

Identification of good practices

This is the template for collecting existing good practices in which any kind of validation of people’s prior learning experiences was part of the integration process. It could be processes concerning non-national candidates or national ones. The important purpose of this template is to identify successful stories and to explain how the experience that you present can be adapted or can be useful when dealing particularly with the validation of migrant or refugee candidates. Please do not surpass a max of 3 pages in total.

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Questions to be replied:

1. The VNIL/VPL practice in your country/institution

- a) Briefly, how does it work? How long has it been operational?
- b) Which are the **strengths and the areas for improvement** of this practice?

a) Student Refugees began as a student-driven project in 2017. The purpose of the project is to help refugees in Denmark gain access to the Higher Education (HE) system in Denmark. Refugees often need guidance as the application process is quite complex. Moreover, they are often faced with different other demands as they settle in Denmark. We believe that these conditions together result in very few refugees attending HE in Denmark, and we try to mediate them through personal guidance. The project’s foundation is also grounded in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. More specifically focused on SDG nr. 4, quality education.

The volunteers offer guidance to the refugees at ‘application cafes’ in Copenhagen for two hours twice a month. In addition, the volunteers communicate with and guide the refugees via email and Skype. If the refugees live far from Copenhagen or are not able to attend the cafe, the volunteers arrange meetings with the refugees outside of the application cafes as well. Recently, the project also began having “pop-up application cafes”, where we have travel to different parts of Denmark and have our application cafes outside of Copenhagen. Next step in the project is to expand so it covers greater parts of Denmark.

In 2018 the project added a new branch called Student Refugees Buddies. The purpose of Student Refugees Buddies is to help refugees who have been accepted into a HE programme. Each fall a refugee student is paired with a volunteer who is already attending a HE programme in Denmark. The project consists of a group of volunteers who are primarily students attending HE in Denmark.

Another part of the project has been to host events to help the applicants apply for student jobs. We have found that there is a correlation between jobs after graduation

and student jobs during the education for Danish students. In Denmark the job market highly depends on having a professional network. Therefore, a student job can enhance the network for the target group and hopefully foster a closer connection and integration into the Danish job market. By hosting events with a focus on how to apply for a student job, we try to help people with a refugee background come closer to a student job.

- b) Strengths: Student Refugees consists of a group of dedicated diverse volunteers who work hard to assist the refugees as much as possible. Each volunteer has been carefully chosen based on their applications and their educational background. It is important for us to have volunteers from as many Danish universities and education programmes as possible, in order to be more able to cater to each refugees needs. In this way we have made sure that the volunteers have experience with different parts of the educational system and are able to assist each other when guiding the refugees. The commitment of volunteers to assist refugees to apply for higher education is key, because the application process can take months or even years and involves many challenges that are unique for each refugee - however not easily accommodated in the usual student guidance system in Denmark.

One area for improvement is that we would like to have more focus on helping women as well as different ethnicities. A large part of the refugees that come for guidance are male and from the same couple of countries. We wish to help a wider range of refugees, therefore we have been trying to reach out to these groups through social media and other outreach projects.

Further area of improvement is the lack of knowledge about whether the refugees gets in to a HE programme or not. We regularly send follow-up emails to the refugees that have been in touch with us regarding the application process. We do this to get an idea about whether the refugees complete the application process and/or get accepted into a HE programme. Some of the refugees reply the emails and inform us about their situation, but many do not. This means that we do not have a full overview over how many refugees have continued/completed the application process successfully.

2. The candidate

a) Key details of the **candidate** of this case study (if applicable): age, gender, country of origin...

b) What **qualifications and/or experience** did the candidate bring to the VNIL/VPL process?

- a) The candidates are people with refugee backgrounds who wish to apply for a HE programme in Denmark. Some of them have completed a whole or parts of a HE programme, while others have not yet began their studies at a HE programme. We have guided people who wished to apply for degrees within many different subject areas, however we have noticed a tendency that many of them are interested in programmes within the health and natural sciences fields. The majority of the candidates are of Syrian origin. Furthermore, there is a majority of men within the candidates, but the number of female applicants is expanding. In 2018 we had 27 female and 55 male applicants and in 2019 we had 49 female and 76 male applicants.

b) Cultural knowledge: In Denmark it is often the case, that Danes and refugees rarely interact in their everyday life, unless they seek for it themselves. Therefore, many

Danes only get their knowledge about refugees from the media. When the refugees come to Student Refugees, the volunteers get a chance to meet refugees in person and learn about their situation from the refugees' perspectives. This is an important learning process for the volunteers as they get a better understanding about the refugees as individuals and their struggles as well.

3. What was the *outcome* of the process? (e.g. access to or credits within a course, part or whole diploma BA/MA, create a job opportunity and/or a social opportunity...)

Helping refugees getting an education: Many of the refugees that comes to Denmark have many qualifications that they are unable to utilise here because they are not guided correctly and the Danish higher education system is very bureaucratic and difficult to navigate. Equal access to education is a vital part of working towards a society with social, and economic equality. By helping refugees getting a higher education, this is also one of the outcomes of the process.

Another important part of the project is creating cultural bridges. By helping the people with a refugee background getting an education in Denmark, the project increases the chance that the refugees become active citizens in Denmark. When the volunteers and people with refugee backgrounds work on the applications together, socializing is also a part of the process. Once the refugees enter higher education, they gain access to a Danish social network.

4. Impact and sustainability

- a) What was the impact of the process for the candidate? (i.e. further study, a job, etc)
- b) How are the processes and impact sustained and how are they integrated into existing structures and processes?

- a) Some of the candidates get accepted into HE programmes, while others get an overview over their possibilities and what their next steps are in the application process.
- b) We are always working on improving the project through keeping an eye on changes in laws regarding education, refugees, etc. and we make sure to adapt to given changes. Furthermore, we are always welcoming new initiatives on how to improve and expand the project. We are cooperating with other organisations that work with refugees and/or education and we are also ensuring that we always receive enough funding to keep the project going.

By getting accepted into the Danish education system you achieve a higher degree of integration, both labor market integration but just as important social and cultural integration.

5. Relevance and Transferability to VINCE:

- a) Are there any aspects of your practice that are adapted to the needs of refugees or people with a migrant background - what makes these aspects special?
- b) Are there any aspects of your practice that could be adapted to these groups of learners? What adaptations would be needed?

1. The project primarily works to support people with a refugee background in Denmark. When new volunteers are being trained, they are being taught about the general refugee situation and about the challenges refugees face when they meet the Danish education system. Moreover, the volunteers are taught to keep an open mind towards possible cultural differences and understandings when working with the refugees. This ensures that the volunteers approach the refugees with a cultural sensitivity that minimises misunderstandings. In this way the refugees are provided with a guidance that is efficient and sensitive.

2. All aspects of our practice are aimed at refugees so the only adaptations that would be



WP2 - Op2.2b: external case studies

needed for that target groups are country-specific.

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