

GUIDELINES

for the recognition of refugees' qualifications

Introduction

by Mr. Erwin Malfroy, NARIC-Flanders

The report of the Danish Refugee Council '*Assessment and Recognition of Refugees' Qualifications in the European Community*' (December 1998) identified a number of recognition-related problems facing refugees in many countries.

Numerous refugees who could be contributing to the European societies using their qualifications are today unemployed or obliged to restart education or training already completed in their home country. Whilst many barriers can be mentioned to explain refugee unemployment, there is much evidence that systems for assessment and recognition of foreign certificates, skills and knowledge often fail to offer refugees appropriate routes into employment or further education and training.

Important changes have taken place in the field of assessment and recognition of foreign qualifications in Europe, such as increasing cooperation within higher education (e.g. the Bologna Declaration and the new model of the Diploma Supplement), the implementation of EU directives concerning the recognition of regulated professions and the Lisbon Recognition Convention. Concepts of recognition have evolved towards a wider acceptance of differences between various education systems.

In recent years, the question of recognition of refugees' qualifications has been dealt with within several European forums on refugee integration or international mobility. Conventions, like the Lisbon Recognition Convention and networks existing in the field of higher education have begun to address the particular problems of refugees and, in some European countries, the question has been given some attention by the government.

The main recognition-related problems facing refugees are:

- insufficient information and opaque procedures;
- lack of provisions for various areas of assessment or recognition;
- lack of procedures to deal with insufficient documentation;
- additional procedures or requirements for non-EU nationals;
- lack of financial support and bridging to mainstream education and training.

These are problems adding to the barriers affecting the professional and academic opportunities of refugee qualification holders.

The assessment of refugees' qualifications

The assessment of a refugee qualification calls for a different approach than that normally used by credential evaluators.

Instead of assessing a qualification on the basis of a well documented file, credential evaluators will often have to assess refugee qualifications on the basis of incomplete – or even entirely missing – information about both the individual qualification and the system from which it hails. The educational system may be a parallel one or may be broken down caused by a civil war.

It goes without saying that the legalisation of the refugees' documents by an authority of a refugee producing country is a Danaides' job.

An assessment of competence instead of an assessment of documents may be a soul-saving approach.

The working party of the Council of Europe suggests in this document a kind of good practice for the credential evaluator dealing with refugees' qualifications.

The guidelines may be used by the parties of the Lisbon Recognition Convention as a tool to fulfil their legal duty mentioned in article VII:

'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 access fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements

for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.’

Credential evaluators belonging to an ENIC may use the *Statement by the ENIC Network on the crisis in South East Europe* to strengthen their efforts to implement the suggested guidelines.

Guidelines for the credential evaluator

The guidelines are based upon the suggestions made by the Danish Refugee Council in their report. Terms are used in the same sense as the educational terms in the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

The guidelines are in particular directed at recognition cases where a refugee qualification is involved. It is understood that for the recognition of refugees’ qualifications the general principles and good practices for the assessment of foreign qualifications are unrestrictedly applicable.

Next to the guidelines, the credential evaluator is invited to contact the ENIC and NARIC Network and share the gained knowledge and experience concerning the recognition of refugees’ qualifications.

<http://www.europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg22/socrates/agenar.html>

<http://www.culture.coe.fr>

<http://www.cepes.ro>

1. The recognition issue is the assessment of refugee qualifications on the basis of incomplete – or even entirely missing – information about both the individual qualification and the system from which it hails.

Missing documented information in the process of **access** to higher education could be compensated by interviews, special examinations, sworn statements or competence tests.

Credential evaluators should also accept *supporting evidence* demonstrating the student had access to higher education in the home country, thus resulting in the possibility to apply the principle of the Convention on the equivalence of diplomas leading to admission to universities nr.15 of the Council of Europe.

Some examples of supporting evidence:

teachers’ statements about the followed educational training

- a published list of registered students
- student Ids
- students’ index
- transcripts
- admittance to State Examinations
- professional status

Credential evaluators should also accept documents from *supporting institutions*, like The British Council and the Red Cross.

A provisional recognition for the purpose of **employment** can be granted under the condition the refugee proves his or her skills and competence in the line of the claimed final educational training through supervised temporary employment.

2. In order not to lose valuable time, the refugee should

- have access to the assessment at an early stage in order not to miss the start of the academic year. A conditional access upon arrival of the required documents after a special examination or interview should be possible.
- receive a final recognition decision within 4 months after the application
- be able to obtain an advisory statement that can be used as a reliable tool in job search, career guidance, etc. Of course, this kind of statement can not replace a real recognition decision.
- be able to stay in touch with the field of study, profession or trade, through various measures including bridging courses with language tuition

3. To give refugees full benefit of their individual qualifications skills and knowledge, the criteria for the assessment of the refugee qualification for employment purposes should include work experience, which can be proven by statements of employers. The work experience should make it possible to:

- bridge undocumented educational gap
- fully compensate detected shortfalls, like a shortage of practical training hours
- update old degrees

4. Refugees are often in a difficult financial situation. No extra fees for the assessment of refugees’ qualifications should be charged, on the contrary, refugees may be exempted from it. To reduce the costs even more the credential evaluators

should accept as much as possible documents in another language. They should also accept translations of the documents into another language than theirs.

5. The information on the procedures and criteria for the assessment of refugees' qualifications should be plain and the written materials, such as the application form should be in a relevant language, where appropriate.

Social workers, vocational guidance counsellors, etc. should be kept informed on the procedures and criteria for the assessment of refugees' qualifications.

6. In case the credential evaluator discover a substantial difference between the refugees' qualification and the local one, suitable adaptation courses to bridge the gaps and shortfalls should be encouraged to organise, taking into account the refugees' qualifications to avoid starting from scratch.

7. Relevant data on refugee applicants should be collected in order to provide information facilitating the development of integration measures.

8. By organising encounters (face tot face or via the Internet) between

assessment agencies and refugee-assisting organisations

assessment agencies and labour-assisting organisations

the awareness of certain recognition procedure problems will increase and solutions can be suggested and discussed.

"Background Paper"

a potential tool for the recognition of refugees' qualifications

Introduction

Recognition bodies consider missing documents as the most important problem experienced when dealing with refugee applicants. Credential evaluators are also concerned with the related problem of verifying documents. Often the degree was retained at or had not yet been issued by the higher education institution at the time of departure. Sometimes documents are destroyed in a war. Afterwards it is quite impossible to obtain documents or a legalisation from authorities in the refugee producing country.

Next to suggested measures like special examinations, interviews, sworn statements, competence tests, the use of supporting evidence and a provisional recognition for employment, the Working Party wants to raise the idea of a *Background Paper*.

The Background Paper

The Background Paper intends to be a tool

- for the credential evaluator to reconstruct the educational background of the refugee in order to facilitate the (future) assessment
- for the refugee to affirm his or her academic achievements towards other evaluating bodies, like universities and employers, in order to gain access to further studies or an appropriate job.

The Background Paper itself is not an evaluation, but a reliable describing reconstruction of the academic achievements linked with the available documents and supporting evidence.

The Background Paper is a twofold paper:

1. Overview of the claimed educational background with the available documents and supporting evidence
2. Checklist, based upon the DS model, that can be used by the credential evaluator to add more relevant information

Example of overview

Educational Background	
Qualification	Evidence
Secondary education	diploma
Higher education -first degree	Student ID + transcript of 1st year
Higher education -second degree	No educational documents, but teacher statement + employment contract

CHECKLIST

This checklist is a working model. Some items may not be appropriate.

The credential evaluator should be aware that the checklist is meant to be an extra aid for future employers and for the refugee in order to get his/her life back on track. It is certainly not an extra way to increase the bureaucracy burden of the refugee.

- 1 INFORMATION IDENTIFYING THE HOLDER OF THE QUALIFICATION
 - 1.1 Family name(s):
 - 1.2 Given name(s) or maiden name:
 - 1.3 Date of birth (*day/month/year*):
- 2 INFORMATION ON THE EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND ACHIEVEMENTS
 - 2.1 Name of qualification and title conferred (*in original language*):
 - 2.2 Main field(s) of study for the qualification:
 - 2.3 Name and status of awarding institution + previous names (*in original language*):
 - 2.4 Name and status of institution administering studies (*if different from 2.3 and in original language*):
 - 2.5 Language(s) of instruction/examination:
- 3 INFORMATION ON THE LEVEL OF THE QUALIFICATION
 - 3.1 Level of qualification:
 - 3.1 Official length of programme:
 - 3.2 Access requirements(s)
- 4 INFORMATION ON THE CONTENTS AND RESULTS GAINED
 - 4.1 Mode of study:
 - 4.2 Programme requirements:
 - 4.3 Programme details: (e.g. modules or units studied), and the individual grades/marks/credits obtained:
 - 4.4 Grading scheme and, if available, grade distribution guidance:
 - 4.5 Overall classification of the qualification (*in original language*):
- 5 INFORMATION ON THE FUNCTION OF THE QUALIFICATION
 - 5.1 Access to further study:
 - 5.2 Professional status (*if applicable*):
- 6 INFORMATION ON INCOMPLETE STUDIES
- 7 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION
which is found relevant by the credential evaluator
- 8 USED SOURCES
- 9 RECOGNITION PROCEDURES
Legal text

RECOMMENDATION ON INTERNATIONAL ACCESS QUALIFICATIONS

Adopted at the First meeting of the Committee of the Lisbon Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, Vilnius, 16 June, 1999.

PREAMBLE

The Parties to the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (the Lisbon Recognition Convention),

Conscious of the fact that the right to education and freedom of choice is a human right and that a fair recognition of qualifications is a key element of the right to education and a responsibility of society;

Taking into account the growing diversity in educational systems throughout Europe and the world and the multitude of alternative ways of learning available to students;

Having regard to the increasing internationalisation of higher education as well as of education giving access to higher education;

Considering that any recommendation adopted under the aegis of the Council of Europe and UNESCO should promote international understanding and tolerance and foster mutual confidence and peace among peoples and nations;

Considering that international access qualifications facilitate international academic mobility, one of the major objectives of UNESCO and the Council of Europe;

Having regard to the Lisbon Recognition Convention and in particular Section IV which addresses the Recognition of Qualifications giving Access to Higher Education;

Taking into account that the Lisbon Recognition Convention concerns the recognition of qualifications belonging to the education systems of the Parties and therefore does not cover international access qualifications;

Considering that Article X.2.5 of the Lisbon Recognition Convention foresees the elaboration of recommendations, declarations and protocols as subsidiary to the Convention, and that while Parties are not legally bound by such texts, they should use their best endeavours to encourage their application;

Considering, however, that an international recommendation addressing the recognition of international access qualifications is timely and necessary;

have agreed as follows:

I. DEFINITION

For the purpose of this Recommendation, International Access Qualifications refer to secondary school leaving qualifications awarded upon completion of a programme:

- distinct from the programmes offered within national education systems
- administered by one or more bodies external to national education systems
- having an international orientation and scope per se
- meeting the general requirements for access to higher education
- subject to well-defined and transparent quality assurance mechanisms
- incorporating a core curriculum of sufficient academic rigour.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. TO THE PARTIES OF THE LISBON RECOGNITION CONVENTION

1. Each Party should recognise International Access Qualifications for the purpose of access to programmes belonging to its higher education system, unless a substantial difference can be shown between the International Access Qualification assessed and the comparable qualification(s) of the Party in which recognition is sought.
2. The Parties are encouraged to acknowledge the merits of an International Access Qualification, taking into account the core curriculum and the academic rigour of the programme in resolving possible differences.
3. Parties are encouraged to show flexibility in the assessment of International Access Qualifications in the spirit of the increasing internationalisation and diversification of education.
4. The Basic Principles as laid down in Section III of the Lisbon Recognition Convention shall apply to the assessment of International Access Qualifications.
5. The competent recognition authorities should use criteria and procedures for the assessment of International Access Qualifications comparable to those applied in the assessment of the access qualifications of the other Parties.
6. Parties should encourage the ENIC Network to maintain up-to-date information on International Access Qualifications and to regularly review new developments.
7. Each Party should take all possible measures to widely disseminate the provisions of the present Recommendation.

B. TO PROVIDERS OF INTERNATIONAL ACCESS QUALIFICATIONS

1. In order to facilitate the recognition of International Access Qualifications, each Provider shall establish transparent systems for a complete description of the programmes offered, the evaluation systems, the qualification(s) awarded and the administering bodies.
2. Furthermore, each Provider shall:
 - a. make available reliable information on the programmes offered and on the basic values they promote
 - b. use the UNESCO/Council of Europe/European Union Diploma Supplement
 - c. furnish transparent information on the quality assurance mechanism(s) of the programmes leading to the qualification.
 - d. provide information essential for the verification of the authenticity of qualifications and documents.
3. Acknowledging the need for relevant, accurate and up-to-date information, each Provider should establish and maintain an information contact point.
4. Each Provider should see to it that students are fully informed of the provisions of the present Recommendation.