

# Countries in Crisis: Credential Evaluation for Interrupted or Undocumented Studies

Wednesday, May 27, 2015:  
10:15 AM - 12:15 PM

NEW HORIZONS  
IN INTERNATIONAL  
EDUCATION



NAFSA  
2015

Annual  
Conference  
& Expo

MAY 24-29, 2015  
BOSTON, MA USA

NAFSA  
Association of  
International Educators



# Presenters

- Marybeth Gruenewald, Director of Global Initiatives and Senior Evaluator, ECE, Inc., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA
- Jeanie Bell, Senior Assistant Director, International Admissions, University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado, USA
- Stig Arne Skjerven, Director of Foreign Education, Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), Norwegian ENIC-NARIC, Norway



# Session Organization

- Marybeth Gruenewald
  - Define the populations we will address today
  - Represent the point of view of a credential evaluation organization
- Jeanie Bell
  - Represent the point of view of a US university
- Stig Arne Skjerven
  - Discuss the Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (UVD-procedure), from NOKUT (the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education)



# Session Outcomes

- Participants will be able to identify situations in which applicants requesting a service (e.g., admission to a university; gaining employment) are legitimately unable to provide complete academic credentials.
- Participants will be able to analyze the information and establish an assessment of the incomplete or missing academic credentials.
- Participants will be able to develop a process using such an assessment to meet the needs of the individual requesting a service, e.g., enabling an admission decision to an institution or gaining employment.



## Marybeth Gruenewald, Director of Global Initiatives and Senior Evaluator, ECE, Inc., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA



- A private, non-profit credential evaluation organization
- Founded in 1980; charter member of NACES
- Mission: To serve persons who have completed part or all of their education outside of the United States so that their educational qualifications are properly recognized when they seek employment, professional licensure, further education, or other benefits for which educational achievement is a prerequisite.
- Prepares advisory credential evaluation reports
- Offers training and resources for professional credential evaluators worldwide



# Whom are we speaking about?

- **Refugee:** someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence.
- Refugees differ from other immigrants in that they do not have the choice to remain in their home country.
- Many refugees have high levels of education and are multi-lingual. All refugees have valuable skills that they bring to the workplace. Refugees are doctors, nurses, small business owners, farmers, construction workers, graphic designers, tailors, cooks, and more.



- **Stateless People:** not having a nationality. Occurs because of discrimination against certain groups; redrawing of borders; and gaps in nationality laws.
- Forfeit basic rights – access to education and job market
- Stateless communities are pushed further into the margins of society
- Statelessness can cause displacement



# Problems encountered:

- Interrupted periods of education because of institution closings, environmental disasters, war
- Unable to provide official proof of educational achievements such as diplomas, degree certificates, transcripts, academic records
- Lack of financial support
- Lack of English language proficiency



- May have unofficial documentation (student or employment identification cards, instructor recommendation letters, certificate of employment qualifications, etc.) which cannot be verified through conventional means
- May have attended unrecognized refugee camp schools for which educational recognition is unlikely
- Communication is difficult



# Whom we are **not** speaking about...

## ■ **Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**

- An American immigration policy which allows certain undocumented immigrants who entered the U.S. before their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and before June of 2007 to receive 2-year work permit and exemption from deportation.
- Does not confer legal immigration status.
- No social security number
- Entered without authorization or overstayed visa
- These potential students should not be considered international students.



# The Human Story



- **Country of Origin:** Rwanda
- **Country of Settlement:** USA
- Fortunee: Tutsi mother & Hutu father
- Lost 5 siblings & her father because of genocide and violence in refugee camps
- Fluent in French, Swahili and Kinyarwanda; no English proficiency
- Eventually became a translator and a farmer

<http://www.refugees.org/refugee-voices/>



# The Human Story



- **Country of Origin:** Iran
- **Country of Settlement:** USA
- Nairi faced discrimination as a religious minority
- Speaks Armenian & Farsi; little English language instruction
- Sponsored by relative who lived in the USA
- Working towards a bachelor degree



# The Human Story



- **Country of Origin:** Sudan
- **Country of Settlement:** USA
- At 9 years old, Zacharia began a period of four years in dire conditions wandering in and out of war zones
- Some Lost Boys of Sudan escaped and settled in Kenya's Kakuma refugee camp
- Some resettled in the USA
- No documents; no access to education
- <http://www.rescue.org/news/irc-helps-lost-boys-sudan-rebuild-their-lives-united-states-3867>



# The view from a professional credential evaluator in the United States

- **Essential information for review:**
  - Application form
  - Educational history
  - Official documentation
  - Other documentation



# The view from a professional credential evaluator in the United States

- **Knowledge of country's educational system**
  - Institution official degree-granting?
  - What academic credentials should look like
  - Admission requirements
  - Graduation requirements



# The view from a professional credential evaluator in the United States

- **Letter explaining omissions**
  - Why no documents
  - Why cannot obtain documents
  - Any other necessary information to obtain the “big” picture



# The view from a professional credential evaluator in the United States

## ■ **Research the evaluatee's personal situation**

- What has occurred in the home country? War, famine, environmental catastrophe, refugee camp

## • **Essential resources:**

- News (web, print)
- Colleagues
- Social Media
- EducationUSA
- AMIDEAST
- The UN Refugee Agency
- U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants
- Institute of International Education, NAFSA, AACRAO, EAIE, others



# Outcomes of Analysis

- Exercise due diligence
- Keep in mind The Human Story
- Group discussions with Senior Evaluators
- Results may or may not be in evaluatee's favor
- May not correlate well with organization's policy on recognized institutions or programs of study
- Attempt flexibility without damaging credibility
- Communication lines may not be open



# Case Study 1

**Country:** Guinea

**Institution:** International Rescue Committee, Refugee School System

**Credential:** Diploma, awarded upon completion of an integrated course of study based on the secondary school curricula of Liberia & Sierra Leone

**Result Statement:** Completion of a program of study at an institution that is not comparable to a regionally-accredited institution in the United States



# Case Study 1



- This program did not have official academic recognition at the time of enrollment.
- Studies were completed in a refugee camp.
- Official government-recognized secondary credentials were not available.



# Case Study 2

**Country:** Syria

**Institution:** Danish Refugee Council and Mamoun International Center

**Credential:** Certificates **a** and **b**

**Result Statement:** **(a)** Completion of a three-month vocational training program in hairdressing **(b)** Documents cannot be verified



# Case Study 2

## Certificate a

 منظمة الهلال الأحمر العربي السوري  
SYRIAN ARAB RED CRESCENT

 DANISH  
REFUGEE  
COUNCIL

 UNHCR  
The UN Refugee Agency

**Participation Certificate**

This is to certify that Mr. /Ms. ... [REDACTED]

Has participated a three months course in hairdressing  
in the community center of Jaramana

 Country Representation

DRC Project Manager [Signature]

Date 7/7/2010



# Case Study 2

## Certificate b





# Case Study 3

**Country:** Syria

**Credential:** Etilaf-Issued Certificate

**Etilaf** = National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces

**Note:** Students unable to take the Syrian government-authorized General Secondary Education Examinations.



## **Solution:**

In 2013, Etilaf's Office of the National Higher Commission for Learning and Higher Education began offering the Syrian high school graduation exams in liberated parts of Syria, refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon, and urban refugees in Turkey.



# Case Study 3

- 14,000 students took the Etilaf-authorized examinations in June 2014
- Certificates accepted in Turkey
- Removal of content related to “National Socialist Education”
- U.S. institutions will need to decide whether or not to accept certificates



# Case Study 3

## Etilaf-issued certificate in Arabic Scientific Track

- Stamp & signature of National Commission for Higher Education is at the bottom left
- Location & date where exam was issued is on the right side

وثيقة  
شهادة الدراسة الثانوية العامة  
الفرع العلمي

الجمهورية العربية السورية  
الهيئة الوطنية للتربية والتعليم العالي  
دائرة الامتحانات في تركيا

رقم الاكتناب : 99121103  
دورة 2013 م

استحققت الطالبة: ميساء الدرويش  
ابنة احمد والنتها سوده  
المولودة في دير الزور عام 1996 م

شهادة الدراسة الثانوية العامة الفرع العلمي وفق الدرجات التالية

المواد	العلوم الطبيعية	اللغة العربية	اللغة الانكليزية	الرياضيات	الفيزياء	الكيمياء	التربية الدينية	المجموع العام
النهاية العظمى	30	40	30	60	40	20	20	240
النهاية الصغرى	12	16	12	24	16	8	8	96
رقماً	22	31	18	38	2	10	10	131
الدرجة المستحقة كتابة	اثنان و عشرون درجة	احدى و ثلاثون درجة	ثمان عشرة درجة	ثمان و ثلاثون درجة	اثنان درجة	عشرة درجات	عشرة درجات	مائة و احدى و ثلاثون درجة

في 1434 / 12 / 24 هـ  
2013 / 10 / 29 م

كل شطب أو حك أو تحرير في الوثيقة يلغونها

رئيس اللجنة العليا لامتحانات

الهيئة الوطنية للتربية والتعليم العالي  
دائرة الامتحانات في تركيا



# Case Study 3

Etilaf-issued certificate

Scientific Track

English translation

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC  
The National Commission for Higher Education  
DIRECTORY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN PROVINCE: TURKEY

HIGH SCHOOL CERTIFICATE  
IN THE FIELD OF CIENCE  
THE DICTATED NUMBER: 99090851

STUDYING YEAR : 2013

THE STUDENT: [REDACTED]

At the end of the high school- in the field of cience exams he has Gradulated by the following Marks:

Subjects	Natural Sciences	Arabic Language	English Language	Mathematics	Physics	Chemistry	Religious Education	General Total
Highest end	30	40	30	60	40	20	20	240
Lowest end	12	16	12	24	16	8	8	96
Grade by Number	30	34	28	58	37	18	17	222
Deserved by Letter	Thirty	Thirty Four	Twenty Eight	Fifty eight aaa	Thirty Seven	Eighteen	Seventeen	Two Hundred Twenty Two

Sertificate Date: 29/10/2013

Head Of Exam Department

Head of Educational Department

Signature

Chashet/Signature

REYHANI NOTERLİĞİ  
Sworn Translator  
İngilizce-Arapça-Türkçe-Osmanlı



# Case Study 4

## **United Nations Relief and Works Agency: UNWRA**

Created in 1950 with technical assistance from UNESCO

Provides formal & non-formal education

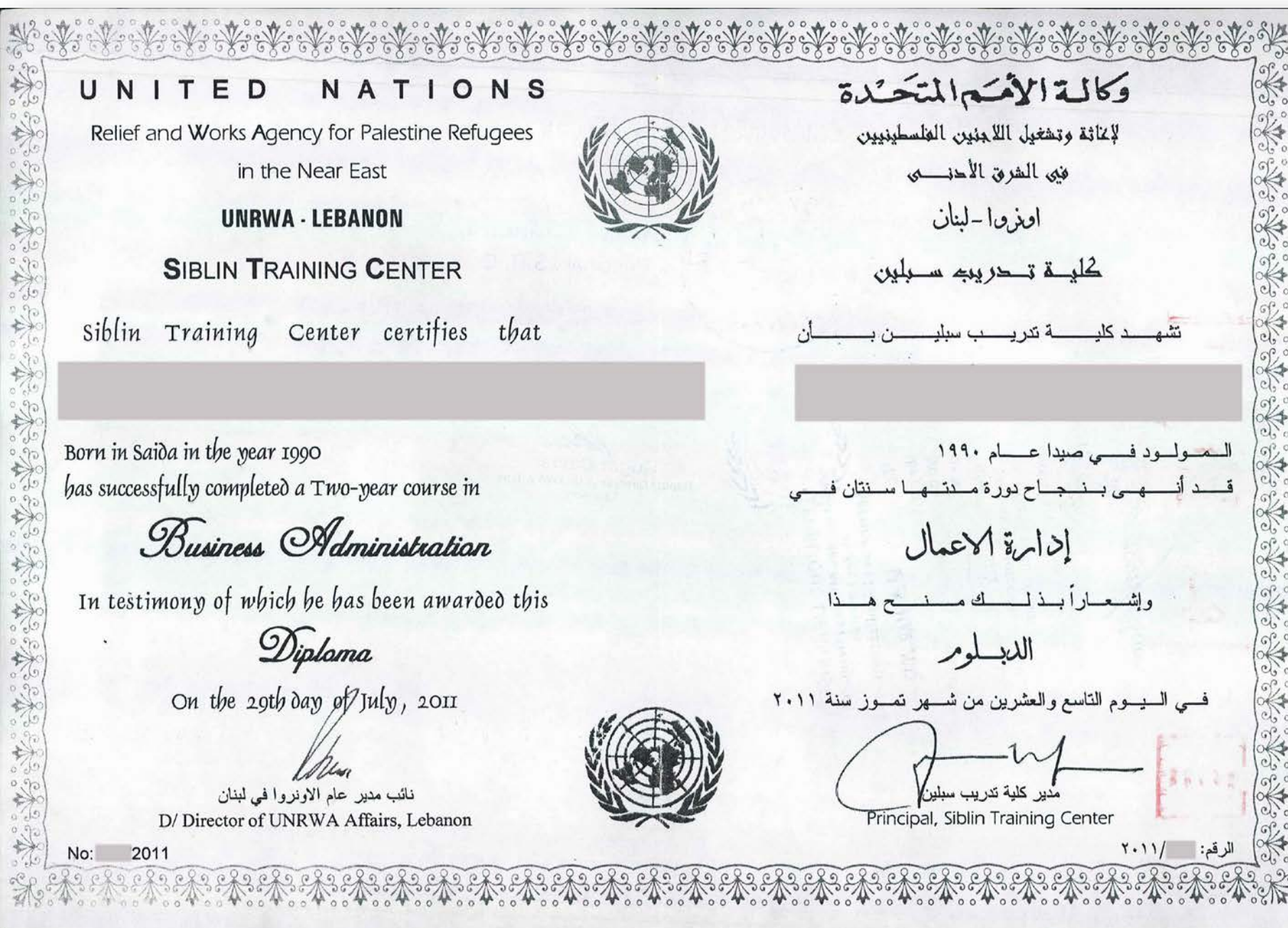
**Countries:** Gaza Strip, West Bank, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan

Range of educational establishments: 703 schools, 9 vocational colleges, 2 educational science faculties, and 2 teacher training institutes.



# Case Study 4

- **Country:** Lebanon
- **Institution:** Siblin Training Center
- **Credential:** Diploma confirming completion of two-year course in Business Administration
- **ECE Comparability:** U.S. Associate Degree





# Resources for further reading:

UNHCR: The UN Refugee Agency

<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>

International Rescue Committee

<http://www.rescue.org/>

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

<http://www.refugees.org/>

National Coalition of Syrian Revolution & Opposition Forces

<http://www.etilaf.us/>

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)

<http://www.unrwa.org/>

The Connection for International Credential Evaluation Professionals

<https://theconnection.ece.org/>





Jeanie Bell, Senior Assistant Director/International Admissions, Office of Admissions, University of Colorado Boulder, USA

- Flagship university of the state of Colorado, founded in 1877
- A public research university located in Boulder, Colorado
- The largest university in Colorado
  - 29,772 total enrollment
    - 7.2% International - 2,152
    - 83% Undergraduates (bachelor degree-seeking) – 24,818
    - 17% Graduates (master's and doctoral degree-seeking) – 4,954
  - Office of Admissions
    - Received 32,133 applications for fall 2014
    - Includes applications to all degree programs (bachelor, master's, doctoral)
- 3 additional campuses, including a medical campus



- This type of situation is relatively rare for the University of Colorado Boulder
- Affects students applying to all levels
- Countries of origin
  - Afghanistan, Libya, Iraq, Iran, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine



# What's the plan?

- How would you start this process?
- Who would you contact?
- What resources are at your disposal?
- How well do you know your campus or organization?
- Is the process formalized, transparent and accessible?

**A well-thought-out policy can cover multiple situations.**



- Identify situations in which applicants requesting a service are legitimately unable to provide complete academic credentials.
  
- Who is seeking assistance?
  - International students
  - Permanent Residents of the US
  - Refugees/Asylees
  
- What is the student seeking?
  - Admission
  - Transfer credit toward a degree
  - Credential Evaluation for another purpose



- Determine what can be submitted
  - Discuss this with the student at length and in detail
    - Dates
    - Names of institutions and documents in native language and English
      - Have them write it out if it's in a different language (e.g., Cyrillic, Greek, other)
      - Have the individual look at your resources and point out what they are referencing
    - Subjects studied
    - What it gave access to in home country
      - The next higher level of education
      - Terminal benchmark credential leading into the workforce.



## ■ Know your institution's standard requirements

- Source of requirement (government, accreditation board, state, department, division)
  - Types of documents
  - Origin of documents
  - What is posted on web pages, in manuals, through training
- 
- If documentation is less than complete, ask:
    - Why they have whatever they have
    - Why they don't have a complete set
    - Why they cannot get an official set
    - Situations affecting ability to get necessary documents
      - Refugees/Asylees
      - Policy of the country regarding duplicates
      - Length of time since completing the program



- Do your research on the situation as described by the applicant.

- Colleagues
- EducationUSA Advisors
- Fulbright
- AMIDEAST
- News (print, electronic)
- Web
- Social media
- Various publications
  - NAFSA news, International Educator, ACE Digest
  - AACRAO
  - ECE, The Connection
  - Chronicle of Higher Ed
  - IIE Scholar Rescue Fund Beacon, IIE blog
  - Chronicle of Higher Education



- Analyze the information and establish an assessment of the incomplete or missing academic credentials.
- Know the educational system of the country
  - Did the information provided by the student match the country's education system?
  - Is the institution accredited/recognized during those years?
  - Is it an exam-based system with an examining body that will reissue documents?
- Know the assessment requirements of the receiving department
  - Is there a requirement to prove graduation?



- Develop a process for an admission decision to the institution, or to fulfill the needs of the requested service.
- Identify the stakeholders and decision makers, and their purpose in the process
  - Who makes decisions on appeals and exceptions?
    - University Administration
    - Graduate School
    - Academic Department
    - Admissions Office
    - Registrar
    - Other



## ■ Identify the appeal process

- Do you have one already? Don't reinvent the wheel.
  - What is it?
  - Where is it posted?

## ■ Develop a process

- Is there a parallel to US student processes?
  - Would you allow a US student to be admitted if they couldn't provide such a document, or require them to go to another US school to start a record?
- Check other institution websites for published information.
- Create one yourself, and have the appropriate administrators approve it, then post it.



- Contact colleagues – there is a wealth of information out there
- Informal Poll asking about Syria, Afghanistan, Libya, Ukraine, Others
  - Received responses from
    - Laurie Cook, Associate Director, International Student Admission, Office of the Registrar, University of Denver, Denver, Colorado
    - Kelly Sharp, Senior Graduate and International Programs Associate, Office of the Registrar, Columbia College, Columbia, Missouri
    - Robert Watkins, Assistant Director of Admissions, Graduate and International Admissions Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas



- Questions and Responses

- What is your process for handling such cases (allow application and appeal, refer to alternate schools such as community college to establish some type of record, submit such cases to a committee, other possibilities)?
  - Columbia College – allow students to register and give 90 days to attempt to get some sort of document from the school (transcript or letter).
  - UT-Austin – Require documents first.
  - University of Denver – have a posted process to help students try to get official documents (rarely see students with no documents). There is a time frame for this, after which the student can petition.



- What options do you offer such students (e.g., waive documents, test out of subjects or levels, interview with a faculty member, go through a credential evaluation agency, or other options)?
  - Columbia College – allow letter of appeal requesting one of three options: allow the unofficial to be considered official and the evaluation continue as normal; allow the unofficial to fulfill the requirement of the need for an official document but no credit granted from it; allow a complete waiver of any requirement of the document, official or otherwise.
  - UT-Austin – No options.
  - University of Denver – using an established process, works with the student to request an official transcript. This includes a cover letter signed by an official at the University of Denver.



- Who has the final authority to make decisions on exceptions to standard procedures (you, the Director, the Dean, other administrators)?
  - Columbia College – Dean of Academic Affairs, who is responsible for approving or denying any deviations from academic college-wide policy.
  - UT-Austin - Associate Director of Admissions/Assistant Dean of Graduate Admissions is the final authority but she will refer to the Assistant Director of Admissions who oversees international admissions, who will have the final word.
  - University of Denver - Associate Provost for Graduate Studies, based on the DU Graduate Policy Manual. Input may be sought from the Associate Director of International Student Admission.



- Is there anything else you'd like to share about this situation on your campus?
  - This process can be used for students from countries that have had natural disasters or epidemics (earthquakes, tsunamis, Ebola, SARS).



## ■ Create a report

- Include details about how the document or the information provided by the student matches the education system of the native country.
- Cite sources
- Include non-standard information
  - Web sites
  - News articles (print, electronic)
  - Letters from former faculty in other countries
- Assess the equivalency or comparability of the students' academic background if you are authorized.



# Examples

- The Lost Boys and Girls of the Sudan
  - Seeking admission to a bachelor degree
  - Late 1990s through early 2000s
  - Had advocates in the community and on campus
  - Support from the Director of Admissions



## ■ Refugee from Syria

- Seeking admission to a doctorate
- Had only a letter from a former faculty members at the school in Syria and department support, including funding
- Used the web to check on the university attended
- Checked information in the letter against Syrian higher education system
- Kept documentation proving the exception, such as email threads, in the students record



- Individual from Francophone Africa
  - Seeking counseling on an appropriate entry level
  - Asked for documents which he provided in English only
    - Submitted documentation for a 4 year bachelor
    - Didn't match the Francophone education system



# Case Study-Refugee from Ukraine

- Seeking counseling on an appropriate entry level
- Submitted photocopies of documents – Diploma of Junior Specialist and Diploma of Bachelor
- Both documents could be checked on a centralized web-based system, the OSVITA verification site (in Ukrainian only)
- The school involved is verified to be in a conflict zone (Donbass State Engineering Academy in Kramatorsk)
- What would your institution require, and why?

**How would you start this process?**

**Who would you contact?**

**What resources are at your disposal?**

**How well do you know your campus or organization?**

**Is the process formalized, transparent and accessible?**



# Session Outcomes

- Participants will be able to identify situations in which applicants requesting a service (e.g., admission to a university; gaining employment) are legitimately unable to provide complete academic credentials.
- Participants will be able to analyze the information and establish an assessment of the incomplete or missing academic credentials.
- Participants will be able to develop a process using such an assessment to meet the needs of the individual requesting a service, e.g., enabling an admission decision to an institution or gaining employment.



# In Closing:

- Balance compassion with practicality in meeting the needs of your organization.
- Don't reinvent the wheel.
- Conduct research and explore best practices.
- A well-thought-out policy can cover multiple situations.





■ Thank you!



- Stig Arne Skjerven, Director of Foreign Education, Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), Norwegian ENIC-NARIC, Norway



# Recognition Procedure for Persons with Insufficient / Non-Verifiable Documentation

Stig Arne Skjerven

*Director of Foreign Education*

Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education  
(NOKUT), Norwegian ENIC-NARIC

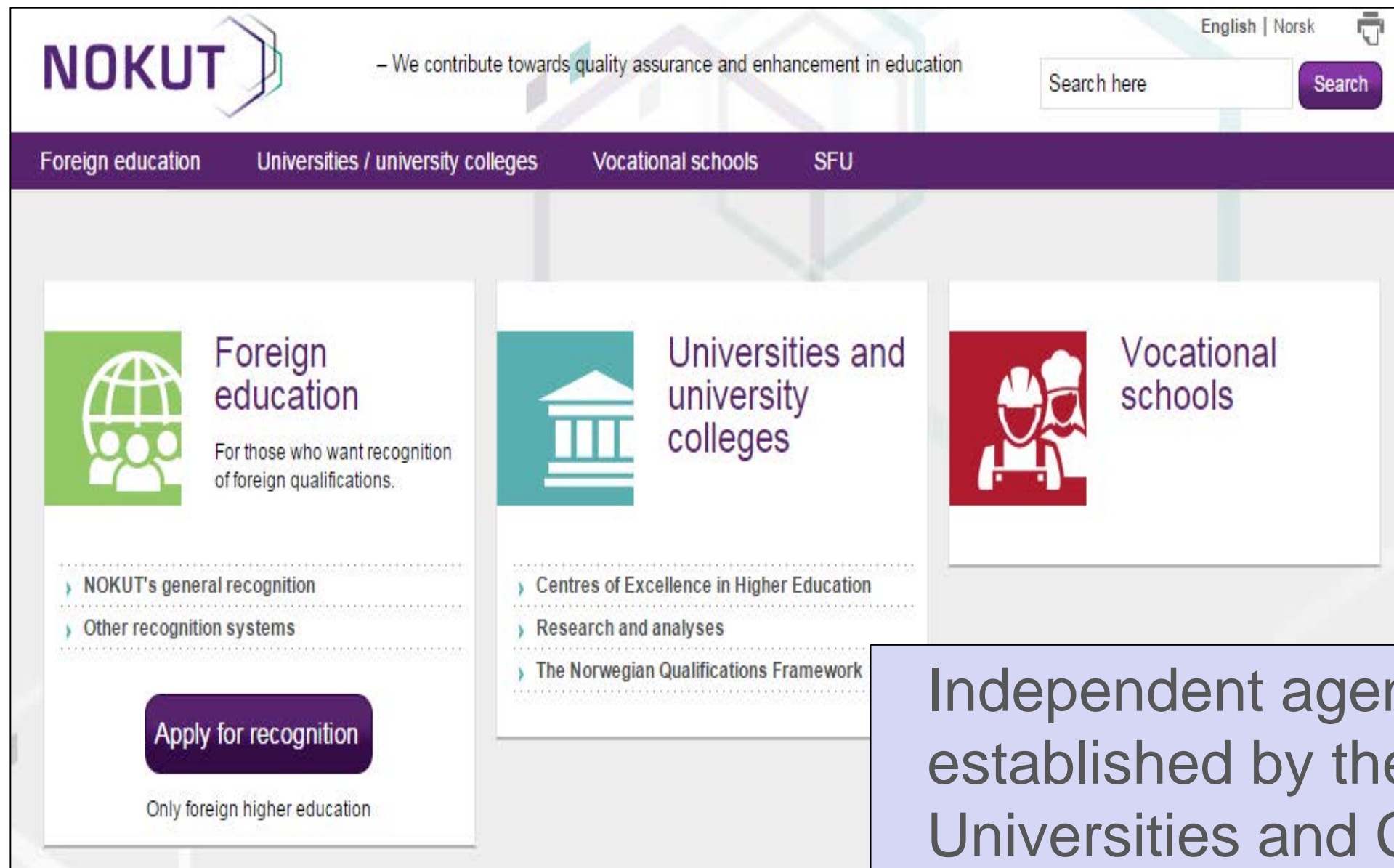


# Overview of the presentation

- About NOKUT
- NOKUT's general recognition of foreign education
- Recognition procedure for applicants with insufficient or non-verifiable documentation
  - ✓ International obligations and national demand
  - ✓ Norwegian recognition scheme for persons with insufficient/ non-verifiable documentation
  - ✓ Results and experience so far
  - ✓ Example cases



# NOKUT – Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education



Independent agency,  
established by the  
Universities and Colleges  
Act in 2003



# NOKUT – Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education

## Quality Assurance

controlling authority for educational activity at all Norwegian HEIs and VETs

- Over 4000 education programs at 190 institutions

## Foreign education

- Over 8000 applications for general recognition/year from almost all countries of the world

100 employees + 300 independent experts



## NOKUT – Department of Foreign Education

1. Recognition and evaluation of foreign higher education
2. Information services
3. National coordination related tasks

Number of employees: 30



# NOKUT's general recognition

## NOKUT considers

- the status of the educational institution and the qualification in the country where the education was received
- the length of the program
- the level of the program

Verification if necessary

## NOKUT's decision states

- the length of the program
- the number of credits the program is worth
- the corresponding Norwegian academic degree for the program, if any

NB! Equivalent/comparable,  
not identical



# Why NOKUT's general recognition?

## Individual

- Important tool while establishing in the Norwegian labor market - **employment in professions that are not regulated.**
- The recognition document can also be used as **an aid in salary placement.**
- The recognition document may be used in connection with **admission to further studies in higher education.**

## Society

Ever-increasing demand in Norwegian business and industry (non-regulated professions).

- Contributes to **mobility** across national borders.
- Helps to ensure that Norwegian employers receive **correct information** about the level and quality of higher education qualifications awarded in foreign countries.

- Free
- Average processing time is under 2 months



## NOKUT's general recognition

In order for NOKUT to be in a position to assess the qualifications awarded in a foreign country:

- The application must be adequately documented and if necessary verified by the place of study or the authorities in the country of origin.
- The link between identity and the education documents must be substantiated.



# NOKUT's general recognition - documentation requirements

- A) Identity
- B) Proof of name change
- C) Documentation from higher education
- D) Documentation from upper secondary school

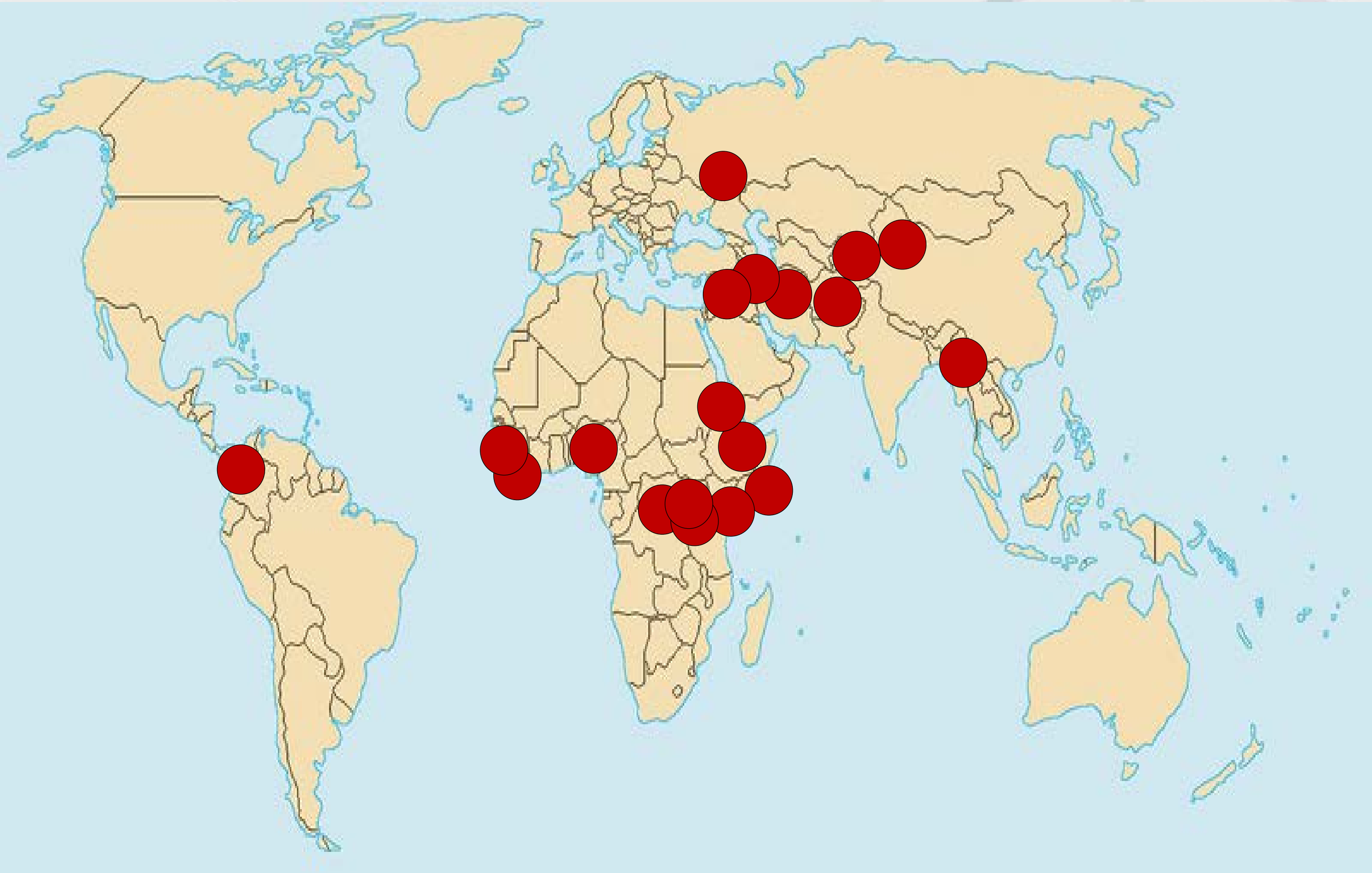


# What if you can't submit the required documentation or if the documentation is insufficient?

Applicants with foreign **higher education** that is education at the level of university / university college, who cannot be granted general recognition due to missing, insufficient or unverifiable documentation will be referred to the **Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (UVD-procedure)**.

- ✓ Established in May 2013
- ✓ About 250 applicants/year





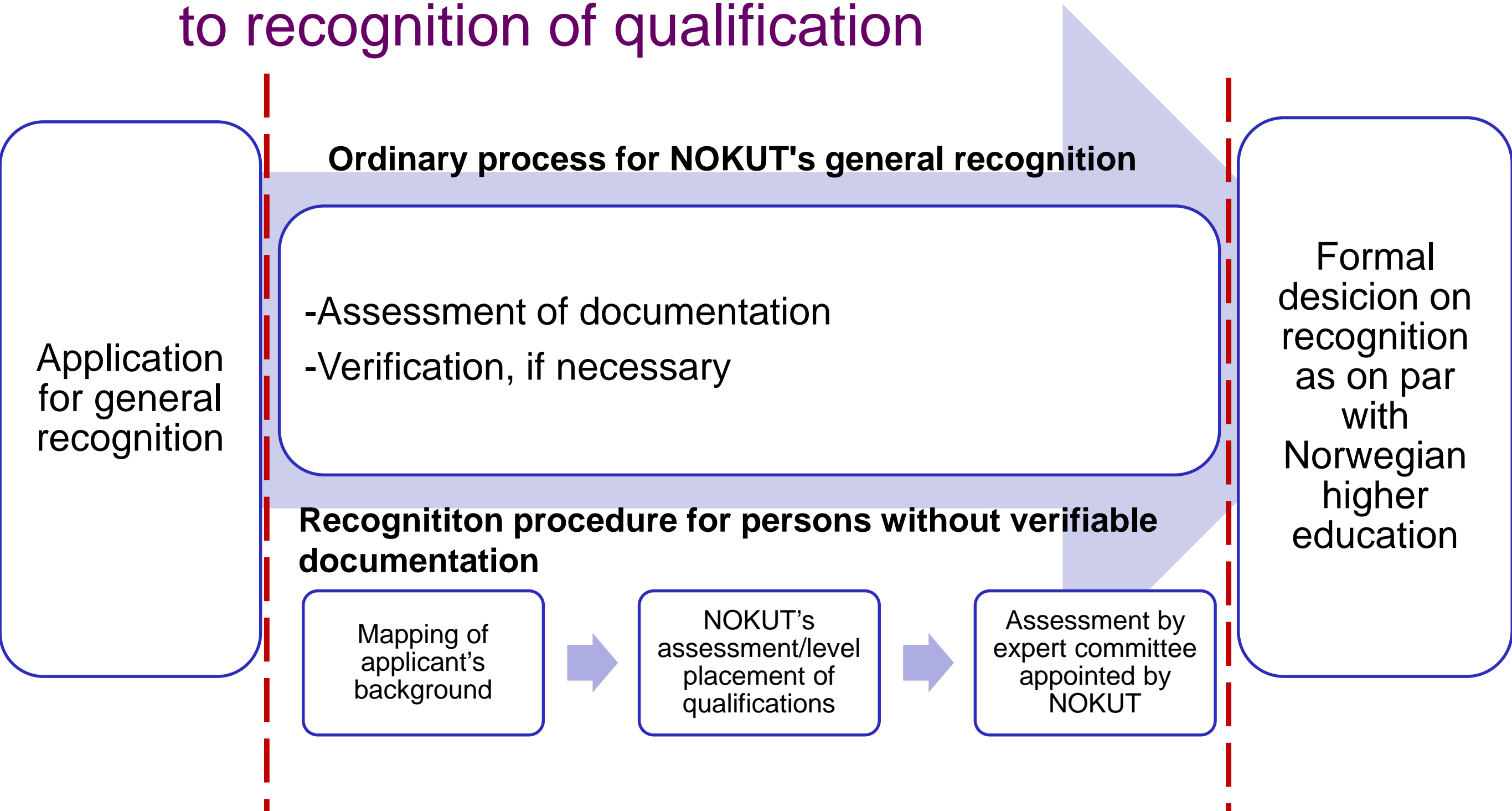


# Recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation: international obligations

- By ratifying The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (**The Lisbon Convention**) Norway has undertaken to establish a system for the recognition of qualifications held by refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation (Article VII).
- Recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation is established according to the recommendations stated in the **European Area of Recognition Manual, Chapter 12: Refugees**

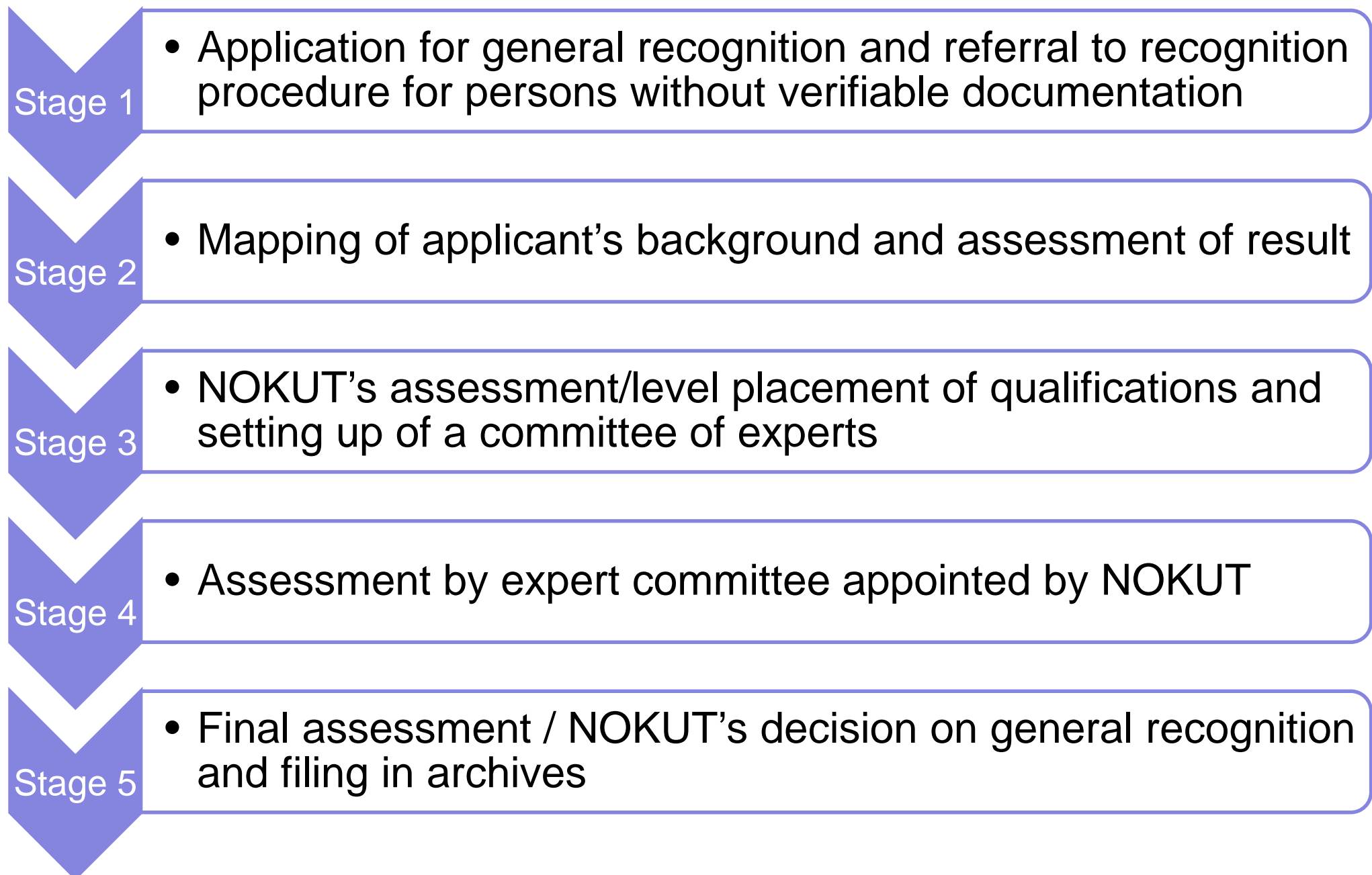


# Recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation – an alternative way to recognition of qualification





# Recognition model





**Stage 1**

- **Application for general recognition and referral to recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation**

Applicants who cannot be granted general recognition due to missing, insufficient or unverifiable documentation will be referred to the NOKUT's Recognition Procedure for Persons without Verifiable Documentation (UVD-procedure).

NB! applicants with higher education degrees from accredited /officially recognized higher education institution in the country of origin



**Stage 2**

• **Mapping of applicant's background and assessment of result**

- Reconstruction of the missing part of the documentation
    - applicant is required to fill in the questionnaire and describe the courses as detailed as possible;
  - Statement of language proficiency in English or Norwegian - the applicant should be able to communicate with the expert committee;
  - Refugee status or residence permit in Norway
- 
- Applicants who satisfy these requirements can proceed to the next stage.
  - Applicants who do not qualify receive information about the opportunity to get back to the recognition process when the requirements are satisfied.



## Stage 3

- **NOKUT's assessment/level placement of qualifications and setting up of a committee of experts**

- NOKUT conducts preliminary interview with each individual applicant;
- NOKUT assesses the level of the qualification on the assumption that the given information is correct:  
Bachelor's degree (3 years / 180 credits), I cycle  
Master's degree (2 years / 120 credits), II cycle
- NOKUT produces an assessment portfolio for each individual applicant;
- NOKUT sets up a committee of experts



## Stage 4

- **Assessment by expert committee appointed by NOKUT**

- **The aim is to substantiate that the person in question has completed a foreign programme of higher education studies.**
- The committee consists of two academics and one representative from NOKUT.
- Expert committees are appointed on a ongoing basis as and when the need arises.
- NOKUT gather a number of applicants with a similar academic background, so that they may be assessed by the same committee.



Stage 4

- **Assessment by expert committee appointed by NOKUT**

- The assessment shall be **sufficiently comprehensive** as to allow NOKUT to use it as a basis for a binding decision regarding general recognition, and it shall consist of **both written and oral elements** in order to allow NOKUT to form a **best possible picture of the applicant's educational background**;
- The assessment shall be well documented (e.g. transcripts of interviews, copies of tests, home assignments etc);
- The assessment shall be an overall expert opinion with an unequivocal conclusion that indicates the candidates' qualifications in the relevant academic fields



## Stage 5

- **Final assessment / NOKUT's decision on general recognition and filing in archives**

- NOKUT uses the assessment made by the expert committee as a basis for a binding decision regarding general recognition.
- The recognition document issued at the end of this recognition procedure is alike recognition documents issued in ordinary cases.
- The results as well as applicants' assessment portfolios are filed in the NOKUT's archive.



## Status as of May 2015

- 220 formal decisions (May 2013 – May 2015)
- Engineering, Architecture, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Journalism, Economy, Statistics, Agronomy, Psychology, Language (Arabic, English, Dari, Spanish)
- Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Iran, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Colombia, Syria, Pakistan and Eritrea
- Positive response from applicants and experts in the committees
- High demand for this type of recognition in the society



## Status, applicants 2013-2014

- 2013: 52 % got either relevant job or opportunity to continue studies in Norway
- 2014: 49 % found NOKUT's recognition helpful while applying for jobs or studies in Norway
- 84 % satisfied with the recognition scheme
- 92 % would recommend the recognition scheme to others





# Suzan



- Came to Norway as an asylumseeker in 2010
- Contacted NOKUT for recognition of her engineering qualification (Bachelor degree) in June 2013 in connection with jobseeking process
- Referred to the new recognition procedure in July 2013



## Interview in the expert committee





## 29. August 2013 : Education is recognized as equivalent to Norwegian Bachelor degree!





# Suzan

Got a job as a piping engineer in the engineering company REINERTSEN in Bergen





## Baydaa



- Came to Norway in March 2011 with her two children
- Contacted NOKUT in February 2012
- 2012, pilotproject: language proficiency is not enough
- NOKUT contacted her in May 2013 with information about new recognition scheme



## Interview in the expert committee





## Baydaa



- Master's degree in Material Science from University of Baghdad, Iraq is recognised as equivalent to Norwegian Master degree
- Could continue as a trainee at Aker Solutions
- Wishes to apply for PhD positions in Norway



## Muhmed



TAKKSAM: Ferrhan Hekmed Muhmed er glad for sjansen han fekk på FTA.

### «Alt eg har kan eg takke» Firdaposten

Med drapstruslar hengande over seg rømde Ferrhan Hekmed Muhmed frå Irak til Norge. Han er klar på kva FTA og Otto Bergstrøm har betydd for han.

– Eg er evig takksam for alt FTA har gjort for meg. Dei har gjeve meg sjansen til å ta opp huslån, skaffe meg sertifikat og kjøpe bil. Alt eg og familien min har no, kan eg takke FTA og Otto Bergstrøm for, seier Muhmed.

Etter å ha kjempa lenge for å få

godkjent utdanninga sin i Norge, utan hell, begynte den ingeniør-utdanna irakaren å arbeide hos FTA i 2010.

– Eg hugsar godt den første dagen min på FTA. Det var i oktober 2010 og det var eit heilt forferdeleg vēr. Tiltross for at himmelen opna seg og ønskte meg velkommen til Vestlandet, var eg frå meg av lukke. Om eg skulle gje meg og familien eit verdig liv var eg nøydd å gripe denne sjansen med begge hender, fortel han.

Muhmed greipsjansen – og det har lønna seg. Han arbeider i dag som vaksjef på FTA, og fekk i desember endå ei gladnyheit.

NOKUT, som er eit nasjonalt organ med føremål å sikre og fremje kvalitet i utdanning, fortalde at han skulle få ta ein eksamen for å få godkjenne utdanninga si. Muhmed stod med glans, og er i dag sertifisert som å arbeide som ingeniør i Norge.

**...NOKUT, som er eit nasjonalt organ med føremål å sikre og fremje kvalitet i høgare utdanning, fortalde at han skulle få ta ein eksamen for å få godkjenne utdanninga si. Muhmed stod med glans, og er i dag sertifisert som å arbeide som ingeniør i Norge.**





## Tete

University of Kinshasa,  
DRC

- 1994: Licence en Sciences Economiques
- 1996: Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies en Economie et Finance Internationale
- 1998: Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies en Gestion et Management Qualite





## Stage 1

- **Application for general recognition and referral to recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation**

- Applied for NOKUT's general recognition in January 2014;
- Couldn't provide a single document / evidence for his three educations;
- Referred to the recognition procedure for applicants with insufficient / non-verifiable documentation



## Stage 2

- **Mapping of applicant's background and assessment of result**

- ✓ Questionnaire: reconstruction/ detailed description of all three educations (applicant made a fantastic effort: about 40 pages with descriptions of courses!)
  - ✓ Statement of language proficiency in Norwegian. The level of proficiency is verified in the preliminary interview with NOKUT.
  - ✓ Residence permit in Norway
- All three criteria are satisfied, can proceed to the next stage



**Stage 3**

- **NOKUT's assessment/level placement of qualifications and setting up of a committee of experts**

We didn't get any official evidence for the applicant's qualifications...

- NOKUT has to cross check the information given by the applicant and try to provide as good information as possible to the experts:
  - Does educational institution exist/existed? Is it accredited / officially recognised? Does it have Faculty of Economic Sciences?
  - Does educational institution provide these particular study programs?
  - What is / was the scope of the study programs?
  - Is there any information about the courses / content of the study programs?



**Stage 3**

**• NOKUT's assessment/level placement of qualifications and setting up of a committee of experts**

- International databases (general information on education system and status of the educational institutions: UK NARIC, AEI, ANABIN)
- Check in NOKUT's own database
- Check in NOKUT's archive – are there any well documented files from this educational institution from before?
- Check in NOKUT's library
- Asked for help from some ENIC-NARIC offices



## Stage 4

- **Assessment by expert committee appointed by NOKUT**

- The committee consists of two academics and one representative from NOKUT.
- The committee receives following documentation from NOKUT:
  - Questionnaire filled in by the applicant;
  - NOKUT's evaluation of education;
  - Information about the education system in the given country;
  - Copies of transcripts from similar files (to help to know the combination of subjects);
  - Applicant's CV, reference letters;
  - Template for the final report.



**Stage 4**

- **Assessment by expert committee appointed by NOKUT**

- Homeassignment (3 workdays)
- Interview in the committee (2 hours)
- The report (5 pages) with an unequivocal conclusion on whether or not the applicant has the educations he claims.

Conclusion: " The candidate passed the exam. The experts were impressed by the candidate's abilities and overall knowledge. There's a clear evidence that the actual study program was completed by the candidate".



## Stage 5

- **Final assessment / NOKUT's decision on general recognition and filing in archives**

- 1994: Licence en Sciences Economiques
- 1996: Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies en Economie et Finance Internationale
- 1998: Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies en Gestion et Management Qualite



- 1994: Bachelor's degree (3 years/180 ECTS)
  - 1996: Master's degree (2 years/120 ECTS)
  - 1998: Master's degree (2 years/120 ECTS)
- = 7 years higher education/ 420 ECTS







## Concluding comments

- ✓ Centralized scheme is an advantage:
  - Standardized procedures → equal treatment of candidates;
  - Applicants have just one liaison body to deal with;
  - NOKUT with its central role builds up expertise → less time-consuming and more efficient processes.



## Concluding comments

- ✓ Why NOKUT's general recognition and not academic equivalence at the HEIs:
  - Not all foreign education can be given academic equivalence with the programs existing at Norwegian HEIs (educations from a long time ago, lower level of education compared to Norwegian standard (e.g. engineering), combination of subjects etc.)
  - Important to receive an official document (statement of comparability) that confirms that it has been verified that that qualification **in essence** provides competence as Norwegian course of study at the same level → cost effective and practical to use the system for NOKUT's general recognition



## Concluding comments

### ✓ Important to keep in mind:

- The process may be timeconsuming for the individual involved;
- The process requires motivation and active participation from the applicant
- important to have a robust support services for the participants, provide adequate information about the process

Where there is a will there is way 😊



Thank you for your attention!