socio-economic data – including on labour markets, investment and skills – which would, among other benefits, help foster inclusive economic growth for both host communities and refugees. The Talent Catalog is one example of capturing data on and demonstrating the range and depth of refugee skills – skills which could meet employers’ needs and contribute to economic growth anywhere in the world.

Engaging States
Governments have a critical role in creating economic opportunities for skilled refugees and in recognising qualifications but, to date, economic migration pathways have not been designed with the circumstances of refugees in mind. Those fleeing conflict zones may not have access to evidence of their qualifications or legal identification documents, and may not be able to provide traditional work histories, references and evidence of annual earnings. Recognising this, the Government of Canada is funding a pilot project in Kenya to identify barriers to refugees’ access to its skilled migration schemes. In both Canada and Australia, while working with increasing numbers of employers to recruit skilled refugees, TBB continues to consult with and carry out advocacy work targeting both governments on how existing skilled visa systems may take account of skilled refugees’ unique circumstances. It is also in similar discussions with three other States.

Talent Beyond Boundaries is helping to advance an effective framework – one that may be replicated by others – for refugees to rebuild lives of self-reliance with protection and dignity, while contributing to the global economy.

Leah Nichles
lnichles@talentbeyondboundaries.org
International Advocacy Director

Sayre Nyce snyce@talentbeyondboundaries.org
Executive Director

Talent Beyond Boundaries
www.talentbeyondboundaries.org


Validating highly educated refugees’ qualifications
Katarina Mozetič

Qualification certificates play a central role in the labour market integration of highly educated refugees but validating them presents considerable challenges. Sweden and Norway have introduced some positive developments to address such difficulties.

Whether doctors, teachers, engineers or IT specialists, the highly educated refugees I interviewed in Norway, Sweden and Germany between 2016 and 2017 aspired to continue working within their occupational fields. In order to do so they need to validate their foreign qualifications but the validation process for certain occupations is extremely lengthy, preventing some highly educated refugees from re-entering their professions for years.

Qualifications recognition and validation processes differ substantially between different occupational groups, with the principal division between occupations regulated by law (for instance, medical doctors and teachers) and non-regulated ones (such as IT engineers). For individuals in non-regulated occupations, the qualifications validation process is often simple and short. For those in legally regulated occupations the experience is very different. In order to be able to continue working as, for instance, medical doctors and teachers, foreign professionals have to obtain national licences, usually needing to provide proof of destination-
country language skills, pass an exam, attend supplementary courses and (often) undergo a period of practical training.

All of the medical doctors and teachers who participated in my research project who embarked upon these licensing processes in Norway, Sweden and Germany described numerous difficulties. Some felt that the required knowledge tests and supplementary training ignored their existing knowledge and experience, and some medical specialists were sceptical that the destination country licence would equal the professional level they had achieved in their home country. Most of the research participants criticised the long duration of the licensing processes.

In Sweden, for instance, foreign teachers require an estimated five to eight years to obtain a Swedish teaching licence. In order to enable migrants to gain faster access to the labour market, the Swedish Public Employment Service, commissioned by the Swedish government and in cooperation with industry partners, established fast-track programmes.1 Designed for occupations that experience labour shortages, the first programmes were initiated in 2015 and programmes currently exist for migrant chefs, social workers and those in regulated occupations such as teachers. The programme participants undergo a qualifications validation process, occupation-specific Swedish language courses, internships and supplementary theoretical courses. Participants take part in these activities simultaneously, thereby reducing the time it takes to get the national licence. Moreover, the programmes provide participants with an institutional framework that sketches out the steps they need to take in order to reach their goal and offers them guidance along the way.

One such fast-track programme is a 26-week programme aimed at foreign teachers in Malmö, Sweden. This consists of courses in pedagogy and about the Swedish school system that are taught in both Swedish and Arabic (since it is anticipated that most participants are Arabic-speaking), an internship at one of the local schools and a Swedish language course that is tailored for teachers. Practical work experience enables the individual to enhance their Swedish language skills and establish the professional contacts necessary for future job seeking. Moreover, the decision about whether an individual must undergo a programme of supplementary training for foreign teachers in order to obtain their teaching licence – a decision taken by the Swedish National Agency for Education upon a request to validate their qualifications – can be re-evaluated depending on how that individual performs in the fast-track programme.

Physical possession of certificates

In order to be able to validate their qualifications, highly educated refugees have to be in physical possession of their qualification certificates. Many respondents recounted, however, how they had lost part or all of their certificates in the rubble of their bombed homes or on their journeys. Obtaining new certificates from the educational institutions where they studied was often a nearly insurmountable obstacle – state institutions were often reluctant, unwilling or even legally constrained from issuing educational certificates to individuals abroad.

In order to address this problem, and to meet the requirements of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) developed a Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (also known as the UVD-procedure).2 The UVD-procedure is oriented towards individuals with foreign higher education for whom the general recognition procedure is not appropriate, due to either missing, insufficient or unverifiable educational and/or identity documentation. Thereby, it is directed mainly at refugees and persons in a refugee-like situation. The UVD-procedure includes input by one or two NOKUT employees with knowledge about the educational system in the applicant’s country of origin and two external experts with subject-specific expertise. An applicant’s educational background is verified through a
A questionnaire, an interview and both oral and written assignments relating to the applicant’s field of expertise. Although Norway is the only European country with the UVD-procedure, a couple of others, including Sweden, employ similar procedures.

Due to increasing numbers of refugees, the time-consuming and resource-intensive nature of the UVD-procedure, and the fact that an ever expanding group of refugees does not fulfil the requirements for evaluation according to the UVD-procedure, NOKUT has, along with the United Kingdom National Academic Recognition Information Centre, developed a new type of faster, cheaper evaluation procedure for those without verifiable documentation. The new Qualifications Assessment for Refugees combines an evaluation of available documentation and a structured interview carried out by an experienced NOKUT case officer with the applicant.

The attempts outlined here are examples of positive developments aimed at addressing the difficulties of qualification recognition. It remains to be seen how these programmes will continue to evolve and how they can be implemented elsewhere.

Katarina Mozetič
katarina.mozetic@sosgeo.uio.no
PhD Research Fellow, Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo
www.sv.uio.no/iss/english/people/aca/katarmo/index.html


Refugee livelihoods: new actors, new models

Ziad Ayoubi and Regina Saavedra

The international community is increasingly emphasising the need to bridge the humanitarian–development gap. But what does this mean on the ground in terms of refugees’ livelihoods and economic inclusion?

In addition to shelter, water, food and education, refugees (just like everyone else) need productive employment. Generating an income to meet one’s basic needs and provide for one’s family is essential for human dignity, and is a human right under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Furthermore, there is growing evidence that refugees can contribute to economic development in host countries if given the chance to participate. Refugees’ human capital (skills and experience) can bring new products and services to the local market, while financial capital such as remittances and international aid can stimulate economies. However, in most countries refugees still lack the right to work. From a host country’s perspective, governments should recognise, firstly, that a legal framework which allows the economic inclusion of refugees can generate benefits for host countries and, secondly, that it is preferable for work rights to be granted as early as possible in order not to prevent or delay the potential contribution of refugees to economies. Restrictive work rights encourage informal economic activities and deprive host countries of an economically active population who could otherwise pay taxes and consume, produce and sell goods and services. It is neither desirable nor logical to postpone work rights until refugees become legally integrated (for example, through naturalisation), which can take a long time; people will still work but will be excluded from formal, decent employment opportunities. Good practice (in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Germany, among others) shows that supporting early labour market insertion – for example, through skills certification, apprenticeships and job matching schemes – allows refugees to become contributing members of host communities. This is