
Policy on Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees and Asylum-seekers with a legal right to live and study in Austria

(applicable to all US-registered and Austrian-accredited master's degree programs)

Central European University (CEU) has encountered applicants who have been granted refugee status by Austria or other state or are being assessed for refugee status or are in refugee-like situations¹ (hereinafter: “**Applicants**”) whose existing qualifications require specific means of assessment and recognition. This policy is intended to establish procedures for assessing qualifications for entry to Master's degree programs at CEU by refugees and asylum seekers or individuals in refugee-like situations.

CEU will consider applications of refugees and asylum-seekers with legal status in Austria and refugees with legal status in another state who are able to apply for a residence or study permit in Austria. Additionally this policy applies to people in refugee-like situations, i.e. individuals who are stateless or denied protection in their countries of citizenship or habitual residence but not recognized as refugees in their country of residence.

The procedures outlined here follow best practice recommendations by the Council of Europe's Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region, hereinafter: “**Convention**”) and are already in place in a number of European states.² The Convention has been signed and ratified in Austria with the BGBl. III Nr. 71/1999 and it has entered into force on April 1, 1999 in respect of Austria.

¹ The ‘term’ refugee refers to individuals recognized by national states following national and/or international legal procedures, and include individuals granted full or subsidiary protection. The term ‘asylum seeker’ refers to individuals who are being assessed for refugee protection. The term ‘refugee-like’ refers to individuals who are either stateless or denied adequate protection by the governments in their countries of citizenship or habitual residence and are not able to claim refugee status.

² The European Commission's *European Area of Recognition Manual* (EAR Manual) Chapter 12 http://www.eurorecognition.eu/manual/ear_manual_v_1.0.pdf and [The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region](#), particularly Article VII.

The procedures are intended to address three situations:

1. Refugee students sometimes do not have adequate documentary evidence of past Bachelor's qualifications, such as a diploma, despite having completed all requirements for the Bachelor's degree. Refugees are often unable to safely access a copy of that diploma because of well-founded fears of approaching authorities in their home countries. The policy makes provisions for assessing the learning and qualifications of refugee applications without adequate evidence of previous study.
2. Refugees are sometimes not granted a full university degrees or are not awarded a qualification at all despite having completed all requirements for a Bachelor's degree program. The Policy makes provisions for accepting refugee students awarded a lower qualification than deserved or not awarded a degree at all if adequate evidence showing completion of all degree requirements is present. If such evidence is not present, the policy makes provisions for assessing learning and qualifications.
3. Refugee students sometimes have not been able to complete their education, having had to interrupt study for reasons related to their flight. The policy makes provisions for refugee students who have completed at least two-thirds of their previous degree (e.g. two years of a three-year Bachelors program) to undertake CEU recognised preparatory programs, the completion of which will make them eligible to apply to Masters programs at CEU.

I. General rules and basic principles of the assessment procedures

1. The procedures listed here are derived from the European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions, published in 2014 (http://www.eurorecognition.eu/manual/ear_manual_v_1.0.pdf; hereinafter: “**Manual**”). The Manual gives general practical guidance on the recognition of academic qualifications and on the obligations on institutions in countries which have signed and ratified the Convention.³
2. In line with the Convention CEU acknowledges that the right to education is a human right, and that higher education, which is instrumental in the pursuit and advancement of knowledge, constitutes an exceptionally rich cultural and scientific asset for both individuals and society.
3. Taking the above into consideration the aim of CEU is to set up a fair and transparent recognition procedure and policy regarding the assessment of qualifications.

³ The text of this introduction is adapted from a document summarizing EAR Manual procedures published by the European Network of Information Centers, an agency of the European Commission fostering cohesion in education policy in Europe. http://www.enic-naric.net/fileusers/5335_EAR-HEI-Recognition-of-qualification-holders-without-documentation.pdf

II. Assessment of Bachelors Qualification Holders With Incomplete or Missing Documentation

The Convention covers the recognition of qualifications from people who, for reasons beyond their control, are unable to provide full documentary evidence of academic experience and qualifications. This includes refugees, stateless persons and asylum-seekers.

According to Article VII of the Convention, refugees, displaced persons or persons in a refugee-like situation who have formal education from a recognized and/or accredited educational institution and others, who for valid reasons cannot document the qualifications they claim, have a right to assessment of their qualifications when applying for admission to a study program.

Problems arise when certificates and transcripts have been lost or are not available because of conditions of or reasons for flight. Further, it may be difficult to verify documentation or inquire about the education system, because of the political situation in the country of origin.

The European Handbook on Recognition encourages the preparation of a “background paper” giving an overview of qualifications or periods of study claimed. This background paper should be the basis for assessing qualifications with all available documents and supporting evidence present. The background paper is also the basis for an assessment procedure examining the learning outcomes which could be reasonably expected from the undocumented qualification. This assessment procedure may involve specially arranged examination and interviews with University academic staff.

Procedure

Refugee applicants to CEU Masters programs who have successfully completed Bachelor’s study but do not have adequate documented evidence of educational qualifications may apply in the normal way. When asked, in the application process, to present proof of previous educational experience such as a degree or diploma, the Applicant may upload a brief statement stating: (a) the name of the degree earned and its grade (if applicable), (2) the university or institute of higher education studied at, (3) title of thesis if applicable, (4) and key subjects studied.

CEU Academic Units should assess the application following its normal procedures. If the Academic Unit considers that the Applicant merits and offer of a place, the Academic Unit may assess on the basis of the information in the application that the Application meets the entry qualifications of the Master’s program. The Unit may wish to ascertain such knowledge on the basis of a test or academic interview (the Applicant should be informed of the topics of the assessment at least two weeks before to enable time for preparation).

If the Academic Unit is of the opinion that additional assessment is required, the Unit may undertake the procedure listed below, which is derived from the European Area of Recognition Manual:

1. An Assessment Committee should be formed comprising the Director of the Master’s Program applied to, a second faculty member, and the Pro-Rector for Teaching and Learning, or Pro-Rector’s appointee.

2. The Applicant is asked to complete a “background paper” using the form in the Appendix. The background paper should be completed in English.
3. The Assessment Committee examines information in the background paper. The first step is to assess the extent of documentary evidence of qualifications available. The Committee should take into account diverse documents put forward, including testimonials by former professors, teachers or university staff, transcripts (including incomplete ones) and any other documented proof of registering, attending and/or graduating from university or an institute of higher education. Lack of these documentation should not be held against the Applicant at any stage of the assessment.
4. If necessary the Assessment Committee may organize an examination or interview , to allow the demonstration of acquired knowledge, competencies and skills to assess the learning outcomes that could reasonably be expected to have been gained from the educational qualifications claimed.. The Applicant should be informed of the topics to be prepared for and the method of the exam with enough time to adequately prepare (a minimum of two weeks is recommended)
5. If the Applicant is a student at a university preparatory program recognised by CEU, the Committee should take into account academic records from the preparatory program.
6. Once the assessment procedure is complete the Assessment Committee may recommend: (a) that the Applicant be accepted, (b) that the Applicant undertake a CEU recognised university preparatory program because the assessment of the Applicant’s level of knowledge and learning points to the need for some further preparation, or (c) that the Applicant not be offered a place at the Master’s program based on assessment of past education and level of knowledge.
7. Based on the recommendation of the Assessment Committee as a result of the assessment procedure CEU will – within a reasonable time limit – issue an official, formal document which outlines the recognition decision, based on the evaluation purpose; and validity period thereof.
8. In situations where the outcome is not favorable for the Applicant, CEU should offer:
 - a. information on the possibility to appeal the evaluation outcome;
 - b. alternative pathways to recognition.
9. The responsibility to demonstrate that an application does not fulfil the relevant requirements lies with the Assessment Committee.

III. Refugee Applicants Not Awarded Bachelor’s Degrees Despite Completing all Course Requirements

Refugee students who have not been awarded a Bachelor’s degree despite completing all requirements may apply directly to CEU Masters programs. Applicants who may have been granted an ‘Associate Bachelor’s’ or its equivalent will be assessed for entry to Masters programs where there is documentary evidence that the applicant has completed all required courses (e.g. a transcript) and would have been academically eligible to receive a full Bachelor’s degree. In either case, where such documentary evidence is not available, the student should apply under the provisions of Section II ‘Recognition of Bachelors Qualification Holders With Incomplete Documentation’.

IV. Refugee Applicants with Incomplete Qualifications

Sometimes, for reasons related to their flight, refugees who had already completed a significant part of their degree were not able to fully complete their studies. In some cases, refugees have been expelled from university for the reasons that led them to flee (political activities, discrimination on ethnic, religious or gender basis, and so on) or otherwise been unable to complete a degree. In these cases, Academic Units should initiate an academic assessment of applicants' learning, following the procedure outlined below.

Academic Units are encouraged to make recourse to a 'Foundation Year' for refugee students who have completed up to two-thirds of course requirements for Bachelor's degrees. Completion of this Foundation Year - the equivalent of a university preparatory program run by CEU - would allow students to be assessed on merit for entry to a Master's program with certain conditions.

CEU may encounter Applicants with incomplete educational qualifications either once they apply for an Master's program or when they apply to CEU's existing university preparatory programs for refugees (those run at CEU Open Learning Initiative).

When encountered in the normal application process to a Master's program, the steps listed in section II. above should be followed. Academic Units may at this time recommend that a student enrolls in a CEU Open Learning Initiative program.

Potential Applicants with incomplete educational qualifications are also likely to apply directly to one of CEU's refugee preparatory courses. Academic Units are encouraged to consider these preparatory courses as adequate for completing the knowledge requirements to be assessed as a Master's program candidate, though there is no obligation on the part of the Academic Unit to accept the student. Preparatory programs are encouraged to consult with Academic Units when developing a course of study for these students.

Procedure

1. The Applicant with incomplete educational qualifications is asked to fill out the background paper (Appendix). If the Applicant has had to fill out a background paper previously when applying directly to a Master's program, that same paper may be used.
2. The level of knowledge of the Applicant and their qualifications (documented or not) is assessed by the Master's Program Director who should identify key knowledge areas lacking. The Master's Program Director should consider if this lack can be made up for in a 10-month university preparatory program.
3. Where such missing knowledge can be reasonably expected to be made up for in a preparatory program, the Master's Program Director consults with Directors of CEU preparatory program to construct a 10-month long syllabus designed to compensate for missing knowledge areas and allow the student to reach a level where they may be assessed for Masters entry.
4. The Master's Program Director should be involved in supervising the course of study at the preparatory program in consultation with CEU preparatory program Directors.

5. The student may apply to the Master's program while still enrolled in the CEU preparatory program and the Master's Program may make a conditional offer, stipulating successful completion, including examination, of the preparatory program syllabus.
6. The Master's Program is under no obligation to accept an Applicant who has completed the CEU preparatory program, and may assess the Applicant with recourse to further examinations as it sees fit.

Signed by *CEU President and Rector Shalini Randeria*.

The original document is filed at the Office of the Academic Secretary.

APPENDIX

FORM FOR PREPARATION OF BACKGROUND REPORT

This is a form adapted from one in use by the Danish Ministry of Higher Education and Science.

This form is for you to give relevant information on your previous educational experience and qualifications. Its purpose is to allow Central European University to assess if you are qualified for entry to one of its Master's programs.

Personal Details

CITIZENSHIP:

GENDER:

FIRST AND MIDDLE NAME:

FAMILY NAME:

PREVIOUS NAME, IF CHANGED (ENCLOSE DOCUMENTATION if available, E.G. MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE):

POSTAL ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE:

E-MAIL:

Contact person

Is there a person (e.g. a person helping you fill in the form) that we may contact if we need further clarification of your information?

NAME OF CONTACT PERSON:

NAME OF INSTITUTION/AUTHORITY/COMPANY (if applicable):

POSTAL ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE :

E-MAIL:

Documentation

If you have any documentation at all, please enclose it with the application. This may include a statement by your educational institution confirming that you have been enrolled in a program, a testimonial from a former professor, a diploma of some sort or it may be a complete or incomplete transcript of subjects you have studied. If you have any of these or any other document showing that you have enrolled in, attended or graduated from university please include it here.

List of documentation included:

If you are filling out this form, you are likely not to have a copy of your Diploma or Degree. Central European University understands that access to such documentation may be impossible. To the extent that you are comfortable, please indicate why you have been unable to provide a copy of your degree or diploma:

Education

NAME OF QUALIFICATION/PROGRAM OF EDUCATION:

NAME OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION:

TOWN:

COUNTRY:

PERIOD OF EDUCATION: START (YEAR): ____ – END (YEAR): ____

DID YOU COMPLETE ALL OF THE PROGRAM? YES NO

WHAT WERE THE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PROGRAM?

E.g. certificate, admissions exam.

WHAT WAS THE OFFICIAL LENGTH OF THE PROGRAM?

How many years, weeks or semesters?

What was the official language of the Program?

Subject field and content of the program

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE SUBJECT FIELD(S) OF THE PROGRAM

PLEASE DESCRIBE THE MOST IMPORTANT SUBJECTS

DID YOU SUBMIT A MAJOR WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT/PROJECT (such as a thesis)? YES

NO If yes:

WAS IT A FINAL ASSIGNMENT/PROJECT? YES NO

HOW MANY PAGES WAS IT? _____

OFFICIAL DURATION OF YOUR WORK ON THE ASSIGNMENT/PROJECT: ___ WEEKS

PLEASE GIVE A SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT/PROJECT:

Purpose of the program

DID COMPLETION OF THE PROGRAM GIVE ACCESS TO FURTHER EDUCATION (is this program considered adequate preparation for Masters study)?

WAS THE PROGRAM AIMED AT EMPLOYMENT IN A PARTICULAR LINE OF WORK?

IF YES: WHICH OCCUPATION/PROFESSION?

Work experience

HAVE YOU WORKED IN YOUR FIELD AFTER THE END OF YOUR STUDIES/TRAINING?

IF YOU HAVE RELEVANT EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE: PLEASE INDICATE YOUR EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE HERE:

EMPLOYMENT PERIOD:

JOB FUNCTIONS:

IS CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLOWED TO MAKE INQUIRIES IN YOUR COUNTRY OF EDUCATION IN ORDER TO VERIFY YOUR INFORMATION? PLEASE STATE ANY CONDITIONS TO YOUR ANSWER (FOR EXAMPLE YOU MAY ASK US NOT TO CONTACT A PARTICULAR INSTITUTION OR PERSON)

DATE:

SIGNATURE:

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