



## **Brain waste: 1 in 8 immigrants in Europe say the inability to have their qualifications recognized is their greatest challenge**

Released on International Migrants Day, a new paper produced by UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report, the Education Above All Foundation and UNHCR, entitled "*What a waste: Ensure the recognition of migrants and refugees qualification and prior learning*", shows that over a third of highly educated immigrants are overqualified for their jobs, compared to a quarter of non-migrants.

Systems for recognizing their qualifications and prior learning are inadequate despite the need: one in eight immigrants in Europe said that not having qualifications recognized is the biggest challenge they face, placed well above inadequate language skills, discrimination, or visa restrictions.

*"Stories of immigrant doctors or teachers who are taxi drivers bring to light how much potential is being wasted the world over. Some migrants and refugees find the procedures for getting their qualifications recognized so complex that they cannot find work at all."* said Ita Sheehy, Senior Education Advisor at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *"Imagine how much better society could be if these people were in jobs that matched their skills"*.

The paper estimates that only 30% of those with higher education degrees in OECD countries gained outside of Europe and North America work in high-skilled occupations. Less than 15% said their level of education matched their jobs.

Particular note is made of the United States, where nearly one in four immigrants with post-secondary degrees end up in low-skilled jobs or unemployed. This results in an annual cost of US\$39 billion in foregone wages and US\$10.2 billion in lost taxes.

There are multiple conventions and laws created to address the issue, but most face challenges. ASEAN has multiple recognition agreements covering seven occupations, but only seven engineers had gone through the system by 2017. The Lisbon Recognition Convention called on signatories to take steps to recognize refugee qualifications that cannot be fully documented, but over two-thirds of signatories had taken few or no such measures by 2016 prompting a new Recommendation in November 2017.

National systems are also often fragmented, or not effectively advertised, reducing their value: Canada's has no fewer than 400 regulatory bodies associated with its systems. Poland set up a process to assess migrants' qualifications, but had no cases in the first year.

*"Refugees are even less likely to have proof of qualifications in their possession," said Manos Antoninis, Director of the Global Education Monitoring Report. "When fleeing a conflict, packing a diploma is likely not to be top of your mind. Systems need to be simpler and reduce the administrative hoops that refugees are being asked to jump through."*

Some countries are taking positive steps. Germany has a website on qualifications' recognition, accessible in 9 languages, which receives 1 million visitors a year. In Flanders, Belgium, fees for recognition procedures are waived for displaced people, and an adapted procedure is offered when they have no evidence of qualifications. Italy has set up an informal network of experts to help evaluate refugees' qualifications. Several countries including Norway have worked with the Council of Europe to develop a European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, which is currently being rolled out in Greece, Italy, Norway and the United Kingdom and has potential for broader global application.

Learning that comes without a piece of paper is even harder to assess. Although a small number of countries have positive practices specifically assessing prior learning of migrants and refugees, including in Norway, which electronically maps the skills of adults in asylum reception centres, most do not. Only one third of European countries had projects to validate prior learning that were targeted at immigrants. France, for example, does not target immigrants in its system to recognize prior learning launched in 2002.

Children and students also face challenges being placed in appropriate school levels without official paperwork. Positive initiatives are seen in Costa Rica, Iraq, Lebanon, South Africa, Sweden and Turkey, including sitting placement or general knowledge tests, doing interviews, or bridging programmes. Sweden's Education Act lets unaccompanied minors be assessed and placed at the appropriate level within two months of arrival.

Mary Joy Pigozzi, Dr Mary Joy Pigozzi, Executive Director of Education Above All's programme, Educate A Child, said: *"A new Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications drafted by UNESCO is tabled for adoption next year. But while a lot of emphasis is being placed on perfecting our instruments for higher education, we should not forget the recognition challenges at the primary and secondary education level as expressed in our recently published policy paper entitled "What a waste: Ensure the recognition of migrants and refugees qualification and prior learning".*

### **Recognition mechanisms need to:**

1. include provisions targeted at migrants and refugees

2. be simpler, more flexible and with reduced costs
3. create clear, transparent and coherent frameworks to recognize prior learning
4. raise awareness of existing recognition procedures
5. be combined with services to help with the transition to work
6. assess the knowledge and skills of children and place them in appropriate grades within, at most, weeks of their arrival.
7. use technology where relevant