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Kick-off meeting with consortium – ARENA project

Time: Tuesday, 20.10.2020 (12:00 – 15:00 CEST)

Place: Online meeting – Microsoft Teams

Participants: Silvia Bianco (CIMEA), Emanuela Gitto (CIMEA), Margriet Van de Leur (NUFFIC), Stefan Sant (MQRIC), Jon Vercellono (MQRIC), Bessy Athanasopoulou (D.O.A.T.A.P), Dominique Van der Velpen (NARIC-Vlaanderen), Kim Vanelderden (NARIC-Vlaanderen), Henriette Stoeber (European University Association), Martina Darmanin (European Students Union), Fanchon Lefevre (European Students Union), Samir Heco (Council of Europe), Ceren Genc (European Association for International Education), Maria Drakaki (International Hellenic University), Josef Buttigieg (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology), Roberta Zammit (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology), Roberta Gatt (Malta College of Arts, Science & Technology), Adriana Bortolotti (University of Brescia), Megan van der Moezel (University of Utrecht), Rocío Iglesias de Ussel (Technical Support Team of the ENIC-NARIC Networks), Marina Malgina (NOKUT), Erlend Bern Aaser (NOKUT) and Kristina Rognlien Aardal (NOKUT).

1. Welcome and introduction to the project (Marina Malgina)

- Very glad to welcome everyone to the start of this third cycle Toolkit-project, which will run from 2020-2022.
- The project will build on the results from the previous projects, with the Toolkit from the first cycle project and the Q-Card developed in the REACT project.
- Broad experience and knowledge related to this topic at the organisations part of the consortium.
- Project team: NARIC centres of Norway (coordinator), Italy, the Netherlands, Greece, Malta and Belgium (Flanders).
- Steering group: European University Association, European Students Union, Council of Europe and the European Association of International Education.
- Higher Education Institutions: University of Utrecht, International Hellenic University, University of Brescia and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology.

2. Work packages, project objectives and task distribution (Erlend Bern Aaser)

(see presentation for more detailed information)

- WP3 on refugees country briefings and e-learning materials is in progress.
- Next up will be the workshop with HEIs (WP4) and the testing in Malta and Greece (WP5).
- EQPR pathway (WP6) and Sustainability Management (WP7) will be started on in 2021.
- In WP7: integrate a broader focus on sustainability in this cycle.
- Focus areas in all WPs: preparation, implementation and dissemination.
- There are 11 different work packages in this project. **WP1** (Partnership meeting) started in June, with an online meeting with the partners focused on task distribution, agree on the project's objectives, identify five countries for the refugees country briefings and discuss the process of recruiting HEIs.



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- WP2** Kick-off meeting w/consortium is to achieve a common understanding, agree on task distribution, learn more about all participant's motivation for taking part in the project and provide clarity on administrative and financial requirements.
- **WP3** Refugees country briefings and e-learning materials. We are developing country briefings on Yemen, Burundi, Rwanda, Sudan and Palestine. The responsible centres are NARIC-Vlaanderen, CIMEA and NOKUT. The country briefing on Yemen is completed and available on the project's website. The briefings on Burundi and Rwanda are ready for print, and the briefings on Sudan and Palestine will be finalized soon. All five briefings will be available on the project's website during this fall.
 - **WP4** Workshop with HEIs: online workshop where NOKUT will provide training in the Toolkit methodology, in order to get a clear understanding of the tools and methods of the Toolkit. Tentative date is November 17th, but a new date will be found if this does not suit everyone.
 - **WP5** Testing of the toolkit in Greece and Malta. This work package has a two-fold value: providing applicants (refugees) an opportunity to have their qualifications assessed and capacity building with the HEIs and NARICs, which is important in terms of building knowledge.
 - **WP8** National seminar for stakeholders and HEIs in Greece + **WP9** National seminar for stakeholders and HEIs in Malta: EUA + ESU will help towards dissemination of results.
 - **WP6** EQPR pathway. University of Brescia and CIMEA have both been involved in Council of Europe's EQPR-project. Focus on how HEIs in Italy can view EQPR as a supplementary document for admission to further studies.
 - **WP7** Further implementation of the Toolkit and sustainability of best practices procedures at the University of Utrecht. The university will work on this WP in cooperation with NUFFIC. Integrate a broader focus to manage sustainability and how this work can be developed even further.
 - **WP10** Development of e-learning materials on best practice cases of recognition and admission of refugee students. Project team + HEI subcontractors will cooperate on this work package.
 - **WP 11** Final dissemination seminar in Brussels (sustainability and dissemination). Broader dissemination of project and achieved results to HEIs, ENIC-NARICs and policymakers.

3. Brief presentations from the participant countries and steering group members

Erlend Bern Aaser (NOKUT)

- NOKUT started on work with refugees on a national level in 2013, development of interview-based methodology and procedures.
- In 2016: the first Erasmus+ Toolkit-project.
- In 2017 together with Council of Europe – the EQPR-project, which is still running. The methodology was in 2019 put to a global level, with the work on the UNESCO Qualifications Passport (UQP).

Henriette Stoeber (European University Association)

- Refugee at risk and recognition of refugees' qualifications have been big topics for EUA over the years, especially since 2015.



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Mapping of institutional activities across Europe, staff training, publishing reports, the and universities have been very cooperative – more sustainable over the years.

- EUA tried to convince the European Commission on a scholarship program for refugees as part of the Erasmus+, but this was blocked.
- EUA are currently very active and in contact with universities on this topic, but there are always two questions that are coming up; funding (who is funding) and recognition. Important to continue this work as more organizations would be interested in this topic.

Martina Darmanin (European Students Union)

- ESU has led projects since 2016 and has supported over 50 projects over Europe: student-led project on increasing inclusion of refugees into education, especially higher education.
- Involvement in this project: improving advocacy on government consortium to push for policies of inclusion of refugees into higher education.
- New website: <https://www.togethertomorrow.eu/>

Samir Heco (Council of Europe)

- EQPR aims to fairly assess the qualifications refugees have that cannot be proved by the documents provided.
- The standard EQPR-document: assess and present the highest achieved qualification in addition to information on relevant work experience and language proficiencies.
- EQPR aims to help refugees for further studies in their new country and to access relevant work, with the methodology developed by NOKUT.
- The project started in 2017 together with NOKUT, CIMEA, DOATAP and UK NARIC.
- Today's participating countries: Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania and the United Kingdom.
- The EQPR was first for academic qualifications, and in 2018 the methodology was adapted to the assessment of upper secondary qualifications. There have also been conducted online interviews in the previous sessions, and because of the pandemic, the sessions with University of Brescia (which was supposed to be held in Italy) was held online.

Ceren Genc (European Association for International Education)

- Very excited to take part and contribute as part of this project.
- Several different "hats" in terms of participation in the project: member of EAIE, Team Leader for International Student Admissions at Utrecht University and have been working on projects in Turkey with focus on refugees, higher education and employment.

Silvia Bianco (CIMEA)

- 2016: evaluation of the qualifications of refugees through participation in the first toolkit project.
- 2017: participated in the EQPR-pilot project. CIMEA created a national tool for the evaluation of the refugees ("Academic passport").
- 2018: participated in REACT with university testing and developing country briefing. CIMEA is still one of the participating countries in the EQPR-project, and this year's EQPR session organised with the University of Brescia was held online. They have interviewed almost 200 candidates in Italy (6 sessions) and over 50 EQPR-holders are enrolled in Italian universities.
- CIMEA has a service that is status of comparability that is free for refugees and has since 2015 issued over 600 statements for refugees in Italy to enrol in higher institutions.



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The first and second round of the Toolkit-projects were very useful for implementation of these procedures and in terms of networking, peer-learning activity on this topic. This is still very high on the agenda at national level.

Adriana Bortolotti (University of Brescia)

(see presentation for more detailed information)

- The university was founded in 1982, with 8 departments and 4 areas; Economics, Engineering, Law and Medicine.
- The University of Brescia is deeply involved in the UN Global Goals.
- Ongoing projects: STAR scholarship started from the 2017/2018 academic year: a yearly grant of 5750 Euros (5 winners: 1 postgraduate and 4 undergraduates from Eritrea, Nigeria, Syria and Sudan). Starting from this academic year: all refugees and all holders of international protection will benefit from exemption from university contribution and are not paying any fees.
- In 2019: signed a panel for inclusive university issued by UNHCR and are now planning to take part in the project UNICORE starting from 2021/2022.
- Participated and organized the fifth session of the EQPR, and one of the EQPR-holder is enrolled at the university (in total 3 EQPR-holders enrolled at the universities).
- The EQPR-passport is accepted for admission due to missing official documents. Will create official procedures and tools to enrol refugees.

Margriet van de Leur (NUFFIC)

(see presentation for more detailed information)

- Refugees that are eligible for diploma evaluation as part of the refugee program get this for free as part of the civic integration programme.
- The possible outcomes: credential evaluation for those provided the required documents of a completed degree, evaluation of unfinished studies and indication of educational level (since 2013) which is a non-binding document which is a general comparison to the Dutch education level.
- NUFFIC developed a Toolkit in 2015 in cooperation with several HEIs, to help HEIs develop a procedure enabling refugees who cannot provide educational documents to access higher education.
- NUFFIC also participated in the Toolkit-projects and is also one of the participating countries in the EQPR-project.
- Motivation for taking part in the ARENA-project: believe in this product, the procedure is quick and practical which makes it easy to implement in the higher education institutions' admissions procedures and to further promote the topic among higher institutions and other NARICs.

Due to positive experiences in previous projects, NUFFIC believes in a continuation of the previous projects and contribution towards new projects activities.

Megan van der Moezel (Utrecht University)

(see presentation for more detailed information)

- Participated in the previous Toolkit-project, in order to test the Toolkit at the university.
- The reason that they were approached to participate was that the university also has a project called InClUusion which aims at students with a refugee background that are on a



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- hold in refugee centres and waiting for their status, and allows them to participate for free in courses offered by the university.
- The aim is to include people who are waiting whether they can stay or not to allow them to get into contact with the higher education in the Netherlands to see if it suits them and what possibilities that are available.
 - It is important for the university to provide this group the opportunity to get an education here. Refugee students usually have the required documentation, but there is a small group who do not have all the necessary documents they normally require in order to apply for one of the programmes, and this project helps with methodology of acceptance of students with missing documents.

Stefan Sant (MQRIC)

(see presentation for more detailed information)

- Motivation for this project: we were aware of the Toolkit 1 and Toolkit 2, but we were never active participant in the project and neither did we have time to implement the outcomes of these both studies.
- The current situation of Malta is that we have a fractured approach to how we approach to how we recognize refugee qualifications. ENIC-NARIC has its own procedure which depends on the cooperation with how NGOs working with the refugees, and the higher education institutions also have their own approaches.
- Outcome of this project: the lessons that we learn from this projects, both MQRIC, the ENIC-NARICs and Malta College of Art, Science and Technology, it will give a lot of momentum and weight so that we push to a more uniform national policy on recognition of refugee qualification.
- MQRIC procedures: offer a free service for the recognition of qualifications of refugees, but the stumbling block is that we treat them the same as any other applicant. The problem with this is that the majority of refugees don't have documentation, and with the kind of recognition statement that we provide, the refugees will have a problem finding a job or to access higher education without supporting or any original certificate.
- We need to develop tools where we can substantiate the qualifications that the asylum seekers and refugees alleging to possess.
The reason why Malta College of Art, Science and Technology was chosen to this project is that it is Malta's leading vocational education and training institution and the institution provide courses from MQF Level 1 to Level 7, and with their wide competences, their involvement is crucial for both Malta and MQRIC to solidify our working policy on how to treat refugees and asylum seekers.

Josef Buttigieg (Malta College of Art, Science and Technology)

- This project can be of help to the institution to provide the same opportunities to everyone.
- The institution tries to follow the same admission process for everyone, but in cases with lack of certification, they use other tools. Such as an admissions board and conducting interviews for level placement.
- For MQF Level 1 and MQF Level 2, refugee applicants will go through an initial assessment test for level placement.



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Maria Drakaki (International Hellenic University)

(see presentation for more detailed information)

- DOATAP: refugee children have access and are enrolled to primary and secondary education in Greece (since 2016).
- There is no legal framework in Greece for refugees to enter higher education, but the refugee children who are enrolled and finish Greek secondary education can formally take the Pan-Hellenic examinations to access higher education.
- However, many refugees cannot be enrolled into higher education because they do not have the legal or official documentation.
- DOATAP and the International Hellenic University hope now that they can test the use of the EQPR-passports regarding access into higher education, and that the Toolkit can be adopted and further developed by DOATAP and IHU. They also wish to disseminate the result of this project to the Ministry and to other stakeholders.
- International Hellenic University: up until 2019, the university was the only university in Greece that legally could offer bachelor/master/PhD degree programmes in English.
- During the academic year 2019/2020, international students from 40 different nationalities, from countries such as Palestine, Pakistan, Lebanon, Cameroon and Turkey are actively enrolled into the university.
- In 2020/2021 the university hope to contribute to enabling access to refugees to higher education by developing sustainable solution through this project in cooperation with DOATAP.
- A new postgraduate programme will start in 2020/2021: humanitarian analytics and crisis management.
- After 2019, the university merged with the former polytechnical educational institutes (three institutes), and IHU is now the second largest university in Greece with 9 schools and 60.000 students.

Kim Vanelderren and Dominique Van der Velpen (NARIC-Vlaanderen)

(see presentation for more detailed information)

- Three Ministries of Education and three ENIC-NARICs in Belgium (French community, German Speaking Community and Flemish Community).
- NARIC-Vlaanderen act as service under the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training.
- The decision is a legally binding decision, which has the same legal value as the Flemish qualification. Mainly work for the labour market, because the higher institutions are autonomous and can accept students themselves directly into their programmes.
- NARIC-Vlaanderen received the highest number of applications from refugees in 2017. Top ten countries in 2019 with applications from refugees: Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran, Burundi, Pakistan, Russia and Egypt.
- NARIC-Vlaanderen has two procedures: specific procedures or level recognition.
- Around 70 % of their applicants are exempted from payment of the procedure, including refugees and asylum seekers.
- Procedure for refugees or persons in a refugee-like situation: they are allowed to submit an incomplete file, but the minimum requirement is at least one supporting document (diploma/provisional, diploma/duplicate of diploma/transcript of the last year).
- Motivation for taking part in the project: around 20 % of the applications are from applicants who are refugees or persons in a refugee-like situation. Many applications from Burundi, Rwanda and DRC.



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Kim worked on the country briefing on DRC in the second Toolkit-project and is excited on developing country briefings on Burundi and Rwanda in this project.

- It is good practice in connecting country information which is important for ENIC-NARICs. Also to share good practices regarding the recognition of refugee credentials.

4. Presentation and clarification of the administrative and financial issues (Erlend Bern Aaser)

(see presentation for more detailed information)

- Grant agreement: regulates the relationship between NOKUT as a coordinator, the partners and the EACEA.
- Estimated total costs: approx. 177.000 Euros. 25 % contribution from the partners themselves and 75 % from the Erasmus+ grant.
- Revised cost and budgets for travel after the pandemic.
- Contract and more information to the subcontractors and steering group will be sent soon.
- Each partner has their own budget regarding the different costs involved.
- Real costs: all costs claimed must be based on incurred costs, which are documented.
- Changed regulations regarding audit, from the previous Toolkit projects.
- There is no need to have an audit revising the budget and all of the costs in this project. However, several supporting documents must be provided to the coordinator along the way and at the end of the project period. This is for the partners, not the subcontractors.
- Templates for the time and travel sheet will be distributed to the partners.
- Four reporting periods in order to make the reporting easier.
- Partnership and subcontracting agreements develop based on template from the REACT project.
- Pre-financing on 50% of estimated costs to be transferred after signing of agreements. Remaining 50% to be calculated and transferred at the end of the project period, after approval of project from EACEA.
- Answer to question from Adriana: Erlend will send an updated version of the contract.
Answer to question from Margriet: Erlend will send the details on working hours/days from the agreement.

5. Summary of meeting and looking ahead towards upcoming activities (Marina Malgina)

- The next activity is WP4 Workshop with HEIs and then WP5 Testing of the toolkit in Greece and Malta. Suggested date for the online workshop is 17th of November, and the participants are to check whether the date is suitable for you.
- Regarding finalising of the refugees country briefings (WP3): receive briefings on Sudan and Palestine soon.
- E-learning in WP3: we will start working on this in January 2021. More information will be provided for the involved partners. Schedules for the webinars will be disseminated to everyone.
- The project's website: <https://www.nokut.no/en/arena-toolkit-3>
- Contracts and administrative information will be sent to everyone by Erlend in the coming weeks.