



Tackling today's challenges together: Recognising refugees' qualifications

” FACTS AND FIGURES

One million refugees and asylum seekers came to Europe in 2015.¹ In the first six weeks of 2016, more than 80 000 arrived by sea.

Through the Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Recognition Convention, 53 countries have pledged to facilitate the recognition of refugees' qualifications. However, 70% have failed to do so.²

RECOGNISING REFUGEES' QUALIFICATIONS

■ Even though many refugees have good academic or vocational qualifications from their home countries, recognition of their qualifications can take years, blocking their access to work and study.

■ This is a human rights issue, as refugees have the same human rights as people already living in the host country, including the right to education.

■ Qualifications are like speaking a language. If refugees cannot use their qualifications to work or study, they will eventually lose them. They may become disillusioned, become socially excluded or, in extreme cases, may even turn to violence.

■ Both the refugees' host country and their country of origin – if or when they return – benefit if they can use their qualifications to work or study.

■ Frequently, refugees cannot bring their diplomas with them or lose them on their journey. Others have been unable to complete their studies.

■ Where refugees do have diplomas, it may not be possible to check their authenticity: the awarding institutions may not co-operate, communications may have been cut or archives destroyed.

■ The institutions where refugees have obtained their qualifications are not always well known in Europe.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

■ All the countries which have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention are bound to take measures to assess whether refugees qualify for higher education and job offers, whether or not they provide documentary evidence.

■ Europe needs to develop a more flexible approach to the recognition of refugees' qualifications, even where they cannot be documented.

■ Countries which have not done so must set up the necessary procedures as a matter of urgency. These must be fair and transparent.

■ Given the number of refugees arriving in Europe, it is necessary to pool resources. Credential evaluators may interview refugees to assess whether they are likely to have the qualifications claimed and provide a written evaluation, or “recognition passport”, of the refugee's competences, which should also be accepted by other countries.

■ Refugees and other disadvantaged groups must not be barred from further study or work because they cannot afford to have their qualifications recognised.



Sources:

1. <http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php>, accessed February 15, 2015.

2. Survey presented to the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee on February 29, 2016.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE RESOURCES

■ The European Network of National Information Centres on recognition (ENIC-NARIC) website – a joint Council of Europe, European Commission and UNESCO initiative – provides comprehensive information for individuals, including refugees, on how to have their qualifications recognised in 55 countries. It covers Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. It also provides information for employers, higher education institutions and credential evaluators.

■ *The European Area of Recognition Manual: standards and guidelines on recognition* (2012) advises on access to higher education for those without adequate documentation, including refugees.

Council of Europe higher education series

■ *Standards for recognition: the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its subsidiary texts* (2005)

■ *Recognition in the Bologna Process: policy development and the road to good practice* (2006)

■ *Qualifications – Introduction to a concept* (2007)

■ *New challenges in recognition* (2008)

■ *Improving recognition in the European Higher Education Area: an analysis of national action plans* (2010)

■ *Developing attitudes to recognition: substantial differences in an age of globalisation* (2010)



COUNCIL OF EUROPE STANDARDS

Council of Europe conventions

■ The 1997 Council of Europe/UNESCO Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (ETS No. 165) aims to ensure qualifications gained in one signatory country are recognised fairly by the others. It prohibits discrimination in the recognition of qualifications and requires national information centres to be established and maintained. Article VII requires Parties to: “develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.”

Key documents adopted by the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee:

■ The European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO Diploma Supplement (1999)

■ Recommendation on the Recognition of Joint Degrees (2004)

■ Recommendation on Criteria and Procedures for the Assessment of Foreign Qualifications and Explanatory Memorandum (revised 2010)

■ Recommendation on the Use of Qualifications Frameworks in the Recognition of Foreign Qualifications (2013)

USEFUL WEBSITES

■ Council of Europe education website:
www.coe.int/education

■ ENIC-NARIC:
www.enic-naric.net