



Higher Education regional cooperation to develop welcome strategies for exiled students and researchers



REPORT

Camille NAU
Université Bordeaux Montaigne

31/01/2024



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Deliverable Factsheet

Project Number	2022-1-FR01-KA220-HED-000087334
Project Acronym	AGILE
Project Title	Higher Education resilience in refugee crises: forging social inclusion through capacity building, civic engagement and skills recognition
Title of the document	HE- regional cooperation to develop welcome strategies for exiled students and researchers
Author	Camille Nau
Publication date	31/01/2024
Contributors	Linda Lawrance
Reviewers	Linda Lawrance Anthippi Potolia Léa Meunier
Approved by	All partners
Dissemination level	Public
Keyword list	Higher Education, refugee education
Please cite as	NAU, Camille (2024). HE- regional cooperation to develop welcome strategies for exiled students and researchers. AGILE consortium.

Abstract

This report is based on first-hand experience with Higher education and regional actors in the Nouvelle Aquitaine region (France).

It includes the identification of the drivers and barriers experienced in this territorial coordination initiative, which aims to improve the sociolinguistic integration of exiled students and researchers in a specific region in France.

Revision history

Version	Date	Revised by	Comments
V.1	12/10/2023	Linda Lawrance	Comments
V.2	26/10/2023	Linda Lawrance	Comments
V.3	24/11/2023	Anthippi Potolia Léa Meunier	Comments
V.4	30/01/2024	Linda Lawrance	Final comments and layout

Statement of originality

This deliverable contains original unpublished work except where clearly indicated otherwise. Acknowledgement of previously published material and of the work of others has been made through appropriate citation, quotation or both.

Disclaimer

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme.

This deliverable reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Erasmus+
Enriching lives, opening minds.

Project summary

This publication is a result of the Erasmus+-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 the 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) specialised in open recognition systems and social learning.

Consortium

Partner n°	Name	Short name	Country	Logo
1.	University Paris 8	UP8	France	
2.	The University of Bordeaux Montaigne	UBM	France	
3.	Web2Learn	W2L	Greece	
4.	University of Ljubljana	UL	Slovenia	
5.	Polish Rectors Foundation	PRF	Poland	
6.	Lviv Polytechnic National University	LPNU	Ukraine	
7.	University of Hamburg	UH	Germany	
8.	Kaunas University of Technology	KTU	Lithuania	

Table of content

1. General presentation of the Convention of Territorial Coordination of Nouvelle Aquitaine	9
1.1. The origin of the convention	9
1.2. Organisation of this model of cooperation	10
1.2.1. The political and the administrative advisors	10
1.2.2. The project manager	10
1.2.3. The decisional committees	11
2. State of play after three years	13
2.1. Preparatory Work / in depth work	13
2.2. Actions of communication, formation	14
2.3. Examples of initiatives 2021-2023	14
2.3.1. Bridge diplomas and joint Bridge diplomas	14
2.3.2. Other initiatives	16
3. Drivers and barriers for a coordinated response	18
3.1. Drivers	18
3.2. Barriers	18
Conclusion	19
Acknowledgement	20
Author	21

List of abbreviations

The following list presents the acronyms used in the deliverable in alphabetical order.

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
COMUE	Community of universities and higher education institutions
DEFLE	Département d'Études de Français Langue Étrangère (Department of French as a Foreign Language)
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution

Executive summary

The Convention of Territorial Coordination of Nouvelle Aquitaine is a regional example of cooperation for student and researcher refugee integration.

The AGILE team chose to include this regional model for cooperation because it represents an original and very local response that complements national initiatives. Pooling resources and sharing knowledge reduce the strain on individual colleagues and learning from past experiences is also timesaving. This regional approach can easily be transferred to other countries thus providing a pragmatic solution for HEIs who do not have the human resources necessary to implement and coordinate their actions on their own.

This report aims to give a general overview of this example of cooperation by describing its organisation, the missions of the actors involved and giving concrete examples of projects and initiatives.

The report also gives insight into some of the drivers and barriers observed since its creation.

1. General presentation of the Convention of Territorial Coordination of Nouvelle Aquitaine

1.1. The origin of the convention

The CCT is an association of universities and higher education institutions in the Aquitaine region of France. This association was made possible by French law in 2013. This region is located in the southwest of France and brings together the departments below.



The CCT association includes the following HEIs:

1. The University of Bordeaux Montaigne: 17000 students in the arts, languages, literature and human and social sciences.
2. The University of Bordeaux: 50 000 students in law, economics and management, science and technology, health Sciences and human Sciences.
3. The University of La Rochelle 68 000 students in literature, arts, languages, law, economy, management; social sciences and humanities, science, technology, Health.
4. The University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour: 13 800 students in economics,

management, languages, human sciences, sports, science and technology.

5. Bordeaux INP is an engineering graduate school which offers 22 high-level engineering specialisations. It brings together more than 3 400 students.
6. Bordeaux Sciences Agro is an engineering school specialising in viticulture and oenology. It gathers more than 560 students.
7. Sciences Po Bordeaux is one of the ten French Institutes of Political Studies which more than 2,300 students. It is a public institution of higher education.

The seven CCT partners agreed to work together on a series of shared objectives which would benefit from cooperation between them.

Each topic of cooperation is led by one of the partners. Among these topics, one of the objectives was to better welcome and support exiled students and researchers. This objective is led by Bordeaux Montaigne university.

All seven HE institutions have thus committed to cooperating and coordinating their initiatives so as to enhance their policies and practices in favour of the integration of exiled persons wishing to start or resume their studies in France.

1.2. Organisation of this model of cooperation

1.2.1. The political and the administrative advisors

In order to work together, each institution nominates a political advisor and an administrative advisor. The political advisor provides political support for the projects and deployment of the action within the institution, attends the political meetings for the action, regularly meets the project manager to discuss the needs and expectations of the institution regarding the initiatives. The political advisors also present the projects to the other political representatives of the institution.

The administrative advisor provides administrative support to ensure that projects run smoothly. The administrative advisor provides the information needed by the project manager such as the number of exiled students or researchers registered in the institution, presents the projects and ensures their diffusion within the other services of the institution.

Their role is essential as they are the first point of contact between the project manager and each institution. They know perfectly how their institutions work. Their missions allow them to find ways to ensure that a project will go ahead.

1.2.2. The project manager

The project manager role was created in order to work on the integration of exiled

persons within the HEIs. The recruitment of a dedicated person to work full time on refugee inclusion allows the seven HEIs to compare their practices and learn from one another.

The main missions include:

- Coordinating existing programmes and set up new programmes to enhance HE integration of exiled people in the region of Nouvelle Aquitaine,
- Setting up coherent actions with regional and national actors in charge of this question,
- Proposing services and tools to the member institutions,
- Working with students and student associations to develop mentoring projects.

The main activities include:

- Conceiving and lead the welcoming and integration scheme of the signatory institutions,
- Organising meetings between the signatories and local and national actors, the State, associations, networks,
- Ensuring that all students receive the help they need from professionals, be it academic, financial, medical or social help ,
- Collaborating with associations working in the field of refugee integration,
- Following up the mentoring projects and assuring qualitative evaluation,
- Preparing and coordinating applications for funding,
- Assuring qualitative and quantitative assessments of all initiatives.

1.2.3. The decisional committees

In order to work, this cooperation model is composed of three distinct committees:

- The Conference (*heads of the partners' Institutions' meeting*): it meets on a monthly basis and is the decision-making body. It determines priorities and defines the annual guidelines.
- The steering committee (*political advisors meeting*): it meets twice a year and is in charge of ensuring the advancement of the projects and providing support for decisions.
- The operational committee (*administrative advisors meeting*): ensures the operational implementation of the project.

The project manager organises and participates in all of these meetings.

The project manager also presents an annual qualitative and quantitative evaluation of all the initiatives and projects undertaken during the year. This is the moment when figures and statistics are presented and new initiatives discussed. It means that

the seven members of the CCT are aware of everything that has been achieved (or not) and can then take action if necessary. This organisation allows priorities and decisions concerning specific actions to be decided collectively.

The political advisors are often members of the political teams that run the establishments. At their request, the project manager also became the representative of all seven HEIs at both a local and national level which was yet another advantage.

The HE institution in charge of the action¹ finances all expenses pertaining to the action and recruits a dedicated project manager who works full time on the different projects. The finances include the project manager's salary and the funding of programmes or events related to the overall project. Some projects are financed jointly by the institution in charge and public funding.

The project manager works alongside the political advisors nominated by each HEI to bring political support to the different actions.

¹ The University Bordeaux Montaigne.

2. State of play after three years

Before the Convention was signed – and the project manager was recruited – some of the HE institutions had welcomed exiled students and some already had their own projects or programmes.

The cooperation between the partners on this topic started once the project manager was recruited. In order to launch this cooperation, different work stages were implemented by the project manager.

2.1. Preparatory Work / in depth work

The first step for the project manager was to meet with each of the seven political advisors so as to understand what had been done to facilitate refugee integration in each Institution and to understand the needs and expectations of the institutions.

Whilst several institutions had welcomed exiled students in the past, they did not all have the same requirements or needs. Universities obviously received more applications than engineering schools due to the specificity of the French system.²

During this preparatory phase, the project manager also presented two reports, the first of which gave a global overview of the integration of exiled students and researchers within the French HE system and the second presented a comparative study of seven French “bridge programmes” (*cf. focus point below*).

During this preparatory phase, the project manager met and/or contacted

- 22 local associations involved with exiled persons,
- 15 national institutions working toward the inclusion of exiled persons,
- 8 local centres for asylum seekers,
- institutions committed to ensuring refugee integration in HE institutions.

This preparatory work allowed the project manager to gain expertise about the issue and to become a source of knowledge for the seven signatories’ institutions. By meeting with local associations, local authorities and national institutions the project manager had a full understanding of all the help available, the limits of that help and could begin to envisage partnerships that would help the exiled students and researchers. By meeting with so many different actors the project manager was able to suggest and prioritise a list of initiatives for the months to come.

Since this “preparatory work” phase, the project manager has regularly attended regional or national meetings, events and training courses (such as the training programmes organised by the national network “Migrants in Higher Education) in

² To enrol in engineering schools in France it is usually necessary to complete 2-3 preparatory years (les « classes préparatoires » and then take competitive exams for entry into each engineering school. The level of French required is thus C2.

order to develop knowledge. The project manager also maintains regular contact with national and local associations and institutions.

2.2. Actions of communication, formation

Another aspect of the coordination of the seven HE institutions is the organisation of several training programmes and events such as:

- An initiation into international law and the status of exiled people in France for administrative staff, teachers and students;
- A half-day training session for local associations and institutions that work with exiled people to present the programmes at the local universities and schools;
- Events to raise awareness such as “World Refugee Day” (June 20th) during which there are art exhibitions, debates, and presentations of the programmes available for exiled students.

2.3. Examples of initiatives 2021-2023

2.3.1. Bridge diplomas and joint Bridge diplomas

During this period, the project manager and political advisors worked together to create bridge diplomas and joint bridge diplomas.

A bridge programme is a programme dedicated to exiled people who want to resume or continue their studies in France. It includes French courses and activities in order to prepare them to apply and enrol in French university diplomas and courses. In Bordeaux, a bridge diploma has been created by two universities:

- ⇒ The University of Bordeaux is in charge of running workshops such as “CV creation”, “cover letter creation”, “how to prepare an interview”,
- ⇒ The University Bordeaux Montaigne’s DEFLE is in charge of running French classes, activities, and general administration.

The two Universities collaborate in order to reinforce the partnership and work together to facilitate the access to their courses.

During the academic year 2021/2022 the DUP welcomed 57 exiled students, *among which*:

- ⇒ 21 received monthly financial support from the CROUS (“French student welfare organisation”),
- ⇒ 14 had a student accommodation from the CROUS (“French student welfare organisation”),
- ⇒ 38 students had social support from the University social worker.

During the year 2022/2023, the DUP welcomed:

- ⇒ 56 students and evolved.
- ⇒ 23 received monthly financial support from the CROUS,

- ⇒ 19 had a student accommodation from the CROUS,
- ⇒ 19 students had social support from the University social worker.

Regarding their academic project (year 2022/2023):

- ⇒ 16 students who reached the B2 level in French applied to HE courses and were accepted,
- ⇒ A dedicated position has been created to provide administrative support: each student had individual meeting and was guided through the application procedure.

Expertise and networks developed by the project manager have been used in order to setup several initiatives with local or national associations/ institutions:

Initiative 1: Partnerships with institutions/associations useful for students

The national French health system (CPAM): the students were given a presentation of the French health system and can receive individual support in order to verify that they are fully registered in the system and that they can benefit from all the services available (free access to doctors, refunding of medical expenses etc.);

- A Law Clinic: the students listed their needs in response to a questionnaire developed by the project manager and then a group presentation was organised on the topics relevant to their situations. Students also had the possibility of receiving individual legal support;
- A local association (reseau AIME): the association organised student mentoring which allowed students enrolled in the bridge diploma to be matched with French students from both Bordeaux universities. This mentoring was organised around cultural activities and student life.

Initiative 2: Interventions by associations specialised in refugee integration

The national association of exiled students (UEE): the UEE comes each year in order to present its role and how to access Higher Education when you're exiled. The association was chosen for its very practical help. A Syrian refugee. It allowed the students to meet a "peer" and to identify an association dedicated to exiled students.

- An association dedicated to professional integration of Refugees (Action Emploi Réfugiés): this association is national but has an office in Bordeaux. It presented to the students the different type of contracts when you work in France and offers free support to students who look for a job.
- An access to services dedicated to mental health in one of the local hospitals which has a service dedicated to "transcultural consultations" and a local association which is specialised in providing psychological support to migrants.

Initiative 3: Visits and presentation of local associations

- University associations which can be useful for students: second hands shops, associations which organise food banks on the campus, shared gardens,
- Local associations involved with migrants: Croix Rouge, Secours Populaire.

2.3.2. Other initiatives

Other results were the creation of a programme dedicated to refugees at Sciences Po. Bordeaux³ the launch of a programme for Scientists in Exile in one of the universities as well as the launch of a new programme with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

The project manager was responsible for contacting the network of local associations and civil actors to present the new programmes and explain the recruitment procedures.

As all the HE institutions are signatories of the CCT, those responsible for the different projects regularly spoke of their needs, shared their experiences and coordinated their programmes.

Examples of dynamics between the programmes:

- The University of Bordeaux wanted to set up a bridge programme but couldn't (they don't have a department of French as a Foreign language). Instead, they

³ School of politics.

became partners of the bridge programme created by Bordeaux Montaigne University by proposing a workshop on professional integration (how to do CVs, cover letters, how to prepare for an interview).

- The University of Bordeaux had been welcoming scientists in exile for several years via the PAUSE programme. After presenting the programme to Bordeaux Montaigne University, the latter was able to welcome two exiled scientists.
- To set up its bridge programme, the University of La Rochelle was able to benefit from the experience of Bordeaux Montaigne University.
- The School of Politics had its own programme dedicated to refugees. With the help of the project manager, it was decided that a new programme would be introduced which would enable students to attain the language level A2 necessary for integration into the bridge diploma.
- Bordeaux Montaigne University and the University of Bordeaux launched the programme UNIV'R together and set up the same partnerships (for instance, with banks, a local association that provides housing for students).

These examples show how HEIs can be complementary and that sharing experiences and practices is time-saving and stimulating.

3. Drivers and barriers for a coordinated response

3.1. Drivers

One of the most important reasons for the success of this regional initiative is the recruitment of a dedicated person: the project manager. The project manager is a facilitator who organises exchanges and helps university staff to develop their actions.

The political and administrative advisors are nominated to work on this initiative. However, these are additional missions, on the top of their main activities. The presence of a specific person (the project manager) capable of answering all the questions related to exiled students and researchers is therefore a time saver and a valuable source of knowledge.

For universities it is timesaving since the project manager represents the institutions at a local and national level and takes on the task of organising events and training sessions. For the local authorities it means that there is a coherent, visible policy in place represented by one person.

Essential to the success of this initiative is the drive of each HEI to set up a dedicated policy that enables projects and programmes to be launched and the identification of the right advisors to embody this policy within their institution. (*cf. political and administrative advisors page 10*).

Despite the obvious advantages of having an identified contact person to run and oversee the different projects and actions, difficulties remain.

3.2. Barriers

The size of the region means there is more proximity with the institutions based in Bordeaux where the project manager is based.

Another difficulty is that each institution has its own procedures and so coordination and harmonisation can be a complicated and lengthy operation especially as the governing body of each institution has to validate all decisions.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty, at the beginning at least, is to fully engage the advisors and staff in each institution. Unlike the project manager, they all have other missions and responsibilities and so their time is limited.

Additionally, the number of exiled students can be considered as “small” in comparison to other students and so they are not considered a priority.

Another difficulty encountered can be the financial aspect: most programmes are financed by external funding and for some institutions, the implementation of programmes is dependent on funding.

Conclusion

This coordinated initiative began in January 2021. Since this date, several objectives have been reached and the position of “project manager” is now fully recognised as both useful and time-saving. However, some challenges remain: several projects exist and have been launched but today, the main objective is to reinforce the initiatives improving their organisation and implementation in each institution.

If coordination is to be successful, each University or School needs to formulate a clear and dedicated policy toward the integration of exiled students and researchers. This policy then has to be presented and explained to the different departments and services of each institution so as to promote better understanding.

Once an internal policy is defined, each Institution has to identify their needs and priorities in order to set up appropriate actions.

Among the actions which enhance the integration of exiled students, there are administrative measures (free scholarships, easier application forms), creation of bridge diplomas programmes (cf. page 10), creation of mentoring programmes, organisation of regular training events for university staff and the creation of a “welcome desk” dedicated to exiled students (information, follow-up).

The coordination between HEIs is essential, whether at a regional or national level, as it allows HEIs to exchange information. This process of exchange can lead to the creation of shared tools and help work towards harmonised procedures.

Acknowledgement

This short report was the result of the Work Package 3 of the EU-funded project AGILE: “Higher education resilience in refugee crises: forging social inclusion through capacity building, civic engagement and skills recognition” ([https:// agileproject-erasmus.eu](https://agileproject-erasmus.eu), Project Number 2022-1-FR01-KA220-HED-000087334).

The author of this study would like to warmly thank all AGILE partner organisations and all those who took part in the various activities for their invaluable input which enabled the project to have a general overview of the mechanisms in place and a clear understanding of the levers and barriers to implementing an inclusive higher education system for exiled students. The AGILE partners also reviewed the paper.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission and the Erasmus+ programme.

This deliverable only reflects the views of the author and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Author

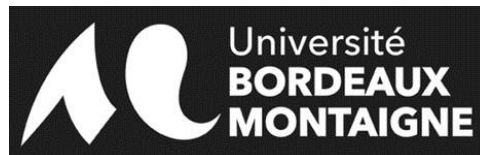


Camille Nau

Camille Nau has worked as project manager on the integration of exiled students in Higher Education Institutions within the French region of Nouvelle Aquitaine, since the position was created in January 2021. She is based at the University of Bordeaux Montaigne.

She has completed a French Master's Degree and a Master of Law (LLM) in Comparative and European Private International Law, from the University of Toulouse Capitole (Toulouse, France) and the University of Dundee (Scotland, United Kingdom).

Her previous work experiences include a position as project manager for the Anne Fontaine Foundation and a position as legal advisor for the French Adoption Agency, a public body which supervises intercountry adoption. She also volunteered as a legal counsel for "La Cimade", a French association which provides legal advice to migrants.





Do not miss any AGILE news, follow us on our social media!



<https://www.facebook.com/people/AGILE-project/100089331830169/>



[agile_project_](https://www.instagram.com/agile_project/)



<https://www.linkedin.com/company/agile-erasmus-project/>



<https://agileproject-erasmus.eu>



agileproject@protonmail.com