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AGILE

Support mechanisms for exiled students in Higher Education

LITHUANIA

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Deliverable Factsheet

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Abstract:	In this document we present the support mechanisms for refugee students at higher education institutions in Lithuania, according to responses collected through an online questionnaire survey of these institutions. The analysis also mentions the most common difficulties experienced by institutions in their work with this specific audience, as well as their suggestions for more sustainable and continuous work.
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Consortium

	Université Paris 8 (UP8)	France
	Université Bordeaux Montaigne (UBM)	France
	Web2Learn (W2L)	Greece
	University of Ljubljana (UL)	Slovenia
	Lviv Polytechnic National University (LPNU)	Ukraine
	University of Hamburg (UH)	Germany
	Kaunas University of Technology (KTU)	Lithuania
	Polish Rectors Foundation (PRF)	Poland

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Executive Summary

In this document we present the support mechanisms for refugee students at higher education institutions in Lithuania, according to responses collected through an online questionnaire survey of these institutions. The analysis also mentions the most common difficulties experienced by institutions in their work with this specific audience, as well as their suggestions for more sustainable and continuous work. Lithuanian universities demonstrate some structured efforts to support exiled students, but there are gaps in policy standardization, student representation, and national coordination. A government-led initiative could unify and strengthen these efforts.

The AGILE project

This publication is a result of the EU-funded AGILE project ("Higher education resilience in refugee crises: forging social inclusion through capacity building, civic engagement and skills recognition", http://www.agileproject-erasmus.eu/), whose aim is to increase resilience of HE systems to address the ongoing needs of refugees through social participation and skills recognition. The AGILE project aims to enrich HE curricula by proposing new pedagogical designs that encourage grassroots and digitally-enhanced actions in both formal and informal learning environments.

The project is coordinated by the University Paris 8. The consortium is made up of six universities (University Paris 8, Bordeaux Montaigne University, University of Hamburg, University of Ljubljana, Lviv Polytechnic National University, Kaunas University of Technology), one think-tank (Polish Rectors Foundation) and one business partner (Web2Learn) who specialises in open recognition systems and social learning.

1. Introduction

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To achieve our goal, the AGILE consortium developed a questionnaire, which was completed by higher education stakeholders across the project member countries. Created in French by partner institutions in Bordeaux, Paris, and Hamburg, the questionnaire was translated into multiple languages of the participating universities, as well as English. It was implemented online using the EU survey tool (https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/home/welcome/runner) in various languages. National AGILE coordinators reached out to participants, inviting them to respond to the questionnaire in one of the project's available languages. Each institution was allowed to submit a maximum of four responses.

A total of 141 participants took part in the survey, with responses distributed as follows: 38 from Poland, 35 from France, 27 from Germany, 21 from Ukraine, 7 each from Greece and Slovenia, and 6 from Lithuania.

For Lithuania, potential participants from selected HE institutions were initially contacted in January 7, 2025. Emails were sent to 57 people and higher education institutions in Lithuania who work with foreign students, are familiar with the admissions system, or are people holding high positions in the study process. Two emails bounced back due to recipients no longer being employed at the organization, while 4 others received automated responses indicating waiting list notifications. In January 24, 2025, the surveys were send again with a request to fill in it.

6 responses were collected from 6 different Lithuanian higher education institutions. Comparing the letters sent and the responses received, the number is very small. One institution responded that they do not have any refugee students. We can assume that the few responses received are due to the limited experience and skills in working with refugee students in Lithuanian higher education institutions.

This report specifically analyzes responses from Lithuania, with all data anonymized. For insights from other countries and a comprehensive overview of all AGILE member contributions, please refer to the reports available at https://agileproject-erasmus.eu/ (section: Results).

2. Results

2. Results

The data includes responses from different universities regarding procedures and policies related to exiled students. First section of questions was „Skills recognition prior to enrolment at the host university".

The question, in order to clarify, does university have procedures for recognizing the qualifications acquired by exiled students before arriving in the host country, seeks to reveal whether, in general, a higher education institution has certain procedures for recognizing the qualifications acquired by exiled students before arriving in the host country. Four institutions gave a positive answer, and two gave a negative answer, so, this shows that some institutions have little or no contact with exiled students and do not have any algorithms in place. Those institutions that noted that they had certain procedures listed them as „organisation for the recognition of foreign diplomas; Tests/examinations; Interviews".

Regarding the question „Do exiled students who enrol in your university's various courses continue their studies where they left off, or do they generally have to repeat one or more years?" three respondents choose the answer „They continue at the year/level at which they left off" and three other choose „it depends". This answer they specify as „Each case is specific and discussed with faculty Admission Commission of the respective study programme" and „We have never had to work with a refugee student before, it would depend on the situation because our institution can only provide Professional Bachelor's Degree" also „ in these cases we recognize the achievements of prior learning as a part of chosen study programme if the former higher education institution is accredited". The main criteria for accepting Exiled Students are level of English and prerequisites in the diploma subject. Other aspect have been „previously achieved Learning outcome".

The answers to the questions also supplemented the information that „each case would be assessed on its own merits, depending on the situation of the applicant." and „local language is not a prerequisite for enrollment".

Regarding the question „does the university recognise the skills of refugee students (linguistic, subject-specific, etc.) acquired outside university courses (via MOOCs, Open Badges, training in associations, work experience, etc.)?" three respondents choose answer „yes" and, one choose „no" and one „I don't know". Those, who choose the answer „yes" named that „ The University has special procedures for assessment and recognition of competences acquired in an informal and self-directed way. A person can claim to assess acquired competences: In work activities; In unpaid or voluntary work;

Internships, courses, seminars, projects, etc. during; Learning independently; In free time, etc. ". Another answer was „ we have a procedure for the assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in non-formal and informal way".

Regarding the question „ Does your university encounter any obstacles in recognising the skills of exiled students?" the majority of answers was „no" and „I don't know" and three people answered „yes". The main obstacles they encountered with „Missing documents. Students that want to approve competencies that were acquired in an non-formal way, must take exams to prove competencies", „ differences in higher education systems" and „ cultural context and differences in understanding the level of skills achievement".,

The second section of questions was about „Capacity building". The question, in order to clarify, does your university offer training courses for its staff to prepare them to welcome exiled students, received 4 positive and 2 negative answers. Those who chose a positive response have named the type: „Mostly the trainings are organised by Lithuanian ENIR/NARIC Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education, also EQUAL Training Session for Lithuania" or „ How to deal with students coming from war zones" and „ cultural sensitivity; multicultural communication" also added, that they „have courses on intercultural communication".

Four representatives from different institutions said that their university have specific resources to help exiled students with the administrative formalities before they enrol at university, such as „mostly human resources, admission coordinators", „guidelines and processes described in details" or „refugees do not pay application fee to apply".

All six respondents said that they have measures in place to support exiled students during their studies, such as: „individual consultations and meetings with faculty academic coordinators, lectures, academic support, psychological service (free psychological individual or group consultations), free Lithuanian language courses for easier adaptation, free sport centre, mentoring program, social support scholarships, tuition and dormitory fee discounts", „discounts from tuition fee, social scholarships", academic, financial, social support", „access to social support funding, accommodation, counselling, depending on what individual student needs" and „we have welfare manager and students support manager as well as available psychologists on campus".

The Higher Education Institutions represented by the respondents are offered specific language courses and system, in place to welcome exiled students and introduce them to the various student life services at the universities. Regarding to this answers, the services or actions are covered by this scheme is „ Administrative support; Educational support / tutoring; Digital support; Cultural activities; Help with finding accommodation; Help with finding a student job; University library; Information and guidance service; Sport; Psycho-medical support service; Community life". Also it is worth mentioned that 4 of 6 answers said that universities face obstacles in setting up support systems for exiled students: „ Financial; Policies (municipal, departmental, regional, national); Human

resources" and just one respondent mark that university set up a specific follow-up system for exiled students after they have finished their studies.

Third question section was „Civic engagement". Five of 6 representatives of higher education institutions highlight that their institutions inform exiled students about the possibility of getting involved in civic and/or community life but just 3 of them mark that civic engagement recognised in the academic career of exiled students, like open badges, internships, bonus points, certificates, optional/open courses, etc.

The majority of respondents said that exiled students do not represented in the university's decision-making bodies or they do not know about that but 4 of 6 mark that university work with external organisations such as various companies, NGOs, associations to promote civic engagement and/or socio-cultural inclusion of exiled students.

All these questions lead to the suggestion question, where all the representatives could suggest their ideas. One of them said that there is a „ need national policy how to support exiled students" or „ more attention should be paid on preparation of academic staff, on engagement of exiled students in decision making at the institution and involvement in social life of hosting country/city". Also, a very important aspect is that they need „more attention should be paid on preparation of academic staff, on engagement of exiled students in decision making at the institution and involvement in social life of hosting country/city". The last bu not least, regarding to exiled students we need „dedicated contact for exiled students (one window inquiry system)" and „more common activities with the rest of the academic community"

3. Key insights

3. Key insights

- Higher education institutions have procedures for recognizing diplomas.
- The Organisation for the Recognition of Foreign Diplomas plays a key role in this process.
- Some institutions conduct tests and examinations as part of the admissions process.
- Some universities allow exiled students to continue at their previous academic level, while others assess placements on a case-by-case basis.
- Faculty members discuss each student's situation individually.
- In cases where academic records are unavailable, universities make efforts to recognize past achievements.
- Some universities have set up specific support mechanisms, while others do not have a structured follow-up system.
- Communication and administrative support are commonly provided for exiled students.
- Some institutions lack experience in working with exiled students and have not yet developed formal policies.
- Universities and colleges have various student associations, but there is a lack of exiled student organizations.
- Representation of exiled students in university governance structures is limited or these students lack information about such an opportunity.
- Some institutions are open to creating new initiatives to increase representation.
- Several universities work with external organizations to support exiled students.
- Forms of support include academic recognition, financial aid, and cultural engagement initiatives.
- Some institutions expressed a need for clearer national policies on supporting exiled students.

4. Suggestions

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Lithuanian universities have made progress in recognizing and supporting exiled students, but significant gaps remain in policy standardization, student engagement, and institutional preparedness. While some universities have established recognition procedures for foreign diplomas and collaborate with external organizations, others still lack structured approaches to handling exiled students. This inconsistency highlights the need for a more cohesive national strategy to ensure equitable opportunities for all exiled students.

One of the most pressing concerns raised by universities is the lack of a national policy framework for exiled student support. Without clear governmental guidelines, institutions are left to develop their own approaches, leading to fragmentation and inefficiencies. Universities stress that the government should establish national policies to provide a standardized foundation for recognizing qualifications, integrating students, and offering long-term academic and social support.

Another key recommendation is the creation of dedicated contacts or "one-stop shops" within universities to assist exiled students. These centralized support offices would streamline the admissions process, provide guidance on diploma recognition, and help students navigate administrative procedures more efficiently. Currently, many institutions handle exiled student cases individually, which can lead to delays, miscommunication, and inconsistencies in decision-making. A formalized support structure would ensure a smoother transition for exiled students and better coordination between different university departments.

Beyond administrative support, social integration is a crucial aspect of successful inclusion. Universities emphasize the need for more common activities with local students to foster cultural exchange, social cohesion, and mutual understanding. Creating inclusive events, mentorship programs, and intercultural initiatives can help exiled students build a sense of belonging within the academic community. At present, student engagement varies across institutions, with limited representation of exiled students in governance structures or student associations. Encouraging greater student participation in university life would enhance both academic and social experiences.

Additionally, universities acknowledge the need for better institutional preparedness in handling exiled students. Many institutions have little to no prior experience working with exiled student populations, which can lead to uncertainty and ad-hoc decision-making. Universities should develop clear protocols, train staff, and establish dedicated resources to effectively address the unique needs of exiled students. This proactive approach would enable institutions to respond efficiently and ensure a more supportive learning environment.

In summary, while Lithuanian universities recognize the importance of supporting exiled students, there is a clear need for policy alignment, structured support services, and

improved integration efforts. A coordinated national-level strategy, combined with proactive university initiatives, would significantly enhance the ability of institutions to provide sustainable and effective support for exiled students. By implementing these improvements, Lithuania can create a more inclusive higher education system that offers equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their background.

5. Conclusion

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Lithuanian universities have taken steps to support exiled students, particularly in recognizing foreign diplomas and collaborating with external organizations. However, the level of institutional preparedness varies significantly. While some universities have structured admission and support processes, others handle cases on an individual basis, leading to inconsistencies.

A major challenge is the lack of a unified national strategy for exiled students. Universities are calling for clearer government policies to guide their approach, particularly regarding diploma recognition, student integration, and long-term academic support. Additionally, student representation remains limited, and efforts to engage exiled students in university governance or student associations are inconsistent.

Despite these challenges, universities recognize the need for more structured follow-up mechanisms and greater integration efforts. Suggested improvements include creating dedicated student support offices, increasing civic engagement opportunities, and fostering more interactions between exiled and local students.

To build a more inclusive academic environment, Lithuanian institutions should work toward standardized policies, increased student engagement, and stronger collaborations with government bodies and external partners. With a coordinated national framework, universities can enhance their ability to support exiled students more effectively and sustainably.

6. References

6. References

Acknowledgements

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