

BEING AN INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITY FOR REFUGEE STUDENTS:

CONCEPTS, METHODS AND TOOLS

Services and Good Practices for Refugee in Higher Education

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Introduction

“Being an inclusive university for refugee students” project aims to bring together five universities that have experience with refugee students in order to strengthen instruments that restore a universal notion to the right to education for refugees. Participating project partners include the University of Birmingham, University of Cologne, Leiden University, Linnaeus University and the University of Florence.

During the project, specific activities have been implemented to enhance academic enrollment and reduce those constraints that produce discrimination and, to this end, the present guide aims to help staff members of higher education institutions (HEI) to improve or to initiate assistance activities for integrating refugee students within the university.

Complementarity of the action

Aiming at fostering the complementarity of EUNIWELL activities with past actions carried out by other organizations, the guide draw from, amongst other, the inHERE project’s results, and aims at fostering and integrating them with the EUNIWELL Consortium’s best practices and experiences. Indeed, in June 2018, inHERE Project, a 2-years project co-funded with the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union, lunched the *Guidelines for University Staff Members*. In the following pages the opportunities that Universities should put in place to guarantee an inclusive environment for refugee students in terms of services are illustrated.

Enrollment

Outreach – Recruitment

Universities should seek active ways to reach out to and recruit refugees, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive educational system.

The university collaborates with key stakeholders to bring information outside the university and directly to refugees potentially interested in pursuing academic studies .

Refugees can count on a counselling service that, according to their aspirations and through an evaluation of their past experience and skills, addresses them to an academic path considering also study opportunities at offer at other institutions.

Recognition of qualifications

Universities are responsible for designing flexible and fair enrolment procedures that take into account refugee-specific needs.

Enrolment is allowed also to refugee students who are not in possess of any documentation concerning their previous studies.

University can count on dedicated internal resources for the verification and recognition of refugee previous qualifications.

Informal and non-formal learning is also taken into consideration for the assessment of qualifications and credits of refugee students.

Preparatory and bridging courses

Universities should help refugees to bridge gaps through tailored solutions thus facilitating their integration into the higher education system. Access to courses is available to refugees and asylum seekers including those who will not enrol to university. In addition to language and/or academic classes, prospective refugee students have access to courses on soft skills such as academic writing, IT, academic culture, etc. Prospective refugee students can be admitted to a relevant degree program and redeem credits towards a degree once enrolled.

Financial Support

Universities should adopt financial solutions that are diversified and sustainable over time. Scholarships offered to refugee students cover also living allowances (e.g. accommodation, food, transportation, etc.) and extra costs (e.g. language courses). Financial support for refugees integrates university internal budget with funds made available through local/ national (governmental) programs and other sources of funding (e.g. European programmes, private sponsorships, etc.). The university decides to allocate permanently a special budget for refugee students.

Overall, universities should guarantee a proper

Access to information

Institutional websites should provide comprehensive information for prospective refugee students. Such information, preferable provided in all main EU languages (EN, FR, ES, DE, PT) and in the main languages spoken by refugees, should be easy-to-find and up-to-date and inclusive. Relevant contact person should be identified as well. In particular, the websites should provide information on the following matters:

asylum procedures, enrollment procedures, recognition of qualification, services and programs, dedicated services, accommodation, available scholarships / Financial support measures, health and social security.

Social Integration

Universities should foster societal integration and cultural exchange among individuals while actively promoting the integration of refugees within the local community and society at large. The university, in collaboration with local stakeholders, should organise social and cultural activities involving refugees and the local community. The university sets up a dedicated desk to support refugees with administrative/legal aspects of everyday life.

Integration

To reduce the risk of dropouts, universities should provide adequate academic and administrative support and guide refugees throughout their entire course of study. Refugee students can count on a dedicated desk to receive support with the administrative and bureaucratic aspects associated with the academic life, as well as additional services, such as a buddy system. Refugee students have access to a dedicated one-to-one tutoring program that provides professional study support from scholars.

Management

Universities should ensure that they can provide an adequate management of all issues related to the inclusion and retention of refugees in their institution, taking into account their unique circumstances and specific needs. The university sets up a dedicated welcome office for refugees that provides an integrated and comprehensive support in all aspects of their academic and social life. The university trains scholars on specific pedagogical approaches relevant for refugees.

Psychological support

Universities should play a role in helping refugees to overcome psychological barriers that might jeopardize their academic performance and integration. The university activates a dedicated desk on campus that provides free professional support by university scholars and/or in collaboration with external associations (e.g. the red cross).

Sustainability

Universities should ensure a long-term commitment and include the integration of refugees in their institutional strategy, contributing to the realization of an open and non-discriminatory European higher education system. The university includes refugee inclusion as a core element of its strategy, devoting financial and human resources to its realization.

Career Guidance

Universities should provide tailored support to prepare refugees for – and ease their transition to – the labour market. The university activates collaborations with local companies to provide refugee students with internship opportunities

Collaboration

Universities should capitalize on all their existing resources while creating synergies with external stakeholders. The university fosters collaborations and synergies between the university and stakeholders at national and international level.

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Best practices

In the previous pages, we grouped the services in three main categories: enrollment, social integration, and sustainability. Starting from inHERE project's results, we highlighted the services that should put in place by the administrative offices of Universities in order to guarantee a proper level of inclusion.

In the following section, the project partners' best practices are offered as relevant blueprint to achieve consistent and sustainable results.

Integration

University of Birmingham is an active branch of [Student Action for Refugees](#) (STAR), the national network of students building a more understanding and just society where refugees are welcomed and can thrive in the UK.

The student groups and a central team of experts work together at a number of levels to bring about lasting change.

They volunteer locally working directly with refugees, building understanding and connections, organize campaign nationally for policy change and equal access to higher education for refugees and learn about refugee protection and the asylum journey in the UK with experts and peers.

Community Sponsorship: In 2016 the UK Government pledged to resettle 20,000 refugees from the Syrian conflict by 2020. One of the key innovations associated with this pledge was the development of the Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS). The UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme was introduced and enabled, for the first time in the UK, local community groups to become directly responsible for supporting refugee resettlement. Following the introduction of the UK's Community Sponsorship Scheme (CSS) in 2016, the Institute for Research into Superdiversity (IRIS) at the University of Birmingham has completed a three year evaluation of the processes, provisions and effects on refugees, volunteers and communities. Researchers completed 250 interviews with refugees, volunteers, thought leaders and wider community members involved in the CSS.

Community Practitioner Research Programme (CPRP): The Community Practitioner Research Programme (CPRP) has taken the initiative in opening up new spaces for collaboration between academic researchers and community practitioners, establishing early approaches to co-production. The city of Birmingham has led the UK in social work and the development of community practice for the last century and we have utilised our community networks to bring together The University of Birmingham and many of its practitioners.

Useful links:

[RMC Refugees and Migrant Centre Birmingham](#)



[Refugee Council Birmingham](#)



[Refugee Education UK](#)



Access to information

The [institutional website](#) of the University of Cologne provides comprehensive information for prospective refugee students.

Financial Support

Students with a refugee background who are enrolled at the University of Cologne can apply for a scholarship from the [NRWege ins Studium](#) programme.

Students at risk worldwide and doctoral students who are denied the right to education in their country of origin can be nominated for the [Hilde Domin Programme](#).

Preparatory and bridging courses

The University of Cologne offers special (free) German courses for refugees.

You can find more information on this website: [Preparatory \(German\) courses for refugees](#)

Cologne University is part of the Consortium of the [S.U.C.RE. Project](#), two-year KA2 Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership in the field of Higher Education.

The project's main objective is to successfully build the necessary guidelines and training material that will allow practitioners and stakeholders to facilitate the smooth integration of students and scholars in Higher Education and society.

Useful links:

[Academic Refugee Support](#)

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[German courses at Uni Köln](#)

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[Courses "Mathematics and Programming for Refugees" at Uni Köln](#)

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[Events / academic offers in the winter term](#)

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[Buddy program for refugees \(page only available in German\)](#)

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[Information for Refugees that want to study at Uni Köln](#)

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[Program for refugee teachers at Uni Köln \(page only available in German\)](#)

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[Support for Scholars with a Refugee Background](#)

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Recognition of Qualifications

In 2020, the University of Florence joined the National coordination for the Evaluation of Refugee Qualifications (CNVQR) at the [Academic Mobility Information Centre \(CIMEA\)](#).

Under the CNVQR, the teaching staff and officials of the University of Florence are responsible for identifying practices evaluating the qualifications held by beneficiaries of international protection (individuals with refugee status or subsidiary protection) who already live in Italy and want to resume their studies. The evaluation of qualifications is possible even if the students' documentation is absent or incomplete due to the difficulty of finding it in the countries of origin from which they fled. The purpose of the evaluation is to:

- ◇ Free of charge issue of the comparability certificate (subject to evidence of status)
- ◇ Issue of the “European Refugee Qualification Passport”

The certificates allow beneficiaries of international protection, who have previously completed a useful study path for access to the university in the country of origin or in a country along the migration route to Italy, to enrol in universities in Italy.

Thanks to the agreement with CIMEA, the University of Florence has developed specific procedures for enrolment which consist of:

- ⇒ Request for CIMEA comparability certificate (issued free of charge) in place of the declaration of value
- ⇒ Abolition of proof of authenticity
- ⇒ Activation of a preferential route to apply for a scholarship from the Regional Board for the Right to University Education – [DSU Toscana](#)

[CIMEA Documentation](#)

Financial Support

Starting from 2021, thanks to the collaboration with the Giorgio La Pira International Students Centre, the University has made available scholarships for students waiting for recognition of international protection (asylum seekers) and willing to start a university study path. The scholarships include monthly financial support and accommodation at one of the facilities of the La Pira Centre.

Management

The University of Florence has prepared an administrative support and a specific tutoring activity for the newly enrolled students who are beneficiaries of international protection in order to orient and facilitate the participation in the educational system as well as in society.

The aim is to expand the information and access to the services of the university (such as the use of the services of the Right to Education Board, the Library System, the University Language Centre, the University IT Service), as well as the resolution of administrative and bureaucratic issues.

Contacts write to tutormulticulturali@unifi.it.

Useful links:

[Access and support for students seeking asylum and with international protection](#)



Florence University

A regular and secure path to study in Italy is offered to students with refugee status from Ethiopia as part of the [UNICORE](#) (University corridors for Refugees) project, an initiative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

The University of Florence joined the project, for the second year running, together with other Italian universities and is offering two scholarships to support the study path of two students who will enroll in any of the University's degree programs taught in English.

The Unifi initiative takes place in partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation as well as various national and local institutions.

The University of Florence has joined the [Scholars at Risk \(SAR\) network](#), which consists of 530 universities in 41 countries (including 28 Italian universities) which share the concerns about the limits placed on academic and research freedom in some countries of the world, governed by illiberal regimes.

The main aim of the network is to provide temporary shelter for teachers and researchers "at risk" from countries where academic freedom is not guaranteed and where their personal safety is threatened. The SAR – scholars at risk network also promotes advocacy activities through the organization of seminars and the production of specific reports on issues related to the violation of freedom of thought and the dissemination of critical knowledge, also through the involvement of scholars at risk hosted in the various Italian and foreign universities participating in [the SAR network](#).

Preparatory and bridging courses

The [Preparatory Year Leiden](#) offers students aged between 18 and 30 years, with a refugee background, the opportunity to develop to the desired starting level for Dutch higher education.

This initiative by Leiden University and Hogeschool Leiden makes it possible for refugees to enroll in a bachelor's programme.

The [InclUision initiative](#) makes it possible for refugees who are not (yet) able to register as students to follow courses at Leiden University. In addition, there is a team of buddies ready to help out with both the practical and social aspect of your studies.

Integration

Studying is more than just attending classes, which is why [InclUision initiative](#) works with a buddy system. Buddies are Leiden University students who will help you to integrate at the university by answering your questions and accompanying you to social activities.

Leiden University implemented a [Meeting Point](#) for refugee students, a place where current and future refugee students can not only meet each other, but also other students and staff of the university. Through the Meeting Point, the university contributes to the academic and social integration of newcomers, such as refugees, for example by improving their chances on the job market.

Useful links:

[Education for refugee](#)



Access to information

The [institutional website](#) of the Linnaeus University provides comprehensive information for prospective refugee students.

Linnaeus University helps spread the European Commission's broadened Erasmus initiative to offer cost-free language courses online for refugees. Migrants, regardless of their migration status, are given the opportunity to study up to twelve languages, for instance, Swedish, English and German. Linnaeus University is collaborating with external, regional parties in order to spread this offer.

Financial Support

Linnaeus University has established scholarships aimed at asylum-seeking academics, making it possible for them to study at the university while they are awaiting their residence permits. The scholarships are co-funded by the county councils, Regionförbundet i Kalmar län, Region Kronoberg, and Linnaeus University.

Read more about [scholarships for asylum seekers](#).

Recognition of Qualifications

Recognition of prior learning means the mapping out and assessment of an individual's competence and qualifications, regardless of how, where and when these have been acquired – through the formal education system in Sweden or abroad, just recently or a long time ago.

When carrying out a validation, the knowledge and experience of an individual is compared to the objectives stated for a subject, course or programme.

Linnaeus University's ambition is to be on the forefront in the work on recognition of prior learning. The university has established a full-time position that will work with the establishment of a legally sound and sustainable method for the validation of knowledge and skills in an individual, alternatively what parts the individual is missing, in order for the individual to be able to supplement his/her knowledge.

Collaboration

Contract education contributes with skills development of staff working with the target group newly-arrived within authorities, organisations, companies, and, last but not least, schools. For instance, we offer in-service training of staff at sheltered accommodations for unaccompanied refugee children. Fojo, the institute for further education of journalists, provides in-service training for journalists and is tied to Linnaeus University. In this context, the institute has produced information to journalists on the topic "How to cover refugees", dealing with, for instance, who is a refugee and what international regulations apply.

Career Guidance

Linnaeus University prioritises the work to arrange with internship positions for newly arrived job applicants who are registered with Sweden's Public Employment Agency and have a residence permit.

The university map out and make an inventory of the possibilities to accept trainees. The internship positions are then listed with Sweden's Public Employment Agency. The agency does the matchmaking and presents trainees.

[THE MOONLITE PROJECT](#)—“Learning, support and certification without frontiers”. Harnessing the potential of Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs) for refugees and migrants to build their language competences and entrepreneurial skills for employment, higher education, and social inclusion.

- ⇒ Traeger, C. (ed). (2016) *Exploiting MOOCs for Access and Progression into Higher Education Institutions and Employment Market*.
- ⇒ Read, T. (ed) (2016) *The MOONLITE Meta-MOOC A MOOC detailing how to design and utilize MOOCs for refugees*.
- ⇒ Kluijfhout, E. (2016) *A viable role of MOOCs in European HEIs – Vision & recommendations*.

Useful links:

[Swedish educational system](#)

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[Swedish courses](#)

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[Validation/recognition of prior learning](#)

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[Student counselling](#)

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