

# *MaxiPAC*

## *OUTCOME 5*

### *e-Learning support for Third Country Nationals*

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

Project MaxiPAC.eu  
2019-1-BE02-KA203-060340  
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## Acronyms

EAC = elsewhere acquired competences

EAQ = elsewhere acquired qualifications

ENIC/NARIC = The use of the ENIC (European Network of Information Centres in the European Region) and NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union) in one term refers to the network of collaboration between the national information centers on academic recognition of qualifications of in total 55 countries. The national information centers operate under the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997).

EHEA = European Higher Education Area

EQS = European Qualification Scan

EU = European Union

HEI = Higher Education Institutions (Universities & Universities of Applied Sciences)

MaxiPAC = Maximizing Previously Acquired Competences

RPL = Recognition of Prior Learning

TCN = Third Country National

PAC = Previously Acquired Competences

FAQs = Frequently asked questions

## 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 4

Access to education is a fundamental human right, but also an important prerequisite for more inclusive societies. To achieve this goal, EU countries should ensure that migrants and refugees living in Europe and/or arriving in Europe in search of refuge and a better life have the opportunity to continue their studies if they so wish. To facilitate migrants' and refugees' access to higher education, the MaxiPAC.eu project has implemented several activities and intellectual outcomes.

The National Centre for Social Research (EKKE) is responsible for the implementation of **Outcome 5: “E-Learning support for third country nationals”**. The aim of this outcome is **to examine how e-learning can be used and maximised in higher education for third country nationals**. Since many refugees and TCNs have limited or no knowledge of the local language of the host country, e-learning can be a solution by using the English language, which more people know. In other words, e-learning may address the language challenge that many migrants and refugees face when they arrive in a new place of residence and facilitate access to information and to higher education.

To achieve the required aim, EKKE team followed different pathways, which offered significant input and allowed for assessing the best possible ways to address the objectives of the project:

- Encouraged the exchange of information and expertise at national level between participants to share expertise and knowledge relevant to e-learning in higher education.
- Promoted discussions and took stock of critical assessments of the educational development plans of the participating universities to respond to the needs of refugee students. Through exchanges with the participating institutions relevant information was gathered on how HEIs coordinate and implement their actions – both at the undergraduate and postgraduate level – regarding TCNs enrollment and teaching.
- Identified a wide range of e-learning opportunities and challenges faced by universities and ways to overcome them in the participating countries.
- Based on the experiences and input gathered through Round Tables, meetings, and national workshops - organised by/with the cooperation of the participating institutions - explored the admission criteria for refugee and TCN students and identified potential structures that would benefit non-EU students.

This output has addressed the following elements:

1. Following an assessment of the available e-learning platforms, it is structured in such way as to contribute to the purpose of helping refugees and TCNs overcome the issues discouraging them from higher education in Europe.
2. It contains practical e-learning materials:
  - a) It offers an e-learning platform to inform both university administrations and refugee/TCN students about enrolling in higher education using the MaxiPAC.eu procedure.
  - b) It may act as a digital guide explaining student services for refugees. It contains a great deal of input/material which is useful for different groups of non-EU students who seek possible ways to enrol to HEIs in MaxiPAC.eu project countries.
  - c) It is an e-learning platform which enhances and promotes real-life lessons.

Overall, the main objectives of the e-learning platform are depicted in Figure 1, which also offers a graphic representation of each objective:



**Figure 1.** Illustration of the main objectives of the e-learning platform

The research carried out in the MaxiPAC.eu project also showed that in many countries' university courses are held in the local language (e.g., in Greece), so e-learning could be a solution. Therefore, we investigated which tools would be useful to enable third-country nationals to access courses that are either taught only in the national language or require a lot of national knowledge that the refugee does not have. Since the online tools are offered in English and can be repeated as often as necessary, e-learning can offer a solution.

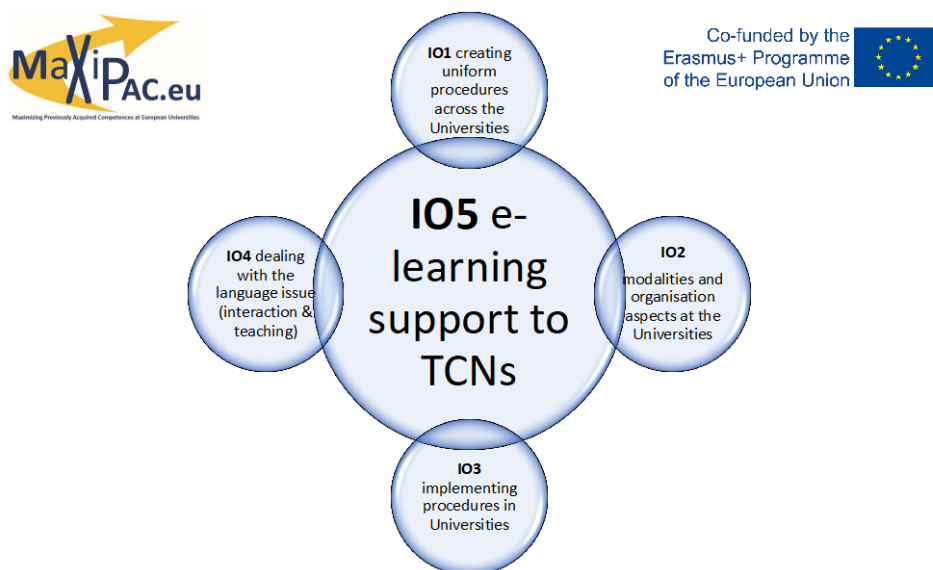
The use of digital technologies to support student access and participation in higher education is at the forefront of innovation. The recent Covid-19 pandemic has shown that e-learning can maintain educational activities even in times of global and national crisis.

EKKE, with the support of the partner countries in this project, designed and set up an e-learning platform containing information, online materials, and courses to support migrants and refugees who wish to access Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the MaxiPAC.eu partner countries. This report describes the design and technical specifications of the e-learning platform. The next section focuses specifically on how the e-learning platform achieved the project's objective. This is followed by the technical specifications of the platform and the description of its structure. The final section looks at the lessons learned from the implementation of the e-learning platform in terms of facilitating access to TCNs' HEIs and the report concludes with a set of policy recommendations at EU, national and university level.

## 2. How has the platform addressed the aim of the project?

### 2.1 Rationale

The MaxiPac.eu project seeks to address the growing challenges of potential TCNs students seeking validation of previously recognised competences (PAC) in order to attend a higher education institution in the EU that would lead to a better future in the host country. While the project partners were limited to three universities from Belgium, Italy and Finland and one research institution from Greece, the geographical representation of different higher education systems from Northern to Southern Europe provided an initial diversity and complexity of objectives to be achieved during the project implementation (see Figure 2). From the beginning, one of the objectives and potential outcomes of the project was to develop and set up an e-learning platform to ensure a continuous flow of information for refugees and migrants as third-country nationals who want to facilitate the validation of their PAC. As English is a common language of communication for these populations, all information should be collected and disseminated in English, which is the first added value of the e-learning platform at European level.



**Figure 2.** The interlinkages between the project outcomes (emphasis is on Outcome 5)

The Covid - 19 conjuncture enhanced the undertakings of the e-learning platform, as population movements and daily life were strongly affected by the protective measures against the pandemic all over the world. During this period, a considerable amount of information and daily routines and forms of communication were transferred online. This enabled the e-learning platform to be elevated to an information hub in all circumstances, regardless of where TCN students looking for valuable information reside. Moreover, in the second year of implementation, all partners committed to update the information on each national context, while EKKE, as the partner-in-charge of the e-learning platform, was mandated to ensure its sustainability in all technical aspects.



## 2.2 Basic guidelines

The e-learning platform attempted to serve various objectives by applying the following guidelines and/or approaches:

- 1) The European perspective through the exchange of good practices and information on HEIs in the four countries is in line with the EU institutional framework and in particular with the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997), Article 7 of which provides for "recognition of refugees' qualifications in the absence of full documentation". The lack of documentation underlines the need to verify PAC through other options or methods to address the problem arising from the lack of relevant evidence. Therefore, in the implementation of the project and the development of the e-learning platform, integrative approaches and perspectives were adopted to harmonise to a large extent the information collected and disseminated. As an example, good practices were collected at European level,<sup>1</sup> which could serve as inspiration for policy. To serve the European perspective of the e-learning platform, important background work was done in the first year. Research was carried out, including a focus group and an online survey of different target groups, to first investigate the needs and information requirements of our target group (TCNs who want to enroll in HEIs).
- 2) The need to raise awareness and familiarise our target groups with the aim of the project, while providing them with useful tools to promote their competences and respond to the demands made by relevant authorities.
- 3) A step-by-step provision of information ranging from the general to the specific, from the European (i.e., information on the European Qualifications Scan) to the local context. The local context includes information about specific universities and best practices for navigation and knowledge acquisition (e.g. student portfolio). This information is structured in the form of courses, with an emphasis on standardising the information for all four countries.
- 4) The integration perspective on local communities and European societies has also determined the structure of the platform. In this perspective, the user is referred to the national context by receiving accurate and well-presented information about the higher education system in each of the four countries. The information ranges from general information about the functioning of higher education institutions and the National Institutions for the Recognition of Competences (ENIC/NARIC) to the degrees offered (Bachelor, Master) and their requirements.
- 5) A common component that affects both social and cultural/educational integration is knowledge of the language in the host society and in the education system. Language skills are seen both as a vehicle for MaxiPAC outcomes (the English language skills) and as a driver of integration (in terms of learning the language of the host country). Therefore, information for accessing language courses in the respective countries is provided through the e-learning platform.

## 2.3 Type of information included

There are a variety of documents to facilitate the search for information. The interactive nature of the information provided facilitates seamless search and navigation through the e-learning platform. Despite the different national contexts, efforts have been made to enable standardised retrieval of all information. The information is then organised by courses, which are divided into four categories, each offering a total of 14 courses. Each course is accompanied by a variety of supporting documents, additional resources

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<sup>1</sup> Work towards this direction was carried out by one of the project partners, i.e. AEGEE Europe.

such as videos, relevant testimonials, best practices, useful links as well as frequently asked questions (FAQ) to help the user. The four categories that make up the content of the e-learning platform are as mentioned earlier:

- A. Information of a general order regarding the MaxiPAC aims and objectives, the key components to achieve previously acquired competences of TCNs, useful links to the respective countries HEIs as well as information on language courses in the countries and guidance to create a student portfolio. Thus, an integrated approach is undertaken to help TCNs to gain necessary knowledge to satisfy the process of their previous acquired competencies in the absence of accurate documentation.
- B. Initiation to the educational systems of each country's partner including administrative but also practical useful information for the potential students. This type of information helps any potential user to get familiar with the national context as often and as much s/he needs.
- C. Information on the Bachelor Degrees in the respective countries
- D. Information on the Master Degrees in the respective countries.

The e-learning platform will continue to update its content and its technical performance in view of running as soon as possible as a hub of information and training for TCNs (refugees or migrants) to enroll in HEIs courses by recognizing their PAC.

### ***3. The technical specifications of the e-learning platform***

Today the use of digital technologies to support student learning is at the forefront of innovation; as technology advances rapidly, new digital learning tools are constantly being developed. However, digital learning tools need to address the specific requirements and needs of the target group to prove effective, constructive, and responsive. For a more detailed treatment of this issue see Section 5 in this Outcome.

The innovative pedagogical approach to using these technologies in a learning environment is as important as the technical part of e-learning skills.

As not all students are proficient in the use of technology, research was conducted into what technologies can be used to create a platform that is easy to use, while at the same time it contains all necessary information.

Extended work and research have been carried out, in the early stages of the project, with respect to how e-learning tools can best be used and enhanced to support TCNs and especially refugees. Since many TCNs and refugees speak English, it was decided to prepare all lessons in English, as well as videos, testimonials, best practices, etc. Moreover, English remains a language easier to locate relevant information for many different backgrounds and topics.

The methodology for implementing Outcome 5 followed three phases: A) Preparation and Design; b) Implementation; and C) Evaluation.

#### ***3.1 Preparation and Designing phase***

The preparatory phase for the design of the e-learning platform was a joint effort of all partners, as was the case with all intellectual outcomes in this project. Initially, EKKE came up with a basic structure of the e-learning platform, following a long search and assessment of available e-learning platforms operating by HEIs and/or other institutions aiming at providing information to TCNs and refugees. In particular, EKKE identified relevant educational platforms and e-learning tools such as [Study in Greece](#), to inform the design of the e-learning platform.

During the project, EKKE coordinated a series of internal discussions and discussions among partners, to define the design and development of the platform. In this regard, there was a continuous exchange of information, expertise, and input between the partners to identify the opportunities and barriers for e-learning in the universities in the participating countries and to find ways to overcome them and address the needs of refugee students. Input from administrative bodies facilitating access to higher education in each partner country was very valuable.

It should be noted that during the discussions among partners, each participating partner provided comments to the responsible partner for this outcome (EKKE) on the design and development of the platform. The type of information, the topics of the individual chapters, the detail of information and the number of chapters were all decided and implemented in collaboration with all partners. More to the point, each partner undertook the task to contribute to the chapters which concerned its country and institution, while also sent comments and suggestions regarding the overall platform and the topics included.

In sum, the following procedures were taken with respect to the designing the platform:

- Interaction amongst participants to exchange knowledge and skills relevant to e-learning in higher education at the national level and the level of partner.
- Cooperation with the Department of Studies and other administrative staff involved in undergraduate and postgraduate studies for subjects of foreign students in cooperating academic units (in all participating countries).
- Conducted a detailed analysis of the educational development methods followed by the participating universities to satisfy the requirements of TCNs and refugee students.
- Identified the available potential together with the challenges faced by the universities in the participating countries in relation to the e-learning platform and its successful implementation to mitigate institutional and non-institutional obstacles.
- The partners' meetings, round tables, and national workshops offered the basis for deciding over structure of the platform, which would be helpful for students from non-EU countries and the administration staff of the Universities in the partner countries.

The MaxiPAC e-learning platform is accessible at: <https://www.ekke.gr/maxipac/>

### 3.2 Implementation – Output

Following the decision on the number and content of the chapters to be included in the e-learning platform, EKKE as the responsible partner of this outcome undertook the following actions in view of the platform's implementation:

- Created a digital online platform that explains effective e-learning usage techniques with focus on TCNs and refugees as one of the main target groups of this project.
- Developed and/or adapted existing information, resources, and guidelines to assist TCNs and refugees in enrolling at HEIs in Belgium, Finland, Greece, and Italy.
- Collected and made available e-learning material which would be invaluable resource for the administrative staff of the universities in the four involved countries in this project.
- Incorporated lessons from real life situation of refugee and/or TCN students' lived experiences with facing everyday challenges and issues. These lessons are depicted in the platform through videos, testimonies etc. This aspect is particularly appealing to potential non-European students who seek for real life input and experiences and for examples with which they can identify with.

In addition to the lessons describing the admission of TCNs students to universities in the participating countries, additional lessons were added based on the desk work and research related to the various outcomes of the project. What follows are additional lessons connected to the need to inform the visitors on the requirements for enrolling in one of the partner Universities and the basic achievements arising from the implementation of the project:

1. **What is the MaxiPAC.eu project:** The project aims to streamline the validation of competencies acquired elsewhere for non-European (TCNs) students for entering the European Higher Education Institutes (HEI) and to develop a new procedure for the recognition of their Previously Acquired Competences (PACs) and for enabling their enrolment in such institutions.
2. **Detailed description of the MaxiPAC procedure:** The project proposes a uniform procedure to valorize previously acquired competencies of TCNs including refugees to facilitate their enrolment in such institutions across Europe. The University of Thomas More has elaborated a specific procedure and implemented it in the national context offering a pathway to be adapted and followed by other universities in the partner countries.
3. **Modalities and organizational aspects provided by the University of Bari "Aldo Moro":** The Italian partner has provided informed feedback together with useful suggestions for the appropriate and effective implementation of the MaxiPAC.eu procedure. Their experience has been gathered after years of extensive valorisation of new pedagogical techniques/administrative tools to be adopted in cases of TCNs and refugees.
4. **Language Valorization:** This lesson provides information for those who recently relocated to Belgium, Finland, Greece, or Italy and wish to enroll in a non-English course. This is an essential lesson that facilitates TCN's reception and familiarization with the participant countries. More to the point, cultural dimensions -as they are enmeshed with language- may be relevant in this lesson.
5. **"Glossary" & "Guidelines for building a portfolio":** Certain chapters, as the ones included in the platform provide students with broad information they need to acquire before they become engaged with the particular topic, they interested to pursue in the four countries participating in this project.
6. **Introduction to the national education systems:** It is considered very important for those students who are interested to enroll and/or having their competences recognized in one of the four partner countries to acquire basic information for the educational systems in each of them. Such knowledge is considered essential before being engaged in studying at HEIs.

The e-learning platform (website) was created with open-source software and is (and will remain) hosted by EKKE. The copyright of the platform belongs to MaxiPAC accompanied with the creation year. The website's "Time Stamp" is highly helpful in letting viewers know that it has been updated with fresh content and isn't just sitting on old information. Moreover, the platform also follows the [Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License](#). In terms of maintenance, an open-source software is employed to detect the website's broken links. EKKE's obligation is to run this procedure few times within the year and inform each partner country that appears to have the problem.

All images used in the construction of the platform are free downloads with a link to the website from which they were obtained. For all material included in the lessons whose content originates from another website, a link to the original source is included. While setting up the platform, special attention was paid to working correctly with tablets and mobile phones. All videos are posted to MaxiPAC's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/@maxipac176/playlists>

As for the content of the platforms, each partner country is responsible of having a separate chapter for their:

- A. Introduction to the education system
- B. Admission to Higher Level Education – Bachelor’s degree
- C. Admission to Higher Level Education – Master’s degree

It is important to mention the involvement of each partner to the special lessons included in the e-learning platform. Each partner was responsible for managing their own chapter and contributed to the other partners' chapters in the following ways:

**CHAPTER A - Lessons Explaining MaxiPAC procedure as well as the implementation & Prerequisites of TCNs joining MaxiPAC** (videos and testimonies in English or in any other Language from students already used the procedure) - **Thomas More University**

*Note: The third step of the procedure “portfolio” has its own chapter with contribution from ALL PARTNERS.*

**CHAPTER B - Modalities and organizational aspects at the universities** (videos and testimonies from universities’ staff in English or in any other Language and good practices) - **University of Bari**

**CHAPTER C - How to deal with the Language** (videos and testimonies in English or in any other Language and good practices) **University of Lapland**

*Note: Each country should give info of all the lessons given in country’s native language – e.g., how a TCN or refugee learn the country's native language (ALL PARTNERS)*

**CHAPTER D – Guidelines of creating a portfolio** (Agreed upon among all countries, common chapter from ALL PARTNERS)

**CHAPTER E – Glossary** (Agreed upon among all countries, common chapter from all countries)

*Note: definitions & links to related sites for TCNs and refugees from ALL PARTNERS*

*Note: All chapters can have **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) section** with key points of every chapter. Useful for each countries’ administrative staff as well as TCNs and refugees.*

*Note: Every chapter can have an “Appendix section” where we can put useful links group, so a person doesn’t have to go to the lesson to find the link or any other links we want to include.*

### 3.3 Evaluation

The e-learning resources accessed through the platform are used as an intermediate product for the setting of the guidelines for the MaxiPAC procedure. The available information and reference to the resources per country/ topic offer an angle through which the visitors may comprehend some of the opportunities and challenges attached to the recognition of previously acquired competences and to be enrolled in European Universities. Moreover, the available input will allow them to evaluate their own knowledge on the topic, and possibly enable/encourage them to seek for new knowledge and additional information.

EKKE as the responsible partner for constructing the e-learning platform has put together an online questionnaire asking visitors to provide feedback on the usefulness and comprehensibility of the content,



while also visitors are asked to suggest improvements to the platform (e.g. related to its functionality, content, clarity and timeliness). The input from the responses to the questionnaire will offer an evaluation of the quality and adequacy of the information services provided by the platform. More to the point, the suggestion of the visitors may well be used to improve the functionality of the platform along with services offered.

### *3.4 Target group(s)*

The e-learning platform was constructed to address the needs of two major target groups:

First, the platform provides wider information and more focused knowledge to TCNs, and refugees, in particular, who wish to be enrolled in the HEIs and/or seek for ways to get their previously acquired competences recognized in the four partner countries. As this target group is highly diverse -because it includes people who recently arrived and others who have been for many years living these countries- the platform includes different sorts (and types) of information depending on non-European peoples' own needs and potential knowledge of the countries of reception. Information on the educational system of each partner country together with acquiring a good knowledge of the national language are considered essential both for newcomers and older TCNs living in these countries. More focused information on how to proceed with being enrolled with the HEIs and/or following the MaxiPAC procedure for facilitating their enrollment process, are more relevant to those TCNs who are more prepared/ empowered to pursue such administrative procedures.

Meanwhile, TCNs and refugees are enabled to go through the platform and being selective with the information they would like to cherry-pick. The function of "FAQs" and that of "queries" allow potential student-visitors of the platform to carefully collect the material they are interested more. In this guise, visitors may follow different pathways to get information through the platform, and each visitor may decide how to utilize the available knowledge.

Second, the platform offers more particular information to administrative staff in HEIs in the four partner countries in view of assisting them to provide guidance and support to TCNs to enroll to their own University and/or pursue the recognition of previously acquired competences in the host country. The information and knowledge made available to the administrative staff enables them to follow the relevant procedures in other countries where the project has been implemented and be in position to learn by thoroughly studying similar cases in other countries. Moreover, the administrative staff may be enabled to improve the knowledge over the enrollment and recognition procedures and follow the new developments regarding the changes in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the new practices being implemented by the ENIC/NARICs of other EU Member States.

## 4. The Structure of the e-learning platform

### 4.1 Introduction

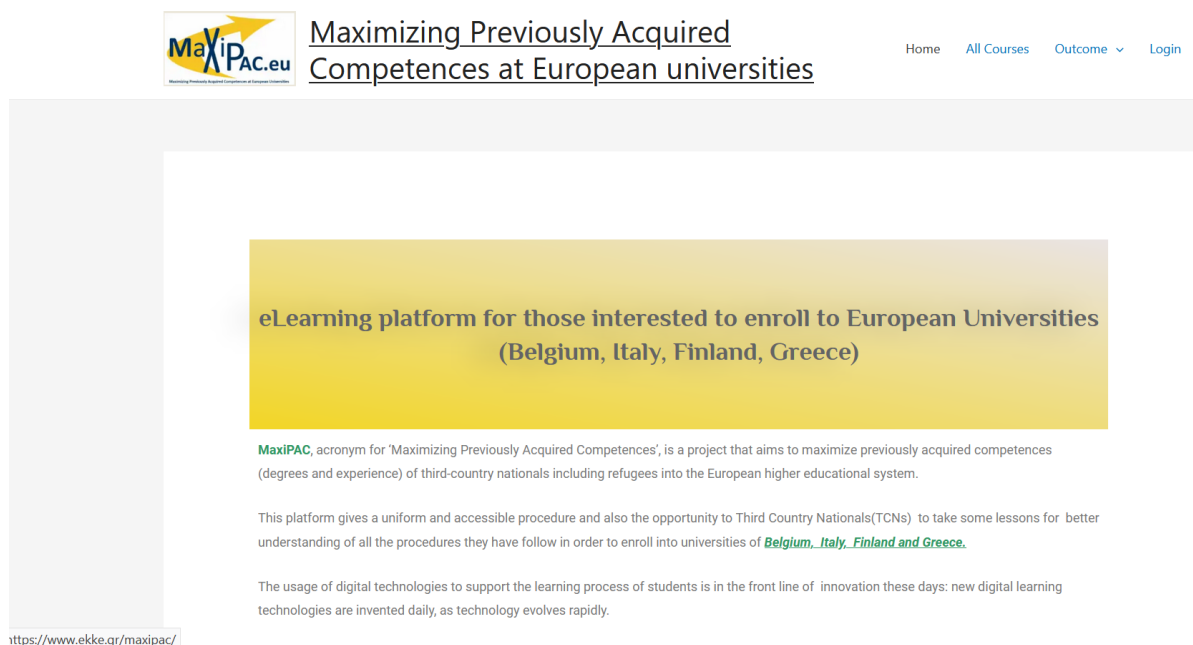
Within the scope of the Maximizing Previously Acquired Competences (MaxiPAC) project an e-learning platform was developed. The aim of the platform is twofold. On the one hand, it aims to inform TCNs and refugees in particular on the procedures they have to follow in order to enroll into universities in Belgium, Finland, Greece, and Italy. On the other hand, via the different courses offered, it aims to provide for a uniform and accessible procedure for all these countries. Moreover, the administrative staff in the HEIs of the four partner countries, will be enabled to follow the older and new procedures.

### 4.2 Home Menu

Users of the e-platform can access the material provided via the home menu on the top menu bar.

- “Home” provides the landing page for the platform, which informs visitors for the rationale behind the MaxiPAC programme and its partners.
- “All courses” displays the available courses, as analyzed in section “4.3 e-platform Structure” below.
- “Outcome: MaxiPAC Procedure” informs visitors on the four steps envisaged within the MaxiPAC programme, and provides an external link for a “Guideline for assessors”.
- “Login” prompts visitors to input their credentials in order to create an e-platform account, as demonstrated in section “4.4.1 User Account” below.

**Picture 1:** Homepage of the e-learning platform





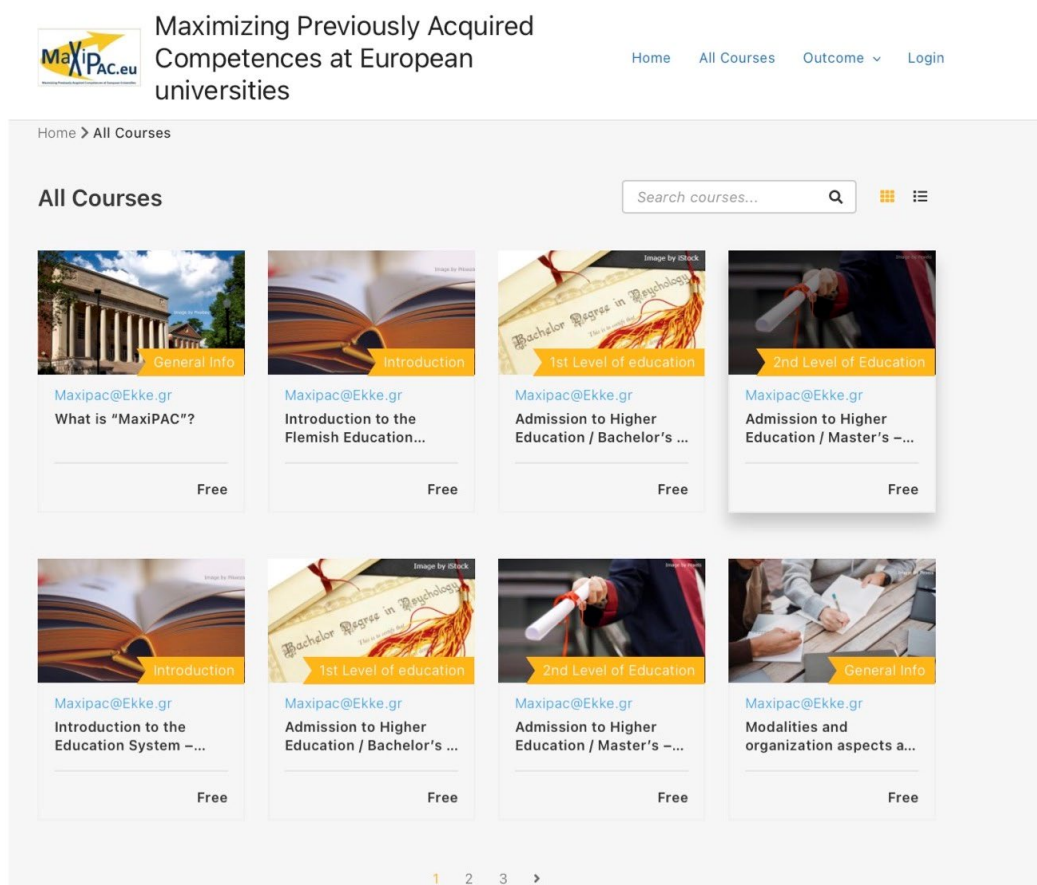
### 4.3 e-platform Structure

The e-platform is structured around 4 categories which provide a total of 14 courses. Each course is comprised of several supporting documents, as well as additional resources such as videos, good practices, testimonies, and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

The four categories are as follows:

1. General information
2. Introduction to the educational systems
3. 1<sup>st</sup> level of education: Bachelor Degrees
4. 2<sup>nd</sup> level of education: Master Degrees

**Picture 2:** List of Courses











Maximizing Previously Acquired Competences at European universities

Home All Courses Outcome Login

Home > All Courses

All Courses

Search courses...

 <p>General Info</p> <p>Maxipac@Ekke.gr</p> <p>What is "MaxiPAC"?</p> <p>Free</p>	 <p>Introduction</p> <p>Maxipac@Ekke.gr</p> <p>Introduction to the Flemish Education...</p> <p>Free</p>	 <p>1st Level of education</p> <p>Maxipac@Ekke.gr</p> <p>Admission to Higher Education / Bachelor's ...</p> <p>Free</p>	 <p>2nd Level of Education</p> <p>Maxipac@Ekke.gr</p> <p>Admission to Higher Education / Master's -...</p> <p>Free</p>
 <p>Introduction</p> <p>Maxipac@Ekke.gr</p> <p>Introduction to the Education System -...</p> <p>Free</p>	 <p>1st Level of education</p> <p>Maxipac@Ekke.gr</p> <p>Admission to Higher Education / Bachelor's ...</p> <p>Free</p>	 <p>2nd Level of Education</p> <p>Maxipac@Ekke.gr</p> <p>Admission to Higher Education / Master's -...</p> <p>Free</p>	 <p>General Info</p> <p>Maxipac@Ekke.gr</p> <p>Modalities and organization aspects a...</p> <p>Free</p>

1 2 3 >

#### 4.3.1. General Information

The first chapter provides the general information regarding MaxiPAC. Within the chapter, the following courses are available:

*What is "MaxiPAC"?*

The lessons in this course provide an introduction on the MaxiPAC Project and explain in detail the MaxiPAC procedure. Therefore, information is offered on the global overview of the procedure, the three steps of the process (Step 1: The European Qualifications Scan; Step 2: Multiple Short Cases; and Step 3: Portfolio and assessment), as well as the importance of psycho-social support for TCNs. Finally, a series of good practices are provided, via the testimony of the first MaxiPAC graduate in Flanders, and an example by the University of Bari on the use of the Student Portfolio as a tool for Academic and Social Integration.

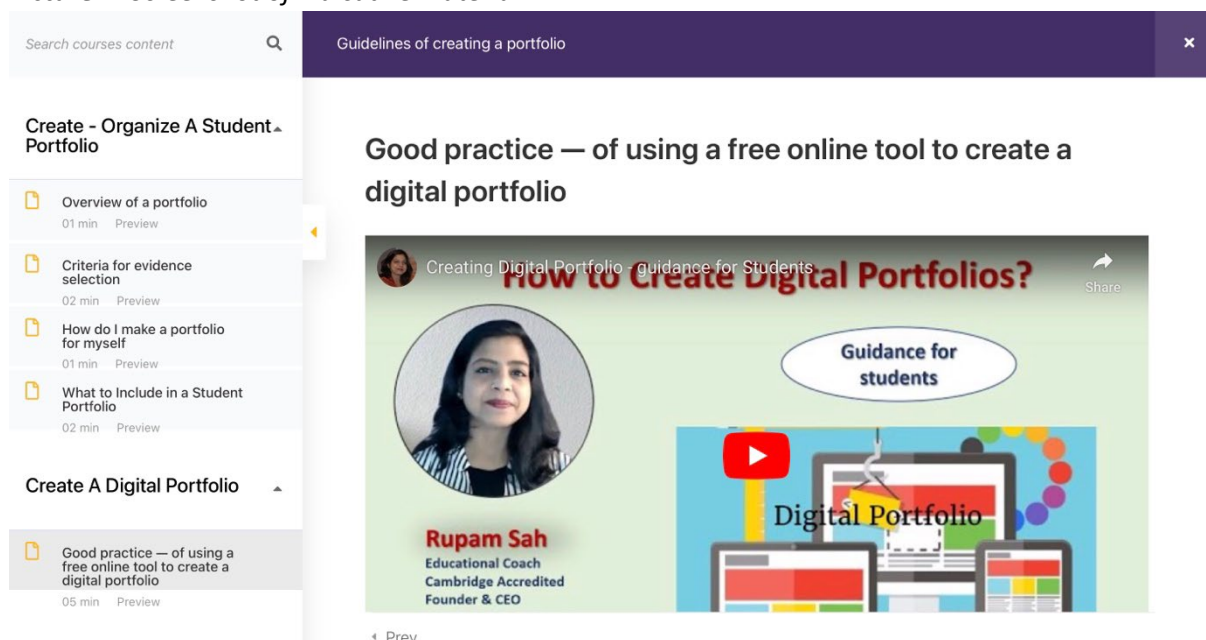
### *Language valorization*

This course is aimed to those who have newly arrived in Belgium, Finland, Greece or Italy, and want to enroll into courses taught in the native tongue of the host country. Therefore, it provides information on where a person can learn Dutch, Modern Greek or Finish, and it informs on the access for Uniba international and refugees students to Italian and international language courses for linguistic certifications.

### *Guidelines of creating a portfolio*

The aim of this lesson is to support students into creating and organising a Student Portfolio. Within the scope of MaxiPAC, a portfolio is a file compiled by the third country national with evidence from his/her own practice to demonstrate the competences acquired. In this lesson, students will have to submit a portfolio of supporting documents proving that they have sufficient relevant experience with regard to the different learning outcomes and corresponding behavioral indicators. Indicative pieces of evidence could be evaluation reports, work experience, papers, reports of practical experience, publications, final products or presentations, training certificates, etc.

### **Picture 2:** Screenshot of indicative material



The screenshot shows a digital interface for creating a portfolio. On the left, there is a sidebar with a search bar and a list of topics: 'Create - Organize A Student Portfolio' (with sub-items: Overview of a portfolio, Criteria for evidence selection, How do I make a portfolio for myself, What to Include in a Student Portfolio) and 'Create A Digital Portfolio' (with sub-item: Good practice — of using a free online tool to create a digital portfolio). The main content area displays a video titled 'Good practice — of using a free online tool to create a digital portfolio' by Rupam Sah, Educational Coach at Cambridge Accredited. The video thumbnail shows a woman and text: 'Creating Digital Portfolio - guidance for Students', 'How to Create Digital Portfolios?', 'Guidance for students', and 'Digital Portfolio'.

### *Modalities and organizational aspects at the University of Bari “Aldo Moro” – Italy*

This course is comprised of two lessons. In the first one, the informative feedback and useful suggestions for a correct and effective implementation of the MaxiPAC.EU procedure are discussed in detail. This lesson draws its material from the topics covered in the online training organised by the University of Bari in January 2022, addressed to the administrative staff of the MaxiPAC Project Partners. The second lesson

gives a brief presentation of CAP Uniba, the Service Centre for Lifelong Learning of University of Bari “Aldo Moro” and the inclusion services promoted to support the academic integration of refugee students.

### Glossary

This course provides for a basic glossary of terms related to the project, useful links for each country, as well as relevant source material.

*The Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) part is an additional section to various chapters*

This part will be very helpful to all visitors as well as the administrative staff in locating some questions that often students ask quickly and readily (without having to read the entire chapter again). Along with the query, we also offer a response for each one of them.

**Picture 3:** Indicative Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Overview	Curriculum	Instructor	FAQs
<p><b>What should my introductory letter include?</b></p> <p>In your introductory letter address why you want to attend University, the reasons and motivation behind choosing this Institution/academic field, and your future career goals. The letter should reflect your commitment, preparation to study and motivation to be successful.</p>			
<p><b>What should I pay attention to in my resume?</b></p> <p>Your resume must be updated. Outline your education and work experience up to date. Your resume should include details of paid work and any voluntary positions held.</p>			
<p><b>Who can I ask for a letter of recommendation?</b></p> <p>Your letter(s) of recommendation can be from your school, work, or a professional representative. The letter should comment on your academic performance, aptitude and likelihood to succeed in your chosen university field.</p>			
<p>I don't feel confident about my portfolio. What should I do?</p>			

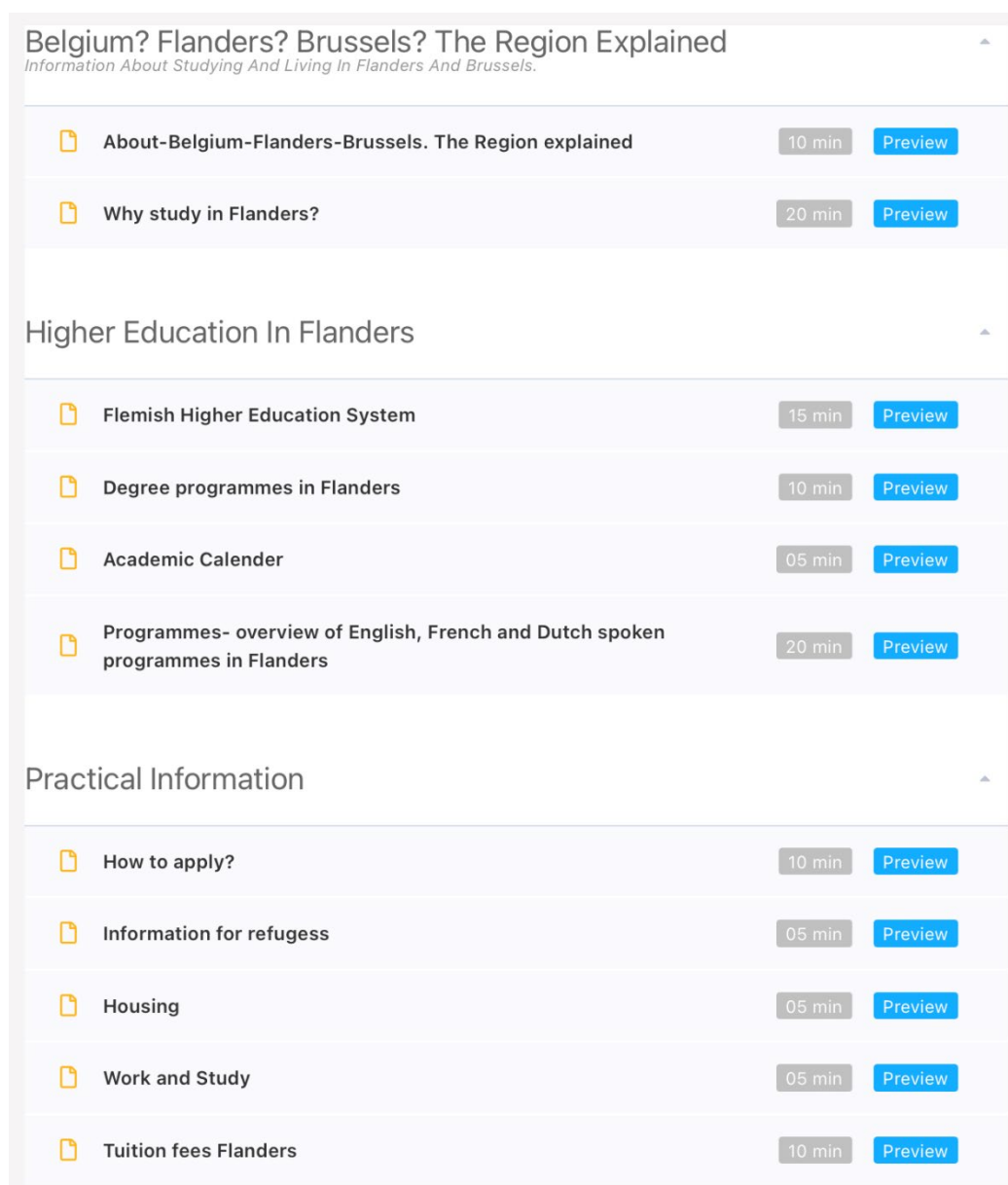
#### 4.3.2. Introduction to the educational systems

The aim of this chapter is to provide introductory information of the different educational systems in the four participating countries. Therefore, the following courses are provided:

##### *Introduction to the Flemish Education system – Belgium*

This course provides basic information on studying and living in Flanders and Brussels. It covers educational aspects, such as explaining the Flemish Higher Education System, the Degree programmes, or providing an overview of English, French and Dutch spoken programmes in Flanders. In addition, it covers practical aspects such as the process on how to apply to a course, explaining the regional structure (Belgium / Flanders / Brussels), aspects related to housing, employment, and tuition fees.

#### **Picture 4:** Screenshot of indicative material



**Belgium? Flanders? Brussels? The Region Explained**  
Information About Studying And Living In Flanders And Brussels.

- About-Belgium-Flanders-Brussels. The Region explained** (10 min) [Preview](#)
- Why study in Flanders?** (20 min) [Preview](#)

**Higher Education In Flanders**

- Flemish Higher Education System** (15 min) [Preview](#)
- Degree programmes in Flanders** (10 min) [Preview](#)
- Academic Calender** (05 min) [Preview](#)
- Programmes- overview of English, French and Dutch spoken programmes in Flanders** (20 min) [Preview](#)

**Practical Information**

- How to apply?** (10 min) [Preview](#)
- Information for refugess** (05 min) [Preview](#)
- Housing** (05 min) [Preview](#)
- Work and Study** (05 min) [Preview](#)
- Tuition fees Flanders** (10 min) [Preview](#)

### *Introduction to the Education System – Italy*

The contents covered in the lessons discuss in depth the organization of the Italian education system and the procedures for accessing higher education pathways. The different lessons aim to provide an overview of the Education Programmes offered by the different education programmes promoted by Italian universities and other Higher Education Institutes, with a particular focus on the admission requirements for accessing Tertiary Education courses.

### *Introduction to the Education System – Greece*

The aim of this course is to provide an overview of the Greek educational system, by examining the Higher Education Landscape in Greece. Therefore, information is provided on the 24 Public Universities, all of which are accredited by the Greek state. Apart from these public higher education institutes, several private Colleges operate in the country as well. Therefore, information is provided on these colleges who through collaboration with foreign universities, offer undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

### *Introduction to the Education System – Finland*

This course is based on the information provided by the Finnish Ministry for Education and Culture. As such, it covers the educational system of the country starting from the early childhood education and care systems, all the way to the higher education system of universities and universities of applied sciences. Emphasis is also placed on the importance of education and training in the spirit of lifelong learning.

### *4.3.3. 1st Level of education*

This chapter aims to introduce individuals to the first level of Higher Education, i.e. the Bachelor Degrees provided in the four countries. The relevant courses in this chapter are as follows:

#### *Admission to Higher Education / Bachelor's – Belgium*

This course provides information on the diploma requirements and the language level requirements for international students to enroll in a Flemish Bachelors' degree program. In addition, links are provided to the dedicated websites of all Flemish Higher Education Institutes (HEI).

#### *Admission to Higher Education / Bachelor's – Italy*

This course describes the admission procedures and requirements of Tertiary Education Institutions, such as the University of Bari, for the enrolment of refugee students in a Bachelor's Degree program. The lessons provided give a general overview of the access requirements for refugee and asylum-seeking students to academic education pathways and enrolment in a Bachelor's Degree Program in Italy. Further examples are offered regarding the procedures for accessing Bari University's Bachelor's Degree programs and the work done by CAP Uniba in reference to those purposes.

#### *Admission to Higher Education / Bachelor's – Finland*

The aim of this course is to present the guidelines provided by the official web site [studyinfinland.fi](http://studyinfinland.fi) for Admissions to Finnish Higher Education. As such, it provides a series of information regarding the admission to Finnish Higher Education/ Bachelor's, related to the process of selecting and applying for programmes and scholarships, how to be informed on admissions information, and what are the different study programmes and bachelor's degrees.

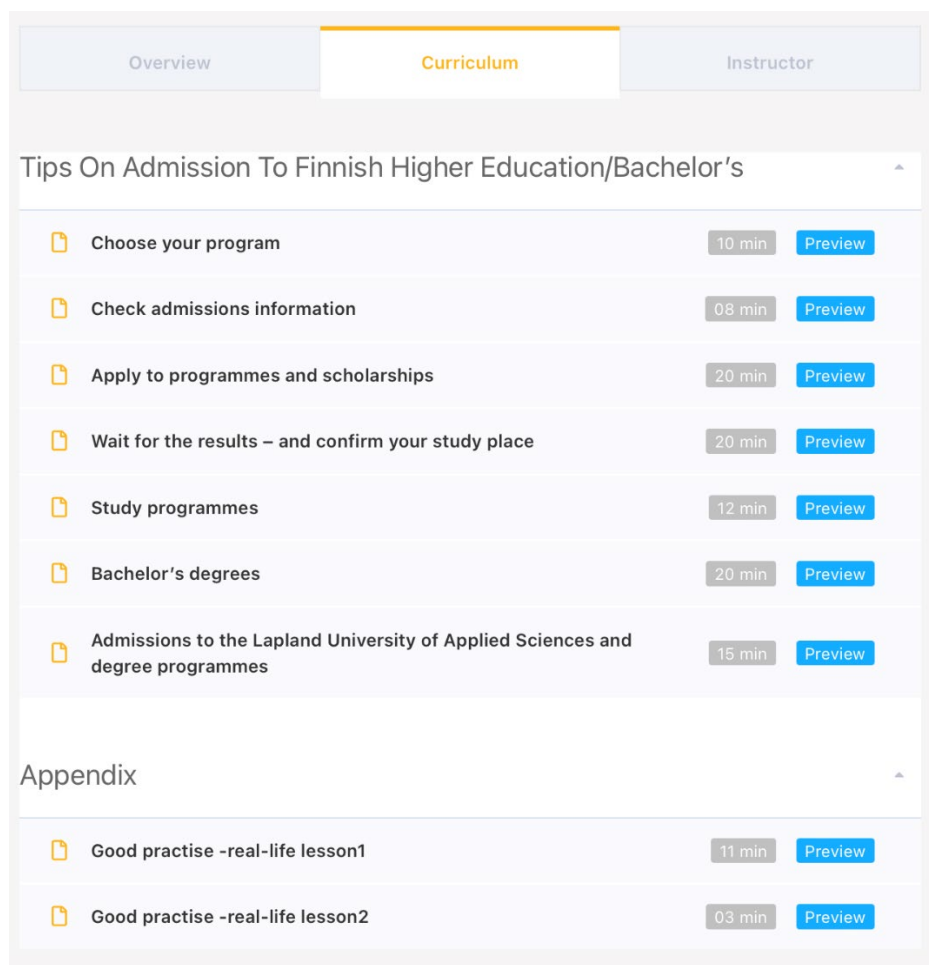
#### *Admission to Higher Education / Bachelor's – Greece*

This course describes the steps that Third Country Nationals including refugees should follow to enroll



into Greek universities for Bachelor's degree. It provides information on the general instructions for submission to Higher Education, or on the process of legalization for foreign public documents, obtaining Visas and insurance. In addition, it provides information on the different scholarships available, and the opportunities presented via the Erasmus+ initiative.

**Picture 5:** Screenshot of indicative material



#### 4.3.4. 2<sup>nd</sup> Level of education

This chapter aims to inform individuals on the opportunities to study at a Master's degree program. There are four courses under this chapter, as follows:

##### *Admission to Higher Education / Master's – Belgium*

This course aims to provide information on the diploma requirements and the language level requirements for international students to enroll in a Flemish Master's degree program. In addition, links are provided for the dedicated websites of all Flemish Higher Education Institutes (HEI).

##### *Admission to Higher Education / Master's – Italy*

This section describes the admission procedures and requirements for the enrolment of a refugee student in a master's degree program in Italian Tertiary Education Institutions. Apart from testimonies by

international students enrolled in a MA program, a few lessons provide for a general overview of the admission requirements that a refugee and asylum-seekers will need to meet, in order to enter a master's degree program. In addition, other lessons cover the more specific procedures and modalities of access for a refugee or asylum-seeker student who wants to continue his or her studies enrolling in a Bari University Master's Degree program.

#### *Admission to Higher Education / Master's – Greece*

This course describes the steps that TCNs including refugees should follow in order to enroll into Greek universities for Master's degree. Among others, it provides a catalog for postgraduate courses offered in Greece, information on validation, official approval and translation of foreign documents, as well as information on obtaining visa for studies in the country.

#### *Admission to Higher Education / Master's – Finland*

The aim of this course is to inform on the guidelines provided by the official web site [studyinginfinland.fi](http://studyinginfinland.fi) for Admissions to Finnish Higher Education – Master's. As such, it provides information on how to select and apply for a Master's degree, on how to check admissions information and confirm the study place, as well as more practical information such as on how to prepare for arrival in Finland.

### **4.4 User interface**

#### **4.4.1 User Account**

There are two modes for an individual to access the material provided by the e-learning platform. In the first mode, a individual can simply browse the material provided and be informed on the topic he / she wishes.

The second option is to create a user account in the platform. Through this mode, an individual can track his/ hers progress, be informed on which lessons they have completed, are currently enrolled and those they are still active on. Furthermore, they can add courses they are interested in to a wishlist, so they enroll in a future date. Through the user panel more information is available, such as which courses they have passed or failed. All courses in the e-platform are provided free of charge, as well indicated.

#### **4.4.2 Evaluation Form**

Finally, users of the platform are encouraged to submit an online Evaluation Form, in order to inform the MaxiPAC partners on issues related to their experience on using the e-learning platform.

Picture 6: User account & course progress

Courses
Quizzes
Wishlist
Orders
Settings
Logout




Enrolled Courses  
3

Active Courses  
1

Completed Courses  
2


Enrolled

All | In Progress | Finished | Passed | Failed

Name	Result	Expiration time	End time
 <a href="#">Modalities and organization aspects at the University of Bari "Aldo Moro" – Italy</a>	0%	-	-
 <a href="#">Introduction to the Flemish Education system – Belgium</a>	0%	-	2022-12-01 10:49:01
 <a href="#">Introduction to the Education System – Greece</a>	100%	-	2022-05-04 15:45:18

Picture 7: Evaluation Form

Evaluation Form
Maximizing Previously Acquired Competences at European universities
eleni.ch227@gmail.com (not shared) Switch account
\* Required



Please state the country of origin \*
Your answer

How useful the e-learning platform was for you. (Please choose from the scale 1 to 5. Meaning 1 is not good and 5 excellent)

1 2 3 4 5

After completing all the lessons, are you aware of the actions to enroll into higher education?

☐ Fully aware
☐ Well informed
☐ Poorly informed
☐ Inadequately informed
☐ Other:

Please indicate if any of the courses took more time than expected
Your answer

Please help us to improve our platform - Take few minutes to give us your personal opinion
Your answer

Submit
Clear form



## ***5. Summarizing the lessons learned from the MaxiPAC.eu procedure e-learning platform***

During the implementation of the project, it was often pointed out that migrants and refugees are a very differentiated group with different socio-demographic characteristics and needs. The life trajectories of migrants and refugees are also different, as is their position in the life cycle. A lesson learned from the development and implementation of the e-learning platform was therefore that e-learning tools need to take account of the different needs of migrants and refugees seeking further education, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Consideration should be given to an online learning environment that seeks to be inclusive and participatory.

In addition, during the implementation of the project, it became evident that the design of an e-learning platform must consider the changing social and political environment and thus be adaptable to changing needs and challenges. For example, while in 2015 the Syrian migration/refugee crisis was among the key challenges to be addressed by the EU member states. In the first quarter of 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the health and livelihood globally. More recently, an ongoing refugee crisis began in Europe in late February 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. According to UNCHR data for December 2022, 7,832,493 there are Refugees from Ukraine recorded across Europe. In this rapidly changing setting, it is crucial that an e-learning platform can follow current developments.

At national level, university requirements for educational qualifications and procedures for the recognition of previous qualifications may additionally change in the countries participating in the MaxiPac.eu project. Therefore, an e-learning platform should be up to date. This also means that institutions should follow developments and continuously update the e-learning platform.

An important lesson we learnt during the Covid-19 pandemic was that digital inequalities are crucial and affect individuals' access to online materials such as the e-learning platform. In this regard, any digital / e-learning support tool should consider that not all migrants and refugees have access to the internet or can afford internet access. Furthermore, not all migrants and refugees have the necessary tools, such as PC or a tablet, to participate in online learning. The issue of digital inequality, especially among the most vulnerable populations such as migrants and refugees, is important to consider when designing online courses and e-learning platforms.

Similarly, the issue of digital literacy meaning an individual's ability to find, evaluate, and communicate information through typing and other media on various digital platforms, in an important factor of consideration. Every e-learning platform should be very user-friendly as some migrants and refugees may not be familiar with new technologies, especially older migrants who want to recognize their qualifications and look for alternative career opportunities.

## 6. Policy recommendations

The following policy recommendations are reflections arising from the experience of designing and implementing the e-learning platform. The knowledge acquired from comparing and/or contrasting the cases in the four EU countries allowed us to reach certain insights and preliminary conclusions regarding possible improvements to the existing policy framework.

### *European level*

- It becomes apparent that the implementation of the procedures facilitating the recognition of competences and qualifications of third country nationals across the EU countries will, in practice, vary a lot due to the role of preceding national legislation, institutional capacities and national particularities
- Access to affordable internet and necessary equipment to support e-learning participation and mitigate digital inequalities is crucial for e-learning support tools.
- E-learning support tools are important for both EU educational and migration policy. Future Action Plan and design of migrant/refugee integration actions should consider the potential offered though e-learning particularly in times of crisis.

### *University level*

- Universities and HEIs across Europe have the capacity to learn from each other (capitalizing on the available best practices) and increase their flexibility regarding the acceptance and enrollment of TCNs.
- Based on the experience from implementing this project, the Universities and HEIs have in many cases detected the shortcomings of the existing framework of recognizing previously acquired competences and qualifications, but they are not empowered and/or provided with the tools to remedy these shortcomings.
- Universities and HEIs may create clusters with other national and/or European Universities to pursue practices related to the outcomes of this MaxiPAC project.
- The e-learning platform should be seen as a supportive tool that is useful along with the support of university admissions offices. Interaction via an e-learning platform alone can overwhelm refugees.
- To connect the e-learning University platform with other platforms of similar interest is important to allow migrants and refugees to access a variety of information and educational support
- Future designs and implementations of e-learning tool may hold a variety of courses and different degrees of interaction with: a) administrators from other universities and thus sharing best practices; and b) students, as some of them may be in a vulnerable state and the platform is considered a safe place for them to interact.

- Universities may disseminate the message that a platform is a safe place and inclusive to those with irregular status. Therefore, the digital platforms ensure that irregular TCNs and/or those who have not yet acquired refugee status are enabled to seek for reliable information and intermediate their application and interface with the HEIs of their preference.

#### *National level*

- The challenge that incoming TCNs face because of limited or no knowledge of national languages is addressed by the project's e-learning platform which allows for gaining an adequate level of information of educational system per country.
- The practice of e-learning platform could be integrated in the National Action Plan for Education and/or the Action Plan for TCNs inclusion in each country.
- The e-learning platform can further expand/develop to include more in-depth information regarding more specific academic or language topics to facilitate incoming third country nationals' knowledge at the level of disciplines.
- Cooperation among relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of e-learning tools is of high importance. These include -but not limited to – Universities, Embassies, NGOs, Migrant and refugee association, migration services and so on.

## 7. Conclusion

This outcome aimed to explore how e-learning can be used and maximised in higher education for third country nationals. At the same time, it was recognised that e-learning can act as a bridge connecting the refugees and TCNs, who have limited or no knowledge of the national language of the respective EU country with the education system and higher education institutions of that country. By using the English language, the e-learning tool can help refugees and TCNs overcome the language challenge (and/or barrier) and facilitate access to information about the general situation, living conditions, accommodation, amenities and studies in the host countries.

Most importantly, the e-learning support was designed to facilitate the search for information while providing up-to-date information on the education systems, undergraduate and postgraduate studies in the four partner countries (Belgium, Finland, Greece and Italy). In addition to this targeted information, the platform provides access to more general information and references to resources related to the inclusion of refugees and TCNs in the education system, society and culture of the host countries. Therefore, practical information as well as technical, essential, and thematic information is made available through the platform. The information is organised in the form of courses, complemented by a variety of documents and additional resources such as videos, relevant testimonials, best practices, useful links as well as frequently asked questions (FAQ) to help users. The structure and content of the e-learning platform was decided and approved by the project partners and implemented by EKKE (Greece), which is well connected to HEI in Athens and throughout the country (Greece). All partners were involved in providing the relevant information per country and actively participated in all phases of the design, construction and operation of the platform.

This outcome, as well as all other outcomes of this project, was achieved through the systematic cooperation between the project partners who developed a common language/communication code. The partner meetings, events and workshops enabled participants to create a culture of collaboration, build trust and facilitate exchanges and cross-fertilisation. In such a working environment, partners were able to make recommendations on each other's findings, contribute with ideas and their experience, point to relevant research/work in their country or elsewhere, and learn from each other. It is important to note that the MaxiPac.eu procedure, which is/was at the heart of discussions and cooperation between partners, has been firmly embedded in the actions and outcomes of this project. All partners are convinced that this procedure - and as an initiative - has great potential in EU countries to improve the opportunities of refugees and TCNs to be employed and better integrated in their educational institutions.

An important challenge for the e-learning platform is to be updated at regular intervals to keep it relevant. EKKE is committed to continue updating the content and technical performance as an information and training centre for TCNs (refugees and/or migrants) to enroll in HEIs courses by recognising their previously acquired competences (PAC). Of course, the updates for each country depend on the continuous commitment of the partners.

All in all, the e-learning platform is unique as it is the result of a joint effort of four partner countries to continue the main objective of the MaxiPac.eu procedure and to make it feasible and operational for all EU countries that want to adopt it. We believe that the MaxiPac.eu procedure can be adapted and implemented to different national contexts, while at the same time it may create new pathways for improving TCNs futures within Europe.