



Focus Group Report

Career Advancement for Refugee Researchers in Europe
– CArE project, 2020



CArE

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Summary

This report presents the findings of the focus groups conducted in 10 target countries between June 2019 – February 2020 in the framework of the CARE project (Career Advancement for Refugee Researchers in Europe), which is funded by the Horizon2020 science4refugees initiative. In the focus groups, the CARE project partners (Academic Cooperation Association ACA, German Academic Exchange Service DAAD and Finnish National Agency for Education EDUFI) discussed research labour market and career paths of researchers with refugee background before and after arriving in the host country. The purpose of the focus groups was to collect the perspectives of researchers from various countries of origin, academic fields, career stages and employment statuses sharing somewhat similar experience of arriving in Europe as at-risk scholars. The main aim of the focus groups was to map the needs, interests and competences of researchers with refugee background who are navigating the research labour market in different European countries (CARE target countries: Austria, Belgium/Flanders, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands).

The initial expectation was that there would be substantial country-specific findings concerning the perspectives of individual researchers in each country. However, most of the issues and themes raised by the researchers were widely shared across the 10 countries and the results reflect a very similar situation that the target group has experienced. Therefore, the report mainly focuses on the main findings that apply to a large extent to all the target countries.

First of all, it is noteworthy that researchers coming from different academic cultures and traditions might need time and support for adjusting to the system of the new higher education institution. Therefore, there is also an evident need for clear and accessible information and resources for researchers to find their way into the new structure and become familiar with its operational aspects. One of the key messages from the focus groups, is to be mindful and to remember that not everyone has a similar academic background, nor do they follow the same career paths.

Networks and personal contacts within academia play a significant role in finding one's place in the academia and therefore it is crucial to ensure relevant networking opportunities for researchers with refugee background. Scholars also highlighted the importance of peer support and mentoring by other refugees or migrants who have gone through a similar process. It is important to make the diversity of the research community visible and at the same time to change and diversify the image of refugees who are nothing but a homogeneous group.

Although there are many existing initiatives and support measures, the target group is not always aware of the existence of such measures. Intensifying the promotion and visibility of existing initiatives is needed as well as creating new strategies in order to better reach out to the target group. It is of utmost importance to review the existing support programmes regularly based on the feedback collected from the supported scholars and to acknowledge and focus on the questions concerning the sustainability of grant periods.

The CARE focus groups participants emphasised the significance of concrete measures such as providing targeted language training of good quality and ensuring access to psycho-social support. Another aspect which should not be overlooked is the question of anonymity and similar aspects related to individual safety, which should be taken seriously when disseminating the outcomes of such support measures.

In summary, there is a clearly identified need for targeted support for researchers with refugee background which should be addressed, recognised and intensified throughout Europe. The main message from the focus groups conducted in the framework of the CARE project is that the target group should be first and foremost seen as researchers in their own field and merit – and not as refugees. Although there is a clear need for tailored and targeted support, this should not diminish their profile as researchers above all.

In the following chapters the key observations, messages and main recommendations are presented thoroughly.

Introduction

The CARE project (Career Advancement for Refugee Researchers in Europe) is a 24-month project, funded by the Horizon2020 science4refugees initiative, aiming to support the integration of researchers with a refugee background into the European research labour market.

The project targets 10 European countries (see picture 1) which meet the criteria of having with a high number of asylum seekers, an absorption capacity of the Research and Development (R&D) labour market and supportive environment to facilitate refugee researchers' entry and integration in the labour market: Austria, Belgium/Flanders, Finland,

France, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

The project supports needs-based guidance and compilation of country-specific information on employment requirements and opportunities for the target group, through the following main activities: focus groups engaging refugee researchers, employer survey, country guides, and thematic webinars involving experts and employers.

The core consortium is composed of the Brussels-based Academic Cooperation Association ACA Secretariat (the co-ordinator), and German Academic Exchange Service DAAD (Germany) and Finnish National Agency for Education EDUFI (Finland).

This report presents the findings of the focus groups¹ conducted in 10 target countries between June 2019 – February 2020, in which the three CARE project partners discussed



Picture 1. CARE project target countries

¹"A focus group is a qualitative research method in which a trained moderator conducts a collective interview of typically six to eight participants from similar backgrounds, similar demographic characteristics, or both. Focus groups create open lines of communication across individuals and rely on the dynamic interaction between participants to yield data that would be impossible to gather via other approaches, such as one-on-one interviewing. When done well, focus groups offer powerful insights into people's feelings and thoughts and thus a more detailed, nuanced, and richer understanding of their perspectives on ideas, products, and policies."

Encyclopedia of Survey Research Methods

Paul Lavrakas (2008) <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412963947.n192>

the research labour market and career paths with researchers with refugee background / displaced scholars / scholars at risk. The aim of the focus groups was to map the needs, experiences and competences of researchers with refugee background and at-risk scholars that are navigating the research labour market in different European countries.

In the CARE project, the term *researcher with refugee background* is understood widely including displaced scholars, scholars from crisis areas and researchers under international protection. The term *employer* covers in this report higher education institutions (HEIs), research organisations, private and public organisations active in the research labour market.

The focus groups were conducted in the 10 target countries with the expectation of specific country level findings.

However, most of the issues and themes raised by the researchers were shared across the 10 European countries. The purpose of the focus groups was also to collect the perspectives of researchers from various countries of origin, academic fields, career stages and employment statuses sharing somewhat similar experience of arriving to Europe as at-risk scholars.

Although country-specific results cannot be seen as comprehensive with this approach, the results reflect a similar situation of at-risk academics in the 10 European target countries.

The results are presented anonymously, taking into consideration the vulnerability of the target group. Many of the researches do not wish to be identified due to safety concerns.

Implementation of the focus groups

In the focus groups a small group of researchers (3-9, depending on the country) discussed their experiences and challenges in the research labour market of the host country in question. The groups were intentionally kept small in order to provide sufficient space for each participant to express their experiences in-depth and to maintain a “safe space” for everyone having in mind the potential sensitivity of the group.

The focus group discussions covered researchers’ career paths, their previous and current experiences with employers in the target countries, how they identified employment opportunities, what experiences and challenges they have faced when applying and working in research positions as well as their future career plans.

Moreover, the discussions pertained to what kind of information and support would be beneficial to enter or better navigate the research labour market in their respective host countries.

Furthermore, the participants of the focus groups were presented with the EURAXESS portal, with a special focus on the science4refugees initiative and the national portals and asked to explore the designated pages during the focus groups.

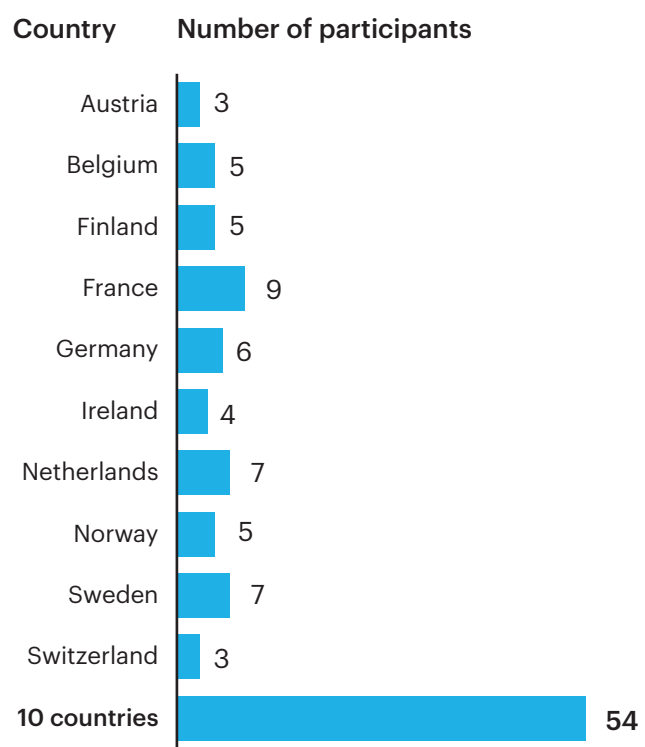


Chart 1. Focus groups

Profile of participants

When arranging the focus groups, the CARE project's aim was to ensure gender balance and a diversity of countries of origin and research disciplines. This was communicated in the invitation letter for the focus group participants and was the basis for the selection of participants when needed.

The focus group participants represented 19 different countries of origin. A majority of participants were originally from Turkey. Many of the Turkish participants had left the country due to the recent developments related to the Peace Petition.² The on-going crises in Syria, Yemen and Iraq are also reflected in the composition of participants. From most of the other countries of origin there was only one individual.

In total, there were 54 participants out of whom 38 male and 16 female. Most focus groups were composed of both male and female participants, except Austria, Finland and Switzerland, with male participants only. The gender dimension was, understandably, dependent on the composition of the candidates, i.e. those who were willing or interested to take part in the focus groups.

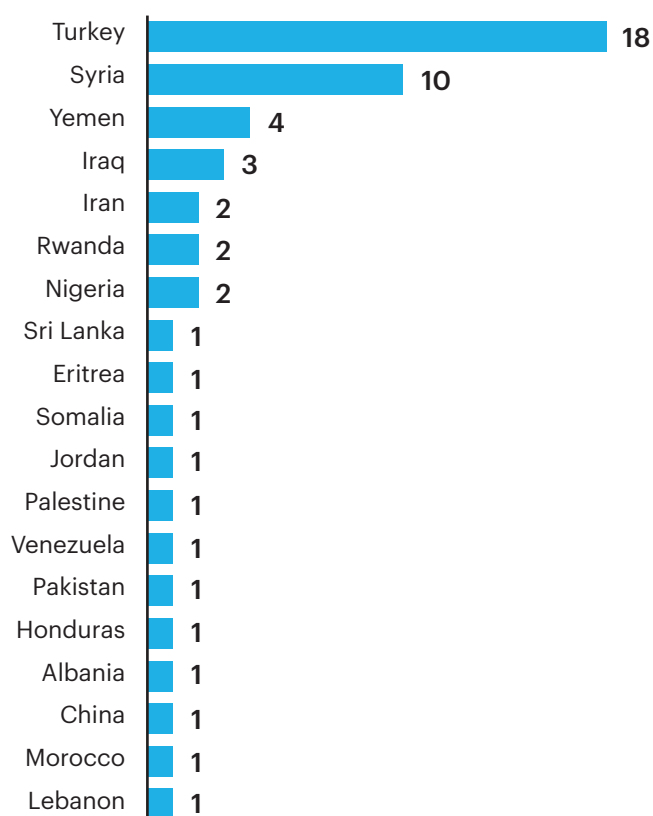


Chart 2: Countries of origin

The focus group participants were at different stages of research careers. They evenly represented the three target research profiles as classified below, based on the European Framework for Research Careers. The CARE focused on the three research profiles R1-R3. The category of leading researchers (R4) was not included in the defined target group. The one participant who was under the category of "Other" was in the process of applying for a PhD position.

Research profile descriptions:³

- First Stage Researcher (R1), up to the point of PhD
- Recognised Researcher (R2), PhD holders or equivalent who are not yet fully independent
- Established Researcher (R3), researchers who have developed a level of independence

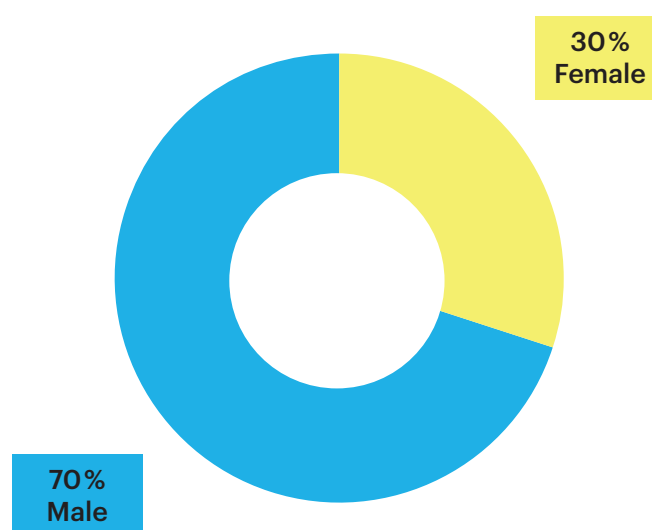


Chart 3: Gender distribution in the focus groups

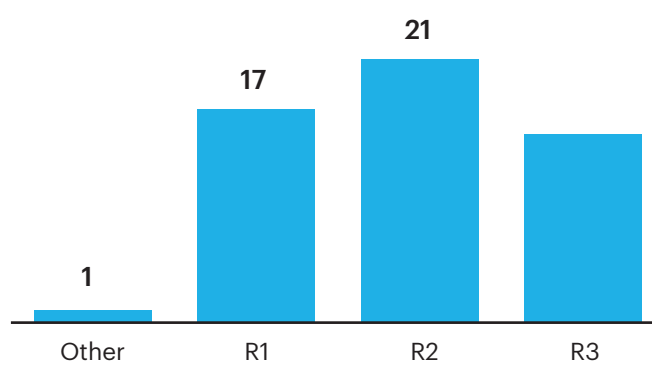


Chart 4: Research profile

² <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/07/01/about-700-academics-have-been-criminally-charged-turkey-their-signatures-petition>

³ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/europe/career-development/training-researchers/research-profiles-descriptors>

Participants represented various fields of education based on the ISCED classification⁴ while social sciences and education were the most common fields. Since participants were able to select multiple fields, some participants chose “other” in addition to one or several ISCED fields of education and clarified their specific academic field in “other” option. As an illustration, one participant in social sciences specified his/her field as human rights law in the “other” field.

The employment status of the focus group participants varied. In total, 31 researchers were employed and 21 unemployed when respective focus groups took place. The employed scholars held different research positions, such as having permanent or temporary contracts or were recipients of external grants from different funding programmes. In addition, two participants, who indicated their employment

status as other, were a PhD student and a scholar focusing on language studies.

The majority of the currently employed researchers worked at higher education institutions or at research centres. Those who replied “other” were involved in voluntary activities or doing independent research without affiliation or funding. One of the participants was working in a private company and one participant in the public sector for a city. However, neither of them was employed in a research position.

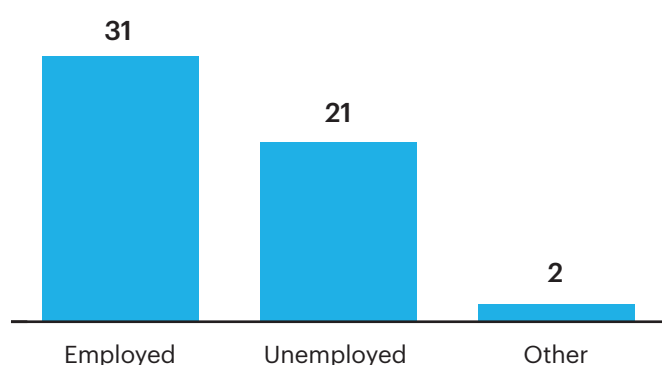


Chart 5: Current employment status

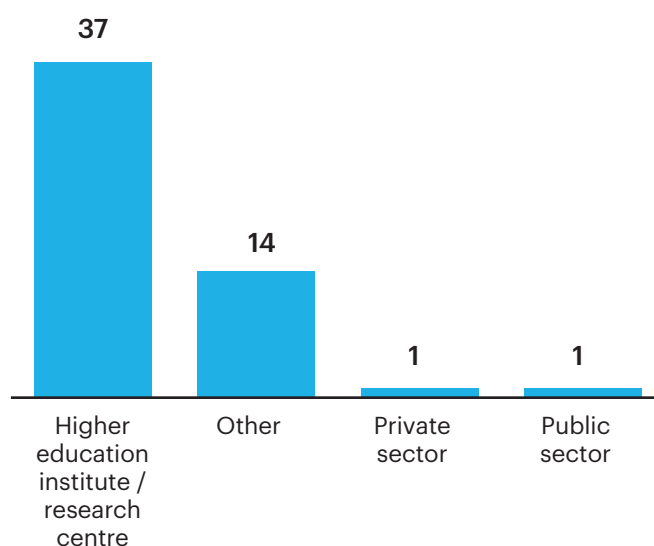


Chart 7: Organisation types

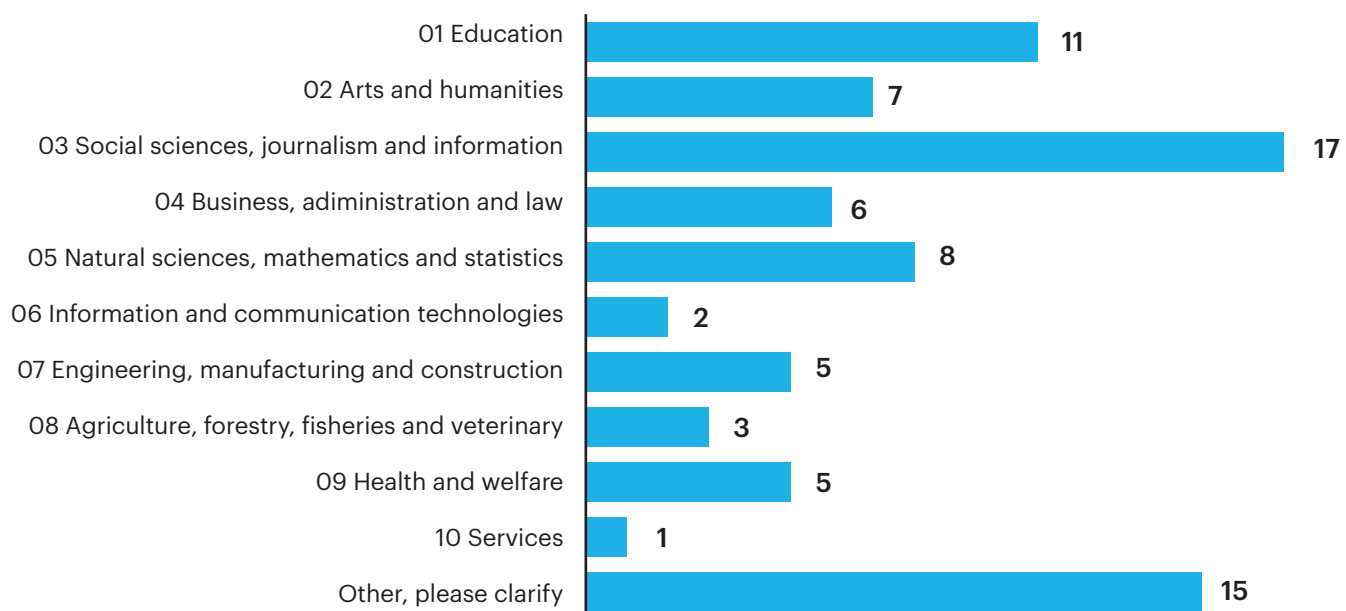


Chart 6: ISCED fields of education

⁴ <http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>

Main findings

After conducting focus group discussions in 10 European countries with the target group including 54 researchers with refugee background, it is evident that researchers with refugee background are facing similar experiences and challenges in all the target countries. Many of the issues and themes raised by the researchers with different backgrounds, countries of origin, academic field, career stages, employment status, were common across the 10 European countries.

Researchers with refugee background are facing similar experiences and challenges in the 10 European target countries. This section comprises the main findings covering jointly all the target countries. Country-specific aspects are briefly described in a separate section.

Different academic cultures and traditions

The academic cultures and traditions differ from one country to another. Hence, it is evident that the disruptions in careers that researchers with refugee background often face were raised as one of the common challenges. Researchers with refugee background might need time to adjust to a new academic tradition and academic culture and the differences inside one single field can be major. In some cases, scholars even needed to change their research topic and it took them a lot of time to start working on a completely new research topic. Sometimes there might be hindrances as one is not following a typical career path or a typical timeline. What poses a problem in such cases and is demanding is to explain and fill in the gaps in one's CVs. In this case, some of the participants have also felt that their age can pose problems to their career.

When arriving in a new country, many of the researchers had to adjust to a completely different position and professional setting than the one they were used to. For example, having a high social status and academic position previously sometimes changed to applying for funding with early-stage researchers or working side by side with PhD students. Their academic status in their country of origin might also have

provided a secured career path compared to the instability, precariousness and fierce competition faced in the current country of residence.

Moreover, the communication culture varies greatly. Some researchers feel that they need to make an effort to reach out to the colleagues in order to get in contact with them. When researchers needed support, they had to directly request assistance in order to receive it which felt foreign to some of them. On the other hand, it was also highlighted that if you do not ask and request what you need, the colleagues cannot know that you are in need for help.

Most participants stated that the working environment in the universities is welcoming and that employers are usually supportive and give assistance in the integration process. However, while colleagues are friendly at work, it can still be hard to make friends with them. And the welcoming atmosphere at the universities does not always reflect the general atmosphere in the country or society at large.

Equally, the lack of social networks poses a challenge: there might be nobody who could help scholars with everyday issues in a new country. This kind of support is also hard to find among colleagues, as the social environment does not make it easy to make friends with the colleagues.

Another difference in academic working cultures, not only presents challenges but can also bring positive surprises. One of the focus group participants acknowledged the fact that there is no expectation to work all day long, as was the situation in the country of origin. The quality of life is enhanced when there is a possibility to balance work life and time with the family. There is also an opportunity to actually have holidays and salary high enough to cover the living costs. One researcher also highlighted the gender equality as a positive aspect in the current working environment.

Recommendation:

- Be mindful – researchers with refugee background might need time and support in order to adjust to a new academic tradition and academic culture.

Networking

The importance of networks and personal contacts within academia was emphasised in all focus group discussions. Many researchers stressed that when applying for a position or research funding, networks and personal academic connections are crucial. Besides, networks help to find open positions and funding sources, as it is hard to discover relevant information without assistance. Networks and personal contacts greatly improve chances to find funding or receive a position and therefore, the scholars underlined the importance of receiving recommendations from colleagues.

Researchers who do not currently have an affiliation to any university find it very difficult to continue their career. There are some major hindrances in their research career as they lack access to library and academic e-journals, which makes it extremely difficult to keep active and abreast of developments in their research field. Moreover, they lack resources to attend relevant international conferences, which would offer them networking possibilities which could lead to finding positions or cooperation possibilities in research projects. International conferences would also allow them to follow latest developments in their academic field.

Building up and sustaining an international network in own research field was seen as a very important aspect of career advancement efforts. Maintaining contacts with researchers in other countries as well as the perspectives for international funding sources build a significant part of the horizon of opportunities allowing them to continue their research career.

As discussed earlier, academic cultures and traditions vary from country to country and without personal contacts at faculty level it is even more challenging to become accustomed to this new environment.

Recommendations:

- Ensuring relevant networking opportunities in their research field for researchers with refugee background. This could entail:
- Providing support to attend international conferences would be extremely beneficial both for

the scholars with no current affiliation but also for the scholars with a research position.

- Introducing a visitor scholar programme for refugees, which would provide a link to academic community and an opportunity for networking and access to resources.
- Entailing internship opportunities for refugees.

Peer support

One of the clear messages from researchers with refugee background was the significance of peer support and mentoring of other refugees or migrants who have gone through a similar process. It would be important to highlight the diversity of the research community. There are existing initiatives facilitating peer support, mentoring and matching buddies, but however, these initiatives had not reached all the scholars interviewed in the CARE project. Thus, they should be better promoted, and these measures also seem to be insufficient compared to their needs.

Mentoring and support provided by colleagues with similar background and career path, having faced similar challenges would, in many cases, be the key to finding functional solutions to the situations that scholars are facing when navigating in the research system of the new home country. The support provided by colleagues is often seen as more helpful than any assistance provided by the official structures. These connections can pass on the knowledge of how the system works and create networks improving the chances of finding relevant positions and continuing their research careers.

“There are not many migrants, refugees, minority representatives, there are white local citizens who cannot know how it is to come to the system from outside. Peer support is needed!”⁵

⁵ All quotes in this document by scholars who attended the CARE focus groups. To protect their identity, no further information is provided.

Recommendations:

- Creating platforms for peer support (on or offline).
- Enhancing the promotion of existing peer support activities so that the information reaches the target group.

Research career and funding structures

Several focus group participants had either studied or done parts of their master or PhD studies in a European country or in North America. Many had also arrived in their current host country through several other countries. For some researchers with refugee background, it was helpful for their career that they had e.g. a master's degree or PhD from the country where they currently live, but for some it was rather difficult to find a position despite having a degree from the current country of residence.

Local researchers get familiar with the research funding structures during their university studies and while the information might not be openly available, it is rather considered as common knowledge. The whole system of applying for funding from different sources might often be very different from what the researchers coming from different academic cultures have been used to. Many scholars remarked that there is little guidance available on how to submit a good application, and what is expected concerning content and form. This applies also when applying for a position. Furthermore, it is rather complicated to identify the correct funding sources for a specific type of project or topic without having some previous experiences from this specific academic culture and its structure.

Improving the clarity and accessibility of the information and resources provided about different aspects of the researcher's career path could be beneficial including the funding structures, open positions and how to navigate in the research labour market of that country, specific field and

institution. Be mindful, that the information should be understandable, open and detailed enough so that it is accessible to people with different backgrounds and for the scholars coming from outside of the system. This could mean going through existing instructions/websites/resources and setting up more information resources – even little things matter.

Support is needed at different stages of one's academic career. The scholars report difficulties in finding suitable positions to enter the research field, such as assistant positions during their PhD or finding the first postdoc positions. In the case of PhD students, the central role of the supervisor was highlighted in guiding them. It was noted that the opportunities to get the very first experience was extremely hard – according to the scholars, this is partly due to the lack of this type of positions in the target countries. Also, when being a researcher with currently no affiliation and having the need to get acquainted with the local research field, it was remarked that such positions were reserved for young PhD graduates. When it comes to the colleagues who have not yet finalised their PhD, they are currently excluded from some of the existing scholar support programmes. One scholar pointed out, that for example, in some countries of origin there are simply very limited opportunities to achieve this level of education, such as in Afghanistan and in Eritrea.

“Be mindful that everyone is not like you.”⁶

Recommendations:

- Improving the clarity and accessibility of the information and resources provided.
- Providing support on how to apply for funding and positions, on academic writing and publishing structures both during PhD studies and also when researchers in various stages of their career arrive in a new country.
- Facilitating contacts through matchmaking events, as well as through other channels and putting scholars in direct contact with universities but also with NGOs.
- Support building start-ups, other business ideas and initiatives outside the academic field.

⁶ All quotes in this document by scholars who attended the CARE focus groups. To protect their identity, no further information is provided.

Targeted career services

One of the challenges for researchers who do not have an affiliation is the issue of not having access to the career development services at the higher education institutions (HEIs). The career services at HEIs are often targeted mainly for students and not for external persons. The participants' experience is that it would be very useful for them to have access to the HEIs' career services as public employment services often lack detailed information for this target group. The focus group participants were suggesting a possibility to receive some assistance from higher education institutions even if they do not have an official position at the university. Participants also suggested establishing a visiting Scholars programme that could provide valuable assistance and networks for the target group. Such programmes could give the target group access to the academic career services, library and e-journals, a possibility to operate as an assistant lecturer and would also support scholars' connection with their own academic field. A low-key programme would create valuable connections between refugee researchers and higher education institutions which could increase the possibilities to have research position or funding later. Such an initiative would be very beneficial in the integration process and in finding positions and funding opportunities in the future.

Researchers have experienced that in case they contact, for example, a public employment office, the staff has no specific knowledge on how to advise highly skilled refugees. In many target countries, the focus group participants report that there is no direct link between the higher education institutions and employment services, hence a sort of intermediary actor at the national level would be needed. Participants shared the view that all relevant information is not easily available, and it is hard to find relevant sources. Researchers also remarked that there is not enough information on how to seek funding and often the employment offices are not the ones who can give assistance on this.

Participants report that in many target countries there is a need for an actor operating between academia and employment offices providing support and assistance for the highly skilled refugees specifically. As the target group does not have access to career services of the higher education institutions and public employment offices are not always experts in the field of research positions and funding opportunities, a dedicated actor/contact point/office or agency who provides special assistance for the target group would be beneficial.

Many researchers also shared their experiences concerning job offers for which they were often overqualified. Some participants reported that the higher degree one holds, the more challenging it is to find a suitable position. Both inside and outside the academic sphere, researchers with refugee background have experienced that they need to accept positions that nobody else wants to do. Some feel that the reasons behind this might be the underlying structural racism and discrimination. Being a foreigner implies having access only to manual, low-paid jobs. As foreign researchers, they feel that they have less access to information and fewer connections which could ease up their career path.

In addition, as a foreigner, one might not be familiar with the academic and funding structure of the current country of residence and may not know how the system works or whom to contact. At the same time, there is a feeling of embarrassment as the researchers feel that it is assumed that they know the processes and can figure them out themselves. Many researchers highlighted the need for targeted support and the importance of networks also when it comes to finding enough information.

Recommendations:

- Establishing visiting scholar programmes for researchers with refugee background providing career assistance, networking, access to the academic career services, library and e-journals, a possibility to operate as an assistant lecturer and support scholars' connection with their on academic field.
- Introducing an intermediary actor operating between academia and employment offices providing support and assistance for highly skilled refugees in particular.

Language and other practical challenges in the integration process

Researchers in all the target countries share a joint challenge with language barriers. Generally, learning a local language is an integral part of the integration process to a new country of residence and this element is even more complex for researchers. For example, there are often open calls for positions which have no mention of the local language as a requirement. Many participants reported however, that knowing the local language is often considered as an asset by employers and the candidate might still need the language skills, even if it is not explicitly mentioned in the call. For instance, in higher education institutions there might be quite few possibilities to teach in case one cannot hold lectures in the local language. Local language skills are considered particularly important in social sciences and humanities but also in the medical field, when having contact with patients. Moreover, the scholars emphasised that it is time consuming and challenging, for example, to write an article when it is not possible to do so in their mother tongue but in a quite newly learned language.

In the private sector, the language requirements may not be as crucial as in the academic field. However, it is not easy to find a suitable position in the private sector with a research background – on the contrary, having a PhD degree might make it even harder to find a job and thus limits employment options.

Language also plays a crucial part in building social relationships in a new job. Knowing the local language makes it easier to build rapport with the new colleagues and integrate into the new working environment. Fluent language skills facilitate making new connections and communication between colleagues.

Language-related challenges were especially highlighted in the countries where it is necessary to learn several languages depending on the region of residence, specifically in Switzerland, Belgium and Norway but also in smaller countries like the Netherlands and Finland. For example, as there are four official languages in Switzerland, moving from one canton to another may imply learning a new language from scratch.

In order to tackle the language challenges, there is a clear need for targeted language courses for academics which are of good quality and match the learners' skills. For research-

ers, it is not enough to learn colloquial language for coping in everyday life, but they need to be able to write and teach on a scientific level relevant to their research field. The focus group participants reported on several occasions that they did not have access to language courses at all or there were no available courses. On the other hand, learning a new language when working full-time can also be quite demanding. Language training opportunities were seen as crucial in solving this issue.

Besides language barriers, scholars face challenges related to different systems, equipment and working culture compared to their home country. Employers often assume that new employees can automatically use all the equipment with ease although, in reality, the available equipment can be very different from that used in the country of origin. These challenges make participants feel dependent on colleagues and unable to handle the work on their own. This might even make them feel like outsiders in the work community.

There are also other practical challenges outside the work environment. For the refugee researchers with families, the income and safety of their family always comes first, which naturally takes up a lot of their energy and makes it hard to have a full-time commitment to the research work. There are also very practical issues of for example organising day care for children and finding an apartment in an environment that has prejudices against foreigners. Fortunately, in such cases some employers have been able to step in and support their employees in, for example, finding suitable accommodation. There were cases where the employer had rented an apartment for the scholar to overcome this challenge.

Many scholars might suffer from post-traumatic stress, depression or anxiety. Also, the worries of the family members in difficult situations in home countries as well as those family members who are struggling to adapt to the new home country might pose stress on them. The situation is mentally demanding, especially as the focus is on finding a position. Therefore, an additional emphasis should be also given to psychological and emotional aspects.

Recommendations:

- Providing targeted academic language training opportunities for researchers with refugee background.
- Ensuring access to psycho-social support.

Safety concerns affecting the research career

At-risk scholars, who have reasonable concerns about their safety and who hope to stay anonymous, sometimes face a challenge to get their wish respected. Such challenges include activities on institutional level as well as in the framework of the support programmes, such as publishing their name on the institution's website against their explicit wish. Some focus group participants also reported on cases when they had been publicly connected with affiliated scholar support programmes despite their wishes to stay anonymous.

While anonymity is contradictory to the regular procedures of scientific publications for instance, there is a need for more awareness raising and procedures on institutional level that could support the continuation of academic career of at-risk scholars who wish their identity not to be publicly available.

Recommendation:

- Supporting and recognising the anonymity of the target group in their working environment and among support programmes. It is necessary to have clear procedures in place supporting academic careers of at-risk scholars who wish to stay anonymous.

Perceptions towards researchers with refugee background

One aspect which was raised in all the focus groups is the perception of researchers with refugee background within the academic community and in society as a whole. The perception of a person as a refugee or as a person in a refugee-like situation seems to overshadow the perception of them as skilled academics. The scholars interviewed explained that it seems to be challenging to combine these roles of being a researcher and being an asylum seeker or a refugee, as in many contexts being perceived as the latter seems to diminish or even nullify the potential of being recognised as the former.

The participants of the focus groups report that they often feel like they are treated primarily as refugee researchers which makes them feel being perceived as less qualified. The researchers feel that their background or status as refugee, in refugee-like situation or displaced is highlighted and they are put in the spotlight as refugees in a victimising and patronising sense when instead, they want to be seen primarily as researchers and judged by their academic achievements.

Moreover, the participants estimated that at least sometimes this kind of perception had also affected their opportunities to find research positions. Several researchers stated that as a researcher with refugee background their qualifications are often considered inadequate in their current countries of residence. Some of the participants have faced discrimination towards their origin and they think that a potential employer would more likely choose a European applicant for the position than a researcher with a refugee background. The negative attributes the scholars believe to be linked to being a refugee are assumed incompetence as they feel that refugees are too often seen as a burden for the society and economy and that the employers do not see the potential refugees can have for the society.

Scholars also reflected on the specific skills their experience might have gained them. How to translate the experiences and knowledge so that it could benefit the scholar in the new home country and in their career path? Even though educational opportunities might have been affected by a crisis or been paused for various reasons, researchers with refugee background may have practical research experiences from their home countries that could be useful also in the new home country.

Most researchers interviewed in the focus groups have been very active in applying for open positions, however, they find it almost impossible to even be considered as relevant candidates. Researchers provide several possible explanations for this. Without relevant and personal contacts, it is hard to be recognised among the other applicants, some of whom have contacts and links to the hiring institution. Researchers report that after applying for dozens of positions that suit their research profile and receiving no answer from the employers, the reason behind this could be discrimination due to name and nationality. This was the observation of several participants. Researchers who have been sending a great amount of applications for positions that match their background, report receiving no invitations to interviews nor receiving any feedback regarding their application. Researchers even report cases when their fellow researchers changed their names to ones considered as local, in order to get the same treatment in the hiring process and have noticed the difference.

Creating an academic career at universities can be challenging, and scholars have also identified potential opportunities outside higher education institutions. However, creating connections to private companies has been especially challenging. One of the researchers even reported that they had no success of finding a host organisation for an internship period that would have been fully compensated by the university during the Master studies in the framework of an internship programme, whereas all other students received offers. While strong competition for research positions in the target countries is recognised as a general feature of the research labour markets among the focus group participants, scholars often feel discouraged when there is no responsiveness from employers' side and this experience is repetitive.

Here targeted support measures and funding opportunities can make a significant difference. While the targeted funding opportunities for researchers with refugee background are seen as a highly necessary initiative, at the same time the researchers do not want to be labelled as "refugee researchers". Also, being associated as a grant holder of one of the existing funding and support schemes for displaced scholars can sometimes be seen in a negative light by the scholars as they feel that somebody categorised under this 'label' is considered less skilled than other researchers.

In general, the participants point out that there is a lack of diversity in academia and entering this community as a foreigner coming from a different culture and especially as a refugee is not easy. Participants report that being labelled as someone with refugee background might lower the expectations towards them as if people from other cultures or countries would not be able to complete more difficult tasks.

In addition to experiencing discrimination based on their background and status as a refugee or being in a refugee-like situation, the researchers can face further discrimination and bias based on disability, gender or being a person of colour. These experiences can add to the challenges the researchers face in different situations in building their career in the new home country. Moreover, the researchers report that the patronising attitude might be stronger when you for example have a disability in addition to being in a refugee-like situation.

Thus, it is important to notice that intersectional approaches taking into account the spectrum of bias in our societies and in our research labour market should be considered when formulating functional solutions.

"Only motivation we need is honour, we would all be more successful. I refuse to be supported as a refugee but as a scholar. Dignity is needed, we will be more successful when we are treated like the locals."

Recommendations:

- All relevant actors at EU, national and institutional level should be actively changing and diversifying the image of refugees including highly skilled researchers.
- Ensuring inclusiveness of the own institution by critically reviewing the recruitment processes.

Existing support programmes

Currently, there are several different programmes and initiatives providing support for displaced scholars available in Europe and globally.⁸ A large share of the scholars participating in the focus groups were supported by one of these existing support programmes or structures. These

⁷ All quotes in this document by scholars who attended the CARE focus groups. To protect their identity, no further information is provided.

programmes, their significance and different aspects of their implementation were discussed in several of the focus groups and the main observations and recommendations were quite similar.

The existence of such initiatives was seen as instrumental for supporting career advancement of scholars with refugee background. In countries where such support initiatives were lacking on national level, this was seen as a serious shortcoming. All in all, the availability of these support programmes was seen as a baseline necessity and clearly as a positive measure.

The available information sources on support structures include conferences and workshops, newsletters, websites as well as receiving relevant information through personal contacts. Many scholars mentioned having received beneficial practical support through local support structures, networks and from local university programmes in, for example, the application process.

However, several issues were raised as well as recommendations for improvement concerning these programmes. Many of these aspects have been identified by the funding bodies and management of the initiatives, but the feedback received from the focus groups confirms these as something that is a shared experience of the scholars supported by the programmes in different countries. This feedback should also be taken into account when developing further efforts.

One of the issues raised in all the focus groups was the short grant period. In most cases the financial support is limited to up to two years, which was seen as too short for the scholars to be able to create sustainable opportunities to continue their career, thinking of all the different demands linked to moving to a complete new country and academic environment, learning a new language, taking care of the families – all the pressures discussed earlier. Identifying additional funding opportunities after this grant period would improve the situation greatly by creating more stability for the scholars and their families.

In addition to that the grant periods were seen as too short; the scholars raised the need for stability in the positions offered. In some cases, a potential placement following the initial position can be at another university or even in a different country. Moving inside one country is already challenging enough, whereas moving to yet another country implies a brand-new start of the process, as described in the chapters above. As much stability as possible would be preferred in order for the scholars to be able to focus on their careers.

Many support programmes offer a wide variety of assistance. One aspect, which many of the scholars however

raised, was the need for more support in professional integration. Furthermore, many scholars highlighted that they would find soft skills training a beneficial part of support activities. Support from the university career services, such as guidance and training for the soft skills needed in the working life with a focus on skills, behaviour and competencies required in the new work environment might prove to be a crucial element when orienting towards a new career path in a new country.

Recommendations:

- Reviewing the existing support programmes regularly based on the feedback collected from the supported scholars.
- Ensuring support for a sustainable career path beyond the grant period in all support programmes.
- Exploring opportunities for long-term support structures for the scholars in the framework of the support programmes.

Need for more targeted support

Generally, the competition for research funding and positions is extremely high in the target countries. The available funding and research opportunities are quite limited for all researches and even more so for researchers with refugee background. Research careers often consist of short-term projects or positions, making the career perspectives precarious with no guarantee of permanent position. Uncertainty

⁸ These programmes include initiatives such as PAUSE in France, Philipp Schwarz Initiative in Germany, EDUFI scholarships in Finland, Scholar Rescue Fund and Scholars at Risk network on global level. For further information, please see the list provided at the end of this report.

makes it very difficult for any researcher but poses specific challenges for researchers with refugee background especially taking into account the insecurity of continuing the career, income, keeping themselves and their families safe and the residence permit that might be linked to the research position. For a researcher with refugee background not being able to continue their career might lead to drastic consequences meaning that they need to leave the country without any knowledge of the future and no place to return to.

Some participants of the focus groups point out that being a scholar at risk often means that there is no return to the country of origin. Moreover, the relatively short-term positions supported by the different support programmes pose a specific stress factor on the researcher if the residence permit is linked with the 1-2-year position. Even though any researcher may have an unknown future, it is a very different situation for someone with a permanent residence compared to a scholar without a permanent residence permit and no possibilities to return to the country of origin. It was pointed out by many researchers that a one-year position is too short for researchers to stabilise their career, learn a new language, adjust to the culture, integrate in the country of residence, find relevant networks and funding positions in order to prolong the residence permit. This creates a feeling of constant instability.

“Even if you have been able to save yourself and your family from the war, it is more difficult to save your research career.”⁹

Starting a new life in a new country is full of uncertainties, difficulties and stress factors: new culture, new society, pressure for integration, hardship for making friends and finding relevant networks and even the weather. For a scholar the list goes on with short scholarship periods, stress of having their contract prolonged and achieving academic stability. There would be a need for additional support as well as flexibility from the employers' side.

All in all, it can be difficult to consider the possibility to move yet to another country after being forced to leave one's country of origin. Integration takes time and moving from one country to another makes everything harder as researchers need to start building their life from scratch several times. Having a family does not ease the possibility of moving either. It is already challenging to move inside one country, but even more challenging to move to another country.

A general feeling among the researchers is that the academic world is highly competitive and there are scarce resources available, which makes it extremely difficult to find a position or receive funding. Many of the focus group participants have the feeling that finding a permanent position is nearly impossible in academia and especially in some research fields. Some of the target countries are also rather small and therefore there might be only few possible research institutes or research groups in person's own academic field, if any. The possibilities from one field to another differ quite a lot. Some disciplines might even be more or less endangered in one country and there can already be many scholars from the field in question who are unemployed, which means that there is more pressure to find a position outside academia or try to find another academic path through cross-disciplinary research.

“We want stable jobs and there are no stable jobs. We cannot, however, change things at the employment sector. But we can appeal to extend the support. Something needs to happen. At the moment, there is no possibility to plan future.”¹⁰

The opportunities offered at higher education institutions for systematically building the career was in some cases confusing. Some researchers felt that higher education institutions are focusing more efforts in attracting new students instead of offering positions for post-docs. Some of the researchers also mentioned that there are so few assistant positions available that it makes it very hard to even get into the academic career.

There are also regulations which restrict the employment possibilities of this target group. For example, it is not always clear what are the rights concerning working as an asylum seeker or someone who has already received a residence permit. These rules are apparently sometimes unclear not only to the researchers themselves but also to potential employers. Depending on the residence permit, the options for applying positions are limited to one country compared to the local or European colleagues which can move around more freely. The regulations are not clear to many of the focus participants, they do not know if they can apply for jobs in other EU countries and how this would affect their residence permit. There is a clear need for more information for both the researchers themselves and employers. As academic work is international and often entails attending international conferences and meetings, it can be quite challenging for

^{9, 10} All quotes in this document by scholars who attended the CARE focus groups. To protect their identity, no further information is provided.

researchers with refugee background to know if they are able to travel or not.

There is a clear need for more targeted support programmes for scholars with refugee background, from crisis areas and / or at risk. These support initiatives should provide more funding opportunities for this target group, providing them the support needed in the extremely competitive research environment. The existing funding opportunities and support initiatives are not available in all countries.

Recommendations:

- There is a clearly identified need for targeted support for researchers with refugee background, that should be recognised and intensified throughout Europe.
- Introducing EU-wide support programme for at-risk academics to ensure availability in all European countries.
- Ensuring availability of support structures on national and institutional levels.
- Clarifying and providing more information on mobility possibilities with different residence permits both for scholars and employers.

Country-specific findings

Country-specific findings cannot be seen as comprehensive with this approach, as the results reflect more the similar situation of at-risk academics in the 10 European target countries rather than country-specific issues. However, some observations can be made from each country.

The focus group participants in Austria remarked that there is relevant information available. However, there is lack of national support initiatives or actions and lack of coordination between relevant national level actors. Also, country-specific language requirements (German) were indicated as challenging.

In Belgium/Flanders, the focus group participants noted that there is a lack of coordination on national level and that there is not enough information available. It was also highlighted that besides English there are multiple languages which are required (French, Dutch/Flemish).

Finland is a small country, which means that also employment opportunities in higher education are limited and the focus group participants indicated that there is very high competition for research positions. There are also national language requirements (Finnish or Swedish) for teaching positions at universities especially when teaching bachelor level courses.

The focus group participants in France remarked that there is very high competition for academic positions and the language requirements concerning the level of French are challenging. The target group also noted that there is lack of information.

In Germany, the focus group participants emphasised the importance of networks. Moreover, the importance of the national level funding programmes was highlighted.

In Ireland one of the challenges is limited access to the labour market during long asylum and residence permit processes. The focus group participants also commented that there is a great difference between the opportunities in cities compared to the countryside. It was also highlighted that there is lack of diversity in the academic community. On the other hand, the recognition process is clear, and there are associations for specific professions and informative websites.

The focus group participants both in the Netherlands and in Norway found the language requirements challenging.

In Sweden gender equality was seen as a positive aspect by the focus group participants. However, the academic competition was seen high and the participants highlighted the difficulty to move from academia to the private sector.

In Switzerland, the focus group participants noted also that the language requirements are challenging. Furthermore, recognition of academic qualifications is equally challenging and there is lack of coordination on national level and not enough information available. On the other hand, there are decentralised services for the target group.

EURAXESS portal

EURAXESS - Researchers in Motion is a European initiative delivering information and support services to professional researchers. Backed by the European Union, member states and associated countries, it supports re-

searcher mobility and career development, while enhancing scientific collaboration between Europe and the world. EURAXESS is also a gateway to Science4Refugees, a European Commission's initiative helping refugee researchers find suitable jobs in today's challenging research landscape. Part of the initiative, is the Science4Refugees Research Buddies, supporting refugee scientists in finding European researchers to discuss problems, find solutions and study together, by matching their research field, scientific studies and interests.

A need for a job portal for refugees including relevant information as well as providing targeted jobs for refugees was identified in the focus groups as one of the potential ways to enhance the employment opportunities. There is a clear link of this idea to the existing activities of the EURAXESS portal¹¹ and the science4refugees initiative¹² and one of the findings of the focus groups is that these available services and resources were not widely known among the target group.

The EURAXESS portal provides information for researchers planning on moving to different European countries. The network covers all European countries and the portal provides comprehensive information on different aspects of the arrival and settlement process, as well as information on legislative aspects and country-specific information.

In the CARE project the next step after the focus groups and the employer survey, is to create country guides linked to the EURAXESS portal. To ensure the usefulness of the

information provided, the EURAXESS portal and especially the national level portals of each target country and the science4refugees section were discussed and tested during the focus group discussions.

Furthermore, in many of the focus groups the national contact point joined the focus group for the section covering the EURAXESS portal. This way the links with the target group were established and/or strengthened, and the scholars could get direct guidance and information while the EURAXESS contact could get immediate feedback on different aspects of their activities.

Recommendations:

- Intensifying the promotion of EURAXESS services among the target group of highly skilled refugees.
- Linking EURAXESS with national support structures.
- Further development of science4refugees-services on national levels.

Main findings:

- The EURAXESS portal is quite easy to use and provides comprehensive information in one place, covering all European countries.
- Potentially providing the needed information and support for the target group on open positions and funding opportunities, as well as providing country specific information on different aspects when arriving, living and working in a country, personal assistance and career development.
- However, the portal and its functionalities as well as the network and its services are not very well known among the target group. As a recommendation, the national EURAXESS contact points could intensify targeted efforts towards reaching out to the target group to cover this gap.
- Science4refugees section is potentially responding to many of the needs raised by the target group: however, the functionalities such as the Research buddy programme, as well as the flagging function for refugee friendly positions remain a bit unclear as they differ from country to country.
- National portals vary – contents differ from country to country: it would be useful to collect best practices and most useful aspects to provide coherent information.
- National level cooperation between EURAXESS and national initiatives could lead to mutual benefits.

¹¹ <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/>

¹² <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/science4refugees>

Main recommendations and messages

The focus group report of the CARE project is presenting the perspectives of the scholars with refugee background currently continuing their research careers in 10 European countries. The displaced scholars are facing similar experiences and challenges in the 10 European countries and therefore this report has mainly concentrated on these shared observations and recommendations and the country-specific findings were only briefly discussed.

The relevant key observations and recommendations which are common to all these 10 European countries are presented in the table below. A clear message expressed by the researchers with refugee background is the importance of

being heard. The findings presented in this report are based on direct discussions with the researchers with refugee background, which adds to the relevance of the results.

Many scholars pointed out, that the focus in many countries is on recruiting and attracting the highly skilled work force from abroad. European countries should acknowledge the expertise and knowledge among the people already living in their countries, in order not to lose any human potential. Many scholars are eager to provide input to the society and are disappointed, when opportunities to do so are not given. The contribution researchers with different backgrounds and career paths can make to the European community should be recognised and the necessary support structures should be built.

Often, the situation would ameliorate already significantly by remembering the diversity of the scholars in general and paying attention to accessibility and inclusion.

Scholars clearly highlight their wish not to be seen primarily as refugees, but as researchers. At the same time, there is a need for targeted support measures. The main message from the focus groups conducted in the framework of the CARE project is, that scholars should be first and foremost seen as researchers in their own field. The need for tailored and targeted support should not diminish their profile as researchers.

Observation	Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic cultures and traditions differ from one country to another. Hence, the disruptions of the career pose major challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be mindful – researchers with refugee background might need time and support in order to adjust to a new academic tradition and academic culture.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Networks are crucial for enabling the continuity of the academic career. Scholars without affiliation are particularly in a difficult situation as it is very hard for them to follow developments in their research field without resources to attend conferences and no access to academic e-journals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring relevant networking opportunities in the research held for researchers with refugee background. This could entail: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing support to attend international conferences would be extremely beneficial both for the scholars with no current affiliation but also for the scholars with a research position. Introducing a visitor scholar programme for refugees, which would provide a link to academic community and an opportunity for networking and access to resources. Entailing internship opportunities for refugees.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research communities are not always diverse. • There are existing initiatives facilitating peer support, however, the target group is not always aware of the existence of these measures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating platforms for peer support (on or offline). • Enhancing the promotion of existing peer support activities so that the information reaches the target group.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on research career opportunities and funding structures is not always openly available but is rather considered as common knowledge. • This information might not be transparent for scholars with different backgrounds. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the clarity and accessibility of the information and resources provided. • Providing support on how to apply for funding and positions, on academic writing and publishing structures both during PhD studies and also when researchers in various stages of their career arrive in a new country. • Facilitating contacts through matchmaking events, as well as through other channels and putting scholars in direct contact with universities but also with NGOs. • Support building start-ups, other business ideas and initiatives outside the academic field.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars with no existing affiliation to higher education institution find it difficult to continue active research careers and to establish connections to employers inside and outside academia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing visiting scholar programmes for researchers with refugee background providing career assistance, networking, access to the academic career services, library and e-journals, a possibility to operate as an assistant lecturer and support scholars' connection with their own academic field. • Introducing an intermediary actor operating between academia and employment offices providing support and assistance for highly skilled refugees in particular.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient level of local language skills is seen as a barrier. • Being a researcher with refugee background is stressful at many levels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing targeted academic language training opportunities for researchers with refugee background. • Ensuring access to psycho-social support.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incidents when the anonymity has not been guaranteed at a sufficient level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting and recognising the anonymity of the target group in their working environment and among support programmes. It is necessary to have clear procedures in place supporting academic careers of at-risk scholars who wish to stay anonymous.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees are only seen as a homogenous group with low qualifications. • The researchers have experienced systemic racism and discrimination in recruitment processes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All relevant actors at EU, national and institutional level should be actively changing and diversifying the image of refugees including highly skilled researchers. • Ensuring inclusiveness of the own institution by critically reviewing the recruitment processes.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholars supported by existing programmes made suggestions for further development and improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reviewing the existing support programmes regularly based on the feedback collected from the supported scholars.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term grants are problematic with little time to establish the research career. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring support for a sustainable career path beyond the grant period in all support programmes. Exploring opportunities for long-term support structures for the scholars in the framework of the support programmes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a clearly identified need for targeted support for researchers with refugee background, that should be recognised and intensified throughout Europe. • Support initiatives are not available in all European countries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing EU-wide support programme for at-risk academics to ensure availability in all European countries. • Ensuring availability of support structures on national and institutional levels. • Clarifying and providing more information on mobility possibilities with different residence permits both for scholars and employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EURAXESS platform is potentially very useful and relevant for the researchers with refugee background, but is currently not widely known among the target group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensifying the promotion of EURAXESS-services among the target group of highly skilled refugees. • Linking EURAXESS with national support structures. • Further development of science4refugees services on national levels.

CARe project's Employer Survey

On the same topic, the CARe project has conducted an employer survey gathering the perspectives of the employers active in the research labour market of 10 European target countries. Based on the employer survey results it is clear that the situation, challenges and perspectives of the employers on academic and non-academic sectors concerning employment

of researchers with refugee background are predominantly shared across all target countries. The findings are in line with the results of the focus group report concerning the need for targeted measures and support structures, networking and awareness raising as well as the wish for more involvement of the private sector.

Please see the report on the CARe-website <http://www.aca-secretariat.be/index.php?id=1123>

Further information

For further information please consult the project website and contact the CARE team:

CARe project

- **Career Advancement for Refugee Researchers in Europe – CARe project**

Email address: care@aca-secretariat.be

Webpage: <http://www.aca-secretariat.be/index.php?id=1123>

Twitter: @CAReRefugees

Funding sources, initiatives and projects

- **EURAXESS: Science4refugees initiative**

<https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/science4refugees>

- **Scholars at Risk**

<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/>

- **IIE- Scholar Rescue Fund**

<https://www.scholarrescuefund.org/>

- **Partnership of the Finnish National Agency for Education EDUFI and the IIE-Scholar Rescue Fund**

<https://www.oph.fi/en/programmes/scholar-rescue-fund>

- **The national programme for the urgent aid and reception of scientists in exile, PAUSE**

<https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/en-program-pause/index.htm>

- **The Council for At-Risk Academics, CARA**

<https://www.cara.ngo/>

- **The Philipp Schwartz Initiative, PSI**

<https://www.humboldt-foundation.de/web/philipp-schwartz-initiative-en.html>

- **BRiDGE II:**

www.uni-bielefeld.de/International/projects/bridge2/bridge2.html

- **InSPIREurope:**

<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sar-europe/inspireurope>

- **Inclusive Internationalisation:**

www.gu.se/english/research/doctoral_studies/programme-for-refugees-with-a-research-background



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 824651

Layout and graphics: Liisa Valtonen