



DigIT: Developing Digital Skills and Tools for Better Inclusion of Refugees and Immigrants

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Toolkit to higher education (HE) training for educators

CHAPTER-3

Common barriers to fulfilling the desire and motivation of refugees/immigrants to access higher education



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Introduction

Access to higher education (HE) is a fundamental right that should be granted to all individuals regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. However, refugees and immigrants often face numerous barriers that prevent them from fulfilling their desire and motivation to access HE. These barriers can be cultural, social, economic, and legal in nature, and they require a concerted effort from all stakeholders to overcome.

HE professionals play a crucial role in facilitating access to HE for refugees and immigrants, as they are in a unique position to provide tailored support and guidance. However, HE professionals need to be aware of the specific challenges faced by refugees and immigrants and equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to address these challenges.

This digital toolkit is designed to address this need by providing HE professionals, student association members, social workers, teachers/career advisors from schools and colleges, and workers from refugee support organizations with a comprehensive guide on how to facilitate access to HE for refugees and immigrants. The toolkit's objectives are to raise the level of competence and socio-economic awareness among HE professionals, enhance refugees/immigrants' professional and personal growth, and encourage refugees/immigrants to pursue their education and contribute to community development.

To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the toolkit, the recommendations provided are based on the latest legal and policy developments affecting access to HE, as well as the best practices identified by experts in the field. This digital toolkit was created to serve as a valuable resource for HE professionals and other stakeholders involved in facilitating access to HE for refugees and immigrants. By equipping HE professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to address the barriers faced by refugees and immigrants, we can promote social inclusion, diversity, and community development.

Chapter 3-
*Common barriers to fulfilling the desire and motivation of refugees/immigrants to access
higher education*

Introduction:

In recent years, there have been significant legal and policy developments aimed at addressing the barriers faced by refugees and immigrants in accessing higher education. The landscape of legal and policy frameworks concerning access to higher education for refugees and immigrants in Europe has witnessed significant advancements. These developments reflect the growing recognition of the rights and potential of refugees and immigrants to pursue higher education, as well as the need to address the barriers they face. This module explores the latest legal and policy developments shaping access to higher education for refugees and immigrants in Europe, drawing upon authoritative sources to provide a comprehensive overview. The structure of this topic includes a background of the challenge followed by a part on the role of advocacy in supporting refugees/immigrants' access to higher education.

Background of the Challenge:

The evolving landscape of laws and policies surrounding access to higher education has been shaped by a growing understanding of the unique challenges faced by refugees and immigrants. These challenges include issues related to language proficiency, recognition of qualifications obtained outside the host country, financial constraints, cultural integration, and access to support services. Recognizing these barriers, governments, educational institutions, and international bodies have taken steps to address them and create more inclusive environments that facilitate the educational aspirations of refugees and immigrants.

The European Commission Report on Education for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Europe (2016): This report by the European Commission sheds light on the legal and policy landscape pertaining to access higher education for refugees and asylum seekers across Europe. It provides insights into the challenges they face, highlights good practices, and emphasizes the role of higher education institutions in promoting inclusivity and supporting their educational aspirations.

The Council of Europe Recommendation on the Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees and Displaced Persons (2017): This recommendation focuses on the recognition of qualifications obtained by refugees and displaced persons, urging member states to establish fair

and transparent recognition procedures. It emphasizes the importance of removing unnecessary obstacles and ensuring equal treatment in assessing qualifications, enabling refugees and immigrants to access higher education opportunities.

The European University Association (EUA) Policy Position on Refugees and Displaced Persons (2017): EUA, representing universities across Europe, has formulated a policy position highlighting the importance of higher education in the integration and social inclusion of refugees and displaced persons. It calls for supportive legal frameworks, adequate financial resources, recognition of prior qualifications, language support, and tailored integration programs to facilitate access to higher education.

The Higher Education Support Mechanism (HESME) Report: Improving Higher Education Access and Retention for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Europe (2019): This report, commissioned by the European Union, presents recommendations for enhancing access and retention of refugees and asylum seekers in higher education. It explores legal and policy frameworks, financial support mechanisms, integration programs, and innovative practices implemented by higher education institutions to address the barriers faced by refugees and immigrants.

The MIRPAL Handbook on Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications (2019): Developed as part of the "More than Recognition, Practice Makes Perfect" project funded by the European Commission, this handbook offers guidance on the recognition of refugees' qualifications across European countries. It provides insights into legal frameworks, procedures, and practices related to qualification recognition, aiming to facilitate access to higher education and employment for refugees.

These sources serve as reputable references for understanding the latest legal and policy developments concerning access to higher education for refugees and immigrants in Europe. They highlight the evolving nature of legal frameworks, emphasize the significance of recognition procedures, and underscore the role of higher education institutions in promoting inclusivity and supporting the educational aspirations of refugees and immigrants.

By staying informed about these developments, policymakers, higher education professionals, and advocates can contribute effectively to the creation of an inclusive and equitable higher education system that empowers refugees and immigrants, harnesses their talents, and fosters their integration into European societies.

The role of advocacy in supporting refugees/immigrants' access to higher education

Advocacy plays a crucial role in ensuring that these legal and policy developments translate into meaningful opportunities for refugees and immigrants to access higher education. By advocating on their behalf with local authorities and universities, individuals and organizations can contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and equitable education system. Effective advocacy involves raising awareness about the barriers faced by refugees and immigrants, promoting policy changes that remove these barriers, and collaborating with relevant stakeholders to implement inclusive practices within educational institutions.

To empower individuals and organizations in their advocacy efforts, this toolkit provides valuable tips and strategies for engaging with local authorities and universities. These tips encompass a range of approaches, including building relationships with decision-makers, raising awareness through effective communication, and leveraging available resources and support networks. By effectively advocating for the rights of refugees and immigrants to access higher education, individuals and organizations can drive positive change and contribute to a more inclusive society.

It is essential for advocates to stay informed about the latest legal and policy developments in the field of access to higher education. This toolkit aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the current landscape, highlighting key changes and initiatives that impact refugees and immigrants. Additionally, it offers guidance on navigating the complexities of advocating within various contexts, empowering advocates to effectively engage with local authorities and universities to create positive change.

By working together and leveraging the power of advocacy, we can break down the barriers that hinder access to higher education for refugees and immigrants. Through collective efforts, we can promote equal educational opportunities, foster diversity and inclusion within higher education institutions, and empower refugees and immigrants to fulfill their academic aspirations and contribute to the social and economic development of their host countries. Let us embark on this journey of advocacy, armed with knowledge, determination, and compassion, to make a lasting impact on the lives of individuals seeking to access higher education.

Access to higher education for refugees and immigrants is influenced by various legal and policy developments that can either facilitate or hinder their educational opportunities. Staying informed about these developments and engaging in advocacy efforts is crucial for

supporting and promoting access to higher education for these individuals. Here are some key points to consider regarding the latest legal and policy developments and tips for advocating on behalf of refugees and immigrants with local authorities and universities:

1. Stay updated on legal and policy changes: Laws and policies related to immigration, asylum, and education are subject to change. Stay informed about the latest updates, amendments, and developments in your country or region. This includes changes in immigration regulations, policies on refugee admissions, and educational policies that affect access to higher education for refugees and immigrants. Regularly check government websites, educational institutions' policies, and reputable news sources for the most current information.
2. Understand the rights and entitlements: Familiarize yourself with the rights and entitlements of refugees and immigrants regarding access to education. This includes understanding international conventions and human rights frameworks, as well as national laws and policies that protect the rights of refugees and immigrants to pursue higher education. This knowledge will empower you to advocate effectively and make informed arguments for inclusive and equitable access to education.
3. Connect with local advocacy organizations: Identify and connect with local advocacy organizations that focus on refugee and immigrant rights and education. These organizations often have expertise in navigating legal and policy frameworks and can provide guidance and support for advocating on behalf of refugees and immigrants. Collaborate with these organizations to amplify your advocacy efforts and work together towards common goals.
4. Establish relationships with key stakeholders: Build relationships with key stakeholders who have influence over educational policies and decisions. This includes local authorities, policymakers, university administrators, student organizations, and community leaders. Engage in constructive dialogue, attend meetings, and participate in forums where you can voice the concerns and needs of refugees and immigrants regarding higher education. Cultivate relationships based on trust, collaboration, and mutual understanding.
5. Raise awareness and educate: Advocate for greater awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by refugees and immigrants in accessing higher education. Organize

awareness campaigns, workshops, and seminars to educate local authorities, university staff, students, and the wider community about the barriers faced by these individuals. Share success stories and highlight the benefits of diverse and inclusive educational environments.

6. **Collect and share data:** Collect and share data and research that demonstrate the positive impact of higher education for refugees and immigrants. Quantitative and qualitative data can help policymakers and educational institutions understand the value of supporting access to higher education for these individuals. Collaborate with researchers and academic institutions to conduct studies that shed light on the experiences and achievements of refugees and immigrants in higher education.
7. **Advocate for policy changes:** Use your voice and influence to advocate for policy changes that promote access to higher education for refugees and immigrants. This may involve drafting policy proposals, submitting recommendations to relevant authorities, participating in public consultations, and engaging in advocacy campaigns. Highlight the importance of fair and inclusive admission processes, financial support options, language support programs, and culturally sensitive support services.
8. **Support networking and mentorship initiatives:** Promote networking and mentorship initiatives that connect refugees and immigrants with professionals, alumni, and individuals who can provide guidance and support in their educational journey. Advocate for the establishment of mentorship programs within universities and collaborate with local organizations to facilitate networking opportunities for refugees and immigrants.
9. **Collaborate with universities and educational institutions:** Engage with universities and educational institutions to foster partnerships and collaborations that support access to higher education for refugees and immigrants. Encourage universities to develop inclusive admission policies, provide scholarships and financial aid specifically targeted at refugees and immigrants, establish language support programs, and enhance cultural sensitivity training for faculty and staff.
10. **Share personal stories and experiences:** Personal stories and experiences can be powerful tools for advocacy. Encourage refugees and immigrants who have successfully accessed higher education to share their personal stories and experiences. These stories can humanize the issue, raise awareness, and demonstrate the resilience, talent, and potential

of refugees and immigrants. Use various platforms, such as social media, blogs, and public events, to amplify these voices and create a positive narrative around the importance of educational opportunities for all.

11. Collaborate with student organizations: Engage with student organizations and societies within universities to promote inclusivity and support for refugees and immigrants. Partner with existing groups or establish new ones focused on advocating for the rights and needs of these individuals. Work together to organize events, workshops, and initiatives that foster understanding, promote cultural exchange, and address the specific challenges faced by refugees and immigrants.
12. Engage in policy discussions and consultations: Participate actively in policy discussions and consultations related to education and immigration. Attend public hearings, submit written recommendations, and engage in constructive dialogue with policymakers and government officials. Present evidence-based arguments and highlight the potential benefits of inclusive educational policies for refugees, immigrants, and the wider society.
13. Foster collaborations between universities and refugee support organizations: Encourage partnerships and collaborations between universities and organizations that provide support to refugees and immigrants. This can include refugee resettlement agencies, community centers, and NGOs working in the field of migration and education. By working together, universities can leverage their resources and expertise to provide comprehensive support to refugees and immigrants, addressing their unique needs and ensuring a smoother transition into higher education.
14. Advocate for accessible information and resources: Ensure that information about educational opportunities, scholarships, financial aid, and support services is accessible and readily available to refugees and immigrants. Advocate for the translation of relevant documents into multiple languages, the provision of clear guidelines on application processes, and the availability of dedicated support staff who can assist with navigating the application and enrollment procedures.
15. Monitor implementation and impact: Stay vigilant and monitor the implementation of policies and initiatives aimed at supporting access to higher education for refugees and immigrants. Track the impact of these measures and identify areas for improvement. Collect feedback from affected individuals and use this information to advocate for

necessary changes and adjustments to ensure that policies and programs are effectively meeting the needs of refugees and immigrants.

Advocacy plays a vital role in supporting refugees and immigrants in accessing higher education. By staying informed, building relationships, raising awareness, and actively engaging with policymakers and educational institutions, you can contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable higher education system that recognizes and supports the potential of all individuals, regardless of their background or status.

External Sources

- The UN Refugee Agency - Higher Education Programs for Refugees:
<https://www.unhcr.org/education/higher-education.html>
- The European Commission's Erasmus+ Program for Refugees:
https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities-for-refugees_en
- The Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford: <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/>
- The Journal of Refugee Studies: <https://academic.oup.com/jrs>
- The Migration Policy Institute: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/>
- The International Association of Universities - Refugees, Displaced Persons, and Higher Education: <https://www.iau-aiu.net/Refugees-Displaced-Persons-and-Higher-Education>
- The World University Service of Canada - Student Refugee Program:
<https://www.wusc.ca/our-work/student-refugees/>
- The Refugee Education Initiative: <https://refugeeeducationinitiative.org/>
- The Higher Education Support Program by the Open Society Foundations:
<https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/what-we-do/themes/higher-education-support-program>
- The International Refugee Assistance Project: <https://refugeerights.org/>
- European website on Integration: https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/report-health-refugees-and-migrants-who-european-region_en

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