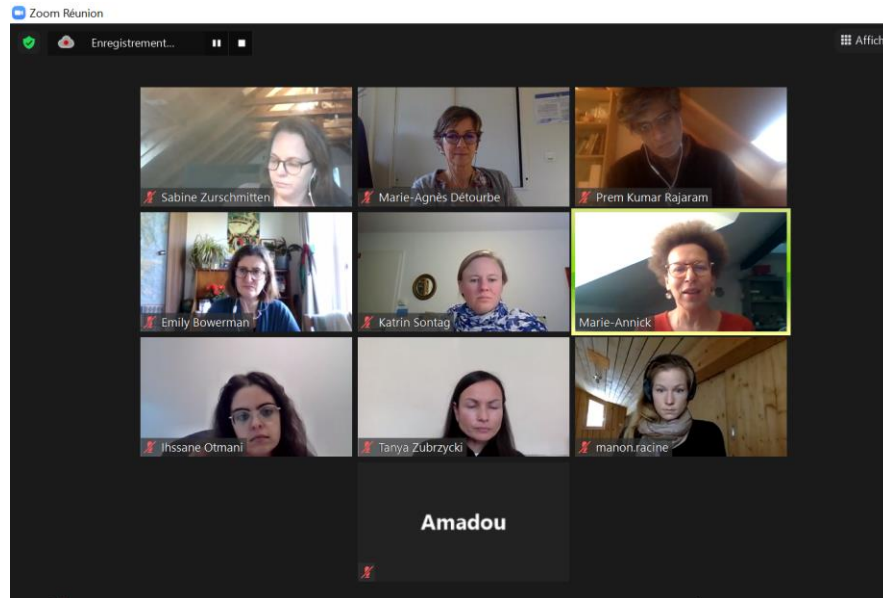


European Universities – Critical Futures
Refugee Access to HE Working Group
Dec 15, 2020 Webinar



The aim of this webinar series is to open a space for students, practitioners and researchers to engage together in issues related to the inclusion of students with a refugee background into higher education (HE) structures. What brings the participants together is their wish to understand further the dynamics at play, not only the obstacles but also the opportunities in widening access, from multiple perspectives. We believe a diversity of voices should be heard to support the idea that higher education can provide a range of answers and opportunities for people undergoing forced migration in all their diversity; and to support further action to improve access to HE. And we decided that the first voices that should be heard is that of the students themselves.

In this second session, Emily Bowerman, from the Refugee Support Network, and Marie-Annick Mattioli, from Université Paris Descartes, accepted to share their experience of building access programmes. The questions that guided their talks were the following:

- when and why did you decide to set up such programme?
- who was involved?
- what were the main issues you faced in building access programmes?
- which solutions did you find?
- what are the current issues you are still facing? Can you identify what remains to be understood?

The link to the recorded webinar is here:

<https://zoom.us/rec/share/NGpV-xvczack73dzSmIEA2gWflbggevbNVE1RaICCbMSxVp31AG4KaZ3xUDous3B.9L9GGaGyal74OPLa>

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Emily Bowerman, Head of Programmes, Refugee Support Network (RSN)

Through a combination of face-to-face advice and support, guidance, factsheets, workshops, training and research, Refugee Support Network (RSN) seeks to enable young refugees and asylum seekers in the UK to overcome their barriers to Higher Education. In this presentation, RSN's Head of Programmes Emily Bowerman will share key ideas and learning from this Access to HE programme.

Marie-Annick Mattioli, lecturer, co-head of the FLAVIC program, Université Paris Descartes

The bridging programme FlaViC started 3 years ago at the University Institute of technology with a group of 15 migrant students from different horizons. It stemmed from a unique collaboration between 2 academics and the social services of our institution. While citizenship status is not an issue to access higher education in France, issues related to funding and legitimacy were major obstacles when the programme started. The project is now interconnected to different services at the IUT and the university of Paris, but many hurdles remain to make it sustainable.

What appeared from the two very interesting presentations was that both bridging programmes were set to fill a gap in the system, one as a charity, the other as an internal programme within a higher education institution. They target people with a refugee background from a different age range, and with slightly different aims in terms of access to higher education, further education or the job market.

Briefly stated, the main issues identified by both practitioners were that of:

- finance, either for students themselves who struggle to access institutional funding or targeted scholarships (especially when fees are high), or for the programme creators who can find it hard to fund their programme in a sustainable way;
- providing the right information early enough for those young people not to face the barriers at a later stage; both making the relevant information available and providing it at the right time are key. For instance, unaccompanied young asylum seekers must be informed in their teen years for them to make the right choices of education afterwards;
- keeping in touch with the students after they have actually accessed HE to help them through the many obstacles that come up once they've entered the system; finding inclusive ways of teaching and learning that allow them to complete their studies successfully
- adjusting to changing contexts in terms of migration rules and eligibility to access HE depending on specific asylum or refugee statuses, with significant variations from one country to the next and from one status to the other

Some solutions and lessons learned were shared too:

- information and guidance can be targeted not just to the students themselves, but also to key actors that provide them with support: university staff with no expertise on

refugees, people supporting refugees with little knowledge of the education system, social workers, etc. Barriers can and should thus be tackled from different angles.

- Networks and partnerships with different types of people and organizations are very valuable and efficient to lift barriers through shared expertise; including people from the workplace, outside HE, in bridging programmes can improve the knowledge of the labour market and create opportunities
- Sustaining long-term relationships with former students so as to create a community, even if it's often hard to keep in touch or set up buddying system; it is often interesting to let the student take initiatives and set up their own networks.

The webinar closed on discussions on how the COVID crisis may have developed digital literacy and opened new online or blended opportunities which may well widen access to both information and higher education training for students with a refugee background.