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Meeting in Rome: final minutes

Time: Friday, 01.06.2018 (09:00 – 16:00)

Place: CIMEA - NARIC Italia, Viale Ventuno Aprile 36, Rome

Minutes: Erlend Bern Aaser (NOKUT).

Participants: Nathanael Polli (CICIC, skype), Letizia Brambilla Pisoni (CIMEA), Silvia Bianco (CIMEA), Helge Schwitters (ESU), Henriette Stoeber (EUA), Heba Ledwon (KIRON), Theresia Strumpfel (KMK), Khaled El-Bahi (KMK), Michele Gradoli (LUISS), Barbara Kelly (QQI), Stog Arne Skjerven (NOKUT), Marina Malgina (NOKUT), Einar Meier (NOKUT), Erlend Bern Aaser (NOKUT), Samer Alzaidy (NUFFIC), Liv Silje Borg (OsloMet), Jens Kemper (University of Bremen), James Carr (University of Limerick), Elena Valbusa (Utrecht University).

1. Presentation of the project and overview of the activities

- Marina Malgina presents the Toolkit project (Refugees and Recognition) which the REACT-project builds on and the different workpackages part of the current project.
- The main outcome was the development of a comprehensive Toolkit, which will be distributed in a booklet later this summer.
- The toolkit was tested with several different partners of the project (CIMEA, KMK, ArmENIC).
- Five refugee country briefings were developed: Afghanistan, Eritrea, Irak, Syria and Libya. Logic: relevant and necessary information in one booklet. Used for EQPR in 2017.
- Five new refugee briefings for the REACT-project: Iran (NUFFIC), Somalia (KMK), DRC (QQI), Venezuela (CIMEA), Ethiopia (NOKUT).
- E-learning modules were developed for the refugee country briefings.
- REACT (Toolkit 2) builds on this project and runs from 2018 – 2020.
- Stakeholders in the project: 1) project team, 2) steering group, 3) HEIs.
- Seminar (training for higher education institutions): 26th of November in the Hague, hosted by NUFFIC.





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- **Dissemination template will be distributed by NOKUT to all participants after the meeting. This is to be filled in continuously as the project develops.**
 - Logic and content: each activity related to the project participation, information distributed internal and external. Important when reporting to the EC after the end of the project, as well as an overview for the project partners of what has been done and what should be followed up.
2. **Presentation of activities related to recognition and admission of refugee students to higher education**
- Marina Malgina presents NOKUTs activities related to the recognition of refugees higher education qualifications. This includes both internal and external activities.
 - Silvia Bianco presents CIMEAs current activities and procedures for the recognition of refugees higher education qualifications. CIMEA will work on EQPR in Sardinia next month, financed by the Italian government.
 - Theresia Strumpfel presents KMKs work with refugees higher education qualifications. Two main tasks: statement of comparability and expert assessment.
 - Samer Alzaidy presents NUFFICs work with the ION – Indication of education level, as well as other internal and external activities related to assessment of refugees higher education qualifications.
 - Barbara Kelly presents the internal and external activities of QQI, as well as the current challenges being faced in Ireland. Yearly conference, in cooperation with HEIs, which has been very successful.
 - Henriette Stoeber presents the EUAs commitment to the higher education sector of refugee integration as well as other initiatives that are part of the organisations work. Have several projects undergoing related to refugees integration into higher education, closely working with HEIs across Europe.
 - Heba Ledwon presents KIRONs work with refugees and their integration into higher education institutions across Europe. Kiron has the vision to bring higher education to everyone and is heavily involved in innovative, tailor made, digital solutions (Massive Open Online Courses - MOOCs).





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- Helge Schwitters explains and outlines the work of the European Students Union (ESU) in relation to admission for refugees into HEIs, support for this group in the process, and the recognition of qualifications, in several European countries. Create counter-narratives and change the way refugee students are portrayed in the media. Cooperation with Soros foundation, research with Kessel and regranting scheme. Large project in Denmark, where the focus has been on making relevant information more easily accessible for refugees.

3. Universities present their activities, procedures and reflections related to the topic of admission of refugee students

1) University of Utrecht (Elena Valbusa):

- Refugee crisis 2015, two programs: UU-UAF (top-down) and Inclusion (bottom-up)
- From department level to central level.
- UAF is a foundation for refugee students: targets students with academic background – thereby a competent partner.
- UU-UAF: strengthen cooperation between University and UAF. Target refugee students with academic background and scholars at risk (looking into opportunity for resettling).
- Aim: help towards meeting official educational requirements: language & discipline based, interview (intake, no admission procedure). After meeting official requirements applicants can take part in already existing courses.
- Inclusion: over 200 courses to hundreds of students each year. For both asylum seekers and permit holders.
- If students pass exam at end of courses they receive a certificate of participation.
- Can thereby gain confidence and prove able to follow academic courses: increase the probability of success in later enrollment.
- Receive ECTS registered in SD Osiris, but not the official transcript.
- Cooperation with two technical universities, to further the program at these institutions.





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- Elena confirms that the admission office at UU is on board for the project. Applicants apply online like other students. Make use of NUFFIC advice. Faculty takes over selection, if admission office decides the individual is admissible.
- Colloquium doctum: set of exams and no age requirement for refugees (as with other applicants).
- Challenges: missing documentation, prior education learning, mismatch qualification and admission (uni of applied sciences).
- Limit of courses: one per semester because of workload, but no in total over a longer period.
- Decide on courses available in dialogue with both the dean and the academic staff. This counts on an individual basis.
- Interview: assess level of English and motivation for studying at the university.
- It is mentioned that it should be looked into how the methodology of EQPR can maybe be integrated into this process.
- Fragile initiatives: the importance of leadership support.

2) LUISS (Michele Gradoli):

- Small, private, university.
- 8858 italian students and 158 foreign students.
- Internationalisation strategy: improve the reception procedures of international students.
- Project Mediterraneo: started in May 2017. Cosponsored by LUISS and Fondazione Terzo Pilastro.
- Goal: education of refugee students, offering them the possibility to attend bachelor's and master's courses.
- Established partnership with two universities in Jordan and Malta.
- 7 refugee students are part of the project enrolled as double-degree students: they live in Jordan and are students at the University of Petra.
- Challenge: they are not recognized as refugees in Italy (recognized by Jordan as refugees).
- Attend classes as regular double-degree students.





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- LUISS staff gives lectures in Jordan (students not able to travel to Italy).
- Four bachelor programmes: business administration, accounting, e-Business and Commerce, Marketing.
- Selection: first assessment made by University of Petra and CIMEA, then LUISS make final selection.

3) OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University (Liv Silje Borg):

- Professional programs: nurses, teachers and engineers.
- Inclusion of refugees: formal and informal initiatives.
- Formal procedures are more time consuming.
- Academic dugnad (volunteer course of action): response to the refugee crisis in 2015.
- Term used for a variety of initiatives: rectors at UiO and OsloMet made the initiative.
- Content: academic internship, language cafes, computer and language courses, sports events, information meetings.
- University committed to diversity: social responsibility.
- Strong collaboration with reception centres close to campus.
- From fall period: agreement with city administration.
- Complimentary educational programmes: opportunity for those with education from home country, to cover what they need to work in Norway.
Teacher/nursing/engineering and technology education.
- Staff experience: work with students who are already well trained and motivated.
- No specific method or procedure to evaluate refugees qualifications: but more holistic and dynamic approach (to see the application as a whole).
- Result: admitted one student with EQPR to courses (now intern at institute for physiotherapy).
- Challenges: details of admission procedures. How to assess applicant with EQPR in accordance to minimum grade average, specific course requirements, and ranking according to GPA?
- Can these aspects become included in assessment: relevance of degree? Language test scores? Length of education?





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- Question is raised about the flexibility of the complimentary programs? For nurses: apply first for authorization, then they will be told by the office responsible what they need to gain competence in to receive authorization.
- OsloMet: will develop more programmes in English in the time ahead.

4) University of Bremen (Jens Kemper):

- 2013: initiative started.
- Built up programme called In Touch: april 2014.
- Started with ca 25 people: 7 received a certificate.
- 2015: number of applicants under tremendous increase.
- Everybody that fulfilled the requirements could participate.
- Refugees Welcome: cooperation.
- University wanted progress and development.
- Office of the Rectorate involved.
- Language preparation, TestAS (5 hrs test of academic), send documents they have which are then checked by university assistant.
- 2016: preparation programme (HERE).
- Started with 60 places.
- Second term: took in 140 individuals.
- Peak time: 250 participants last semester.
- Changed the Bremen University Act: extra entrance examination semester (only one semester for those with secondary ed. Certificate). Have to do written and oral exam.
- When they reach sufficient language level: have an interview - therefore very much interested in Toolkit.
- Experience: applicants got ahold of some papers after a period of time.
- Comment by Theresia: different procedures in the different federal states.
- Comment by Einar: it has originally been thought that the HEIs will cooperate with NARICs; but the HEIs can have a lot to learn by cooperating with each other directly.





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5) University of Limerick (James Carr):

- Good cooperation with QQI.
- University of Sanctuary: support refugees in local environment and welcomes to higher education.
- Fragility of the process.
- Noted that Mairead Moriarty will be the head of the project from UOL's side.
- Established in 1972.
- Broad specter of sciences.
- Different projects related to migrant communities.
- Key obstacles: financial, legal status (asylum seekers), language barrier, poor recognition of prior learning.
- REC-provision: housing and food. Low level of financial support.
- Primary and secondary school for children: entitled to according to regulations.
- Higher education: not entitled (asylum seekers).
- Recognition of prior learning: have been dealing with on a case-by-case basis, nothing formalized.
- From admission office to staff with no experience; make decision. Fragile approach.
- Lack of systematic guidelines to deal with applications: need more systematic guidelines to ensure fair and transparent treatment.
- University of Sanctuary: committed to three-year action plan to promote access and integrate refugees into higher education.
- Sanctuary scholarships: aim to offer 5 for 2017/2018.
- Changed: offered 17 students free access to one-year course. Financial element: fee of only 100 euro, transportation fee taken by university, bought laptops, and provided a small fee for food.
- Some students were not taken into the programme: vulnerable individuals so had to take a thorough assessment.
- Entrance based on interview: decided if they were ready to enter the course.
- Issues faced: 2 students dropped out (lack of resources).
- Formation of UOL sanctuary steering group.
- English language provision. Also focus on CV and interview skills.





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- Important to secure the scholarship funding: looks promising.
- Want to develop MOOCs.
- Would like to engage law, journalist and social science students to assist refugees.

4. CICIC (Nathanael Poli):

- 2015: government decided to welcome 25.000 Syrian refugees
- Demanding situation: idea of a workshop to engage the relevant stakeholders.
- Goal: to build knowledge within Canadian assessment community, for refugees and displaced persons.
- 2015 – 2017: more than 40.000 Syrian refugees.
- Workshop: 93 participants from across Canada and Europe
- Learn from each other and share experiences.
- Outcome: identify best practices and guidelines for the Canadian assessment communities. Help organizations build new practices for the assessment of refugee applicants.
- Approach: country profile and comparability statement (assessment services only; background paper; some documentation; some verifiable documentation; testing of skills and competences (recognition bodies only).
- Assessment services (non-binding) and recognition bodies.
- CICIC recommended best practices and guidelines: 13 in total.
- Practical worksheet: meant for organisations' policies. Consists of initial and additional considerations.
- CICICs website: toolbox accessible for Canadian evaluators.

5. 12.45 – 13.00: Testing of the Qualifications Passport approach in cooperation with the Italian universities

- CIMEA: free of charge statement of comparability.
- Mandate: information centre.
- HEIs are autonomous and therefore CIMEA provides them with guidance.
- CNVQR: 2017





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- 25 participating HEIs; Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research; UNHCR.
- Presented the Academic Pass of Refugee Qualifications, developed in the Toolkit project).
- Tested in summer of 2017.
- Transfer knowledge, as HEIs responsible for recognition.
- Two testings:
- Qualifications passport for refugees (Academic Pass of Refugee Qualifications): testing in 6 universities, translation into Italian language.
- Refugee country briefings: preparation of interviews and in training.
- Called Academic Pass of Refugee Qualifications because it is in line with the purpose of the instrument and with the nature of CIMEA within the Italian context.
- Same value as statement of comparability; advice to HEIs, not legally binding.
- Pre-testing: asked HEIs for open cases of evaluation of refugee qualifications.
- 11 cases; 6 hosting institutions.
- Issued 9 academic passes, based on 11 cases evaluated.
- One unsubstantiated case and one with false documents.
- Outcomes: Pass Academico.
- Choosing candidates: refugee status and minimum qualification giving access to higher education. Proposed by the host university (admission office in contact with interested candidates). Questionnaire.
- One hour of training: information on education system of country, interview procedure and issuing of pass.
- Interview: CIMEA staff (1), admissions officer (1) and observers (HEIs). Discussion around content of questionnaire and other relevant issues.
- Lessons learned: applicant is a main source of information (interview important); personal questions should only be asked if relevant; interview is helpful for educational information if without documents.
- Question: how to handle interviews with applicants with poor language skills in English or local language? Answer: often able to have credential evaluator available with relevant language competence.





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6. Questions (4) to participants will be distributed by NOKUT (Marina) today, focusing on best practices and challenges.

- Deadline of answers to be sent to NOKUT: by the end of next week (10.06.2018).
- Aim to move from ad-hoc to systematic approaches that can be implemented by the institutions.

7. **Comments, responses and discussion on the presented initiatives**

- James Carr: proposal that the HEIs should work more closely together throughout the project, as there are similar barriers that are being faced which are approached differently.
- QQI: create an inventory of interventions? Compiled and circulated?
- It is noted that the Refugees Welcome Map from EUA is an inventory.
- HEI challenges from EUA Refugees Welcome Map: ask Henriette to bring this for the next meeting.
- Explore the idea brought up by James Carr more thoroughly in the meeting in November.
- Marina: as soon as Refugee Briefings are completed, they will be distributed to the whole consortium.

