

MaxiPac

OUTCOME 2

Modalities and organization aspects at the Universities

Summary Report Prepared for Collaborative Universities, Policy-makers, and other Experts
on the MaxiPAC.eu Procedure to Maximize Previously Acquired Competences
(Degrees and experiences) of Refugees and Third-Country National Students in European Higher
Education

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Acronyms

MAXIPAC-EU= This is the name of the European Project meaning Maximising Previously Acquired Competences

UNHCR= United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

EQPR= European Qualification Passport for Refugees

ONG= Non-Governmental Organizations

HEI= Higher Education Institutions

HES= Higher Education Systems

IOM=International Organization for Migration

CAP: Centre for Long-Life Learning

CIMEA= this is the Italian acronym for information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence

General Introduction

The MaxiPAC.eu project (Maximize Previously Acquired Competences at European Universities) started on 31st of December 2019 and concludes on 31st December 2022, with co-funding from the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. Its target group, third country national student, persons in refugee-like situations, and persons coming from non-European countries who have acquired a skill, qualification, and do not have documentary evidence such as certificates for proving their previously acquired competences for various reasons. Its partner Universities include: The University of Lapland in Finland; EKKE (The National Centre for Social Research) in Greece; AEGEE (The European Student Organisation) in Belgium; the University of Bari Aldo Moro in Italy, and the project lead Thomas More University in Belgium. To achieve the goal of the project, partners took upon Outcomes 1-5:

1. Uniform Procedure to valorize previously acquired competencies (Thomas More Kempen - Belgium)
2. Modalities and organization aspects at the University (Bari Aldo Moro - Italy)
3. How to implement the procedure in Universities? (Thomas More Kempen - Belgium)
4. How to deal with languages? (University of Lapland - Finland)
5. E-learning support (EKKE - Greece)

On the legalities and rationale for addressing the above problem, the Bologna Declaration (1999) specifies that European Universities and Universities of Applied Sciences in Europe have the autonomy to valorize the qualifications and competencies acquired elsewhere according to their standards. Further, the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997) did raise the need for EU countries to develop procedures to assess whether groups as refugees and displaced persons fulfill the relevant requirements for access to higher education and places of employment, even when the qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence. However, despite this autonomy, the targeted migrant group and those in refugee-like situations who travel to Europe continue to experience numerous challenges. In particular, where their previously acquired competencies are not recognized in Europe making them unable to work or study. Other barriers they face include inadequate access to e-services and language support services, among others. In some cases, dealing with University program requirements, learning procedures, and employment needs can be difficult, especially where information is made available in languages other than those of the target group.

To address the above challenges, MaxiPAC has developed a procedure with the following contents to make it easier for persons of the targeted migrant group to access higher education. The procedure also makes available, various steps that can be adapted to the overarching admission procedures for student enrolment in degree programs at European Universities. It takes into consideration, the following:

- Structured scan: A means to provide reliable information about the applicant's educational qualifications, work experience, and language skills. A scan that applies to all European higher education institutions upon taking.
- Multiple short cases: An initial and low-cost step to measure the feasibility of the student and the chosen program.
- A portfolio: This includes various forms of assessments offered to the applicant as the main step of the EAC procedure.
- Psychosocial support: Support provided to the student throughout the application process. Such support Integration training coordinated by the student services of the relevant higher

education institution with other local services that can support the refugee Integration training. This step is rather a continuous process during the procedure.

1. Introduction Outcome 2

Within the MaxiPAC- EU project the University of Bari (Italy) has been in charge for Outcome 2 "*Modalities and organization aspects at the universities*". More specifically, this Outcome has been functional to provide methodologies/guidelines, as well as a methodological framework for implementation to administrative staff involved in the process of previous learning recognition for third-country national students at university. Compared to other educational projects (e.g., NOKUT, KA2 Toolkit 1 (2016-2018) + KA2 REACT (2018-2020), this project, in an innovative and original way, pays attention to the modalities to make the recognition implementation a sound procedure in universities. Therefore, Outcome 2 has been guided by the following main research questions:

- To what extent universities have services where recognition tasks can be included, and which services and functions are necessary?
- Where is the lack of support for the staff to carry out this task properly?

To reply to these questions, the University of Bari, relying upon its members' research professionalism in the educational field as well as on the consolidated expertise in the validation and recognition of previous learning (formal, non-formal, informal), has performed, firstly, a review study on common recognition practices across the EU boards. This study has been functional to analyze and interpret the main challenges and criticalities in the recognition of previous learning and competences of third country national students. Then, a smart training path aimed to support the administrative staff, has been designed and developed involving all the MaxiPAC-EU Project partners.

2. Target Groups

Over the years, one of the most frequent challenges faced in the implementation of recognition procedures across the EU higher education context attained the difficulties in introducing and managing student careers which appear incomplete and not aligned with the national higher education systems. In this perspective, administrative staff involved in the recognition processes have a crucial role, not only in supporting third countries national students, but also in ensuring a sound, responsive and inclusive process. Within the MaxiPAC-EU Project the University of Bari focused on identifying and designing the most effective modalities to train the administrative staff support students in the four recognition phases defined in the MaxiPAC-EU procedure (Output 1).

Providing guidance and training to administrative staff in implementing the MaxiPAC-EU approach is an important aspect that has led to shed light on how a European systemic and integrated approach in terms of local, national policies and practices is necessary to ensure a sound, transparent and effective inclusive education for third countries national students.

Considering the context of the European higher education system, informing and training administrative staff on the coaching activities as well as on the formal procedure of recognition represent a pivotal element to ensure a good result in the recognition of previous learning and competencies of third countries national students.

Working on the skills of administrative staff, the project has allowed to:

1. modernising and optimising the internal processes;
2. improving the interaction between our institutions and stakeholders (e.g., student associations; NGOs; etc.);
3. improving the delivery and quality of service.

Along with the coaching activities such as tutoring, mentorship and peer education activities the intake practices held by administrative staff are relevant to support third countries national students in their integration path. Moreover, administrative staff are crucial because they must explain to the third countries national students the recognition procedure pointing out: expenses (e.g., in case of fees); time; efforts; realistic chances to intake and complete the procedure.

In this perspective, Outcome 2 of the MaxiPAC_EU project points out how important it is having a scalable sound recognition procedure: not only for students but also for faculty and academic staff.

In the following we first report the systematic review study on recognition practices realised in the EU context. This study has been performed to detect if, and to what extent, common practices have been defined and implemented, at national level, in the different European higher education systems. Then, we report how the training path for administrative staff has been designed and implemented. Finally, we critically provide some policy advice at international, national, and local levels.

3. Research on Recognition Practices

3.1 *The Need for a Uniform Procedure*

The epistemological, social and policy implications of the concept of lifelong learning have been widely scrutinized and recognized over the last twenty years. Lifelong learning has been on policy agenda of the European Union for decades. In this perspective, the principles of human dignity, autonomy, active citizenship, personal self-attainment, social inclusion, and employability linked to the lifelong learning have been considered as a strategic lever for the economic growth, the social stability, and the redress of structural inequalities of racially minorized target of people.

The differencing conceptualizations of lifelong learning (included the identification of the non-formal and informal learning) have produced a large body of validation and recognition practices for different target groups across the European area. At the same time, it is somewhat unclear which factors facilitate or inhibit the implementation of these processes. An aspect that has become more urgent due to the new immigration waves, as well as the recent Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).

More specifically, the existing body of literature on recognition of third-country national students' learning (i.e., qualifications and/or competencies elsewhere acquired) is generally considered extensive in terms of principles and practices. However, despite the policy recognition of the importance of recognition practices, it must be noted that this broad field of research shows scant effects (or sometimes ineffective implementations) in the European higher education contexts.

If on the one hand, The Lisbon Recognition Convention states that all countries should develop procedures to assess whether refugees and displaced persons fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications cannot be proven through documentary evidence; on the other hand, higher education institutions have the autonomy to organize the inflow of third country nationals and to decide on the program of this group of lateral entrants. However, any structure in terms of recognition of qualifications and competences acquired elsewhere is lacking for third country nationals who wish to continue their studies in Europe after they have already made their way into higher education outside Europe. evidently, there is no proper tool to enable universities to effectively scale up the qualifications and competences of third country nationals acquired elsewhere. Moreover, no systematic analysis has been conducted on evidence gathered from previous studies on recognition practices for third-country national students at university.

The MaxiPAC-EU project Output 2 has tried to fill this gap providing an updated overview of validation and recognition practices for students with a migratory background within the EU area.

3.2 Recognition practices across the EU Area

Within the lifelong and life-wide learning perspective, the learning that takes place anywhere and anytime in the life of individuals must be identified and made visible. This assumption, in the European policy documents represents a key aspect to ensure the principle of the equivalence of learning of individuals, to integrate broader sections of populations into education and training systems, as well as to build more inclusive societies. In this vein, the attention deserved to the recognition of qualifications and competencies, as a mean for equity and social inclusion has deeply influenced educational research, educational policy (at national and local levels), and educational practices.

Different European countries, agreeing with the importance of recognition and certification of informal learning, have expressed the need to make learning “beyond the classroom” visible and to value it in a more responsive and effective way. Following *The European Guidelines for Validating Non-Formal and Informal Learning* different approaches have been developed over the years (e.g. firstly in France and UK and then in Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark), with a focus on different contexts (e.g. workplace, vocational education and training, higher education), for different targets (e.g. migrants, women, student employability), and different aims.

In 2012 the European Council issued the *Recommendations for the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning*, asking all member nations to define within 2018 “necessary arrangements for validation”. However, nowadays, the over production of methods and devices in comparison to the real needs of certification points out that the identification and use of a shared common practice are far to be pursued. Different studies demonstrated how complex and problematic recognition of informal learning appears to be, especially for target groups like students with a migratory background. Moreover, these studies showed how informal learning, even within the consistent legislative framework, had not sufficient recognition: the difficulties for implementation of recognition/validation affect also social inclusion. Other studies, instead, highlighted how the power of recognition in terms of liberty, social justice, and equity are underestimated. The comparative analysis realized by the EU Commission in 2010 confirms how weak, across the EU countries, the processes of recognition may be. A latent paradox becomes evident here: some people may be made despondent by the process of recognition and, as a negative consequence, social exclusion may grow. Furthermore, what is becoming clear is the difficulty of integrating recognition and certification practices into formal education systems.

In the follow some factors may constrain or facilitate access to recognition practices:

- The need to differentiate between the grade awarded, in horizontal (meaning the progress through the system) and vertical (meaning consistent grades when changing from one institution to another) terms, within an education system;
- The level of autonomy and flexibility that education institutions have over assessment arrangements;
- The accessibility to lifelong learning programs;
- The organization of learning paths;
- The economic supports;
- The identification of concrete chances of continuous learning.

It is worth noting also that some problems affect the recognition/validation:

- The limited opportunities for individuals to access these practices;

- The lack of coherence between different recognition approaches, and
- The lack of a unique definition in terms of policy.

Although the European Union has defined a common framework, there are many differences between the several initiatives taken, in policy and practice, to facilitate integration and inclusion. Sometimes these differences are substantial, among the European countries. Taking account of the complex validation and recognition landscape *The European Inventory on Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning* (CEDEFOP, 2014) gave a detailed snapshot of the state of the art. This *Inventory* underlines how the gap is relevant in the development of recognition and certification systems: while great attention has been reserved to the effects of recognition, few efforts have been made in theoretical (what recognition is and what it can accomplish) and methodological terms (approaches and practices of recognition).

The first evidence of the MaxiPAC-EU project Output 2, based on the screening of the literature as well as the desk analysis on recognition and validation practices realised by the EU higher education institutions, confirms how the scenario is not coherent and cohesive. If on the one hand, there are consistent signs of progress in the definition of achievable aims, on the other hand, there are some unresolved assessment dilemmas (e.g., who is responsible for the recognition? Which criteria must be considered in this assessment process?). Considering the impact that the results of recognition of third-country national students learning have as expanding practices in the higher education context, these processes must be regarded more carefully.

The Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997) - signed and ratified by almost all European countries — stipulates: ‘Each party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation’. Higher Education Institutions (HEI) have to fulfill the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programs or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.

4. Administrative Staff Training

4.1. A bottom-up approach

One of the main aims of the MaxiPAC-EU project specifically connected with Outcome 2 was to outline the state of the art of policies and services provided by the partner universities in the field of reception of third country nationals, identifying criticalities and needs on the administrative staff side for first reception of students belonging to this specific target. Accordingly, a training via webinar for reception staff was finally planned and delivered to support the administrative staff of the universities, giving them appropriate tools and instruments to deal with the complex recognition procedures.

In light with this assumption, this section of the report summarizes the concrete actions that have been carried out by the University of Bari to fulfil these aims and introduces the outcomes that have been produced within the wider frame of the MaxiPAC-EU project.

The approach used by the research group to go through these actions is a bottom-up approach, based on the acknowledgement that the administrative staff could be the best informants about the current criticalities experienced during the procedure in universities and if properly involved could fruitfully support the research group in shaping tools and instruments that could concretely facilitate the introduction of a uniform procedure. Consequently, dedicated actions with this target have been planned and carried out, as described in detail the following sections.

4.2. Methodology, instruments, participants

According to the workplan agreed with the partnership of the MaxiPAC-EU project, the methodology used by the University of Bari has articulated into different moments also adopting a range of tools to support the gathering of information.

A first exploration of the necessary conditions for first reception of third country nationals was conducted during the international training in Belgium in October 2021. Here, during the working sessions foreseen by the agenda of the event, focus groups with representatives of the Universities partner of the project were conducted to explore the “state of the art” and the current needs of administrative staff while interacting with third country nationals requiring the recognition of their prior learning. The hint for the focused discussions was: *What works, what does not work in the procedure currently used in your institution?*

Results coming from this first exploration were analysed and shared with the partners, descriptive material was produced to sketch the criticalities but also the suggestions coming from the reception staff from each partner country. The main findings highlighted positive and negative aspects: flexible and

customized services for students, cooperation among universities but also linguistic obstacles and bureaucratic workload, intercultural illiteracy and difficulties in coordinating, at local level (e.g. different departments, schools, etc.).

Following to this descriptive phase and consequent to the evolution of Outcome 1, foreseeing the definition and the proposal of a definite uniform procedure to implement in universities, two sessions of online training were organized to have informative feedback and useful suggestions for a sound and effective implementation of the MaxiPAC—EU procedure.

On the 25th and on the 27th of January 2022, the research group from the University of Bari met the administrative staff from each national context to investigate their perception of the procedure with specific reference to the strengths and criticalities it could have.

Participants to the first session were 7: 3 from the University of Bari, Serafina Pastore, Amelia Manuti, Marianna Colosimo, 2 from Thomas More University, Vera Nijs and Els Voet, 2 from the University of Lapland, Tkach Pavel and Tiina Maki Petaja. While to the second session participated 4 from the University of Bari, Serafina Pastore, Amelia Manuti, Fausta Scardigno, Marianna Colosimo – Bari, 3 from EKKE – Harokopio, University of Athens, Angelo Tramountanis, Alexandra Theofili and Polys Papadopoulos.

The topics covered during the training were:

- What are the main criticalities and/or difficulties you see in the procedure currently used for the formal recognition of qualifications (degrees) and of the learning/skills/abilities previously acquired in informal and non-formal settings by students who are refugees and/or third country nationals?
- If you have a look at the MaxiPAC-EU procedure which practices/processes do you feel that mostly need attention to ensure its feasible and effective implementation?
- Which are your needs in terms of your professional competencies/expertise/knowledge to implement this procedure?

The tables above show the main results coming from the two sections.

Overview of the key issues emerged in the discussion (January 25th 2022)

Steps of the MaxiPAC-EU procedure	Criticalities	Skills to be developed
1. European Qualifications Scan	Difficulties in language, difficulties in knowing the specific contents of the qualification previously acquired (e.g. a degree in law is not universal in terms of expertise)	language skills, soft skills (empathy, communication, openness to culture), technical skills (knowledge of the study fields)
2. Multiple Short Cases	Difficulties in telling it is better asking them to write	Mostly the same as in the previous step
3. Portfolio and assessment	Difficulties in finding and organizing evidence in support, time consuming activities that could negatively impact on motivation especially if there are few conditions to go further	Coaching
4. Assessment of the psycho-social situation	This step could be experienced by the student as very similar to the first one being a moment dedicated to the reflection about the state of the art and about the possibility to project in the future.	Socio-economic knowledge of the context where the student is willing to continue studying (e.g. it is important also to consider the average wage in the country of origin as compared with the hosting one to avoid that economical affordance is not possible)



Overview of the key issues emerged in the discussion (January 27th 2022)

Steps of the MaxiPAC-EU procedure	Criticalities	Skills to be developed	Suggestions for the implementation
1. European Qualifications Scan	Difficulties in language, difficulties in knowing the specific contents of the qualification previously acquired (e.g. a degree in law is not universal in terms of expertise)	language skills, soft skills (empathy, communication, openness to culture), technical skills (knowledge of the study fields)	Gather information about motivations, about intention to stay or to leave the country where they study More information about time, costs, possibilities to succeed
2. Multiple Short Cases	Difficulties in telling it is better asking them to write	Mostly the same as in the previous step	Bullet list with previous experience (more schematic) Involvement of NGOs and migrant organizations
3. Portfolio and assessment	Difficulties in finding and organizing evidence in support, time consuming activities that could negatively impact on motivation especially if there are few conditions to go further	Coaching	Check list of the possible evidence to be produced Difficulties in understanding different educational systems (table to make an overview of the main points in common and of the differences between systems)
4. Assessment of the psycho-social situation	This step could be experienced by the student as very similar to the first one being a moment dedicated to the reflection about the state of the art and about the possibility to project in the future.	Socio-economic knowledge of the context where the student is willing to continue studying (e.g. it is important also to consider the average wage in the country of origin as compared with the hosting one to avoid that economical affordance is not possible)	Ambassadors (third-country national senior students) who have undertaken the same procedure

Briefly, among the positive aspects, it emerged flexibility and customized services by the Universities, counselling and networking (University cooperation), however more negative aspects were also mentioned, such as language (obstacle), bureaucratic workload, intercultural illiteracy/lack of competence, difficulties in retrieving qualifications/evidence from origin countries, national policy orientations in the higher education field and some difficulties to coordinate, at local level, different departments, schools, etc.

Results were used to develop a leaflet.

4.3. Tools for administrative staff training on the MaxiPAC-EU Procedure

Moving from the acknowledgement that administrative staff in universities is often called to be the first interface while receiving third country nationals and that they had clearly manifested the need to be supported especially in giving information to this target helping them to start a procedure, in the previous phase of the project, in line with aims of Outcome 2, the University of Bari produced two operative instruments/resources, dedicated to the administrative staff to sponsor the MaxiPAC-EU procedure appropriately: a front-office tool, namely a leaflet that gives a rapid overview of the procedure focusing

on each step and on its requirements, and a back-office tool, a booklet containing guidelines for the MaxiPAC-EU procedure, namely tips and hints precious for the staff to lead students while applying for the procedure and to make sure they are aware about the challenges and obstacles that they could encounter in order to make the way to the recognition sustainable and affordable from different points of view (material, psychological, economical, etc.).

The first tool, the leaflet, is meant as an informative tool that can be distributed to students interested in enrolling to courses and in valorising previous learning to give them support about requirements and about important contact persons. It describes the MaxiPAC-EU Project, its main aims and then it goes into details of each step of the uniform procedure proposed within the project (European Qualification Scan, Multiple Short Cases, Portfolio and assessment and Follow-up of broad economical and psycho-social situation) to make them aware about challenges and opportunities. On the other hand, the second tool is a back-office tool a booklet containing guidelines for the administrative staff useful to manage efficiently the interaction with students interested in the procedure. Accordingly, guidelines describe each step of the procedure not simply in terms of actions that need to be accomplished to progress in the procedure, rather in terms of behaviours and competences that need to be showed from the standpoint of the operator engaged in sponsoring the enrolment and in assuring its sustainability.

Therefore, this tool gives concrete suggestions to the administrative staff about how to behave, to inform, to encourage and to ascertain that students could successfully go through the procedure. In this vein, guidelines have been meant as a training tool useful to make aware administrative staff about the soft skills that need to be developed to interact with the specific target of third country national students.

In line with these assumptions, also videos with some representatives of the Italian administrative staff working with these issues and with some students who have been supported in their way to the recognition of prior learning by the Centre for life-long Learning or the University of Bari have been produced.

4.3.1. Leaflet



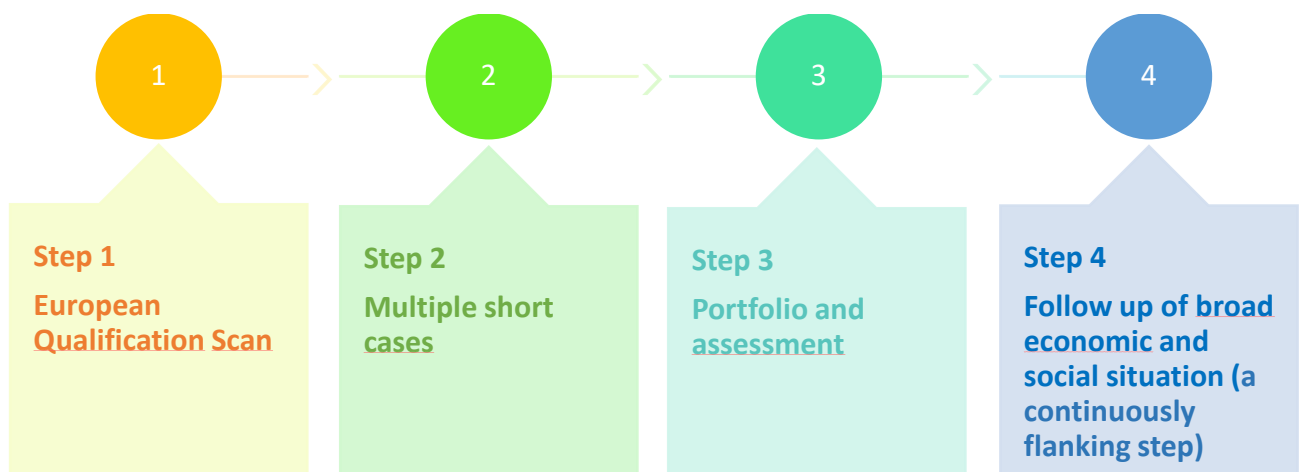
4.3.2. Guidelines

THE MAXIPAC-EU PROCEDURE: A STEP-BY-STEP SMART GUIDE FOR ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF HINTS, TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO PERFORM YOUR ROLE IN THE PROCEDURE

About the MaxiPAC-EU Project

MaxiPAC-EU, acronym for Maximising Previously acquired Competence in European Universities, is an Erasmus + Project aiming to maximise previously acquired competences (degrees and experience) of Third Country Nationals in European Higher Education

The procedure in a nutshell



What is your role in the procedure?

Here are some information about each step and some tips about how to manage the procedure on your side!

STEP I EUROPEAN QUALIFICATION SCAN

Focus and highlights

This step is aimed to collect information about the third country nationals' qualifications, competencies and experiences, using the European Qualification Scan Form;

The MaxiPAC-EU procedure needs to be clearly explained to the third countries national students in terms of:

1. Expenses (e.g., in case of fees);
2. Time;
3. Efforts;
4. Realistic chances to intake and complete the procedure;

5. Students' expectations and institution's requirements.

Tips and hints

- Be sensitive, honest, and transparent with third-country national students: it is important that they would rely upon you to intake the procedure!
- Your support is fundamental in filling the five sections of the European Qualification Scan:
 - Personal information
 - Language Skills
 - Summary of qualifications
 - Overview of experience
 - Computer skills

Smart Ideas

- Be informative and clear: to prepare a detailed checklist about the documents that third country national students need to provide is an effective strategy.
- Assure yourself to have sufficient information about the students' life history and learning needs: you need sound information for your decision-making in proceeding to the next steps of the MaxiPAC-EU procedure.
- Don't forget to ask about the motivations for the enrolment and recognition and to inform timely about the complexity from the inner side.
- Language may be an obstacle: if you do not speak the language of the student asking for the procedure you can involve a cultural mediator, a senior international student or you can also use a translator device;

STEP II MULTIPLE SHORT CASES

Focus and highlights

The second step of the procedure consists of submitting some short, written cases to the third country national who is interested in a particular program and would like to start a MaxiPAC-EU procedure. After this step, you need to assess whether the third-country national student has a chance to go further with the procedure or not, having the necessary (basic) knowledge required for the program;

Tips and hints

- You need to be prepared to gather information about the subject matters of each study fields inside your institution, as well as about the number of credits needed to obtain a diploma;
- You need to contact teachers and courses' coordinators to ask them to help you comparing contents and knowledge mastered by third country national students;
- Third-country national students interested in the procedure might also need to formally attest their learning outcomes and/or partial qualification (i.e., considering the numbers of credits) to go further in the process of recognition.

Smart Ideas

- A comparative table of graduate and post-graduate degrees of your university should be useful in this phase.
- Please remember that students are very vulnerable in this phase, because they strongly rely upon the possibility that their qualification could be recognized;
- An ambassador, better if a senior student in the same situation, could be helpful to third country national students to guide them appropriately through the pros and contras of the procedure and to socialize better with the university context.

STEP III PORTFOLIO AND ASSESSMENT

Focus and highlights

The third step of the procedure is the preparation of a portfolio and the assessment.

The portfolio is a file compiled by the third country national with evidence from his/her own practice to demonstrate the competences acquired.

The program must provide the third country national with an overview of the competencies to be achieved related to the program. For each learning outcome, the third country national must provide an overview of his learning and work experience.

To support this, he/she will have to submit a portfolio of supporting documents proving that he/she has sufficient relevant experience about the different learning outcomes and corresponding behavioural indicators.

Possible pieces of evidence could be evaluation reports, work experience, papers, reports of practical experience, reflections on cases, publications, final products or presentations, reports from the professional field in which he/she is mentioned, training certificates, etc. Previously acquired qualifications can also be included in the portfolio, such as diplomas, course units taken in the country of origin or in another country, etc.

Tips and Hints

- Provide students with a list of eventual/possible evidence that could be useful to be produced and give them some exemplars: this strategy will be helpful to understand what kind of evidence they must produce, and which criteria will be considered to assess the collected evidence (e.g., authenticity; relevance; quantity, etc.).
- By this, students will save time because find out, prepare and collect all evidence can be time-consuming and stressful processes.
- Don't forget to show to students the alternatives that could be possible if the procedure fails and support them from a psychological point of view: they are in a hosting country.
-

Smart Ideas

- Develop a bullet list with the things needed for a sound and informative portfolio: it could be useful both for the professionals accompanying the students in this procedure and for the students who undergo such process.
- It is also important to give students information about the “demands” of the course namely to inform them about the expectations that are implied in university, as for instance the need to accomplish internship before graduating and the need to discuss a dissertation that should be written down by them in the national language.

STEP IV FOLLOW-UP OF BROAD ECONOMIC-PSYCHOSOCIAL SITUATION (A CONTINUOUSLY FLANKING STEP)

Focus and highlights

The final step of the MaxiPAC-EU procedure is the exploration of the broad economic, medical, psychological and social situation of the third-country national.

If the third-country national has successfully completed step 3 - portfolio and assessment – she/he is generally able to start the course with exemptions.

To maximise the chance to succeed in his study program, the broad social context experienced by the student is balanced with the workload. The situation in which third country nationals find themselves often makes it difficult to follow a full-time study program.

In step 4 – Psycho-social support (a continuously flanking step), you look at the contextual situation together with the third country nationals.

Tips and hints

- Keep an eye on third country national students!!!
- Regularly monitor the intention of the student to stay in the country where he/she studied.

Smart ideas

- To secure conditions for a successful integration foresee an ambassador (another third-country national student) as a positive example of academic integration or a mentor (a professor and/or a peer student) who knows how university works.

For more information contact us: sportello.cap@uniba.it or visit the website: <http://www.MaxiPac.eu>

4.3.3. Videos

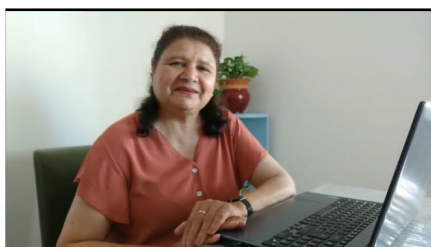


Video testimony from Dr. Marianna Colosimo,
Responsible of CAPUniba Service.

<https://youtu.be/1H0UneF7WxQ>



Video testimony from Noreen Suleman, a refugee
student enrolled in the second year of the Uniba
Master's Degree Course in "Public, Social and
Business Communication Sciences".



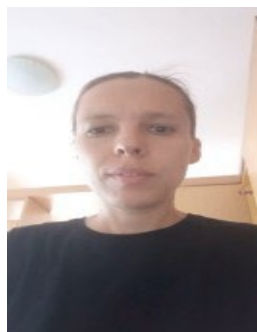
<https://youtu.be/PsIFVHcF-TQ>

Video testimony from Baba Traore, an international student enrolled at the second year of the Uniba Master's Degree Course in "International Relations and European Studies".



<https://youtu.be/JSYxGw25wYI>

Video testimony from Olena, an Ukrainian doctor who obtained the EQPR for working as a health professional in Italy.



<https://youtu.be/q5Wklqh-MNQ>

5. Policy Recommendations

5.1. Policy Recommendations on the international level

Despite the efforts made at international and European level since the 1997 Lisbon Convention, the skills acquired by Third Country Citizens are still not easily expendable in the Higher Education system and in the labour market. Similarly, educational qualifications are not always recognized as equivalent in the world of education. The delay in the recognition of an educational qualification produces a "devaluation" of the cultural capital of migrant people, who are thus considered "low-skilled", effectively limiting the possibility of accessing to the educational system and the labour market. Consequently, migrant people can't continue their path of tertiary education and academic and social integration.

UNHCR's education strategy "Refugee Education 2030: A strategy for Refugee Inclusion" has long supported the importance of promoting, also at university level, conditions, partnerships, collaborations, and approaches that guarantee all young refugees and asylum seekers to inclusive and equitable quality education. This is also confirmed in the "Global Compact on Refugees", approved on 17 December 2017 by the United Nations General Assembly, which highlights that: *"In line with national education laws, policies and planning, and in support of host countries, States and relevant stakeholders will contribute resources and expertise to expand and enhance the quality and inclusiveness of national education systems to facilitate access by refugee and host community children (both boys and girls), adolescents and youth to primary, secondary and tertiary education"*.

Even the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has long supported HEIs in helping third-country national students to access to higher education paths, by providing specific tools favouring the exchange of skills and positive experience of inclusion and best practices with and between universities (for example, with the Mentorship project). In the context of the procedures for the recognition of foreign qualifications acquired by young migrants in the European country in which they reside, the work carried out by the NARIC Network promoted by the European Union and the ENIC Network promoted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO (Europe Region) is crucial. (<http://www.enic-naric.net>).

Although there is growing attention in international policies and especially in European policies to the integration processes of third-country national students, the COVID-19 crisis has made the pre-existing inequalities even more evident and determined a significant risk of increasing poverty or social exclusion (European Commission, 2021).

When we consider the educational needs of refugees, the importance of accessing tertiary education opportunities is well known. In this regard, the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) in the latest Report on Refugees and Education *"Staying the Course: The Challenges Facing Refugee Education"*, sets as a goal that 15% of refugees should have access to tertiary education by 2030 (today it is 5%) (UNHCR, 2021). The report notes how young refugees around the world are trying to continue their studies, despite the serious difficulties imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With the New Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion 2021-2027, even more attention is paid to the skills of migrants and their education and training paths, tertiary education included. A particular emphasis is given to the processes of recognition of qualifications and the skills acquired, also including language skills. For these reasons at international and European level it is important that the evaluation procedures such as those developed by the MaxiPAC-EU Project are activated to support the principle of equal access (and success) of refugee people to Higher Education paths. In this way it will be possible to guarantee the right to study and lifelong learning, also through peer support and tutoring.

At the international level, therefore, it is recommended that policies intervene to promote not only the implementation of the provisions of the International Conventions (of Geneva, Lisbon, Bologna), but also to support:

- University corridors for the continuation of studies interrupted in the own country and direct access to universities through international agreements and network protocols;
- Processes of recognition and validation of formal, informal and non-formal skills to be implemented even after or in parallel with university enrolments, as a guarantee of the Lifelong Learning right;
- Recognition of formal, informal, and non-formal skills, along with peer tutoring, welcome, orientation, academic inclusion and social cohesion and support in reducing the risk of dropping out of university studies.

5.2. Policy Recommendations on the national levels

In Italy Universities adhering to the "**Manifesto for Inclusive Universities**", an UNHCR'network aimed to improve the access of refugees to the HE system, focusing on the recognition of qualifications, provide scholarships for students and researchers with international protection, and other incentives aimed, for example, to support for food and accommodation, support for study and urban mobility, counselling services, psychological support. They also promote, through the involvement of the local community, private sponsorship initiatives dedicated at students and researchers with international protection. They also undertake to activate university corridors for refugee teachers, students, and researchers, providing for the annual entry of quotas of refugee students residing in third countries, to favour complementary legal entry routes for refugees and facilitate their integration into society and academic environment. Furthermore, the Universities and research institutes of the Manifesto undertake to offer third-country national students economic support to cover university expenses and related maintenance costs, and a specific information, accompaniment and orientation service and promote participation in the academic life of refugee students and researchers, also by supporting them in setting up their associations or offering psychological counselling services aimed above all at maintaining their studies.

Many obstacles persist for third-country national students to have their skills recognized in non-formal and informal learning contexts, also due to the length and complexity of the practices of recognition and the limited development of support policies in favour of their integration into the social context and the labour market. In addition, there is sometimes a widespread idea that the need for requalification of one's own course of study and / or work does not depend on the possession of high qualifications acquired in one's own countries of origin. For these reasons, it is crucial that at national level all possible initiatives are taken to guarantee the right to lifelong learning of the refugee person (Law 92/2012). As part of the process of recognition of qualifications addressed to refugees, Italy is one of the few Member States that already twenty years ago provided for the Internal Ratification of the "Convention on the recognition of qualifications relating to higher education in the European Region "(Lisbon Convention), with Law no. 148

of 2002, "Ratification and execution of the Convention on the recognition of qualifications relating to higher education in the European Region and rules for the adaptation of the internal system". This law establishes for the first time the "finalized recognition" procedure, defining precise steps for the assessment of the equivalence of first, second and third level qualifications acquired abroad (Article 9 of Law 148/2022).

It is therefore recommended that the procedure of "finalized recognition" could be adopted at national level, especially for refugees who wish not to waste the cultural capital previously acquired, rather wish to enhance prior learning and/or experience to restart/continue their study and improve their professional situation suddenly interrupted by a their migratory condition (Scardigno et alii, 2019). Furthermore, it is recommended the implementation of the recent Art. 1 paragraph 28-quinquies of Law no. 15/2022. This law establishes that higher education institutions are responsible for the legal recognition of qualifications acquired abroad regardless of the citizenship held, which also applies to qualifications acquired in countries other than those signatories of the Lisbon Convention (recognition of qualifications relating to higher education in the European Region), pursuant to article 2 of law no. 148.

5.3 Policy Recommendations on the level of the Universities

Following the Lisbon Convention, higher education institutions have been called to introduce and use a fair, transparent, and effective recognition of diplomas, certificates and other qualifications obtained abroad by holders of refugee status or subsidiary protection status, even in the absence of certification from the State where the qualification was obtained. In 2019 Italian universities signed the "**Manifesto for Inclusive Universities**", proposed by the UNHCR' network and aimed to improve the access of refugees to the HE system, focusing on the recognition of qualifications. This is also the main focus of the MaxiPAC-EU Project.

Universities and research institutes adhering to the Manifesto provide information and assistance to refugees regarding the procedures for recognizing qualifications and qualifications obtained abroad, bearing in mind that, for reasons of protection and pursuant to Art. 25 of the Geneva Convention, the institutions cannot demand from refugees any benefits that involve recourse to the authorities of the country of origin (Embassies and Consulates). More specifically, the CIMEA, **Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence** (Enic-Naric network), is responsible of the certification and comparability service for Italian and foreign qualifications. Some Italian universities (e.g., Sassari, Torino, Rome) use the EQPR (European Qualification Passport for refugees) for the refugee students' enrolment in graduate and post-graduate courses. Moreover, the CIMEA promotes the Group of National Correspondents for Qualification Frameworks.

The University of Bari as many other Italian academic institutions has a very formal procedure for the recognition of previously acquired competences. In cases of formal education the candidate should send all the formal documentation about exams, credits, learning goals and final formal evaluation to a committee appointed by each degree course and composed by teachers expert in the field. This committee analyses the coherence between different learning paths and the possibility to recognize eventual credits and/or exams. In the end it formally expresses agreement or disagreement with the partial and/or complete recognition of previously acquired competences. In case of partial recognition the candidate should add exams to his/her career in order to collect the credits that are needed for that degree course. The same procedure used with compatriots is used for EU countries.

However, there is also the chance to ask for the recognition of the equivalence of the degrees obtained in other EU countries or the recognition of credits: by this students can be directly enrolled to first and second-level degree courses or can have a curtailment of credits. The procedures that have so far been adopted by Italian universities, even the most culturally sensitive ones such as those adhering to the Manifesto, have two limits:

- 1) They do not fully guarantee the "right to lifelong learning" of third-country national students as they limit themselves to the comparability of formal educational credentials, leaving out the whole range of skills acquired in informal and non-formal contexts;
- 2) They do not allow universities to be autonomous in assessing previously acquired educational credentials of third-country national students. These procedures still make Universities dependent on Ministerial bodies such as Cimea, also reducing the development of skills of the administrative staff involved in the processes of recognition and enhancement of the Cultural Capital of people with a migratory background.

Therefore, there is a need to adopt the MaxiPAC-EU procedure, which aims to define a uniform procedure, simplifying the criteria for the access to specific degree first and second level degree courses and the evaluation and administrative procedures necessary to formalize the enrolment of the beneficiary students. This pre-assessment of the educational credentials previously acquired abroad would allow third country nationals to actively choose their education and training, promote inclusion and academic integration, two important aspect to enhance to cope with the challenges of lifelong learning in adulthood.

5.4 In Brief: Recommendations for stakeholders and policy makers

Results collected working at Outcome 2 for the MaxiPAC-EU project has produced recommendations that could be articulated as follows:

At the international level:

We suggest developing policies aimed at promoting the actualization of the main International Conventions (Geneva, Lisbon, Bologna), through dedicated international agreements and network protocols, allowing third country national students to continue/restart their study, make their formal, informal and non-formal previously acquired knowledge being validated and recognized, enhancing their human capital and fostering social inclusion;

Examples of these positive experience are for instance the Project University Corridors for Refugees (UNICORE 4.0) promoted by 32 Italian universities with the support of UNHCR, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and many other NGO's organizations to increase opportunities for refugees **to continue their higher education in Italy, profiting from an exemption** from tuition fees and receiving financial support for plane tickets and visa-related expenses, as well as a study grant to help them during their stay in Italy.

At a national level:

We recommend improving the adoption of the "finalized recognition" procedure, introduced in most European countries after the Lisbon Convention since 2007. Through this procedure, issued by the CIMEA (A national network for information on academic mobility) third country nationals could apply for the recognition of their previously acquired qualifications having the possibility to restart/continue their study and/or to enhance their human capital and enter the labour market.

At the university level:

We recommend that universities and higher education institutions could gain their autonomy in assessing the educational credentials of third-country national students, even if still in collaboration with some national and international networks, such as ENIC-NARIC or CIMEA.

6. Conclusion

Although the over production of educational policies recommendations and orientations the university enrolment of third-country national students still represents a difficult challenge in terms of embedded practices and systemic processes within the European universities: migration phenomenon, inclusion, and higher education systems still present structural inconsistencies. In this perspective, the problems of access third nationals' country students, despite the advocated massification of higher education, continue to exist and to raise concerns in terms of real inclusion and of responsive education practice. A considerable body of literature has documented the factors (at institutional, structural, personal levels) which affect inclusion and impact the participation, as well as the learning performances of students with a migratory background. However, few solid evidence exists on effective and systematic practices of inclusion. Working at the interplay of opportunity structures of host societies (and therefore of higher education institutions) with individual needs, resources and preferences represents a strategic lever to reply to the equity instances properly and responsively.

Relevant problems remain to be solved:

- Ensuring a sound, sustainable, and equity-minded process of recognition of qualifications and competences of students with a migratory background;
- Facilitating the transfer of university educational policies into sustainable and effective practices;
- Reducing the main criticalities, the hindrances, and the inefficacies that affect the implementation of the recognition process;
- Sharing the good practices of university recognition that can be used to shape third countries national's student education paths

The MaxiPAC-EU project Output 2, in this perspective, may be helpful in outlining future debate and further educational projects and research studies to addressing the persistent structural inequalities in the higher education systems. Inclusion is a policy that recognises diversity as standard and creates conditions so that everyone can participate. It is linked to democratic participation within and beyond education.

To achieve inclusion, it is necessary to increase the capacity of settings and systems to respond to diversity in ways that value everyone equally. First and foremost, an inclusive university requires a new way of thinking. This is important for the attitude of stakeholders such as fellow students, teachers, administrative staff or the management of the "inclusive universities network".

The MaxiPAC-EU procedure, finally, would be responsive to the needs of the third national countries students, as well as to the University ones. The procedure attempts to overcome the highlighted limits and once adopted in MaxiPAC-EU partners' higher education institutions will be an example for all universities.