHE) which is responsible for planning, coordination and supervision of higher education. The "Higher Education Supervision Board" and the "Inter-University Council" are other responsible authorities that take part in the recognition of degrees. Turkey adopted its National Qualifications Framework for all higher education degrees in 2016 in line with the objectives of the Bologna Process and the European Qualifications Framework. There are 206 higher education institutions in Turkey, of which 123 are public universities, 72 are non-profit private universities established by foundations and 5 non-profit higher vocational schools established by foundations (CoHE, 2019a). In the academic year 2017-2018, 7,560,371 students were enrolled in higher education at all levels (CoHE, 2019b).

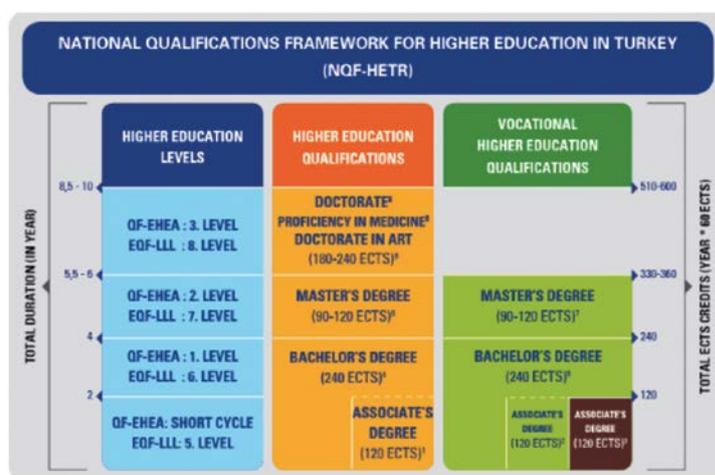


Image 1. National qualifications framework for higher education in Turkey (number of first-time applicants, rounded figures)

Source: Reprinted from CoHe (2019); <http://tyyc.yok.gov.tr/?pid=31&dil=eng>

Access to higher education for Turkish students is based on a nation-wide, competitive central placement exam (Higher Education Institutions Exam-YKS) which aims to assess students' competence and knowledge to be admitted to an HEI. Students are ranked according to their overall scores consisting of the combined scores on the YKS exam and their high school grade point averages. Places are allocated according to the base scores received and the limited number of offered quotas at the HEIs. In 2018, of the 2,381,412 Turkish students who participated in the YKS exams, only 857,240 (36 per cent) were placed at HEIs (CoHE 2019c). This information is critical and deserves special attention to better grasp the existing competitive context in Turkey for local students concerning their admission to higher education.

Access to higher education at the undergraduate level for international students is determined according to different admission criteria set individually by each HEI through a decentralised system. The criteria must be in line with the general legislative framework set by CoHE². CoHE allows the HEIs to determine their own specific procedures to admit international students on the condition that they announce their admission requirements and principles by publishing their own “Admission Regulations”. The admission requirements and available quotas for each HEI are published in CoHE’s guide for international students each year³. International students who have completed their secondary education either in a Turkish high school or a foreign one equivalent to a Turkish high school may apply directly to the Turkish HEI of their choice⁴.

Regarding admission criteria, some universities might require a Foreign Student Exam (YÖS)⁵ which is prepared and conducted by the HEIs themselves, not by a central authority. The exam is commonly held in Turkish but some universities offer YÖS in Arabic, English, French and Russian. The students have to succeed in the exam to be eligible for admission to their preferred HEIs. Some of the HEIs accept scores achieved from a YÖS conducted by another HEI. Other HEIs do not require YÖS but ask for a different set of admission criteria such as minimum scores from international standard exams: for example SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), ACT (National College Admission Examination) or MCAT (Medical College Admission Test). They can also accept students on minimum grades from an international diploma such as IB (International Baccalaureate), French Baccalaureate, or Diploma Debirestan from Iran. Students are also required to prove their language proficiency in the language of instruction for the relevant degree programme. Applications are evaluated on academic merit by the faculties of the relevant academic programme and acceptance is given individually by each HEI. In short, while the maximum quotas and general principles of admission for international students are centrally approved, HEIs are autonomous and have flexible authority to set their own criteria and policy for international student admissions.

7.3 Access to higher education for refugees and refugee-like populations

In Turkey, national legislation grants the right to education to everyone. Turkey offers inclusive and facilitated procedures to support the integration of refugees and refugee-like populations into Turkish HEIs. The procedures are particularly facilitated for “transfer students” who have had to interrupt their education due to violent conflict in their home countries. Rather than keeping refugees in limbo by pushing them into difficult and protracted procedures due to status related obstacles, Turkey provides them with flexible pathways to access higher education. Accordingly, Turkey facilitated this system by creating supportive legislation and allowing universities to implement their autonomous practices in line with the overarching national and international legislations. Although first admission and transfer procedures are totally different, due to the high number of Syrian students enrolled at Turkish HEIs in the last few years, this facilitated procedure sometimes creates unrest among locals who have to go through a competitive central exam to be admitted to higher education.

² “Principles for Admission of International Students”: http://www.yok.gov.tr/documents/10279/40914149/2018_Yurtdisindan_Ogrenci_Kabulune_Iliskin_Esaslar.pdf

³ Admission criteria and quotas for international students for each HEI in Turkey for 2018-2019 academic year: <https://www.yok.gov.tr/ogrenci/2018-yurt-disinda-kabul-edilecek-ogrenci-kontenjanlari>

⁴ Recognition and equivalence of high school diplomas of all international students are decided by Ministry of National Education (MoNE).

⁵ The exam do not have a standard common content since HEIs organize their own exams. It mainly includes questions of mathematics, geometry and basic learning skills.

7.3.1 First-time admission applications to HEIs

Within “first time admission applications” to a Turkish HEI as a new regular diploma student, refugees and refugee like populations are not treated differently from other international students. This ensures a fair approach without discriminating other international students since first time applications have to be assessed based on the applicants’ acquired skills and knowledge in their prior learning. Accordingly, refugees and refugee like students are free to apply directly to their HEI of choice given that they satisfy the admission criteria of the HEI which is set equally for all international students. These criteria can differ between each HEI. For instance, irrespective of their status, if a Syrian and a German apply to Istanbul University for an engineering degree programme, they both need to be a high school graduate and they both need to pass Istanbul University’s Foreign Student Exam (IUYÖS) with a minimum score of 40. On the other hand, Firat University accepts a minimum score of 180/240 from Syria’s Al-Shahada-Al Thanawiyya exam or IB/ABITUR/SAT I/ACT exams with minimum scores set by the university. There is no difference in how these students are treated due to their status (refugee or not) or their country of origin. Differences only exist in terms of divergent admission criteria between HEIs, which are set within a broader context for all international students.

Language proficiency is another common criteria for entering HEIs. Depending on the medium of instruction in the relevant programme, students have to prove their language proficiency. For example, for undergraduate programmes offered in Turkish, Istanbul University requires a B2 level Turkish certificate from the applicants. The medium of instruction at Yaşar University is English and it asks applicants to prove their English proficiency by providing an internationally recognized language certificate such as TOEFL, ESOL, or pass the English exam offered by Yaşar University. In cases where applicants lack a language proficiency certificate, universities might require enrolment in a one year language preparatory class.

7.3.2 Facilitated procedures for “transfer students”

Following the mass flow of Syrians to Turkey starting in 2011, CoHE responded fast and has issued new legislation to facilitate and support the participation of Syrian students in the Turkish higher education system. It should be noted that Syrians who came to Turkey in the mass flow have “temporary protection status” which grants them free access to education, health care and social services. Table 1 shows the age distribution of Syrians where the highest proportion consists of the group aged 19-24 years old with 550,993 people. When the age group 15-18 is also added, the number reaches 778,044. This demonstrates the crucial and urgent need to develop policies on securing an education path for this dynamic young population.

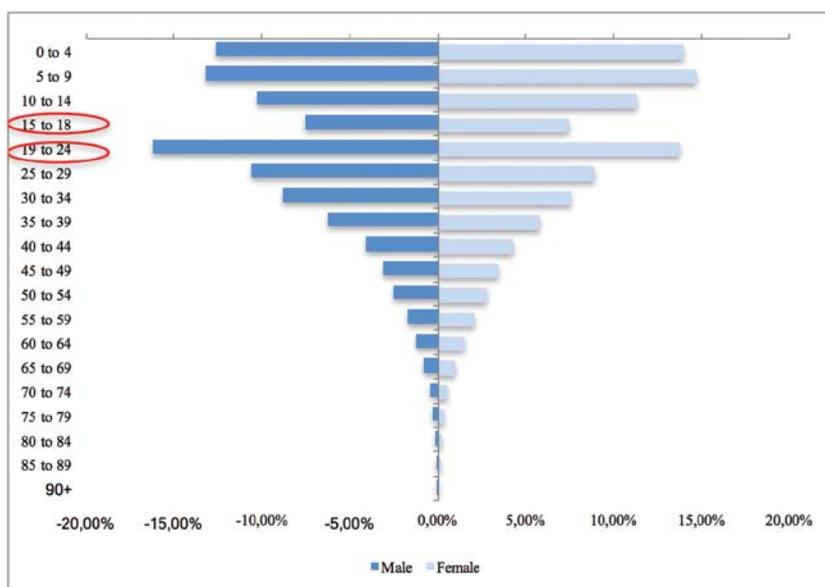


Figure 1. Age pyramid of Syrians in Turkey

Source: Data compiled from DGMM statistics (2019)

As an immediate policy response to the mass flow of Syrians, CoHE decided for the academic year 2012-2013 that **Syrian students without documents** would be allowed to enrol at seven selected Turkish HEIs located close to the border as “**special students**”⁶. These universities are Gaziantep University, Kilis 7 Aralık University, Harran University (Şanlıurfa), Mustafa Kemal University (Hatay), Osmaniye Korkut Ata University, Çukurova University (Adana) and Mersin University. Special student status does not offer a degree at the end of studies, but it keeps refugee students in the education system to maintain and acquire skills, allow them to attend courses, and prevent an interruption to their education during the period of crisis and displacement. If the student enrolls to a degree programme later, the HEI might also decide to accept the succeeded courses that have been taken with special student status.

Another significant change came in 2013 with the new article on “Regulation on Principles of Transfers Between Associate and Undergraduate Degree Programs of Higher Education Institutions, Double Major, Minor, and Credit Transfers Between Institutions” which has facilitated the transfer procedure for students who have had to interrupt their education due to violent events and humanitarian crises in countries determined by CoHE⁷. Based on this new legislation, CoHE allowed transfer of students (with documents) who have enrolled in higher education before the academic year 2013-14 in Syria and Egypt⁸. The decision encompasses all programmes (except Proficiency in Medicine and Dentistry) for all associate, undergraduate and graduate level degrees. Through a decentralised system, HEIs are responsible for evaluating documents submitted by applicants. Documents like transcripts and available course content are evaluated by ad-hoc recognition committees established by faculties, and accepted applications are sent to academic departments or programmes for decision on credit transfer or exemptions as well as the year of study students will be enrolled in.

Transfer students without documents are allowed to apply at the universities of Gaziantep, Kilis 7 Aralık, Harran, Mustafa Kemal, Osmaniye Korkut Ata, Çukurova, or Mersin as “special students”. Enrolment with special student status was extended to all other HEIs in the academic year 2014-15⁹. In 2014, the decision was made to extend the special student status and transfer procedures to students from Yemen as well.¹⁰ Through these immediate legislative actions, CoHE has facilitated transfer procedures for refugee and refugee like students to continue their higher education in Turkey. If the students have documents they are offered direct access to proceed their higher education as “transfer students” whereas the ones without documents are offered engagement with HEIs as “special students” to stay on their education path. It should be noted that the number of Syrians with special student status has decreased over time while the number of Syrian degree students is increasing. One of the reasons is that, with time, those with special student status have made up for missing documents such as transcripts and their status can then be changed into regular degree students. For example, at Istanbul University only 19 out of 1,241 Syrian students have special student status (Yürür et al. 2018).

In 2017-2018, the number of international students enrolled at Turkish HEIs was 125,030 in total, which includes students from 180 different countries (CoHE 2019d). The 20,683 Syrian students constitute 17 per cent of all international students and three per cent of all registered students at Turkish HEIs. As of February 2019, the number of Syrian students is 28,000 according to CoHE (Kapıcıoğlu, 2018).

⁶ CoHE, General Assembly Decision dated 3.9.2012.

⁷ Official Gazette dated 21 September 2013, issue 28772: <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2013/09/20130921-9.html>

⁸ CoHE, Executive Board decision dated 9.10.2013 <https://www.yok.gov.tr/ogrenci/ek-madde-2-uyarinca-misir-ve-suriyeden-yapilabilecek-yatay-gecis-islemlerine-iliskin-esaslar>

⁹ CoHE decision dated 18.6.2014, 9.7.2014, 6.6.2018

¹⁰ CoHE decision dated 14.10.2014 <https://www.yok.gov.tr/ogrenci/ek-madde-2-uyarinca-yemenden-yapilabilecek-yatay-gecis-islemlerine-iliskin-esaslar>

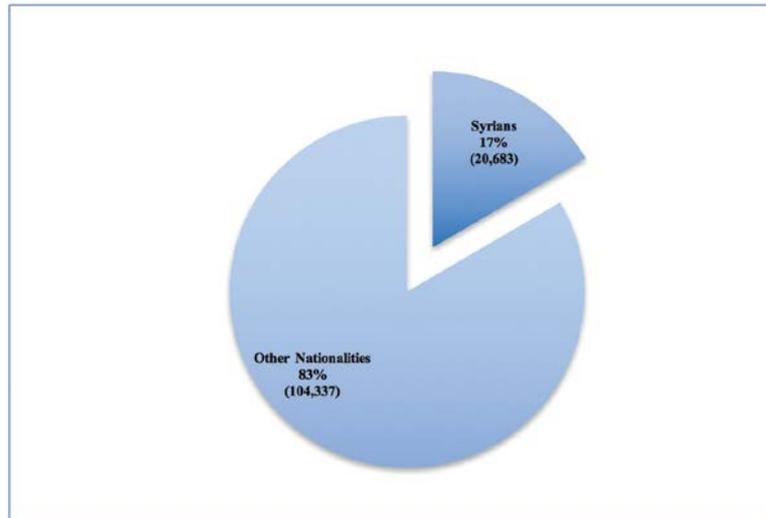


Figure 2. Number of Syrian students at Turkish HEIs

Source: Data compiled from CoHE database (2019)

Table 1. Top five universities in terms of registered number of Syrian students

Universities	Number of Syrian Students
Gaziantep University	1,986
Istanbul University	1,217
Karabük University	1,178
Mersin University	1,127

Source: Data compiled from CoHE database (2019)

Syrians are also exempt from international student fees at state universities, as their fees are covered by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB)¹¹. They are also offered accommodation at state student dormitories. Since 2012, around 16,000 Syrian students have benefited from “Türkiye Scholarships”, a government funded scholarship program administered by YTB and in 2019, YTB covered the tuition fees of over 5,000 Syrian students (YTB 2019). In addition, more than 3,000 students have received the full scholarships including university and program placement, monthly stipend, tuition fee, one-off return flight ticket, health insurance, accommodation and one-year Turkish language course.

As a result of these facilitated procedures, Figure 4 demonstrates that the number of students enrolled at Turkish HEIs from Syria, Iraq and Egypt has steadily increased since 2014. Although there is no specific statistical categorization of refugee or refugee like populations, it is obvious that especially Syrian students have benefited from the facilitated procedures and their enrolment numbers have nearly tripled (272 per cent) in the last four years. For instance Istanbul University, which hosts the second highest group of Syrian students, reports that 62 per cent of the registered Syrian students have enrolled through the transfer student procedure by benefiting from CoHE’s facilitated process (Yürür et al. 2018).

¹¹ Council of Minister’s Decision published at Official Gazette on 31.8.2018

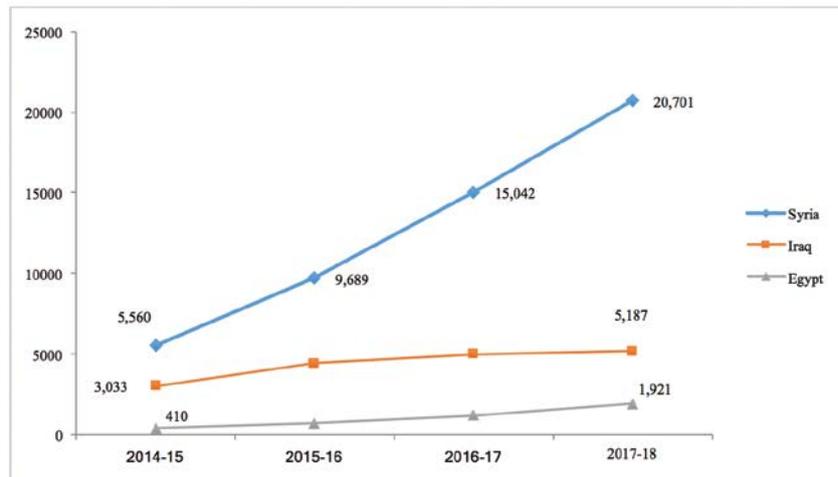


Figure 3. Number of students at Turkish HEIs from Syria, Iraq and Egypt
 Source: Data compiled from CoHE database (2019)

7.4 Recognition of qualifications and equivalency procedures

CoHE is the authority responsible for issuing recognition and equivalence of foreign diplomas and qualifications for associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees. Upon submission of the required documents, applications for equivalence of degrees and diplomas are reviewed by CoHE in accordance with the "Regulations on Recognition and Equivalence of Foreign Diplomas"¹². PhD degrees received abroad are assessed by the Inter-University Council.

"Recognition" and "equivalency" should not be confused as they are two different subjects requiring different procedures that are closely related. Recognition of HEIs, study programmes and degrees abroad refers to the recognition of an HEI by CoHE as the authorised body to offer academic programmes and grant academic degrees. This recognition process is carried out by CoHE. The institution or the degree received must be recognized by CoHE as a pre-condition to initiate the equivalency process. HEIs acknowledged on the UK-NARIC's list, the US regional accreditation institutions' (recognized by CoHE) list, or on the NVAO list for the Belgian-Dutch region are directly recognized by CoHE. If the HEI, degree or programme is recognized, applicants receive a "Graduation Recognition Document". This document does not grant equivalency and cannot be accepted for access to further study or for employment purposes. It only acknowledges that the applicant is a graduate of a specific programme and holds a degree which is recognized by CoHE, but it does not mean that it is equivalent to the same degree in Turkey offering the same qualifications (Tufan, 2018).

It should be noted that recognition of prior learning during transfer admissions (such as courses, credits, grades), recognition of qualifications and the degree equivalency after graduation are done through different procedures. The transfer procedure is decentralized and HEIs are autonomous to a great extent in assessing the acquired knowledge and qualifications. However, the recognition of HEIs abroad and equivalency procedures are centralized where CoHE is the central body. Turkey's approach to recognition is more focused on recognizing "people" first and keeping or offering pathways to engage in further education rather than creating refugee status-related barriers that exclude people by pushing them into a long process of assessment.

¹² Unofficial translation, CoHE: <https://yok.gov.tr/en/Documents/legislation/1.pdf>

However, it should also be noted that Turkey is a country that receives many students from countries that are not in the EHEA and do not offer comparable degrees. Therefore, enrolment in Turkish higher education and the recognition of prior learning provide a pathway for those students to proceed with their education elsewhere in Europe as well.

Secondly, in many European countries a graduation diploma does not provide direct access to employment without additional procedures and practices to pursue a profession. Employers might require applicants to be registered or certified by the relevant professional association. For example, in Netherlands, NUFFIC might provide an evaluation of foreign diplomas, but it only serves as a recommendation and employers are not required to recognize it. For regulated professions, the “competent authority” checks whether the person meet the requirements of that profession. Recognition of credentials lay also with the employer (Nuffic, 2019). Thus, in the Netherlands, studying with a foreign diploma and working with a foreign diploma are regulated as two different procedures. However, in Turkey, the equivalency of a diploma provides direct access to the Turkish labour market for many professions such as doctors, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, architects and veterinary surgeons. In this respect, rather than automatic recognition, Turkey pursues a standardised system for equivalency that might require candidates to take Level Identification Exams in order to evaluate applications on academic merit and ensure a fair system where equivalence of professional qualifications is cautiously examined. In that respect, recognition of diplomas and qualifications are not assessed differently for a French, Syrian or Turkish student who graduated abroad. Additionally, Turkey as a country in the EHEA can be considered a “first country of recognition and equivalency” for many international students coming from countries that have not harmonized their education systems with the EHEA countries, and should pursue a deliberate assessment irrespective of the applicant’s status. Assessment of comparable professional qualifications requires a cautious examination of acquired knowledge, skills and competences (Açıkgöz 2018).

Turkey’s approach to recognition of qualifications is also important in relation to the on-going automatic recognition debate in Europe. Despite flaws and divergent implementation of the Bologna reforms among member states, EU has the ambitious target of making automatic recognition of higher education diplomas a reality by 2025 (Schwitters and Skjerven 2018). In November 2018, the Council of the European Union made a remarkable decision and unanimously adopted a recommendation to promote automatic mutual recognition (Council of the EU 2018). Currently, for member states, EU Directive 2005/36/EC on professional qualifications enables automatic recognition of qualifications for seven professions: nurses, midwives, doctors, dentists, pharmacists, architects and veterinary surgeons. As a signatory country to Lisbon Recognition Convention since 2004, in line with the Article IV, rather than offering automatic recognition, Turkey recognizes qualifications “unless a substantial difference can be shown between the general requirements for access in the Party in which the qualification was obtained and in the Party in which recognition of the qualification is sought”. Since Turkey has comparable structures to the EHEA, the practice of automatic recognition should also be studied by taking Turkey’s practices into account if the process is to be extended to all EHEA countries in future.

The number of equivalency applications in Turkey has steadily increased in recent years. One reason for this increase is that Turkey recently digitalized the recognition and equivalency procedures by establishing the “Equivalency Information Management System” in 2016 (Açıkgöz 2019). Accordingly, all applications for recognition of HEIs and diploma equivalency are submitted, tracked and verified via Turkey’s E-government portal. Açıkgöz (2019) reports that the number of HEI Recognition Documents issued in 2018 had increased to 14,345, which is three times higher than before the digitalization of the process. Similarly, as Figure 5 shows, the number of equivalency applications in particular has increased by 45 per cent in 2018 compared to 2015.

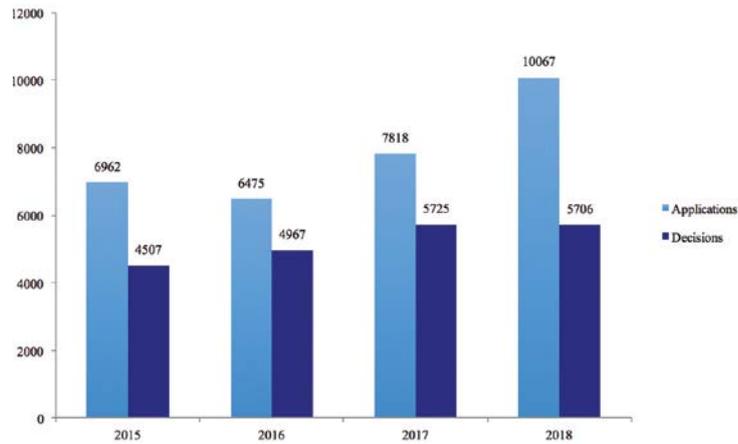


Figure 4. Number of equivalency applications and decisions in Turkey between 2015-2018

Source: Data compiled from Tufan 2018, Açıkgöz 2019

7.5 Recognition of qualifications held by refugees

Concerning equivalency procedures and recognition of qualifications held by refugees, Turkey pursues a centralised system based on its existing experience of recognition and equivalency processes for degrees and diplomas received abroad, and the structured system already in place for this. The process is managed according to CoHE's 2017 decision on "Recognition and Equivalence Application Processes for Those from Countries with War, Invasion and Annexation"¹³. The places listed by CoHE are: Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Palestine, Somalia, South Sudan and Crimea. The decision defines facilitated equivalence procedures for those who:

- are not able to submit diplomas or transcripts;
- are not able to submit any documents to prove their level of education;
- have missing documents; or
- have the original diplomas or transcripts but are not able to validate them due to a lack of official response or correspondence from the concerned institutions.



Available at: CoHE, <https://denklik.yok.gov.tr/multeciler>

¹³ CoHE Executive Board Decision (18.01.2017)

Any student from the above mentioned countries who applies for the equivalence of diplomas/degrees and is not able to submit an original or copy of their diploma, transcript, or other documents showing proof of education is requested to fill in the “Equivalence Application Form” with their educational information¹⁴. The same procedure applies if documents are missing. They are then required to apply to CoHE in person or by means of a legal representative. As a facilitated procedure, applications with missing documents or without documents are accepted for assessment, however such a procedure does not apply for other Turkish or international students who received their degrees abroad. For applicants from other countries equivalency applications without the relevant documentation are directly rejected.

Applications are reviewed in line with consultations and opinions received from a) The Scientific Advisory Board (composed of 98 academics working within 15 different commissions); b) Diploma and Degree Identification Commissions established at selected university commissions determined by CoHE; and c) The Recognition and Equivalence Commission. University commissions are expected to provide decisions on identifying and confirming the applicants’ field of study and degree. Further action is then taken and a final decision is given by CoHE in accordance with provisions of the Regulations on Recognition and Equivalence of Foreign Diplomas. The final decision can be a) direct equivalence; b) applicant being subject to “Level and Proficiency Identification” procedures (course completion, internship, clinical practice etc.) or; c) Rejection.

Table 2. Top five countries issued equivalency approvals

Undergraduate level			Graduate level	
	Countries	Number of issued equivalency approvals	Countries	Number of issued equivalency approvals
1	Azerbaijan	764	UK	319
2	Syria	596	USA	309
3	Bulgaria	282	Germany	92
4	Ukraine	200	France	62
5	USA	184	Syria	56

Source: Açıkgöz (2019)

The Diploma and Degree Identification Commissions that are determined by CoHE to evaluate the applications are as follows:

- Istanbul University, Necmettin Erbakan University, Akdeniz University, Gaziantep University and Mustafa Kemal University: Responsible for carrying out identification and confirmation processes in the field of medicine.
- Selçuk University, Sakarya University, Marmara University, Karabük University, Gaziantep University and Çukurova University: Responsible for carrying out identification and confirmation processes in all other fields.

These commissions carry out evaluation of the submitted documents and where the commission deems it necessary, applicants will be invited for verbal and practical evaluation. Applicants are recommended to submit any proof of their professional work experience that may support their equivalence assessment process, especially when a diploma cannot be confirmed. Following a decision from CoHE, applicants may appeal the result through a written objection submitted to CoHE within 30 days. There is no official record on whether these commissions have received any applications, if so how many and what the results were. It is observed that there is no significant number of Syrians without documents, but in general they are able to provide or complete their missing documents or validate them in time during their applications to CoHE.

¹⁴The form is available at CoHE’s web site: <http://yok.gov.tr/web/denklikbirimi>.

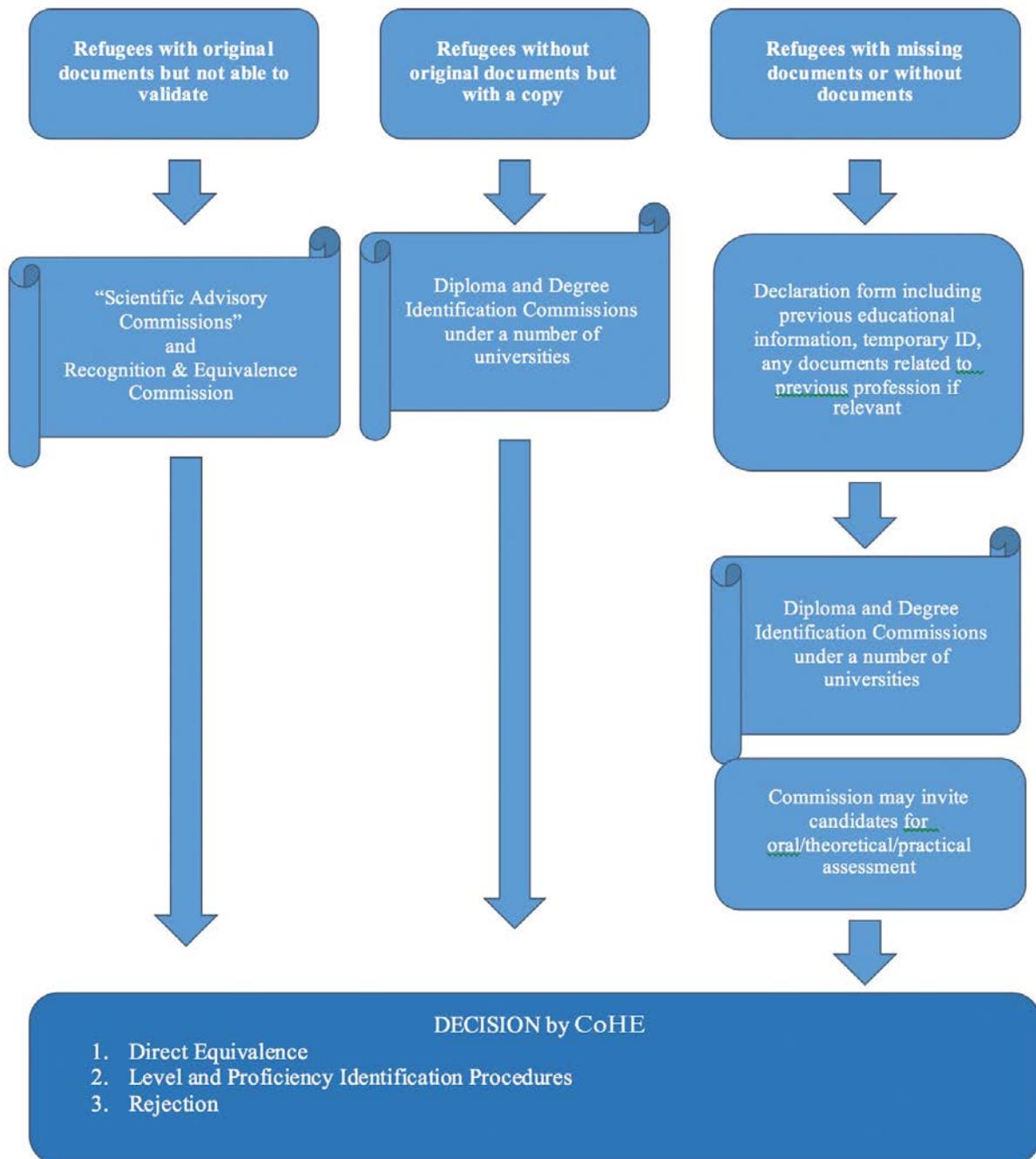


Image 2. Recognition and equivalence procedures for refugees and refugee like populations in Turkey

7.6 International Cooperation

Turkey works closely with international organizations and institutions to support refugees' integration into higher education. Turkey currently hosts the largest DAFI programme (UNHCR's worldwide scholarship programme) which provides monthly stipends to cover student living expenses, and activities to create peer support networks. Since the launch of the programme in 2014 more than 800 scholarships have been awarded (UNHCR, 2019).

Turkey's Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) works in partnership with UNHCR and HOPES to support enrolment of young Syrian and refugee high school graduates in higher education. These initiatives include offering intensive Turkish language programmes delivered by specialized language teaching institutes attached to universities, and awarding full scholarships to study at Turkish universities.

UNHCR (2019) reports that in 2018, over 4,000 students benefited from Turkish language programmes that allowed them to develop their language proficiency, which is one of the requirements for admission to university programmes. YTB also enables Syrians to attend advanced level Turkish language courses, in collaboration with UNHCR. Since 2013, more than 12,000 students obtained C1 level Turkish language certificates within this collaboration (YTB 2019). This programme is offered regardless of whether Syrians are willing to stay in higher education or not, as the main purpose is to support their social integration. As of 2019, more than 2,500 students receive Turkish language classes in 32 Turkish language centers in 18 cities (YTB 2019).

As another example of international collaboration, SPARK Turkey (non-profit international development organization) has provided scholarships to 3,182 students to support vocational training for them (SPARK 2019). In addition to Syrian students under temporary protection, SPARK also supports students from the local community. In 2018, SPARK Turkey provided 559 students including 30 Turkish students with business English courses in collaboration with TOMER Ankara University. In 2019, SPARK aims to support around 1,300 young Syrians to continue their higher education and vocational education by providing them with scholarships in collaboration with seven universities; Kilis 7 Aralık, Mersin, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa Harran, Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam, Osmaniye Korkut Ata, and Hatay Mustafa Kemal University (SPARK 2019). In addition to scholarships being provided for university degrees, SPARK currently supports 860 trainees in five different agronomy courses, namely green housing, fungal growing, dairy production, chicken breeding and reproduction of Syrian local seeds in collaboration with Harran University, GAPTEM and the Qatari Red Crescent.

A final example of good practice concerning international cooperation is the testing of NOKUT's "Qualification Passport for Refugees (QPR)"¹⁵ in Turkey. As part of the HOPES/MADAD project titled "Integrating Syrians into Turkish Higher Education through Recognition of Qualifications (REFREC-TR)", NOKUT's QPR was successfully tested in Turkey in May 2018 and eight Syrian candidates were given the passports¹⁶. Three credential evaluators from NOKUT first examined documents submitted by the participants. Then each participant was invited for a 30-40 minute structured interview where their documents and statements were carefully evaluated and cross-checked with the information in NOKUT's database.

Although it is not representative, the pilot testing provided some remarkable insights to the Turkish case. The profile of applicants specific to the pilot testing was not composed of university graduates at all, but the applicants were usually first year university students in Syria; high school graduates; or students who had enrolled at university in Syria but not taken any courses. Therefore, the applicants were required to answer more validation questions about admission and registration procedures at the HEIs in Syria during interviews, rather than questions about their education and graduation. Another common problem observed with applicants was their missing high school certifications, which created a need for extending the scope of the interviews¹⁷. Overall, the methodology proved to be supportive especially for participants with missing university documents, and participants with documents that needed validation. It was observed that interviews might be useful to validate documents if a pre-assessment by credential evaluators can be done in advance to reduce institutions' workload since they also lack experts and databases to validate submitted documents or statement-based information. For the end users such as employers and higher education institutions, QPRs can be utilized for recognition procedures that might result in legally binding decisions, as a supplement to academic and vocational assessment processes.

¹⁵ QPR contain necessary information on the applicant's highest completed qualification, work experience and language proficiency, in addition to advice and guidance about the road ahead. Further info on NOKUT's QPR: <https://www.nokut.no/en/news-2016/NOKUTs-Qualifications-Passport-for-Refugees/>

¹⁶ REFREC-TR project is conducted by Yasar University in cooperation with NOKUT and Izmir Provincial Directorate of Migration Management. The project team presents gratitude to Turkish Red Crescent Sultanbeyli Community Center and also to Refugees Association for their valuable support to contact relevant participants to be interviewed.

¹⁷ In Turkey, if the refugee student lacks high school certification, he/she can take high school completion test option which is conducted by MoNE.

7.7 Challenges on access and integration of refugees in higher education

- While Turkey has adopted an exemplary approach to ensuring refugee access and integration into higher education, the high student numbers make Turkey's efforts appreciated but also highly challenging. The critical question is how to sustain a balanced and fair approach for local students, international students and refugees and prevent any potential tensions that might arise, especially among domestic students. As Bülbül (2017) argues, despite the rapid expansion of the higher education system in Turkey in recent years, local students still experience problems of social and material inequalities during the process of accessing higher education. Positive discrimination and constructive approaches towards refugees should not underestimate the limited resources and the already competitive procedures for accessing higher education for domestic students. Thus, a long-term communication strategy and public diplomacy efforts are necessary to ensure dissemination of correct information that prevents fast growing myths and misinterpretations. This strategy should target not only domestic students but also academics and administrative staff at Turkish HEIs. Additionally, financial assistance and scholarship programmes should be offering -to an extent- support to domestic students as well.
- The decentralized and facilitated procedures for transfer students are appreciated as they ensure higher education access for a high number of Syrians, but this also leads to divergent practices among HEIs. Some HEIs deter Syrian students' applications by implementing strict transfer procedures and refusing to recognize previously taken courses. Besides, while some universities carry out detailed assessments of prior learning and allow students to enrol in the most relevant year of study, others reject previous learning outcomes and register all transfer students in the first year. These differences in approach even exist within the same HEI, varying between different faculties. Some potential reasons for divergent approaches are: a lack of standardized procedures for transfer students; a lack of course content provided by Syrian students; an inadequate number of competent staff (both academic and administrative) to examine submitted documents; language limitations; and a lack of coordination among Turkish HEIs in terms of experience sharing.
- Decentralised transfer procedures can also lead to accepting students from non-recognized HEIs, since the recognition of HEIs is carried out by CoHE but the transfer procedures are carried out autonomously by the relevant HEIs. Validation of documents and recognition of gained competences are evaluated by ad-hoc Recognition Committees established by the HEIs within the faculties. For example, while a student graduated from an HEI which is not recognized by CoHE can not get equivalency from CoHE, but another student from the same HEI might apply as a transfer student and can therefore enrol in a Turkish HEI without asking CoHE for recognition of the HEI in which the qualification was obtained.
- Another challenge is the lack of information made available by the HEIs on how to enrol, and procedures and guidelines for refugees, which creates obstacles for refugees who wish to apply. Unfortunately, not all HEIs publish their admission criteria on their websites. HEIs also require staff speaking English or Arabic to provide necessary information for refugees. The research findings of Erdoğan and Erdoğan (2018) also confirm that the main difficulties encountered by Syrians are the lack of information sources and language barriers to acquire information.
- The number of registered Syrians at Turkish HEIs is high, and although there are no official statistics it has been observed that some of them do not actually attend courses or proceed with their education but instead they work to generate income due to economic difficulties. As Yavcan and El-Ghali (2017) also highlight, problem of student attendance and dropout rates are among the common challenges. The drop out rate of Syrian students should be better traced and addressed with preventive mechanisms. Even the scholarship programmes do not regularly monitor whether the students follow through with their courses and continue their education, but they focus on increasing the number of beneficiaries.

The conditionality on attendance or on performance needs to be improved. The attendance level of Syrians also differs according to the city and the HEI they are enrolled at. For example, living expenses are high in Istanbul and there are more opportunities to work. However, in Karabük, a city located in the Black Sea coast region, living expenses are cheaper with relatively few job opportunities. As result, an HEI in Istanbul will have a higher number of registered students, but a lower number of attending students in reality.

- A large group of young Syrians are currently enrolled in secondary education in Turkey. As of February 2019, the number of Syrian school aged children is 1,100,122 (Ok 2019) and 655,454 of them are registered at schools (Özer 2019). There is potentially a large number of students within this group who will need to be supported with YÖS preparation courses and Turkish language proficiency to satisfy university admission criteria.
- In Syria, compulsory education consists of primary and lower secondary education (children aged between 6 and 15). However, in Turkey secondary education (age 14-17) is mandatory as well. Thus, Syrian parents usually prefer their sons to leave school and start working while daughters will marry at early ages. Child marriage is common, and girls are unlikely to get an education if they are married. This is also a challenge to be addressed that requires to policies targeting Syrian parents to be developed.
- Another challenge is emerging university-like institutions that are not accredited by CoHE but offering higher education programmes for refugees. These non-recognized institutions establish partnerships with HEIs in Lebanon or Syria, offer their diplomas and students then request equivalency in Turkey. CoHE rightly does not recognize these institutions or the programmes and diplomas they offer. Other institutions also offer these non-accredited programmes in neighbouring countries, as a way to exploit refugees. Some of them sell fake diplomas. Document fraud is also common within student applications.

7.8 Concluding remarks and suggestions

Through a constructive and inclusive approach, Turkey offers facilitated procedures to ensure the access and integration of refugees into higher education. This approach extends existing admission, recognition and equivalency procedures by facilitating some conditions specifically for refugees. All these initiatives should be understood within Turkey's broader policy on internationalization of higher education, which has gained momentum in the last decade. In this respect, rather than framing its approach around the debate on "lost generations", Turkey emphasizes the "gained generations" discourse by applying an inclusive framework.

Access to higher education for refugees in Turkey is decentralized; admission and transfer procedures are carried out by HEIs. The general facilitated procedures set by CoHE actually opens a path for accessing to higher education without status related obstacles. This is evident from the number of registered Syrian students at HEIs in Turkey, which is about 28,000. However, this number is distributed unevenly among HEIs. While respecting the autonomy of universities, the divergent practices especially on transferring and recognizing prior learning require some common standards and principles to be developed.

Recognition of HEIs and the diplomas received abroad is carried out centrally by CoHE. Being a signatory to the Lisbon Recognition Convention, Turkey recognizes qualifications and prior learning irrespective of international, domestic or refugee type of categorizations. Turkey should also conduct a delicate recognition and equivalency assessment process since most refugee applicants obtain their qualification in non-EHEA countries. This gives Turkey a role as the "first country of recognition" which acknowledges and integrates previous learning by transferring them to the EHEA. Besides, in Turkey the "diploma" offers direct access to the labour market for most professions. Therefore, automatic recognition becomes difficult because it might create unintended and unfair consequences in education and on the labour market. Accordingly, Turkey

implements its own assessment procedures in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention's "substantial difference" clause.

The procedures on equivalency of qualifications or diplomas are only facilitated for refugees in terms of allowing them to submit their equivalency applications with missing or without documents. The additional advisory and academic committees do evaluate these applications, whereas non-refugee applicants have to submit their applications with full documentation. It is suggested that, as with NOKUT, Turkey should also create its own database of HEIs and recognition committees where all previously approved sample diplomas, decisions, transcripts and course contents are made available. The number of students, documents and files submitted to Turkish institutions from various countries is very high. All this accumulated knowledge, experience and practices should be made accessible and be disseminated to all HEIs.

Another suggestion is that Turkey should improve its system on determining minimum national standards and qualifications to pursue different professions. Due to direct access to the labour market with only a diploma for most professions, universities and academic committees become the main actors of equivalency procedures and recognition of qualifications. Actually, academic institutions are just one of the stakeholders within the process and they are not the only relevant actors who can assess qualifications. Therefore, Turkey should make its Vocational Qualifications Authority much more involved in equivalency procedures by rearranging the professions that can be directly pursued with a higher education diploma. Vocational institutions, associations and unions should be more active in qualification assessments, while academics should focus more on recognition of education programmes and prior learning.

All in all, despite some institutional and structural challenges that can be overcome by policy interventions, Turkey's approach to integrating refugees into higher education should be understood within a broader framework of ensuring peaceful and multi-cultural co-existence based on sustainable socio-economic integration and social acceptance.

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