

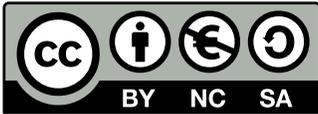
THE YOUNG ACADEMY



SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK SCHOLARS IN THE NETHERLANDS

FACILITIES, PROBLEMS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR STRUCTURED SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK SCHOLARS
IN THE NETHERLANDS





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SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The war in Ukraine has increased attention for the problems involved in receiving and supporting scholars who flee to the Netherlands because of threats or war, i.e. ‘at-risk scholars’. The Young Academy conducted 15 interviews with staff of Dutch knowledge institutions and other relevant parties in order to analyse the current situation regarding the need for assistance expressed by at-risk scholars and the assistance that can actually be offered. The aim of this survey is to identify the problems involved and make recommendations that can improve assistance for all at-risk scholars (i.e. from anywhere in the world). The following are the main findings and recommendations.

- There is currently no national structure in the Netherlands for the registration and reception of at-risk scholars. Requests are received by individual knowledge institutions.
- Knowledge institutions are severely limited in the financial support they can offer refugee scholars, mainly because tax rules make it impossible to provide temporary bursaries. Under the current rules, knowledge institutions are permitted – broadly speaking – to offer an unpaid guest appointment or an employment relationship consistent with the applicable collective labour agreement, with the associated job requirements. However, many at-risk scholars are at a competitive disadvantage for the latter positions due to not knowing Dutch, having a non-compatible CV, or suffering from tremendous stress due to their flight history.
- Scholars at Risk (SAR) is an aid organisation with global expertise regarding at-risk scholars and can provide small bursaries. There is currently no ‘country section’ for the Netherlands, which means that no bursaries can be awarded to scholars at this time.

- The Dutch Research Council (NWO) runs the competitive Hestia programme to assist refugee scholars. In its current form, however, that programme is not sufficient because Hestia bursaries are only available to a limited number of scholars who have completed the asylum procedure. Moreover, these bursaries are linked to existing research projects and are in practice awarded almost exclusively to scholars at an early stage of their career.
- The tax constraints on providing assistance in acute situations of scholars who have not yet completed the asylum procedure and the lack of a body that can provide bursaries demand attention and action on the part of politicians.
- The Young Academy recommends that the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science enter into talks with the Minister of Finance and the Dutch Labour Inspectorate in order to guarantee a bursary-granting party that there will be no tax consequences if that body provides flexible bursaries to at-risk scholars working at a Dutch university. This would enable SAR-NL to recommence supporting at-risk scholars in the Netherlands.
- In addition, a more flexible design of the NWO's Hestia programme could also ensure that bursaries are available to support at-risk scholars who do not apply for asylum, and without those bursaries being linked to an existing project. Best practices in other countries can serve as an inspiration to facilitate selection and the procedure.
- Finally, The Young Academy wishes to emphasise the importance of supporting all at-risk scholars. It calls for the recommendations in this report to apply to at-risk scholars of every nationality. All parties involved with this report argue that it is time to create a permanent structure for supporting at-risk scholars during the acute phase and in the medium term, in a non-competitive manner, in addition to extending the provision of existing bursaries to scholars seeking more permanent inclusion in the Dutch scientific and scholarly system (i.e. Hestia).

INTRODUCTION

On 24 February 2022, the international community was alarmed as Russia invaded its neighbour Ukraine on multiple fronts. A great deal of goodwill arose in Europe for supporting the people of Ukraine. Various initiatives were launched to receive refugees from the affected areas. That was also true in the world of academia. Many (female) scholars from Ukraine had to flee; by the end of March, four to six thousand had left the country (Polishchuk et al., 2022), including some who had earlier fled to Ukraine precisely in order to seek refuge. A large proportion of the refugees from Ukraine received shelter at academic institutions in Poland or other neighbouring countries. Dutch universities also received requests for support from at-risk scholars who wished to continue their work here in safety. It turned out, however, that providing that support is not always an easy matter.

The keen desire to help highlighted the problems involved in receiving and supporting at-risk scholars in the Netherlands. However, these problems in fact go back a long way. Even before the war in Ukraine, there were scholars from other countries in need of support. Since 1999, the international Scholars at Risk organisation (SAR) has been engaged in temporarily accommodating at-risk scholars at universities worldwide. During the 2020-2021 academic year, most requests for assistance came from scholars who had been forced to flee from Afghanistan, Turkey, Yemen, Myanmar, and Ethiopia (SAR, 2022). The number of requests from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia will be published in SAR's Annual Report for 2021-2022. Besides the provision of assistance to scholars who are in acute danger, help is also needed for people who have already been uprooted for some considerable time. There are numerous scholars (and aspiring scholars) in the Netherlands who would benefit from support, such as scholars and students from non-European countries who have completed the asylum procedure and are trying to build a new life. Consequently, the reception of at-risk scholars does not require an emergency solution only for Ukrainians, but a structure that can provide long-term flexible

assistance to scholars of any nationality. The Young Academy sees it as its moral duty to support scholars who cannot practise their profession in freedom and/or whose very life is threatened (see also GYA, 2021). It is precisely scholars who are often the first people to pose a threat to repressive regimes, and they are therefore often among the first group who must take flight.

The present report describes The Young Academy's investigation of the current facilities for at-risk scholars in the Netherlands and the obstacles encountered by universities and knowledge institutions. It also includes recommendations for improving the situation.

Methodology

This report is based on semi-structured oral interviews with contacts from 13 universities and two research organisations (the Dutch Research Council [NWO] and the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences [KNAW]) in the Netherlands.

The interviews took place from May to July 2022. The Open University (OU) was not approached, given the substantially different structure of that institution. The aim of the report is to provide an overall policy recommendation regarding at-risk scholars. The aim is explicitly not to provide a complete overview of what assistance is or is not offered at which universities. This was made clear to the representatives interviewed, so that they could speak freely. Their anonymity was thus guaranteed. Although Dutch universities of applied sciences [*hogescholen*] were not included in this initial survey, the report's findings and recommendations may also be relevant to them, given that they presumably face similar problems.

The Young Academy used its network to access the person responsible for helping at-risk scholars at each university and knowledge institution, or the person acting as that body's spokesperson. In most cases, these were employees of the Human Resources department or an International Office. A student assistant (AvG) then conducted a semi-structured interview (see Appendix 1 for the interview questions). Among other things, this dealt with the organisation of support for at-risk scholars in general and for scholars and students from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia in particular. What are the challenges, problems, and financial resources? With which partner organisations does the university or knowledge institute collaborate? The responses were processed for this report and reflect what universities offer and what challenges they face.

Best practices in other countries were also surveyed. Based on all this information, recommendations were drawn up for improving structured support for at-risk scholars in the Netherlands.

Since February 2022 The Young Academy has also consulted regularly with individuals involved in dealing with the issue of at-risk scholars. This involved an exchange of knowledge and experience with contacts at various organisations: the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), the Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education (Nuffic), the Royal Academy, the NWO, the Dutch Foundation for Refugee Students UAF, the Universities of the Netherlands (UNL), the Netherlands Federation of University Medical Centres (NFU), and the PhD Network Netherlands (PNN). Information from these consultations has also been incorporated into the report.

Structure of the report

The report comprises the following sections: (1) demand and needs of at-risk scholars, (2) institutional structures for support, (3) support for current conflict-affected staff, (4) support for at-risk scholars, (5) problems in reception and support, (6) best practices in other countries, and (7) recommendations for improved support for at-risk scholars in the Netherlands.

Finally, support for refugee students was also discussed in a similarly structured manner. That information has been incorporated into Appendix 2 to this report. Students are not, however, included in the recommendations because this report focuses on scholars.

1. DEMAND AND NEEDS OF AT-RISK SCHOLARS

All over the world, there are scholars who are wrongfully dismissed from their position or who face travel restrictions, arrest, persecution or violence, sometimes even resulting in their death (SAR, 2022). Driven by conflict and other pressures on universities and knowledge institutions, some 1053 scholars worldwide contacted SAR in 2021 requesting support. Those requests came from countries such as Afghanistan, Turkey, Yemen, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Syria, Iran, Pakistan, and Cameroon (SAR, 2022). These scholars needed direct support in the form of a temporary academic position outside their home country, advice on their career and the transition involved, and various other services. There are also at-risk scholars who do not appeal to SAR but to similar organisations and programmes, such as the Scholar Rescue Fund (SRF) or various German programmes, or who approach partner universities themselves with a view to continuing their work elsewhere. The actual number of at-risk scholars worldwide is therefore many times higher than the 1053 individuals who contacted SAR. There are, for example, a large number of scholars who fled Ukraine in 2022 because of the Russian invasion and who attempted to find shelter in the region, including within academia, without getting in touch with SAR (Polishchuk et al., 2022).

Support for scholars because of the war in Ukraine

Many Ukrainian scholars fled to neighbouring Poland after the outbreak of war. Based on interviews with them, the Polish Young Academy drew up a list of their needs (Polish Young Academy, 2022). There was high demand, for instance, for accommodation and vacancies available at short notice, as well as a need for simplified registration procedures and vacancy announcements in English and Ukrainian. Scholars were seeking work for a relatively short period, for example three months with the possibility of extension. They also needed mentoring at

the university by a supervisor who would support them throughout the entire work process. And finally, they referred to their concerns about a brain drain from Ukraine (Polish Young Academy, 2022).

Dutch universities too responded to the need to support scholars after the Russian invasion. Immediately after it took place, all the Dutch universities took stock of the support needs of their own staff and students who were in Ukraine at the time. They also drew up an overview of students and staff from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia who were at universities in the Netherlands. There were only a limited number of employees in the latter group; interviews conducted for this report revealed that they were around 20 to 100 employees from the three countries concerned. Not everyone interviewed had access to these figures, however.

Determining the exact number of requests from abroad for ‘academic shelter’ is a bigger challenge, given that there is no national centre to contact. Many requests arrive at individual institutions, in most cases through the network of scholars with an appointment there. These requests can be split into two categories: requests for guest workplaces and requests for (temporary) employment. Centrally, most universities have received few specific requests from scholars from Ukraine. The requests that were in fact received were mainly for (temporary) employment, with very few for guest workplaces. Moreover, the number of requests decreased at many universities in the period from May to July 2022.

At least five of the 13 Dutch universities have actually taken in scholars from Ukraine since the war broke out. At one university, this involved one guest workplace and one employment contract. At another university it involved two temporary employment contracts. A third university provided two scholars with a guest workplace and a bursary to cover their subsistence costs. A fourth institution employs three scholars from Ukraine on a temporary contract. A fifth university has given four scholars a temporary appointment. As far as the contacts interviewed were aware, a total of 13 scholars from Ukraine have thus been accommodated. That figure may in reality be higher, given that not all the support provided is discussed or recorded centrally.

The demand for guest workplaces or (temporary) employment contracts at universities and institutes in the Netherlands seems lower than one might expect based on the number of (academic) refugees from Ukraine. There are several factors that may have limited the demand for support from Dutch universities. The slight demand for guest workplaces might well be because much teaching and work can still continue through the servers of Ukrainian universities themselves. These have often been made safe because these universities feel responsible for ensuring that students and staff can continue their work even during the war. As a result, scholars

retain access to the digital infrastructure. A large proportion of them have also retained their contract and salary with their own university. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of experience had already been gained with teaching and working online. Finally, there is little demand from male scholars because Ukrainian men are not permitted to leave their country due to obligatory military service.

Another reason for the limited demand at Dutch universities from scholars who fled Ukraine is that most Ukrainian scholars are still in the country itself. They need other forms of support. Most bursaries in Europe are used to support at-risk scholars in the new host country, but long-term support is also needed in Ukraine to rebuild the academic infrastructure (Naujokaitytė, 2022). Finally, the limited demand may be partly because there are fewer opportunities for at-risk scholars in the Netherlands than in other European countries, such as Germany. Compared to those countries, few opportunities were offered for at-risk scholars from Ukraine on the websites of Dutch knowledge institutions. Moreover, comments from within our network of organisations suggest that the Netherlands is known among at-risk scholars as a difficult place to find shelter at academic institutions, although that suggestion is difficult to verify.

It should be noted that requests that did come in at Dutch universities are often (but not always) of high quality; enquiries from Ukraine come from highly qualified scholars with an impressive CV. Nevertheless, this does not always lead to an actual placement at a university or some other form of institutional inclusion. An additional problem is that the quality of the CVs is not always easy to interpret, because, for example, Dutch academics cannot properly assess the quality of non-English-language academic journals.

2. INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES FOR SUPPORTING AT-RISK SCHOLARS

The way universities deal with requests from at-risk scholars who are already in the Netherlands or who wish to come here varies greatly from one institution to another. Some universities discuss requests during centralised university-wide consultations, but at most institutions such discussion is on a decentralised basis, taking place within individual faculties, departments, or research groups. The requests concerned are often from at-risk scholars who are already known within the relevant department's network. Many universities already had a contact person for at-risk scholars even before the war in Ukraine, making it easier to provide information on the options for assistance.

After the invasion, structures were set up at many universities to deal with the specific situation arising from the war. Ten universities set up a new working group, task force, or crisis consultation group in 2022. These bodies brought together staff from various departments, including members of the Executive Board, Teaching and Student Affairs, Student Administration, Student Assessors, International Admissions and Exchange, Operations, Human Resources, International Cooperation, Diversity & Inclusion, Press Information, Legal Affairs, and a number of concerned instructors or members of university young academies. At some universities, these bodies were disbanded after a few weeks. At others, the working group continued to exist and – in addition to the question of at-risk scholars in general – discussed requests and problems of potential students and scholars from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus.

At three universities, no crisis consultation or working group was set up; at those institutions, support for the students and staff affected was integrated into existing structures. Incoming requests were/are immediately passed on to the relevant

department and dealt with on a decentralised basis. Two of these universities already had a department to support at-risk scholars before the start of the war in Ukraine.

Finally, the extent to which universities are involved with issues regarding at-risk scholars varies greatly. In many cases, support is strongly driven by the intrinsic motivation of individual policy officers or researchers. Many Dutch universities do not have a long-term structure in place for providing help and support for this group of scholars.

3. SUPPORT FOR CURRENT EMPLOYEES AFFECTED BY CONFLICT

When a crisis or war breaks out somewhere in the world or when academic freedom is under pressure, it also affects people outside the crisis area itself through all kinds of networks. Dutch universities have staff from all kinds of backgrounds and nationalities. When Russia invaded Ukraine, higher education staff in the Netherlands were therefore also affected who had family, friends, acquaintances, and colleagues in Ukraine, Belarus, or Russia. The stress that caused sometimes left them in need of extra support.

Following the invasion, Dutch universities quickly drew up lists of staff with Ukrainian, Russian, or Belarussian nationality and contacted them to see what support they needed. Initially, the uncertain situation in which they found themselves meant that there was a great need for accurate information. There were many questions, for example, about visas and residence permits from employees who were basically in the Netherlands only temporarily.

It also became apparent that some members of staff had financial problems, in particular those from Russia, who no longer had access to their Russian bank account. At many universities, the staff affected, and also students, were therefore able to draw on the institution's emergency funds and emergency loans. This was intended specifically as acute assistance so that they could cover their subsistence costs. Little use was made of this option, however.

There was also a great need for stress reduction. The war put extra pressure on the private lives of affected staff, making it sometimes difficult to meet the strict criteria relating to their employment, tenure track, or PhD programme. There were also concerns about temporary contracts that were due to expire, because

not all employees were able or willing to return to their home country. As a result, many universities adopted a flexible approach regarding the duration of temporary contracts and extended them. Staff were naturally also able to make use of regular psychological support and other facilities at their university. In addition, many universities organised social activities, allowing students and staff affected by the war in Ukraine to find support from one another.

Staff from Belarus and Russia also face an additional problem, fearing negative treatment because of Russia's role in the war. One example cited was of a fellow scholar who sat in on lectures by a Russian scholar so as to provide psychological support. This made it possible to see if there were any negative reactions from the students and intervene if necessary. There are also cases of Russian students or scholars in the Netherlands being intimidated over the phone by the Russian authorities, receiving a call asking about their loyalty in the Ukraine war (Hoger Onderwijs Persbureau, 2022).

4. SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK SCHOLARS

There are also foreign scholars who flee to the Netherlands or who make it known to Dutch universities that they wish to do so. In the past, such cases were mainly dealt with via SAR, which screens the scholars who apply and tries to find a suitable place for them abroad. Currently, SAR-NL – despite most Dutch universities being members and paying a contribution – is less active due to a number of problems discussed later in this report. As a result, SAR-NL cannot provide bursaries in the Netherlands. Universities also receive requests for support themselves. Roughly speaking, there are three things they can offer: a temporary guest workplace, a secondment agreement, or a (temporary) employment contract. In the case of a bursary, the university only pays for certain facilities for the individuals concerned, such as a physical workplace. Under a secondment agreement, the Dutch university pays a small contribution on top of the salary paid by a foreign university. With a (temporary) employment contract, the scholar receives his or her salary from a Dutch university. These three options are dealt with in greater detail below.

University's support options

If a scholar comes to the Netherlands with their own funding or is able to support themselves, the university can offer them an unpaid guest workplace, doing so by means of a 'hospitality declaration' [*gastvrijheidsverklaring*]. The person concerned can then continue their own work remotely. He or she does not become an employee but has access to certain university facilities, for example, the digital infrastructure and provision of information, an office or physical workplace, and perhaps a laptop, phone, or public transport pass. Because the university does not enter into real collaboration, the extent to which the scholar is a match with the institution's research field is less relevant. One of the knowledge institutions surveyed made an allowance of €5000 available for each guest workplace.

Another option is a secondment agreement, with the employee concerned then remaining employed by their original employer abroad, but being seconded to a Dutch university. They then still receive their salary from a foreign university or foreign research institute, but can receive an allowance for accommodation and travel costs from the Dutch university, costs which are often higher in the Netherlands than abroad. In the case of a secondment agreement, however, it is important that the scholar's research area is a good match with the work of the host university. A secondment agreement is often for between a few months and a year, and a clear job description needs to be drawn up. The costs involved can be around €50,000.

Scholars without their own funding can look for (temporary) employment in the Netherlands. They then receive their income through salary paid by the university or through a bursary paid by the university or an external party. As far as we know, however, only two universities have made bursaries available to provide visiting scholars with a subsistence allowance; the positions concerned were for three to 12 months. Another university stated that a general budget is available each year to finance an employment contract or placement for an at-risk scholar. In 2022, part of this budget was set aside for Ukrainian scholars to support them with housing, travel expenses, and a place to work. Their salary was paid by the relevant department. In addition, one university has created 20 temporary appointments for at-risk scholars from its own financial resources. These positions are open to all refugee scholars regardless of nationality, and are appointments, often for up to one year, consistent with the applicable collective labour agreement.

Information and mentoring

To conveniently show the support available for scholars from Ukraine at each Dutch institution, the 'AcademicsNLforUkraine' webpage was created on the Factcards platform. The page was set up quite soon after the outbreak of war by a partnership comprising the Royal Academy, the NWO, the UNL, NFU and AcademicTransfer. The aim is to offer scholars from Ukraine a platform with a clear overview of the support available at Dutch knowledge institutions and how to get in touch with them (NWO, 2022). At international level, there is also #ScienceForUkraine, a community of volunteers from academic institutions in Europe and worldwide that aims to collect and disseminate information about the various support opportunities for students and scholars from Ukraine (#ScienceForUkraine, n.d.). Finally, there is the University of New Europe's mentoring programme, which includes a contact from the University of Amsterdam (UvA). This has a similar objective to #ScienceForUkraine but also caters for at-risk scholars from Russia and Belarus, a rapidly growing group

for whom fewer facilities are currently available than for scholars from Ukraine. This network, together with an international team of researchers and volunteers, has set up an interactive database of fellowships and calls intended for researchers from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia (University of New Europe, 2022).

Support programmes and bursaries

One option for providing at-risk scholars with a bursary is through the NWO's Hestia programme. This enables scholars with a temporary or permanent residence permit to apply for funding for 12 to 18 months for full-time appointments or 24 months for part-time appointments (NWO, n.d.). A Hestia bursary is always linked to an ongoing NWO-funded project and aims to give scholars a means of entry to the Dutch scholarly community. However, a Hestia bursary is not available for most refugees from Ukraine because they are not asylum permit holders [*statushouders*].¹

Otherwise, few bursaries are available in the Netherlands for at-risk scholars. Some of the options at international level are also available in the Netherlands, but at-risk scholars and host organisations here compete with academic institutions in other countries. For example, the All European Academies organisation (ALLEA) has created Funding Line 1 and 2 as part of the European Fund for Displaced Scientists. European academic institutions can apply for funding for up to one year to employ an at-risk scholar from Ukraine. The application procedure consisted of two rounds, the first of which was open until 1 July 2022; the second was open until 15 August 2022 (ALLEA, n.d.). The European Commission has also decided to award bursaries as part of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). MSCA4Ukraine awards bursaries to doctoral candidates and postdoc scholars. The bursary enables scholars from Ukraine to continue their work at other European universities or in Ukraine itself. A total of €25 million has been made available and it has been possible to submit applications since October 2022. The bursaries are for a maximum of two years (European Commission, 2022).

¹ See for example: www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/asielbeleid/huisvesting-asielzoekers-met-verblijfsvergunning en <https://ind.nl/nl/oekraine/richtlijn-tijdelijke-bescherming-oekraine>.

5. PROBLEMS IN RECEPTION AND SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK SCHOLARS

This survey shows that Dutch universities, compared to those in other countries, have few options of their own for providing support for at-risk scholars. Unfortunately, most requests for support from them cannot be processed in the Netherlands because there is no way to provide financial compensation or financial support through institutions. All the institutions interviewed indicate that no options exist because they are worried about problems with the Ministry of Finance and the Dutch Labour Inspectorate, which could potentially impose a fine because the work of a refugee scholar might inadvertently be viewed as an employment relationship requiring a salary instead of a bursary, with this applying to both the institution itself and the at-risk scholar who is to be received. There is no external bursary provider that can take on this task. The NWO's Hestia programme offers a partial solution, but that programme has a number of limitations, meaning that it is not available to all at-risk scholars. Moreover, there is limited availability of vacancies for at-risk scholars at knowledge institutions, staff at universities have a high workload which leaves them little scope for providing additional support for at-risk scholars, and there is no national platform to inform scholars about options for support. Institutions also question who is responsible for supporting at-risk scholars with practical matters (such as finding housing) and in what way public perception influences the provision of support. Finally, some institutions and individuals from conflict zones fear a brain drain if a large number of scholars flee abroad. These various problems are dealt with in greater detail below.

Problem number 1: the lack of an external bursary provider

Almost all the Dutch universities are concerned about problems with the Tax and Customs Administration and the Labour Inspectorate if they were to pay a financial contribution to at-risk scholars. Dutch labour law is extremely strict and when work is performed within an employment relationship, the employer must adhere to a framework of rules. An employment relationship consists of three elements: the performance of work, an authority relationship between the principal and the worker, and a wage component. If these conditions are met, then an employer-employee relationship exists and the employer must remit payroll tax. Even if there is no actual employment relationship, the Tax and Customs Administration may still deem the work relationship between principal and worker to be an employment relationship. This is then referred to as a case of notional employment [*fictief dienstverband*] and the principal must then withhold and remit payroll tax just as in a real employment relationship.

When a university engages a scholar, work is performed and wages are paid. Although the existence of an hierarchical relationship can be disputed, the Dutch Tax and Customs Administration considers that a notional employment relationship still exists if a university pays funds directly to a private individual. When a university offers an at-risk scholar a (temporary) appointment, payroll tax must therefore be remitted. If this is not done, the Tax and Customs Administration may impose fines. This would mean universities having to pay more and therefore being unable to go ahead and offer financial support to at-risk scholars. Although it is possible within the tax framework to pay a volunteer's allowance to at-risk scholars, this must not exceed €1800 per calendar year.

In the past, the UAF, a partner of SAR-NL, provided bursaries to at-risk scholars, with the UAF and the relevant university sharing the cost and the UAF paying out the money to the scholar. This arrangement meant that the university did not have to remit payroll tax. Because it was an external flow of funds, universities were also able to pay out limited bursaries temporarily without risk (unless when financing a temporary appointment from their own funds they were afraid of needing to make it a permanent one after a year).

In 2020, the UAF broke off the partnership. The UAF was concerned about the financial risks involved in acting as an intermediary in the distribution of bursaries. Until it has an external bursary provider as a partner, SAR-NL cannot therefore award bursaries to at-risk scholars who wish to continue their academic work at a Dutch university for the short or medium term.

The UAF currently supports both scholars going through the asylum procedure in the Netherlands and those who are already a status holder. In addition, the UAF has indicated in its new overall approach that it wants to investigate whether at-risk scholars will be given a place at the UAF again. At the time of writing, however, the UAF has not made any specific commitments.

Problem number 2: limitations of NWO Hestia bursaries

The NWO's Hestia bursary programme works well, but it has certain limitations. For example, most at-risk scholars, including those from Ukraine, do not apply for a bursary because, as already mentioned, they do not have official refugee status. Moreover, only 10 bursaries are usually awarded each year, meaning that large numbers of at-risk scholars cannot be provided with support. Finally, the bursaries are always linked to an NWO-funded project. On 17 June 2022, the Dutch Minister of Education, Culture and Science, Robbert Dijkgraaf, addressed this issue in his Memorandum to Parliament setting out aims for higher education and research, stating: 'Within the existing financial frameworks, I will discuss with the NWO whether the current resources for Hestia are sufficient.' (Dijkgraaf, 2022). It is not clear, however, what this possible extension of the Hestia programme will entail.

Problem number 3: limited availability of vacancies

At-risk scholars with a residence/work permit can apply for vacancies, but competition for academic positions is fierce. As universities point out, it will always be the best applicant who is hired for a position. The criteria for appointment are often unfavourable for scholars with a refugee background, for example because they are judged on the basis of English-language publications and/or their command of English, both of which are often insufficient. Moreover, a refugee background can lead to large gaps in someone's CV. Many positions are also incorporated into existing projects and lines of research, which are by no means always aligned with the expertise of at-risk scholars. Finally, #ScienceForUkraine pointed out that for many open positions, someone is sought who can stay for a number of years; this can be problematical for scholars hoping to return to their home country in the near future. This is also why scholars from Ukraine express a particular need for flexible, short-term but extendible support. A commitment for several years can feel like betrayal of the country and compatriots that they leave behind.

Problem number 4: communication about what is available

Staff from a number of universities criticised the ‘AcademicsNLforUkraine’ webpage on the AcademicTransfer platform. They saw it as window-dressing because they believed that (paid) vacancies for refugee scholars were being offered there, whereas in practice there were no vacancies specifically for that target group. Such was not, however, the purpose of the initiative. Collaboration with AcademicTransfer was intended to show the availability of (unpaid) guest workplaces and to publish fact cards with the contact details for each institution or department. Unfortunately, it was difficult for the available guest workplaces at Dutch universities to find its way onto the AcademicsNLforUkraine webpage because the centrally selected route via HR departments did not always facilitate this. At the time of writing, five universities and a few research institutes are represented on the platform. In the past, other universities also posted vacancies but these were taken down after a candidate was found. University staff say they prefer to reverse the process by focusing initially on demand on the part of at-risk scholars; based on a scholar’s profile and CV, they can then see where that person would fit in best. There are no specific plans for this yet, however.

The aforementioned fierce competition means that in practice refugee scholars from Ukraine have little chance of being hired for open vacancies.

Problem number 5: high workload

Some staff fear that supporting at-risk scholars will increase the workload for other university staff. Experience shows that scholars with a refugee background sometimes find that that background makes it difficult to link up with existing research groups. Traumatic experiences and gaps in their CV mean that they need additional support. Although many universities are ready to offer such support, doing so can impose an extra burden on the research group concerned, thus increasing the existing workload, which for many researchers in the Netherlands is already very high. It is therefore problematical to hire people who cannot participate one hundred percent (or more). Past experience has also shown that supervising PhD candidates with a refugee background can place increased pressure on the supervisor.

Problem number 6: support with practical matters

A number of universities noted that finding living accommodation for at-risk scholars was a major problem. In their view, it makes little sense to offer them a workplace if they are unable to find accommodation at an acceptable distance from the university, including because of the high cost of public transport. The question, however, is who has responsibility for supporting them with practical matters such as housing, but also childcare or applying for subsidies.

Problem number 7: public pressure and perception

Although there would appear to be a great willingness to help, perception plays a role in who can be helped. Where refugees from Ukraine are concerned, it would seem that the desire to help is sometimes greater in practice than what this group actually need. On the other hand, universities are wary of providing support for scholars from Belarus and Russia because they fear negative reactions. Financial support for scholars from these countries is sometimes – to put it simplistically – viewed as indirectly funding the war in Ukraine. Finally, other groups of at-risk scholars in need of support are neglected in the public debate and public perception, for example scholars from Afghanistan, who are currently little mentioned.

Problem number 8: a brain drain

Another issue concerns which form of support is the right one. On the one hand, universities wish to offer at-risk scholars security by providing structured support. On the other, long-term reception outside their country of origin can cause a brain drain away from that country, which can in turn have a negative impact on the reconstruction of academic institutions there (if that is in fact possible; unfortunately, an improvement in the situation of scholars cannot be expected in all countries). The interviews revealed that this is also something that scholars from Ukraine are currently concerned about. However, brain drain must not be used as an argument to justify not offering assistance, but for being flexible as regards the form and duration of that assistance.

6. BEST PRACTICES

Other European countries adopt very different approaches to receiving and supporting at-risk scholars. A number of initiatives are highlighted below that could serve as inspiration for the Netherlands, as well as other countries.

In Germany, there are various options for applying for bursaries for at-risk scholars, either by scholars themselves or by institutions wishing to host them. An important example is the Philipp Schwartz Initiative by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. This enables universities to apply for a full bursary for 24 months in order to take on an at-risk scholar; there is then the possibility of extending it for a further 12 months. There is scope for 25 to 30 bursaries annually. The initiative is partly funded by the German Foreign Ministry and a number of foundations. Scholars located outside Germany can also apply for a bursary (Humboldt Foundation, n.d.). The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), which allocates bursaries, has also set up a database of all available bursaries for students and scholars from Ukraine. This conveniently lists all the options in Germany on a single webpage, <https://daad-ukraine.org>, which is also available in Ukrainian.

In the United Kingdom, academic institutions are engaging in ‘twinning’ with Ukrainian higher education institutions. By twinning institutions with one another, support initiatives can be set up, such as sharing online resources, initiating new research partnerships, and arranging student and staff exchanges. It is possible to accommodate academics from Ukraine at a twinned UK university at short notice so they can continue teaching remotely from a stable environment. The aim is to prevent a brain drain by ensuring that students and staff do not just ‘disappear’ within all sorts of other European higher education institutions. Moreover, the partnerships are intended to offer long-term support (Hazell, 2022).

In Poland, the Polish Young Academy (PAS) works with ‘tickets’ to help at-risk scholars. On its platform, a refugee scholar can indicate which scientific discipline and university they are from, which city or university they are travelling to, and

how many family members are accompanying them. Conversely, institutions can fill in a form showing the resources available to support at-risk scholars. This enables PAS to match scholars with suitable institutions. PAS also reimburses the cost of the journey from Ukraine to Poland and the scholars' accommodation costs (Zdziebłowski, 2022).

Another interesting model is the New University in Exile Consortium. A number of US universities started this initiative in the 1930s to accommodate refugee scholars from Europe, most of them Jewish, initially at the University in Exile in New York. Universities that are members of the consortium promise to take in at least one at-risk scholar each year. The scholars are linked up with one another digitally. In addition, support is provided for refugee scholars from countries experiencing an acute conflict, such as Afghanistan (see newuniversityinexileconsortium.org). In other cases, communities of refugee scholars from countries such as Yemen or Iran are themselves engaged in digital support and networking (see, for example, iranacademia.com/about/?lang=en).

The Groningen Young Academy is working on a pilot for a language buddy programme, offering scholars in Ukraine (and in future possibly other countries) support with writing and publishing scholarly articles in English, by connecting them with volunteers from other countries. This is partly inspired by the mentoring project offered by the Global Young Academy in collaboration with Scholars-At-Risk and the Scholar Rescue Fund.

Finally, as already noted, there is the University of New Europe's mentoring programme. This international programme is not affiliated to just a single institution but is supported and funded by Germany and the Netherlands. At the time of writing, nearly six hundred people are taking part, including just under three hundred mentors and mentees, many of them scholars from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia who are in need of assistance. Dutch universities make little use of (online) mentoring systems, even though these appear to work well in practice. The mentoring programme has already offered many individuals a way into universities worldwide; it is designed in such a way that mentoring takes up relatively little time. Mentors are also instructed as to the best way to conduct mentoring, for example by providing support with networking and writing applications. Mentors have indicated that the workload is manageable and that mentoring also provides moral support at times when news about the war is worrying (E. Rutten, personal communication, 6 September 2022). More information about the programme is available on the neweurope.university website.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVED SUPPORT FOR AT-RISK SCHOLARS

Based on the interviews that were conducted, we can conclude that the current system for reception and support for at-risk scholars in the Netherlands does not function adequately, whereas it does in other European countries. This was also apparent in that many of the interviewees were frustrated at being unable to help when help was wanted. Based on the information collected and the problems identified, six recommendations were therefore drawn up to promote reception and support for at-risk scholars in the Netherlands.

RECOMMENDATION 1: A SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT STRUCTURE

First of all, a national structure is needed for reception and support for at-risk scholars. This will ensure that requests are treated uniformly and that it is not only at-risk scholars with an extensive network who receive support from Dutch knowledge institutions. Centralised processing will also ensure that the exact needs and support options are clearer.

In order to achieve this, tax-related problems and the lack of bursaries need to be addressed. Where SAR-NL and the Dutch universities are concerned, it would help to have an external bursaries provider who acts as a central point of contact for the SAR network and who is able to organise the bursaries providing process. In the past, the UAF had this role and Nuffic, at the request of institutions in the Dutch SAR network, has also investigated whether it would be able to fulfill this role. However, Nuffic has found that it is encountering the same obstacles as the UAF, which it cannot solve itself. These obstacles, as described under problem number 1, require a solution in tax and employment law. This requires government and politics. The ministries involved, such as Education, Culture and Science, and Finance, should therefore enter into discussions with each other and with implementing

bodies such as the Tax and Customs Administration and the Labor Inspectorate to investigate whether they can offer the necessary solutions and guarantees for a Dutch SAR program to succeed. If the Ministry can help set up this structure, universities will also be able to invest money in a fund from which the bursaries will be paid, knowing that they will not run into problems with the Tax and Customs Administration. Private entities could also contribute. When setting up such a new fund, it is also important to think about practical aspects such as the length of stay, finding accommodation, etc.

RECOMMENDATION 2: EXPANSION OF THE HESTIA PROGRAMME

As already noted, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, together with the NWO, intend reviewing whether funding for the Hestia programme is sufficient (Dijkgraaf, 2022). The current programme has scope for some 10 bursaries a year, but these are only available in specific cases. In actual practice, the persons concerned are often international master's degree students who have been unable to return to their country of origin after graduating and have therefore applied for refugee status in the Netherlands. These are therefore often young scholars. Expanding the target group and the number of bursaries available within this programme would make it possible to cater for a greater number of at-risk scholars in this way. It would also help if Hestia were made more flexible, with the bursary not necessarily being linked to an ongoing project. This would make it easier to match at-risk scholars.

RECOMMENDATION 3: SHARING BEST PRACTICES

Sharing knowledge and experience on how to support at-risk scholars can help in setting up more initiatives. It can be achieved through the UNL or SAR-NL networks, for example. The extent of such knowledge and experience varies greatly, enabling universities to learn from one another, for example as regards providing additional support or matching scholars to the right department. International initiatives can also be of interest to Dutch institutions, such as the approach to matching adopted by the Polish Young Academy, especially if European Academy networks join forces so that refugee scholars can be distributed across Europe. This is in fact the best way to optimise matching. Another interesting possibility is to work with mentoring programmes, such as the one at the University of New Europe.

RECOMMENDATION 4: A PLATFORM FOR PROVIDING INFORMATION FOR AT-RISK SCHOLARS

It is still difficult for at-risk scholars to get an overview of what opportunities there are in the Netherlands. The various initiatives are not (yet) always properly aligned with one another, for example the webpages of AcademicsNLforUkraine and #SciencezForUkraine. Both of these compile job vacancies and opportunities

for scholars from Ukraine, but not all the information on AcademicsNLforUkraine is also displayed on #ScienceForUkraine. It would therefore be a good idea to set up a general platform where all at-risk scholars can find information about support opportunities in the Netherlands.

RECOMMENDATION 5: PREVENTING A BRAIN DRAIN

Preventing a brain drain does not mean that we should not shelter at-risk scholars in the Netherlands but that we should be flexible in the help we offer. In this way, a scholar can easily return to his or her home country if desired, or scholars can be supported remotely. According to the Polish Young Academy (2022), this can be done, for example, by offering short-term work with the possibility of extension. At-risk scholars can also build up a network during their time abroad that will continue to be useful after their return home, thus improving their position after returning.

In Ukraine, for example, many universities are continuing to offer online and/or in-person teaching. In many cases, academic staff are also continuing to work in their home country, but no longer have the right resources and networks. Scholars in Ukraine could thus be helped by bursaries from abroad or by networking with fellow scholars elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATION 6: EQUAL ATTENTION TO ALL AT-RISK SCHOLARS

Scholars from Russia and Belarus are in an awkward position and must not be overlooked. In many cases, openly condemning the invasion of Ukraine may place them and their family at risk, as well as their career. Moreover, scholars from these countries are unlikely to experience any improvement in their scientific freedom in the short term. This group must therefore also be supported whenever possible in order to promote scientific freedom. Institutional ties with Russia have in many cases been severed, but it is important not to confuse individuals with institutions.

The war in Ukraine has opened many people's eyes to the fact that universities and research institutes also play a role in sheltering at-risk scholars and protecting knowledge. This is in itself excellent, but it is sometimes painful for refugees from other countries who have not received such support and attention. It would therefore be a good thing if the experience and recommendations set out in this report could be used for at-risk scholars of all nationalities. The war in Ukraine is not the first time a country's sovereignty has been grossly violated and people have had to flee because their knowledge is perceived as threatening by an oppressive regime; it will certainly not be the last time either. The parties involved with this report support the conclusion that it is time to create a permanent structure to support at-risk scholars.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Contact:

University:

Date and time:

Did your university set up an internal working group to support refugee students and staff after the outbreak of war in Ukraine?

- If so, who are the members of that working group? And what is their role within the university?
- Was the working group set up because of the war in Ukraine or were there already initiatives to support at-risk scholars and students?
- What is your own role in this?

What is your university currently doing for students affected by war?

- What about students affected by the war in Ukraine who were enrolled before the war started? Approximately how many students are concerned?
- What about requests from students from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia who wish to come and study in the Netherlands next year? Approximately how many enrolments are involved?
- What about other groups of students who come to the Netherlands as refugees?

What do you see as the biggest challenge as regards sheltering refugee students, for example from Ukraine?

What financial resources are available to help refugee students?

What is your university currently doing for scholars with a refugee background, for example from Ukraine, Belarus, or Russia?

- Are any at-risk scholars currently working at your university? How many individuals are involved?
- Are requests received from scholars from Ukraine, Belarus, or Russia seeking a placement or position at your university?
- Is there also support for PhD candidates with a refugee background?
- Does your university provide remote support for this target group?

What problems do you experience or foresee as regards reception and support for at-risk scholars, for example from Ukraine?

Is support available from other organisations?

- Do you have active ties to Scholars at Risk?
- Are any scholars working at your university on a Hestia bursary?

What other financial resources are available to help at-risk scholars?

What partner organisations does your university have in Ukraine, and are there any plans to support scholars there?

- What about in regions bordering Ukraine (for example Poland)?

Does your university make use of the AcademicTransfer platform to share workplaces and facilities for Ukrainian scholars?

- Is much use made of it?
- What is your experience with this platform?

Do you yourself have any other questions/comments?

APPENDIX 2: SUPPORT FOR REFUGEE STUDENTS IN THE NETHERLANDS

Introduction

On 6 May 2022, the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science reported that 1635 of the country's schools and universities had been damaged by the war and another 126 totally destroyed. Officially, classes were continuing at 86% of educational institutions at the time, but in many cases they were taking place remotely and/or online. At that time, 8 million people had been displaced within Ukraine, while another 6 million had fled the country, including 665,000 students. This amounts to no fewer than 16% of the country's total population (World Bank, 2022). While some students enrolled again hopefully at a Ukrainian university for the next academic year, others decided to try to do so abroad. Requests are also received in the Netherlands. The way Dutch universities deal with them varies but there are many similarities between institutions as regards the needs and difficulties.

In addition to questions about support for at-risk scholars in the Netherlands, interviewees were also asked about the demand and needs of refugee students, how their requests are handled, the support provided for current students affected by conflict and refugee students, and the problems that universities encounter when seeking to provide support. This appendix reflects the content of the interviews. It also singles out a number of initiatives on the part of Dutch universities that serve to inspire other higher education institutions.

There are, of course, refugee students in the Netherlands from many more countries than just Ukraine. In most cases, they are required to complete the normal asylum procedure before they can study at a Dutch university. Subsequently, and sometimes already during the procedure, they can participate in various programmes and opportunities for refugee students in the Netherlands. The special status of Ukrainians in the Netherlands means that the situation of students who have fled

that country is different to that of other refugee students. We will therefore deal separately with the support provided for them.

1. Demand and needs of students affected by conflict

In 2021, 1414 refugees approached the Dutch Foundation for Refugee Students UAF for support relating to a study programme or preparation for the Dutch labour market (UAF, 2021). With UAF support, 642 students with a refugee background began a study programme. Most of them were from Syria, Turkey, Iran, Yemen, Eritrea, and Afghanistan (UAF, 2021). After the outbreak of war in Ukraine, there was also an increased need for support from students from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine.

Most universities indicated that after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, they mainly provided support for a large number of students from Russia who were studying in the Netherlands at the time. A total of some 1150 students of Russian nationality are enrolled at Dutch universities (Higher Education Press Agency, 2022). The group of students from Ukraine is smaller, and there are still fewer from Belarus. To be specific, one university stated that it had ‘about 100 students of Ukrainian, Russian, or Belarussian nationality’. Others stated that they had ‘82 students from Russia, 56 from Ukraine, and 6 from Belarus’; ‘about 50 students from Ukraine and 100 from Russia’; ‘40 to 50 from Ukraine, about 300 from Russia, and a handful from Belarus’; ‘12 students from Ukraine’; and ‘88 students from Ukraine’. Another university spoke of ‘a few dozen’ and two universities spoke of ‘a small number of students’. A significant proportion of the students with one of these three nationalities have needed some form of support since the outbreak of the war. Nevertheless, by no means all of them applied to make use of the facilities available.

Universities also receive enquiries and requests from students from Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine who wish to come and study in the Netherlands in the next academic year. When asked about the number of requests from Ukraine, the answers given by the universities sometimes differed greatly. They referred, for example, to ‘hundreds of requests’; ‘a large number of requests’ (three universities); ‘176 registrations from Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, including 33 from Ukraine’; ‘10 to 15 applications’; and ‘few requests’. It was not always clear, however, whether ‘requests’ meant only actual applications for entry to a study programme or whether it also meant questions about practical matters. Not all the incoming requests were very specific. In some cases, students seemed to be approaching universities haphazardly in the hope of being admitted somewhere. In many cases, their prior education was insufficient for admission, or their area of interest did not match the programmes offered by

the university concerned. Two universities stated that the number of students from Ukraine who were actually admissible was '10' and '25 to 30' respectively. Requests from Ukraine come mainly from female students; men aged over 18 are still subject to a general ban on leaving the country because they may be called up for military service.

2. Institutional structures for supporting refugee students

Whereas many requests from at-risk scholars are dealt with by the individual institutions, applications and requests from refugee students are dealt with centrally. Many Dutch universities have years of experience in receiving and supporting refugee students, and have set up special departments or programmes for that purpose. Due to the special status of Ukrainian students in the Netherlands, additional structures have been set up for issues relating to the current war.

As this report has already noted regarding at-risk scholars, 10 universities set up an additional consultation group after the Russian invasion. These bodies brought together staff from various different departments, including members of the Executive Board, Teaching and Student Affairs, Student Administration, Student Assessors, International Admissions and Exchange, Operations, Human Resources, International Cooperation, Diversity & Inclusion, Press Information, Legal Affairs, and a number of concerned instructors or members of university young academies. At some universities, these bodies were disbanded after a few weeks. At others, the working group continued to exist and discussed requests and problems of potential students and scholars from Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus.

At three universities, no crisis consultation or working group was set up; at those institutions, support for the students and staff affected was integrated into existing structures. Incoming requests are immediately passed on to the relevant department and dealt with on a decentralised basis. Current students are referred, for example, to student counsellors, study advisers and psychologists for possible guidance and assistance. Applications from abroad arrive at a university's International Admissions Office.

3. Support for current students affected by conflict

Universities offer support for students affected by conflict abroad in a variety of ways, including financial, psychological, and social support. Extra study guidance

is also available, or students are subject to more flexible assessment criteria. An outline is given below of the support provided for students following the outbreak of war in Ukraine.

As an initial step, many universities compiled an inventory of students of Ukrainian, Russian, or Belarussian nationality. They then contacted them to determine their needs; these concerned mainly financial support.

Students from Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia were subject to the higher non-EU/EEA tuition fee for their courses in the 2021-2022 academic year. In some cases, universities reduced this amount unilaterally or granted the students concerned deferral of payment. Financial support is also being provided from emergency funds, in some cases in the form of a gift and in others a loan. Russian students in particular face financial problems because they can no longer access their Russian bank account. In some cases, the emergency fund was created specifically because of the war in Ukraine, but in many cases it already existed. For example, such funds are often targeted at all students in a distressing situation, or were set up because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is assumed, however, that not all students in need of support apply for assistance from the emergency fund. Some of the staff members interviewed suspect that students sometimes feel awkward or ashamed about doing so.

Almost all the universities have insufficient money in their fund to fully meet the subsistence needs of all the students affected. In March 2022, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science therefore made €1 million available to support Ukrainian, Belarussian, and Russian students, staff, and researchers at Dutch educational and research institutions. This may be spent as the institutions see fit, for example for their emergency fund or other projects intended to support this target group. In late April 2022, the institutions received a memorandum on the distribution of this money. From this amount, the NWO and the Royal Academy receive € 35,000, while the university medical centres each receive € 10,000. The remaining €850,000 is distributed between the universities based on the number of students from Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. A temporary compensation sum of €2.3 million was added in April. This is intended to help students meet their subsistence costs and pay their study costs during the period from March to May 2022 (Rijksoverheid, 2022). This facility works retrospectively; at the time of writing, institutions were being surveyed regarding how much emergency support they had provided. The money will be paid out in December 2022. Among other things, it can be used to (partially) waive repayment of loans from emergency funds.

Students can also make use of regular support; universities provide psychological support and study guidance, for example. Many universities have also organised social activities, allowing affected students and staff to find support from one another. Finally, universities are doing their best to provide staff and students with the right information. There are many questions about residence permits that are due to expire, for example. Staff of at least one university have also been given a roadmap showing them how to route students' queries through to the right person.

One university emphasised in that regard that a distinction was made between students of Ukrainian nationality with and without displaced person status. At that university, supplementary support was only available to students with that status, because otherwise students not facing immediate problems could also apply for assistance from the emergency fund.

4. Support for refugee students

Universities provide various forms of support for students with refugee status. They are often entitled to pay reduced tuition fees, and they can also avail themselves of various bursaries, for example from the university's fund or the UAF. More flexible admission criteria also often apply. Finally, some universities have a special contact person or coordinator for supporting refugee students.

Additional support has been made available for Ukrainian students in the Netherlands due to their special status. Originally, they were charged the non-EU/EEA tuition fee for all Dutch bachelor's and master's degree programmes because Ukraine is not part of the EU or the European Economic Area. In the 2022-2023 academic year, that fee will be around €10,000 to €30,000 a year for many programmes. Given their financial difficulties as a result of the war, many Ukrainian students cannot afford to pay it. Research universities, universities of applied sciences, and the UAF have therefore called upon the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to permit Ukrainian students to pay the statutory tuition fee of €2209. Because central government's decision was delayed, the universities decided on 17 May 2022 to reduce the fee themselves. Ukrainian students will therefore pay the statutory tuition fee of €2209 for the 2022-2023 academic year (Universities of the Netherlands, 2022). The universities say they still hope that the Ministry will eventually compensate them for these costs, given that they are losing income due to the reduced tuition fee. The Ministry has yet to issue its decision on this matter. It should be noted that the tuition fee reduction does not apply to Russian and Belarussian students.

The fact that the tuition fee for Ukrainian students was only reduced relatively late in the 2021-2022 academic year meant that the deadline for applying for many university programmes had already passed; for non-EU/EEA students, it was originally 1 May 2022. Many universities therefore decided to extend the application deadline for Ukrainian students. That was possible because they do not need to submit a visa application in order to be admitted. For many other non-EU/EEA students, the visa requirement is the main reason why the application process takes a long time. Russian and Belarussian students, for example, do need a visa, and for them the deadline has not therefore been extended.

Finally, many universities offer online courses that students from Ukraine can take free of charge, for example language courses. It is unclear, however, whether there is actually a need for this facility, given that many students can still access their own university's systems, and some universities still give online lectures. Some Dutch universities have therefore decided not to devote time and energy to online education.

5. Best practices of Dutch universities

Besides providing this general support for refugee students, a number of universities have decided to go the extra mile.

A number of them have organised a preparatory year for refugee students, who can devote it to improving their English and Dutch language skills or taking other subjects in preparation for a regular study programme. There are also sometimes summer courses of shorter duration or other opportunities to take free language courses.

In addition, some universities have programmes enabling asylum permit holders to take bachelor's degree programmes free of charge or enter a work experience programme to prepare for the Dutch labour market. A traineeship enables them to enhance their CV, build a network, improve their language skills, and familiarise themselves with working in the Netherlands. Other options include buddy programmes or a two-day preparatory programme to familiarise students from a refugee background with the university, instructors, and cultural differences.

One university also has a special meeting place for students who are new to the Netherlands. This is specifically intended for refugee students, but all newcomers are welcome. Assistance with language learning, peer support and help with queries about admissions, course selection, finances, and finding work are all offered. This helps students with the transition from one education system to another. It is also a

kind of low-threshold homeroom at the university, where students can go with their questions or to socialise.

6. Problems in reception and support for refugee students

The interviews revealed various problems in the reception and support for refugee students. These included problems concerning matching up students with regular study programmes; structural funding; limits to support; lack of clarity and delays in national coordination; defining the target group for support; and dealing with the growing number of refugee students at the university.

Problem number 1: matching with study programmes

In many cases, it is difficult to match up refugee students with regular study programmes. Foreign diplomas and prior education rarely link up seamlessly with programmes in the Netherlands. In many cases, moreover, students' proficiency not only in Dutch but also in English is insufficient, requiring them to first take language courses. Finally, documentation (diplomas, certificates, etc.) is often missing, having been lost during a student's flight abroad. Universities therefore need to resolve these issues before refugee students can enter regular programmes. This also applies to students from Ukraine. In many cases, Ukrainian programmes do not link up with Dutch ones. For example, some (research) university programmes in Ukraine are equivalent to university of applied sciences [*HBO*] programmes in the Netherlands because universities of applied sciences do not exist in the Ukrainian higher education system. Moreover, many programmes in the Netherlands, in particular bachelor's degree programmes, are given in Dutch, while many Ukrainian refugee students have not taken a Dutch language course due to their special status. Unfortunately, their command of English is also not always sufficient for them to be able to take a programme here in the Netherlands.

Problem number 2: structural funding

Universities have now themselves reduced tuition fees for students from Ukraine for the duration of one academic year. The question is then what will happen after that. To what extent can universities continue to make up for that gap in income? And if the reduction applies to this target group, why not to other students with a refugee background? This raises the question of the extent to which students from Ukraine should be treated differently to other refugee students.

Problem number 3: limits to support

Refugee students often also need support in other respects than their study programme. They may, for example, need extra study guidance, psychological support, or assistance in finding somewhere to live. Students who are still going through the asylum procedure are often under a lot of stress as a result. All this creates additional pressure on such students and additional tasks for university staff. It is sometimes difficult to determine how far the university's responsibility extends; after all, the university is primarily a knowledge institution, but it also finds it important to assist its students effectively.

Problem number 4: lack of clarity in national coordination

In the specific case of students from Ukraine, a lack of clarity regarding tuition fees remained an issue for a long time. University staff received numerous queries about this matter right from the start of the war, but were unable to respond because the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science had not yet taken a decision.

Problem number 5: determining the target group

It is sometimes difficult to determine which students should be given support. Universities have, for instance, become the target of criticism for supporting Russian students, for example with financial support from emergency funds. Supposedly, they are thus 'indirectly funding the war'. Many students from Russia face major financial problems, however. Nor is it always realistic to expect them to speak out openly against the invasion, which was sometimes demanded in the context of partnerships. Doing so may have major consequences for them; for instance, it may then be unsafe for them to return to Russia, or their family there may be put at risk. The same problem can occur in other conflict situations also.

Problem number 6: a growing number of refugee students

Finally, one university stated that it was having difficulty accepting additional students because the facilities available are already insufficient for the growing number of refugee students.

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