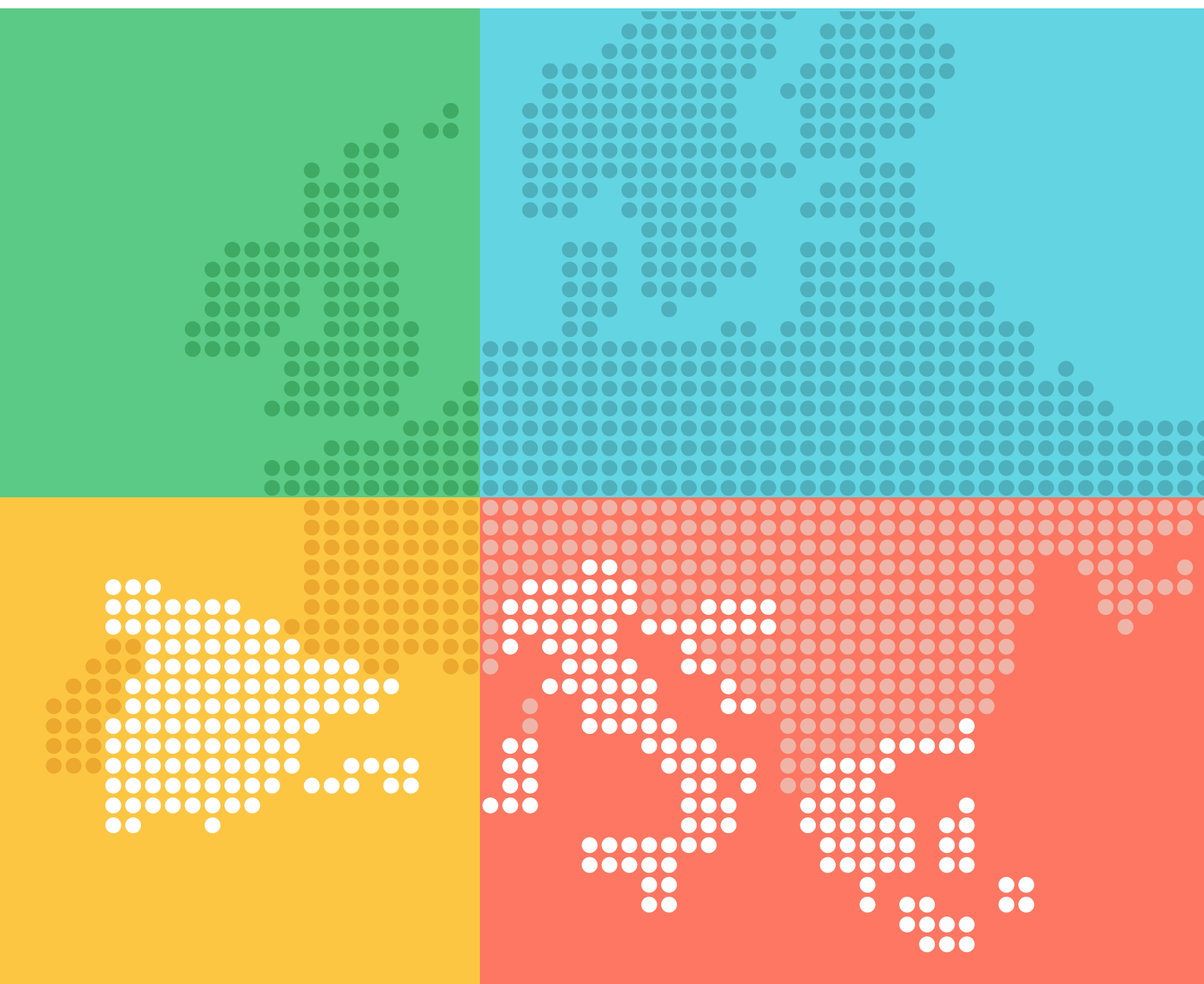




# HIGHER EDUCATION FOR THIRD COUNTRY NATIONAL AND REFUGEE INTEGRATION IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

TandEM - Towards Empowered Migrant  
Youth in Southern Europe



The project is co-funded  
by the Asylum, Migration  
and Integration Fund of the  
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<sup>1</sup> European Network of Information Centres in the European Region (ENIC), National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC)



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The TandEM project

Over the last decade, Southern Europe has become the entry point for large numbers of migrants who had to flee their countries or who are seeking a better life in Europe. While to some, southern European countries may just be a leg in the journey, others are settling and building their lives in the region. Multiculturalism and diversity have shaped the face of southern European countries for centuries. However, misconceptions and negative attitudes towards migration and diversity, based on fears and misinformation, are on the rise. Subsequently, it is essential to disprove false representations, share the positive contribution that migration can bring to every society and promote understanding and acceptance for diversity among the different communities living in this part of the Mediterranean.

In this spirit, the project TandEM – Towards Empowered Migrant Youth in Southern Europe - aims to build a bridge between migrant and local youth to promote dialogue, mutual understanding and cohesion in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain. TandEM focuses on local and migrant youth currently enrolled, or interested in enrolling, in higher education institutions. Higher education institutions have, in turn, since the beginning of the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015, provided a major contribution in supporting the integration of refugees. They provided shelter, medical and social support, helped with translations and advice, offered language courses and cultural events, in some cases not only for refugees, but also for the domestic population, in order to enable better integration. In addition, a large share of the TandEM project is dedicated to encouraging young southern Europeans to actively contribute to the integration of young migrants in their higher education institutions and thus also in their countries through, for example, peer-to-peer student mentorship schemes and youth campaigns.

As part of the project, the Study on Higher Education for Third Country National and Refugee Integration in Southern Europe provides information about the target group’s needs and the barriers they may face when accessing to – as well as succeeding in - higher education, including concrete recommendations for the different policy levels (European, national, institutional).

TandEM is co-funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Union and implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with the European University Association (EUA) and the Italian Islamic Religious Community (COREIS).

## 1.2 The Study on Higher Education for Third Country National and Refugee Integration: Scope, Aims and Methodology

The Study on Higher Education for Third Country National and Refugee Integration in Southern Europe addresses the question of access to and participation in higher education and its potential impact on the integration of two groups of international students:

- **Third country national (TCN) students**, defined as citizens of a state that is not a member of the European Union (EU), nor a citizen of Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway or Switzerland. Whereas in EU member states, EU students enjoy the privileges of EU citizens (with respect to freedom of movement, residency, and right to work) and are treated equally to domestic students (therefore they pay the same or no tuition fees), for TCN students other rules apply.
- The study will provide a specific focus, within this group, to **refugees** who are under any form of international protection have particularly urgent societal integration needs. In the context of this study, and unless specified otherwise, the term 'refugee' covers all TCNs with full refugee status or with any other international protection status, such as subsidiary protection, etc as well as asylum seekers.

While higher education can play a significant role in the integration of refugees in their host countries, this particular group of potential students, however, faces a range of specific barriers when trying to access higher education. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that globally only 1% of refugees have been able to enrol in higher education courses, compared with a global average of 36% of young people (UNHCR 2018), or almost 40% of the 30 to 34-year olds in the European Union that hold a degree (European Union 2018). Therefore, while referencing implications for both groups' access to higher education and implications for integration, the study highlights the situation of refugees and focuses on students and their backgrounds in its recommendations.

The negative impact of migration on higher education participation has already been recognised in other contexts: for instance, the 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report shows that throughout the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the participation and completion rates of students with a migrant background lag behind those of domestic students, whether or not they have recently arrived or belong to the group of first- or second-generation migrants (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018b). And in both the 2015 Yerevan and 2018 Paris Communiqués, EHEA Ministers in charge of higher education stress the need to ensure social inclusion and equity and to provide fair recognition, with explicit mention of refugees. In the southern European member states, which are the geographic focus of this report, a fairly large share of TCNs who have arrived within the last few years have done so with a refugee background, many of them being in the typical age group to access higher education (see in detail section 2.2.2).

Hence the aim of the study is to identify links between integration and education, and to analyse and compare the access barriers to higher education in Southern Europe for TCNs and refugees. While strategic documents on integration policy of the countries covered in the TandEM project differ in their level of detail and priorities, all of them focus largely on the integration of TCNs with refugee or other international protections status – and not the integration of TCNs arriving as international students per se. Therefore, the report scrutinises the links between higher education policy and integration policy, as better cooperation between the two policy areas could hold the key for major improvements. It provides concrete recommendations for the region and the individual countries on how to remove barriers for access to and the participation of TCNs and refugees in higher education and, by doing so, promote their social integration.



The scope of this study concerns the integration of TCN students, rather than broader issues related to internationalisation of higher education. While the two may be related, policies and mechanisms for access and participation are analysed with the perspective of addressing mid- or long-term integration into their host societies and economies.

The analytical framework depicted in Figure 1 below has been applied in the research for the six target countries, distinguishing three levels, which are interlinked:

- On the **national level**, access barriers stemming from integration policy, higher education policy and social policy were reviewed, in careful consideration of the legal status implications of the TCNs. The level of implementation of international conventions such as the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)<sup>2</sup> were considered both on paper and in practice.
- The **institutional level**<sup>3</sup> covered (A) overall access barriers, stemming from either strategy, mission or general practice at the higher education institution. As many institutions are already active in the integration of TCNs, including refugees<sup>4</sup>, the study reviewed their approaches and initiatives, in order to identify good practice, as well as the specific challenges that came with their implementation (under B in Fig. 1).
- **Individual level** barriers for higher education access considered include qualifications and legal status, as well as needs and expectations of the TCNs and refugees when considering access into higher education.

NATIONAL LEVEL	INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL		INDIVIDUAL LEVEL
Access barriers	(A) Access barriers	(B) Current integration approaches & challenges	(TCN/refugee)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>LEGAL/POLICY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ links between integration and higher education policy</li> <li>▪ access requirements,</li> <li>▪ recognition procedures – LRC implementation,</li> <li>▪ autonomy in admissions,</li> <li>▪ student support, etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>CULTURAL</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ language,</li> <li>▪ academic culture,</li> <li>▪ study &amp; research skills,</li> <li>▪ teaching approaches etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>INTERNAL POLICY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ strategy and mission links,</li> <li>▪ recruitment priorities,</li> <li>▪ admission &amp; recognition practices,</li> <li>▪ third mission,</li> <li>▪ outreach, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ <b>SERVICES</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ admissions,</li> <li>▪ language training,</li> <li>▪ consultation,</li> <li>▪ funding, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ <b>STUDENTS, STAFF</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ volunteering,</li> <li>▪ mentoring,</li> <li>▪ outreach, etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>QUALIFICATIONS</b></li> <li>▶ <b>NEEDS &amp; EXPECTATIONS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ interest in higher education,</li> <li>▪ financial situation,</li> <li>▪ info gap, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ <b>INTEGRATION</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ cultural,</li> <li>▪ societal, etc.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ <b>LEGAL STATUS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Visa or international protection</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Table 1 - Analytical framework of TandEM study on access barriers for TCNs, with thematic examples (non-exhaustive)</b></p>			

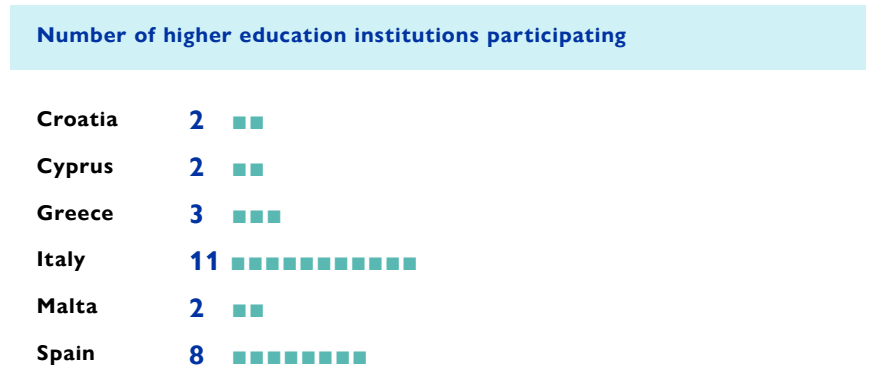
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/165>

<sup>3</sup> In the context of this study, institutions refer to higher education institutions (HEI), such as universities, colleges and other tertiary education establishments.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of practices please refer to EJA's interactive compendium of higher education initiatives: <http://refugeeswelcomemap.eua.be>



The study started with desktop research and evaluation of existing data sources. In order to gather initial evidence on the situation in the TandEM countries<sup>5</sup>, an explorative survey has been carried out amongst higher education institutions, providing some examples of practice – but by no means being fully representative of the sector in the individual country and the entire region. A total of 37 respondents from 28 higher education institutions participated.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 1.** Higher education institutions participating in the TandEM survey (N=28)

All survey responses were from universities, except for one university college. Based on the findings, ministries responsible for integration, and ministries responsible for higher education, as well as national recognition agencies or information centres (ENIC NARICS) were interviewed<sup>7</sup> – as all of them are relevant actors in the integration of migrants into higher education. Finally, up to seven TCN students per country were interviewed in order to share their success stories and the challenges they have faced when accessing higher education in Southern Europe.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For country specific details and references to legislation, policy and practice, please refer to the reports in Chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup> Due to the decentralised structure of the Croatian higher education institutions, responses from different faculties/departments were treated as separate entries. In addition, at four of the institutions, two or more responses were collected, which were aggregated for questions on central institutional strategies (N= 28, see Figure 3), but considered as separate responses for opinion questions (N= 37).

<sup>7</sup> Participants had a choice between telephone interviews or responding to the questions in writing.

<sup>8</sup> The full list of organisations, ministries and institutions contributing to the research can be found in Annex III; an overview of the survey and interview questions in Annexes IV and V.







## 2. THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS' AND REFUGEES' INTEGRATION THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

This chapter reviews higher education participation of TCNs, including refugees, and its impact on societal inclusion, in a comparative perspective across the countries covered by TandEM.<sup>9</sup>

Higher education access and participation can have clear benefits for the target group's integration, and vice-versa, their participation can benefit host societies (section 2.1). Europe has seen large migration flows in the past years; however, potential EU level policy making in this area is limited (section 2.2). National level integration policy (section 2.3.1) in the TandEM countries recognises the role of general education in societal integration but is often not directly linked to the higher education policy sector (section 2.3.2). Regardless of policy level support or lack thereof, higher education institutions are actively welcoming TCNs and refugees on their campuses and contributing to their integration (section 2.3.3).

Based on the comparative review, the chapter concludes in a summary of the key challenges to higher education access and participation of TCN, including refugee students, and their societal integration.

### 2.1 Higher Education and the Integration of Third Country Nationals: Mutual Benefits

Higher education participation creates multiple benefits for students and their respective societies, and it enhances social mobility and economic prospects. There are clear benefits of integrating third country nationals (TCNs) into higher education – for the individual, the institution as well as for the host nation. And, vice-versa, higher education can play a crucial role in the integration of TCNs who would want to settle in the host country, and thus contribute to its society and economy.

Compared to some decades ago, higher education participation is much more common in Europe, also as an increasing number of jobs require a higher education qualification. In some European countries, every second school graduate accesses higher education, and large numbers of TCNs in Europe are in fact international students. While integration can be important for any TCN or EU international students who may decide to stay in their host country, those with a refugee background as a group arguably have more urgent integration needs.

<sup>9</sup> For country specific reviews, please refer to Chapter 4 – Country reports.

In the countries covered by TandEM (Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain), a large share of TCNs who arrived in 2015-17 have applied for asylum (see in detail section 2.1.1). For those among them who qualify for access to higher education, participation can be empowering on a social, economic and gender-balance level. It can foster a sense of hope and a change in self-perceptions and perspectives from refugee to university student. It broadens capacities and capabilities, and no matter what their chosen subject area may be, it can build leadership skills. These can benefit entire communities in the event of repatriation, along with the skills needed for reconstruction. Also, in host societies, refugees with higher education qualifications can better contribute to the economy and sustain meaningful livelihoods (UNHCR 2018). Finally, integration into a higher education community can benefit integration into the host society, through discussion and exchange with peers in the classroom, participation in cultural activities and in general student life. In turn, this can have a positive impact on the domestic student body and potentially change narratives on migration in the host country as well.

With or without international protection (e.g. as refugees), TCNs are regarded as international students in most of the higher education systems covered by TandEM<sup>10</sup>. European higher education institutions are nowadays highly internationalised – already in 2015, 93% of them had an internationalisation strategy in place or were about to implement such a strategy (Sursock, A. 2015). In some institutions and systems, international students generate an additional, higher income via tuition fees. More importantly, TCNs are a welcome addition to the talent pool of students and researchers at any higher education institution. They are also regarded as an asset for foreign relations, with potential for strengthening scientific, but also economic, cultural and political links to other countries.

In addition, TCN students potentially contribute to the work force through part-time work during study and through further employment in case they decide to stay on in the host country after they graduate. They also contribute to the host country's economy through living expenses and spending on study materials. For instance, one study estimates that in Italy international students (TCN and EU) contribute as much as 0.05% to the GDP through their spending on higher education (EC/European Migration Network 2012).

In summary, higher education participation can have the same benefits for TCNs as for domestic or EU students, with additional benefits for the subgroup of refugee students. It fosters TCN's and refugees' integration and increases their social mobility, enhances the international profile of higher education institutions, but also contributes to host countries' labour forces and economies.

Beyond the question of benefits, it should be underlined that, as established by several international conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26.2), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 13c) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28c), access to higher education is a human right. Access to, and participation in, higher education should also be regarded from the more general perspective of empowering migrant populations to exercise such rights.

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<sup>10</sup> See in detail section 2.3.



## 2.2 Third Country National Migration & Integration in Europe: Figures & Policies

### 2.2.1 Data on Third Country Nationals in Europe

The following section provides an overview of Immigration figures and perceptions of migration in Europe (2.2.1), as well as of EU-level policies for their integration and participation in higher education (2.2.2). It highlights regional specificities in the six southern European countries covered by the TandEM project<sup>11</sup>, and compares them against the average situation in the EU Member States.

#### 2.2.1.1. Migration figures

Europe received a total of 4.3 million migrants in 2016 and 4.4 million in 2017 (Table 2 below), of which 47% were from third countries in 2016 and 46% in 2017.

Across the TandEM countries, the share of TCNs in overall immigration figures was 13% higher than the EU average in 2016 and 15% higher in 2017. While in 2017 the share of TCNs across the EU decreased slightly (-1%), in Southern Europe - specifically in Italy (3%) and Spain (2%) - it continued to increase.

The TCN share differs considerably across the TandEM countries: in 2016, Croatia, Cyprus and Malta's shares of TCNs among migrants were below EU average (29%; 37% and 39% respectively), while in Greece, Italy and Spain they were above EU average (59%, 67% and 57% respectively).

	2016		2017	
	TCN migration	Total migration	TCN migration	Total migration
<b>Croatia</b>	4.0	13.9	5.4	15.6
<b>Cyprus</b>	6.5	17.3	8.0	21.3
<b>Greece</b>	69.5	116.9	63.3	112.2
<b>Italy</b>	200.2	300.8	240.0	343.4
<b>Malta</b>	6.7	17.1	8.5	21.7
<b>Spain</b>	235.6	414.7	314.2	532.1
<b>Southern Europe (TandEM total)</b>	<b>522.6</b>	<b>880.9</b>	<b>639.5</b>	<b>1,046.4</b>
<b>EU total</b>	<b>1,993.3</b>	<b>4,282.9</b>	<b>2,011.2</b>	<b>4,396.3</b>

**Table 2 - Annual migration: TCN and total (thousands).** Source: Eurostat (migr\_imm1ctz). Data extracted in January 2019.

Some of the TCNs immigrating to Europe are eligible for refugee status or other international protection. Table 3 below depicts the numbers of first-time applicants (applying for asylum for the first time in any of the EU member states). While across the EU, there was a significant decrease of applicants from 2016 to 2017, the total number slightly increased in the TandEM countries. In 2016, 16% of the first-time applications in the EU were submitted in the region. This more than doubled in the following year

<sup>11</sup> The specific situation in each of the TandEM countries is detailed in Chapter 4.



to 34% - partially due to the decrease of the overall number of first-time applications in the EU by almost half, between 2016 and 2017.

	2016	2017
<b>Croatia</b>	2.2	0.9
<b>Cyprus</b>	2.8	4.5
<b>Greece</b>	49.9	57
<b>Italy</b>	121.2	126.6
<b>Malta</b>	1.7	1.6
<b>Spain</b>	15.6	30.4
<b>Southern Europe (TandEM total)</b>	<b>193.4</b>	<b>221</b>
<b>EU total</b>	<b>1206.1</b>	<b>649.9</b>

**Table 3 - . First-time asylum applications (non-EU) in the EU, 2006–2017 (thousands)**

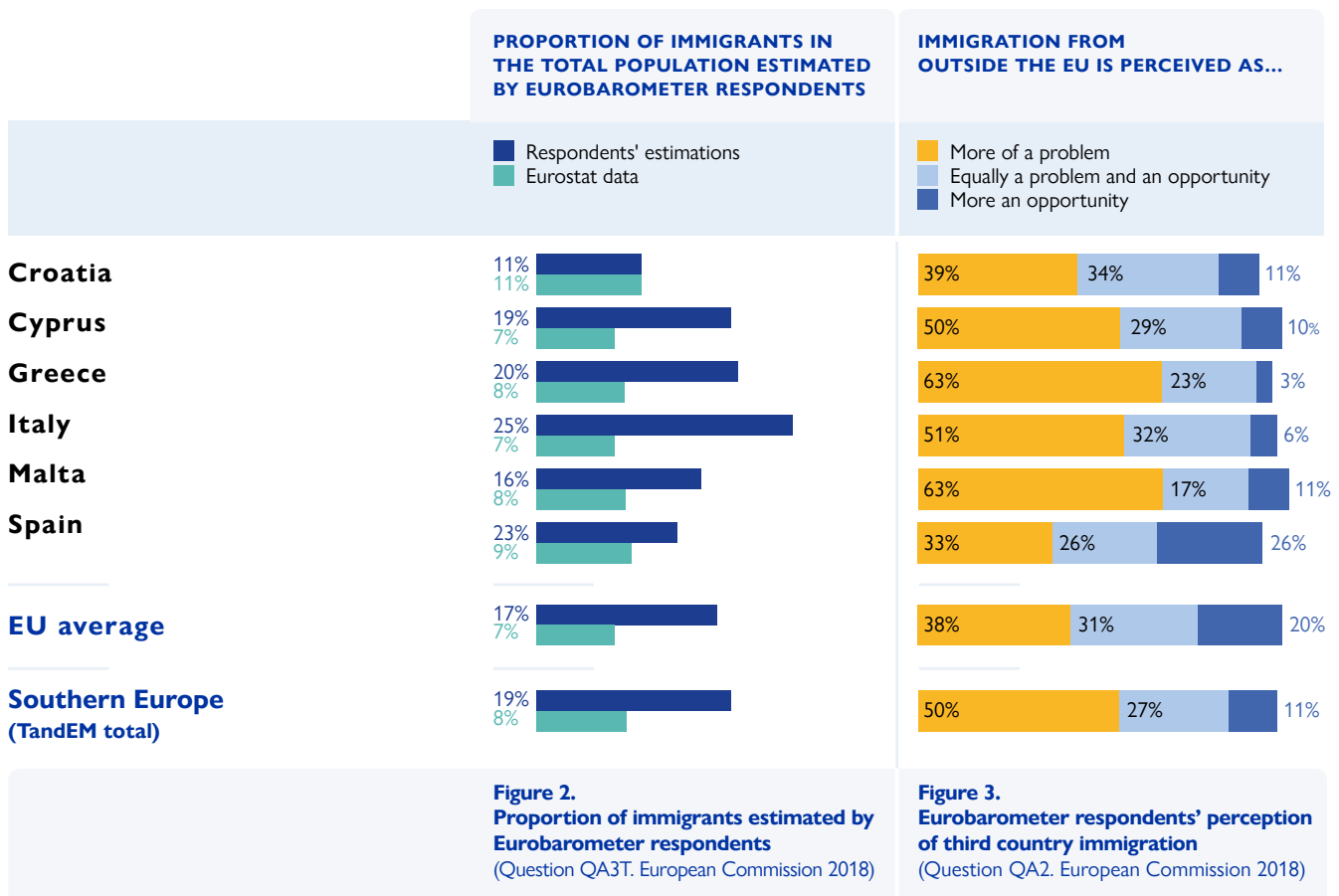
Source: Eurostat (migr\_asyappctza). Data extracted in November 2018.

On EU average, 52% of first-time asylum applicants is in the age group typically associated with university studies (18-34 years old). The share is even larger amongst asylum applicants in Southern Europe (60%), with Italy (77%), Croatia (64%) and Cyprus (63%) receiving the largest shares (European Commission/ EACEA/ Eurydice 2019). Thus, amongst the specific group of asylum seekers and refugees in Southern Europe, there is a large number of potential higher education students, based on their age profile. Data also shows that on average migrants (EU and TCN) in TandEM countries are less likely to have a tertiary degree than the domestic population - with the exception of Malta where on average migrants are more likely to have higher education than natives (OECD/EU 2018).

### 2.2.1.1. Perception of migration

Across the member states, views and perceptions on migration differ. In a large-scale Eurobarometer survey (European Commission 2018), participants were asked to estimate how many migrants live in their country, as a share of the total population. On EU average, respondents overestimated this by a factor of 2.4 (see Figure 1 below). Respondents from Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain largely overestimated the migrant shares in their country, assessing the proportion of migrants as between 16% and 25% higher than what it actually is. Only Croatians correctly perceived the share of migrants in their country's population which, with 11%, is also the highest amongst the southern European countries, all others averaging between 7% and 8%. Citizens of the TandEM countries (50%) were also significantly more likely to perceive migration as a problem than the EU average (38%), particularly in Greece and Malta (63% each, see Figure 2 below).





When asked about the main challenges to integration, the Eurobarometer participants ranked limited access to education amongst the top three issues in their country. On the other hand, speaking the domestic language was seen as the number one success factor for integration (European Commission 2018). This finding is reflected throughout the research carried out for TandEM: interviewees and survey participants often pointed to the lack of opportunities for education, and particularly the lack of language training available to TCNs as one of the main barriers for integration in general, and for accessing higher education in particular.

### 2.2.2 EU-level Policies for Third Country National Integration

In 1999, the Council of the European Union concluded that “The European Union must ensure fair treatment of third country nationals who reside legally on the territory of its Member States. (...)” (Council of the European Union 1999) and agreed that a more detailed integration policy should aim at establishing rights and obligations for TCNs, similar to those of EU citizens, as long as they are legal residents.

Under the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the EU has only a supporting role in the area of integration. The Union’s integration policy nowadays includes “measures to provide incentives and support for the action of Member States with a view to promoting the integration of third-country nationals residing legally in their territories, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States.” (TFEU Art. 79.4). Hence, the Union’s competencies in the field of integration are limited to support of the development of Member States’ own integration policies and exchange of good practices.



Most recently, the European Commission set up an Action Plan on the Integration of TCNs (EC 2016), which establishes both the overarching framework of the supporting actions on integration as well as measures the European Commission itself is implementing. The European Commission considers that migration can be an opportunity both for TCNs and the countries that host them. Provided that conditions for swift integration are met, migrants can contribute to boosting host economies. Participation in, and completion of formal education, is seen as one of the key contributing factors to integration. Hence, education is one of the five policy priorities under the Plan, with measures for upskilling at all education levels and for language learning.

Beyond measures for enhancing the recognition of qualifications however, little attention is given to higher education as a sector contributing to integration. One of the few references is made in the 2011 Directive on TCNs as international protection beneficiaries, which states that “Member States shall allow adults granted international protection access to the general education system, further training or retraining, under the same conditions as third country nationals legally resident.” (Directive 2011/95/EU, Art. 27.2). This is in line with Article 26.2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In terms of recognition of qualifications, all but one EU member state (Greece) have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC, Council of Europe Treaty No.165), which provides a legal framework for the recognition of higher education qualifications and of periods of study. Signatories commit to establish agencies of the European Network of Information Centres in the European Region (ENICs) or National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARICs). The European Commission, in collaboration with the Council of Europe and UNESCO, supports the network of ENICs and NARICs, for instance by funding collaborative projects that enhance the level of implementation of the LRC. Despite ratification in most of the signatory countries, the implementation of some of the LRC articles remains patchy (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2019). This includes Art. VII, which deals with the establishment of national level frameworks and procedures to evaluate the qualifications of persons with a refugee, or refugee-like background, who cannot provide (full) documentation of their prior learning (LRC, Council of Europe Treaty No.165, Art VII).

In the areas of both integration and education, the EU has only supporting competences, with the exception of issuing directives in the area of the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and qualifications (TFEU Art. 53). As part of its supporting role for education policies, the European Commission is a full member of the Bologna Process, an intergovernmental cooperation of 48 countries, including all EU member states, to establish the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Member countries of the EHEA, represented by the ministries in charge of higher education, strive to implement a common set of commitments and have adopted a number of reforms on higher education over the past 20 years. In the most recent EHEA Communiqué (Paris, 2018), the ministers recognised migration-related issues amongst Europe’s most important societal challenges and stated that “(...) higher education can and must play a decisive role in providing solutions” (EHEA 2018, p. 4). They committed to improving the conditions



of access for under-represented groups and to developing policies that support higher education institutions in fulfilling their social responsibility, so that “(...) the student body entering and graduating from European higher education institutions [reflects] the diversity of Europe’s populations.” (EHEA 2018, p. 4).

TCNs with international protection or refugee status are part of said diverse populations. They also fall under the classification of the groups under-represented in higher education<sup>12</sup>, for which according to commitments of the Paris Communiqué new policy approaches are to be developed to enhance access and completion. In its supporting role, the EC has thus funded a large number of projects for the exchange of good practices on refugee integration through participation in higher education – often directly targeting higher education institutions instead of the policy level. For instance, in 2016-2018, 219 projects with the keyword ‘refugee integration’ were funded by the Erasmus+ programme<sup>13</sup>, 81 of which were implemented in the higher education sector.

## 2.3 Integration through Higher Education: Key Findings from the TandEM Countries

This section discusses the policies and practices of integration and higher education for TCNs, including refugees, in a comparative perspective across the countries covered by TandEM. For country specific details and references to legislation, policy and practice, please refer to the reports in Chapter 4. Concrete access barriers and challenges to higher education integration are highlighted both for individual countries and the group of TandEM countries as a whole.

Each of the following sections looks at the theme of integration through higher education from the angle of a different policy area or actor involved, namely the national structures and policy levels regarding integration (2.3.1) and higher education (2.3.2), the local higher education institutions (2.3.3) and the TCN and refugee students in the TandEM countries themselves (2.3.4). Main findings stemming from all areas are summarised in Section 2.4.

In all TandEM countries, general education is regarded as a priority means to integration, but higher education is not. Links between integration and higher education policy only exist in about half of the cases and their scope varies across countries (2.3.1). Conditions set by national level policies for TCN participation in higher education are diverse (2.3.2), yet challenges faced by TCN students are fairly similar (2.3.4). Good practices to overcome these may be found at higher education institutions which - even in the absence of policy support - are found to be active in welcoming and supporting TCNs from any background, whether they are international exchange students or refugees (2.3.3).

### 2.3.1 Links between Integration Policy and Higher Education in Southern Europe

Across the TandEM countries<sup>14</sup>, the integration policy portfolio falls within the responsibility of different central government entities: the Ministry of Interior in both Cyprus and Italy, the Government Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities in Croatia, the Ministry for Migration Policy in Greece, the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality in Malta, the

<sup>12</sup> Both in the EHEA context as well as in the EU’s education funding programmes (e.g. Erasmus+)

<sup>13</sup> Erasmus+ projects results platform. Refugee integration projects under Erasmus+, KA2 Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices. Ongoing and completed projects. <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/> Accessed in March 2019.

<sup>14</sup> For country specific details and references to legislation, policy and practice, please refer to the reports in Chapter 4.



Ministry of Employment and Social Security in Spain and regional authorities such as the Department of Work, Social Affairs and Families in Catalonia.<sup>15</sup>

A national level action plan or a strategy on integration exists in each of the countries, with the exception of Cyprus, which previously had a National Action Plan, but nowadays carries out integration measures via a European Commission supported<sup>16</sup> national programme for integration. While strategic documents differ in level of detail and priorities, all of them focus largely on the integration of TCNs with refugee or other international protection status and allocate a role to education and training for the integration of migrants. For example, the Greek National Strategy includes a specific policy axis “*Integration through education*”<sup>17</sup> and the Catalan Citizen and Migration Plan places focus on an overarching “*education for all*” approach to enhance social mobility of TCNs. However, under the heading of education, the main emphasis of the strategies lies mostly in language training as a key step towards integration, as well as in the swift integration of minors into primary and secondary education. Only in half of the countries (Croatia, Greece, Italy) a link is established to higher education and its potential contribution to the integration of TCNs and refugees, and only for some of the measures they entail, concrete programmes and budgets are allocated.

The Croat strategy<sup>18</sup> includes measures that are directly related to higher education access and completion, such as access to student support and housing, allocating also specific budget lines to each of them. The Greek and Italian integration strategies<sup>19</sup> emphasise more broadly widening access to higher education for the target group. While the National Strategy in Spain does not refer explicitly to higher education, the Catalan Migration Plan includes support measures, such as information about the system as well as guidance and mentorship programmes.<sup>20</sup> In addition, each of these three plans aims to overcome the concrete access barrier of recognition of prior qualifications, often with reference to refugees who cannot provide full documentation of their prior learning<sup>21</sup>.

While the Cypriot National Programme for Integration and the previous Action Plan do not explicitly refer to higher education<sup>22</sup>, they have led to the establishment of four permanent Migrant Information Centres, which also provide basic consultation and guidance on how to access higher education. Likewise, even though the Maltese National Strategy<sup>23</sup> does not refer explicitly to education measures, it calls for strengthened collaboration and coordination between ministries relevant to integration, including the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality and the Ministry of Education.

<sup>5</sup> Due to the high level of decentralisation of integration policy in Spain, in addition to the central level, TandEM research included the autonomous region of Catalonia as a case study.

<sup>16</sup> Via the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF).

<sup>6</sup> Freely translated from Greek. Full National Strategy in Greek language available via [http://www.ypes.gr/UserFiles/f0ff9297-f516-40ff-a70e-eca84e2ec9b9/ethnikisratig\\_30042013.pdf](http://www.ypes.gr/UserFiles/f0ff9297-f516-40ff-a70e-eca84e2ec9b9/ethnikisratig_30042013.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/croatian-action-plan-for-the-integration-of-beneficiaries-of-international-protection-2017-2019>.

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.ypes.gr/UserFiles/f0ff9297-f516-40ff-a70e-eca84e2ec9b9/ethnikisratig\\_30042013.pdf](http://www.ypes.gr/UserFiles/f0ff9297-f516-40ff-a70e-eca84e2ec9b9/ethnikisratig_30042013.pdf) and [http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/piano\\_nazionale\\_integrazione\\_eng.pdf](http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/piano_nazionale_integrazione_eng.pdf).

<sup>20</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/?action=media.download&uui-d=53CAE156-EC04-F55F-50018C9179C2F7AA>

<sup>21</sup> In line with Art VII of the LRC – see also section 2.3.2

<sup>22</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/index.cfm?action=furl.go&go=/librarydoc/cyprus-nap-on-integration-of-migrants-2010-2012>.

<sup>23</sup> [https://meae.gov.mt/en/public\\_consultations/msdc/documents/2015%20-%20integration/msd\\_report%20booklet\\_jf\\_rev4.pdf](https://meae.gov.mt/en/public_consultations/msdc/documents/2015%20-%20integration/msd_report%20booklet_jf_rev4.pdf).





In addition, Maltese higher education institutions play a key role in the provision of integration and language courses, which are funded by the ministry responsible for integration.

Language courses for TCNs and refugees are offered across the TandEM countries by the national and regional authorities, and often also by NGOs. Currently, in none of the countries is there a national level programme offering training with a view to higher education access and the language skills required for it. However, an upcoming programme in Greece in collaboration with the IOM<sup>24</sup> prepares for the “State Certification of Language Proficiency”, which is a higher education admission requirement. Other concrete examples of initiatives implemented with the support of the ministries responsible for integration include scholarships and a university mentorship programme at Italian higher education institutions, which builds on a network of already existing, similar programmes offered by higher education institutions. In Catalonia, an access and support programme enables refugee students to complete the studies they had begun in their home countries.

All countries participating in TandEM strive to achieve a transectoral approach for integration – at least on paper. Most commonly, they consult different government bodies and entities in the drafting and implementation of new policy approaches. In some countries stakeholders are also consulted, such as NGOs, representatives from the regional and domestic levels and from the higher education sector. Greece even ran a public consultation on its new National Strategy. Malta relies on higher education institutions for the implementation of language and integration courses. The scholarship programme funded by the Italian Ministry of Interior is rolled out in collaboration with the Conference of Italian University Rectors.

Despite commitments to multi-stakeholder approaches, in some countries the implementation remains highly centralised, with a top-down approach, low degree of subsidiarity and little decision-making power delegated to decentralised bodies or stakeholders. This is especially the case in Greece which is traditionally a highly centralised policy system. Efforts to establish decentralised, multi-stakeholder Integration Councils at municipal level, including permanent TCN representatives, were not successful despite best intentions. In general, however, integration policy developments in the TandEM countries over time follow a clear trend to decentralise and to involve a growing number of relevant stakeholders - albeit so far only in a few cases including higher education representatives. This could however be the basis for a more dynamic and proactive participatory approach to integration, better tailored to the specific needs of the target groups in the specific context of the domestic communities.

Finally, it is difficult to quantitatively evaluate the impact of the national strategies and the measures offered. At the time of writing this report, very little concrete data on take-up and participation of TCNs in the initiatives was available. Most of the action plans remain rather vague on the aim of enabling participation and facilitating access for TCNs in higher education. Only in Croatia have specific budget lines been established for measures regarding access to higher education. In addition, the Croatian National Strategy is highly transparent in its implementation: data on its impact is to be published on a dedicated website<sup>25</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> HELIOS (Hellenic Integration Support) programme <https://greece.iom.int/en/helios-hellenic-integration-system>

<sup>25</sup> <http://integracijskapolitika.hr/>



### 2.3.2 Higher Education Policy for Third Country Nationals in Southern Europe – Key Findings for the TandEM Countries

The report will be available only later in 2019, but preliminary data suggests that there were very few applications for student support and accommodation from TCNs that would qualify for these higher education integration measures. The reason might be a lack of information about the academic opportunities available for TCNs, but also the time it may take to acquire the Croatian language skills required for university admissions.

Higher education legislation in three of the six TandEM<sup>26</sup> countries stipulates explicitly that TCNs should enjoy the same rights to access university as the domestic population: in Croatia and Italy this is the case for all students, no matter what their nationality might be, whereas in Spain it is limited to TCNs with a resident status.

In all TandEM countries, a Ministry of Education is in charge of higher education<sup>27</sup>. None of the ministries of education have their own integration portfolios, but three national (Croatia, Greece and Italy) and one regional (Catalonia) ministry have been consulted in the drafting of the integration plans, which also refer to higher education, and are to different degrees also involved in their implementation (see section 2.3.1 above). However, policy leadership rests with the government entities responsible for integration.

#### Admission Requirements for TCNs and Refugees

Access conditions stemming from national or institutional policy for both TCNs as international students and for refugee TCNs are fairly similar across the TandEM countries, often with additional requirements set by higher education institutions for each of their programmes.

For admission to the first cycle (BA or similar), proof of a university entrance qualification is required in all countries. This qualification must be comparable to the national qualification in the country in question. In Spain, it must be officially recognised by the Spanish embassy in the country of origin. In Croatia, recognition of the entrance qualification is based on whether the TCNs home country has external evaluation of secondary education as a means of quality assurance in place. If not, TCNs are required to take part in the “State Matura”, a centralised university entrance exam. In Greece, regardless of the entrance qualification provided, all TCNs must take part in the same exam as Greek nationals who wish to enter higher education. In addition, all future students must pass the exam for the Greek State Certification of Language Proficiency. Language requirements of B2<sup>28</sup>, or a comparable level, are also set in all other countries, either on the national level (e.g. Croatia, Italy) or by the institutions (e.g. Malta, Spain).

Admission requirements for TCNs and refugees wishing to access the second (MA or similar) or third cycle (PhD) of higher education are set in all TandEM countries by the higher education institutions themselves, with no additional national requirements to be met, except for the formal recognition of prior degrees in the case of Greece.

<sup>26</sup> For country specific details and references to legislation, policy and practice, please refer to the country reports in Chapter 4.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Science and Education (Croatia), Ministry of Education and Culture (Cyprus), Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (Greece), Ministry for Education and Employment (Malta), Ministry of Education, University and Research (Italy), Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (Spain).

<sup>28</sup> Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.



## Cost and funding support

Across the EHEA, funding approaches are highly diverse. Public higher education institutions, which tend to dominate the systems, rely to different extents on funding sources other than public funding, including tuition fees<sup>29</sup>. On the other hand, in some systems financial support is available to students, including direct support (grants, loans) and indirect support (tax breaks, family allowances) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018a). For the specific group of TCNs, especially those with refugee or similar status, other forms of direct support, such as scholarships and waivers, may be offered.

With the exception of Greece, where first cycle education in the public systems is free of charge to any student, in all other TandEM countries, TCNs are required to pay tuition fees. The amount of fees is highly varied: in Italy, fees for all students – including TCNs - depend on their income and socio-economic background. In all other systems, TCNs pay higher tuition fees than domestic and other EU students. In Spain this represents a minimum of 600 Euro per annum, depending on the region, about 1,300 Euro in Croatia to up to 7,000 Euro in Cyprus, and up to 11,000 Euro in Malta.

Student financial support is granted in some systems, such as in Italy, to any student on the basis of socio-economic background, regardless of their nationality. TCNs students who arrive as international students and are able to cover travel costs, higher tuition fees and living costs in a foreign country are not likely to be the target group of such student support. Fee waivers are available based on socio-economic background to all students in Greece and some institutions in Malta, in principle including TCNs. In Croatia, fee waivers and access to the national financial support are available only to TCNs with refugee or other international protection status.

National scholarship programmes for TCNs are somewhat rare and often focused on the inclusion of refugees, offered for example in Italy and some of the autonomous regions of Spain. In addition, some national programmes support refugee students with in kind measures, by offering, for instance, (reduced rate) accommodation (Croatia, Catalonia, Italy). Also, higher education institutions offer a range of scholarships and support for refugees, often exclusively from their core budgets (see section 2.3.3 below). Private entities, fundraisers and charities may also support scholarship programmes – e.g. in Malta, open to all students, including TCNs.

## Recognition of prior qualifications

Both TCN and refugee students who were interviewed and institutions that were surveyed for TandEM, confirmed that the recognition of their qualifications, and generally, of any prior learning is one of the most pressing challenges for TCNs when trying to access the labour market or further education in the host country. This has to some degree also been picked up at the policy level: in Croatia, Greece, Italy, and in the region of Catalonia where the integration action plans link to higher education, it is also specifically aimed to enhance recognition practices.

<sup>29</sup> For more detailed insights into the funding of higher education institutions, please refer to e.g. EUA's Public Funding Observatory via <https://eua.eu/101-projects/586-public-funding-observatory.html> or the DEFINE project (Designing Strategies for Efficient Funding of Higher Education in Europe) via <https://www.eua.eu/101-projects/552-define.html>



All TandEM countries – except Greece – have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) of the Council of Europe, which provides a legal framework for the recognition of degrees and periods of study (see also section 2.2). In each of the countries – including Greece – recognition information centres (ENICs or NARICs) have been established. In general, they offer information about the recognition and comparability with national degrees, albeit to different extents in each country. In all TandEM countries, except Spain where different agencies deal with it, TCNs can request the formal evaluation of their qualification at the ENICs and NARICs, as supporting documents to their application to higher education institutions.

Institutions, usually through their admissions offices, can request information and support from the agencies when evaluating the degrees of their applicants, a frequent practice confirmed by many of the interviewees. It is important to underline that institutions autonomously decide who to admit to their programmes: except for admissions to postgraduate degrees in Greece, formal recognition through a recognition agency is not required.

Cost and timeframe for the formal evaluation of a degree varies across countries, due to differences in the administrative structures, and also depending on each individual case. In cases where the ENIC NARIC has already evaluated the same or similar degrees from the same foreign institution, and the documents of the applicant are complete, requests may be processed in as little as two weeks and for 20 Euro, but this can go up to four months for more ‘difficult’ cases (e.g. Malta), or be further delayed due to missing documents and other bureaucratic issues. Feedback from some interviewees was that in reality recognition was much slower in some countries – one case reported it taking two years. Average fees range from 50 Euro (Croatia) to more than 100 Euro (Cyprus, Italy), but may be waived, e.g. for refugees in Croatia and in Malta.

The national level action plans and strategies for integration (see section 2.3.1) that include measures on enhanced recognition practices exclusively focus on qualifications of refugees, particularly those with incomplete documentation of their prior learning (Croatia, Greece, Italy, Catalonia). Recognition for this target group is subject of Art. VII<sup>30</sup> of the LRC, whose implementation across the signatory countries remains patchy. While Art. VII of the LRC is fully implemented in Italy and Malta, there are no legal requirements for recognition procedures for refugees in place in Croatia, Cyprus and Spain (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2019)). But in practice, in Croatia each request is considered on a case-by-case basis by the ENIC NARIC and in Spain some procedures are also in place.

Whilst none of the national strategies for integration explicitly refer to Art. VII, if they refer to recognition, they do imply enhancing procedures in line with its stipulations. In addition to the existing provision at national level and additional commitments made in the integration strategy, the Italian Ministry of Education and Research requests that Italian higher education

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<sup>30</sup> “Each Party shall take all feasible and reasonable steps within the framework of its education system and in conformity with its constitutional, legal, and regulatory provisions to develop procedures designed to assess fairly and expeditiously whether refugees, displaced persons and persons in a refugee-like situation fulfil the relevant requirements for access to higher education, to further higher education programmes or to employment activities, even in cases in which the qualifications obtained in one of the Parties cannot be proven through documentary evidence.” (LRC, Council of Europe Treaty No.165, Art. VII).



institutions themselves make “all necessary efforts to introduce internal procedures and mechanisms to evaluate refugee and subsidiary protection holder qualifications, even in cases where all or part of the relative documents certifying the qualifications are missing<sup>31</sup>”. This request is made in the ministry’s official procedures for international students and recognises the institutions’ autonomy in admissions to their own programmes.

In summary, recognition procedures are in place in all TandEM countries, but the approaches vary. Nevertheless, recognition is viewed as challenging because of the often high level of bureaucracy involved. Coupled with a lack of clear information on procedures and requirements, the process can be discouraging to some applicants. With the exception of Greece, universities are free to recognise degrees and periods of study, though universities themselves might not be sufficiently aware and informed about this. 61% of the TandEM survey respondents believed that formal recognition through the ENIC NARIC was a prerequisite for admission of TCN applicants at their institution (see section 2.3.3 below). In reality, this is the case only for Greek higher education institutions – and only for second cycle degrees, i.e. 11% of survey respondents.

### 2.3.3 Higher Education Practices across the TandEM Countries

Higher education institutions are known to be active in integration of both TCNs and refugees, even in the absence of national level support. Institutions are generally committed to support refugees in their country and consider TCNs as international students in their internationalisation policies.

In order to gather initial evidence on the situation in the TandEM countries<sup>32</sup>, an exploratory survey was carried out amongst higher education institutions, providing some examples of practice – but by no means being fully representative of the sector in the individual country and the entire region. A total of 37 respondents from 28 higher education institutions participated (see also section 1.2).

#### 2.3.3.1 Access to higher education

Both TCNs who are international students and those in a refugee-like situation, face specific barriers and challenges when entering higher education (Figure 4 in the next page).

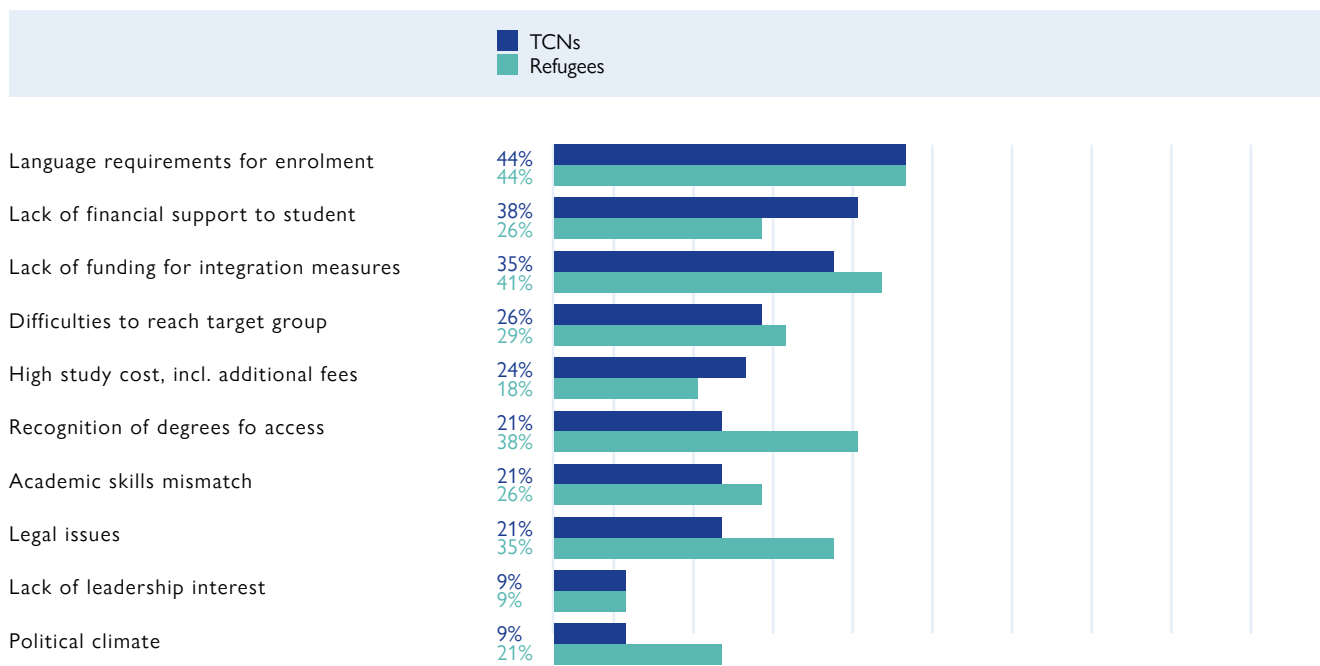
The language barrier is one of the most pressing issues for both integration into host societies and access to and for participation in higher education. Respondents to the higher education institution survey identified meeting the language requirements as the number one challenge to accessing higher education and to integration overall, concerning both TCNs and refugees. Challenges around it were also confirmed by virtually all TCN students interviewed for TandEM. A lack of language training opportunities was mentioned by all but one of the national level representatives interviewed.

<sup>31</sup> Freely translated from Procedures for entry, stay and enrolment of foreign / international students in higher education courses in Italy academic year 2019-2020. Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR). Available online (Italian language only): <http://www.studiare-in-italia.it/studentistranieri/>

<sup>32</sup> For country specific details and references to legislation, policy and practice, please refer to the reports in Chapter 4.



## Main challenges and access barriers (top three)



**Figure 4.**

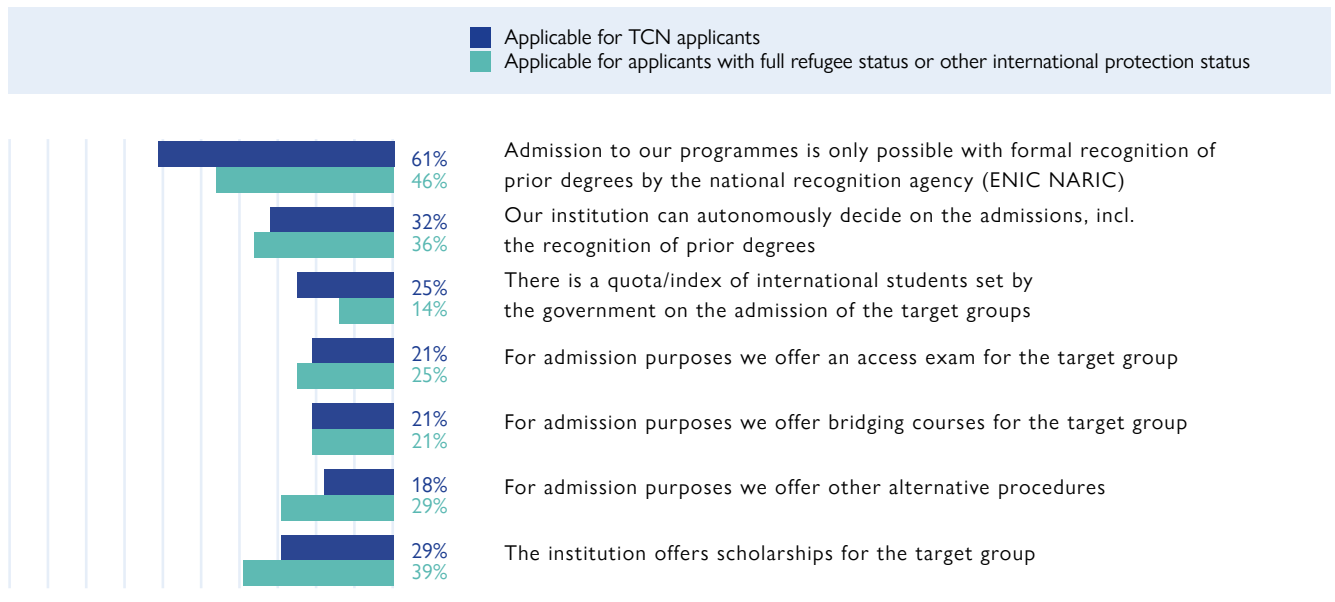
**At your institution, what are the main challenges for integration and the main access barriers for TCNs or refugees? Please select the top three challenges/barriers for each group. (N=37)**

Other than language skills, the main challenges and barriers differ between TCNs and refugees in the survey: for TCN students, lack of student financial support, lack of funding for student support services, and difficulties in recruitment (to reach the target group) are the access barriers most mentioned (38%, 35% and 26% respectively). For refugee students, respondents count the lack of financial student support (41%), degree recognition (38%) and legal issues (35%) amongst the top barriers. In addition, only 9% of respondents mention the general political climate as a problem for the participation of international students from third countries, but 21% identify this as a barrier for refugee students.

When asked in a follow-up question how these challenges could be overcome, respondents frequently cite better language training, more funding for the TCN and refugee students and more funding and staff time to those that support their integration at the institution. In addition, suggestions included “scholarships or [ECTS] credits for [student] volunteers who are involved in promoting integration and in the orientation of students with migratory background”, “more opportunity[ies] of integration with other students (the political climate in this period doesn't help us)”, and “legislative measures to facilitate the recognition of degrees and qualifications”. Respondents also mention several measures at institutional level that could help overcome these challenges, such as equitable access in programme admissions, by providing alternative enrolment procedures and exams, provision of financial support and specific services offered to the target groups.



## Admission of TCN and refugee students to study programmes



**Figure 5.** Which of the following applies regarding the admission of TCNs or refugee students to your institution's study programmes? (...) Please select all that apply. (N=28)

In terms of access to study programmes, recognition of prior degrees was found to be one of the main barriers for TCNs (21%) and especially for refugees (38%) (see Figure 4 above). Around half of respondents (61% for TCNs and 46% for refugees) stated that it is necessary for TCNs to receive formal recognition of their prior degrees by the national ENIC NARIC in order to be admitted to study programmes (Figure 5). In reality, recognition can be requested by any TCN or refugee at any of the ENIC NARICs, for purposes of access to the labour market and to further education, but ultimately it is for the higher education institution to recognise and to decide on who to admit to their programmes. Formal recognition is only a requirement in the case of admissions to Greek postgraduate programmes (see also section 2.3.2). Thus, although admission officers frequently collaborate with and consult the ENIC NARIC in making their decision, formal and bureaucratic aspects of access to higher education are not always clear to all stakeholders involved.

TCNs students are mentioned specifically in the admissions policy of 29% of institutions, refugees in only 14% of them (Figure 7). However, alternative procedures and support for admission are more likely to be in place for refugees than for TCNs overall.

While bridging courses are available at 21% of all participating institutions for both target groups, alternative admission procedures are offered to refugees at 29% of institutions, but only at 18% for international students. In Greece, all students, whether national or international, are required to undergo a central level exam for entering the first cycle. In Greece and Croatia a quota is set by the Ministry of Education for the overall intake of international students, including refugees.



### 2.3.3.2 Financial support

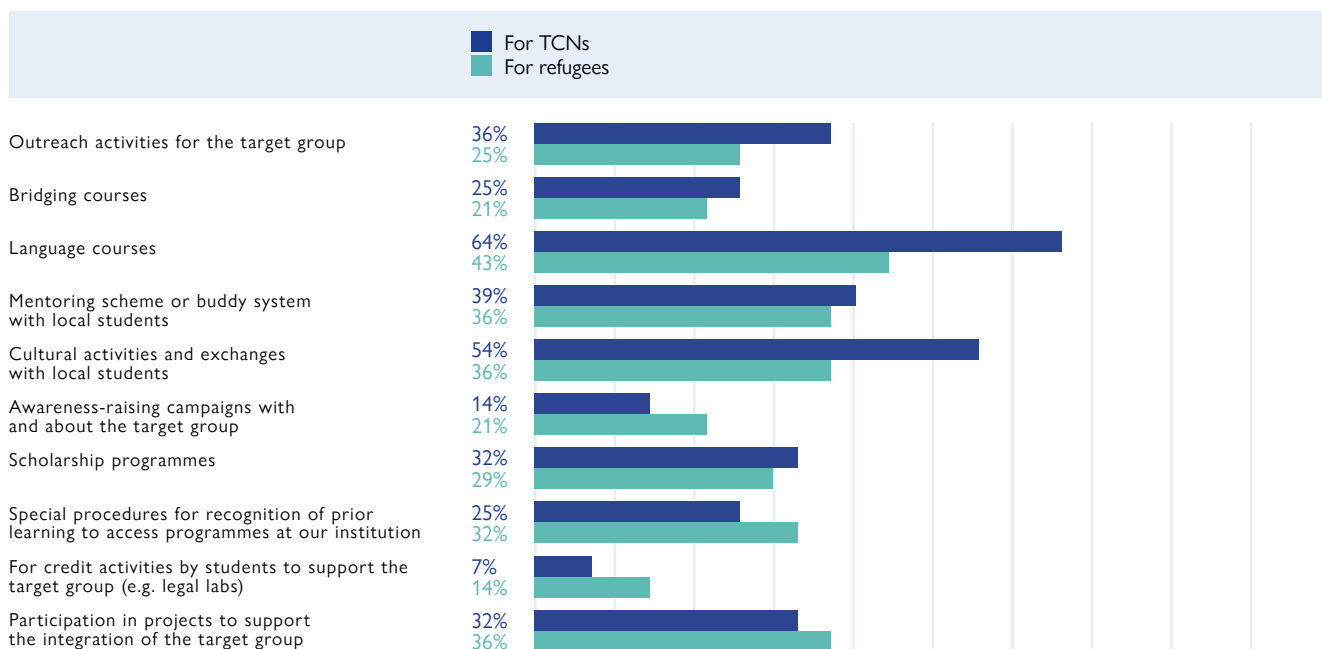
Most institutional scholarships for TCNs are available to those with a refugee background. The few scholarship schemes available for non-refugee TCNs are often limited to specific target groups, such as e.g. returning national diaspora (Croatian and Greek participants mentioned such examples).

For both groups, about a third of survey participants also mention fee-waivers, and that refugees are slightly more likely to have access to national level student support than the general TCN student body. This is due to refugees' socio-economic background, in some countries a criterium to have access to the student support system at national level body (see in detail section 2.3.2). Financial support is mostly available for undergraduate studies (57%), but less so for second and third cycle studies (39%). Only rarely are part-time studies on either level (18% for BA and 14% for MA), or preparatory and language course participation (18%) covered.

### 2.3.3.3 Services for access

Access to and success of students in higher education depends not only on providing a study place and funding, but also on support services. The survey showed that a number of services is more likely to be targeted to international students in general, than catering exclusively to the specific group of refugees (Figure 6).

### Services and activities specifically targeting TCNs or refugees



**Figure 6.** Are any of the following services or activities available at your institution specifically targeting TCNs and/or refugees? Please select all that apply. (N= 28)

As interviews and survey responses confirmed language barriers as a top challenge (see also Figure 4), it is not surprising that the primary service offered to TCNs and refugee students are language courses (64% and 43% respectively). However, in some cases, these courses are only offered to





enrolled TCN and refugee students, and thereby do not facilitate access per se. Additional bridging courses are offered at around a quarter of the institutions that aim to address the knowledge and skills gaps, perhaps due to different curricula in secondary education in TCN's home countries and a difference in classroom cultures.

Higher education institutions also play a role in broader integration measures for international and refugee students: this is reflected in the large number of cultural activities and exchanges with domestic students offered for TCNs at 54% and for refugees at 36% of participating institutions. Mentoring or buddy systems – similar to those offered for instance in the TandEM project in a selected number of institutions<sup>33</sup> - are available at more than a third of participating institutions. Such schemes are a valuable contribution to ensure study success, to provide the students with the information and support they need and help their general integration. Also, outreach activities such as information days are organised outside or on campus (available at 36% for TCNs, at 25% for refugees) to help both inform and recruit potential students.

Domestic students who are currently enrolled may be involved in both outreach and mentoring activities. As confirmed by the TandEM buddy scheme, they are doing so with enthusiasm and dedication, no matter what the political climate of their respective countries may be, and in some cases perhaps even because of a negative political climate: campaigns to raise awareness about the target group are run at 21% of participating institutions for refugees.

Student participation in support activities is largely voluntary. Among the institutions participating in the survey, only very few provided ECTS<sup>34</sup> credits towards the degree programme for the students' engagement<sup>35</sup>.

Services to TCNs and refugees are largely funded through the institution's core budget (75%) and through volunteering in kind and in time by dedicated staff and students (39%). A third of the respondents also stated that their institution participates in international projects that provide some funding. When asking in more detail about the projects, it was evident that the main share of them is focused on refugees, rather than on internationalisation and outreach to TCNs as international students. This confirms a trend at European level: in 2016-2018, 219 projects with the keyword 'refugee integration' have been funded by the Erasmus+ programme<sup>36</sup>, 81 of which were implemented in the higher education sector.

### 2.3.3.4 Links to central level strategy

While higher education institutions in Europe recruit and support international students as part of their strategic internationalisation, only very few of the services and activities for refugees are an outcome of central strategic

<sup>33</sup> For further information on the TandEM mentorship scheme and on participating institutions please visit: <https://iomintandem.com/integration/>

<sup>34</sup> European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

<sup>35</sup> In fact there are only few examples throughout the EHEA where ECTS credits are gained for such work, e.g. for the participation in legal labs, where currently enrolled law students provide legal advice free of charge. For examples please visit <https://refugeeswelcomemap.eua.be>

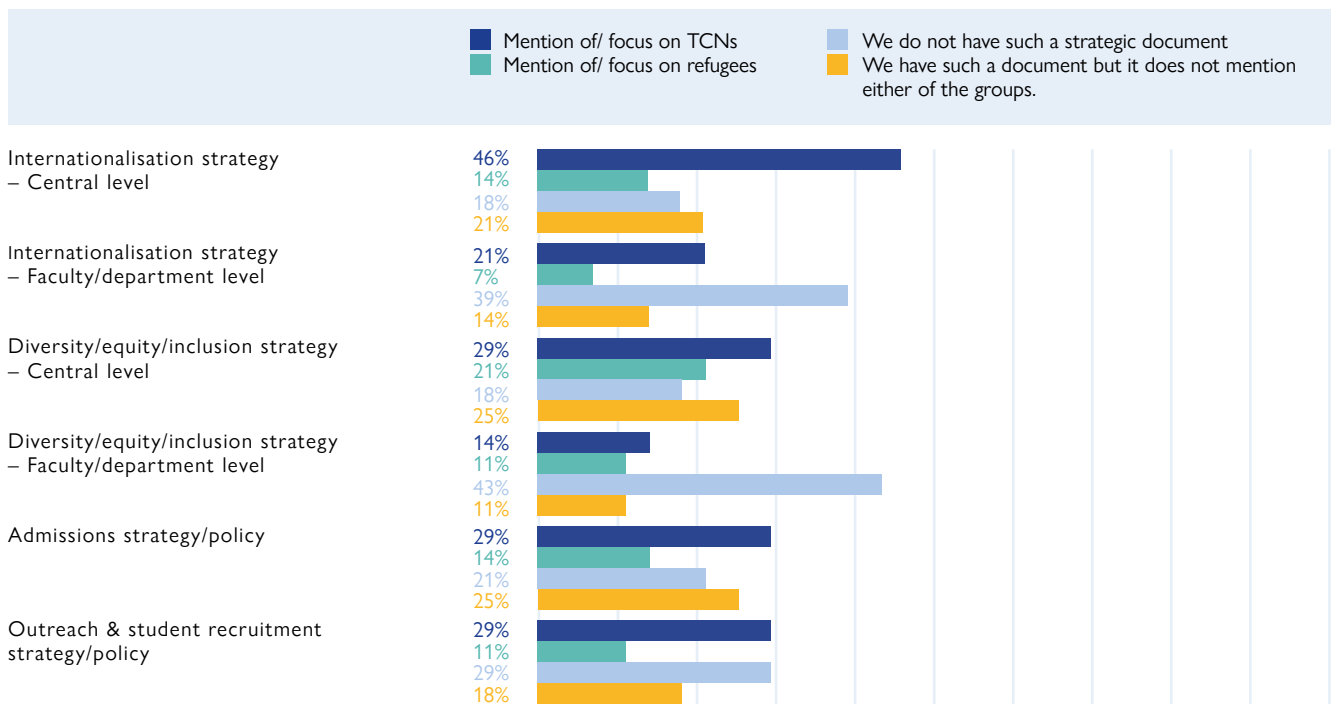
<sup>36</sup> Erasmus+ projects results platform. Refugee integration projects under Erasmus+, KA2 Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices. Ongoing and completed projects. <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/> Accessed in March 2019.



planning - at least at the beginning of their implementation - or are linked to the institutional mission.

Most of the initiatives have commenced ad hoc, through bottom-up approaches, by highly committed students and staff. However, over time, some institutions have developed more strategic approaches, and often linked their engagement for refugees to existing strategies for social inclusion, or to internationalisation overall. Integration of refugees in higher education is argued to be more successful if supported by the strategic level, both regarding long-term sustainability of initiatives, and in terms of the range of activities that can be covered - from outreach and admissions to cultural exchange, teaching practices and services for retention. In addition, even if focused on the needs of the target group of refugees, activities that are embedded in overarching, strategic approaches have the potential in the long run to also be beneficial to other groups of international students and disadvantaged learners. Vice versa, activities for refugees may be based on already existing approaches at the institution and can be re-defined for the specific target group (inHERE project, 2017).

### Central strategic documents with reference of TCNs or refugees



**Figure 7. Does your institution have one of the following strategies (e.g. strategic document, mission statement, management plan) with concrete reference to TCNs and/or refugees? Please select all that apply. N= 28**

Higher education institutions in Europe tend to have internationalisation strategies in place, either at central or faculty level (EUA 2015). This is confirmed by TandEM survey participants whereby 82% of their institutions have such a strategy at central level. International students from third countries are explicitly mentioned in internationalisation strategies in almost half of the institutions that have such strategies in place at central level, and 21% of the few institutions that have it at faculty level.

Refugees on the other hand were hardly ever mentioned in strategies at either level. They were also rarely considered in admissions, outreach and





Yet still, most interviewees were challenged by the high tuition fees for TCN students as well as the living costs, with little support available for them in form of scholarships or student aid. They also mentioned issues regarding navigating the education system, and the rules and regulations for higher education admissions. Bureaucracy with lengthy and unclear procedures was also cited in relation to visas and other legal status questions. Some interviewees mentioned difficulties in having their documents recognised formally (Malta, Spain). Overcoming the language barrier was described as a key challenge – mentioned more often in relation to national languages in view of general integration than to study success, also given that some students studied in English.

While almost all participants implied that they feel at home in their new country and talked about an overall warm welcome at their institution, some reported negative experiences with the local population, which they saw related also to the overall political climate.

Their recommendations to the policy level and to higher education institutions largely focused on the simplification of procedures, more student support and more in-depth language training. Several TCNs also mentioned that governments should acknowledge TCNs' potential contribution to society as an opportunity, instead of limiting them by not recognising their skills and degrees, or not giving them (full) access to the labour market.

All of the interviewees' recommendations to future students with similar backgrounds were messages concerning persistence and determination: to not give up, to keep on trying, to be patient with the procedures, not to be worried about asking too many questions, to do their own research and come prepared, in summary to "stay positive and work hard!" In addition, several students suggested to invest as much time as possible into language learning, ideally prior to arrival, and once in the country by networking with domestic students and making new friends.

The feedback from TCN students was largely in line with what was reported in interviews with ministry representatives and in the survey responses of institutions. The challenges of language learning and funding were especially featured across the board. The challenges faced by students are rarely addressed through national level programmes - with the exception of plans for enhancing recognition practices for TCNs and refugees, featured in three national integration strategies (see section 2.3.1). However, many higher education institutions in the TandEM countries offer services and activities to overcome issues faced by TCN and refugee students, and they do so often with funding from their own budgets and without specific additional government support (see section 2.3.3 for further details).

## 2.4 Main Challenges to Higher Education Access and Integration through Higher Education Participation

There are clear benefits of integrating third country nationals (TCNs) into higher education – for the individual, the institution as well as the host nation. Higher education can play a crucial role in the integration of migrants into the host country and thus contribute to social cohesion.

For TCN students, and in particular for refugees, participation in higher education can be empowering on social and economic levels. They contribute to the work force and the talent pool, and become active citizens, and contribute to higher education institutions' internationalisation and global



connectivity. In most countries, income is expected from tuition fees of TCN students, which is a clear obstacle for the participation of refugees, and generally, also for TCN students from less affluent backgrounds.

Europe has received large numbers of migrants in previous years, with just over half of them from third countries in 2016/17. This share was considerably higher in the countries covered by TandEM and a large number of TCNs arriving in the region applied for international protection. Perceptions on migration vary across the Union, and citizens tend to overestimate the numbers of migrants, and of refugees in particular. Citizens of the TandEM countries are significantly more likely to perceive immigration as a problem than the EU average. Such perception issues might be connected with more recent trends in arrivals of migrants and refugees through irregular means at the southern borders of Europe, which receive more media coverage.

Asylum seekers in TandEM countries are younger than the European average asylum applicants, more likely in the age cohort traditionally associated with university studies (18-34 years old). Hence based on age profiles in the region, there are a large number of potential higher education students, especially amongst the group of TCNs seeking or having received international protection.

Conditions set by national level policies and by institutions for TCNs' and refugees' access to – and success in - higher education are diverse, yet challenges faced by TCN and refugee students are fairly similar across the TandEM countries. These challenges can stem from the areas of integration and education, both in terms of policy as well as practice.

### **Lack of policy support**

While education is often viewed as a key area of integration policy, the focus is mostly on early education levels. Not often a concrete link is established between higher education participation and integration policy. Even if the role of the tertiary sector in contributing to societal integration is recognised, it is often left entirely to the higher education institutions to implement measures for TCN and refugee integration. There is a general lack of European and national level policy support, with too few concrete measures, a lack of funding for integration activities, and overall, a lack of visibility and recognition for the role of and the work done by the higher education sector.

In both the policy areas of integration and education, the EU has only a supporting role. The EC thus funds a large number of projects for the exchange of good practices on refugee integration in higher education – which is directed mostly at institutional, but very little national policy level change. In its recent Action Plan on the Integration of TCNs, education is one of the five policy priorities, but focuses largely on primary and secondary education and language learning measures. In terms of higher education policy, the EC, together with all other Bologna Process members recently made commitments to improve the conditions of access for under-represented groups, including refugees.

In all TandEM countries, national level action plans or strategies for integration exist, or have existed until recently, which mostly focus on TCNs with international protection status (refugees). All of these policies view education as a means to integration, yet concrete links between integration and higher education policy are only established in half of the countries (Croatia,



Greece, Italy). But in these cases also, commitments to facilitate access to higher education for TCNs and refugees, or to use higher education as a means to their integration often remain vague. Only in two out of the six countries (Croatia, Italy) concrete higher education measures are included in the top-level policy documents – and only in one country (Croatia) these are equipped with concrete targets and budget headings, as well as steps for impact evaluation.

### **Lack of transectoral and multi-stakeholder collaboration**

All countries participating in TandEM strive for a transectoral, multi-stakeholder approach for integration policy and its implementation – at least on paper. In reality, approaches largely remain top-down, which can be a challenge to realising high impact, dynamic and participatory measures for integration.

Policy is often centralised at the ministry responsible for integration. There are only few examples of approaches that successfully decentralise integration to e.g. municipal levels and that directly involve TCNs and refugees in the development and implementation of the measures that aim to integrate and facilitate access to higher education for them.

The ministries of education are at times involved to different degrees in the drafting and parts of the implementation of the national level integration plans. However, none of them have their own integration portfolio, or integration-related budgets available.

Non-governmental actors, such as charities and higher education institutions, have been active in TCN and refugee integration for many years - with or without government support. Therefore, expertise and established good practices already exist in all of the TandEM countries. However, only one of the countries (Italy) highlights in its national level integration policy that lessons could be learnt from practices at higher education institutions, and that subsequently funding would be made available for upscaling.

### **Bureaucracy and lack of information on education systems**

Some of the student interviewees reported challenges in navigating the new higher education system they are finding themselves in, either as refugee or TCN international students. The bureaucratic procedures of student visas, admissions or formal recognition procedures were described as particularly difficult.

In addition, the higher education institutions reported in the survey difficulties in reaching the target groups of TCN and refugee international students in order to attract them to their study programmes. This can also be an issue for national level programmes: one of the countries (Croatia) reported that no applications were received to a financial study support scheme for refugees.

Hence, beyond general websites on studying in the country there is a clear lack of accessible information tailored to the needs of TCN students, and particularly of refugees. Only in one country (Cyprus) basic consultation on study opportunities and enrolment is offered at the national level, as part of a larger information scheme for refugee integration. Mentorship programmes and buddy systems can contribute to overcoming this information gap,





however not many of the programmes focus on prospective students, but rather on those who are already enrolled.

### **Cost of study - and lack of funding to TCN and refugee students**

Almost all of the TCN and refugee students interviewed mentioned high tuition fees as one of the main challenges they had to face in accessing to and participating in higher education in their host countries. Some also expressed their frustration about having to pay significantly higher tuition fees than domestic and EU students, which is the case in four of the six countries covered by TandEM.

Little financial support is available to them in the form of scholarships or student aid – especially if they are non-refugee TCN students. Higher education institutions surveyed and many of the national level interviewees confirmed this as one of the top challenges. Based on their socio-economic background, all TCNs may qualify for student support or fee waivers in two of the six TandEM countries (Italy, Greece), and in one other country (Croatia) only if they are refugees. Scholarships for non-refugee TCNs are rare, and for refugee and other international protected students, state scholarship programmes and in-kind support (accommodation, etc.) are available in two countries (Croatia, Italy and some of the autonomous regions of Spain). Higher education institutions themselves offer financial support to refugee students, albeit very limited due to their own budgetary constraints.

Financial support for refugee students, if at all, is usually provided for undergraduate study. No financial support programme could be identified by the project research for participation in language or bridging programmes, which are however vital for the preparation of future students to their higher education participation.

### **Recognition of third country academic qualifications**

All but one (Greece) of the countries covered by TandEM have ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC), which provides a legal framework for the recognition of higher education and professional qualifications and periods of study. In all TandEM countries, higher education institutions can autonomously decide who to enrol. Also the evaluation and recognition of TCN and refugee applicants' previous higher education qualifications is up to them, with the exception of one country (Greece), where formal recognition is required for admissions to second cycle programmes. In their evaluation, institutions can consult the domestic recognition agency or information centre. These ENICs or NARICs - depending on the scope of their mandate – provide information about, evaluate and compare, or formally recognise foreign qualifications on request, and usually against a fee, at times waived for refugees.

Across the TandEM countries, there is evidence for a need for better information sharing and perhaps training on this theme. Even though not mandatory for higher education admissions in most cases, both TCNs and institutions participating in TandEM research regardless mentioned recognition as one of the main access barriers that is faced. For students, the issue particularly lies in the bureaucratic aspects and the at times long timeframe for their degrees to be recognised (both for admissions and for labour market purposes) and in generally navigating the procedure. Lack of information



was also evident at the institutions, with many of them reporting formal recognition by the ENIC NARIC to be mandatory, when in fact this is not the case in their country.

The level of implementation of the various stipulations of the LRC vary across countries. A concrete challenge mentioned by interviewees, including some of the ENIC NARIC representatives, was in relation to LRC Article VII on recognition for refugees, who are not able to present complete documentation of their prior learning. A legal basis for recognition procedures in line with Art. VII is in place in only two of the countries covered by TandEM (Italy, Malta). Regardless of this, all ENIC NARICs participating in the research aim to review applications for recognition on a case by case basis. In two countries (Italy, Greece) the agencies are involved in international projects to overcome this particular barrier for TCNs with a refugee background.

### **Admission requirements - and lack of support to fulfil them**

Admission requirements stemming from national policy for both TCNs and refugees are fairly similar across the TandEM countries. Higher education institutions can autonomously decide on enrolment, and would usually set their own, additional requirements. In two countries, however (Croatia, Greece), there are some limitations to this autonomy in form of specific quotas for international students. This can be problematic for refugee student applicants, who even though they are already in the country in question, have to compete with other international students from third countries. The latter might already be advantaged, as they do not face the typical access barriers of refugees (e.g. financial, documentation or status related).

For admission to the first cycle (BA or similar), proof of a university entrance qualification comparable to the national one is required in all TandEM countries. Different stipulations exist for its recognition, but only in two countries does it have to be carried out formally by a national level body other than the ENIC NARIC (Croatia, Spain). In addition to proof of secondary education, participation in the national university entrance exam is mandatory in one country (Greece), and optional to gain a competitive advantage in the admissions of another two countries (Cyprus, Spain). According to institutions and student interviewees, there is an urgent lack of bridging programmes to prepare for such entrance exams, as well as to generally meet other requirements of higher education access and success.

Language skills are a key prerequisite not only for societal inclusion but also for higher education admissions: across the TandEM countries a minimum level of B2 - an advanced level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages - is required, usually by law. While language courses are offered across the TandEM countries as part of national level integration policy measures, currently, no national level programme offers training with a view to higher education and the academic language skills that are required for succeeding in it. Only in one country are language courses for refugees offered up until the same level that is set as higher education admissions requirement (Greece). A number of institutions themselves offer language courses for TCNs and refugees. However, these are often provided to already enrolled, and not to potential future students, with the exception of a few institutions' access programmes for refugee students.





## Need for support services - and lack of funding and strategic support to provide them at higher education institutions

Enhancing the conditions for successful participation of TCN and refugee students in higher education, and their integration in domestic student life, entails far more than providing low cost or free of charge access to study programmes. To succeed, international and refugee students require institutional services tailored to their specific needs. In addition to the above-mentioned language courses, institutions may provide courses to improve study skills and to help students adjust to academic and classroom cultures that may differ from their home education systems.

Many of the institutions in the TandEM countries offer cultural activities and other platforms for exchanges with domestic students, which can play a critical role in their integration, especially for the group of TCNs with refugee or similar status. However, all of these services and programmes are usually small in scale, ad hoc and with little strategic or leadership support, which can be problematic from the point of capacity and long-term sustainability. They are mostly funded by the institution's core budget, at times reinforced with international project (co-) funding. Depending on the country, little to no funding is available at the national level.

In summary, a number of barriers to higher education access and participation persist for TCNs in the TandEM countries. Interestingly, the challenges faced by TCNs arriving as international students and TCNs with refugee background who are already in the country are similar, for example, the language barrier and the need for additional support services at institutions are fairly common for both target groups across the TandEM countries, and arguably would be similar across the entire European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Other challenges however are typical of the country in question, such as the comparatively high tuition fees for TCNs in some of the TandEM countries, no matter whether they have a refugee background or not, the lack of policy support, and especially challenges resulting from bureaucratic processes for access, admission and recognition.

All countries covered in the project's research see value in general education as a means for integrating TCNs, especially those with a refugee background. So far, however, only some countries have put in place policies and practices in order to valorise such contributions. With the trend of increased trans-sectoral and de-centralised integration policy visible in most of the TandEM countries, higher education institutions will hopefully play an even bigger role in TCN and refugee integration in the future.





### 3. TANDEM PROJECT RECOMMENDATIONS: ENHANCED INTEGRATION OF THIRD COUNTRY NATIONALS AND REFUGEES THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION PARTICIPATION IN SOUTHERN EUROPE

While integration can be important for any TCN or EU international students who may decide to stay in their host country, the following recommendations for the European, national and higher education institutional level focus largely on TCNs with a refugee background, who as a group have more urgent integration needs in the current context of the countries covered by TandEM (Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain).

For TCNs arriving in a host country, education participation is of crucial importance, and vital for the further societal and economic integration. This is the case for basic education, but also for other types and levels of education. Compared to some decades ago, higher education participation is much more common in Europe, also as an increasing number of jobs require a higher education qualification. In some European countries, every second school graduate accesses higher education, and large numbers of TCNs in Europe are in fact international students. Therefore, those TCNs who have been forced to leave their countries of origin as refugees should be principally entitled and enabled to access higher education. There are clear benefits to their participation in higher education: for the individual, the institution as well as the host nation.

Conditions for higher education participation of TCNs and refugees by national level policies and higher education institutions are diverse, yet the challenges they face are similar across the TandEM countries. Policies and actions at European, national and institutional levels can help to address these challenges.

#### **1. Recognise the potential of the higher education sector's contribution to integration**

Many higher education institutions are actively welcoming TCN and refugee students, scholars and researchers, supporting their integration on campus and in their respective societies. Many good practices exist throughout the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Higher education institutions in the six countries are autonomous and can for instance decide on who to

enrol in their programmes without major constraints from the national level. This might be one of the reasons why the provision of support, services, training and funding that refugees require to participate in higher education is mostly left to the institutions themselves. The contribution of the sector to integration of this target group, and the potential for further upscaling their work, should be better recognised.

- The *European Union* is already providing funding support for projects on refugee integration through participation in higher education, mostly targeting higher education institutions. Future project calls should emphasise policy level change. In order to increase impact, enhance synergies and avoid duplication, exchanges between projects should be facilitated e.g. through regular cluster events or exchanges, no matter which European funding source they may be supported by (Erasmus+, Horizon 2020, Marie Curie, AMIF fund, Madad Fund, etc.).
- *National level* policy makers in both the areas of education and integration should acknowledge the work already carried out by domestic higher education institutions, review current practices and consider their upscaling through national level support. Successful practices to meet the needs of national integration plans already exist at some higher education institutions, albeit often on a small scale, e.g. language training or cultural exchange and integration activities. This could be used as the basis for national level schemes.
- In order to ensure long-term sustainability and to enhance impact, *higher education institutions* should consider linking their current activities for refugees to overarching institutional strategies, for example, social inclusion, or internationalisation. It is the higher education institutions' social responsibility to ensure to that their student body reflects societal diversity. As refugees are part of the domestic society, it should therefore be ensured that they have access to higher education.

## 2. Increase policy support for participation in higher education as a means to integration

National and European integration policies acknowledge the importance of education for the integration of TCNs and refugees. Measures largely focus on early education levels and language learning, yet the potential impact of higher education participation in societal integration is either not considered or not met with concrete actions. From the point of equity and social integration, it has to be ensured that refugees who qualify have access to higher education. It has to be considered that TCNs and refugees with higher education qualifications are in a better position to contribute to host and home societies, as citizens and in the workforce, and thus also sustain better livelihoods.

Policy support for participation in higher education as a means to integration therefore needs to be increased.

- Supporting actions at the *European level*, such as the current Action Plan on the Integration of TCNs, already include education as a priority, but should emphasise not only the removal of access barriers to primary and secondary education, but also to higher education – beyond those linked to formal recognition procedures. They should also encourage Member States to follow suit, for instance through awareness raising and peer learning activities.



- Likewise, policy makers at the *national level* should enhance their action plans and strategies to include higher education - not only in principle, as it is currently the case in many TandEM countries, but also backed with concrete measures, budgets and targets. Where this is not the case yet, particular attention should be paid to include Ministries of Education, and representatives of higher education institutions, in the development and implementation of national integration strategies and plans.
- *Higher education institutions* should include participation of students with a refugee background as an explicit theme in their broader social inclusion and equity approaches, measures and strategies.

### 3. Provide targeted funding

The aforementioned lack of commitment from the policy level translates into lack of funding for higher education access programmes and student support. This is one of the main challenges faced by potential and current TCN refugee students, but also by the institutions that aim to enrol them in their programmes and provide them with additional services and support they require. Targeted integration funding for TCN and refugee participation in higher education is required.

- Existing *European* funding programmes for higher education participation should be made eligible for refugees and be complemented by a dedicated programme targeting them as well as the higher education institutions hosting them. Such programmes should offer scholarships and grants to refugee students and researchers and provide resources to the hosting institutions for the integration work they carry out. For instance, the next generation of the Erasmus+ programme (post-2020), potentially in synergy with other EU programmes and funds, should offer comprehensive scholarships and grants for eligible refugees already residing in the EU. Synergies with other initiatives funded by international donors, such as the UNHCR, should also be taken into consideration, not to duplicate the actions but to multiply their overall impact.
- *National level* measures that aim to support students in accessing and progressing through higher education should be opened up for TCNs with a refugee background and provide access based on their socio-economic background, not their residence status. Integration policy should include measures that allocate funding to access higher education programmes, through scholarships and in kind support. In addition, recognising the contribution of higher education institutions, additional funding should also be made available for institutional measures and services that support refugee students in higher education.
- Beyond contributions from the core budget of *higher education institutions*, funding for scholarships and support measures for refugee students can be raised through fundraising and in collaboration with civil society organisations, the private sector and charities. Institutions can also encourage in time and in kind support from their staff and students.



#### 4. Enhance multi-stakeholder, transectoral policy development and implementation

High impact, dynamic approaches to integration through higher education participation involve the migrants themselves, and all relevant sectors and actors, which are experienced in addressing their needs of the target groups in the local context. While in principle several of the countries covered by TandEM recognise the potential of transectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches in integration, policy making in reality remains top down and centralised. This should be reconsidered.

- The theme of integration through higher education participation of TCNs links to the portfolio of several of the *European Commission's* Directorates General (DGs), including those for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME), Education and Culture (DG EAC), Research and Innovation (DG RTD) and European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). All of them carry out activities and provide funding for projects, albeit with different thematic and geographical focus. Enhanced interagency collaboration across DGs and connection of their activities would be recommended.
- A *national level* approach to integration policy-making should entail sector or even public consultations, and transectoral, multi-stakeholder collaboration, for example, through working groups that are involved in the drafting of policy and the assessing of its impact. Principally, all relevant government entities – in different sectors and levels (including the municipalities), and civil society actors working with the target groups - such as national and international NGOs and education providers, as well as TCNs and refugees should be considered to participate.
- A participatory approach is also recommended for strategies, initiatives and activities at *higher education institutions*, involving TCNs and refugees in the framing, drafting, implementation and assessment of the measures offered at institutions for their inclusion and participation.

#### 5. Consider integration as a two-way process

Successful integration is reciprocal. TCN and refugee integration can benefit local communities economically, socially and culturally. Measures therefore should not only address the target group but also their hosts. In addition, framing integration as a two-way process can help overcome negative perceptions and attitudes towards migrants

- At the *European level*, the positive impact of integration of TCNs and refugees for the host communities should be featured in communications and campaigns, such as for instance the #EUinmyregion campaign.
- At the *national level*, policies and measures for integration should consider the potential benefits to citizens and government entities, especially at local or regional levels, where many of the integration measures are implemented. Such consideration of benefits should also be taken into account in the monitoring of integration policy and measures. In line with this, the government should communicate on the positive impact of integration policies for both the TCNs and their host communities.



- Ideally, all members of *higher education institutions* should be able to participate in initiatives and measures for the target group. Cultural exchanges between TCNs and refugees with domestic students and staff are mutually beneficial, as shown by the TandEM mentorship programme piloted in Italy and Spain. Furthermore, institutions should consider helping domestic students to apply their knowledge in a community-based learning approach, i.e. working with local refugees, such as in legal labs, clinics, consultations etc. This can tremendously enhance their learning experience and, if integrated in study programmes, earn them credits towards their degree.

## 6. Ensure equal treatment of refugee students with national and EU students in higher education policy and practice

In national legislation and regulation in most TandEM countries, refugees are treated as TCN students: they pay higher tuition fees than domestic students, have to compete with other TCN students for study places as they fall into the same quotas, are less likely to receive financial student support and have to fulfil additional admissions criteria to domestic and EU students. However, refugee students are in a different situation than the typical international students arriving from third countries for an international study experience. They are usually already in the country, they face a number of specific access barriers (e.g. financial problems, documentation or status related issues, possibly also a discontinued educational career) and arguably, their integration needs are more urgent. In some TandEM countries a limited number of national measures and programmes exist to facilitate refugees' access to higher education, such as fee waivers and eligibility for financial support due to their status. However, it should be considered to generally treat them equally to domestic or EU students in terms of admissions, fees and support.

- In the *European Higher Education Area (EHEA)* more explicit emphasis should be placed on the inclusion of refugees as part of the diverse student body, for instance under recommendations for national strategies for the social dimension of higher education<sup>37</sup>.
- In *national level* higher education policy, refugees should be acknowledged as a specific sub-group of TCNs, who are in a challenging situation with urgent integration needs, and therefore should not have to compete under quotas for TCN students. Policies that restrict them from participating in higher education based on their nationality should be revised.
- *Higher education institutions* may give priority to refugee students, in their recruitment strategies and as part of their equity and diversity measures.

## 7. Address the information gap and streamline procedures

Navigating a foreign higher education system (structures, application processes, rules and regulations, scholarships and support programmes) can be a challenge for any international student. Potential students with a refugee background face additional challenges and constraints, based on the implications of their international protection status in terms of e.g. admissions requirements, access to financial support etc. They may have to undergo additional procedures to apply, for instance with regard to the recognition

<sup>37</sup> Currently under renewed discussion in one of the EHEA Advisory Groups (AG1 on the Social Dimension).



of their prior degrees. Targeted and accessible step-by-step information should be formulated and made available through a multitude of channels.

- *European* measures and projects for TCN and refugee integration often invest in infrastructure, support and consultation for newly arrived refugees, e.g. at reception centres or dedicated information points. Information materials and training for the staff working with the target group should include at least basic information on higher education access and guidance on where to obtain more detailed information.
- Web- and paper-based information materials tailored to the target group and its needs in accessing higher education should be developed at *national level* and ideally be provided in several languages. It should include direct contact points at all relevant institutions and agencies. Collaboration with and training for the staff at reception centres, NGOs, government agencies and institutions who are typically the first contact points for refugees, is recommended.
- *Higher education institutions* could further enhance their outreach efforts, by for example providing targeted information about their programmes and the additional support available on the institution's website. Buddy or mentoring programmes as well as cultural activities, which currently are mostly offered to enrolled TCN students, should be opened up to prospective refugee students. Such peer-to-peer guidance can be beneficial both in terms of receiving information to access higher education, but also in terms of societal integration overall.

## 8. Include the perspective to higher education access in integration and language courses

Language is recognised as a key integration factor and all TandEM countries offer language courses through their national programmes for integration – at times (co-) funded by the AMIF fund of the EU - often coupled with courses for social integration. These programmes should be adaptable to the interests and needs of the target group and, if of interest, provide optional, additional training opportunities with a view to enhancing higher education access prospects for the participants.

- Existing *European* language assessment and learning support programmes for TCNs and refugees<sup>38</sup> should be upscaled to serve a larger number of participants. It should include courses that lead to the language level necessary for higher education access – in the TandEM countries usually B2<sup>39</sup> or comparable.
- Likewise, language courses offered as part of the integration programmes at national level should be available until B2 level and provide additional options for academic language training as well. *National level* policy makers should consider collaborating with higher education institutions in offering these courses, as institutions may have the facilities and professional staff available to provide such training but are lacking the funds to do so themselves.
- *Higher education institutions* should enhance and open up their offer of language and bridging courses enabling potential TCN and refugee students to fully participate in studies and prepare them for the domestic academic and classroom culture.

<sup>38</sup> Such as currently offered through the Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals and the Erasmus+ online linguistic support tool.

<sup>39</sup> Common European Framework of Reference





## 4. COUNTRY REPORTS

The following sections provide country briefings for the countries participating in TandEM: Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta and Spain.

The country briefings are based on information gathered in the background research and policy review, results from a survey amongst higher education institutions, interviews with representatives from ministries responsible for integration policy and for education policy, and interviews with TCN and refugee students<sup>40</sup>. Each country report includes an overview of key data and a summary of the country’s integration policy and its links to higher education, as well as its education policy and system for TCNs and refugees, with regard to admission requirements, cost and funding, recognition of prior degrees, and services offered for TCN integration. Each section concludes with a summary of the country’s barriers and challenges for TCN and refugee integration into higher education.

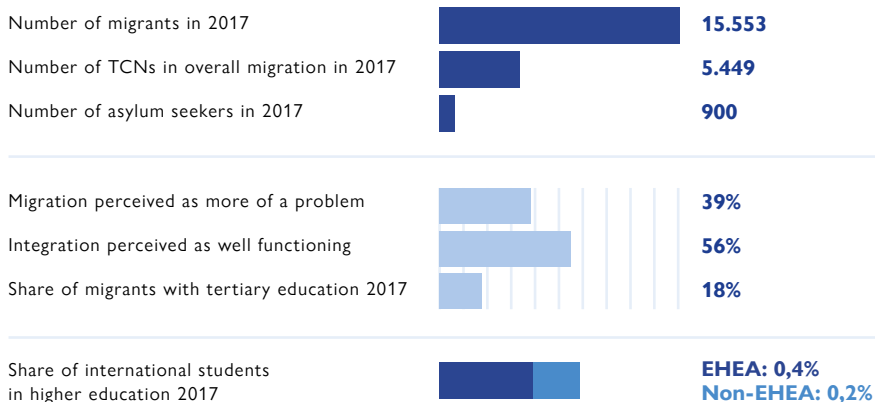
### 4.1 Croatia

#### TCN students’ voices

*“While there is a quota for diaspora students, there was no process in place in regard to [facilitating access to higher education for] diaspora students.”*

*“Intensive Croatian language classes [are needed to enhance access]!”*

#### Key figures:



**Source:** Eurostat (migr\_imm1ctz), (migr\_asyappctza), European Commission (2018), European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018b), OECD/EU (2018)

<sup>40</sup> For a list of institutions, organisations and ministries contributing to the research, please refer to Annex III.



## Integration policy and its links to higher education

Integration of TCNs in Croatia is trans-sectorial, pursued through initiatives and measures across several policy areas and by different government ministries and agencies. The Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities is the coordination body responsible for integration. Croatia has in place an “Action Plan for Integration of Persons who have been granted International Protection for the Period from 2017 to 2019<sup>41</sup>”. This plan includes a range of measures directly related to higher education access and completion, including, for instance:

- Measure 10.2. *To enable people who have been granted international protection, and who have enrolled in institutions of higher education in the RC, to apply for student accommodation and state scholarships for students with lower social and economic status, under the same conditions that apply to citizens of the RC.*
- Measure 10.3. *Adjust the IT system for enrolment in institutions of higher education for persons who have been granted international protection.*
- Measure 10.4. *Ensure recognition of educational qualifications and competences acquired previously by persons who (due to the crisis and unsafe situation in their country of origin) are not able to obtain their diplomas and other documents to confirm their previous level of education.*

Each of the measures lists a budget, indicators for impact, and the responsible government entity – the Ministry of Science Education in the case of all the above.<sup>42</sup>

The plan was developed and is coordinated in a multi-stakeholder approach. A permanent Committee with high-level representatives from 16 bodies, including ministries and state offices, is in overall charge of the plan. It has in addition a working group whose task includes drafting the plan. The WG brings together the same 16 bodies, plus a number of stakeholders and NGOs.

There are a number of non-governmental initiatives for TCN and refugee integration that use education as a means to integration, several of them with a focus on primary and secondary education levels only. Some of these are project-based and led by NGOs or charitable organisations, such as the Red Cross or the JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service). These provide mentoring of children and parents and staff training for school teachers, for instance. Overall, especially integration into primary education has been evaluated as swift and effective by the participants in TandEM interviews. Children are on average enrolled within 30 days of arrival and are provided with language and integration courses in parallel.

Language courses are also available for adult TCNs on international protection, as set out in detail in the Action Plan. However, the number of classes is limited (about 70 hours, roughly half of what is offered to children). There are no language or bridging courses offered from the national level with a view to higher education access. Interview participants, students and survey respondents all mentioned insufficient availability of language training courses as one of the main integration obstacles.

<sup>41</sup> Available in English language via: <https://pravamanjina.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/ACTION%20PLAN%20FOR%20INTEGRATION%202017-2019.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, the results of the impact assessment are to be published after this publication. They will be made available via the dedicated website of the Action Plan, in Croatian language (approx. in spring/summer 2019): <http://integracijskapolitika.hr/>



After 2019, a new action plan will come into force (2020-23). It is likely that this plan will put additional emphasis on the regions and the domestic level as contributors to integration in Croatia.

### Higher education policy for TCNs and refugees

Croatia's Act on Scientific Activity and Higher Education stipulates that any foreigner shall be enrolled under the same conditions as citizens of the Republic of Croatia. However, they may be required to cover a partial or full cost of the study programme (Art. 36.6). Only full-time international students with refugee or other international protection status are entitled to study support, as outlined in Measure 10.2 of the Action Plan.

#### Admission requirements

A pre-condition for access to most study programmes is a B2 level<sup>43</sup> of the Croatian language. In addition, the basis for the admission to first cycle higher education (Bachelor or similar) are secondary school grades and the success at the State Matura (or a recognised equivalent from countries that have external evaluation of secondary education in place). This exam is organised by the National Centre for External Assessment of Education, a government agency. Access to the second cycle (Master or similar) is possible through academic recognition of the previous qualifications.

There is a quota of TCN students, but each institution may decide whether the quota for international students shall be applied for all or only for selected study programmes. In 2018/2019 the quota across all institutions was 1,115 TCN students to 37,673 Croatian and EU students.

The Ministry of Science and Education cooperates with the Central State Office for the Croats Abroad on attracting students with Croatian diaspora background (descendants of Croatian emigration without Croatian citizenship). At the University of Zagreb there is a special quota for this category of international students.

#### Funding

TCN students in Croatia pay tuition fees (between 10,000 HRK for BA and 12,000 HRK for MA programmes). Those with a refugee background are exempt from fees in case of publicly funded programmes. As set out by the Action Plan for Integration (see above), they also are eligible for support from the national student support system and subsidised student accommodation. However, in 2017 and 2018 the Central Applications Office at the Agency for Science and Higher Education received no applications for financial study support in this category of students. In the same year, there were two applications for subsidised accommodation at the student dormitories and both were approved. Hence the budget set by the Action Plan was not used in full.

Scholarships for international students are available in the framework of government bilateral programmes concluded by the Ministry of Science and Education, through university bilateral agreements, as well as in the framework of the multilateral government programme CEEPUS (Central European Exchange Programme for University Studies), and Erasmus+.

<sup>43</sup> Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.



## Recognition

Recognition of a previous higher education degree for the purpose of accessing study programmes is carried out by the higher education institutions. In Croatia, they all have an Office for Academic Recognition of Foreign Higher Education Qualifications. Formal recognition of a secondary-school certificate is carried out by two government agencies (one is responsible for general secondary education and the other for secondary VET education). The Croatian ENIC NARIC office<sup>44</sup> is responsible for the formal recognition for the purpose of employment.

However, institutions can request support from the ENIC NARIC office in evaluating a degree. TCNs and refugees themselves may request credential evaluation from the agency. By law, the timeframe for an evaluation is set to a maximum of two months after all documents have been handed in. The fee is around 50 EUR but is waived if the TCN is of a lower socio-economic background or has international protection status.

Article VII of the LRC (on recognition for persons in a refugee like situation, also in the absence of documentation on previous education) is not yet formally implemented in Croatia. But the Ministry of Education is currently working on establishing policies and formal procedures in line with Art. VII of the LRC.

However, all applications for credential evaluation are considered by the ENIC NARIC office, no matter whether all documents are available or not. In particularly difficult cases, the Croatian agency collaborates with other offices in the ENIC NARIC network. The ENIC NARIC also participates in international project funding calls to collaborate with other stakeholders on the topic of recognition for TCNs and refugees.

## Higher education initiatives and support

In addition to the language courses offered via the national level, some higher education institutions in Croatia offer a range of services for the integration of TCNs into their programmes. Examples mentioned during the interviews and in the survey included outreach activities for the target group, mentoring schemes or buddy systems with domestic students, cultural activities and exchanges with domestic students. Such measures are funded by the institution's core budget. Some of the institutions also participate in projects to support the integration of the target group.

## Conclusion - Main Barriers and challenges

In Croatia, there is an impressive Action Plan in place to support the integration of TCNs with international protection. It is especially noteworthy that this plan was drafted and is implemented across different policy sectors and their relevant actors, that it sets concrete indicators to each of its measures and that it is implemented and followed up in a highly transparent fashion. Some challenges and barriers to TCN inclusion do however persist. The focus of most of the action is on refugees and other international protected. There are no measures on the national level, and few activities by institutions, for other TCNs (i.e. international students overall, or diaspora students in particular). With regard to both groups, interviewees and survey participants all pointed to overcoming the language barrier as a major hur-

<sup>44</sup> The Agency for Science and Education <https://www.azvo.hr/en/enic-naric-office/guidelines-for-starting-the-procedure-for-professional-recognition-of-foreign-heq>



dle, and that there are not sufficient in-depth courses available, and none at all with a view to accessing higher education. There are also no bridging courses available. While there is good collaboration between relevant actors in the field of recognition, the high level of bureaucracy was mentioned as a challenge.

All of the above points may be reasons why so few of the concrete measures offered via the Action Plan have been taken up so far, for instance no candidate has requested the study support offer for TCNs on international protection and only two applications came in for subsidised accommodation. Potential students might be in the country, but to take up the support available, they first have to learn the language. They may require bridging courses, and would also require information to learn about the opportunities that the Croatian higher education system might be able to offer them.



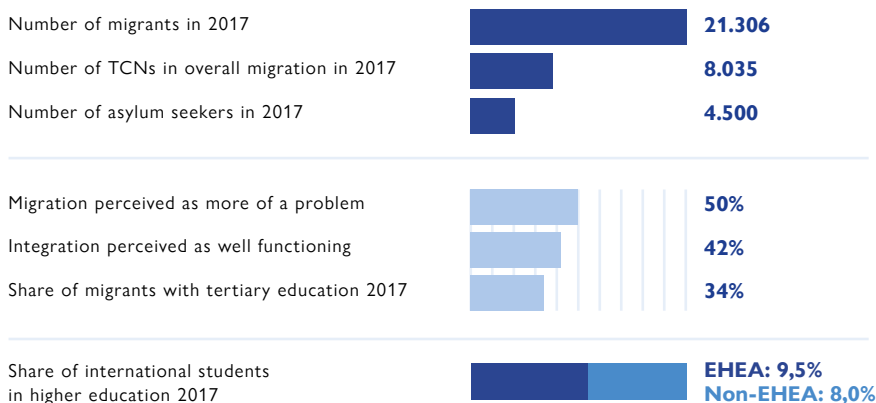
## 4.2 Cyprus

### TCN students' voices

*"I want to be able to give back to Cyprus for the acceptance, love and care she has shown to me. (...) I want to be an active citizen. (...)"*

*"An open system should be [created] where asylum seekers can freely access school - for now it is just [for] minors, it should be extended."*

#### Key figures:



**Source:** Eurostat (migr\_imm1ctz), (migr\_asyappctza), European Commission (2018), European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018b), OECD/EU (2018)

### Integration policy and its links to higher education

The governance of integration issues in Cyprus is led by the Ministry of Interior. An Experts Committee on Integration of TCNs was set up in 2007 by the Council of Ministers whose purpose is to develop a policy framework with interventions and measures aimed at integration of migrants, including those under international protection. The committee prepared the "National Action Plan for the Integration of Migrants who are legally residing in Cyprus 2010 – 2012".<sup>45</sup> The European Funds Unit of the Ministry of Interior assesses funding needs and subsequently designs and manages the implementation of related projects. An Advisory Committee for Migrant Integration set up in 2011 is in charge of coordinating and monitoring the integration policy in Cyprus. It is composed of representatives of several ministries, including the Ministry for Education and Culture, trade unions, industry representatives, the Union of Cyprus Municipalities and Communities, as well as representatives of NGOs.

The Action Plan 2010-12, revised in 2013 and prolonged for a further three years, has listed as "3rd Priority Pillar: Education and Language Learning". Beyond language training available to all ages, policies and activities established under this pillar largely focus on the integration of pupils with migrant background into the Cypriot education system at primary and secondary levels. The Plan does not foresee, and there is no concrete action with, a specific view to support or prepare access to higher education, with

<sup>45</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/index.cfm?action=furl.go&go=/librarydoc/cyprus-nap-on-integration-of-migrants-2010-2012>



the exception of the provision of basic consultation for refugees on study opportunities. For instance, four Migrant Information Centres (MICs) permanently operate across the country. They serve as one stop-shops for services to TCNs and applicants or beneficiaries for international protection, providing guidance on diverse matters, including access to education.<sup>46</sup> The University of Nicosia, a private institution, is coordinating the project for establishing the MICs.

Subsequent to the Action Plan of 2010-12, Cyprus' integration policy has been defined by the national programme for integration supported by AMIF<sup>47</sup>. The Ministry of Interior does not directly fund any integration measures but carries them out with co-funding from the AMIF Fund of the EC<sup>48</sup>. For instance, the fund supported the drafting of a new action plan on integration of migrants legally residing in Cyprus for the years 2020-2022, which is planned to be adopted by the Council of Ministers by the end of 2019. Furthermore, the Civil Registry and Migration Department are aiming to establish an integration network of all the stakeholders, comprising NGOs, domestic authorities and migrants' organisations, in order to promote cooperation, exchange of ideas, and possibly the creation of new policies.

### Higher education policy for TCNs and refugees

The main legislation which regulates public higher education in Cyprus is "The Institutions of Tertiary Education Laws 1996 to 2013"<sup>49</sup>. There is no direct reference in the main laws to TCNs. Government policy however broadly aims to establish the Republic of Cyprus as a hub for international students. Cypriot higher education is already highly internationalised. Across the TandEM countries, Cypriote higher education institutions have by far the highest share of international students, both from inside and outside the EHEA.

#### Admission requirements

The majority of undergraduate students are admitted to the universities on the basis of their results in the Pancyprian Examinations – the public higher education entrance exam organised centrally by the Ministry of Education and Culture. TCNs may also be admitted based on the results of similar exams in their own countries but must include a proof of sufficient modern Greek skills. Postgraduate students are admitted on the basis of their prior degrees.

Students are required to have a sufficient level of knowledge in either English or Greek language, or both, depending on the institution and on the language of the academic programme. However, as modern Greek is part of the entrance exam, for undergraduate students wishing to enter public higher education, Greek language skills are always a requirement.

#### Funding

Undergraduate education at public institutions is free of charge for EU and Cypriot

<sup>46</sup> They also run a website for TCNs that do not have easy access to the centres' locations: <https://mihub.eu/en/info/info-by-topic/education>

<sup>47</sup> [http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/SF/sf.nsf/All/4FB86846E909A919C2257EB4002B27AD/\\$file/AMIF%20CYPRUS%20National%20Programme.pdf](http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/SF/sf.nsf/All/4FB86846E909A919C2257EB4002B27AD/$file/AMIF%20CYPRUS%20National%20Programme.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> For a complete list (of all AMIF actions) please see here: [http://www.moi.gov.cy/MOI/eufunds2015.nsf/page13\\_en/page13\\_en?OpenDocument](http://www.moi.gov.cy/MOI/eufunds2015.nsf/page13_en/page13_en?OpenDocument)

<sup>49</sup> [http://www.highereducation.ac.cy/en/pdf/unified\\_law\\_iste\\_1996\\_2013.pdf](http://www.highereducation.ac.cy/en/pdf/unified_law_iste_1996_2013.pdf)



students. TCNs pay about 7,000 Euro per annum. Additionally, financial aid schemes are available at public institutions e.g. for socio-economically disadvantaged students, including legally resident TCNs who would qualify for social assistance. Fees at private institutions vary and are usually more expensive for TCNs (around 9,000 Euro) than for domestic or EU students. Some of the private institutions offer scholarships to refugees, funded at least partially from their own core budgets. For instance, the University of Nicosia, in partnership with UNHCR, offers a scholarship programme for refugees in Cyprus and distance learning opportunities for refugees abroad.

### **Recognition**

Recognition of previous qualifications for the purpose of admission to Cypriot higher education is under the autonomy of the higher education institutions' admission offices and procedures. They can however request support from the domestic NARIC – the Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications. It is possible for TCNs to apply for the recognition of equivalence, i.e. evaluating the reference to a qualification offered in Cypriot education. The cost of evaluation and certification are about 110 Euro.

### **Higher education initiatives and support**

Given the high level of internationalisation of the sector in Cyprus, it is hardly surprising that the private institutions in particular offer a range of outreach activities targeting future TCN students. This target group is also specifically mentioned in the internationalisation strategies, recruitment and admissions policies of the institutions. Refugees were however not mentioned in any strategic documents.

These documents mention cultural activities and exchanges with domestic students organised for the integration of TCNs. At least one of the private institutions offers these as well as language courses specifically targeting refugees. Furthermore, some of the private institutions offer medical services (e.g. a mobile clinic) and run projects related to e.g. psychological and pastoral care for TCNs with international protection.

### **Conclusion - Main barriers and challenges**

Cyprus implements a range of activities using education as a vehicle to integration. However, despite – or perhaps because of - the comparatively high level of internationalisation of the higher education sector, integration of TCNs and refugees via – and into - higher education is largely left to the institutions themselves.

Many degree programmes are offered in the English language, but Greek language skills are still a requirement for some programmes, especially those at public institutions and at undergraduate levels. While there are language courses available for TCNs funded by AMIF, these do not prepare students for university or the language skills needed, for example, to pass the modern Greek section of the central admissions exam for public undergraduate studies.

TCN students interviewed mentioned the high cost of study as the most explicit barrier. It is offset only by a few scholarships offered for refugees at some private institutions. Language courses are reported to be limited in time and do not suffice to enhance social integration, let alone to participate in Greek language taught study programmes.



Given the relatively small size of the country, and the relatively large number of new arrivals in the past years, interviewees also mentioned that setting up an efficient system will still take time. The next Integration Plan, and especially the future integration network that is to be established by the Civil Registry and Migration Department, aims to bring together all relevant stakeholders. Hopefully it will also include the Cypriot higher education institutions that are already active in the field of integration of TCNs with and without international protection status.











## 4.3 Greece

### TCN students' voices

*"I feel like being at home"*

*"More language lessons should be provided to [the] migrant population. Also, more work opportunities (...)"*

#### Key figures:

Number of migrants in 2017		112.247
Number of TCNs in overall migration in 2017		63.324
Number of asylum seekers in 2017		57.000
<hr/>		
Migration perceived as more of a problem		63%
Integration perceived as well functioning		49%
Share of migrants with tertiary education 2017		17%

**Source:** Eurostat (migr\_imm1ctz), (migr\_asyappctza), European Commission (2018), European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018b), OECD/EU (2018)

#### Integration policy and its links to higher education

The Greek integration portfolio lies with the Ministry for Migration Policy. Responsibility may be shared with the Ministry of Interior, for example in the drafting of national strategies on the theme. Recently, there have been efforts for additional decentralisation of Greek integration policy. As of 2006, the "Code of the Communities and Municipalities"<sup>50</sup> established some competencies at local levels. Greek Councils for Integration of Migrants<sup>51</sup> should be formed in all municipalities as of 2016, to act as consultative bodies at municipal levels. Composed of elected counsellors and representatives with migrant backgrounds, their task is to highlight integration issues in their community and to propose actions to overcome them. To date, only a handful of these councils have been created country-wide. Despite the multi-stakeholder approach, in terms of policy development and steering, Greece continues to be characterised by a comparatively high degree of centralisation overall (OECD 2018).

In 2013, the Ministry of Interior and the General Secretariat of Population and Social Cohesion published a National Strategy for the Integration of TCNs.<sup>52</sup> In July 2018, a new version was approved by the government, and was open for public consultation until February 2019.<sup>53</sup> The Strategy foresees the cooperation and involvement of all levels of government (central, regional, and local) and actors (organisations, NGOs, public/private sector), and highlights the key role played by the local governments in the integration process. "Integration through education" is one of the nine "Policy Axes" proposed by the strategy. In relation to higher education, this axis proposes measures for the recognition of prior foreign qualifications

<sup>50</sup> Law 3463/2006

<sup>51</sup> Established by Law 4430/2016

<sup>52</sup> Available in Greek:

[http://www.ypes.gr/UserFiles/f0ff9297-f516-40ff-a70e-eca84e2ec9b9/ethnikisratig\\_30042013.pdf](http://www.ypes.gr/UserFiles/f0ff9297-f516-40ff-a70e-eca84e2ec9b9/ethnikisratig_30042013.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Via <http://www.opengov.gr/immigration/?p=801>



and generally widening the access to higher education of migrants and refugees.

There are only few examples of other national level initiatives for integration, but their number is growing. So far, NGOs, charities, religious organisations or private providers, and at times also higher education institutions offer the main share of language courses, for instance. In the coming months, the HELIOS (Hellenic Integration Support) programme<sup>54</sup> is planned to be launched with the support of the European Commission. If approved, it will be implemented by the IOM and key stakeholders in form of a training programme comprising integration and language courses, civic and cultural orientation, consultation mechanisms, etc. A range of other programmes is under development, such as Greek and English language courses for asylum seekers and refugees over the age of 16, to prepare them for the State Certification of Language Proficiency, which is also a requirement for entering higher education.

### Higher education policy for TCNs and refugees

The Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs is coordinating education policy in Greece at central level, on the basis of Law 4009/2011<sup>55</sup>, which sets out the main regulations around mission and functioning of higher education institutions in Greece. Selection, rights and responsibilities of students, as well as fees are regulated by ministerial decision.

#### Admission requirements

In Greece, there is a quota for international students from third countries that is set by the Ministry of Education.

In order to access higher education at the undergraduate level, future students must provide proof of their Greek language skills and complete the State Certification of Language Proficiency.

In addition, they must sit the Greek University Entrance Exam, just as any other Greek student. There are few exceptions to this rule. For instance, first cycle (BA) programmes may be organised fully or in part in a foreign language exclusively for TCNs and only in cooperation with the International University of Greece (DIPAE)<sup>56</sup>. Second (MA) and third (PhD) cycle higher education programmes can be freely organised in other languages, and thus may also have less strict language and related admissions requirements. These programmes can be accessed by Greek and EU students, as well as TCNs.

#### Funding

The right to free education for all Greeks is enshrined in the Greek Constitution (Art 16). Public undergraduate education is also free for any international student who qualifies for it. Master and equivalent second cycle programmes can determine their own specific admissions criteria and tuition fees for TCNs (up to 7,500 Euro per annum). Up to 30% of second cycle students may be exempted from fees according to their socio-economic background. In addition, around 1% of undergraduate students qualify for a 200 Euro per month state scholarship (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018a). For specific

<sup>54</sup> Prior to HELIOS, a pilot was run in two municipalities, supported by internal funds: <https://greece.iom.int/en/helios-hellenic-integration-system>. Building on the experiences gathered in the pilot, the scope, caseload, activities and objectives of the upcoming HELIOS programme will be even broader.

<sup>55</sup> Law on the Structure, operation, quality assurance of studies and internationalization of higher education institutions.

[https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/document\\_navigation/120922/nomos-4009-2011](https://www.kodiko.gr/nomologia/document_navigation/120922/nomos-4009-2011)

<sup>56</sup> Law 4009/2011. Article 44. Organization of studies in foreign languages, and Law 4485/2017. *ibid.*



nationalities, scholarship programmes are offered by the Ministry of Education, based on bi-lateral agreements with TCN's countries of origin.

### **Recognition**

Greece is the only TandEM country that has not ratified the LRC.<sup>57</sup> However, a national information centre – the Hellenic NARIC – has been established by law.<sup>58</sup> Unlike most other systems where institutions may autonomously decide on recognition for admissions purposes, the formal recognition of degrees is a prerequisite for enrolment in Greek postgraduate programmes. The Hellenic NARIC is responsible for the recognition of degrees awarded by foreign HEIs, and more generally for providing information about educational systems and the accreditation of HEIs, domestically and abroad. The agency is centrally organised and the formal recognition procedures are reported to be highly bureaucratic and rather slow in pace.

Although Greece did not ratify the LRC, Greek authorities do work towards enhancing recognition for refugees, in line with Art. VII of the LRC on recognition without sufficient documentation of prior degrees. The International Relations Unit of the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, in collaboration with the Council of Europe and several Greek institutions, has recently participated in a pilot project “European Qualifications Passport for Refugees”<sup>59</sup>.

### **Higher education initiatives and support**

Some of the Greek higher education institutions have been offering Greek language courses open to all vulnerable social groups, including TCNs. Some institutions have been able to offer online language learning specifically for refugees, through the Erasmus+ programme's Online Linguistic Support Tool, which provided a number of free of charge licences from 2016 to 2019<sup>60</sup>. For the same target group, psychological support is offered at some institutions and others organise fundraising and food collections<sup>61</sup>. Cultural activities and exchanges with domestic students are also provided at some of the institutions, usually open to all TCNs. Such services and activities are funded largely through the institutions' core budgets, at times also with the addition of project based (co-) funding, often with international support.

### **Conclusion - Main barriers and challenges**

The newly established National Strategy for Integration in Greece includes education as a measure to integration and also stipulates enhanced access for TCNs and refugees into higher education, although somewhat vaguely. In some areas, it is ambitious but would need to implement concrete measures and funding in order to translate its policy goals into reality.

For example, the Strategy aims to enhance recognition procedures, the need for which was confirmed by TandEM participants and by the findings of an international project in which the Greek Ministry of Education was involved. But this would require that the level of bureaucracy and the number of documents are reduced drastically in order to enhance access for international students to Greek higher education on the postgraduate level. The timeframe for procedures needs to be

<sup>57</sup> Lisbon Recognition Convention of the Council of Europe

<sup>58</sup> Law 3328/2005

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/recognition-of-refugees-qualifications>

<sup>60</sup> Online Linguistic Support Tool <https://erasmusplusols.eu/en/ols-for-refugees/>

<sup>61</sup> For an overview of the Greek institutions' initiatives for refugees, please visit <http://refugeeswelcomemap.eua.be/map> and zoom into Greece.



accelerated and, even in the absence of ratification of the LRC, it is recommended that special procedures for the recognition of degrees of refugees in line with LRC Art. VII are established in Greece (GEAR project 2018; TandEM interviews).

The Strategy also strives to involve a range of relevant stakeholders in its implementation. However, according to interviewees and survey respondents this has turned out to be challenging in the past: bringing together all actors (domestic authorities, ministries, NGOs, institutions etc.) is difficult in a traditionally highly centralised system. A recent example is the Councils for Integration of Migrants, which were supposed to be established at all municipalities as of 2016. Unfortunately, so far only a handful of these councils have been created country-wide and remain rather inactive. This might also be due to the fact that they do not have decision-making authority coupled with an overall lack of funding. Hopefully, the new Strategy and the new Forum on Integration that the Ministry of Integration Policy plans to establish will contribute to overcome these challenges.

Beyond bureaucracy, the main challenge to access higher education is the Greek language, which is not only an admission criterium, but also required in order to pass the national University Entrance Exam. Survey participants and interviewees underlined the lack of language classes, and the fact that none of the existing ones prepares for higher education language use.

TCN students interviewed all reported that they felt very welcome at their new institutions and in their new communities. Overall however, public opinion on migrants is comparatively low: 63% of the population think of migration as a problem, rather than an opportunity. The new strategy includes awareness of raising activities on the basis that integration is a two-way process. TCNs students and the institutions that host them may play a role in this new approach.



## 4.4 Italy

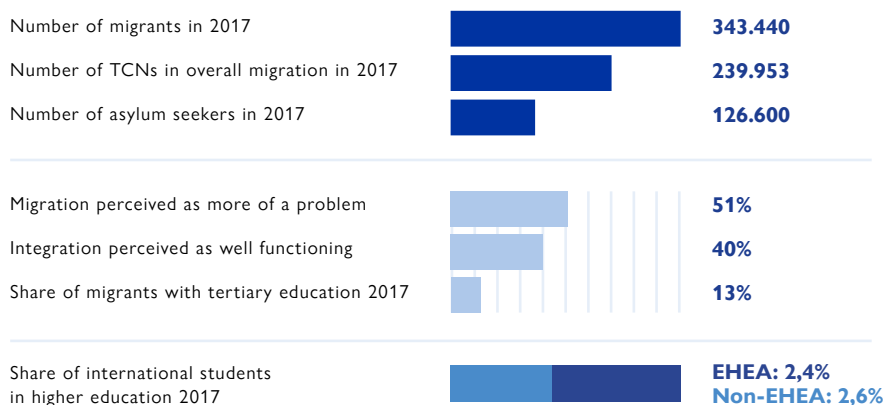
### TCN students' voices

*"It's nice because here university is a place of diversity, there are so many different cultures."*

*"Humanity is important, people should support and help each other, but here I see many racists that don't support people just because of the colour of their skin. [This is] kind of [a] problem in my life."*

*"[On what should change] Procedures! For international students it's all about paperwork, all the time back and forth to [different] offices (...)"*

#### Key figures:



**Source:** Eurostat (migr\_imm1ctz), (migr\_asyappctza), European Commission (2018), European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018b), OECD/EU (2018)

### Integration policy and its links to higher education

In Italy the institutional responsibilities for the integration of TCNs lie with the Ministry of Interior's Department of Civil Liberties and Immigration. This responsibility is shared with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, with regard to activities on the integration into the Italian labour market, training and skills development for TCNs, as well as refugees or international protection holders and asylum seekers.

In September 2017, after two years of inter-agency and multi-sectoral coordination, the first "National Plan on the Integration of Holders of International Protection"<sup>62</sup> was approved. It identifies the national priorities in order to realise effective integration and to remove the obstacles that are impeding its fulfilment. For the first time in Italy, the National Plan builds on the cooperation of all the key national, regional and local government and non-governmental stakeholders involved in integration.

The focus of the National Plan is on international protection holders (refugees and holders of subsidiary protection) but has identified 75,000 people (27,000 refugees and 47,000 holders of subsidiary protection) as potential beneficiaries which only corresponds to about 60% of the asylum seekers in 2017 alone. The Plan is, however, valid for a period of two years. Education is stated as one of the key

<sup>62</sup> [http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/piano\\_nazionale\\_integrazione\\_eng.pdf](http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/piano_nazionale_integrazione_eng.pdf)



routes to societal integration in the Plan, and several of its objectives are directly related to higher education: it calls broadly to enhance measures supporting the pursuit of higher and university studies, and to disseminate the positive initiatives implemented by various universities<sup>63</sup>. More concretely, it aims to simplify procedures for the recognition of prior qualifications, and to standardise alternative methods of evaluation in the event of unavailability of official documents. The Plan's section on education was developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR), which is also part of the national coordination mechanisms on integration. The National Plan is intended to be a framework to guide activities at regional and domestic levels; universities and MIUR are to develop and implement activities.

A priority of the Ministry of Interior is to bring together the many good practices and initiatives already present at the regional and municipal levels, including those at institutions, and to scale them up nationally. For instance, the Ministry funds the "Mentorship in Italian Universities" project, which builds on, and is part of, a national network of similar initiatives<sup>64</sup>. The project aims to support integration of TCNs at three institutions, engaging Italian students as mentors.

The National Integration Plan will expire in September 2019. By Legislative Decree<sup>65</sup> the Ministry of Interior has to prepare a national plan on integration every two years.

### Higher education policy for TCNs and refugees

According to the Italian Constitution, all students are equal in rights, independently of their nationality and status, thus implying that international students and refugees enjoy the same rights as Italian students. In addition, the legislative decree 25 July 1998, n. 286<sup>66</sup> stipulates further details on the access and participation of international students and refugees. MIUR also issues annual guidelines<sup>67</sup> for the access of international students.

#### Admission requirements

Decisions on admissions are based on academic merit. In addition, proof of a level of B2 in Italian language of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages is required to enter Italian higher education. There are no entry exams or quotas (except for some programmes of the regulated professions, e.g. medicine).

#### Funding

In Italy, all students pay tuition fees. The level of the fee is set according to their documented income. If a student, independently of their nationality and status is classified as low income, he or she has access to the national student support systems or a number of specific scholarships. The Ministry of Interior has signed two Memoranda of Understanding with CRUI, the Conference of Italian University Rectors, under which 100 scholarships are funded per annum for refugees. The scholarship package includes living cost support, accommodation, as well as tuition fees.

<sup>63</sup> Italy's higher education institutions, their students and staff are truly committed to supporting refugees and to welcoming them in their communities and campuses. For examples of their initiatives for TCNs with international protection, refer to <http://refugeeswelcomemap.eua.be/map>.

<sup>64</sup> Such as the mentorship scheme implemented by the TandEM project: <https://iomintandem.com/integration/>

<sup>65</sup> Legislative Decree of February 21st 2014, no. 18

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.refworld.org/docid/58c2aa5e4.html>

<sup>67</sup> Procedures for entry, stay and enrolment of foreign / international students in higher education courses in Italy academic year 2019-2020. Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR). Available online (Italian language only): <http://www.studiare-in-italia.it/studentistranieri/>



## Recognition

In Italy, higher education institutions are autonomous by law<sup>68</sup> and they are in charge of recognition procedures for admission purposes. The Italian NARIC (National Academic Recognition Information Centres) CIMEA<sup>69</sup>, provides credential information services, which Italian higher education institutions can use to support their own evaluation of applicants' foreign qualifications. CIMEA issues statements of comparability that institutions can use as supporting documents during their internal admission procedures. TCNs and refugees may also request these services independently.

The cost of a statement of comparability of a higher education qualification is 122 Euro. It can be processed in about 30 working days. There is also a fast track procedure of 15 working days. Statements of comparability are free of charge for persons with valid asylum and subsidiary protection permits.

In Italy, Article VII of the LRC is fully implemented by legislative decree<sup>70</sup>. The National Plan for Integration refers explicitly to procedures related to it without, however, explicitly mentioning the LRC.

In addition, MIUR has requested within its official procedures for international students that Italian higher education institutions make "all necessary efforts to introduce internal procedures and mechanisms to evaluate refugee and subsidiary protection holder qualifications, even in cases where all or part of the relative documents certifying the qualifications are missing<sup>71</sup>". Effectively this would translate into the establishment of procedures in line with Art. VII also at institutional level.

Linked to this comparatively advanced level of recognition practices for refugees, even in the absence of documents, CIMEA is partner to a large number of international projects, peer learning and training activities for credential evaluation for this target group<sup>72</sup>.

## Higher education initiatives and support

The MoU between MIUR and CRUI (see above) besides scholarships to refugees also covers for the support and coordination of other activities aimed at this target group, such as language training, welcome and introductory programmes, online programmes for refugees and asylum seekers, as well as training for staff working with them. All these are implemented directly by higher education institutions, as part of, or in parallel to services for other TCN students.

Amongst the institutions surveyed for this study, almost all have language courses in place for TCNs, and about two-thirds offer these specifically for refugees. Mentoring and buddy programmes – which have explicit support from both ministries responsible for integration and for education – are available at 73% of participating institutions, often open to all TCNs. In addition, about half of the institutions offer

<sup>68</sup> 148/2002

<sup>69</sup> Centro Informazioni Mobilità Equivalenze Accademiche

<sup>70</sup> Legislative Decree 251/2007 Art. 26, 3a: "For the recognition of professional qualifications, diplomas, certificates and other foreign qualifications by holders of refugee status or subsidiary protection status, the competent administrations must identify appropriate evaluation, validation and accreditation systems which allow qualification recognition as stipulated by Art. 49 of the Presidential Decree n. 394 of 31 August 1999, even in the absence of certification on the part of the State that in which the qualification was awarded, in cases where the interested party demonstrates the impossibility of obtaining such certification."

<sup>71</sup> Freely translated from Procedures for entry, stay and enrolment of foreign / international students in higher education courses in Italy academic year 2019-2020. Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR). Available online (Italian language only): <http://www.studiare-in-italia.it/studentistranieri/>

<sup>72</sup> e.g. European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, Refugees and Recognition, REACT. Further information: <http://www.cimea.it/en/recognition-of-qualifications-held-by-refugees.aspx>





other cultural activities and exchanges with domestic students, and one- third explicitly for refugees. Scholarships are available at about a third of institutions for TCNs overall, but less than a fifth indicated they have their own scholarship programme for refugees.

At almost all of the institutions at least part of the funding for these activities stems from their own core budgets, about half also have the support of staff and students who volunteer in kind and in time. Another third receives some national project funding, and a quarter of institutions also participate in internationally funded project activities on the integration of the target group.

### Conclusion - Main barriers and challenges

In Italy the integration of TCNs into and via higher education, especially those with refugee and other international protection status, is coordinated across a large number of relevant stakeholders. It is especially noteworthy that both the Ministry of Interior, as well as the Ministry of Education rely on the expertise of the higher education sector when implementing programmes for the target groups, and that they fund the upscaling of existing best practices, such as the mentorship schemes. Some of the interviewees commented that even further decentralisation of this approach of integration via higher education would be helpful given that the sector carries out the implementation de facto alone, and that instead of the main lead of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Education should have its own integration portfolio, staff and resources. Many good practices and advanced procedures exist, for example for the recognition for refugees. However, according to one interviewee, more needs to be done for their dissemination and upscaling, so as to avoid duplication and to optimise the use of resources.

While the higher education sector is committed to support and include TCNs, other sectors and the overall public sphere may not be as welcoming. At the national level, while the national integration plan for refugees represents an important first step in coordinating all actors involved in integration, the plan lacks resources and a clear implementation strategy. Furthermore, it only focuses on a small percentage of TCNs present in Italy; further policies for the integration of the larger migrant population legally residing in Italy are needed.

Most of the interviewees and TandEM survey respondents for this study commented on the issue of low public opinion. According to the Eurobarometer, only 6% of Italians consider migration as an opportunity (compared to a 20% EU average and an 11% average across the TandEM countries)<sup>73</sup>. In addition, Italians estimate that a quarter of the population nowadays come from a migrant background (the highest estimate in the TandEM countries), when in reality the figure is at 8% (amongst the lowest in the TandEM countries) (European Commission 2018). Only a few of the higher education institutions engage in campaigning to change public opinion, and while the current National Action Plan has a section on communication and raising awareness, more concrete measures could be included in the next version of the Plan.

<sup>73</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/Chart/getChart/themeKy/59/groupKy/279> (question QA2). However, it should be noted that, depending on how the question is asked, variations in opinions can be observed. Looking at general perception under Eurobarometer, for Italy, 26% of surveyed citizens were positive, and 4% very positive on non-EU migration.





## 4.5 Malta

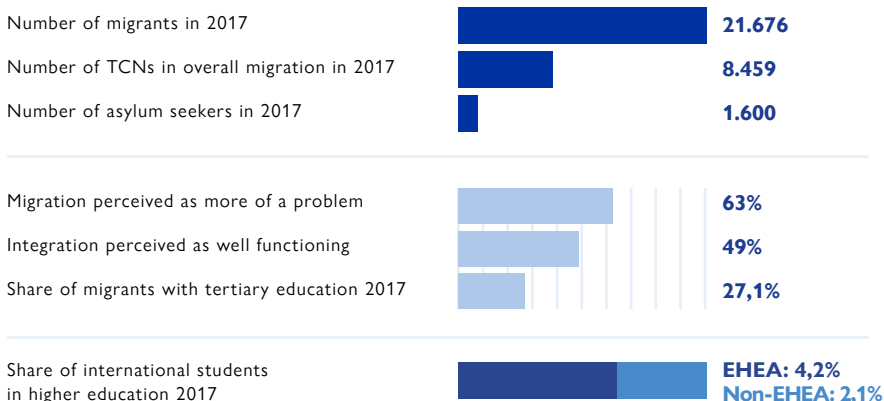
### TCN students' voices

"I had to attend a foundation year here that, to be honest with you, academically it was just a repetition of my final year [back home]; but socially it was very important, it helped me integrate better."

"It would be helpful if there was a specific department (...) to give us comprehensive and correct information, advise on the necessary steps to take, including for the visa, and maybe even tips about the country. (...) But then also removing, or at least reducing, the [fees] gap between domestic and E.U. citizens and TCN students."

"I believe the mindset should change. Rather than looking at us according to our legal status in the country, they should look into the education we already have, if we have some sort of diploma or other relevant qualifications. This is essential to guarantee equality in Malta."

#### Key figures:



**Source:** Eurostat (migr\_imm1ctz), (migr\_asyappctza), European Commission (2018), European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018b), OECD/EU (2018)

### Integration policy and its links to higher education

Migrants account for 3.5% of the total population of the country. Given Malta's small size and its very high population density, these numbers and their impact on education, health care and the labour market, have motivated the substantial attention that the government is currently giving to integration.

As of 2015, the framework document 'Toward a National Migrant Integration Strategy: 2015-2020'<sup>74</sup> aimed at promoting human rights, equal opportunities and obligations for all. Under this approach, diversity is considered a core value necessary to achieve greater social cohesion. Malta's first-ever national integration strategy 'Integration=Belonging: Migrant Integration Strategy and Action Plan, Vision 2020' was launched by the Ministry for European Affairs and Equality (MEAE), responsible for the integration portfolio, in 2017.<sup>75</sup> The national strategy does not specifically address higher education, but via for instance Measure 3: Strengthening of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Integration it fosters cooperation and coordination

<sup>74</sup> For more information, please visit: [http://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/Public\\_Consultations/MSDC/Documents/2015%20-%20Integration/MSD\\_Report%20booklet\\_JF\\_rev4.pdf](http://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSDC/Documents/2015%20-%20Integration/MSD_Report%20booklet_JF_rev4.pdf)

<sup>75</sup> <https://meae.gov.mt/en/Documents/migrant%20integration-EN.pdf>



between the relevant ministries (Ministry for Education and Employment included) for the implementation of integration policies.

MEAE is also working closely with the two main higher education providers in Malta, namely the University of Malta and Malta College of Arts Science and Technology (MCAST), which offer accredited integration courses funded by AMIF and coordinated by the MEAE<sup>76</sup> through the “I belong” programme. Completion of both stages of the course inter alia fulfil the integration requirements laid down in law for long-term residence applicants. The curriculum of the integration courses is composed of courses for Maltese and English language and cultural and societal orientation. However, the courses are not tailored to bridging academic skills gaps or supporting access to higher education in any other way. The Ministry of Integration also funds training courses for the teachers delivering the integration courses.

Both publicly-funded and privately-funded NGOs in Malta have been working on national initiatives for integration, some of which use education as a means to integration into society. NGOs also offer integration courses, which are however not accredited.

After 2020, a follow-up policy framework will be launched, which is planned to be more ambitious and give more concrete measures for integration in Malta.

### Higher education policy for TCNs and refugees

The main legislation which regulates education in Malta, including higher education, is the Education Act.<sup>77</sup> There is no direct reference in the main act to TCNs, but this can be found in subsidiary legislations.

#### Admission requirements

Admission requirements are set autonomously by the Maltese higher education institutions and thus differ across the higher education institutions and even between the study programme of choice. In general, students need a valid study visa to be admitted. For undergraduate studies, applicants need an international baccalaureate comparable with the Maltese Matriculation Certificate and results comparable to B2 level in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages from a Secure English Language Test, such as TOEFL, Cambridge, IELTS. For second cycle studies, test results comparable to C1 level are required. For some courses, English language entry exams are held.

#### Funding

The state ensures equitable access to education to all third country nationals. However, entitlement to free education in state institutions depends on the terms and conditions of their residence permit. There are different fees charged by the institutions, and depending on the institution and the study course, Maltese and EU students may not be charged. In general, all TCN students must pay a fee (between 4,500 and 11,000 Euro per annum). At one of the institutions, TCNs may be exempted from fees through the Exemptions Board mechanism hosted by the Ministry for Education and Employment.

A large number of scholarships in the form of full or partial fee waivers is available to TCN students in postgraduate degrees, often with thematic (e.g. climate change) or country of origin focus (e.g. Palestinian Territories). In addition, a number of scholarships, research grants and bursaries are also made available by private

<sup>76</sup> Further information is available via <https://integration.gov.mt/en/ibelong/Pages/IBelongProgramme.aspx>

<sup>77</sup> CAP327 of the Laws of Malta (1999) <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/downloadaddocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8801>



entities, NGOs, foundations and charities via the University of Malta's Research, Innovation and Development Trust (RIDT) which are open on an equal opportunity basis for domestic and international students.

### **Recognition**

Recognition of foreign qualifications for admissions into further studies is the prerogative of higher education institutions, which are autonomous in setting admission criteria. In practice, the admissions office may request support by the Maltese NARIC (MQRIC), which is part of the National Commission for Further and Higher Education [NCFHE].

TCNs can request recognition of their documents at the NARIC's online system. In line with the stipulations of the LRC, a request will be processed between a period of two weeks and maximum four months. Fees differ from 20 to 50 Euro based on whether the same qualification has already been processed in the past (for another applicant). The fee is waived for refugees for whom there is a procedure in place to confirm their status in collaboration with the JRS (Jesuit Refugee Service). Even though the LRC's Article VII (credential recognition for persons in a refugee like situation without complete documentation of their prior learning), there is no formal structure yet in place. The agency reviews these on a case-by-case basis.

### **Higher education initiatives and support**

Maltese higher education institutions are highly involved in the integration of refugees by offering accredited language and integration courses (see above). The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) has its own integration unit and at the University of Malta, the office of Pro-Rector runs several initiatives on the integration of refugees. At the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), third country nationals are supported through a network of student support services.

Cultural integration activities, such as diversity days, are on offer and are planned to be expanded, given that the number of international students - both TCN and EU - has been constantly increasing. Maltese institutions are already quite internationalised - in Southern Europe, only Cyprus has larger numbers of international students. Activities for international students – TCN and EU alike - also aim to benefit domestic students, making them aware of other cultures and the value of diversity. In addition, institutions offer outreach activities, one-on-one consultations, bridging courses or foundation years for some courses, and continuous professional development (CPD) on diversity and integration for their staff members. The University of Malta is a member of the European Migration Network.<sup>78</sup>

Funding for services and integration activities at Maltese institutions is highly diversified – from the MEAE's support to institutions' core budgets, donations and national and international project (co-) funding.

### **Conclusion - Main barriers and challenges**

While Malta's current National Strategy does not refer to (higher) education as a means to integration, effectively it includes the higher education institutions, as it fosters collaboration of all relevant stakeholders. Integration courses offered by the institutions and organised by the ministry responsible for the integration portfolio are accredited and lead participants towards meeting the requirements for long-term residence applications.

<sup>78</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/about-emn-0\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/about-emn-0_en)



However, specific barriers and challenges remain, especially as regards access to higher education. The Maltese system has comparatively high tuition fees for TCNs. Scholarships and fee waivers are often limited to second cycle studies (Master) and third cycle studies (PhD). Some of the study programmes are restricted to Maltese and European students only.

In addition, not many programmes prepare for admissions and address the academic skills mismatch, named as a challenge by several TandEM participants. Bureaucratic procedures were named as another top barrier, especially regarding the visa and work permits, but in some cases also due to recognition for admission purposes. The political and societal climate towards TCNs, especially refugees is, compared with the other TandEM countries, particularly negative. Migration is perceived as a problem by a majority, but perceptions change and so do policies. Integration is becoming more and more visible on the national agenda while in the past it was a taboo subject in Malta, according to one interviewee. According to another, there is still a need for more openness and mutual learning, so that a true inter-cultural society can be achieved so as to enrich the Maltese society as a whole.



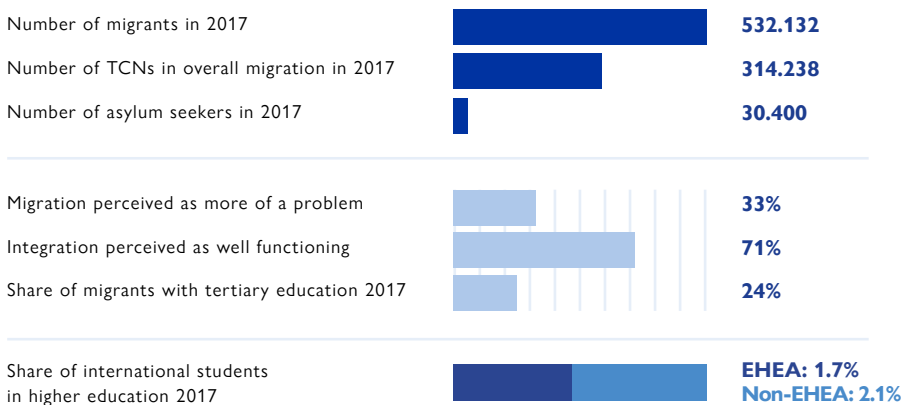
## 4.6 Spain

### TCN students' voices

"I love the diversity and the multicultural society in this city. I was also impressed by the diversity at the University."

"The biggest challenge is the [recognition] of my diploma. If a diploma is issued in countries like mine [Syrian Arab Republic] it takes approximately 2 years for the diploma to be validated and recognized in Spain."

#### Key figures:



**Source:** Eurostat (migr\_imm1ctz), (migr\_asyappctza), European Commission (2018), European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018b), OECD/EU (2018)

### Integration policy and its links to higher education

Out of the TandEM countries, the citizens of Spain have by far the most positive attitude to integration. Only a third see migration as more of a problem, compared to 50% on average in the TandEM countries. 71% said integration was functioning well in their country which is far more positive than the EU average (54%) or the average of Southern Europe (51%) (European Commission 2018).

The rather well perceived integration policy is in the portfolio of the Spanish Ministry of Employment and Social Security, with its Secretariat of State for Immigration and Emigration. Implementation of integration activities is however highly decentralised in Spain: the regions (autonomous communities) assume a great share of the responsibility, including areas such as education, social services and cultural integration activities. Furthermore, the municipalities develop their own integration programmes for the migrant population, offering for example Spanish lessons, legal assistance, labour integration assistance, etc. Civil society plays an additional important role in the integration of the migrant population: many NGOs work in close partnership with the domestic, regional and central governments implementing numerous integration projects.

Spain has a National Strategy for Citizenship and Integration<sup>79</sup> covering 2011 to 2014 officially, but effectively still remaining in force. There are also other national

<sup>79</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/?action=media.download&uid=53CAE156-EC04-F55F-50018C9179C2F7AA>



and regional plans that include actions aimed at the integration and social inclusion<sup>80</sup> of the migrant population. One of these is the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion (2013-2016), including action lines for TCNs and refugees. This Plan is implemented by the Ministry of Health, Equality and Social Policy and follows the Europe 2020 Strategy. It's Strategic Target 3 aims to “guarantee the provision of basic services to the whole population, with special focus on the most disadvantaged groups, particularly those of domestic entities, education, healthcare, housing and the information society”. However, neither the National Strategy nor the National Action Plan mention specifically higher education in their measures and action lines on integration.

Due to the high level of decentralisation, TandEM research on integration focused on the autonomous region of Catalonia as a case study. The Catalan Citizen and Migration Plan (2017-20)<sup>81</sup> is arranged around four pillars, one of which – inclusion – also covers a range of measures and action lines for the integration into higher education. It notes that “education and work are the main allies of social mobility”. With a clear focus on “education for all”, it includes action lines such as Line 2.2. Educational success of the children of immigrant, refugee and returnee families, e.g.:

**Programme 2.2.1.** *School welcome for immigrant families with the objective to ensure knowledge of the education system and the opportunities that it opens up for them, including higher education;*

**Programme 2.2.5.** *Social mentoring in post-compulsory secondary education at CEMC schools aiming to provide the best possible support to enable students from immigrant families in post-compulsory secondary education to successfully complete their studies and pursue them at university or with a vocational qualification. This programme line includes for instance university mentorship programmes.*

Each of the programme lines has a specific ministry or administrative unit assigned to it. In the case of higher education related actions are usually under the Catalan Secretariat for Equality, Migration and Citizenship (SINC), as well as the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (ENS) and the Secretariat for Universities and Research (SUR) at the Ministry of Economy and Knowledge. For instance, in 2018, SINC launched a programme; together with SUR and all public and private Catalan Universities, to support refugees who had started their studies in the country of origin but who could not finish them because of conflict, to do so at Catalan Universities. The programme covers the tuition (at either BA or MA level), health insurance, living expenses, and also a mentorship programme to facilitate inclusion into Catalan society.

In the future, a new framework for policy-making will be developed for Catalonia, with concrete focus on including an intercultural perspective into the actions that are carried out for the integration of TCNs. It is based on an agreement between civil society, political actors and the Catalan public administration.

## Higher education policy for TCNs and refugees

The Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport is responsible for education policy in Spain, based on the 2006 Act on Education<sup>82</sup>. The 1985 Act on the Right to

<sup>80</sup> Available in English: [https://www.mscbs.gob.es/destacados/docs/PNAIN\\_2013\\_2016\\_EN.pdf](https://www.mscbs.gob.es/destacados/docs/PNAIN_2013_2016_EN.pdf)

<sup>81</sup> Available in English [http://dixit.gencat.cat/web/.content/home/04recursos/02publicacions/02publicacions\\_de\\_bsf/05\\_immigracio/pla\\_ciudadania\\_migracions\\_2017\\_2020/citizenship\\_migration\\_plan\\_2017\\_2020.pdf](http://dixit.gencat.cat/web/.content/home/04recursos/02publicacions/02publicacions_de_bsf/05_immigracio/pla_ciudadania_migracions_2017_2020/citizenship_migration_plan_2017_2020.pdf)

<sup>82</sup> Ley organica de educacion: <http://todofp.es/profesores/biblioteca-todofp/normativa-de-educacion/leyes-organicas-de-educacion.html>



Education<sup>83</sup> states the right of all Spaniards, as well as all legally resident foreigners, to participate in higher education, without discrimination on account of economic circumstances, social background or place of residence (Art I, 1-3).

### **Admission requirements**

Until 2014, TCN applicants had to sit an entry exam conducted in Spanish, a policy that was abandoned by the government in order to increase the internationalisation of the sector and attract more international talent to study in Spain. Currently, no formal language requirements are set by national regulations. However, institutions may set such requirements which are usually at B2 level<sup>84</sup>. TCN admissions are thus solely based on valid high school leaving certificates which must be officially recognised by the Spanish embassy in the country of origin, as well as on merit. Regarding undergraduate studies, TCNs can however increase their chances to gain a study place in subjects that are in high demand by voluntarily sitting an entrance exam (Pruebas de Acceso a la Universidad).

### **Funding**

The level of tuition at public institutions is set by the autonomous regions and can vary between 600 and 1,200 Euro a year for undergraduate studies. For Master's degrees, tuition fees are paid per ECTS credit (ca. 20-40 Euro). Only domestic and EU students may qualify for financial aid in Spain, based on their income and the income of their parents. For the specific group of refugees some scholarship opportunities are available, funded either by the regions, or by the institutions themselves: 62% of the institutions surveyed by TandEM had financial support in place for refugees, but only 38% for TCNs overall.

### **Recognition**

For admissions to undergraduate education, it is necessary to follow the official recognition procedure for the high school leaving certificate (described above). For graduate education, the higher education institutions can autonomously decide who to enrol according to the admissions criteria they set and that are in line with their own recognition procedure.

TCN students may request formal recognition of prior degrees via the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport and its Deputy Directorate General of Degrees and Recognition, or the Government Delegation in Catalonia. In addition, the agency SARU (University Qualification Recognition Mentoring Service) provides personalised advice to users about the process of recognition and mentors them during the procedure<sup>85</sup>.

### **Higher education initiatives and support**

The most commonly offered services at Spanish higher education institutions are language courses, mentoring schemes or buddy systems, as well as cultural activities and exchanges with domestic students, of which about half of the institutions offer. Availability of the service offer is slightly more likely for refugee students than for TCNs overall. This is especially the case for special procedures for recognition of prior learning for admission purposes at the institution which are available for refugees at 45% of the institutions, but only at 26% for TCNs overall.

Funding for these activities comes largely from the institutions' core budgets as well as the voluntary in kind and in time support of staff and students at the majority of institutions. Some higher education institutions also participate in international projects for the target group. Funding from the national level is rather rare.

<sup>83</sup> Ley Orgánica Reguladora del Derecho a la Educación. *ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

<sup>85</sup> Further information: [http://treballiaferssocials.gencat.cat/web/.content/03ambits\\_tematicas/05immigracio\\_refugi/13saru/SARU\\_triptic.pdf](http://treballiaferssocials.gencat.cat/web/.content/03ambits_tematicas/05immigracio_refugi/13saru/SARU_triptic.pdf)



## Conclusion - Main barriers and challenges

Education is recognised as a key factor in the various integration strategies and plans in Spain, either at national or regional level. As in other TandEM countries, the focus is however largely on primary and secondary education, as well as language learning, and only in limited cases in direct relation to higher education.

Integration policy in Spain is highly decentralised, giving a lot of autonomy to the regions and municipalities in the drafting and implementation of initiatives. Whilst this certainly can lead to faster impact and measures that are better tailored to the needs of target groups and the local communities that host them, it could also imply a lack of national funding and steering support.

Lack of funding for integration measures as well as a general lack of financial support for students were also amongst the top issues named by higher education institutions in the survey. In addition, the formal recognition of prior degrees appears to be one of the most complicated amongst the TandEM countries. This is confirmed by 70% of institutions surveyed which identified recognition as the top challenge, especially for refugees trying to gain access to higher education in Spain.







# Annex

## Annex I List of Abbreviations

<b>AMIF</b>	Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund
<b>COREIS</b>	Italian Islamic Religious Community
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
<b>ENIC</b>	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region
<b>EUA</b>	European University Association
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>LRC</b>	Lisbon Recognition Convention
<b>NARIC</b>	National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union
<b>TandEM</b>	Towards Empowered Migrant Youth in Southern Europe
<b>TCN</b>	Third Country National
<b>TFEU</b>	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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**Annex IV**  
List of Institutions  
and Organisations  
Contributing to the  
Research

The following lists only those institutions and organisations that have given explicit consent to be published by name – either at the end of the survey questionnaire, or at the end of interviews.

- Croatia** Agency for Science and Education  
Department of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb  
Ministry of Science, Education and Sports  
Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities
- Cyprus** European University Cyprus  
Frederick University  
Ministry of Interior
- Greece** Ministry for Migration Policy  
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki  
Hellenic National Academic Recognition Information Centre  
Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs  
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
- Italy** CIMEA - Information Centre on Academic Mobility  
and Equivalence  
Free University of Bozen-Bolzano  
Ministry of Education, Universities and Research  
Ministry of Interior  
Sapienza University of Rome  
University of Catania  
University of Genoa  
University of Naples "L'Orientale"  
University of Pisa  
University of Roma Tre  
University of Trento  
University of Trieste
- Malta** Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology MCAST  
Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre - National  
Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE)  
Ministry for Education and Employment  
Ministry of European Affairs and Equality  
University of Malta
- Spain** Complutense University  
Secretary of Equality, Migration and Citizenship,  
Government of Catalonia  
Universidad Europea de Madrid  
University Camilo José Cela Foundation  
University of Alicante  
University of Barcelona  
University of Lleida  
University of Santiago de Compostela



## Annex V

### Interview Questions Grids

## Introduction

### About TandEM

TandEM (Towards Empowered Migrant Youth in Southern Europe) is a regional project, funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) of the European Union, implemented in Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Spain, Italy and Malta. The project has four main objectives: enhancing education, promoting understanding, encouraging communication and supporting integration.

The project is led by the IOM (International Organization for Migration). The EUA (European University Association) supports the education related dimension of the project.

### About the research

The aim is to identify access barriers to higher education for Third Country Nationals (TCNs) and refugees in the six target countries and to derive concrete recommendations on how to enhance their access to education, and thus potentially their integration into society overall.

Higher education institutions in target countries have already been surveyed (IT11, ES 8, GR 3, HR, CY and MT 2) and in addition the project is conducting interviews with ministries responsible for integration, ministries responsible for higher education and with national recognition agencies/ info centres (ENIC NARICS) All of these are relevant stakeholders regarding the question of integration of migrants into higher education. Migrant students have also been interviewed to share their success stories in the six countries.

### Definitions

Third country nationals (TCNs): any migrant with a nationality from outside the EU.

Refugees: unless specified otherwise, for editorial reasons the interview uses the term refugee to include a range of different statuses that TCNs are currently seeking or for which they have already received a legal protection status in one of the target countries. These may include persons with a full refugee status, with subsidiary protection or similar status, and all of those in a refugee-like situation.

### Data protection

EUA's research practices for the TandEM project is in line with GDPR regulations (see also here). We will not quote your statements directly by name or by the name of your organisation/ministry/institution. In case statements may be useful for the final report, we would ask for your specific written consent to be quoted directly.



## Ministries responsible for higher education

Structured questions	Unstructured questions – follow up
<p><b>1</b> Which legislation governs higher education in your country (please name it)? Does it refer to access and participation of TCNs as international students and/or to refugees in any way?</p>	<p><b>1a</b> If yes, how does it refer to TCNs?</p>
<p><b>2</b> Which access requirements does your national legislation set for TCNs and for refugees, with regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ national language level required (B2/C1?)</li> <li>▪ formal recognition of previous degree (by the institution or by the ENIC NARIC office?)</li> <li>▪ national quotas for international students?</li> <li>▪ national, centrally organised exams to enter higher education (for all/ for some degrees)?</li> <li>▪ other national level requirements, please give examples</li> </ul>	<p><b>2a</b> If yes, are these any different from the requirements for EU students?</p> <p><b>2b</b> If yes, what is the quota share (roughly)?</p> <p><b>2c</b> If yes to national exam,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ for which subjects is this exam organised?</li> <li>▪ which subjects are included in the exam? (e.g. mathematics and languages...)?</li> <li>▪ are there bridging courses available for TCNs to prepare the exam?</li> </ul>
<p><b>3</b> Can any TCN enter higher education if they meet the right academic requirements, or is it limited by status?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ TCNs as international students</li> <li>▪ TCNs with full refugee status</li> <li>▪ TCNs with other international protection status (e.g. subsidiary protected)</li> <li>▪ TCN asylum seekers</li> </ul>	<p><b>3a</b> If yes, are figures of enrolment available?</p>
<p><b>4</b> Do TCNs or refugees pay fees and do they have access to national student support systems or specific scholarships?</p>	
<p><b>5</b> Are there any links between higher education policy and integration policy in your country? Do you collaborate with the ministry responsible for integration?</p>	<p><b>5a</b> If yes to either option – does it depend on the status (international students, refugee, asylum seeker, etc.)?</p>
<p><b>6</b> Are there any national higher education initiatives for the integration of TCNs and/or specifically refugees?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ scholarships</li> <li>▪ bridging courses</li> <li>▪ language courses</li> <li>▪ consultation/orientation</li> <li>▪ other, please give examples</li> </ul>	<p><b>6a</b> If yes, please give examples.</p> <p>-</p>



- 7 Are you aware of any of the initiatives by universities in your countries to integrate refugee students? Does your ministry collaborate with or fund these initiatives?
- 8 Country specific question – see list below table per country
- 9 In your opinion, what is the main challenge for integration of migrants into your country's higher education system? What is needed to enhance access and integration?
- 10 Do you agree that your organisation/ministry/institution is listed as a contributor to the research in the annex of the final report?

7a refer them to EUA's inventory of university initiatives for refugees here.

### Ministries responsible for integration

Structured questions	Unstructured questions – follow up
1 Are there any links between integration policy and education policy in your country? Do you collaborate with the ministry responsible for integration?	1a If yes, please give examples.
2 Country specific question	
3 Are you aware of any national initiatives for integration that use education as a means to integration into society? Either for TCNs and/or specifically for refugees?	3a If yes, please give examples.
4 Does your ministry fund or coordinate any of the implementation of integration measures with a specific view to support or prepare access to (higher) education? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Language courses?</li> <li>▪ Bridging courses?</li> <li>▪ Integration courses?</li> <li>▪ Consultation about education and employment options?</li> </ul>	4a If yes, please give examples of successful measures and how they are implemented (e.g. via which national organisation/body/ NGO etc.).
5 Are you aware of any of the initiatives by universities in your countries to integrate refugee students? Does your ministry collaborate with or fund these initiatives?	5a refer them to EUA's inventory of university initiatives here.





- 6 What are the plans for the next 5 years in terms of integration in your country? Are there any upcoming changes?
  - 7 In your opinion, what is the main challenge for integration of migrants into your country? What would be needed to enhance integration?
  - 8 Do you agree that your organisation/ministry/institution is listed as a contributor to the research in the annex of the final report?
- 7a refer them to EUA's inventory of university initiatives for refugees [here](#).

## ENIC NARICs

Structured questions	Unstructured questions – follow up if yes, and/or country specific
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 On Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention – is it implemented, and what procedures are in place?</li> <li>2 When a TCN wants to enrol in higher education in your country, is it a legal requirement that they present their foreign degree to your agency for credential evaluation? Or can the higher education institution evaluate the credentials themselves?</li> <li>3 If you are asked to provide credential evaluation of a foreign degree (for any purpose, labour market further education, or other), <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ what is the cost involved?</li> <li>▪ what is the timeframe?</li> </ul> </li> <li>4 Is your agency/recognition information centre involved in any international projects on enhancing recognition for TCNs and/or refugees (such as the refugee skills passport)?</li> <li>5 In your opinion, what is the main challenge for recognition of degrees of TCNs and refugees into your country?</li> <li>6 Do you agree that your organisation/ministry/institution is listed as a contributor to the research in the annex of the final report?</li> </ol>	<p>→ adapt question to country specific info available</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2a If higher education institution themselves – can the admissions officers at the institutions contact you for information about foreign degrees? Do you collaborate in any other way?</li> <li>3a Is the time, cost or decision different for a request by nationals, EU citizens, TCNs, or refugees?</li> <li>4a If yes, please name examples and how they influence recognition in your country.</li> </ol>



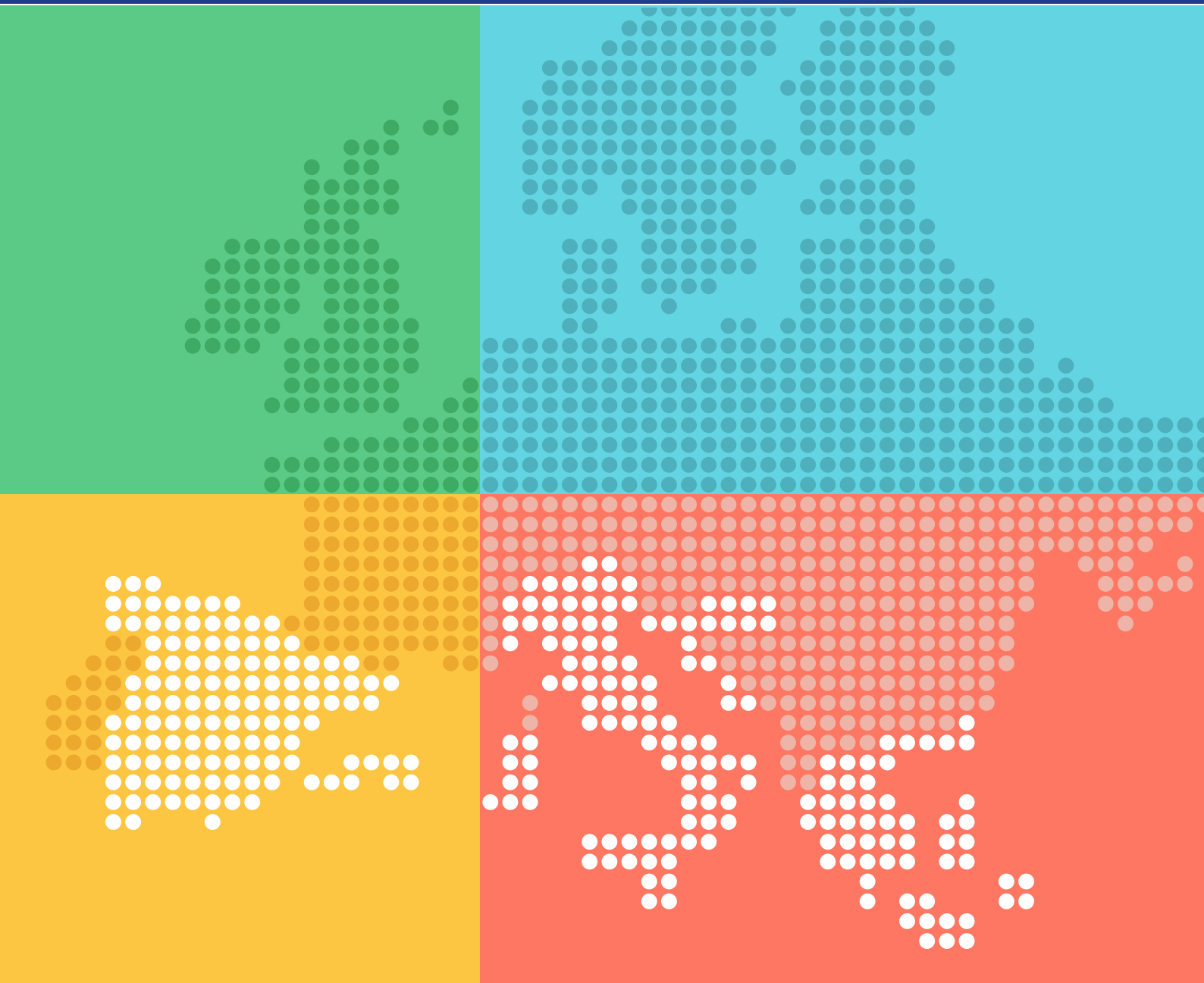
## TCN and Refugee Students

- 1 [Motivation] Why did you want to go (back) to university? What interested you most about studying in -add country, e.g. Italy?
- 2 [Challenge] What was/is the most difficult aspect of accessing higher education in -add country, e.g. Italy? How did/will you overcome this challenge?
- 3 [Change] In your opinion, what needs to change to make access and study success easier/fairer/better for other students with migrant/refugee background?
- 4 [Recommend] In 1-5 words maximum, what would be your number one recommendation to other potential future students who have a similar background to you?

### Annex VI Survey Questions

A preview of the entire TandEM survey to higher education institutions is available online via [https://www.eua.eu/downloads/news/tandem\\_survey\\_in%20qualtrics.pdf](https://www.eua.eu/downloads/news/tandem_survey_in%20qualtrics.pdf) .





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European Union

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