



HIGHER EDUCATION SUPPORTING  
REFUGEES IN EUROPE



**RECOMMENDATIONS**  
**FROM THE PROJECT**  
ENHANCING THE ACCESS OF REFUGEES  
**TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE**  
**AND THEIR INTEGRATION**

## About inHERE

inHERE is a 2-years project co-funded with the support of the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. It aims at facilitating integration and access of refugees in European HEIs.

## Overall goal

In the current refugee challenge in Europe, the social dimension of Higher Education (HE) is concerned with providing opportunities for refugees to participate in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). inHERE strengthens knowledge sharing, peer-support and academic partnership to facilitate integration and access of refugees in European higher education institutions.

## The inHERE Consortium

UNIMED- Mediterranean Universities Union, Italy (coordinator)

Sapienza University, Italy

University of Barcelona, Spain

Campus France, France

EUA- European University Association, Belgium

UNHCR- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (associate partner)

**Website:** [www.inHEREproject.eu](http://www.inHEREproject.eu)



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## RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE PROJECT

# ENHANCING THE ACCESS OF REFUGEES' TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN EUROPE AND THEIR INTEGRATION

Close to 70 million people around the world are forcibly displaced, due to conflicts, violence and persecution. Nearly 25.4 million among them are refugees<sup>2</sup>. In this context of continuous forced migrations<sup>3</sup>, the European Union (EU) and its Member States (MS) have a role to play, as well as duties and responsibilities with regards to migrants and refugees.

Asylum is an international right stated in the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol<sup>4</sup>, by which the signatory countries commit among others to respecting the fundamental principle of *non-refoulement*. The Geneva Convention lays down some basic minimum standards for the treatment of refugees in different domains, including access to education, and specifies in Article 22 that *“the Contracting States shall accord to refugees treatment as favourable as possible, and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education other than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships.”*<sup>5</sup> This is important, as today, due to economic and technological developments, a growing portion of the workforce requires higher education qualifications.

These rights are also confirmed by the *“no one is left behind”* commitment of the United Nations’ Agenda for Sustainable Development, which explicitly mentions refugees and stipulates under Goal 4.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets: *“By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.”*<sup>6</sup>

However, figures show that only 1% of refugee youth participate in tertiary education<sup>7</sup>. In order to reduce the possibility of a lost generation, it is essential to improve access to higher education for all those refugees who qualify. Hosting

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<sup>1</sup> In this document, the term “refugee” is used for all migrants having forcibly fled their country, or being displaced within their country or across borders, regardless of their stage in the application process to obtain formal refugee status.

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR, June 2018: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>

<sup>3</sup> Migration terms: <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/definitions> and <http://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

<sup>4</sup> Convention and Protocol relating to the status of Refugees: <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E)

<sup>7</sup> [http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/ga2018/pdf/Global\\_Appeal\\_2018\\_full\\_lowres.pdf](http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/ga2018/pdf/Global_Appeal_2018_full_lowres.pdf)

countries have hence the responsibility of taking measures to develop a holistic integration framework, with regulations that consider the role of education, human rights and human dignity.

The European Union, EU national governments, international organisations and European higher education institutions (HEIs) are already carrying out a number of actions in this regards, both in the EU and in third countries impacted by conflicts. However, participants of the inHERE project activities call upon European societies and their policy-makers to commit in the long-term in order to support refugee inclusion into open and inclusive higher education and research systems. The integration of refugees is a global challenge that cannot be only resolved at the local or national levels but that needs to be considered at a supranational level, such as the European Union, whose voice counts and is heard worldwide.

Within the Union and supported by it, it is our joint responsibility to combine all efforts and together improve the opportunities offered to these students and researchers. It is also our duty to raise awareness of the critical situation of refugees, for encouraging a positive evolution of European communities' mind-set, by disseminating examples of good practice, success stories or by sharing innovative solutions.

Within this scope, the *inHERE* project, which aims at enhancing knowledge-sharing, peer-support and academic partnerships to facilitate the integration of refugees in higher education in Europe, has developed a series of recommendations, identified during project implementation and elaborated by the institutions participating in the *inHERE* activities, addressing the European Union, EU Member States and higher education institutions in Europe.

## 1. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

> **Assessment:** Provision of comprehensive information and advisory services is a key condition for higher education participation. While important for all potential students, it is particularly vital for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as refugees. Information has to be tailored to this specific target group, to better explain the opportunities offered by the European higher education sector and its support systems and how to navigate them. It is also crucial to take into account refugees' specific personal situations due to their legal status, their psychosocial circumstances and their social situation as well as to match study opportunities to the students' abilities and expectations.

### > **Recommendations:**

- » European higher education information resources<sup>8</sup> for refugees should be improved, and provided in the main languages spoken by refugees and in digital format, so that they can be accessed already in refugees' countries of origin as well as upon their arrival in the EU.
- » Physical welcome desks dedicated to potential refugee students should be established in hotspot areas in the EU. By providing training and information materials to staff working at such contact points, but also to staff based in reception centres, camps, social services and unemployment offices, they would be better equipped to guide potential students and researchers and to make relevant onward referrals to institutions and social services as soon as refugees arrive.
- » Likewise, staff at higher education institutions, should be provided with training and guidance materials on different protection statuses, and on how the different protection statuses impact higher education access in their respective national education and social support systems. Matching study opportunities to the profile of a potential refugee student is time and work intensive and the institutions sometimes do not have sufficient staff capacity for this kind of support. In addition, outreach activities should take into account specific groups among refugees, such as women, and could also bring the information directly to the potential refugee students, for instance through info-days in reception centres, or through buddy and mentoring programmes, which in addition to enhancing access and integration, are also proven to be a valuable experience for the local students participating in them.

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, this webpage of the European Commission already provides some general information in English: [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/migration\\_en](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/migration_en)

- » The success stories of refugees' pathways into higher education could, on the one hand benefit the institutions that can use this information to respond more accurately to refugees' needs and, on the other hand benefit newcomers. The refugees themselves could act as ambassadors providing information to peers. Likewise, positive narratives and refugees' stories could be disseminated in order to contribute to changing the perception of European societies about migration and to give a voice to refugees.

## 2. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF BEST PRACTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY

> **Assessment:** Throughout the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the *inHERE* project found many inspiring initiatives for the integration of refugees into higher education<sup>9</sup>. But often these are short-term, project-based, and have insufficient funding and staff resources. In addition, rather than collaborating, similar initiatives responding to emerging needs might end up competing with each other for the same target group. At the level of the European higher education institutions, initiatives are often implemented on an ad hoc basis, through bottom-up approaches developed by highly committed students and/or staff, with limited impact and sustainability.

### > **Recommendations:**

- » The development of more visible and better resourced initiatives could improve their overall impact. In addition, the positive results of successful projects could feed in to dedicated European policies.
- » Synergies between the various projects and initiatives should be enhanced, be it at the initial launch of the calls for projects and proposals or during the implementation of actions. The different actors involved would benefit from more regular exchanges regarding their actions. For instance, annual cluster meetings of projects financed by different donors (European Union and other international, national or regional institutions, etc.) should be organized to share ideas and good practices, and establish collaboration and task sharing. This would also contribute to the dissemination and development of common policies.
- » Member States should support the development of institutionalised and sustainable initiatives. National long-term strategies could contribute to enhancing the coordination and effectiveness of inclusion measures. In addition, better dissemination of research and studies on social and

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<sup>9</sup> *inHERE* Good Practice Catalogue: <https://www.inhereproject.eu/outputs/good-practice-catalogue>

educational programmes for refugees could facilitate the coordination and success of initiatives on the ground.

- » Higher education institutions should include refugees in their overarching strategies, as an important aspect of their social responsibility under their third mission, in view of internationalisation, diversity and inclusion and as part of their contribution to society. This would enable the different departments and stakeholders of institutions to collaborate in order to ensure the best possible support and integration for refugee students and scholars and the continuity of actions even in the case of institutional leadership changes.

### 3. FUNDING

> **Assessment:** Universities participating in the *inHere* project confirmed that more funding is needed. Currently, funding for institutions to support refugees is too low, limited in duration and often restricted by complex project rules. Furthermore, there is currently little direct funding available to facilitate access to and participation in higher education in Europe for refugee students and researchers.

#### > **Recommendations:**

- » Existing EU and national funding programmes should be made more eligible for refugee students and scholars, and be complemented by a dedicated programme targeting these groups. Such programmes should offer scholarships and grants to refugee students and researchers and provide resources to the EU hosting institutions for the integration work they carry out. For instance, the next generation of the Erasmus+ programme, potentially in synergy with other EU programmes and funds, should offer comprehensive scholarships and grants for eligible refugees already inside the EU as well as for those outside, in countries in crisis. The refugee topic is indeed at the intersection of different policy areas and for this reason the EU could better synergize the funds dedicated to these beneficiaries. A better coordinated and more inclusive approach should also include funds to set up and expand accompanying and support measures to reach out to and enhance access and success for this particular target group.
- » Within the scope of existing measures, additional funds should support specific refugee-oriented services, language programmes (for example in addition to the Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support<sup>10</sup>), cultural training

<sup>10</sup> <https://erasmusplusols.eu/>

sessions, either directly or by (co-)funding the integration activities of higher education institutions and other organisations, to better support the voice of the committed institutions.

- » In addition to dedicated scholarship programmes and supporting measures, more efforts should be made to provide refugee students and researchers with adequate social services, in order to help them face the difficult conditions of their daily life.
- » Moreover, synergies with other initiatives funded by international donors, such as the UNHCR, should be also taken into consideration, not to duplicate the actions but to multiply their overall effects and impact.

## 4. HARMONISATION OF PROCEDURES

> **Assessment:** Another issue identified by institutions participating in the *inHERE* project is the diversity of procedures across Europe and even within EU Member States themselves, e.g. for obtaining refugee status or visas, for arrival and settlement processes or the different protection statuses and their implications on higher education access.

### > **Recommendations:**

- » As highlighted by the ENIC-NARIC network in a recent report<sup>11</sup>, not all of the European countries signatory to the Lisbon Recognition Convention<sup>12</sup> meet the requirements of Article VII. Efforts must be stepped up at national levels to ensure that this important aspect of access to higher education, as well as to the labour market, is met with adequate national level procedures and infrastructures and with sufficient staff, in order to ensure a streamlined and fast recognition procedure for refugees.
- » Individual Member States should enhance the processes that relate to higher education access for refugees, in consultation and close collaboration with the higher education sector, and in full respect of higher education autonomy and academic freedom. This could address streamlined application and access processes, national initiatives for study preparation and language learning, centralised offers and support for capacity building at higher education institutions, and measures to improve the recognition of degrees and prior qualifications in line with the Lisbon Recognition

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<sup>11</sup>[http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Monitoring\\_the\\_Implementation\\_of\\_the\\_Lisbon\\_Recognition\\_Convention\\_2016.pdf](http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/Monitoring_the_Implementation_of_the_Lisbon_Recognition_Convention_2016.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Convention on the recognition of qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region: <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168007f2c7>



Convention. The EU could further facilitate the exchange of experience among Member States on these issues.

## 5. EMPLOYABILITY

> **Assessment:** Article 26 of the European Directive 2011/95/EU (13/12/2011)<sup>13</sup> as well as Article 53 of the Directive 2016/801/EU (11/05 2016)<sup>14</sup> relate to the employment rules that apply to beneficiaries of international protection. Apart from the legal aspects, access to education and the labour market supports the overall integration and improves the social situation of refugees and their potential to contribute to our societies.

### > **Recommendations:**

- » Existing EU regulations on refugees' and migrants' participation in education and employment are not always fully implemented. According to the aforementioned EU regulations, each Member State has the responsibility to act in favour of refugees' employment by proposing more flexible working rules and creating favourable conditions at the national level (language courses for refugees, access to job-information, vocational training, incentive measures for employers, etc.).
- » National governments and the EU could fund projects enhancing the employability of refugee researchers, providing guidelines and training to navigate and access the European research market.
- » European higher education institutions can also participate in this process with the integration of academics and scientists in exile into their campuses and the development of mentoring programmes to facilitate their return to work. For instance, to enhance the employability of refugee academics, they could be involved in a professional capacity in the delivery of courses dedicated to refugee students in the host countries. Furthermore, higher education institutions might provide access to internships, and in addition, specifically for refugee students, information on the structure of the national labour market, interview training and mentoring with particular emphasis on the cultural context and differences.

<sup>13</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32011L0095>

<sup>14</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1529077370000&uri=CELEX:32016L0801#ntr17-L\\_2016132EN.01002101-E0017](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1529077370000&uri=CELEX:32016L0801#ntr17-L_2016132EN.01002101-E0017)

## inHERE project

Further information on the project:

[www.inhereproject.eu](http://www.inhereproject.eu)

Good practice catalogue:

[www.inhereproject.eu/outputs/good-practice-catalogue](http://www.inhereproject.eu/outputs/good-practice-catalogue)

Guidelines for University Staff Members:

[www.inhereproject.eu/outputs/guidelines-for-university-staff-members](http://www.inhereproject.eu/outputs/guidelines-for-university-staff-members)



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