

Refugees' impact on Bologna reform – a 2 day conference in Malmö, Sweden.
Report by Anne Klaas Schilder, member of the Dutch Bologna expert team
(chaired by Nuffic) and Katrien Bardoel, senior policy advisor Nuffic

Outline

June 11 and 12 we attended a highly relevant conference on refugees within higher education in the EU-zone. It was organised by the Swedish Council for Higher Education, and was attended by 170 participants from all over Europe. The conference-location was Malmö University, a twenty year young university with 24.000 students, situated at the heart of the renovated harbour area, next to the central railway station.

The 1st day was packed with presentations, the 2nd day there was a mix of presentations and workshops. These themes stood central throughout:

- Setting the scene – Recognition of Prior Learning, inclusion and alternative study paths in the Bologna Implementation Report
- The refugee situation – a Bologna reform stress test? European stakeholders view on the current situation and the future
- Policies for Recognition of Prior Learning
- Resolution on admission to higher education for refugees in Germany, reform to recognise prior learning
- The EAR manual – Best practice according to the Lisbon Recognition Convention
- The French national system for Recognition of Prior Learning
- Alternative routes into Higher Education for refugees – experiences of Kiron Open Higher Education
- Global challenges and the importance of Recognition of Prior Learning and alternative study paths
- What can Higher Education Institutions learn from the Vocational Education sector?
- Recognition of Prior Learning in practice – Four examples
- Lessons learned – what is the next step forward?

The presentations of these themes can be found on the programme page of the conference website <https://www.uhr.se/om-uhr/Konferenser/refugees-impact-on-bologna-reform/programme/>

Each presentation is linked in the programme to the person who delivered it. In the near future the Council will also publish films from the conference and a written report.

What was our overall impression?

Anne Klaas: “Well, my first impression was that, amongst all the European professionals concerned, there were no actual refugees involved. After a while though I saw why: of all refugees in Europe more than 75% is Syrian of origin. Less surprising is that less than 2% of all refugees get access to graduate or post graduate education. Throughout the conference it became even more clear: within Europe, even within well-organized and willing nations, there is a multitude of measures, procedures, and some bureaucracy that would even frustrate highly educated citizens. The threshold is simply too high, the language barriers might be too steep, and the communication concerned is too variant. Next to that, assessing prior learning, previous work experiences and foreign diploma’s, if present at all, is a complicated and time consuming business, while the formal status of many refugees is quite often unclear as well.”

Katrien, one of the key note speakers in Malmö: “Many speakers underlined the need to embed RPL in broader national structures. For instance when a ‘work first’ principle is being used by national governments or municipalities responsible for the integration of refugees, or when universities have little room to offer flexible education/tailored courses, few migrants and refugees will be able to make effective use of RPL.”

So what to do now?

Too many things– as for us we'll try to establish realistic goals with our colleagues from Nuffic, and with University Assistance Fund (UAF, www.uaf.nl), at the conference represented by Petra Veltman. The overarching goal is to further improve qualification-, financial- and entrance-procedures, to increase enrolment in Dutch HE-programmes. Anne Klaas will focus on universities of applied sciences, like Stenden in Leeuwarden, which has a highly international profile. Within the Bologna expert group we will address the issue as well.

If you can be of help, or if you may have questions, please contact one of us.

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