

Summary

The Nordic Council of Ministers has for many years been working to abolish obstacles for mobility between the Nordic countries. Free movement of labor is furthermore a fundamental principle in the EU's internal market.

Effective recognition schemes for applicants with foreign education and professional qualifications are an important measure for promoting mobility, both for those who wish to study or work in one of the Nordic countries, and for employers and businesses that are looking for qualified labor. The global refugee crisis has highlighted the need for such recognition schemes as all the Nordic countries have received a large number of refugees to be integrated into education or the labor market. In this context, more knowledge about what characterizes efficient recognition schemes for different groups is needed.

About the assignment

The goal of the assignment is to get an overview of recognition schemes for applicants with foreign education and foreign professional qualifications in the various Nordic countries, with the aim to reducing border barriers between the Nordic countries and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. Furthermore, the assignment will map the different countries' offerings for supplementary education in order to close the gap between the applicant's education and what is required in order to get their professional qualifications recognized.

The assignment is in two parts. This report relates to part 1 which consists of 1a) a survey of the schemes for the recognition of foreign education, 1b) survey of regulatory professions and schemes for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications and 1c) survey of supplementary education schemes.

The second part of the assignment, part 2, is a comparative analysis in which the results from part 1 will be analysed across the Nordic countries. The report from part 2 will be available in July 2017.

The data from part 1 consists of extensive desk research for each of the countries covered by the survey. In addition, 86 interviews have been conducted, primarily with people at government level in the various countries. In Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway, national validation workshops have also been carried out with key stakeholders..

Main findings

In the following sections, the main findings from the report are presented with regard to: a) recognition schemes for foreign education; b) regulatory professions and recognition of foreign professional qualifications; and c) organization of supplementary education.

Recognition schemes for foreign educations

The report shows that there are both similarities and differences between the Nordic countries regarding the organization of the recognition schemes for foreign education. At a general level, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland all have a central government body; University and Higher Education Council (UHR) in Sweden, the Norwegian Agency for Quality in Education (NOKUT) in Norway, the Danish Research and Education Board, and ENIC / NARIC office under the Ministry of Education, Research and Culture who conduct the assessment and recognition of foreign education that are not related to regulatory professions.

Finland's ENIC / NARIC office is the Finnish National Agency for Education (FNAE). The FNAE provides advice to colleges on issues related to the recognition of academic education in general, as well as assessing and making decisions regarding the recognition of foreign education for some of the regulated professions in Finland.

Even though the countries at an overall level have organized the recognition system in a similar manner, there are still major differences between the mandates of the recognition bodies and the organization of the recognition process. The variations include whether there are different types of recognition schemes, whether the recognition is legally binding or advisory, and whether the recognition scheme applies to multi-level education. These differences are reflected, inter alia, in the big differences in how many applications the different countries receive: In Sweden, UHR received just over 27,000 applications for so-called general recognition of foreign education in 2016, while the corresponding figures for Norway and Denmark were 7,661 (in 2016) and 2,474 (in 2015). Finnish Education Agency (FNAE) received 836 applications by 2015. Again, it is important to emphasize that the figures are not directly comparable, because the system of recognition is different. Therefore, the different numbers should be read primarily as an indication of differences in the organization of the system, and not directly as an indication of activity related to the recognition of foreign education.

Regulatory professions and recognition of foreign professional qualifications

In this report, we use "regulated professions" on professions regulated according to the EU Professional Qualifications Directive (Directive 2005/36 / EC, as amended by Directive 2013/55 / EU) in the various countries. Professions governed by other national legislation, which are not based on the EU Professional Qualification Directive, are therefore not included in the report.

Big difference in the number of regulatory professions

The report shows that the number of regulatory professions and the authorities responsible for the various regulatory professions varies: Norway has 163 regulatory professions (15 recognition offices), Denmark has 139 (24 recognition offices), Sweden has 66 (15 recognition offices), Finland has 83 (16 recognition offices) and Iceland has 177 (9 recognition offices). However, the figures are not directly comparable as the different medical specialties are registered differently. In Norway, the different doctoral specializations are regarded as a separate regulatory profession, while this is not the case in Sweden or Denmark. Greenland and the Faroe Islands differ from the other countries included in the survey because they are not part of the European cooperation and thus not covered by the EU Qualifications Directive.

Requirements for recognition vary

Furthermore, the survey shows that the recognition process for the regulatory professions varies between different professions and between different countries. The requirements that must be met in order for a foreign professional qualification to be approved also vary. The exception is for professionals with EU / EEA qualifications covered by the EU Professional Qualifications Directive. For this group, the qualifications will initially be approved, provided that it cannot be documented that the qualification differs significantly from the requirements for corresponding national qualifications. However, the interpretation of what constitutes a significant deviation is discretionary, and this report shows that different recognition offices and countries have different practices regarding what is considered to be significant deviations. As an example, the report indicates that Norwegian recognition authorities have consistently adopted stricter recognition practices than the other countries, but several informants now state that this has changed.

For applicants with professional qualifications not covered by the Professional Qualifications Directive, ie applicants from third countries, countries have different requirements, procedures and practices related to recognition. The Danish and the (new) Norwegian scheme for the recognition of health care professionals with third-country education is relatively similar, as both countries require preliminary / initial self-assessment before the candidates must complete and pass courses in language, courses in the Danish / Norwegian legislation and organization of the health sector, courses in drug handling, etc. A similar system is also established for health care professionals in Finland. Some informants have expressed concern that the requirements for health care professionals trained in third countries are significantly stricter than those of EU / EEA qualifications, which many applicants perceive as unfair. On the other hand, other informants emphasize that strict requirements are necessary to maintain patient safety.

Sweden has a different model for the recognition of professional qualifications from third countries. This is largely linked to the supplementary education system and is very extensive. In addition to a process similar to the Norwegian, Danish and Finnish for those who evaluate their qualifying qualifications as a whole, there is a comprehensive offer for supplementary education to those who do not receive their approved qualifications. However, the Swedish system of recognition has recently been revised. Unlike earlier, less emphasis is now placed on the fact that the foreign education must “correspond to Swedish education” and more emphasis that the qualification must “adequately match” with Swedish education.

Lack of statistics at several recognition offices

The report was supposed to include statistics on the number of applications, country of origin etc. for a selection of regulated professions. However, the data collection has shown that there are very different systems for documenting the number of applicants and applications, both within the various recognition offices in each country and between the different countries. In Norway, the largest recognition office, the Norwegian Directorate of Health, which approves all the regulatory professions associated with the health care sector, currently does not have the opportunity to obtain statistics on applications. Denmark differs from the other countries as both the Patient Safety Board and the Board of Research and Education, which are the recognition offices for the professions related to the health care sector and the education sector, have detailed statistics available for all professions. For example, the statistics show that in 2015, the Patient Safety Board received 348 applications from doctors educated in a third country and 454 applications from doctors educated within the EU / EEA. The corresponding number for nurses was 88 (third country) and 54 (EU / EEA) and for dentist 72 (third country) and 29 (EU / EEA).

Updated and detailed knowledge of applicants and their country of origin and qualifications is a key prerequisite for establishing good offers for supplementary education. Where the recognition offices do not have access to systematic data across the target group, this provides a challenge.

Supplementary education

In this report, the following definition of supplementary education is used:

Supplementary education refers to permanent, customized courses or programs aimed at those with an education from an institution in a country outside [Norway] who needs this completed in order for the education to be regarded as equivalent to similar [Norwegian] education.

Furthermore, the survey of supplementary education exclusively covers education re-lated to regulatory professions. This is due to the fact that the need for supplementary education is greatest for the regulatory professions that require a recognition of the foreign professional qualification in order to exercise the profession.

Supplementary education schemes have different priorities

The report shows that supplementary education is prioritized differently in the Nordic countries, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The latter, as well as Iceland, differ from the others because the report has not identified any forms of supplementary education corresponding to the definition used in this survey.

In Norway, there has been more political awareness about the need for supplementary education in recent years and new offers have been created for nurses and teachers, respectively. In addition, an offer will be made to those with science and technology education. This comes as an addition to existing offers for dentists, veterinarians and animal welfare services. In Denmark and Finland, the report has identified some courses and programs that function as complementary, but do not match the definition we use for this report. The identified programs are for example not specifically designed and aimed at people with foreign education, but is part of the ordinary education offer in the countries.

Sweden stands out by having a large offer of supplementary education for those with foreign education. A number of teaching institutions have been commissioned since 2006 to offer supplementary education for different professions, and today the offer includes 17 professions and 23 institutions. The offer is rooted in a separate regulation and institutions receive additional funding for each of those attending in the supplementary education programs. Several evaluations of the schemes have been completed and the conclusion is that the offer for supplementary education is very successful in order to bring people with foreign qualifications integrated into the labour market. Among other things, a report from the University Chancellor's Office in 2016 showed that 66 per cent of those who had participated in the supplementary education programs were established in the labour market within one year of completing their education.