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Summary of the world café discussions at the AGILE Summer School in Bordeaux



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***Summary of the world café
discussions at the AGILE
Summer School in Bordeaux***

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INTRODUCTION. THE WORKSHOP SUMMARY

AGILE Project

This publication is a summary of the workshop conducted by the Polish Rectors Foundation at the AGILE Summer School for Refugee Students in Bordeaux on June 17-20, 2024, within the EU-funded AGILE project (*“Higher education resilience in refugee crises: forging social inclusion through capacity building, civic engagement and skills recognition”*, <http://www.agileproject-erasmus.eu/>). The AGILE project aims to increase resilience of HE systems to address the ongoing needs of refugees through social participation and skills recognition. AGILE surveys, reports and events will enrich higher education curricula, propose new pedagogical designs, encourage grassroots and digitally-enhanced actions in both formal and informal learning environments.

The AGILE project is coordinated by the University Paris 8. The consortium is made up of six universities (University Paris 8, Bordeaux Montaigne University, University of Hamburg, University of Ljubljana, Lviv Polytechnic National University, Kaunas University of Technology), one think-tank (Polish Rectors Foundation) and one business partner (Web2Learn) who specializes in open recognition systems and social learning.

Workshop “Refugee students support before-during-after studies – world café” was conducted during the AGILE Summer School for refugee students in Bordeaux. The format of the World Cafe allowed to have discussion in 3 groups who focused on the support for students with refugee background at different stages of their academic experience: before-during- after studies (as it was well defined in the AGILE report¹). Diversity of the students’ background allowed to address the difference between refugee perspective and perspective of regular international students, and determine the impact of “refugee status” on the educational process and identify the main difficulties of this situation from a student's perspective.

The goal of the workshop was to elaborate the list of concrete comments and recommendations. The key takeaways are the set of ideas for the home universities on support integration of refugee students before-during-after that is based on sharing experiences and developing various learning environments. Workshop was aimed at development teamwork skills, creative problem solving, communication skills, creating a collaborative environment, policy analysis competencies in refugee students, participants of the AGILE Summer School.

¹ <https://agileproject-erasmus.eu/Principles-for-institutional-change-and-curriculum-design-to-welcome-refugee>

The workshop was organised in 3 parts: introduction (up to 10 min), work in groups (3 groups) in world cafe format (30 min) and presentation and discussion (20 min). Students worked according to the world café rules:

- 3 tables with 1 table host
- Brainstorming in small groups in rounds – 10 min each (host stays, participants change the tables)
- Recording key ideas and insights (role of the host!)
- Plenary presentation and discussion

AGILE
World cafe etiquette

Participants	Hosts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the question • Contribute and share your ideas (e.g. name the Initiative) • Listen to others, link and connect diverse perspectives • Change the table • Have fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome new round • Take notes • Remind the question • Brief on the key insights • Listen and connect btw ideas • Present the results to the group • Have fun

AGILE
Do's and Dont's in supporting refugee students


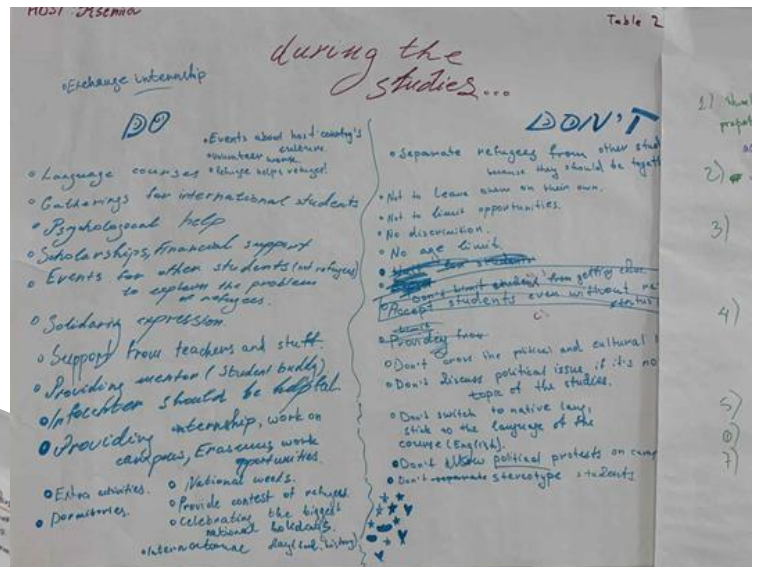
<p>World cafe rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 groups with 1 table host • Brainstorming in small groups in rounds – 10 min each (host stays) • Recording key ideas and insights • Presentation and discussion 	<p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Table 1: Do's and Dont's in supporting refugee students/candidates BEFORE the studies ◦ Table 2: Do's and Dont's ...DURING the studies ◦ Table 3: Do's and Dont's ... AFTER the studies ◦ What would be the desired activity? Not appropriate? ◦ Who are the actors? Who should do/not that? ◦ Think local - focus on the University level
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Figure 1. Workshop World cafe rule,
source: AGILE Workshop presentation by Degtyarova I. (2024)

Refugees from different home countries took part in the AGILE Summer School workshops: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Georgia, Egypt, Iran, Nepal, Syria, Tibet, and Ukraine.



ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE CONTINUOUS SUPPORT. DO’S AND DON’TS

Refugee students who participated in the AGILE Summer School emphasize that they are not merely passive recipients of support. On the contrary, they actively engage in their own integration process and contribute meaningfully to the academic community. They bring unique experiences and a strong commitment to becoming agents of positive change within their universities and society at large.

By analysing the key challenges raised during the group discussions, we identified the full range of needs expressed by the refugee students, AGILE Summer School participants. These needs have been grouped into two overarching categories to better reflect the complexity of their experiences and the areas requiring institutional support (Table 1).

Table 1. Key needs of the refugee students - summary from the AGILE Summer School Workshop

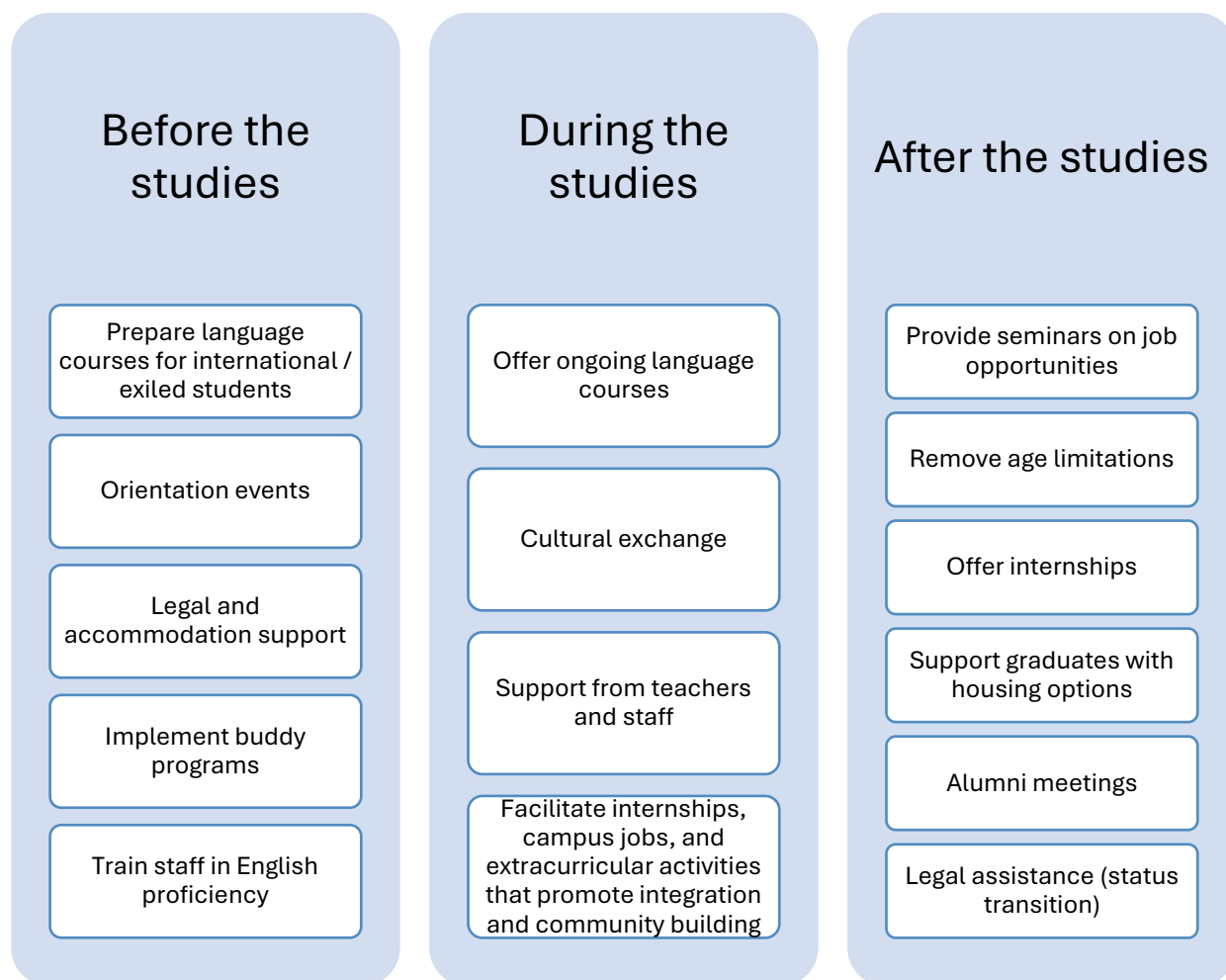
Basic Wellbeing and Access Support		
Accommodation issues	Need for housing before, during, and after studies	Rapid response to housing issues
		Assistance with searching and arranging accommodation
Connections and cooperation with helping	Need for contacts with humanitarian, legal, and registration services	Providing contact information on the website
		Cooperation with international offices
		Organizing informational sessions on legal stay, rights, and obligations
		Attention to recognition of prior education
Language support	Need for continuous language learning	Organizing language courses
		Mixed classes with local students
		Language clubs

Integration and Community needs

Psychological help and support	Need for psycho-emotional support and stress reduction	Free psychological consultations / Hotline
		Group adaptation sessions
		Buddy training for basic support
		Contacts with psychologists fluent in refugees’ native languages
Training and awareness for university staff and faculty	Need to increase awareness and reduce discrimination based on country of origin, age, gender, previous experience, etc.	Conducting training and educational sessions for faculty and staff on working with refugees, preventing discrimination Implementation of anonymous mechanisms for tracking discrimination and harassment
Official representation	Need for official representation and advocacy	Refugee student representative in student government or research/cultural groups; Platform for dialogue with administration; Cooperation with other universities to share experience; Consideration of diverse refugee student groups
Community integration	Inclusion in academic and social life	Intercultural clubs, Joint projects, Living Library, Mentoring programs; Exchange of cultural knowledge (explanations of local customs, traditions, social etiquette (both formal and informal levels))
Online support tools	Need for 24/7 access to information	Dedicated webpage on university site, chatbot/mobile app (can be implemented through student government), Online guide for first steps; * Information on both resources should be continuously updated according to refugee needs

The discussion during the AGILE Summer School “world café” workshop demonstrated that universities should offer continuous, multi-dimensional support for refugee students across all phases of their academic journey: before admission, during studies, and after graduation (Table 2).

Table 2. Recommendations for universities in supporting refugees during the whole academic journey - Summary from the AGILE Summer School Workshop



Source: own elaboration, based on the AGILE workshop discussions


Summing it up, the results of the AGILE Summer School workshop allowed us to identify clear, experience-based DOs and DON'Ts — what universities should and should not do at each stage of a refugee student’s academic journey (Table 3).

Table 3. Do's and Don't's in refugee support in the Universities in Europe – summary of the Workshop

BEFORE THE STUDIES		DURING		AFTER	
DO	DON'T	DO	DON'T	DO	DON'T
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome days (students & teachers) - Mixed classes with locals - Legal support - Accommodation - Social workers - Individual decisions - Buddy's program - Apps/chat first steps - Training stuff in English - Collabs with international office 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't treat all foreign students like refugees - Don't ask private questions to student - Avoid pressure from the teaching and administrative staff - Recognition of prior education - Don't underestimate the abilities of refugee students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language courses - Gatherings for international students - Events for other students to explain the problem of refugees - Solidarity expression - Support from teachers and stuff - Providing student (student's buddy) - Internship, work on campus/Erasmus, work opportunities - Extra activities - Accommodation - National weeks, national holidays - Provide context of refugees - Extra curricular activities (common for locals and refugees), in English - Live libraries (story telling) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't separate refugees from other students - Not to leave them on their own - Not to limit opportunities - No discrimination - No age limit - Don't cross the political and cultural lines - Don't discuss political issues if it's not a topic of the studies - Don't switch to the native language of courses - Don't allow political protests on campus - Don't stereotype students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connect refugee students with helping organisations; - Seminars and recommendations about possible work opportunities - Lessons to improve soft skills and language competences; - Cross off age limitation - Provide separate internships for refugees - Possibilities for housing after graduation - Alumni meetings - Graduate tracking for refugees more intensive - Help with legality (visas) - Foundation for unemployed - Provide work opportunities in academia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Don't discriminate in the job offers; - Don't label the refugees, but treat as professionals - Don't anchor the tragic past, it doesn't define us

The key message, as a take-away from refugee students for the universities (Table 4), highlights their main expectations and priorities regarding support.

Table 4. Key message to Universities from refugee students - summary of the AGILE Summer School

	
Ensure long-term language learning support and help with translation, offer us psychological support, help us with accommodation, train us on students' rights, help us to be heard; connect and cooperate with helping organizations.	Don't discriminate! Don't have assumptions regarding our backgrounds! Don't revolve our education around our "tragic" path! Don't turn foreigners/refugees to nationals

Beyond these expectations, refugee students stress the importance of being met with understanding, having access to clear and accurate information, and receiving ongoing support. Such measures enable them to successfully navigate their new environment and realize their full potential.

Their advice to fellow refugee students reflects this proactive and resilient mindset:

- ✓ Be open to other cultures — ask questions and be willing to answer them.
- ✓ Stay calm and confident.
- ✓ Lead by example through active and responsible participation in university life, collaborate with local organizations, and support one another.

Workshop leaders

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AGILE Project member. Since May 2022 works as Rector’s Representative for Cooperation with Ukrainian Higher Education Institutions at SGH Warsaw School of Economics. She has a PhD in Ukrainian linguistics and a PhD in administration and political sciences, specialising in higher education governance and public policy in the academic sector, as well as in international cooperation in higher education. She is the program coordinator of the Polish-Ukrainian project of cooperation of Polish and Ukrainian Rectors’ Conferences. She is a co-author of the Commentary to the Act on Higher Education and Science of Poland, and a Polish Special Act on the Ukrainian refugees for Wolters Kluwer. In 2023-2024 Iryna coordinated the project “SGH & CIVICA for the European Future of Ukraine” implemented under the NAWA program “Solidarity with Ukraine – European Universities”. ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4298-5488>.

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Computer Science student at the Silesian University of Technology and Erasmus+ participant at TU Dortmund. With lived experience as a refugee student, she actively engages in shaping inclusive academic environments and improving institutional support for displaced learners. Mariia has been involved in educational and social innovation projects in Poland and Germany, as well as academic, leadership, and cybersecurity-related initiatives.