



**AKADEMISK
DUGNAD**



**ACADEMIC
DUGNAD**

**Academic Dugnad for Refugees and Asylum Seekers:
Joining Forces for Academic Inclusion.**

A **report** from the project team at the
University of Oslo, June 2017.



UiO • University of Oslo

An Academic Dugnad for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

At the beginning of the autumn semester 2015, as old and new students were preparing for a new year of studies, the number of asylum seekers entering Europe increased rapidly. The usual holiday news reports about the weather gave way to harrowing stories of people drowning in the Mediterranean Sea and suffocating in trailers. As tens of thousands began walking across the continent in search of a future, it became abundantly clear that this situation was too acute to be handled by authorities – local, national and transnational – alone. Our systems were not prepared.

Rector Ole Petter Ottersen of the University of Oslo – and at the time chairman of the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions – made a call for an academic *dugnad*,¹ requesting the support of universities, university colleges and all sectors relating to higher education and research in an extraordinary effort to help alleviating the situation. Amongst those arriving in Norway, there would certainly be many whose studies had been interrupted, or who would need recognition of previous studies (or perhaps more studies) to be able to find relevant work. Systems for applications, recognition, and admissions, are largely national and in many instances institutional or subject to the profession. To ensure that people did not waste time unnecessarily, we would need to review our information as well as the systems themselves.

Equally important, of course, was sharing our knowledge. Immigration, especially that of refugees and their families, is a sensitive political topic. The dissemination of research-based facts to the public as well as to politicians is always part of our mission as academic institutions. The urgency of the situation, however, suggested that it would be wise to contribute more than usual in order to keep the upcoming debates as equitable as possible.

This document is a review of the collective efforts of the University of Oslo since the Academic Dugnad project was launched in October 2015. It aims to be detailed and forthright enough to be of real value for future dugnad projects at the university itself – the kind of document we wished we had when beginning this project. We also hope it can be of use for other institutions that are, or are planning to get, engaged. Cooperation and the sharing of ideas – across institutions, sectors, and borders – is essential if we are to succeed in including refugee students and researchers into our societies.

Anna Kolberg Buverud, project leader

¹ *Dugnad* derives from the Old Norse “dugnad”, meaning help, good deed. It describes a group of people doing voluntary work together for a common good, as an extraordinary effort to create something of lasting value. The willingness to participate – the “dugnad spirit” – is considered an important part of Norwegian culture.

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1. The initial phase

«With research based knowledge we wish to shed light on what the refugee crisis means: politically, historically, psychologically, economically and socially. Europe is being tested, and with it – our humanity.»

Rector Ole Petter Ottersen, University of Oslo

As the first drafts for the Academic Dugnad project were made in September 2015, we became aware that the University of Oslo (UiO) and the [Oslo and University College of Applied Sciences \(HiOA\)](#) had similar plans. Being the two largest institutions of higher education and research in Oslo, our strengths and profiles are compatible rather than competing. The advantages of working together were clear and the two rectors immediately decided on a close, if informal, collaboration.

At both institutions, international office staff was engaged in the planning. This had a double value: international offices have relevant experience on topics such as international admissions and recognition of foreign education, not least through the continued development of the Bologna process. In addition, this is an administrative area where officers regularly meet across institutions and organisations. If not entirely prepared for the new situation, at least we already knew some of the problem areas, and we knew each other well.

A list of suggested initiatives was made:

- A lecture series on relevant topics
- An academic information day for refugees and asylum seekers who wish to prepare for further studies or relevant work in Norway
- A book drive, collecting literature (scientific as well as otherwise) in relevant languages, to be donated at the information day
- Student-to-student mentoring
- Financial support to a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in Norwegian language
- Cooperation with HiOA on student activities

A senior adviser at the UiO Office for International Relations and Research Support was given the task of coordinating the activities at the university. The university leadership was strongly involved, ensuring that the dugnad work was given priority across the administration. By the end of October 2015, plans were developed for all initiatives, and a [web site](#) and a distinct logo was in place.

Embedding the initiative in the organisation

Within the first few months, the dugnad project was presented to and discussed by the deans as well as the University Board. It was also presented to a number of the internal networks for administrative staff to ensure that all the university employees were aware of the dugnad and able to contribute. We also had meetings with the [Student Parliament](#) and the local and national chapters of the [Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund \(SAIH\)](#).

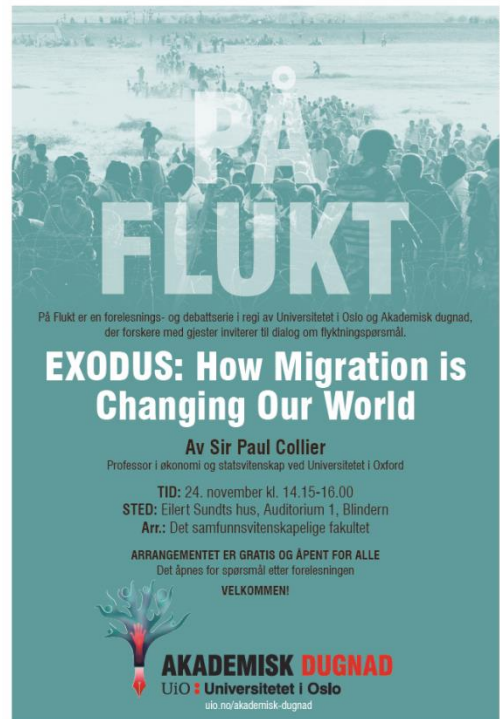
The dugnad received strong support by both students and staff from the very beginning. Many expressed pride in belonging to a university that was actively engaging in the refugees' situation and taking a public stance against xenophobia. The university museums even opened their doors, offering free entrance to all refugees and asylum seekers.

1.1 Lecture series: På Flukt (“Displaced”)

Some open lectures on the refugee topic had already been arranged by departments and centres. The university deans decided to cooperate on a series of relevant lectures and seminars that should be open to the public and widely advertised. The series was called *På Flukt* (“Displaced”) and would offer a wide range of perspectives on the refugee situation, inviting the public to ask questions and participate in the discussions.

The first lecture was arranged by the Faculty of Social Sciences on 24 November 2015. Sir Paul Collier of the University of Oxford was invited to present the findings in his book *Exodus – How migration is changing our world*.

By May 2016, more than 30 lectures had been arranged within a variety of subjects such as political science, sociology, social anthropology, human geography, economy, history, education, law, human rights, environmental studies, psychology and medicine. The majority of the lectures were held at the [House of Literature](#) in Oslo, a popular arena for public meetings and seminars, and regularly attracted a full house.



1.2 A study information day for refugees and asylum seekers

Partners and planning

The university and HiOA invited the [Norwegian Universities and Colleges Admission Service \(NUCAS\)](#) and the [Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance \(NOKUT\)](#) to plan an information day for refugees and asylum seekers wishing to study in Norway.¹

Admission to the majority of undergraduate study programmes in Norway is coordinated by NUCAS, whereas admission to master programmes is administered by the individual institution. NOKUT is in charge of general recognition of foreign higher education (i.e. the alignment of Norwegian and foreign higher education) whereas the individual institution will decide on the academic value when transferring credits from foreign higher education courses.

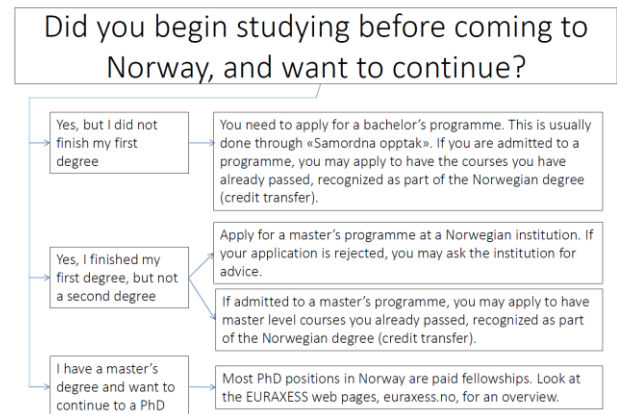
People coming to Norway with a foreign professional qualification may need a specific recognition to be able to practice. As there are 163 regulated professions in Norway, and many different offices for recognition of professional qualifications, it was decided not to include all of these, but rather focus on information about topics relevant for further studies.²

¹ NUCAS web page: <https://www.samordnaoptak.no/info/english/> . NOKUT web page: <http://www.nokut.no/en/>

² For more information, see <http://www.nokut.no/en/Foreign-education/Other-recognition-systems/Regulated-professions/>

The information day would be arranged in English, as newly arrived asylum seekers could not be expected to have reached an adequate level of Norwegian, and because fluency in English is in any case a prerequisite for higher education in Norway.

Our existing information material about application and admission was largely unsuitable for the target group. Information in Norwegian was mostly directed at people who had lived in Norway for a long time (and, preferably, had all their education from here), whereas information in English was almost exclusively directed at potential international students, applying from abroad.



It took ten professionals in international admissions and recognition issues several hours to come up with this flowchart. A NOKUT staff member ensured that it was also made available in Arabic.

The university libraries at UiO and HiOA organized a book drive, encouraging students and staff to give away literature and scientific books to what would become a “free bookstore” where all information day participants could pick up whatever they were interested in.

Universities and university colleges in Oslo and the surrounding counties were invited to set up information stands at the event, to give information about study opportunities in Norway. In addition to UiO and HiOA, the [Norwegian University of Life Sciences](#), the [Oslo School of Architecture and Design](#), and the [Norwegian School of Theology](#) joined in. The [Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education](#), who coordinates English language information about study information in Norway, ensured that information about opportunities all across the country would be available.

A student-to-student mentoring session was planned as the final part of the information day programme. Two student assistants were hired to coordinate this part of the event, which would include food as well as informal discussions on student life in Oslo between our own students and prospective students with a refugee background. We advertised for student volunteers, and the interest was so great that it only took a couple of days to fill up all places. The students received a crash course in the refugee situation and volunteering, which included a lecture from Dr Nora Sveaas, a UiO professor in psychology who specializes in refugee mental health.

We planned for a large audience, and contacted all refugee reception centres in the counties surrounding Oslo (there were no such centres in the city of Oslo at the time) offering free transport to and from the event. Information was also spread through all non-governmental and volunteer organisations we knew of, as well as all mosques in Oslo, our own student organisations etc. As the day – set to 1 December 2015 – drew nearer, however, we realized that our expectations were too high, and we had to scale back our plans.

There are probably several reasons why we overestimated the potential interest. It took just over one and a half month from the start of the planning to the event itself, which left little time to advertise the final programme. We were informed that some potential participants were not able to come due to compulsory Norwegian language classes. Also, it takes time to establish a new initiative,

and to convince possible participants that this is relevant.³ And finally, it may have been too early. The majority of refugee reception centres are far from Oslo, and the majority of the asylum seekers that arrived in 2015 were not yet ready to begin planning future studies. (On the other hand, we were contacted by people from all across the country and even from abroad, who wanted to participate.)

December 1, 2015: the information day

About 75 people met up for the information day, in addition to student volunteers and a rather large contingent of academic and administrative staff. They were welcomed by the rector of UiO, Ole Petter Ottersen, the rector of HiOA, Curt Rice, and Ms Khamshajiny Gunaratnam, Oslo's deputy mayor, who herself has a refugee background.



Oslo's deputy mayor, Khamshajiny Gunaratnam, a previous student at the University of Oslo, welcomes the participants. (Photo: Ola Sæther/UNIFORUM)

The programme included a presentation of NOKUT's recognition systems, and admission procedures to undergraduate and graduate studies by NUCAS and staff from UiO and HiOA respectively. Our [Department of Linguistic and Scandinavian Studies \(ILN\)](#) and [International Summer School \(ISS\)](#) gave information about available on-line and campus training opportunities in Norwegian language.⁴

The libraries' "free bookstore" was a great success, and the participants who lived in reception centres carried home as much as they possibly could - not only for themselves, but also for their

³ Since this first event, similar information days has been arranged by higher education institutions all across Norway, adding significantly to the number of people benefiting from the information material we developed.

⁴ ILN web page: <http://www.hf.uio.no/iln/english/>, ISS web page: <http://www.uio.no/english/studies/summerschool/>

fellow centre inhabitants that were not present. (Some books were not picked up during the event. The libraries solved this by leaving a number of book shelves behind, offering free literature to students in general.)

And finally, the meeting with the students gave the participants a chance to unwind. Over food and soft drinks, they were sharing stories about student life in different parts of the world.

1.3 Strengthening language initiatives

The University of Oslo has offered Norwegian language training for decades. The International Summer School (ISS) offers courses through its summer session, and also courses for international staff and for the public for a fee. The Department of Linguistic and Scandinavian Studies (ILN) teaches the language free of charge to exchange students and international students admitted to bachelor and master programmes. Together, they made an online overview of available web resources, as well as a presentation of the UiO campus opportunities.

ILN was already planning to make a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) in introductory Norwegian, aimed at exchange students not interested in following the ordinary campus-based courses. To accelerate the production, the university leadership decided to give financial support to the MOOC project. Close to 1 million NOK (just over 100 000 Euro) was donated from the central administration's funds, more than one-third of this from the leadership's own funds.

1.4 Lessons learned from the initial phase

The work in the project's first months was coordinated without a formal project team, only a project leader. The extraordinary support of the university leadership ensured that all administrative staff was available when needed. It is estimated that about 30 employees in the University of Oslo's leadership and support units were involved in the project to a smaller or larger degree during the first three months of the *Academic Dugnad*.

Furthermore, there were no formal budget restraints. It was decided that necessary costs were simply to be covered by the university leadership's special funds.

Both these measures, together with the "dugnad spirit" of all involved staff, ensured that the work could move forward without any unnecessary process or delay. Not counting the MOOC support and the (probably unaccountable) cost of changed priorities, the expenditure for this initial stage was not much more than food, drink and transport for the Information Day. The costs relating to the "På Flukt" lecture series (primarily advertising) was covered by the faculties.

The greatest lesson of the initial phase was given by the participants on the information day. They were refugees and asylum seekers, but more importantly, they were journalists, chemistry teachers and students of English literature. Several of them told us that this was the first day, since leaving their home country, that they had felt like the person they used to be. We were taught that we had to plan for potential students, not just "refugees".

2. Towards a more systematic approach

«We believe it is important that the refugees are received as whole people and given a chance to realize themselves. This may give refugees hope for a better future, and will ensure better integration in our society.»

Rector Ole Petter Ottersen, University of Oslo

As in much of the developed world, higher education is increasingly becoming a prerequisite for success in the Norwegian labour market. Unskilled labour is less and less in demand and competition for such jobs is rife. In Norway, an *Introduction Programme* (see text box) shall ensure that refugees are given a real chance to participate in Norwegian society through language classes, cultural training and internships. The programme has a strong focus on entering the work market, although arrangements for refugees who want to continue higher education exists.

Through the review of our information about admissions and recognition as well as by hearing the refugees' own stories, we realised that there are two main challenges for refugees who want to continue with studies or high-skilled work in Norway: Language skills and recognition of previous education.

At the very beginning of the project, we had discussed the establishment of special admission quotas for refugees, allowing them to bypass more qualified applicants or even formal admission requirements. These ideas were soon dismissed.

The entry requirements to higher education in Norway ensure that students have the necessary competencies they need to succeed. Sufficient fluency in Norwegian and English language is crucial to be able to follow courses and pass exams. Educational equity is not achieved by letting in applicants with a poor chance of finishing their studies. The refugees who arrive in Norway have proved that they are resourceful just by getting here. Allowing them into study programmes they were not qualified for, would carry too high a risk of turning success into failure.

Establishing special admission quotas for refugees is a more complex discussion. The implied discrimination of better qualified non-refugee applicants is not only a

The Introduction Programme

The Introductory Act (2003) gives newly arrived refugees the right and duty to participate in an Introduction Programme to improve their opportunities in Norway. The programme provides an introduction to Norwegian society through courses in Norwegian language, society and culture, combined with work internships.

After receiving residence permits, refugees are given temporary housing in a municipality, which is responsible for offering the Introduction Programme and basic living funds. The municipalities receive funding by the state.

The programme usually lasts for two years, and shall be adjusted to the individual refugee's needs and abilities. The refugee has both a right and a duty to participate, and can only move to another municipality and programme by application.

Refugees who are admitted to higher education programmes are written out of the Introduction Programme and may receive regular student loans.

The goal of the Introduction Programme is to improve opportunities for immigrants to participate in the employment market and society in general, and to strengthen immigrants' financial independence as a result.

politically sensitive issue, but goes against the grain of general admission regulations. Moreover, not a single refugee or asylum seeker we met wanted admission through a special refugee quota. They all just wanted a chance to compete on equal terms.

Language skills

All applicants for undergraduate programmes taught in Norwegian at universities and university colleges in Norway must meet Norwegian and English language requirements, equivalent to B2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. (Postgraduate programmes may have even higher requirements.) Although some courses at the University of Oslo may have a curriculum that is entirely Norwegian and others entirely English, these requirements are universal at the bachelor level. At the master level, there are a number of master programmes and courses taught in English, where the Norwegian language requirement is waived.

Decades of experience with international students from across the world have shown that these requirements are not too strict – rather the opposite.

Although the Introduction Programme offers Norwegian language courses on all levels, the wide variety in the refugees' national and academic backgrounds is challenging the programme's ability to provide quality courses on the levels needed for higher education.⁵

Moreover, it seems that the Introduction Programme has had limited awareness of the fact that English is even more important than Norwegian for refugees who want to continue studying in Norway. Nationwide, there is a small number of bachelor programmes and a large number of master programmes taught exclusively in English, with no Norwegian language requirements. It is reasonable to assume that certain refugees with a medium-high level of English proficiency could have begun further studies much earlier after arrival, if English language training was given priority. In a similar vein, refugees with higher education but little or no English skills have little or no chances on the skilled work market.

Recognition of previous education

Being able to transfer educational qualifications across borders has been a major force behind the Bologna Process and its transition to comparable higher education systems in Europe and beyond. These are not trivial formalities. All education builds on previous learning; and content, order, and cultural context varies between countries. For an immigrant to qualify for further education or regulated professions, previous education must be recognized as compatible with that of the receiving country. Often, extra tuition is needed to adjust to national regulations.

Non-regulated professions may not need a document proving such recognition, but many employers prefer such a document to be able to ascertain a refugee's educational background.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance (NOKUT) is in charge of general recognition of foreign higher education (i.e. the alignment of Norwegian and foreign higher education). Over the last decade, NOKUT has developed a special recognition procedure for persons without verifiable documentation (UVD-procedure) and, lately, piloted a qualification passport system for refugees who do not qualify for the UVD-procedure. Such general

⁵ See e.g. Abamosa, Juhar Yasin, *Refugees' Path to Higher Education in a Host Country: Opportunities and Challenges. A Qualitative Study from Norway*, Master Thesis (University of Oslo, 2015).

recognition may be essential to gain access to the work market, and to a lesser degree when applying for study programmes.⁶

One of the general entrance requirements for higher education in Norway is 13 years of basic education. Refugees from countries with a different educational system may need one or more years of higher education to qualify. The UVD-procedure and the qualification passport system could both be used to document this. However, neither system can be used to apply for competitive study programmes where only those with the best grades are accepted.

Another challenge for refugees wishing to continue studying is that they may not meet with specific master programme requirements. Their undergraduate degree may be too short of years, or lack in-depth study of particular topics. Specific recognition procedures determine whether the foreign education fulfils the specific disciplinary requirements for the individual programme, and usually takes place as part of an application process. Applicants who do not meet the requirements may have few opportunities to fill in the necessary academic gaps, unless they are ready to start over with undergraduate studies. Some previous education may then be transferred as credits into the new bachelor programme.

There is a certain merit to this “slow route”, as the repetition of topics in a foreign setting may bridge both academic and cultural differences. Nevertheless, it is likely to significantly slow down or even completely stop a refugee’s way back into academia or skilled labour.

2.1 Academic practice

To meet the challenges facing refugees with higher education, the municipality of Oslo and the University of Oslo developed an internship programme called *Academic Practice*. Refugees with an academic background, whether they aim to continue studying or find relevant work, will often find that the gap between the academic systems and learning requirements in their country of education and the receiving country is larger than expected. The key element of the Academic Practice, therefore, is to use existing welfare programmes for newly arrived refugees in a way that allows those with an academic background to get to know their discipline in a Norwegian setting.

Refugees who participate in the Introduction Programme (see text box on page 8) or similar schemes, and has obtained at least one higher degree, may apply for relevant work practice at the university – as a research assistant or similar – provided that we offer the academic discipline they have training in. Requests from possible applicants trained in other disciplines are as far as possible forwarded to other higher educational institutions in the greater Oslo area.

Cooperation with the municipality

Social welfare programmes in Oslo are administered through the city’s boroughs. 15 in total, the boroughs have organized this in different ways, some using the existing structures of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV), while others have developed their own services for refugees – and with a varying degree of cooperation across borough administrations. Together with the municipality administration, we established a working group that included members of the borough administration.

⁶ For more information, see <http://www.nokut.no/en/Foreign-education/>

Work internships are meant to be a significant part of the Introduction Programme, but finding placements suitable for highly skilled refugees has been a persistent challenge. Many have been left to prove themselves at the dwindling unskilled labour market – and many have been successful, having extra resources to draw on through their education. This success, however, is at the cost of refugees and others with little or no schooling, who are left with even fewer opportunities to work, whereas the society at large loses access to the skilled refugees' competencies and experiences.



Tabassom, our first Academic Practice candidate, together with Geir Ulfstein, Director of PluriCourts. (Photo: Ola Sæther/UNIFORUM)

There is a certain amount of bureaucracy involved in the Introduction Programme, and it is important that the unit engaging an intern stays in regular touch with his or her programme advisor, to ensure that all procedures are followed and expectations are met. General information to the advisors was given through meetings and e-mail correspondence. Rumours spread fast, and we were soon contacted by Introduction Programme officers in other counties who wanted to learn more about the project.

Admitting candidates

Academic Practice started out as a pilot project in spring 2016. [PluriCourts](http://www.jus.uio.no/pluricourts/),⁷ one of our Centres of Excellence in Research, advertised broadly through the Introduction Programme for an internship candidate, and took in two candidates during that year.

An on-line application form was developed, into which Introduction Programme advisors can fill in information about potential candidates. Academic dognad staff assesses the information. If the university can match the refugee's academic background, we would send a request to the relevant faculty, department or centre, asking if they would be interested in receiving a formal application for an Academic Practice internship. If so, the refugee and programme advisor would be asked to produce a formal application including a cover letter and a CV.

If the university cannot match the academic background, we will usually try to contact an academic institution in the greater Oslo area which offer relevant study programmes, in case an internship position is available there. Unqualified applicants are notified as soon as possible.

Since spring 2016, eight refugees have been admitted as Academic Practice interns. 16 applicants have been rejected or passed on to institutions that are more suitable to their academic background, and 13 applications are currently being processed.

⁷ See <http://www.jus.uio.no/pluricourts/english/>

Experiences and lessons

The *Academic Practice* idea and basic concept was developed by the university leadership and discussed with the university deans at an early stage. This contributed strongly to a positive reception of applications by department leadership and staff.

It soon transpired that many refugees had never written a cover letter before, and that the job-seeking courses they attended through the Introduction Programme did not teach how to write such letters for vacant positions demanding academic skills. We therefore made an agreement with our career centre, which allowed all applicants for Academic Practice to seek guidance on how to write their cover letters.

All sectors tend to develop their own “tribal language”. Close cooperation with the municipality, especially during the pilot phase, was essential to ensure that we understood each other properly.

Aspirations and expectations may sometimes run higher than we are able to meet. The university’s faculties, centres and departments have every right to spend as much time as necessary to consider a request – but that may seem unreasonably long to an exited applicant and his/her programme advisor. Also, we have found that professionals with just one degree, who have spent a long time working before coming to Norway, may have little to offer a department as a research assistant.

Academic Practice, in its current form, is a flexible and high-maintenance initiative with tailored solutions for the individual refugee. Support from the academic environments is generally high, but cannot be expected to maintain in the long run unless the majority of participants are genuinely able to contribute to the work place.

The initiative will be evaluated during autumn 2017. Admission requirements, procedures and learning outcomes will be considered, as will the possibility of combining this arrangement with systems for recognition and study advice.

2.2 Academic Network

Academic Network was started by the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA) in spring 2016 and was extended into a cooperation with UiO from fall 2016. Academic Network consists of groups with 4-8 refugees or asylum seekers (participants) lead by students (guides) at UiO and HiOA. This is a low-cost and low-threshold opportunity for students who want to do a voluntary effort for refugees and asylum seekers in Oslo, and refugees and asylum seekers who want to regain their academic identity, build networks, and have a social meeting place.

The main idea is to connect students with refugees and asylum seekers who belong to the same academic field, to exchange academic experiences and learn from each other. Participants are also given information on entrance requirements for higher education in Norway. The number of guides is adjusted to suit the number of participants.

The groups meet every fortnight throughout a semester, ending up with a joint dinner where the guides and participants are awarded diplomas for their efforts. The working language of the groups is English, to ensure that the refugees and asylum seekers get necessary language training. An added bonus to this is that our international students also get a chance to act as guides – which many do.

The first time the Academic Network was arranged, about 80 guides and participants registered, many of whom had been in Norway for several years already. Some of the participants have since changed roles to guides. Since then, the number has sunk to about 40 participants each term. The majority has been in Oslo for a relatively short period and is still part of the Introduction Programme or they are asylum seekers.



A group of Academic Network guides and participants, spring 2017. The closing dinner participation was unfortunately reduced due to Ramadan and the long Norwegian summer evenings. (Photo: Anja Gil Spilling)

Fewer participants make it more difficult to sort the groups into separate academic fields. Especially when it comes to traditional university disciplines, such as humanities and natural and social sciences, the groups tend to cover wider areas. It has been a bit of a challenge to ensure that these groups maintain a student life and career focus. The networks are evaluated at the end of each semester, and inspiration for change is brought in from similar initiatives in other countries (e.g. the Discovery semester for refugees at ETH Zürich).

2.3 Information services

In January 2017, the university's study information office expanded its services to include information to potential applicants with a refugee or asylum seeker background. Potential applicants may include advice on recognition of previous education, information about study programmes at the university, entrance requirements, deadlines, applications procedures, etc

Refugees tend to differ from other groups of applicants by having lived in Norway for a short time, having limited knowledge of the country and its educational system, and often by conveying a special sense of urgency due to "lost years" or traumatic experiences.

Study advisors for refugees need to have certain knowledge of the refugees' background and situation, as well as easily available country-specific information. Basic skills in cross-cultural communication and the ability to create trust is also an advantage.

The advisors aim to inform and inspire refugees with an academic background to prepare for further studies in Norway. The goal is that the refugees shall be able to use their existing qualifications and experiences in the Norwegian society and work market.

Information and supervision is given in the following ways:

- Drop-in hours at the university information centre, "Knutepunktet". Times are announced at the information centre's web pages.
- If unable to meet during drop-in hours, potential applicants may make an individual appointment by e-mail.
- Group counselling: Introduction Programme advisors and others working with refugees may ask for a group counselling session. Such groups may be complex, and a special presentation will be offered in cooperation with the admission office.

Information is also available on-line.

Future plans include establishing a network between the information services at all higher education institutions in the greater Oslo area, to facilitate referrals when needed. Annual workshops with Introduction Programme advisors and other immigration authorities is also being considered.

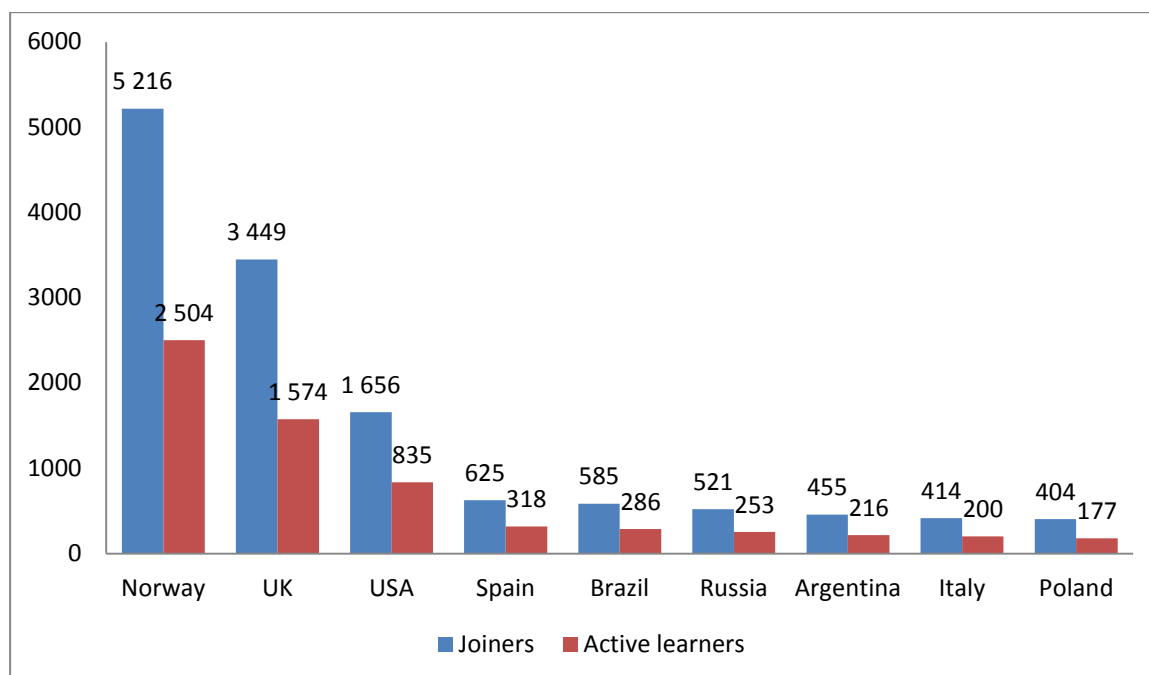
2.4 Language courses

Language courses for refugees who want to qualify for higher education is primarily a governmental responsibility. However, the university offers two low-threshold, online courses for refugees who want to work with language training on their own: one in Norwegian and one in English.

MOOC: Introduction to Norwegian

The "Introduction to Norwegian" Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) that received university leadership support, opened on 16 January 2017. More than 20 000 joined the course, logging in from 168 different countries across the world. As is usual for these kinds of language courses, less than one in ten actively followed the course throughout the period.

The highest number of joiners and active participants lives in Norway, indicating that the course is filling a void in the Norwegian language training offered in the country.



The course is currently (June 2017) running for the second time, and is planned to run twice every semester. The long-term aim is to combine the course with campus sessions to create a 5 ECTS blended learning course.

Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support (OLS): English language training

OLS is a system for free on-line language courses, originally developed for for Erasmus+ exchange students, that has been made available to refugees and asylum seekers across Europe.

Courses are only available in the EU languages, so Norwegian is not included. The University of Oslo, therefore, applied for and received 1000 course licences to share out to refugees and asylum seekers in Norway wishing to practice English. Information about the course has been spread to all refugees, asylum seekers and advisors we have been in contact with during the dugnad project.

Through the OLS course, refugees can test their English language level, participate in language training suitable to their level, and test themselves again at the end of the course. Preliminary reports suggest that the tests give results that are comparable to TOEFL tests results.

By 30 May 2017, 187 refugees had been given access to the test, and 93 had passed the entrance test and begun the course.

The results of the entrance test are sorted according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and shows that the majority will need to work more before qualifying for higher education.

A1-	3
A1	19
A2	35
B1	20
B2	10
C1	5
C2	1
Total	93

Unfortunately, some participants have reported that their Introduction Programme advisors have told them to avoid practicing English while learning Norwegian. Other advisors, however, have contacted the Academic Dugnad team to discuss strategies to ensure that Introduction Programme participants have a chance to maintain and develop their English language skills, because they are aiming for higher education.

2.5 Cooperation and networks

Since the beginning, the University of Oslo and the Academic Dugnad team has sought to cooperate with other higher education institutions and other relevant organisations and offices, at home and abroad. Finding solutions to complex problems demands a complex network. A list of some of our most important partners:

- Institutional: The Student Parliament, Scholars at Risk, Department of Linguistic and Scandinavian Studies, the International Summer School and the University Library. The project has also cooperated with Norwegian and international students writing their theses on relevant topics.
- National: Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Studies, the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, the University College of Southeast Norway, the Peace Research Institute Oslo, the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions, the Norwegian Centre for International Cooperation in Education, NOKUT, NUCAS, International Students Union (ISU), Norwegian Students' and Academics International Assistance fund, The municipality of Oslo, the Directorate of Integration and Diversity, and the International Organization for Migration. We have also invited all higher educational institutions in the greater Oslo area to cooperate about information issues, Academic Networks and Academic Practice.
- International: King's College London (UK), Freie Universität Berlin (Tyskland), Universiteit Utrecht (the Netherlands), European Student Union, UNICA, Scholars at Risk, the European University Association (EUA) and the European Association for International Education (EAIE).

We have also had meetings with a large number of other institutions, organisations, and offices, investigating the possibilities for more cooperation and mutual learning.

Being among the first universities to respond to the refugee situation, we have actively participated in those national and international arenas where the topic is being discussed, presenting our work to others and organising workshops to share experiences and develop new initiatives. The university has also been engaged in the media, particularly through our rector, who has given some 30 interviews and commentaries over the past two years.



An overview of "Low-hanging fruits" – easily established initiatives for institutions wanting to engage in the refugee situation.

Academic Refuge

In 2016, UiO received funding from the Erasmus+ programme for a Strategic Partnership project called Academic Refuge 2016-19. The full title is: An Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership to Promote Core Academic Values and Welcome Refugees and Threatened Academics to European Campuses. The partners are University of Oslo (Coordinator), Scholars at Risk/New York University, UNICA network of universities from the capitals of Europe and University of Ljubljana. EUA and EAIE are associate partners. Even though this is a separate project to the Academic Dugnad, the two teams are closely linked together, particularly in the first year (2016-2017).

Alongside increasing the European universities' capacity to support those who were forced to flee, there is an opportunity for European universities to work together with refugees and threatened academics to look to the longer term. This project combines efforts such as the Academic Dugnad with the long term work of Scholars at Risk. The project will explore the synergies between the work for refugees and scholars at risk. The Academic Practice at UiO is an example of a refugee measure based on experience from the work with scholars at risk.

The project aims to raise greater awareness of the importance of academic freedom to a healthy higher education sector, the consequences for society at large when such freedom is repressed, and the steps we can take as a sector to protect higher education values.

At the time of printing, a *Staff Training on Welcoming Refugees and Threatened Academics to European Campuses* is arranged at the University of Oslo. 60 participants from 20 European countries are in Oslo from 19 to 23 June 2017, for an intensive training and experience-sharing course. Included in the week is a one day conference on 21 June 2017, which also involves the policy level. Both the Norwegian Minister of Education, Torbjørn Røe Isaksen, and EU Principal Administrator in the Task Force Migration, Marc Cosyns, will be coming to the university to discuss higher education responses to the refugee situation. Future outputs of the Academic Refuge programme includes a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on academic freedom and higher education values (tentatively spring 2018) and an electronic handbook on putting higher education values into practice (tentatively spring 2019).

Most of the UiO Academic Dugnad team is participating in the staff training week either as participants or trainers.

Academic Refuge: <https://www.uio.no/english/about/global/globally-engaged/academic-refuge/>



Marit Egner, coordinator of the Academic Refuge programme, and Stine Øfsdahl from the Academic Dugnad team. (Photo: Guri Vestad)

2.6 Dugnad expenditure

A complete list of people formally engaged in the project:

- Anna Kolberg Buverud (Office for International Relations and Research Support), project leader since October 2015. (Unspecified work hours, estimated to 80% of full-time equivalent)
- Andrea Arntzen Bondi (Student Information and Communications Office), student assistant October-December 2015. (20%)
- Ida Madslien (Student Information and Communications Office), student assistant October-December 2015. (20%)
- Anja Gil Spilling (Office for International Relations and Research Support), project worker responsible for student activities since January 2016. (Unspecified work hours, estimated to 50% of full-time equivalent)
- Hiba Arabi (Office for International Relations and Research Support), project worker January-June 2016. (20%)
- Nirmala Eidsgård (Student Information and Communications Office), project worker responsible for information and guidance since August 2016 (10%)
- Marit Egner (Office for International Relations and Research Support), coordinator for the *Academic Refuge* project since August 2016. (Unspecified work hours, overlap between positions makes an estimate impossible)
- Stine Øfsdahl (Education and Research Administration Office), project worker responsible for internships and language opportunities since September 2016. (100%)

In addition to this, several employees in the Departments of Academic Administration and Leadership Support have been involved – altogether about 30 people. We estimate that between four and five full-time equivalents has been spent since the project was established in October 2015. This estimate does not include work done at the faculties, the International Summer School or the university libraries. The Academic Dugnad project was, as a rule, given priority over regular tasks in the university administration. Initially, funding was organized through the university leadership's special funds. For 2017, the project was given a post at the university's budget. Decisions on expenditures were done by the leadership of the Department of Academic Administration or the university leadership, depending on the size of the cost.

From early October 2015 until the end of December 2016, just over 1.6 million NOK was spent (in thousands):

- Salaries: 506
- Travel expenditures: 84
- Arrangements: 64
- Materials and running costs: 28
- MOOC in Norwegian: 957

The project received 1.2 million NOK by the University Board for 2017. The funds have been divided as follows (in thousands):

- One full-time position: 725
- Other salaries: 150
- Information services: 125
- Travel, cooperation and other costs: 200

3. Touchdown: where are we now?

«There is only one academia – and it is global.»

Rector Ole Petter Ottersen, University of Oslo

Overall, this has been a successful project. The University of Oslo has been in the forefront of voicing and responding to the plight of refugees with higher education, nationally as well as internationally. We have coordinated responses to individual refugees as well as meeting places for the relevant sectors, often on short notice. There are four main success factors behind what we have achieved:

1. The initiative came from a united university leadership, as a response to an acute societal challenge. Our rector has had a strong and persistent engagement as the project's official face and driving force.
2. The project goal is embedded in basic academic values, and has been supported by students and staff throughout the organisation.
3. The project has had a team with relevant competencies and a broad network within and outside the organisation.
4. The project has had significant administrative and financial freedom, allowing it to move according to perceived needs.

The *dugnad* structure of the efforts has been important for the results. By using extraordinary resources on cooperation and experience sharing, UiO has been able to push this initiative forwards as a national priority, rather than just an institutional project. This has had the added bonus of strengthening existing cooperation, on the local level with e.g. the Student Parliament, HiOA and the municipality of Oslo, and internationally with partners in the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities and the UNICA network. Also, the university's long-standing engagement in *Scholars at Risk* has been useful, and has given inspiration to several of the new activities.

For refugees with an academic background, it is now somewhat easier to re-enter higher education than it was in 2015. The main reason is that the information and guidance services have improved. Academic practice and academic networks also make it easier for the refugees to acquaint themselves with academia in a new country, and relatively soon after settling down.

Nevertheless, the two main challenges for refugees seeking further studies or relevant work – language requirements and the recognition of previous studies – remain to be solved.

It seems necessary to strengthen the Norwegian language training, especially on the higher levels. It could be an idea that universities and university colleges with experience in Norwegian language training joined forces to develop MOOCs that, combined with campus lectures, could deliver quality assured language training across the country all the way to the academic level.

If refugees who only lack language requirements to apply for master degree programmes could choose to learn English instead of Norwegian during the Introduction Programme, they could begin master studies sooner than today. Norwegian training could be postponed, or perhaps be taught

during the master programme. However, this option may require a change in the Introductory Act (2003).



Language game at an Academic network meeting. (Photo: Vanja Rizvic)

Some bridging courses have been developed for certain professions, aiming to help refugees with an education in nursing, teaching, or engineering to enter Norwegian working life. More bridging solutions are needed to encompass the variety of educations that refugees bring to the country. One solution could be to allow refugees with higher education to take exams in individual courses, even if they do not fulfil the formal requirements, as part of the Introduction Programme. This could, perhaps, allow some refugees to spend the time in the Introduction Programme in a more useful way, enabling them to prepare for future studies. On the other hand, allowing people to take exams that they are not formally qualified for increases the risk of failure. In any case, such a solution may require a change in the Act relating to universities and university colleges (2005).

For some refugees with a master's degree, the best option might be to obtain qualifications as a *lektor* (a teacher on the higher secondary or even university level). Financing extra seats in the necessary practical-pedagogical training courses across the county could be beneficial for this group.

The *Academic Dugnad* project is financed until the end of 2017, and aims to include its initiatives into the regular university activities by then. The work to ensure that we are able to include the competencies and experiences of refugees with an academic background into our society will continue, in one form or another. The final goal must be to reach a level of inclusion where we no longer cooperate to help these potential students and employees, but compete to admit and employ them.

Appendix

Rector's blog

The leadership at the University of Oslo has actively engaged in and promoted the Academic Dugnad work, through meetings and talks at the top political level as well as through the media. Ole Petter Ottersen, rector at the University of Oslo from 2009 to 2017, has also repeatedly written about the project in his blog, combining a practical approach with the academic values that gives the framework for the initiative. The English language blog posts are included here.

Welcome to the Academic Dugnad

(1 December 2015)

This is my opening speech at the Information Day for Refugees and Asylum Seekers, 1 December 2015. The speech was given in the Science Library at the University of Oslo.

As president of the University of Oslo it is an honor to welcome you all to campus, to The Science Library and to our Information Day for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

Access to education: few things are as important as this. Equal access to education is one of the most fundamental values in our society and one that the universities should safeguard, not only in speeches at festive occasions, but also through action. This is what our Academic Dugnad is all about. It's about an initiative to help qualified refugees and asylum seekers gain access to higher education in Norway. Many of you present here today have had your education interrupted due to conflict or war. Many of you harbor a strong wish to resume your education. Our Academic Dugnad is a means towards this end.

The international refugee crisis is the backdrop and the reason we are gathered here today. The vast numbers of refugees coming to various countries in Europe and also to Norway has made us realize that ordinary measures are not enough. Without extraordinary effort many of those arriving in our country will be queuing to get their education evaluated against the Norwegian degree structure. I am therefore glad that the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, NOKUT, already in May began a process of developing a fast-track recognition procedure, in close cooperation with the Norwegian Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi). NOKUT is here today to explain in detail The Norwegian system of Higher Education.

Our Academic Dugnad is an extraordinary effort to welcome refugees and asylum seekers into our educational system. Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences has been our partner from the very beginning and rector Curt Rice is with us here today. The University of Life Sciences is also represented here. So are numerous other partners that you will be meeting during the day.

Many of the refugees have missing documents, and many will experience language barriers. To meet these challenges we must be creative. Those who lack documents may get their knowledge tested. Those who struggle with language will need training. A successful integration of refugees in Norwegian universities and colleges will require a partnership with all involved authorities and organizations.

Our University Libraries have collected books – textbooks, novels and children’s books – from our students and staff. We hope to have books for all. Later today, our students will tell you about student life and education in Oslo. Our students have shown an impressive eagerness to take part in the Academic Dugnad. I am truly proud of them. And I am truly proud of all of our staff members – about 20 in all – who with devotion and stamina have worked to make this happen.

UiO is advocating for what we call ‘Academic Passports’. After WWI, Nansen passports were issued as travel documents for stateless refugees – refugees who had lost their connection to their native country. In the same vein, Academic Passport could be issued to refugees who have lost their connection to their own educational system. Such passports could ensure that once a refugee has been accepted for admission to a specific higher education institution in the European Higher Education Area (AHEA), the same recognition should be given by other institutions throughout this area. This is for the future: it is a difficult task, and it requires cooperation at the European level.

However, we should not let this get in the way of creative thinking. For Europe is now being tested, and with it, our humanistic ideals.

Let me end by saying that today is a very special day for the University of Oslo. Never before have we created a venue for refugees and asylum seekers, as we do today. Our efforts are fueled by the idea that there is just one academy, and that’s the global one.

Welcome to the Academic Dugnad.

Academic dugnad: joining forces for inclusion

(9 November 2016)

A recent report of the UN Refugee Agency highlights the challenge at hand: the report says that 1 % of refugee youth go to university. For youth around the world the corresponding figure is 34 %. This is a stark inequity that calls for collective action.

Offering higher education to those qualified is a win-win, if there is ever such a thing. Our Academic Dugnad (see website) is an effort to integrate refugees and asylum seekers into our educational system.

The term “dugnad” derives from Old Norse “dugnaðr” and aptly describes the nature of the action required. “Dugnad” captures in a single word what could best be described as a good deed or voluntary work done as a community or collective. What else is a university but a community – a community of students and scholars. It is this community that must take the lead in a collective action for inclusion of qualified refugees and asylum seekers.

The task at hand is complex and demands that partnerships be formed with relevant authorities and organizations. Of particular importance in our own country is the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), which is responsible for authorization schemes for education abroad. On 23 November, NOKUT will be hosting a seminar entitled Integrating refugees in higher education. My speech on this occasion will address the need to “join forces for inclusion”. I will emphasize how important it is to recruit the energy and competence of the range of actors that must co-operate for the “dugnad” to succeed.

Among these actors are the municipality, NOKUT, and the Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions (UHR), as well as other higher education institutions including the Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences that has been our partner from the very beginning.

In collaboration with the municipality of Oslo – and under the umbrella of Academic Dugnad - we have established an academic internship programme as part of the two year's Introduction Programme for Refugees. This programme is available for refugees with an academic background, allowing them to apply for internships in academic environments similar to those they were forced to leave. The aim is to ensure that the time spent in the introduction programme is put to good use in preparing for future studies and a relevant career. The principles embedded in this programme have been adopted by HE institutions and municipalities around the country.

Language is a hurdle to overcome for inclusion to occur. I am happy to announce that our brand new MOOC entitled Introduction to Norwegian is now open for registration. This is a four week language course that will be launched on January 16, 2017. The course is available free of charge for all HE institutions and organizations and is meant to facilitate integration and inclusion. I extend my thanks to the Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, Faculty of Humanities, for preparing this MOOC in record time.

The enormous contrast in HE participation rates between refugee youth and youth in general highlights the need to facilitate the transition from “camp to campus”. Esther Nyakong (18) used this apt phrase when she stated that «I want to be the girl that made it from the camp to campus and from a refugee to a neurosurgeon.» She is a native of Juba, South Sudan, but currently lives in the Kakuma camp in Kenya. Esther personifies the ambitions embedded in our Academic Dugnad. Her story should be an inspiration to us all.

Erasmus Project for Academic Freedom: Academic Refuge

(19 June 2017)

Today – June 19th - I had the pleasure of welcoming to the University of Oslo a number of delegates from several collaborating partner institutions and organizations on the occasion of the Academic Refuge Staff Training Week. What a prelude to June 20th: the World Refugee Day! On June 20th the world commemorates the strength, courage, and perseverance of millions of refugees.

Academic refuge is an EU financed project that is led by the University of Oslo and that aims to provide better support for refugees and for scholars under threat. The overriding goal is to improve the capacity of European universities to assist refugees and threatened academics on campus and to promote understanding and respect for academic freedom and the values on which our research and higher education are based.

The Academic Refuge project is closely tied to our Academic Dugnad – an initiative that dates back to the very beginning of the refugee crisis. Now delegates from all over the world come together in Oslo to learn from each other and to discuss how we as academics can live up to the very idea of a university: a community of scholars that is truly universal and that sees it as an imperative to stand up in solidarity for those that cannot any longer pursue their research and ideas in their own countries.

When we serve as sanctuaries for scholars and students that have lost their academic freedom in other countries we send a strong signal to the responsible governments: suppressing academic freedom is of no avail. The unwelcome ideas and research will be pursued nevertheless. But in a different institution, and in a different nation.

What we need to communicate in no uncertain terms is that universities must not be seen as part of an annoying opposition, but as hotbeds for the critical voices that are required to maintain the quality and integrity of institutions and state. To attack universities and higher education is to pull the rug from under the nation's and the region's future. No less.

When I soon step down as Rector of the University of Oslo, I will look back with pride on our Academic Dugnad and our initiatives to provide a safe haven for refugees, and for scholars and students at risk. Our university – and any university - is at its best when it defends academic freedom worldwide – not only in rhetoric, but in action.

Tomorrow the UiO Board will have its last meeting this semester. Last year our board decided to quadruple its support for Scholars at Risk. This was a wise decision of a board that has been consistent in its support of internationalization and international solidarity.

UiO has long cooperated with Scholars at Risk, UNICA, SAIH, HiOA and other Norwegian educational institutions on academic freedom and freedom of expression. With the new project I hope that we can bolster this cooperation and strengthen knowledge of and respect for the freedoms that are the very essence of a well-functioning democracy.

Let me conclude with a couple of quotes:

“No future ... can be built on despair, distrust, hatred, and envy.”

“In my opinion, the only avenue to salvation lies in cooperation between all nations on a basis of honest endeavor.”

These are the words of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Fridtjof Nansen, in his Nobel speech in 1922. They ring true almost 100 years later, on the World Refugee Day.

The best thing for being sad [...] is to learn something. That's the only thing that never fails. You may grow old and trembling in your anatomies, you may lie awake at night listening to the disorder of your veins, you may miss your only love, you may see the world about you devastated by evil lunatics, or know your honour trampled in the sewers of baser minds. There is only one thing for it then — to learn. Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the only thing for you. Look what a lot of things there are to learn.

T.H.White, *The Once and Future King*



UiO : University of Oslo