

Norway – NOKUT

Institution	NOKUT
Interviewed Person	Ahmed (36), a refugee from Kurdistan, Iraq

I – Preparation

Ahmed (36) is from Kurdistan, Iraq. He came to Norway in 2010 as an asylum seeker when he was 30 years old.

II – Awareness

Ahmed had studied a B.A. degree in Sociology in Iraq, and graduated in 2004. After graduating he worked two years as a sociology teacher, and then for several years as a social worker for Handicap International in Iraq. He wanted to continue working within his field of study in Norway, and understood from the start that in order to be able to use his foreign education in Norway he would have to apply for general recognition of his education. Shortly upon arriving in Norway he applied for general recognition of his education to NOKUT (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education).

III – Starting up

When Ahmed first applied to NOKUT for recognition of his foreign higher education in 2010 he received a negative decision. Since Ahmed taken his education in Iraq, NOKUT was not able to recognize his education via the ordinary recognition procedure. Since 2005 there existed a special recognition procedure where Norwegian higher education institutions were responsible for conducting a recognition procedure regarding the academic content of an educational program.

Ahmed contacted the University of Oslo regarding recognition of his education, but the process ended in vain. He continued to contact NOKUT every fourth month in the hope that NOKUT eventually would be able to recognize his education.

Applicants who have their qualifications from a country where the political situation as of today makes it impossible to verify the education documents are not able to have their education recognized through the ordinary recognition procedure. In 2012 the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research gave NOKUT the task to develop an improved procedure for the recognition of higher education qualifications for persons who apply for general recognition, but whose applications are rejected because they have no possibility of documenting their qualifications, or of verifying them in a satisfactory manner.

This was done to ensure that persons would be better able to be acknowledged on the Norwegian labour market for their qualifications.

In 2013 Ahmed was contacted by NOKUT and asked if he wanted to participate in the new recognition procedure which he replied positively to.

IV – Documentation and support

Since he arrived in Norway in 2010 he had participated in the compulsory language course in Norwegian intended for asylum seekers, and he had completed the B1 level in Norwegian.

As a part of the recognition procedure, he was asked to fill out a questionnaire to reconstruct his education. After submitting the questionnaire, he was asked to come to NOKUT for a preliminary interview with his caseworker.

In this interview he was asked questions about his education, and given information about the UVD-process.

V – Assessment

Ten years after he graduated, he was going to be tested in his knowledge. At first, he received a home assignment, and then he had an interview with two professors within his field of studies.

Since it was ten years ago he had been studying he started to look for books on sociology at the library, and he asked family and friends to send him books from back home.

At the interview, he felt that he could easily answer the questions. The two professionals made him feel comfortable and they had a good conversation touching upon sociological theories, and social trends in the Norwegian society. He felt that the interview went well, and that the professionals were pleased with his answers.

VI – Impact

The professionals wrote a positive report on Ahmed' competences in sociology. Based on this NOKUT sent Ahmed a positive decision where he was granted general recognition of his Bachelor degree in sociology from Iraq.

VII – Impact on longer term

“Before I received the recognition I was constantly wondering if I was as valuable in Norway as I was in Iraq. The thought of going back to my homeland was always present. I applied for

all kinds of jobs, from garbage collector to social worker. I wrote about 400 work applications without receiving a proper answer. When I thought about studying, I thought that I would have to start from scratch, and I did not want to say aloud that I had an education.

Now I feel that I am as valuable as before, and that Norway appreciates my background and effort. Now I do not think about going back home, I am happy about my work, and the future of my daughter is omnipresent. After receiving my recognition I chose only to apply for relevant jobs, I only wrote about 10 work applications, and was called in for four job interviews. I actually had to turn down two job offers! Now when I am thinking about studying I am only thinking about doing a Master's degree. Moreover, most importantly of all, I can shout out that I do have an education!

The Norwegian Directorate for Immigration gave me as a refugee a future in Norway, and the recognition from NOKUT gave me my past back in order to have a better future. ”