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## Initial partnership meeting in the ARENA project

Time: Tuesday, 16.06.2020 (12:00 – 15:00 CEST)

Place: Online meeting – Zoom platform

Participants: Silvia Bianco (CIMEA), Karim Darwish (NUFFIC), Stefan Sant (MQRIC), Bessy Athanasopoulou (D.O.A.T.A.P), Dominique Van der Velpen (NARIC-Vlaanderen), Kim Vanelderer (NARIC-Vlaanderen), Marina Malgina (NOKUT), Erlend Bern Aaser (NOKUT) and Kristina Rognljen Aardal (NOKUT)

### 1. Welcome and presentation of the programme for the meeting (Marina Malgina)

- Welcomes everyone to the meeting and emphasises that NOKUT is very much looking forward to discussing the way ahead for the Toolkit 3 project today.
- Although the evaluation decision is not clear yet, this represents a good opportunity to initiate a discussion on what we would like to achieve as part of this project and the organisation of the different work packages.

### 2. Overview of the project objectives and activities (Erlend Bern Aaser)

- Context of the Toolkit 3 project: builds on the previously completed “Refugees and Recognition – Toolkit” and “Refugees and Recognition – Toolkit 2 (REACT)” projects.
- First Toolkit project was initiated in 2016, with the ongoing refugee crisis in Europe.
- Results: Toolkit for Recognition of Refugees’ Qualifications and refugees country briefings for Afghanistan, Syria, Libya, Iraq and Eritrea.
- In the Refugees and Recognition – Toolkit 2 (REACT) project, 2018 – 2020, the main goal was to test the Toolkit in cooperation with HEIs from Norway, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and Ireland.
- The project was recently completed, and the main outcomes of the project is the REACT Q-card for Admission Officers and refugees country briefings for Iran, Ethiopia, Venezuela, Somalia and the DRC.
- With the Toolkit 3 project, the aim is to further upscale and test the recognition methodology in cooperation with NARICs and HEIs from new national contexts, while simultaneously integrating a broader focus on ensuring the sustainability of best practice procedures.
- Three main objectives: address the need for updated and relevant information resources; further testing of the Toolkit in cooperation with HEIs in new national contexts; managing sustainability of identified best practice procedures and schemes.
- Ambitious project, which seeks to achieve impact on several levels. Both in terms of facilitation recognition and admission processes for refugees, contribute towards capacity building at institutions, and ensuring the sustainability of procedures.
- Project team: NARIC Norway, NARIC Italy, NARIC Netherlands, NARIC Belgium (Flanders), NARIC Greece and NARIC Malta.



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- Steering group: European University Association (EUA), European Students Union (ESU), Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Association for International Education (EAIE).
- Higher education institutions: will be recruited to take part in several of the different work packages, concerning testing and sustainability analysis. The major selection criteria should be a demonstrated willingness and experience from other projects related to access and admission of refugee students to further studies.

### 3. Presentation of the participant offices and status of recognition procedures for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation

Bessy Athanasopoulou (D.O.A.T.A.P)

- Greece has not signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention.
- Volume: Since 2016, 650 applications received –not necessarily from refugees- for recognition of degrees issued in Algeria, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Palestine, Pakistan, Sudan and Turkey.
- There has been conducted 92 interviews and 73 passports issued in 2017, 100 interviews and 88 passports issued in 2018 and 90 interviews and 78 passports issued in 2019 (under the CoE project European Qualifications Passport for Refugees).
- Not sure how the issued EQPRs are used in Greece. Not by universities in their admission processes, as for now.
- Difficult for refugees to enter universities as they must have their bachelor's degree recognized from D.O.A.T.A.P (completed, fully documented) in order to apply for master's program. Bachelor programs are only taught in Greek.
- Have been in touch with HEIs in terms of participation in the Toolkit 3 project. The legal framework could make this difficult, but will look into one specific opportunity with the International University of Thessaloniki.

Silvia Bianco (CIMEA)

- Since 2016, CIMEA has worked on evaluation of the qualifications of refugees through participation in the projects EQPR and Toolkit.
- Started national network with evaluators from Italian universities and national coordination group, where they developed the «Academic passport». This passport is a national tool using the methodology from EQPR.
- A holder of the academic passport graduated from university last year.
- CIMEA participated in REACT, with university testing and development of country briefing for Venezuela.
- In 2018, CIMEA arranged EQPR sessions in Italy, and included universities which are autonomous and responsible for recognition and also the main users of EQPR.
- There has been conducted 180 interviews and 49 students have been enrolled to universities.
- Fifth EQPR session in Italy will be held next week (online).



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- The academic passport and EQPR are treated equally by the universities as the statement of comparability.

### Karim Darwish (NUFFIC)

- 30.000 credential evaluations in 2019.
- Since 2015, 5000 of the credential evaluations have been for refugees, and the number is expected to decrease to 4000 this year.
- NUFFIC works in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention.
- 3 routes for credential evaluation:
  1. Diploma + supporting documents: normal evaluation, free of charge
  2. Unfinished: evaluation of education level
  3. Diploma, no supporting documents: ION, Background report
- The third route: applicants must fill out an online application form with information on studies and work experience. The final statement is a background report with information on the qualification, level placement compared to the Dutch qualifications.
- NUFFIC informs the different refugee organizations with information on the education system in refugees countries.
- NUFFIC will participate in the online-EQPR session to be held in Italy next week.

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

- 3 ENIC-NARICs in Belgium (French community, German Speaking Community and Flemish Community).
- Binding decision: applicant receives a ministerial decree, which has same legal value as a Flemish qualification.
- The decision is for applicants seeking to enter the Flemish job market, and not for further studies (autonomy of institutions).
- 2019: highest number of applications in total, but highest number of applications received from refugees was in 2017.
- Top ten countries in 2019, applications from refugees: Syria (287), Iraq (155), Palestine (122), Turkey (86), Afghanistan (53), Iran (45), Burundi (23), Pakistan (19), Russia (17) and Egypt (14).
- Choice between two procedures: specific recognition (e.g. Master of Science in Mathematics) or level recognition (e.g. general master level).
- Exemptions for refugees: allowed to submit an incomplete file, but at least one supporting document proving that the person has a completed degree is required
- Specific equivalence: the applicant needs to fill out a questionnaire.
- Level recognition (secondary education, short cycle HE and bachelor): regular procedure without external advice.
- Specific recognition + level recognition master level: advise by an external expert in the field of study or interview if more information is needed.

### Stefan Sant (MQRIC)



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- In 2015, it was not possible to assess refugees' qualifications, and the only way to verify was to contact the respective university.
- MQRIC's decision has a declaration stating that the decision is not a verification of authenticity.
- The decision is binding, and people with refugee-status does not pay any admission fees.
- Recognition done by HEIs is done differently, and each have their own system
- Refugees coming to Malta are mostly low-skilled workers, and not many have completed bachelor and master degrees.
- Professional qualifications: doctors are directly examined by the regulated responsible office; Medical Council.
- Two universities in Malta currently have their own procedures for assessing refugees' qualifications.
- Positive towards the inclusion of an HEI from Malta to participate in the Toolkit 3 project.

#### 4. Work packages, task distribution and recruitment of HEI subcontractors

##### WP1: Partnership meeting (Project management)

- Part of the WP on project management. More information concerning administrative and financial aspects will be provided when NOKUT is informed about the result of the application from EACEA.

##### WP2: Kick-off meeting w/consortium

- Tentatively to be arranged in September. Will be held online, because of COVID-19 and travel restrictions.
- Gather the whole consortium to discuss the upcoming activities, task distribution and the needs of HEIs taking part in the project.
- Initial plan was to include HEIs for this meeting. Hopefully this will be possible, but dependent on the process ahead and the evaluation of the application.

##### WP3: Refugees country briefings & e-learning materials

- Will be developed five new refugees country briefings as part of the Toolkit 3 project.
- Very positive feedback on the briefings developed in the previous two projects.
- Question raised about which countries briefings have already been developed for and whether it is based on the situation of the country as a whole.
- The briefings are developed as practical, hands-on, tools for the assessment of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation. Compiling the most relevant and updated information.
- Refugees country briefings have already been developed for: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Eritrea, Iran, Ethiopia, Venezuela, Somalia and the DRC.
- Participants provide suggestions on which countries it could be interesting to develop briefings for in the Toolkit 3 project.



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- Suggestions for: Pakistan, Palestine, Bangladesh, Nigeria, Turkey, Burundi, Rwanda, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Mali, Sudan, Serbia, Hong-Kong, Yemen.
- Decision on countries: Rwanda (NARIC-Vlaanderen), Burundi (NARIC-Vlaanderen), Palestine (CIMEA), Sudan (CIMEA) and Yemen (NOKUT).
- NOKUT have updated the template used in the previous projects for the refugees country briefings, focusing on including the most relevant information and increasingly systematising the template.
- NOKUT shows the template to everyone and informs that it will be distributed to NARIC-Vlaanderen and CIMEA after the meeting.

### Testing of the Toolkit in cooperation with HEIs in new national contexts (WP4, WP5, WP8 & WP9)

- Several work packages in the activity plan concerns the testing of the Toolkit in Greece and Malta.
- In WP4, the plan is to arrange for a workshop with HEIs. This was also done in the REACT project, and it will provide the participating institutions with the necessary training in the Toolkit methodology and initial planning of the testing period in WP5 and sustainability analysis in WP7.
- WP5 concerns the implementation phase, with the testing in Greece and Malta.
- Greece: challenges finding a university that could do admissions of refugees
- Foreigners go through a different procedure, but there is only a small percentage of seats for foreigners. Bessy Athanasopoulou will check if some of these seats can be given to refugees as part of testing the Toolkit.
- Bessy Athanasopoulou comments that the International University of Thessaloniki might be included in the project, and that more information will be provided to NOKUT hopefully within the next ten days. The university has their own procedure offering masters degrees.
- Malta: Stefan Sant has been in contact with two HEIs. Positive in terms of the possibility to include an HEI from Malta into the project.
- Will look into this possibility closer, but would like more information from NOKUT in terms of following this up further with the universities in terms of their involvement.
- NOKUT informs that more information will be provided soon, and that this will be followed up with NARIC Malta directly.
- WP8 and WP9 concerns the dissemination phase of the testing of the Toolkit, and will be discussed further at a later stage in the process. However, the logic of including these work packages is based on the importance of dissemination throughout the project period and increased dialogue with stakeholders on a national level.

### WP6: EQPR pathway

- In this work package, the aim is to look into how HEIs in Italy, as a major refugee receiving country, view the EQPR as a supplementary document for admission to further studies.



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- Discussion concerning the inclusion of an HEI from Italy to participate in the project.
- Silvia Bianco: University of Brescia in northern Italy is very interested in the topic, and is also the host of next week's online EQPR session.
- Agreement that this sounds like a very good candidate institution to take part in the project and that this will be discussed further when we have received the evaluation of the application from EACEA.

WP7: Further implementation of the Toolkit  
and sustainability of best practice procedures

- In this work package, the aim is to further test the Toolkit where best practice was identified at one HEI in the REACT project.
- As best practice was identified at the University of Utrecht in the REACT project, NOKUT would like to explore the opportunity to include them in the Toolkit 3 project with the aim of managing sustainability.
- Karim Darwish: NUFFIC thinks the inclusion of the University of Utrecht is a good idea, and will support the implementation of this work package.

WP10: Development of e-learning materials on best practice cases of recognition and admission of refugee students

- In this work package, the aim is to develop e-learning materials for the results achieved in WP5, WP6 and WP7.
- Important that the material is developed based on what is useful and relevant information for staff working with assessing refugees qualifications for recognition and admission purposes.
- The organisation of this WP will be discussed further at a later stage in the project.

WP11: Final seminar in Brussels

- Part of a larger work package on sustainability and dissemination.
- The aim is to wrap-up the project with a final dissemination seminar in Brussels (February 2022), where the results achieved as part of the project will be presented and discussed with external stakeholders.

**5. Any other business & conclusion of meeting**

- Hoping to receive the decision from EACEA by the end of June/beginning of July.
- Reminder to the participants to send presentations held today to Erlend after the meeting.
- Minutes from this meeting will be sent by the end of the week.
- Template of the country briefings will be sent to CIMEA and NARIC-Vlaanderen.
- Decision on countries for the refugees country briefings: Yemen, Sudan, Palestine, Burundi and Rwanda.
- Kick-off meeting w/consortium will be held online in September, and date and time will be decided at a later stage.



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NOKUT will let all partners know the results of the project application as soon as this is ready.