



Strasbourg, 5 July 1999
DECS/EDU/HE (99) 50
Orig. Eng.

Working Party on the Recognition of Refugee Qualifications

Strasbourg, 15 – 16 July 1999 (starting 09h30)

Council of Europe Headquarters, room 16

RECOGNITION OF REFUGEE QUALIFICATIONS – OUTLINE OF A TRAINING SEMINAR

Secretariat discussion document

Directorate of Education, Culture and Sport (Education Department/Higher
Education and Research Section)

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Working Party on Refugee Qualifications, which will meet in Strasbourg on 15 – 16 July 1999, is to prepare a training seminar for credentials evaluators and others who will be called upon to evaluate qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation (hereafter referred to as “refugees”). The purpose of this paper is to introduce the discussion in the Working party. The paper relies on input from the workshop held at the 1999 ENIC/NARIC meeting as well as on points developed by Erwin Malfroy, a member of the Working Party.

The immediate aim is to hold a training seminar in autumn 1999. However, the seminar developed by the Working Party may be repeated later or adapted to other contexts, as the case may be. The training seminar will be developed on the basis of the crisis in South East Europe, although a part of it will deal with concerns of more general relevance to the assessment of any qualifications held by refugees, no matter what their geographical origin.

Although many refugees are now returning to Kosovo, this does not eliminate the need for special measures aimed at those who will remain abroad for some time to come. The return of an unexpectedly large number of refugees reduces the need for such special measures but does not do away with this concern, although much attention will naturally shift to Kosovo as well as to Serbia, provided political conditions in Serbia change.

SCOPE

The assessment of refugee qualification calls for a different approach than that normally used by credentials evaluators. Instead of assessing a qualification on the basis of a well documented file from an education system on which information is more or less readily available, refugee qualifications will often have to be assessed on the basis of incomplete – or even entirely missing – information about both the individual qualification and the system from which it hails. The latter point is important because the situation leading up to a crisis may well have an effect on the education system concerned. This has clearly been the case of Kosovo, where a parallel, non-official education system was in place for a number of years for the Albanian speaking majority of the population.

Like medical treatment, the assessment of qualifications should be fair and equal for all. This implies that while the majority of refugees from South East Europe are of ethnic Albanian origin, the same treatment should be accorded to refugees of Serbian or any other ethnic origin. Some of the Serbian refugees will have their education from Kosovo, others from Serbia. It will be recalled that the ENIC Network at its 1999 meeting adopted a statement on recognition and mobility issues related to the crisis in South East Europe (Appendix 1).

CONTENT OF THE SEMINAR

First part: general considerations on the assessment of refugee qualifications

This part of the training seminar should give an overview of the general issues related to the assessment of refugee qualifications. An important part of the legal basis is provided by Section VII of the Lisboa Recognition Convention and its Explanatory Report, which should be made available to the participants in the seminar. However, this is a starting point for developing good practice rather than a ready-made recipe.

The suggestions made by the Danish Refugee Council on the basis of its project (Appendix 2) constitute a further basis for the seminar. It is suggested that the Working Party spend some time considering these suggestions and how they could be presented to the seminar.

Two other measures would also be relevant in preparing the seminar. One concerns guideline for good practice, the other the drafting of a background model, Diploma Supplement style paper which the refugee could use in his or her search for further studies or employment.

It should also be kept in mind that the content of the seminar is limited to recognition issues. It will not deal with other issues affecting the refugees' situation, such as their legal status in their host country, including the right to work and pursue studies, social security arrangements, etc. Nor it will be the place for political discussions regarding the status of Kosovo and the safe return of the refugees.

Second part: the educational system in Kosovo and Serbia

This part of the training seminar should give an overview of the educational system in Kosovo and Serbia, in particular the higher education system.

It is suggested that the Working Party should find a manner to gather validated information on the educational systems since 1992. Sending out a questionnaire, locating field experts and using the recognition experience of NARICs & ENICs are a few possibilities.

Effective would be to determine the main topics for which information is needed, like the name and status of the awarding institutions, the name of the qualifications, the length of the studies, the access requirements, etc. This information could be presented in accordance with the format of the Diploma Supplement.

After creating the mode of collecting the needed information, the Working Party could also design the presentation of the collected data to the target group of the training seminar.

Maybe the Working Party is also willingly to already think about the follow up of the training seminar. Like the Canadian ENIC has suggested in Vilnius during the Sixth Joint Meeting of the ENIC & NARIC Network, the outcomes of the training seminar could be put on the ENIC & NARIC Website and distributed via the ENIC Listserver.

ORGANISATION OF THE SEMINAR

The Working Party is invited to make suggestions to the Secretariat of the ENIC Network concerning the practical details, like the date(s) and venue of the training seminar, the invitations for the target group, the distribution of the materials and the appointment of experts and presenters.

APPENDIX 1

ENIC STATEMENT ON RECOGNITION AND MOBILITY ISSUES RELATED TO THE CRISIS IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

Adopted by the ENIC Network on 15 June 1999

The *ENIC Network* expresses its deep concern for the situation in the countries of South East Europe.

With reference to its specific competence in the area of the recognition of qualifications, and with particular reference to Section VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which covers the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation, the *ENIC Network* appeals to the Parties and signatories to the Convention, as well as other countries, to:

- apply the principles outlined in the Convention, and in particular in its Section VII, to the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in particular Kosovo and Serbia, regardless of the current legal status of these persons in the respective host countries;
- with reference to Section VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention and its Explanatory Report, encourage higher education institutions belonging to their system of higher education to show a high degree of flexibility with regard to the recognition of qualifications in cases where these cannot be documented because of the war-like conditions in the area;
- encourage higher education institutions belonging to their system of higher education to show the same degree of flexibility with regard to the recognition of qualifications emanating, before the crisis, from the parallel and often non-formal Albanian language education system which had been in operation in Kosovo for a number of years prior to the latest crisis, as well as with regard to those students from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in particular Kosovo and Serbia, whose spring semester has been interrupted by the war-like conditions in the area;
- encourage higher education institutions belonging to their system of higher education to make extra places of study available for refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in particular Kosovo and Serbia, to enable them to pursue their higher education from the autumn semester of this year;
- encourage higher education institutions to make use of the competence and experience of national information centres in their assessment of

qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation;

- encourage higher education institutions and government authorities to establish preparatory courses in the teaching language(s) of institutions to which refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in particular Kosovo and Serbia, are admitted as well as courses which might be required to facilitate their successful participation in the study programmes of the host country;
- encourage higher education institutions and government authorities to provide refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in particular Kosovo and Serbia, with financial aid in order to allow them to carry out their studies successfully.

APPENDIX 2

Suggestions (19)

Made by the Danish Refugee Council

1. flexibility concerning missing documents through
 - interviews
 - special examinations
 - competence tests
 - provisional recognition
2. easy access to assessment resulting in an advisory statement used as a tool in job search, career guidance, etc.
3. procedures should
 - make it possible to evaluate work experience
 - give applicants access to assessment by means of tests
 - in particular when documents or work experience is insufficient
 - combine the evaluation of documents with
 - competence tests
 - special examinations
4. In order not to lose valuable time, the refugee should
 - have access to assessment at an early stage
 - when complementary education or training is necessary, stay in touch with the field of study, profession or trade, through various measures including bridging courses with language tuition
5. recognition cases should be handled
 - as efficiently as possible
 - within 4 months
6. fees should be avoided
7. appropriate financial support to cover
 - assessment
 - complementary education and training
8. **vocational** recognition: further development needed for
 - national centres of expertise
 - international networks on the assessment and recognition
 - e.g. extending the scope of the existing NARIC/ENIC networks

9. assessment agencies should share
 - info on refugees' educational backgrounds
 - the way qualifications have been assessed
10. creation of an information system
11. information should be plain
12. written material in the relevant languages
13. social workers, vocational guidance counsellors, etc. should be kept informed by recognition information centres about
 - recognition procedures
 - methodology
14. Suitable adaptation courses to bridge the gaps, taking into account the qualifications
15. refugees could be assimilated to that of EU nationals concerning professional recognition
16. clear guiding principles to promote good practice in the assessment
17. relevant data on refugee applicants should be collected in order to provide information facilitating the development of integration measures
18. an encounter between assessment agencies and refugee-assisting organisations
 - increasing the awareness of recognition problems
 - discussing solutions
19. Organisations, authorities and individuals dealing with recognition & integration matters are encouraged
 - to analyse the national systems of recognition
 - to consider the suggestions in view of an overall policy for fair assessment adapted to the needs of refugee integration