EAIE webinar: qualifications recognition for refugees

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Speakers

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Recognition of qualifications for refugees and displaced persons: Norwegian approach

Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) - Independent agency, established by the Universities and Colleges Act in 2003
Refugee situation in Norway

Refugees from 169 countries in Norway in 2015

Kilde: Statistisk sentralbyrå.
Refugee situation in Norway

Registered asylum applications by top-5 countries in 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citizenship</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>Change as from 2014</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>10 536</td>
<td>427 %</td>
<td>1 999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>6 987</td>
<td>1107 %</td>
<td>579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>2 991</td>
<td>1508 %</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>2 947</td>
<td>2 %</td>
<td>2 882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>1 342</td>
<td>1242 %</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other countries</td>
<td>6 342</td>
<td>11 %</td>
<td>5 734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>31 145</td>
<td>171 %</td>
<td>11 480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Utlendingsdirektoratet/Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI))
## Applications to NOKUT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>365</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The U.S. Department of Education is dedicated to:
- Establishing policies on federal financial aid for education.
- Collecting data on America's schools and disseminating research.
- Focusing national attention on key educational issues.
- Prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal access to education.

Education is primarily a State and local responsibility in the United States.

US higher education is decentralized
Scope of decentralization

- The policy for qualifications recognition can be as varied as the individual school itself.
- The source of a qualification requirement may come from various sources
  - The State government
  - An accreditation board
  - A university Board of Regents
  - A university department/faculty

There are about 4600 degree-granting institutions in the USA, including 2-year and 4-year schools.
University of Colorado Boulder

- Public, state supported research university located in Boulder, Colorado, USA
- Governed by the Colorado Board of Regents
- 30,789 total student enrollment (Fall 2015)
- 45,684 student applications received for fall 2015
Is your process centralized or decentralized?
NOKUT’s general recognition

NOKUT considers

- The accreditation status of the educational institution and the qualification in the country where the education was received
- The duration of the program
- The grade obtained in the program

Verification if necessary

NOKUT’s decision states

- The duration of the program
- The credits recognized
- The corresponding Norwegian academic degree for the program, if any

Note! Equivalent / comparable, not identical
NOKUT's general recognition - Documentation requirements

A) Identification card
B) Proof of name change
C) Documentation from higher education
D) Documentation from high school
What if the applicant can’t submit the required documentation or if the documentation is insufficient?

Applicants with foreign higher education, whom cannot be granted general recognition due to missing, insufficient or unverifiable documentation, will be referred to the UVD- procedure, Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation

- Inspired by Lisbon Recognition Convention, Article VII
- Established according to the recommendations in the European Area of Recognition Manual, Chapter 12: Refugees
NOKUT - Section for recognition of refugees’ qualifications (since December 2015)

• UVD-procedure – recognition scheme for persons without verifiable documentation

• Assistance in evaluations for «Students at Risk» scheme (based on UVD-methodology)

• Fast track evaluation procedure (from 2016)
Status as of December 2015

260 formal decisions (May 2013 – December 2015)

- Engineering
- Architecture
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Physics
- Mathematics
- Journalism
- Economy
- Statistics
- Agronomy
- Psychology
- Geology
- Language (Arabic, English, Dari, Spanish, French)
University of Colorado Boulder

- Applicants without qualifications are relatively rare for the University of Colorado Boulder
- Countries of origin
  - Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine
- Affects students applying to all levels (post-secondary, graduate/post-graduate)
Recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation (UVD-procedure) – an alternative way to recognition of qualification

Ordinary process for NOKUT’s general recognition

- Assessment of documentation
- Verification, if necessary

Legally binding decision on recognition as on par with Norwegian higher education

Recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation (UVD-procedure)

Mapping of applicant’s background

NOKUT’s assessment/level placement of qualifications

Assessment by expert committee appointed by NOKUT
What’s the plan?

- How would you start this process?
- Who would you contact?
- What resources are at your disposal?
- How well do you know your campus or organization?
- Is the process formalized, transparent and accessible?

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

A well-thought-out policy can cover multiple situations.
Identify situations in which applicants requesting a service are legitimately unable to provide complete academic credentials.

• Who is seeking a service
  – Refugees/asylees
  – International students
  – Permanent residents of the US

• What is being sought
  – Admission
  – Transfer credit toward a degree
  – Qualifications recognition for another purpose
Assessment and best practices

Balance compassion with practicality in meeting the needs of your organization.

• Behind each request is an individual who wishes to better his or her circumstances.

• As a representative of your institution or organization, you are responsible to do due diligence in carrying out the mission of that institution or organization.
Start the process

- Identify existing appeal process
- Alternatively, develop a process
Know your university or organization

What are the standard requirements?

What can the student submit?

- Request detailed information from the applicant.
- Do your research on the situation as described by the applicant.
- Analyze the information and establish an assessment of the incomplete or missing academic credentials.
Contact the Decision Makers

• Identify the stakeholders and decision makers, and their purpose in the process

  – University Administration
  – Graduate (Post-Graduate) School
  – Academic Department
  – Admissions Office
  – Registrar
  – Subject Matter Experts
  – Other

A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead
Gather the resources at your disposal

- **Colleagues**
  - Other universities
  - Education USA Advisors

- **Organizations**
  - NOKUT
  - NUFFIC
  - Fulbright
  - AMIDEAST
  - NAFSA
  - TAICEP
  - AACRAO
  - Credential Evaluation Agencies

- **Communication media**
  - News (print, electronic)
  - Web
  - Social media

- **Publications**
  - NAFSA news, International Educator, ACE Digest
  - AACRAO
  - ECE, The Connection
  - Chronicle of Higher Ed
  - IIE Scholar Rescue Fund Beacon, IIE blog
  - The PIE News
Finalize the process

Ensure that the process is formalized, transparent and accessible

- Create a report
- Make it part of the student’s record
- Share this with the stakeholders
- Establish a written process and share it with the appropriate individuals for the next such instance.
Status, survey of applicants 2013-2014

- 2013: 52% got relevant job or admission
- 2014: 49% found NOKUT's recognition helpful when applying for jobs or studies in Norway
- 84% were satisfied with the recognition scheme
- 92% would recommend the recognition scheme to others
Suzan

• Came to Norway as an asylum-seeker in 2010

• Contacted NOKUT for recognition of her engineering qualification (Bachelor degree) in June 2013

• Referred to the new recognition procedure in July 2013
Interview in the expert committee
August 29, 2013: Education recognized as equivalent to a Norwegian Bachelor degree
Tete
University of Kinshasa, DRC

- 1994: Licence en Sciences Economiques
- 1996: Diplôme d’Etudes Approfondies en Economie et Finance Internationale
Recognition model

Stage 1
• Application for general recognition and referral to recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation

Stage 2
• Mapping of applicant’s background and assessment of result

Stage 3
• NOKUT’s level placement of qualifications and the setting up of a committee of experts

Stage 4
• Assessment by expert committee appointed by NOKUT

Stage 5
• Final assessment / NOKUT’s decision on general recognition
Stage 5: NOKUT's final decision

- 1994: Licence en Sciences Economiques
- 1996: Diplôme d’Etudes Approfondies en Economie et Finance Internationale

- 1994: Bachelor’s degree (3 years/180 ECTS)
- 1996: Master’s degree (2 years/120 ECTS)
- 1998: Master’s degree (2 years/120 ECTS)

= 7 years higher education/ 420 ECTS
Norwegian experience / UVD-methodology

• Centralized procedure;
• Standardized procedures for mapping/surveying of applicant’s educational background;
• Standardized interviews;
• Standardized process for expert assessment;
• Country profile expertise
NOKUT - Refugee section (since December 2015)

• UVD-procedure – recognition scheme for persons without verifiable documentation

• Assistance in evaluations for «Students at Risk» scheme (based on UVD-methodology)

• Fast track evaluation procedure, based on UVD-methodology (from 2016)
Current challenges and possible solutions

Current refugee crisis concerns all European states, but:

• Different legislations;
• Different assessment practices;
• Different financial capacity situation;
• Different number of refugees.
Our way ahead

• NOKUT is willing to share our extensive experiences and ideas on implementation of recognition schemes for refugees;

• NOKUT welcomes a pan-European action on recognition of refugees’ qualifications - European Qualification Passport for Refugees
The Lost Boys and Girls of the Sudan

• Sought admission to a bachelor degree
• Late 1990s through early 2000s
• Had advocates in the community and on campus
• Support from the Director of Admissions
Refugee from Syria

- Sought admission to a doctorate
- Had only a letter from a former faculty member at the school in Syria and department support, including funding
- Used the web to check on the university attended
- Checked information in the letter against Syrian higher education system
- Kept documentation proving the exception, such as email threads, in the students record
Individual from Francophone Africa

- Sought counseling on an appropriate entry level
- Asked for documents which he provided in English only
  - Submitted documentation for a 4 year bachelor
  - Didn’t match the Francophone education system
Refugee from Ukraine

• Sought counseling for entry to an appropriate level

• Submitted photocopies of documents – Diploma of Junior Specialist and Diploma of Bachelor

• Both documents could be checked on a centralized web-based system, the OSVITA verification site (in Ukrainian only)

• The school involved is verified to be in a conflict zone (Donbass State Engineering Academy in Kramatorsk)
In conclusion

- Balance compassion with practicality in meeting the needs of your organization.
- Don’t reinvent the wheel.
- Conduct research and explore best practices.
- A well-thought-out policy can cover multiple situations.
Thank you for your attention!

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