

Norway – NOKUT

Institution	NOKUT
Interviewed Person	Saeed (31), a refugee from Sudan

I – Preparation

Saeed (31) came to Norway as an asylum seeker in 2014. He received his residence permit after waiting for 8 months, and after another 7-month long wait he was settled in Oslo.

II – Awareness

Saeed graduated from his university in Sudan in 2009 with a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Petroleum Engineering. He started studying Petroleum Engineering because his family advised him to do so. With such a degree, he would have good job opportunities, and the field was a prestigious field to work in.

With a degree in Petroleum Engineering he would have a good chance to get a job in the oil industry in Norway. But at the time of his arrival in Norway the oil industry was suffering from a depression, and there were layoffs in the industry.

Saeed had done well in his studies back in Sudan, but his heart was not in it. He therefore decided to do something different. He understood that he either had to start studying again, in a different field, or get into the job-market and see what he could do.

While he was waiting for his decision on residency, he was informed about requirements for studying in Norway. Higher education institutions in Norway has specific admission requirements regarding language. It is required to have a B1/B2- level in both Norwegian, and English.

While in transit, Saeed participated in the intro-program for Norwegian language that consists of 250 hours of language training. He understood that he would need to know Norwegian in order to get a job. He also found out that since he had an education from a foreign country he would have to apply to NOKUT for general recognition of his Bachelor degree.

III – Starting up

Saeed applied to NOKUT for recognition of his foreign higher education not long after he arrived in Norway. He looked at the NOKUT web page and found all the information he needed regarding documentation requirements. Three months after applying for recognition he received the decision stating that his education from Sudan was equivalent to 240 Norwegian credit points.

After finishing the intro-program in Norwegian language, and after waiting for months for his residency permit, he was getting tired of not doing anything, and having to wait all the time. He decided that if he wanted to move forward in his new country, he would have to work hard to get where he wanted.

The first step was to learn Norwegian. In just one year, he managed to go from an A1 level to a B1 level in Norwegian. All he did during this time was to attend Norwegian classes, study as much as possible on his own, and get into the work-life.

He understood that he would have to start at the bottom in the order to climb his way up in the work-marked. Therefore, in addition to his Norwegian lessons he had two part-time jobs. He wanted to start to build a network, and his philosophy was that if you can get one job, it would be easier to get the next job. He therefore did not care much about exactly what kind of job he could get; the most important was actually getting a job, and to be able to have a language training at the same time.

IV – Documentation and support

One of the jobs Saeed held was as a store assistant for a Norwegian outdoor clothing brand named Stormberg. This brand has a large focus on corporate social responsibility. One of the company's policies is to employ one refugee at every Stormberg store. This is to give refugees a possibility to get access to the Norwegian labour-marked, to give them work experience and the possibility to do language training.

For ten months, Saeed worked at the Stormberg store, and he learned that he had to learn many new words in Norwegian, work-terminology. In addition, he got training in new ways of talking to people, other ways of talking than what he learned at the Norwegian classes.

What was completely new for him was how to write work applications in Norway. In Sudan, he was used to only submitting his curriculum vitae when applying for a job, and he also needed to have a recommendation by someone.

In Norwegian classes, they were taught how to write work-applications and the students were guided in what was important in an employment process.

At the Norwegian classes, Saeed heard about a case officer-training course. He called his supervisor at the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration and asked for more information about this training course. The requirement was a B1 level in Norwegian, and he would have to attend the training five days a week. Saeed had at the same time applied for admission to a Master's degree at a Norwegian HEI, and had been given a study offer. He

decided that the case officer-training course would give him a job much sooner than the Master's degree, so he decided to do the training course.

The duration of the training course was three months of theory, and then the participants were given a two months long job-practice at a Norwegian company. Saeed wanted to do his practice at NOKUT, and went through a job interview. He worked for all together four months as a trainee, and proved to be an asset due to his skills in Arabic. After the four-month long trainee period, he was offered a six-month long temporary position as a case officer in the Department of Foreign Education at NOKUT.

VI – Impact

In Saeed's opinion it is important to learn the language of your new country if you want to integrate into the society, and get a job. When it comes to getting a job it is not just your language proficiency that will prove important, it is also important to think strategically about where you would like to work. You cannot expect to obtain the same job in your new country as the one you had in your old country. You will have to start at the bottom, and work yourself up the ladder. It is much more important to actually get a job in the beginning, than to pass on a job because it does not suit you.

The job-culture is different in different countries, and the best way to learn about it is to start working somewhere. The experience one gets from the work will be good for both language training, networking and integration.

In Saeed's opinion it is very easy to obtain information about how to get your education recognized in Norway, and to find information about requirements for admission to studies. All information is also easily accessible online.

Information regarding how to get a job, and if there exist any employment schemes, is much harder to find. If you are motivated and willing to make an effort, it will be much easier. Getting that first job may prove difficult, but when you get it you will get a network, and then the next job will be much easier.