

“ Marita Häkkinen, Katinka Käyhkö & Minna Bogdanoff

# MORE THAN JUST A PROJECT”

**Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland**

**Summary of the SIMHE-UniPID Pilot**



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**Marita Häkkinen, Katinka Käyhkö & Minna Bogdanoff**

**The Finnish University Partnership for International Development (UniPID)**

**University of Jyväskylä**

**Jyväskylä 2017**

**Publisher:**

The Finnish University Partnership for International Development (UniPID)  
University of Jyväskylä

**Original name of the publication:** Enemmän kuin pelkkä projekti. Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland. SIMHE-UniPID -pilottihankkeen yhteenveto.

**Translator:** Jaana Aho

**Illustrations:** Nizar Rahme

**Cover photograph:** lisamikulski / Flickr 2013

**Covers and layout:** Ville Korhakangas

**ISBN** 978-951-39-7254-7 (PDF)

**URN:** ISBN:978-951-39-7254-7

**Permanent link of the publication:** <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-7254-7>

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## To the Reader

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You are holding a summary of the activities of one of the two pilot projects commenced in 2016: *Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland* (SIMHE) i.e. the SIMHE-UniPID\* project. It is a practical report of the steps taken, lessons learnt and points perceived, primarily directed at higher education actors and other stakeholders of the pilot project.

When we speak of the functions of the pilot projects, we use the imperfect in the body of the text, as the pilot phase of the SIMHE work is already over. However, many of the functions began and described in the report continue to develop within the framework of the strategic work conducted in the universities. This report intentionally and primarily uses the word immigrant of people who have arrived or moved into Finland (cf. Abu-Hanna 2012). We also use the expression “immigrated”, which is used in the Career Path Project.

This publication has obtained its name from an observation made by university researcher David Hoffman when he contemplated the overall results of the SIMHE-UniPID pilot. Despite its short duration and meagre resources, the SIMHE-UniPID project could highlight major grassroots viewpoints, combine them to the research and establish a dialogue between different stakeholders. The project hence created a potential basis for a new type of decision-making in educational policy concerning inadequately understood and researched topics. (Hoffman 2017, personal communication.) The illustrations of the report have been drawn by a student of architecture, Bachelor of Science (Technology) Nizar Rahme.

The structure of the publication proceeds from the foreword providing a context and a brief introduction to the SIMHE pilot projects to approaches to the guidance and counselling services of the SIMHE-UniPID project. Through practical examples, the reader can take a peek at day-to-day counselling work. The large collaboration network of the project is introduced, as well as some of the best practices already used by various parties. Finally, we contemplate the contribution of the whole from the viewpoints of immigrants and higher education institutions and sum up the key points. The appendices provide further information on individual aspects, such as the experiences of those using the guidance services and the feedback from the seminar organized as the main event of the project.

We hope that this publication will encourage those working in higher education institutions, other collaboration organisations and different projects to pilot, search for and find ways forward, through day-to-day work and cooperation with immigrated experts by experience.

*The Authors*

\*UniPID = *Finnish University Partnership for International Development*  
(for more: [www.unipid.fi](http://www.unipid.fi))

## Foreword

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In 2015, a total of 32 400 asylum seekers arrived in Finland. 8 500 of them were underage, and 3 024 arrived alone. The prolonged crisis in the Middle East and Africa frequently explains the increase in the number of asylum seekers to Europe and to Finland. Most asylum seekers come from Iraq, Somalia, Albania, Afghanistan and Syria. The number fell in 2016, when only 5 657 asylum seekers entered Finland. However, the number is still higher than in the past few years, and predicting the future is challenging. The international scene is unstable, as the conflicts in the Middle East and Northern Africa do not appear to subside. The Turkish situation also raises questions about the Geneva Convention on Refugees between Turkey and the European Union. It is of utmost importance that Finland has been prepared to support the educational paths of immigrants and to offer a sufficient amount of language teaching on various levels as well as other services boosting integration. The growth in immigration increases the need for preparatory training for immigrants on all educational levels. The need to recognize degrees and learning as well as supplementary studies is heightened. More guidance and counselling are also needed.

In the spring of 2015, the Ministry of Education and Culture commenced a quick survey of the educational and vocational profiles of asylum seekers. Profiles and age structure information were necessary to obtain a clear idea of the time and extent to which the asylum seekers would be participating in early childhood education and primary education; how they would proceed to vocational training, general upper secondary education and higher education and when they might use the opportunities provided by adult education. It transpired that one fourth of the asylum seekers have a background in higher education; 16% have a degree and 11% have studied something. (Sandberg & Stordell 2016.)

The fast growth in the number of asylum seekers posed immediate challenges in the field of operation of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Ministry set up a steering group in November 2015, with the task to prepare and coordinate short and long-term measures for developing the training system caused by the asylum seeker situation and increasing immigration. On 29 January 2016, the steering group submitted its proposal for immediate measures in its interim report *The Educational Paths and Integration of Immigrants – Problems and Proposed Actions* to



the Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture 2016a). The final report was published on 15 February 2017 (Ministry of Education and Culture 2017a).

Introducing higher education institutions responsible for supporting immigrants in higher education in Finland is one of the suggested measures of the interim report. The aim of the activity is to improve the access of asylum seekers and immigrants to higher education and to act as centralised steering points in the educational institutions. The institutions will participate at an early stage in the recognition of the prior learning of immigrants who already have a higher education and steer them to further training and employment. The educational institutions responsible for these activities know the qualifications and continuous training opportunities in the area and the whole country and aim to provide smoother access of immigrants to higher education by guiding them into suitable educational paths. These higher education institutions act in cooperation for example with the Ministry of Education, the accommodation centres and the Employment and Economic Development Offices. It has been the aim of the Metropolia and the Jyväskylä UniPID pilots to build a national model which could be applied to other institutions of higher education as well. The activity proved to be necessary and useful from the very beginning, not only among asylum seekers but also those who have resided longer in the country. Confronting immigrant students is not a new issue in the higher education institutions but there is still room for improvement. It has been a pleasure from the beginning of 2017 to expand the network, which now encompasses the Karelia University of Applied Sciences, the Oulu University of Applied Sciences and the Universities of Helsinki and Turku. The network of higher education institutions responsible for these services supports, facilitates and develops the work of the entire higher education sector to better benefit from the skills of immigrants – and above all, facilitates the guidance counselling of the higher education of these students.

*Senior Advisor Kaisu Piironen, Ministry of Education and Culture*

## Introduction

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### Background

Immigration into Finland is not a new phenomenon, but the events of 2015 boosted the discussion waged on it. During that year, nearly 32 500 asylum seekers arrived in Finland, compared to the 1 500 – 6 000 who had arrived in the past ten years (Finnish Immigration Service 2017b). The number of immigrants arriving in Finland has steadily increased in the past decades. In 1990, there were 37 600 people with immigrant background in Finland, whereas in 2015 there were nearly 340 000, i.e. roughly 6.2 of the entire population. (Statistics, Finland 2017.) The reasons for immigration are diverse. Some immigrants have arrived in Finland for humanitarian reasons, but the most typical reasons for immigration are family ties, employment or studying (Finnish Immigration Service 2017a).

As the number of asylum seekers increased, the need to develop the educational system and educational content also became an issue. It became evident that the previous modes of operation and the existing structures were not flexible enough in the new situation. Immigrants who had already resided in Finland for some time also had questions concerning the educational system and supply, and these needed to be answered. The report initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture in autumn 2015 and the sample selected for that purpose showed that asylum seekers had versatile education and job experience (Sandberg & Stordell 2016). The results revealed that 49% of the asylum seekers who participated in the survey had studies or degrees completed after the basic studies in secondary education, vocational education or higher education. The share of those who had studied or obtained degrees in higher education amounted to 27%. The study gives cause to consider how the recognition of prior learning and education of asylum seekers and other immigrants could be made more flexible. (ibid.) Later studies made elsewhere in Finland provide an even more heterogeneous overview (cf. e.g. Niskala 2016): immigrants have vastly differing educational backgrounds, and it is impossible to find simple package solutions that would fit all.

One of the proposed actions suggested in *The Educational Paths and Integration of Immigrants – Problems and Proposed Actions* report (MEC

2016a), i.e. the introduction of the higher education institutions responsible for meeting the needs of immigrants who already have or are qualified to have a higher education commenced as a pilot in the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and the UniPID network of the University of Jyväskylä in March 2016. This activity was named *Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland* (SIMHE). The Ministry of Education and Culture announced the initiative and the services offered in April (cf. MCE 2016b). In what follows, we briefly introduce both pilot projects before focusing on the functions of the SIMHE-UniPID pilot.

### **SIMHE Pilot Projects of the UniPID Network and the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences as Basis for Wider Action**

The SIMHE Pilot Project of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences focused especially on guidance and counselling services and developing the recognition of prior learning. Immigrants who are eligible for higher education or who had already completed higher education studies or degrees were offered personal guidance. The project also included *Guidance Generalia* mass lectures, which described the Finnish educational system and entry into higher education. Visiting lecturers were also heard. (Stenberg & Autero 2016.) At the pilot stage, SIMHE Metropolia also actively developed learning recognition services. These services were offered to those who had already obtained a residence permit and who had completed a degree in technology or business administration. They contained exploratory phases (incl. expert interviews and self-assessment of knowhow) and opportunities to show one's learning through competence-based examinations and various working life projects. Developed by the Finnish National Agency for Education and the Employment and Economic Development Offices, a skills survey document was provided to the participant which detailed the knowledge that had been recognised and how this had been done, and described the potential continuous learning needs and the learning that the Finnish qualification did not recognise. Those who had completed a working life project also received a transcript of studies. The prior learning recognition service was also found to benefit the employers in issues concerning the knowhow of migrant background employees. In addition to the above-mentioned functions, Metropolia's SIMHE Project actively networked with the actors in the immigration sector

particularly in the capital city region. (Metropolia 2017.) The functions and services and the development thereof in SIMHE-Metropolia continue within the present strategic operations of the University of Applied Sciences.

The activities of the SIMHE-UniPID Pilot Project of the University of Jyväskylä from February 2016 to March 2017 consisted of the guidance and counselling of immigrants living in Finland who already had a higher education or were interested in obtaining it; supporting the organisation of virtual studies directed at this group through funding application and networking and cooperation with various interest groups such as higher education institutions and other educational establishments, accommodation and multicultural centres, the Finnish National Agency for Education, the Employment and Economic Development Offices, and other main authorities and researchers of immigration issues. This report describes, in particular, how SIMHE-UniPID has guided and supported immigrants who have moved into Finland to relevant paths of higher education; networked regionally, nationally and internationally, and participated in education policy discussion, education planning and research cooperation.

From the beginning of 2017, the SIMHE work supporting the higher education of immigrants has expanded and evolved from pilot projects into activities that have integrated into the core services of higher education institutions, such as student and applicant services. Streamlining university education requires cooperation within and between universities, and it is the task of the higher education institutions responsible for the activity to support all Finnish higher education institutions in a manner formulated in more detail in what follows. The SIMHE work now continues in three higher education institutions based on strategic funding negotiated with the Ministry of Education and Culture. As already mentioned in the Foreword, the higher education institutions that have taken this national responsibility upon themselves include the University of Helsinki, the University of Turku, the Karelia University of Applied Sciences and the Oulu University of Applied Sciences in addition to University of Jyväskylä and the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences which have already piloted the work.

## **SIMHE-UniPID in Jyväskylä**

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### **Initial Stages of the Project**

Operationally, the SIMHE-UniPID pilot project commenced in the University of Jyväskylä in March 2016, when the two project coordinators began their work. At the initial stages, the coordinators gathered information on the relevant actors, identified the contact network in the higher education institutions, in the near regions as well as nationally, and formed a view on the possibilities and needs for higher education for the target groups which would support the guidance and counselling work. Additionally, an action plan was drawn up, press releases were issued and a website was built. The guidance and counselling services, which were maintained until the end of the pilot stage, were commenced on 20 April 2016.

In Jyväskylä, the pilot project for supporting higher education for immigrants was carried out through the UniPID network (Finnish University Partnership for International Development) coordinated by the University of Jyväskylä. UniPID promotes global responsibility and cooperation of universities in issues of sustainable development. The network presently contains nine Finnish universities, so acting on a national level was natural for a pilot project which was finally named SIMHE-UniPID. Prospective clients for guidance and counselling and training events that interested them appeared from all over Finland. This required intensive communication and information gathering from the coordinators.

### **Objectives, Functions and Spread of Best Practices**

The SIMHE-UniPID project sought to develop and model guidance and counselling practices to support the development work done in the higher education institutions and to recognise the education, degrees and educational interests of the prospective students as well as to facilitate the recognition of prior learning by various authorities. The national point of coordination offered guidance and counselling in issues related to the higher education system and studies and moving forward in the educational paths. In the counselling sessions, an effort was made to individually support the training plans of the prospective students as well as



charting and finding the relevant training options. Help was also offered in the application stages of trainings and courses and e.g. in searching for supplementary studies required to qualify.

Developing, modelling and offering guidance and counselling required extensive cooperation with different stakeholders. The SIMHE-UniPID pilot project launched the creation of regional and national stakeholder networks, which now continues within the auspices of the strategically funded operations of the University of Jyväskylä. Stakeholders who have a direct link to the guidance processes include the following: the institutes of higher education and other possible institutions, integration instructors, Employment and Economic Development Offices, Kela the Social Insurance Institution of Finland, accommodation centres, regional guidance authorities and initiatives, Centre for International Mobility CIMO (in 2016), the Finnish National Agency for Education and the other authorities responsible for the recognition of prior learning as well as the Finnish Immigration Service in residence permit issues. Approaches to and objectives of guidance and counselling were discussed with the University of Jyväskylä, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, other higher education institutions and educational establishments and with the international experts in the field. Developing the networks continues to enable

the smooth flow of information and low-threshold contacts to support the development work and individual educational paths.

The SIMHE-UniPID pilot project examined the best practices of the higher education institutions in implementing training and carrying out administrative tasks and then communicated this information to the prospective students and stakeholders. These practices were spread in day-to-day guidance and coordination work and in speeches delivered in different domestic and international events. The main event of the project was a multidisciplinary seminar exploring the themes of immigration and further education for the university sector. A publication, *"Open the Doors!" Migrants in Higher Education: Fostering Cooperation at Universities Seminar* 13.-14.12.2016 in Jyväskylä (Käyhkö, Bontenbal & Bogdanoff 2017) was also made. A major objective of the seminar was to support and strengthen the information exchange and cooperation between higher education, administration, research and experience.

Within the framework of the pilot project and the seminar, researchers studying immigration were encouraged to network and join in the discussion on educational supply, linguistic issues, teaching and guidance, the development of educational systems and other principal areas of further education. SIMHE-UniPID also offered asylum seekers and immigrants an opportunity to participate as experts in the discussions in the training and research forums (e.g. Conference on Educational Research and ETMU\* days 2016). The project has also activated social debate on the themes of immigration and sought to highlight the need to reform higher education structures and teaching. The functions of the SIMHE-UniPID pilot hence concern all the basic duties of the universities, i.e. training, research and social influence (cf. the Universities Act 558/2009, Section 2).

## **Support and Coordination for the Project**

A national steering group supported – and continues to support – the SIMHE work. The steering group contains members from the Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finnish National Agency for Education (also CIMO prior to 2017) and various higher education institutions. The steering group was a major

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\*) Study of Ethnic Relations and International Migration

support to the SIMHE pilot projects and followed the progress of the work through its various stages and investigated the reasons for the detected grassroots challenges. A major role was also played by a coordination group in Jyväskylä which was composed of experts from the central administration of the university, the Academic and Student Services, the Language Centre, the Department of Teacher Education, the Open University, the Centre for Applied Language Studies and Institute for Educational Research. The coordination group supported the SIMHE-UniPID pilot project coordinators particularly in questions regarding the administration of higher education, language issues and immigration, and planning of coordination networks.

In addition to a part-time project manager, two full-time project coordinators and a steering and a coordination working group, employees of the UniPID network, three university trainees, two research assistants and several experts by experience participated in the various subparts of the project. From March 2017, the SIMHE guidance and counselling services and the development thereof in Jyväskylä transferred from the UniPID network to the Academic and Student Services of the University of Jyväskylä.



## Guidance and Counselling Services

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### Approaches

Offering guidance and counselling services was one of the core tasks of the SIMHE-UniPID pilot project in Jyväskylä. According to Puukari (2013), guidance and counselling refer to responsive functions, which support people in finding befitting solutions to the challenges of living in a society. Guidance differs from counselling in that guidance seeks to understand the circumstances of the client in a profound and comprehensive manner whereas in counselling the approach is more problem-centred. (Puukari & Korhonen 2013, 15–16.) The guidance offered by the SIMHE-UniPID project may be characterised as giving enough time for posing questions. It was possible to consider the prospective student's educational background and issues of interest with the counsellor, and to discuss the continuation of his/her education and its basic conditions in Finland. Counselling provided within the framework of the project consisted of concretely looking into the next steps, reaching out to the necessary contact persons, going through study programmes and course curricula and investigating the application process together with the prospective students.

Puukari and Korhonen (2013) have approached guidance from a multicultural viewpoint with emphasis on the issues rising from cultural differences. However, the leading idea of the SIMHE-UniPID project is that many cultures and viewpoints are often involved in the interactions, irrespective of the home countries of the people concerned (cf. also Onnismaa 2007, 49). In the guidance discussions, the focus was on questions arising from the prospective student's life and training experiences and the shared expertise of the parties: the prospective students are the experts on their life, situation and decisions, and the counsellor commands the guidance process professionally (Onnismaa 2007, 27).

During the guidance process, questions arose above all from the prospective students themselves, on their educational needs, areas of interest and the challenges they had faced in seeking information on training and commencing studies while settling into their new environment and society. Guidance and counselling sought to support people's plans, concrete application measures and preparation for studies in Finland where the education system is not necessarily previously known to them. Mean-

ingful guidance and counselling has required the ability and willingness to understand the Finnish education system and the expressions and conventions used in it from an immigrant's perspective. In addition, it has been necessary to discuss the system in which the person concerned has been used to act.

However, guidance and counselling was also participated by people who already have a lot of experience of Finnish higher education, for example of open university courses, participating in different projects in universities, joint projects between higher education and working life or exchange studies in Finland. In such cases, the prospective students did not need guidance to clarify their interests in Finnish higher education or advice on finding suitable trainings. Instead, they needed exact information, for example on applying to specific fields or subjects and setting up meetings with key persons to advance the process.

The starting point for the guidance and counselling discussions was the attempt to understand the prospective students' situation, particularly from the viewpoint of educational and vocational concerns. Since many asylum seekers also sought guidance, questions related to residence permits and subsistence were frequently discussed. The main methods used in guidance and counselling were listening, posing questions and creating a safe environment. In the discussions, the educational opportunities available were brought up as well as issues relating to residence permits and studying while showing that the prospective students' questions and concerns were valuable (even if concrete solutions could not always be offered) and deserved to be answered. Solutions and potential methods of action were discussed together with other contact persons while also using the information offered by various websites. Advice and support in continuing the process was requested from the following: the contact persons for trainings that interested the prospective students, those who worked in the admission services of higher education institutions or as experts of study benefits, the authorities in the recognition of prior learning, the Finnish Immigration Service or those acting in guidance and counselling at the Employment and Economic Development Offices and accommodation centres. The experiences obtained from the SIMHE-UniPID work confirmed that supporting and facilitating the educational paths of people with immigrant backgrounds requires well-functioning, multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral networks.

## Target Groups

The target group for the guidance and counselling services of the SIMHE-UniPID project were the immigrants living in Finland who had already completed some higher education studies or degrees or were eligible for such studies. Eligibility means that a person has either completed secondary education studies in Finland or equivalent studies abroad which provide eligibility for higher education studies in the country in question (Universities Act 558/2009, Section 37; Polytechnics Act 932/2014, Section 25). Guidance and counselling services were primarily used by people who were looking for suitable higher education studies, paths for completing a Bachelor's, Master's or a Doctor's Degree or possibilities to qualify for their profession in Finland. For instance, it is not possible to practice a doctor's or nurse's profession without a decision from the National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health (National Supervisory Authority for Welfare and Health 2017). Those who have been in teacher training abroad obtain eligibility by a decision of the Finnish National Agency for Education (Finnish National Agency for Education 2016). However, it is possible to act as a teacher on a fixed-term contract without the qualification. This has a major bearing on the salary level, though.

The prospective students consisted of asylum seekers, immigrants, people who had lived long in Finland, those who had come to work in Finland or those who had arrived for family reasons. According to the law, asylum seekers may seek admission to training and accept any place being offered, if they fulfil the eligibility criteria for the said training. An apprenticeship is also an option (Ministry of Education and Culture 2017b). Studying offers a relevant choice in a situation where the general labour market situation does not promote quick access to the labour market. The target group of the project were people living in Finland, but some queries on educational opportunities in Finland from abroad were also answered within the framework of the service.

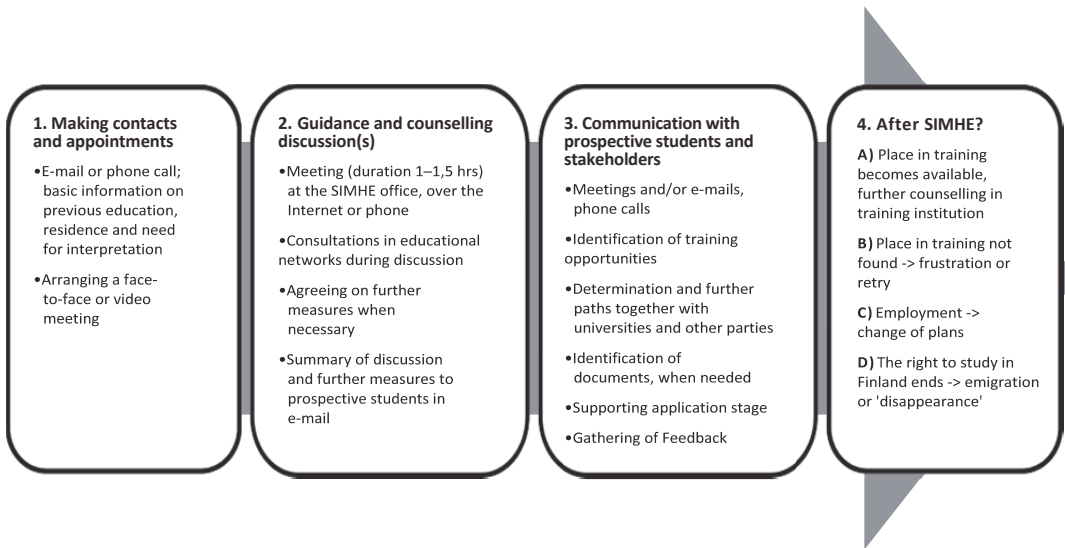
During the pilot stage, which lasted for over a year, personal guidance and counselling services were provided to more than 130 prospective students in the SIMHE-UniPID project and when necessary, several discussions were conducted. Roughly 40% of them were female and a small minority were male. The majority were from Iraq, Afghanistan or Russia, and there were 24 countries of origin. Many of the people were asylum seekers. The typical fields being studied were IT, Business and Construc-



tion Technology, but in all, the spectre of fields was large from the Humanities and Educational Sciences to Medicine and Law. Many of those who sought guidance and counselling had either completed Bachelor-level studies or the studies were still ongoing, but there were also students of upper secondary education, several Master's Degree students, those who already had a Master's Degree and some postgraduate students or people who already had a Doctor's Degree (cf. Appendix 1). Of those who used the services, only a small number have been able to take courses in their own field or entered higher education, and some study languages or are in integration training. However, systematic information on further education paths was not gathered at the pilot stage. A trilingual feedback questionnaire was sent to those who had used the service (cf. Appendix 4).

### **Conducting Guidance and Counselling in Practice**

In the Jyväskylä office, SIMHE-UniPID offered individual guidance face-to-face, by telephone or e-mail or by using the video negotiation or Internet phone call channel. The languages used were Finnish, English and Spanish, and when necessary, interpreters were also used. They were used for roughly ten guidance discussions from Finnish into Arabic, Finnish into Farsi and Finnish into Kurdisoran. In addition to personal guidance, SIMHE-UniPID



**Diagram 1. The Guidance and Counselling Process.**

also arranged more general information and discussion sessions and group guidance for example in accommodation centres and different multicultural project groups mainly in Central Finland. These events gathered roughly 200 participants. Contacts were received from 37 different locations, but almost half the participants regionally represented Central Finland.

The guidance and counselling process began when prospective students or their adviser contacted the SIMHE-UniPID employees and made an appointment by e-mail or by phone. The date and manner of the discussion was fixed as well as the potential need for interpretation. The educational background and interests of the prospective students were briefly discussed and some more preparatory information was given. Following this, the prospective student and one of the SIMHE counsellors engaged in a counselling session face-to-face, in a video meeting or by telephone. Suitable educational paths were gone through together with the relevant parties, such as universities, polytechnics, other educational institutions, authorities carrying out recognition of vocational qualifications, Employment and Economic Development Offices, Finnish National Agency for Education and in individual cases the Finnish Immigration Service. Diagram 1 above illustrates the typical counselling process.

The counselling helped the immigrants to seek the most appropriate trainings for themselves. In addition to clarifying the prospective students' plans and seeking educational solutions, the counsellors also

assisted in the application process where necessary. Help was offered for instance in filling out application forms. Even though it was the initial aim of the project to steer immigrants who were eligible for higher education studies to universities and polytechnics, counselling was also occasionally given to those interested in other types of training. During the pilot project, a clear need for an educational counselling service such as SIMHE was recognised and a proposal for measures to that effect was brought before the Ministry (cf. Ministry of Education and Culture 2017a).

An issue which was frequently discussed during the counselling sessions was subsistence during training. It is not possible for asylum seekers studying for a degree to obtain study benefits, since the right to Kela's benefits only begins when a residence permit has been issued. After other expenses, the monthly reception allowance is not sufficient to cover for instance the study fees of open universities and particularly not the tuition fees. Those who have obtained a residence permit can study full-time and obtain study grants. If unemployed, the immigrants may gain unemployment benefits for training during the integration period, and following it, the studies may be supported as voluntary training, but in such cases the training plan shall be approved as part of an integration or employment plan by the employment agency. If prospective students have taken up so-called path studies, they are not considered full-time students, even if they aim for a degree.

## **Examples of Educational Paths**

Frequently the prospective students wished that they could either apply to a university or polytechnic, continue their unfinished – mostly Bachelor-level – higher education studies in Finland, continue to a Master's Degree based on a previous Bachelor's Degree or go on to doctoral studies. The prospective students included those who had a Master's Degree that had been recognised by the Finnish National Agency for Education and who wished to qualify as teachers in Finland. There was a lively debate on Finnish language studies benefiting those with higher education offered by Finnish higher education institutions – or the lack thereof on higher levels of learning.

Concrete training options were discussed in detail. Potential further paths included English polytechnic degrees and Master's Degrees, inter-

national master's programmes of universities, path studies of open polytechnics, the educational supply of open universities (individual courses or training modules), scientific post-graduate studies, pedagogical studies, apprenticeship training, trainings by business colleges, high school for adults, Finnish as a second and foreign language studies or other language studies (for example English), training supply of adult education centres, language tests (TOEFL), language courses (OLS) or other courses of short duration

As a rule, the immigrants who wished to begin studying had a high motivation to enter Finnish higher education institutions, and they were active and self-steering in finding out about the alternatives. At the same time, they might also be frustrated about their situation. It was not easy to find suitable training options and they were not necessarily available in all fields. Very specific application periods to trainings slow down the process considerably, and for asylum seekers, their uncertain situation causes added stress.

The following examples describe the educational background and possible educational paths of the SIMHE-UniPID clients in Finland. The individuals in the case examples are fictional.

- *Person A arrived in Finland as an asylum seeker in autumn 2015 and gained a refugee status. Person A has completed upper secondary school in his/her home country and is interested in IT studies in Finland. So far, Person A cannot speak Finnish but has studied English in upper secondary school and can speak it fairly well. The mother tongue and study language of Person A is Arabic.*

Applying for preparatory courses to higher education was discussed with Person A. Such trainings are offered by some higher education institutions and adult education centres. The preparatory studies last for one term and prepare the student for the entrance examinations, familiarise him/her with a specific field of study and improve his/her language skills (Finnish/Swedish as a second and foreign language courses) as well as academic study skills. They may entitle the student to study grants or unemployment benefits. A licence for English learning is also provided to the Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support (OLS) service.

- *Person B has arrived in Finland a year ago for family reasons and obtained a residence permit. Person B has gone to upper secondary school in his/her home country. After his/her integration training, Person B commands the basics of Finnish and works at the family restaurant. Person B speaks fluent English. Person B's wish is to enter social services and health care training and find employment as a nurse in Finland. Person B's mother tongue is Hindi and his/her language of study is English.*

Developing language skills is discussed with Person B. It is possible for Person B to study more Finnish for example in an upper secondary school for adults, open university/polytechnic or adult education centre. It is also possible to take up web-based studies, but to obtain good language skills it would be important to participate in contact teaching. With sufficient language skills, Person B may apply for preparatory courses to higher education or nursing studies in a polytechnic, which are also available in English. It is sensible that Person B considers his/her employment after graduation, and therefore s/he needs to actively study the Finnish language.

- *Person C on has moved to Finland having married a Finnish spouse three years ago. Person C has completed a Master of Science Degree in his/her home country and qualified as a mathematics teacher. Person C has a year-long experience of the teaching sector prior to moving into Finland but s/he has not been able to find a teaching post in Finland. Person C, who speaks fairly fluent Finnish, would like to supplement his/her studies so that s/he would be qualified to teach mathematics in Finnish secondary and upper secondary school. Person C's mother tongue is English.*

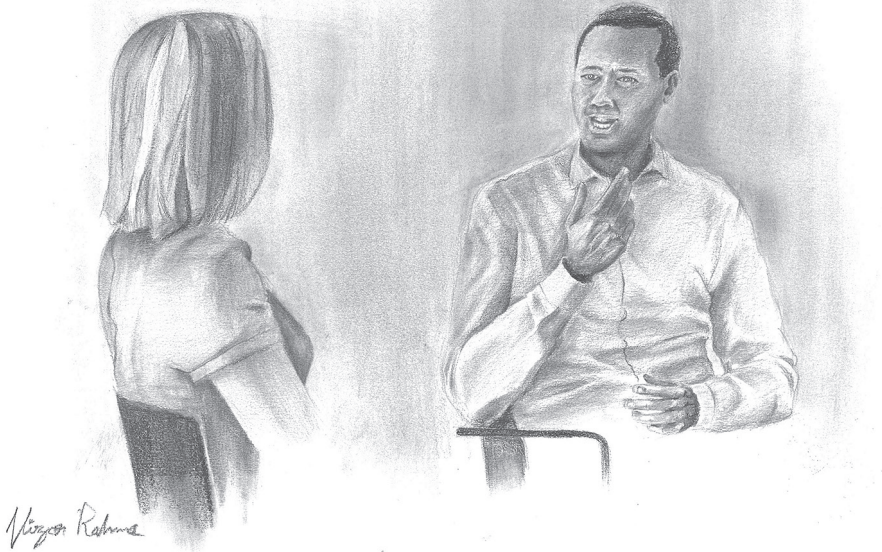
By a decision of the Finnish National Agency for Education, the degree of a Master of Arts in Social Sciences may be recognised as comparable to a Finnish higher education degree. However, obtaining teacher qualifications requires further training both in mathematics and in pedagogics. Pedagogical studies for teachers shall be supplemented as well. To be able to apply for pedagog-



ical studies in a university, Person C's Finnish language skills shall be on level C1 as attested by the National Certificate of Language Proficiency (proficiency level 5). Finnish language studies on this level are almost completely lacking in Finnish higher education institutions. Counsellor colleagues are contacted in different higher education institutions and particularly their open universities to find out where Finnish as a second and foreign language courses are offered and whether person C could study them for example in open universities/polytechnics, as s/he is not yet a degree student in a Finnish higher education institution. Self-study materials and web-based studies can also be used. The possibility to study mathematics courses in an open university or for example through a separate admissions procedure at a Faculty of Science is also investigated. Different university faculties can have vastly differing practices and so-called non-degree studies are not necessarily possible everywhere.

- *Person D has applied for asylum in Finland. In his/her home country, Person D has pursued some English business administration studies but Person D has not finished his/her Bachelor's Degree. Person D would like to continue his/her studies in Finland and move on to a Master's Degree at a later stage. Person D's mother tongue is Arabic, and s/he has studied in an international school and university in English.*

Person D is informed of the possibility to apply for English Bachelor's Degree programmes offered by the polytechnics. Some of them have preparatory courses in business administration, which also qualify as integration training for those granted asylum. The preparatory programmes develop Finnish language skills and capacities of studying in a higher education institution in Finnish and they also provide eligibility for unemployment benefits. It is important for person D to learn about the impact that training leading to a qualification following the preparatory courses may have for entry into integration training and subsistence, if person D obtains asylum and settles in Finland. The supply of open polytechnics in the field of business administration is examined with Person D, as well as opportunities to study



English and Finnish. A licence for the Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support (OLS) tool is also provided for person D, which enables him/her to study English, and from April 2017, Finnish as well.

- *Person E has recently arrived in Finland as an asylum seeker. Person E has a Bachelor's Degree in technology but no documents to show for it. Person E is interested in studying for a Master's Degree in the same field in Finland. Person E's mother tongue is Dari and s/he converses fluently in English. Person E has had little opportunities to study Finnish in the accommodation centre.*

The possibility and safety to request a qualification certificate from his/her home university is discussed with Person E. It is agreed that this will be done as a so-called measure between the university organisations. The Student Services of a Finnish University write a letter of inquiry, which Person E sends to the administration of his/her home university. Because of this query, the qualification certificate is faxed from the home university to the Finnish university. This opens the possibility for Person E to apply for study programmes in polytechnics while waiting for the certificate, since it is possible to participate in

the entrance examination without the certificate if it is delivered later. It is not possible to apply to a polytechnic solely without the qualification certificate or knowledge of obtaining it; Person E must wait to obtain a residence permit. The English Master's programmes in different polytechnics are examined with Person E; further information is requested on the application procedure directly from each school; the tuition fees are explored and the relationship of training for a degree and possible integration training and its impact on subsistence is discussed. The tests for demonstrating English language skills and participating in and preparing for them are examined together. When person E proceeds to the application stage, the entire process is gone through with him/her. To assist in writing a motivation letter, the phrases used in Finnish universities and polytechnics in writing similar documents are discussed with him/her.

- *Through the asylum process, Person F has obtained a residence permit to Finland. The doctoral studies in Science have been discontinued in his/her home country and person F would like to continue writing his/her doctorate in Finland. The mother tongue of Person F is Arabic, s/he is fluent in English and French and commands the basics in Finnish.*

A general discussion is had about Person F's plans and research interests, the websites of Finnish universities describing the doctorate studies in the field of Science is gone through, the broad lines of applying for doctoral studies is described and a professor or an amanuensis is sought as a contact who could support in the making of a doctoral study plan. The possibility of peer instruction is also examined with Person F through the mentor networks of SIMHE and Akava, the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland. Acting in Finnish academic communities and communicating by e-mail for example is also discussed with person F, who has questions about it.

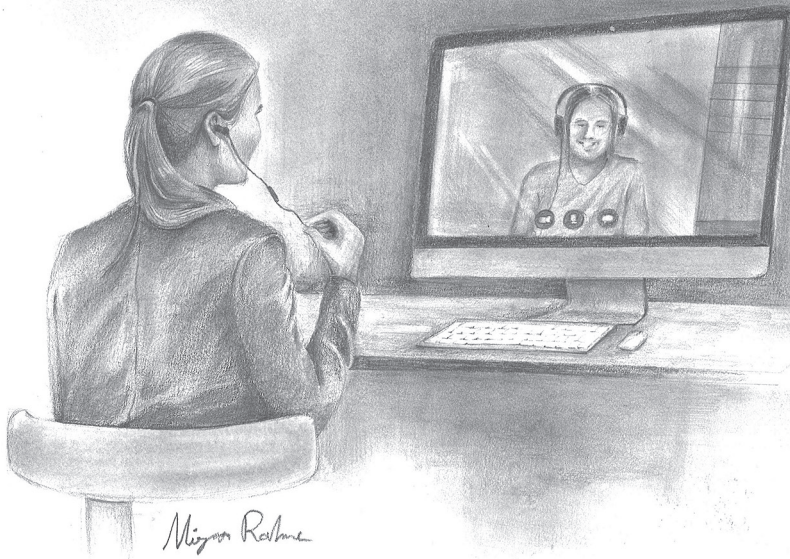
- *Person G has obtained an Engineer's Degree in his/her home country and had ten year's work experience in the field. Person G has recently moved to Finland and participates in integration*

*training. Person G has begun to dream about change of career but is not sure which studies to take up and which would be the best way to proceed. Person G comes to SIMHE guidance and counselling to hear about the different options, study practices and subsistence in Finland. Person G has reserved an interpreter. The other tongue of Person G is Fulani. His/her previous studies were conducted in French, and Russian is fluent as well.*

Different sectors and vocational study paths that might interest him/her are examined with Person G. After deliberation and counselling discussions, Person G decides to continue in integration training. To promote Person G's objectives, possibilities to participate in studies promoting the language skills required by higher education institutions are sought. The age of person G and the price that is too high for a self-paying student limit the chances of gaining access to training directed at 18-29-year-olds funded from the Youth Guarantee Scheme, and the family situation does not allow studying elsewhere, so the supply of open universities/polytechnics and liberal adult education remain left. Person G receives support in course selection from SIMHE. Person G is also reminded that the planned studies shall be approved by the employment agency; they might for example be so wide in credits that the right to an unemployment benefit may cease to exist. The dream about degree studies is left behind "but is not forgotten!".

- *Person H arrived in Finland three years ago, to study a Master's Degree in an English study programme, and the studies are now finished. Alongside his/her studies, Person H has studied a few Finnish courses in the university and commands the language fairly well. Person H feels that s/he needs his/her Finnish skills to be enhanced to be able to work in a Finnish work community. In person H's line of business, English is the main working language but Finnish is needed on a weekly basis for example when negotiating with Finnish stakeholders.*

Person H cannot participate in labour market integration training and receive Finnish lessons therein, as the integration period



has already run out. The possibility to study Finnish in open university/polytechnic, upper secondary school for adults or an adult education centre is examined with Person H. However, courses that are challenging enough are not available for those who are not studying for a degree in a higher education institution. It would be optimal for person H that higher education institutions would offer advanced-level Finnish courses as open courses enabling graduated students to enrol in them as well as other students needing advanced-level Finnish.

- *Person I has lived in Finland for roughly 10 years. S/he speaks fluent Finnish and has worked for the NGO sector for years. However, person I feels that due to his/her prior education and knowledge, it would be possible for him/her to take on more demanding duties. Person I contacts SIMHE to discuss his/her options.*

Person I's education and employment history is gone through in the guidance discussion. Prior to coming to Finland, Person I has

had a high-level of responsibility at work. He has two Master's Degrees obtained from outside of Europe, several years of work experience and much administrative experience. In addition to the mother tongue and Finnish, person I has a strong command of two other languages. Compared to his knowledge potential, Person I's tasks are clearly underestimated. However, there has been a longish break from duties in his/her field of study, and one of the fields, in particular, does not feel relevant anymore. Many potential options are discussed, and finally the duties of an adult teacher and the qualifications for a Finnish as second language teacher begin to appear the most interesting. Further counselling focuses on these options, and the educational paths begins to emerge.

### **Counsellors' On-the-job-learning**

The time between the start of the guidance and counselling services (20 April 2016) and the end of the pilot project (28 February 2017) was very educational for the counsellors as well. The very first sessions taught that the most important aspect of the job was listening. For instance, forms for gathering initial information were quickly left out, as filling them turned out to be difficult. The day-to-day counselling work was educational on the differences of meaning that a Master's Degree has in different educational systems. Talking about a Master's Degree did not necessarily seem natural to the prospective student, even if the counsellor found that after three or four years of studying in a higher education institution or a finished Bachelor' Degree, a Master's Degree could soon seem relevant. A mutual understanding was obtained by asking further about the duration of the Bachelor's Degree in the country or origin (commonly 4-6 years), by realising that in the prospective student's home country only a few people with a higher education degree continue to a Master's Degree, and by explaining in return what a Master's Degree means in today's Finnish higher education. And how does one suggest obtaining a National Certificate of Language Proficiency in English to someone who has conducted his/her entire education in English and acted as an English teacher in his/her home country outside of Europe? Sense of humour and wonder at the Finnish system with the prospective student were often the way forward.

We also learnt to find out about a vast array of trainings all around Finland. Cooperation networks that were built while conducting guidance and counselling were the most important support in this work. We learnt how a guidance discussion may succeed when both the prospective student and the interpreter are at the opposite ends of a telephone line or what to do when the friend of the original client wants to join a guidance discussion. During peak periods, we were grateful that we could also advise people to turn to Metropolia's SIMHE service and we appreciated the possibility to share experiences vice versa. We learnt that a one-and-a-half-hour discussion could be followed by an information gathering process that lasted for several days. Above all, we learnt to be human to humans instead of databases or authorities. We also received good feedback for doing so.

By doing this work, we understood how multidirectional a counsellor's job really is. Frequently the so-called prospective student's problems are the system's problems, and the guidance and counselling situation provided valuable information on this. This information can and should be used to develop both the organisation offering the service and the wider system. We need channels for this, however, to enable transmitting the information – otherwise the knowledge and learning end at individual employees and the necessary changes cannot be made.

## **Feedback on the Guidance Service**

At the final stage of the pilot project, feedback was gathered from the people who had contacted the Jyväskylä guidance service (cf. Appendix 4). The feedback questionnaire sent by e-mail to all who received personal guidance could be answered in Finnish, Arabic or English. It was answered by a total of 44 people i.e. 32% of those who received it. At the time of responding, 36% of the respondents were full-time students based on their own submission, 34% were waiting for a residence permit, 23% were unemployed, 5% worked and 2% lived elsewhere than in Finland.

According to the results, the prospective students were very satisfied with the services offered by SIMHE-UniPID. Contacting the services had been easy for the most part, and the staff had been able to respond quickly enough. Roughly 90% of the respondents agreed wholly or partly that

the SIMHE-UniPID counsellors were knowledgeable and understood the prospective student's situation. It was suggested that the staff could also include immigrants who command the languages spoken by the prospective students and know the education systems of the countries of origin. This is an important point to be noted in future SIMHE work.

Almost all (93%) of the respondents agreed wholly or partly that they had been learnt and respected during the guidance and counselling sessions. The feedback reflects the fact that the basis of the SIMHE-UniPID guidance service, i.e. listening to and meeting the prospective student as a person, already succeeded in practice but there is still room for development. The responses concerning overall satisfaction and the promotion of matters following the guidance discussion were dispersed compared to the responses to the other questions. Even though roughly half the respondents said they were entirely happy with the service, some of the respondents were unhappy as well.

The most frequent problem related to guidance was the bad fit of the solutions discussed: the educational paths that came up during the guidance session did not interest some of the respondents or the trainings were not possible for them after all. Some would have wanted more support in the application process, and for others finding a place of study seemed challenging. The educational system does not offer realistic educational paths for all in its present form, and some of the respondents felt they were left without answers. The situation was partially affected by the time that the pilot was launched – it was only possible to start after the joint application in the spring. However, the entry into force of the tuition fees significantly slowed down the application into international degree studies in December-January 2016-2017.



## **SIMHE Cooperation**

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### **Cooperation Networks**

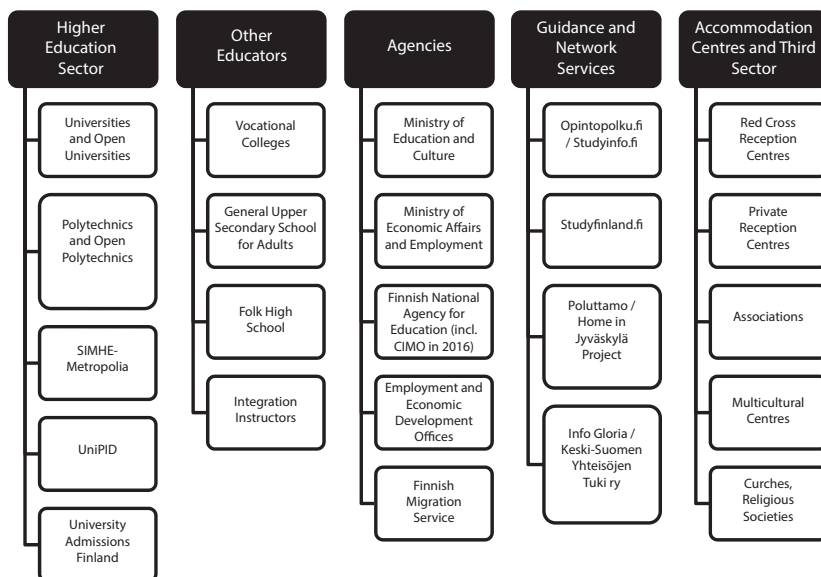
In addition to the guidance and counselling of immigrants and charting of educational options, the SIMHE-UniPID pilot project also included versatile cooperation with different stakeholders. The pilot created networks between different actors and activated both the discussion on the educational needs of immigrants and research in the field. It was the aim of the cooperation to enable smoother communication and information flow between the organisations and institutions working with immigrant issues.

The main stakeholders of the Jyväskylä SIMHE-UniPID project included all the Finnish universities and polytechnics. Close cooperation was conducted with the SIMHE-Metropolia pilot and activities were developed together. Regular contacts were maintained with accommodation centres particularly in Central Finland but elsewhere in Finland as well. Visits were also made to some accommodation centres in the context of the project. SIMHE-UniPID also supported the staff and volunteers of the accommodation centres in finding educational opportunities for the immigrants.

Of the government agencies, the main stakeholders of SIMHE-UniPID included the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finnish National Agency for Education, Employment and Economic Development Offices and Finnish Immigration Service. The cooperation networks also covered the University Admissions Finland service, other parties who assisted in student admissions, regional authorities (e.g. the Home in Jyväskylä project and the Poluttamo (Pathing) guidance service, and NGOs such as the Red Cross, multicultural centres and different associations.

SIMHE-UniPID built connections with e.g. the universities of Bremen, Gothenburg, Coimbra, Brighton, Catania, Harokopio and Paris, EU-level actors (East and North Finland EU offices, EAIE, ESREA Network on Migration, Transnationalism and Racisms, CESIE, Nuffic, DAAD, Foundation for Refugee Students) and participated in an OECD survey on the needs to develop immigrant integration.

Identifying stakeholders and contacting them was of primary importance for the objectives of the SIMHE-UniPID project. Due to the close networks, it was possible to convey information on the educational opportunities of immigrants and associated themes smoothly from one ac-



**Diagram 2. SIMHE-UniPID Cooperation Networks in Finland.**

tor to another, and the guidance provided within the SIMHE-UniPID pilot project would not have been possible without these connections. The cooperation also helped to eliminate overlaps in the functions and ensured that the SIMHE functions have supplemented the existing structures in an appropriate way.

### **Training and Participation throughout Finland**

One of the tasks of the SIMHE pilot was to identify training opportunities and projects where the objective was to promote immigrant integration. The diversity of the projects becomes clear for instance if one looks at the list of ESR-funded integration projects (Sustainable growth and employment programme 2016). Throughout Finland, there are currently several initiatives and projects underway or completed which have been carried out on donor support or voluntary basis and which involve immigrants and especially asylum seekers in the activities of higher education institutions and other educational establishments. In what follows, we provide a few examples of them.

In summer 2016, CIMO and the Ministry of Education and Culture prepared a questionnaire to examine what kind of support measures Finnish higher education institutions had for asylum seekers and refugees. It was answered by 19 higher education institutions. The results showed that in most institutions, support measures had begun during 2015. The most common included projects and initiatives by the students (17), language and cultural studies (13) and leisure activities (12). Challenges were posed e.g. by language barriers, issues related to information flow and totality management and problems in coordination and cooperation with different actors. It is possible to sum up the results of the questionnaire by stating that there was seen to be a great need for networks and smooth information flow (CIMO 2016.)

During the term 2015-2016, the University of Tampere began *Let's work together* activities in cooperation with voluntary students and teachers, in the context of which entry into some courses and a tailored series of lectures on multiculturalism have been made available to asylum seekers. This project has also included early childhood education and care arranged by the university for immigrant children as well as family clubs in the accommodation centres. (Peltonen 2016.) The themes of multiculturalism have been topical before in the University of Tampere. In 2009 already, a *Kuulumisia* project began at the university which offers further vocational training in Finnish for immigrants working in training and counselling duties. Pedagogical, multidisciplinary and supplementary training is arranged within the project enabling the students' qualification as teachers in accordance with the requirements of the Finnish educational system. By the end of 2016, roughly 150 students from 38 countries had participated in the training. (Yli-Jokipii 2016.)

Hanken & SSE Executive Education commenced a *Business Lead* programme in the spring 2016, making it possible for 40 highly trained asylum seekers to study Finnish and European business and organisation culture, business strategy, fiscal management and marketing. The purpose of the programme is to promote the two-way integration of the asylum seekers, and in addition to contact teaching it contained mobile learning, mentoring and a two-month on-the-job training in a Finnish business. The training programme was organised together with Svenska Handelshögskolan and the mobile service company Funz. (Hanken & SSE 2016.)

In the Opinsauna (Learning Spaces) project of the University of East Finland, courses, workshops and leisure opportunities have been devised

for immigrants in cooperation with non-formal educational institutes. The School of Computing at the Joensuu Campus of the University of Eastern Finland has designed mobile applications for asylum seekers and other immigrants, and the Savonlinna Teacher Training School has collaborated closely with the accommodation centres in the teacher training. (Kylänpää 2016.) In addition, the Summer School of the University of Eastern Finland in 2016 piloted the participation of two people who had recently obtained refugee status in courses of their own field (cf. Appendix 2).

The open university of Åbo Akademi launched the possibility of asylum seekers to participate in courses free of charge. In autumn 2016, ten asylum seekers participated in open university courses. Most of them studied Finnish as second language, but the web-based computing courses also attracted attention. More than ten asylum seekers also gained access to individual courses in international Master's programmes together with degree students. (Gräsbeck 2016.)

Since 2015, the University of Lapland and the Lapland University of Applied Sciences have run a project called *Higher Education of Immigrants – Path to a Degree*. The aim of the project is to support the education and employment of immigrants living in the Lapland region. The immigrants have been offered preparatory training and guidance for higher education studies and the opportunity to study training modules in open university or open polytechnic which benefit the applicant in seeking entry to higher education institutions. In the long run, the project is expected to bring more versatility into the economic structure of the Lapland region. (University of Lapland 2015.)

The Kajaani University of Applied Sciences also offers preparatory training for immigrants. *NewLife – Preparatory Training in Support of Higher Education Studies for Immigrants* has a width of 30 credits, and its aim is to promote the integration, education and move into employment of the immigrants living in the Kainuu region (Kajaani University of Applied Sciences 2016). The Turku University of Applied Sciences arranges preparatory training for prospective students of business administration (Turku University of Applied Sciences 2016).

A three-year *Urareitti (Career Path)* project was commenced in the Universities of Applied Sciences in autumn 2015, and polytechnics and other educational institutions participate throughout Finland. The purpose of the Urareitti is to streamline the career paths and employment of immigrants and hence promote their inclusion and participation in the

Finnish society. To obtain this goal, a framework befitting the polytechnics will be developed in the project which will allow the polytechnics to assess and contextualise the knowledge and capabilities of the highly-trained immigrants. (Häme University of Applied Sciences 2017.)

The Lahti University of Applied Sciences, Salpaus Further Education and the Lahti Folk High School have started *OSSI –Osaaminen esiin* project, which is set to promote access into education and employment and the development of job contacts of immigrant background youths living in the Päijät-Häme region. Various guidance and training models are piloted in the project, training products are developed and a regional networking model is built. (Lahti University of Applied Sciences 2016.) The OSSI project arranged a cooperation seminar in Lahti in December 2016 in which SIMHE-UniPID had a presentation.

South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences, Saimaa University of Applied Sciences and the development company Wirma Lappeenranta have participated in a two-year *MASTO – Promotion of Employment and Education of Immigrants* project governed by Socom Oy, the South-Eastern Finland Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare. A model of an educational path is devised and an orientation guide for immigrant background women and their employers is produced in the project. (South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences 2016.)

Folk high schools have also picked up higher education issues for immigrants. For example, the Alkio College in Korpilahti and Paasikivi College in Turku arrange preparatory trainings for higher education studies intended for prospective immigrant students. The aim of these year-long studies is to strengthen Finnish language skills and develop academic capacities for studying at universities and polytechnics. (Alkio College 2017; Paasikivi College 2017.) The Otava College in Mikkeli offers immigrants year-long preparatory Finnish language training supporting academic studies (Otava College 2017).

## **Research Cooperation, International Networks and Seminar**

The SIMHE-UniPiD pilot project actively created contacts with researchers specialising in educational issues of immigrants and participated in scientific discussion in several fields and forums. Researchers from the Faculty of Social Sciences (present Faculty of Humanities and Social Sci-



ences), Centre for Applied Language Studies and Finnish Institute for Educational Research of the University of Jyväskylä participated directly in the project. In addition, the project coordinators were involved in designing several new research projects.

Special attention was sought to be paid to researchers and experts who had an immigrant background themselves. The pilot project also made it possible for asylum seekers to give a speech for example in the FERA Conference on Education 2016, ETMU Days and the project's own seminar *Migrants in Higher Education: Fostering Cooperation at Universities*. During the FERA Conference on Education in Turku on 17 and 18 November 2016, SIMHE-UniPID coordinated a symposium entitled *Seeking asylum and equality – migrants and Finnish higher education*. In the Joensuu ETMU Days on 25 and 26 November 2016, an expert who had recently been granted asylum gave a speech entitled *Reversed development? Iraqi women between past and present*. We must say with gratitude that during both the FERA Conference on Education and the ETMU Days, the organisers strongly supported the participation of the refugee experts. With re-

gards to the activities of the *Scholars at Risk* network coordinated by UNIFI in Finland and the *Scholar Rescue Fund* coordinated by CIMO (present Finnish National Agency for Education), some contacts were forwarded.

The project coordinators also participated in several international workshops, seminars and conferences. The most important included the study trip to the EAIE *Spotlight Seminar* in Amsterdam, the OECD multi-stakeholder workshop on Migrant Policy in Helsinki, the Triennial ESREA Conference in Maynooth and the ERRIN seminar *University and Higher Education Response to the Migrant and Refugee Crisis* in Brussels. Because of all these, important international contacts were gained and information was shared even beyond the borders of Europe. SIMHE-UniPID was also the main applicant for the Erasmus+ KA3 grants, where the international consortium contained eight partners from seven EU countries. Even if funding was not granted for the intended project, the members of the consortium formed a natural network and the cooperation continues.

One of the major international research projects of the SIMHE pilot year was the seminar arranged on 13 and 14 December 2016 in Jyväskylä: *Migrants in Higher Education: Fostering Cooperation at Universities*. The themes dealt with immigration and the education of immigrants and they examined by means of lectures, panel discussions, small group sessions, posters and a workshop for researchers. Experts on immigration issues were invited as speakers from Finnish and foreign universities. A total of 103 people participated in the seminar and they represented the staff and researchers of higher education institutions. In addition, several students and experts by experience were present. A publication "*Open the doors!*" *Migrants in Higher Education: Fostering Cooperation at Universities Seminar 13.-14.12.2016* in Jyväskylä was made, and it is available on the Internet at <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-39-6977-6>.

Feedback was collected from the participants after the seminar (cf. Appendix 3). Most of the participants were happy with the event. The atmosphere of the seminar was found to be particularly positive and the contents inspiring and relevant for the participants' own work. The possibilities for discussion and information exchange were also praised. The participants hoped that events such as the seminar would be regularly arranged in the future. The feedback questionnaire provided valuable ideas for developing the seminar; for example, it would be good to reserve even more time for informal discussion and networking.

## Training Planning and Development

Upon request, the SIMHE-UniPID project offered help in education planning and development for organisations who work with immigrant training issues in higher education institutions. This cooperation was most tangent with the colleges, open universities and polytechnics offering preparatory studies. The cooperation regarding the *Virtual Studies* courses of the UniPID network and social work education was significant.

While we sought to communicate widely on the legislation concerning the study rights of immigrants seeking asylum, we sometimes had to answer detailed questions on individual educational institutions. Representatives of similar projects carried out in other higher education institutions were also interested in SIMHE-UniPID, and several discussions were conducted between projects coordinators in the spirit of mutual development.

Single higher education institutions invested for example in the recognition of prior learning issues by arranging meetings around this theme. In the University of Jyväskylä, this development work was largely done through the project coordination group. The question of study rights was discussed in one academic affairs meeting. Additionally, the project employees participated in the relevant events on departmental and faculty level.

The project coordinators discussed the themes and aims of the project with various parties and acted as experts in different events (for instance the Spring Forum for International Affairs in Higher Education, seminar on *Support Activities of Higher Education Institutions for Immigrants and Asylum Seekers*, Open University Forum's annual consultation). The problems involved in training and studies from immigrants' perspective were communicated to the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the project sought to actively promote concrete solutions and the finding and implementation of common policies in higher education issues of immigrants. The project manager also informed UNIFI of some of the key issues of the project and the activities of the pilot were regularly reported to the steering committee of the UniPID network.

## Virtual Studies and Summer School Cooperation

Since only some accommodation centres are located near good training opportunities and previous experiences from virtual studies seemed

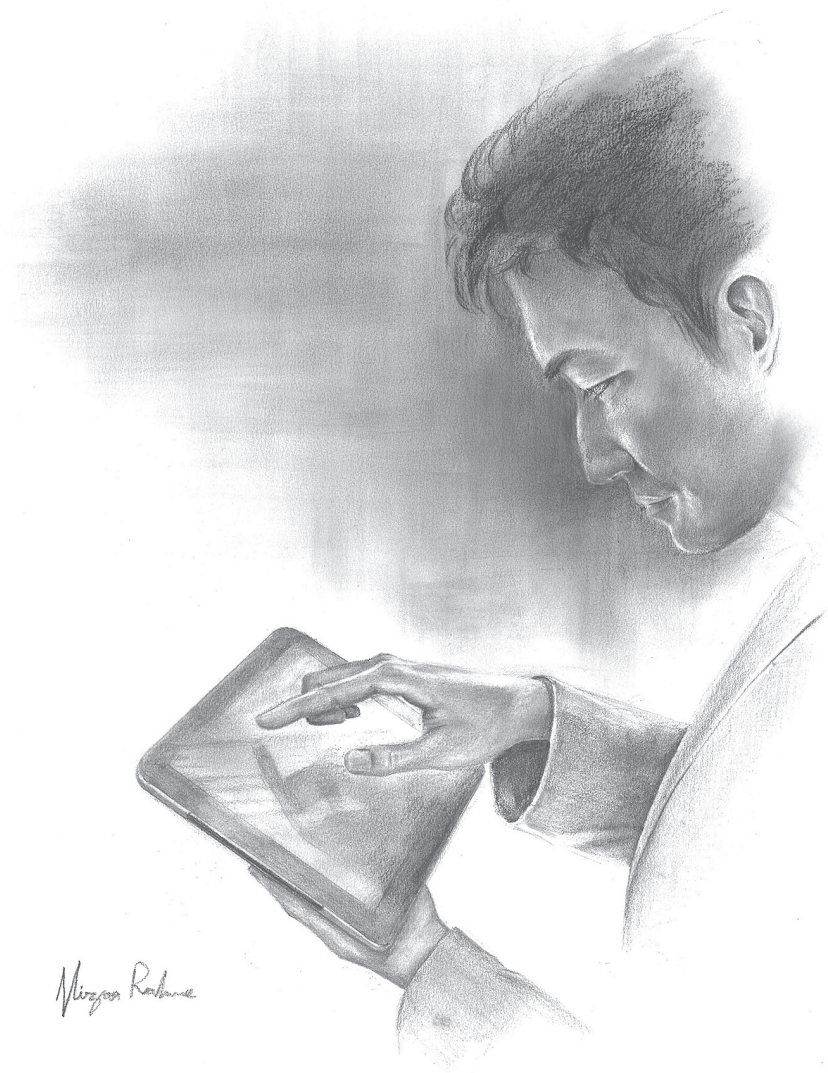


encouraging, the SIMHE-UniPID pilot project enabled the production of virtual courses and opened existing virtual courses and summer studies for asylum seekers on a small scale. These experiments acted as type of "micro pilots" within the bigger project. Opening up existing educational opportunities awarding credits to asylum seekers had actually not been previously done in Finland, although for example Hanken Svenska Handelshögskolan had in spring 2016 offered places for asylum seekers in its Finnish Business Culture course.

The UniPID Virtual Studies offer students enrolled at the UniPID member universities online courses on issues related to sustainable development. They are produced by the member universities and equal five credits (ECTS). It is also possible to build a 25-credit (ECTS) minor out of them. However, the existing supply of virtual studies has not served the new group of students in the best conceivable way. That is why two calls for funding were made in the framework of the SIMHE-UniPID project during summer and autumn of 2016, through which three new courses were chosen to be funded. These courses focus on target groups of asylum seeker and refugee students. The courses which examine the technological applications for learning, scientific research methods and gender studies will all be offered at least three times, and they commence during 2017. The UniPID network continues to coordinate the courses after the termination of the SIMHE-UniPID project.

Opening study places for asylum seekers was negotiated with the teachers of the *Virtual Studies* courses that were offered in autumn 2016. The teachers of four courses replied in the affirmative, but due to administrative challenges it was only possible to take "SIMHE students" to two courses. Concretely, a place was available for 16 out of 37 applicants. Five of them could finish the course. Those who did not finish the course or did not start it at all had problems concerning the availability of equipment (different accommodation centres have vast differences in the possibility to use PCs and the functioning of Internet connections), lack of computer-skills (for example logging into the course and the use of Moodle), lack of time and insufficient language skills. For the course teachers, the most challenging phase was gaining admission to students who came from outside the university and registering them into the systems where the course was not administered via the open university.

In both SIMHE pilot projects, the participation in the virtual studies was supported by providing information on the Erasmus+ Online Lin-



guistic Support (OLS) and providing licences to interested users. OLS offers language courses in 18 different languages and by decision of the European Commission, the service is offered free-of-charge to all immigrant groups, including asylum seekers and refugees. SIMHE-UniPID guided asylum seekers to study languages in the OLS-systems. They mainly chose English courses but Spanish, German and French also interested them. In 2017, the course offer will expand and from April, basic-level Finnish courses will also be offered.

A popular language course was the TOEFL online course also offered by Metropolia's Open University of Applied Sciences (UAS), in which it was possible to practice diverse types of questions in advance and then

take the language test in Helsinki. Additionally, there were single study places in the online courses of the Open UAS's. Many sought international MOOC courses by themselves and for example the courses offered by Kiron (Kiron 2017), and studied Finnish on their own using materials they had discovered from the Internet.

Opening existing educational opportunities to other than the original target groups was also piloted in cooperation with the Summer School of the University of Eastern Finland. The steering committee of the Summer School showed a green light to the participation of some immigrant students, and two students who had recently granted asylum were quickly able to participate. The University of Eastern Finland exempted the students from the course fee and accommodation was found through volunteer networks with the participants themselves paying for food and travel. Feedback from this "micro pilot" was collected from all concerned (cf. Appendix 2).

From the students' angle, the Summer School offered a valuable opportunity to speak with students and teachers in one's own field and to get acquainted with the Finnish education system in practice. The credits obtained were also welcome. Representatives of the university saw some problems with respect to language skills and absorption of theoretical subject matter. But they also obtained a direct contact to immigrant students and their questions and detected that the Finnish education system is not self-evident to everyone. The coordinator of the Summer School summed this up saying, "Based on this experience, immigrant students are welcome to participate in the Summer School again." Those providing accommodation also gave favourable reports. Hopefully, in the years to come other universities may also offer places to asylum seekers and students recently granted asylum. This would both expand the course offer and decrease the need for accommodation, which proved challenging this time.

## **SIMHE Development Work**

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While the SIMHE-UniPID pilot project continued, observations were made on which aspects worked and which merit further concentration as the activities progress. The guidance practices and the systematization thereof should be developed as the project continues. For example, it is possible to modify the online studies to be more relevant than before. The latest research should be used as well, currently produced for example by the Finnish Institute for Educational Research. Systematic guidance documentation should also be invested in and a uniform, virtual path or system be built for that purpose. Systematisation has its drawbacks as well which should be considered when developing the system. If the needs of the documentation begin to determine the guidance situations and processes, it may be more of a drawback than a benefit considering the objective of individuality in guidance and counselling. Furthermore, we should consider how the anonymity of the prospective students is guaranteed in documentation.

Among the feedback collected from the prospective students, there were noteworthy suggestions on the development of the activities. For example, the recruitment of peer counsellors should be considered. Those who speak the same language as the prospective students, know the education systems of the countries in question and have experienced similar situations as the prospective students, could open new possibilities for interaction. The people who participated in the SIMHE pilot and obtained a study place could be integrated in the activities in the role of peer counsellors. Peer counselling could be individual or group-based depending on the situation and need.

More effort shall be invested in the marketing and media exposure of the project. Although there was no shortage of contacts during the pilot stage, all those needing guidance did not find the project or did not have the courage to make contact. Translating the press release and advertisements into more language should be considered and new actors and more widespread channels could be found from e.g. the social media. Communications with university staff and students could also be intensified and the creation of new cooperation networks hence be promoted. In addition, it is necessary to regularly inform the accommodation centres and integration advisors on the possibilities of the clients and students

to seek entry into higher education institutions and that the teachers are able to guide them to the SIMHE service. If they are only informed once, there is a danger that the information will disappear when personnel changes.

From the beginning of 2017, the activities of the higher education institutions responsible for the support of immigrants have expanded to cover a total of six higher education institutions, which have adopted the SIMHE title to their own services. When the project expands, it is time to reflect how the higher education institutions offering the SIMHE service can best build up relationships with other educational institutions. The aim is that the higher education institutions in responsible for the activities could support the activities of other institutions as well. And that the best practices that have arisen via SIMHE could spread in the field. For example, setting up a common webpage for information exchange and topical discussion might be useful, to provide a more permanent foothold for the support measures of immigrants in the Finnish higher education system.

The fact that new higher education institutions have joined in the activities opens new possibilities for the organisation of seminars and corresponding events that are wider and more extensive than before. The concept of a national seminar focusing on issues of higher education for immigrants already exists, although there is still room for development. The feedback on the seminar (cf. Appendix 4) showed that there is an obvious need for such events in the future as well, and this is something that needs to be picked up by the network of SIMHE and other higher education institutions.

## Reflections on the Finnish Education System

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Development needs have been found in the Finnish higher education system during the project which need to be addressed by both the higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Culture. It is important to consider how the higher education institutions could take a more active role and more responsibility for building suitable study and career paths to immigrants. The student's own activity is vital in the education processes but how could the institutions meet them halfway?

Significant improvements are needed in the development of the recognition of prior learning. Those arriving in Finland have a considerable amount of previously acquired knowledge and studies which the present system does not sufficiently acknowledge. For example, the following pose challenges in the recognition of prior learning: the lack of structures of recognition if you are a non-degree student, linguistic challenges, interpretation and comprehension of foreign transcripts of records and qualification certificates, transferring grades from one system into another and validation of learning acquired in non-formal training. The differences in the education systems can also prove problematic; learning valued in another education system is not necessarily equally valuable from the viewpoint of the Finnish system.

When learning cannot be recognised and validated, the immigrated person may end up in jobs which do not correspond to the training acquired or s/he may end up studying something which overlaps with the previous degree. The situation is frustrating for both the individual and society: the individual cannot use his/her education in an appropriate way and the society does not benefit from his/her skills. It is in everybody's best interest that immigrants with higher education obtain appropriate training or employment paths as soon and as smoothly as possible when they have arrived in Finland. Institutes of higher education need support in issues related to recognition of prior learning, and the SIMHE work may be useful in this sense. It would be important to perceive of guidance and counselling as one of the most important means of recognising prior learning. Personal guidance allows us to identify person's knowledge in such a way that it expands the information afforded by qualification certificates and study records. It is possible to jointly

consider the prior learning and competencies of the prospective student during the guidance sessions; what it is like as to its contents, competences and development needs, which trainings and jobs the prospective student is interested in and which studies would assist in reaching that goal. Guidance may be useful during the studies as well in different junctures to make sure that the studies proceed as planned and the goals are obtainable.

In addition to successful guidance, we also need flexible assessment methods and ways of demonstrating one's skills when applying to higher education institutions. It is not necessarily possible to demonstrate one's knowhow for example due to linguistic issues. The Ministry of Education and Culture has also paid attention to how the student selection tradition of higher education institutions complicates the entry of immigrants into higher education (Ministry of Education and Culture 2017a). Universities and polytechnics should consider how the entrance exams could be developed. In addition to immigrants, this would benefit other applicants to whom literary expression which is emphasised in the exams is not the most natural way of demonstrating knowledge and skills. Also problematic is the policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture that higher priority will be given to the Finnish matriculation exam in the student selections (OKM 2016d). What does it mean for applicants with foreign qualifications?

The SIMHE counselling for students of higher education received messages according to which guidance and counselling would be needed as an open service in vocational education as well. The Ministry of Education and Culture has made a proposal on the founding of vocational colleges responsible for the guidance services. The aim of this would be to facilitate the immigrants' access into vocational training and the completion thereof faster, develop recognition of prior learning and support vocational education and career paths (Ministry of Education and Culture 2017a).

The introduction of tuition fees which university students of English degree programmes arriving from outside EU and EEA are liable to pay from autumn 2017 (Ministry of Education and Culture 2015) provoked a lot of discussion. In practice, all asylum seekers arrive from outside the EU and EEA and for the majority, the tuition fees are likely to form an insurmountable obstacle on the educational path in Finland. The scholar-

ship system should therefore be developed to allow the access of asylum seekers into English degree programmes.

A direct move into university or polytechnic is not always the most workable educational route for the immigrant – sometimes preparatory bridge studies are also needed. Due to the differences in the education systems, there is need for preparatory and integrative studies for universities and polytechnics. Studying in a new language, new system and new cultural environment is not easy, even if the student has already studied elsewhere. There are currently very few preparatory studies available for universities, in particular. They are mainly organised by polytechnics or individual colleges and projects. Bridge studies already used in some polytechnics have proven interesting content-wise and by their practical implementation. Their problem for the student so far has been the funding of the studies. Generally, it may be stated that the polytechnics have embraced the educational issues of immigrants more actively than the universities. This is also due to legislative issues and differences in funding models.

There is also a need for English Bachelor's level programmes. There are currently some available in the polytechnics but hardly any in universities. Therefore, unfinished Bachelor's Degree programmes are difficult to supplement in Finnish universities. The English courses in open universities and open universities of applied sciences should also be increased and the selection widened and the open higher education paths be developed at the same time. Discussion should be continued on the possibility to offer higher education studies for free, subsidised (e.g. by a voucher) or at a cheaper price for those studying while waiting for asylum.

At the same time, it is important to increase the supply of the courses available in Finnish as well, particularly on the more advanced levels of study (C levels) and to integrate learning of domestic languages in the educational paths to include the option and incentive to study Finnish or Swedish as a second and foreign language. The study of Finnish or Swedish is important for successful studies but also for social reasons, as language skills open up access into Finnish job and leisure time communities. Finnish and Swedish courses that are appropriate for immigrants who have a higher education should be offered much more extensively. Particularly those who have resided in Finland longer and command Finnish well need appropriate courses, for the language and communica-



tion courses offered by the higher education institutions are typically for beginners and natives.

The Ministry of Culture and Education has also taken a position on the need to increase advance-level language courses and made a proposal for measures (Ministry of Culture and Education 2017a). Since offering suitable language studies that are extensive enough is largely a question of resources, universities and universities of applied sciences could consider whether they could arrange Finnish and Swedish training together. This would ensure that there are enough students in the groups when it comes to the profitability of the courses. In general, a multilingual and language-conscious approach is needed to develop more inclusive higher education.

In liberal adult education, there are many alternatives and knowhow but the supply largely focuses on the first steps and preparatory training for vocational studies. A recent proposal for measures on intensifying the cooperation between higher education institutions and liberal adult education to build up flexible educational paths to higher education (Ministry of Culture and Education 2017a, 19) is noteworthy particularly regarding universities.

Due to long distances and poor accessibility, different online studies have proven important first steps for many during the SIMHE-UniPID pilot in the educational paths of immigrants. Academic and sectoral knowledge and skills can be developed via online studies and language skills can be promoted. Different organisations have been interested in expanding such courses. It remains to be considered whether all interested parties have PCs and ICT knowledge available to them to enable participation and whether virtual courses sufficiently meet the social needs of immigrants. A person who has arrived in a new country does not only need information on different topics but social connections and contacts as well to his/her environment and familiarisation with the culture. Studying alone in front of a computer does not motivate all students. Virtual studies are hence a necessary start and addition to educational and employment paths but they need to be supplemented by other forms of support and training.

To sum up, it may be stated that the systems and arrangements for immigrants of Finnish higher education institutions nowadays seem unnecessarily rigid, and many aspects can be developed. However, many educational establishments have proved willing to offer different alter-

natives, and many higher education institutions have commenced innovative pilots to improve the educational opportunities for immigrant students.

## Closing Remarks

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The growing immigration of the past few decades is a complex phenomenon, which requires examination and development of the education system from a new angle. The phenomenon brings new challenges but also opportunities with it, and recognising the obstacles in the higher education path promotes the solving thereof. Immigration offers Finnish higher education institutions valuable opportunities to develop training, research and social interaction.

From the viewpoint of pedagogics, it is important to consider what kind of higher education supply should be increased, and SIMHE-UniPID has been one of the parties who has identified the educational needs of immigrants through guidance and counselling. In the planning and implementation of teaching, both the individual and the societal viewpoints should be taken into consideration: what would best benefit the individuals and best meet their needs and what kind of learning the society would require. Particular attention should be paid to not isolating immigrants to their own study groups. Learning with other students, whether they are Finns or foreign exchange or degree students, is necessary for all concerned, teachers included. Recognition of prior learning and smooth transitions to training and employment are to everybody's benefit, and structures should allow for them in practice as well.

Changes are felt in the field of research, too, due to growing immigration, and for example definition of concepts should be reflected upon. What do cultures and multiculturalism mean in the global age, and how should these phenomena be described by means of research? More information is needed on how the educational paths of immigrants proceed in practice after a place of study has been obtained from the university or university of applied sciences. There is need for applied linguistics as well, for instance relating to the themes of second language teaching. Based on research, the higher education system and the processes may be further developed.

And what do internationality and internationalisation mean in the context of research and teaching? As found for example by Riitta Pyykkö in our December seminar, internationality in the higher education field is commonly seen as the use of English, publications transcending Finnish borders, ranking or staff exchange programmes. Other types of inter-

nationality have not really been considered. The internationalisation of higher education institutions can also be approached from an inclusive grassroots viewpoint. Internationalisation is then seen as natural part of communities; it is cooperation of people coming from diverse backgrounds and their participation in the activities of higher education institutions.

The societal role of the higher education institutions can be reinforced with respect to immigrants' higher education issues. The key word is cooperation between different actors and experts. Good practices shall pass from one stakeholder to another more smoothly than is presently the case, and the higher education institutions responsible for guidance and counselling have a key role to play as initiators of discussion and creators of networks.

The SIMHE pilot projects have taken first steps on a national level in facilitating the educational paths of immigrants and operated in the fields of teaching, research and social interaction. The activity is beginning to be established as one of the core services of universities and polytechnics. During the pilot project, the foundation has been built and good practices developed from which to continue. There is still much to be done. From now on, six higher education institutions continue the SIMHE work together with other higher education institutions. Even though challenging, this multidimensional cooperation is a key to success.

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## **APPENDIX 1: Extracts from the Guidance Statistics of the SIMHE-UniPID Pilot Project**

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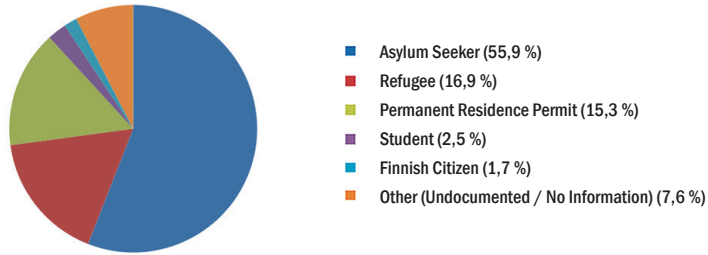
In the Jyväskylä SIMHE-UniPID pilot project, personal guidance and counselling was given to 130 people and group guidance to roughly 200 people. Extensive data could not be gathered from all personal guidance discussions. Particularly the information on direct telephone consultations remained lacking to some extent. In the following, some excerpts from the information that was gathered.

Statistically speaking, the most typical user of the SIMHE-UniPID guidance service was an asylum seeker from the field of trade or technology. S/he spoke Arabic, was 30 years old and resided in Central Finland. In all, contacts were made from 37 locations. Regional dispersion showed that interest was also high in Pirkanmaa, Satakunta, Varsinais-Suomi and Southern Finland. Contacts were made from Northern and Eastern Finland too and several contacts were made from the same location when information about the service spread. Roughly 40 of the clients were women and small majority were men. Most of the clients came from Iraq, Afghanistan or Russia. In all, there were 24 countries of origin.

The oldest user of the service was 53 years old and the youngest 17 years old. It soon became apparent that, due to the frequently youth-scheme based financing models, the possibility of asylum seekers and immigrants who were over 29 years old to obtain places in relevant and inexpensive courses was rare. Even if an interesting and fitting preparatory training could be found nearby, the price for someone 'overage' was impossible to pay.

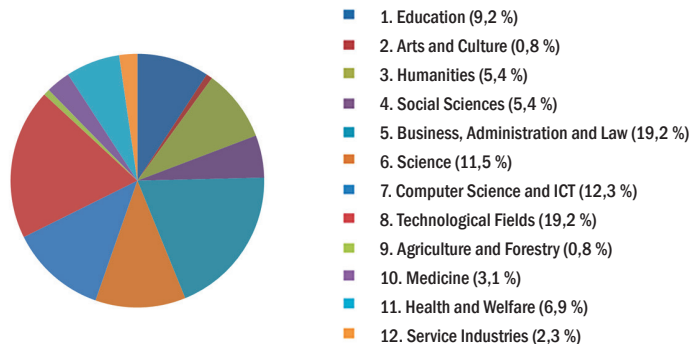
The majority (55.9%) of SIMHE-UniPID users were asylum seekers. Their thoughts about studying were twofold: one needed a sensible pastime to 'to remain sane', and another stated that s/he could not focus on long-term studies before s/he had knowledge of asylum being granted. The vastly varying level of teaching Finnish as second and foreign language and the lack of inexpensive summer courses were felt to be major problems.

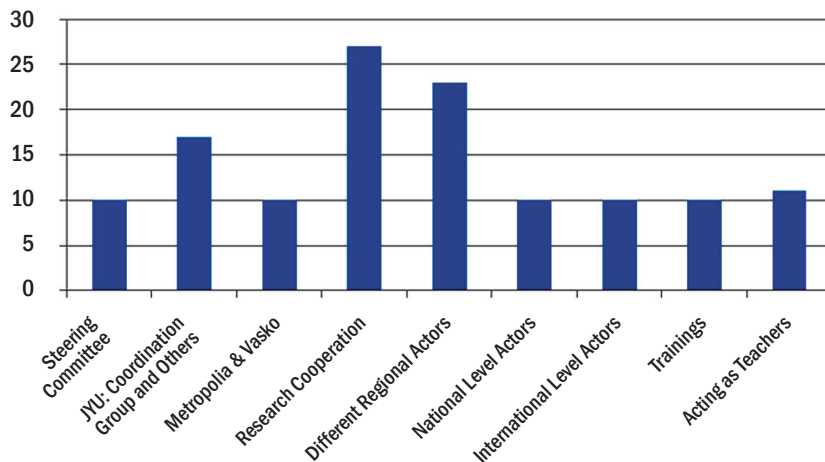
Of the clients, roughly 17% had already been granted or were granted asylum during the pilot functions. If families were involved, trainings were often considered as entities and e.g. the choice of a municipality could be examined from the angle of where the educational needs of all family members could be best met without anybody having to move apart.



The service also interested those who had obtained a permanent residence permit or Finnish citizenship. Some individual queries were received from abroad. These people were directed to the Study in Finland service. By the end of 2016, contacts from those who had received negative decisions on asylum and those who wanted to supplement their vocational qualifications increased significantly. The latter phenomenon is explained by the fact that the Finnish National Agency for Education started to add the SIMHE contact information at the end of its own decisions as a potential further guidance channel. Naturally, the guidance and counselling of the people in these special situations was more demanding than in the so-called basic cases.

The range of previous studies of those who used the SIMHE-uniPID service was vast. In addition to the IT and commercial sectors mentioned above, construction technology, law and the education sector were common. The diagram below shows the previous fields of study of the SIMHE-uniPID service users in percentage terms, divided according to the Ministry of Education and Culture classification. The majority of those seeking guidance and counselling had either a completed or unfinished Bachelor’s Degree, but among them, there were single upper secondary school students, several Master’s Degree students or students who had already completed a Master’s Degree and some doctoral students and people who already had a doctorate.





The SIMHE-UniPID pilot project had many other functions than guidance and counselling. During the year, several negotiations were conducted, many trainings and events were participated and cooperation was made with multiple parties. The table above gives an idea of the whole, and only concrete meetings and events have been listed, not negotiations conducted by e-mail or telephone. Counting this way, there were almost 130 events.

## **APPENDIX 2: SIMHE @Summer School Pilot**

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### **REPORT ON SIMHE @Summer School PILOT**

In the summer of 2016, asylum seekers and immigrants piloted participation in the Summer School of the University of Eastern Finland (between 8 and 19 August 2016). The matter was arranged when after the initial contact made by SIMHE-UniPID (in June), the Summer School Coordinator brought the issue before the steering committee meeting of the Summer School. The steering committee decided that some asylum seekers may be exempted from the course fee but the cost of living and accommodation shall be dealt with "in another way". Because of the specific topics of the courses, it was also found that the applicants must have "a suitable basic training".

The participants in two different courses were two students who had recently been granted asylum. The University exempted them from the course fee. They paid for food and travel themselves. SIMHE-UniPID arranged free accommodation for them through voluntary networks. In what follows, a summary of the feedback from all parties concerned.

### **STUDENT FEEDBACK:**

The students particularly valued the pragmatic sections, such as the lessons in hospital and the Data Laboratory. One of the students also enjoyed the social programme at the Summer School. The teacher who taught their own class also received praise.

Most difficult were individual lectures which were either too complicated or did not quite interest the student. One of the students had a hearing impairment, which complicated studying. Yet both participants recommended opening Summer School courses to asylum seekers and immigrants in the future as well. The argument was that Summer School courses provided additional information and familiarised them with the Finnish education system. For asylum seekers with a higher education, the Summer School was also found to be a place where it was possible to show one's knowledge and skills and potential as students and it was found to promote entry into a degree student's path or employment.

There was room for development for instance in the better use of the students' own expert knowledge in the courses and in the diversification of the course offer. Mere summer courses are not enough, and it should

be possible to study in the autumn and spring as well. The other student even dreamed of setting up their own SIMHE university, as the practices of the different universities and faculties seemed confusing. In addition, education policy changes were hoped for to allow people from outside Europe to continue their studies.

### **FEEDBACK OF ARRANGING UNIVERSITY:**

There were challenges with both students. The hearing impairment of the other came as a surprise to the organisers and caused additional trouble in finding the proper equipment during the first few days. There were challenges in the most theoretic sections of the course, in language skills and in understanding the Finnish education system (for example what is the difference between exchange students, degree students and Summer School students?). However, the Summer School coordinator found that,

*“Based on this experience, immigrants students are welcome to participate in the Summer School again. Exemption from the course fee is not up to me alone but if the applicants have previous study background which is enough for participating in the course, they may apply to the Summer School. More attention should be paid to their English skills and the kind of knowledge they already have of Finland and our education system. Attention should also be paid to the kind of studies they have pursued in their native country when choosing the course. And if a participant has a medical issue demanding special arrangements, we should be informed of it during the application phase already.”*

### **OBSERVATIONS OF SIMHE-UniPID:**

Since this was a ‘pilot of a pilot’, the issue demanded a lot of extra work. The role of SIMHE-UniPID can be summarised as follows:

- 1) Contact to Summer School coordinator, request on the opportunity of opening a few places to the asylum seekers
- 2) Identifying most potential applicants and marketing the courses
- 3) Support in the application process and with appendices when necessary
- 4) Finding most inexpensive/free accommodation (without a doubt the most laborious section)
- 5) Distant support of students during the course when necessary
- 6) Gathering and compiling feedback

Of the two students, one received credits from the completed course, and the other finally left the course unfinished due to excessive stress. The Summer School clearly inspired the students by enabling access to a real university and direct talks with university actors who received a direct contact with immigrant students for the first time.

The opportunity to get in touch with studies, students and teachers in one's own field was felt to be important: as the students themselves found, one learns to better understand the Finnish education system through practice. Even if matters have been discussed and read about beforehand, only the actual study situation helped to see the whole. At the same time, the people in the arranging university understood which issues in their own system may raise questions and confusion. Positive feedback was also received from those providing accommodation – the impression was formed that all parties learnt something from one another.

## **SUMMARY**

We recommend to the universities that Summer School places be offered to asylum seekers and immigrant students. There are practical benefits for both students (possibility to obtain credits from one's own sector) and the university (e.g. additional students to courses where the number of participants is too small).

Some basic things should be considered to ensure a smooth process.

- Financial issues
  - The normal course fee of the Summer School is too high for this groups of students. A significant discount is needed or preferably exemption.
  - Enabling accommodation if possible. Arranging the matter from a different location in the middle of the summer vacation proved to be very challenging. Support could be obtained from local societies, churches etc.? The advantage of homestay is local expertise and getting acquainted. If studies are available close by, accommodation will not be a problem.
  - Paying for food and travel themselves seemed natural to the students.

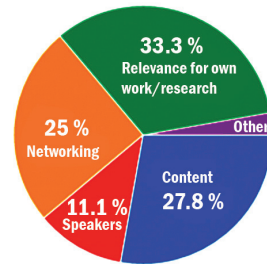
- Clear criteria
  - What kind of initial training and linguistic proficiency is required of applicants?
    - The criteria could be explicated in the course introductions.
    - SIMHE guidance and counselling service as support to those interested: making sure that there are preconditions for completing the course.
  - Information on health issues well in time to organisers!
- Course contents
  - Practical sections gained most positive feedback -> opportunities should be made available to participate in courses where students are able to do things themselves
- Other support
  - Maps of study town, bus routes, possible lending of bicycles is essential information for students arriving from afar.
  - Tutors, multicultural centres and other support networks are necessary as well.

## APPENDIX 3: SEMINAR FEEDBACK SUMMARY

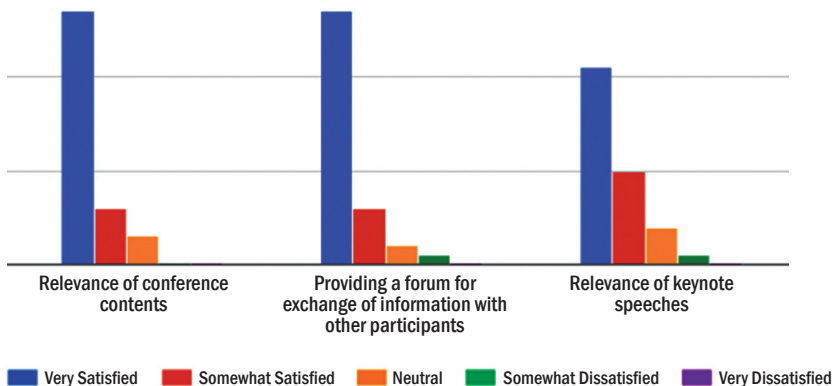
### SEMINAR FEEDBACK SURVEY

#### Migrants in Higher Education: Fostering Cooperation at Universities, 13–14 December 2016

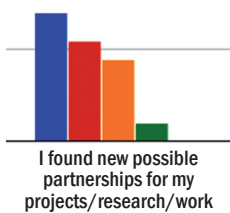
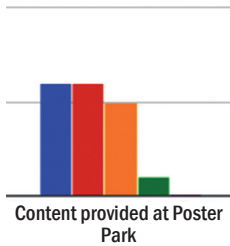
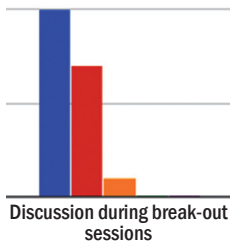
A feedback survey was sent to all the 103 participants of the *Migrants in Higher Education: Fostering Cooperation at Universities* seminar, held 13–14 December 2016, in Jyväskylä at Ruusu-puisto. Of the participants, 36 answered the survey, which is 34,95 % of all the seminar’s participants. The seminar was mostly attended by people working in Higher Education Institutions (41,7 %) and by researchers (27,8 %). The high percentage of “Other” (30,6 %) includes mainly students, volunteers and the experience experts. The most common reason for attending the seminar was the relevance of the topic for one’s own work or research (33,3 %). Also the opportunity of networking (25 %) and the content of the seminar (27,8 %) were important reasons for attending.



The two-day event was composed of different kinds of activities of which some seem to have been more popular than others. The topic of the seminar was found very relevant and interesting, and the people were mostly satisfied with the **contents of the conference** and the **opportunity of sharing** with others. The main goal of the seminar was thus fulfilled. Although the speakers of the seminar were mostly considered







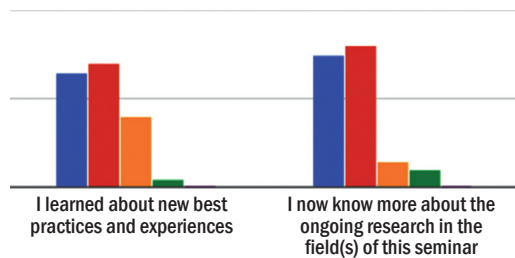
relevant, there were also some neutral and somewhat dissatisfied opinions regarding this. Few of the open responses suggested that the quality of the plenaries could have been better.

Most of those who answered the survey found that the discussion at the **Break-out sessions** had been very satisfying. Some people would have liked to attend more than one Break-out session at the same time but since they were parallel, this was impossible. The **Poster Park** did not score as high as the other contents of the seminar. The Poster Park was one of the new and thus somewhat confusing practices presented in the seminar and the selection of the posters was perhaps not exactly what was expected.

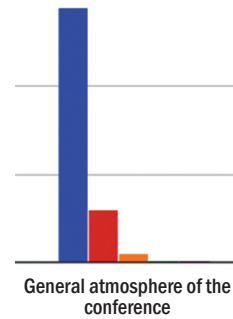
Most participants evaluated that they were satisfied with the seminar providing a forum for the exchange of information with other participants. Some considered **networking** the most beneficial aspect of the seminar. Some participants also found new possible partnerships for their projects, research, or work. The networking objectives of the seminar were thus satisfyingly

fulfilled. People also commented that it was important to share information face-to-face with people from different backgrounds. This also gave the attendants an opportunity to have their voice heard. Many did however comment that there was generally too little time for discussion.

Most (17+14/36) of those who answered the survey expressed that they very satisfied or satisfied with **new ideas and inspiration** for their work. Many had also learned about new practices or about ongoing research in the field. These aspects did however divide opinions more than most other aspects. There were also some comments that the seminar did not include the research perspective as much as it could have.



The **general atmosphere** of the seminar was rated overwhelming positively. All but one (29+6/36) respondents found the atmosphere very satisfying or satisfying. It was also strongly agreed that this kind of seminar should be organized on a regular basis. In addition, the participants were mostly satisfied with the technical issues of the seminar, including conference facilities, food and beverage, and dates of the conference with. It is also worth noticing, that there wasn't a single "very dissatisfied" answer for the whole survey.

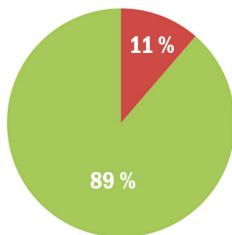


## APPENDIX 4: SIMHE-UniPID Feedback Questionnaire

### Report of SIMHE-UniPID Feedback Questionnaire

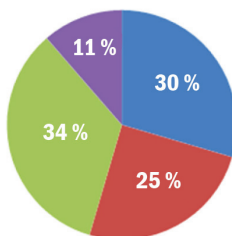
On 19 January 2017, SIMHE-UniPID sent the users of the guidance and counselling services (N =136) an e-mail, which contained links to a feedback questionnaire. It was possible to reply in Finnish, English or Arabic. The questionnaire closed on 26 January, by which time 44 people, i.e. 32% of the clients, had responded to it. Four had replied in Finnish, 13 in Arabic and 27 in English. This report presents the results.

#### When did you arrive in Finland?



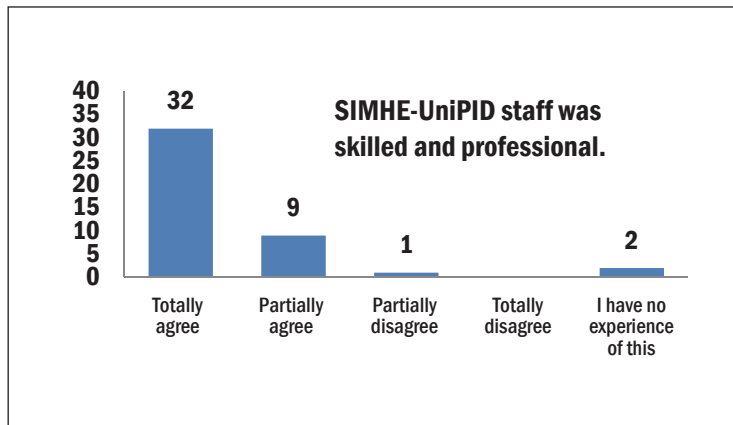
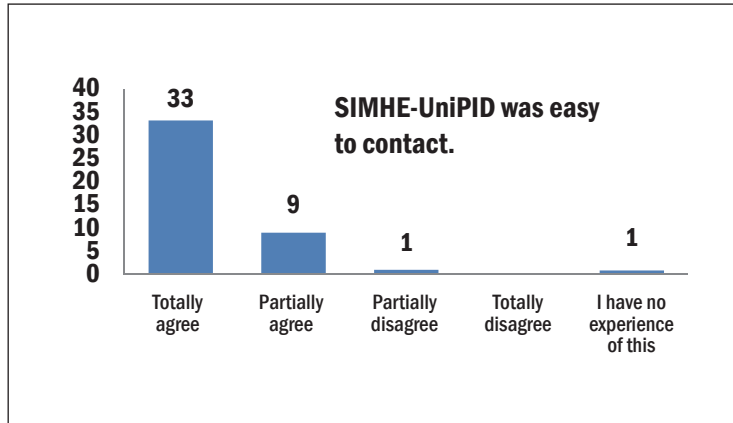
Most of the respondents had arrived in Finland during 2015–2016, when an increasing number of asylum seekers arrived in Finland. Many had sought asylum in Finland, and 34% said that waiting for asylum described their present situation best. 36% of the respondents studied, 23% were unemployed, 5% were working and 2% lived outside of Finland at the time of responding.

#### How did you hear about SIMHE-UniPID?



The information about the SIMHE-UniPID service had reached the majority through various immigration services, such as accommodation centres, multicultural centres, Employment and Economic Development Offices or integration services. Internet and friends proved almost as important sources of information.

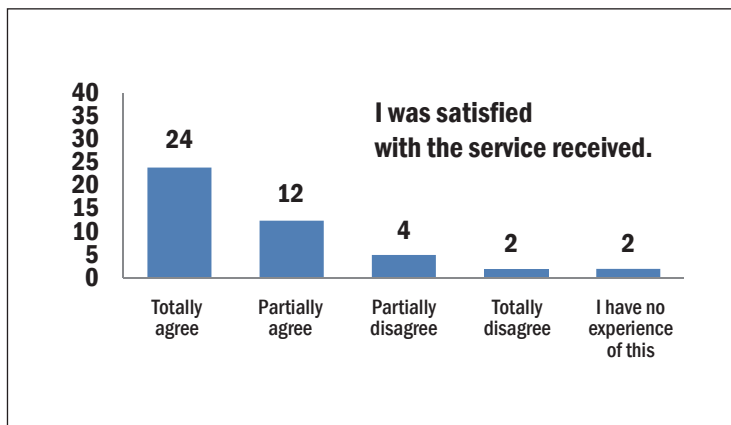
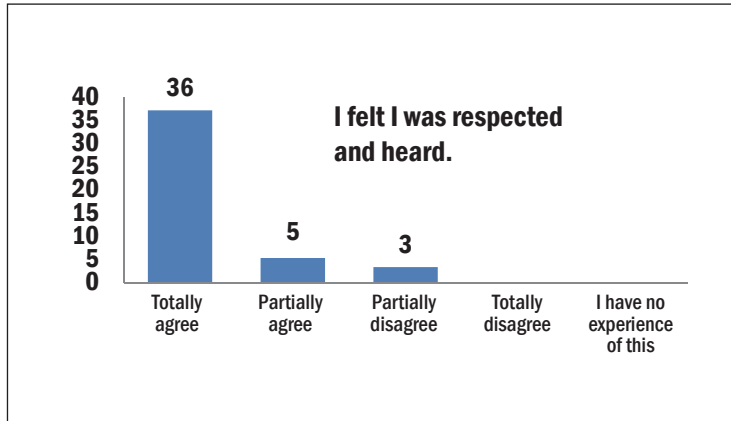
The respondents had received personal guidance face-to-face (18), in a telephone conversation (16) and/or Internet phone call (14). They had also received counselling by e-mail (40%). Replies to whether the guidance had been useful divided rather evenly. The clients felt they received the most valuable information on higher education opportunities (19%), language requirements (17%), recognition of prior learning (16%) and eligibility for studies (14%). Of the respondents, approximately 45% have begun or



continued different studies in higher education institutions, other educational establishments or via online studies.

Contact by e-mail or telephone was a helpful solution from the viewpoint of the respondents. The clients were generally satisfied with the speed of the replies. There was more variation regarding the replies on the usefulness of the webpage. Compiled information on learning opportunities was requested. This also indicates that the Opintopolku.fi (Study-info.fi) service is not user-friendly enough.

Most of the respondents agreed totally or partially that the SIMHE counsellors were skilled and professional and understood their clients' situation. A development proposal was received: the counsellors could also include people with immigrant backgrounds who would command



the languages spoken by the clients and know the education systems in the country of origin.

Roughly 93% of the respondents agreed either totally or partially that they had been heard and respected during guidance and counselling. This feedback shows that the foundation of the SIMHE guidance service, i.e. listening and meeting the client as a person, are already happening but there is still room for development.

The replies concerning total satisfaction and promotion of matters following the discussion varied quite a lot compared to the other replies. Roughly half of the respondents announced that they were totally happy with the service and the way that their problems had been dealt with but there were also those who were unsatisfied among them.

The most frequent problem discussed during guidance was the unsuitability of the options offered: the educational paths that came up in the discussions did not interest the respondents or the trainings did not interest them for some reason. Some required more support in the application stage and others felt that finding one's own place was challenging, despite the guidance service:

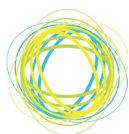
*It is really very good service but I still can't find place to study in the university because it is hard to find what I needed and I am shy to asking again.*

There are development proposals worth considering among the feedback. For example, the possibility of peer counselling and more efficient communication channels are worth investigating in the future. Even if surprisingly many (16) announced they were studying nowadays, attention should also be paid to training supply and the development thereof to better meet the needs of the target group.

This summary presents the activities of the *Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland (SIMHE)* pilot project in Jyväskylä during 2016–2017. The pilot took place during the trial phase of the higher education institutions responsible for the support activities of migrants initiated by Ministry of Education and Culture. Administratively, it belonged to the UniPID network coordinated by the University of Jyväskylä. The activities involving the higher education institutions responsible were simultaneously piloted by the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki.

The SIMHE-UniPID project in Jyväskylä developed guidance and counselling services for immigrants with higher education or interested in obtaining it. Support was offered to find suitable educational paths. Additionally, a wide cooperation network was built in the project between the educational institutions working with immigrant issues, other stakeholders and researchers. One of the high points of the SIMHE-UniPID pilot project was the national seminar arranged in December 2016 on which a report was published entitled *Open the doors!™ Migrants in Higher Education: Fostering Cooperation at Universities Seminar 13.-14.12.2016 in Jyväskylä*.

After the pilot year, the support and guidance to the higher education institutions responsible for the support of immigrants has been continued. From the beginning of 2017, four other higher education institutions joined in the network. The work conducted under the SIMHE title has evolved from a one-time initiative to long-term strategic activity.



Ministry of Education  
and Culture

