

## Finnish higher education institutions' reactions to the 2015 asylum seeker situation: Motives, goals and future challenges

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*In 2015, military conflicts and related humanitarian crises neighbouring areas of Europe made millions of people leave their homes. Europe, including Finland, experienced a rapid increase in the number of asylum seekers. In this article, we examine the reception of asylum seekers by Finnish higher education institutions mainly by analysing media data written about and written by universities and universities of applied sciences in Finland. The higher education institutions, in keeping with their societal role, spontaneously developed various kinds of pop-up courses, co-operation projects and other activities for asylum seekers. These activities range from crisis work to medical clinics and sports events to language teaching. This led us to ask in this article, whether new tasks were emerging in the Finnish higher education institutions' understanding of the societal role of higher education. This main question is operationalised in three subquestions. Firstly, we are interested in seeing how higher education institutions motivate their actions on developing activities for asylum seekers. Secondly, we analyse the goals and gainers of these activities. Thirdly, we discuss the challenges faced by the higher education institutions in their refugee and asylum seeker activities. Based on our findings, we suggest that new kinds of voluntary and humanitarian activities appear to be emerging at Finnish higher education institutions, as they responded to the increase in the number of asylum seekers, suggesting a change in the traditions of societal impact of Finnish higher education. Our analysis also shows an apparent paradox in the activities of the institutions: while they had no way of knowing how many asylum seekers will remain in Finland, they still organised activities that implied staying in Finland for a longer time. The higher education institutions themselves benefitted from the activities: they could exhibit their expertise and previous research in the area of immigrant studies, and aspects of service-learning system of societal activity could be taken into their curricula. Helping the asylum seekers brought the university community together while the asylum seekers themselves remained passive objects of the activities.*

**Keywords:** higher education, asylum seekers, third mission, media, community service

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## 1 Introduction

Finnish higher education institutions have initiated various new activities, when the number of asylum seekers in Finland multiplied compared to previous years. This article analyses the responses of universities and universities of applied sciences (formerly known and referred to as 'polytechnics') to the rapidly changing asylum seeker situation in 2015. We particularly reflect on the activities of higher education institutions from the point of view of the societal tasks of Finnish higher education institutions and the potential changes in that societal role, as this was presented as the main motivation by the higher education institutions themselves.

Finland received more than 32 000 asylum seekers in 2015, which is almost nine times the figures from the previous year. In 2014 there were 3651 asylum seekers, of whom 1346 received a residence permit (Finnish Immigration Service, 2014)<sup>1</sup>. The increase in numbers of asylum seekers created a societal need to respond in various ways: new reception centres were set up, and intakes in old ones were increased. One of the responses came from higher education institutions, which initiated new activities that targeted asylum seekers in different ways and which were reported widely not only inside higher education institutions but also in public media.

The rapid organisation of activities for refugees and asylum seekers in the fall of 2015 brought the thematic of the societal role of higher education to the forefront. This led us to look in more detail into the conceptualization of the third mission in Finnish higher education, as well as to analyzing the implications of the refugee and asylum seeker related activities to that third mission. In the following, we ask whether Finnish higher education institutions are conceptualising the societal task of higher education in a new way in the changing refugee and asylum seeker situation. We further divide this task into three subquestions. Firstly, we are interested in seeing how higher education institutions motivate their actions on developing activities for asylum seekers. Secondly, we analyse the goals and gainers of these activities. Thirdly, we discuss the challenges faced by the higher education institutions in their refugee and asylum seeker activities. We begin the article by contextualising our topic in the literature of higher education institutions as societal actors and discuss that in the European context. After presenting our data and method of analysis, we shall move to the analysis of the motives of higher education institutions; their goals and presented actors; and the challenges that appear to rise from the events in 2015. We conclude by discussing the implications of the activities of higher education institutions to the societal role of Finnish higher education.

## 2 Higher education institutions as societal actors

### 2.1 Higher education institutions' third mission and changing societal role

While the role of higher education has traditionally been conceptualised around teaching and research (and, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a combination of the two in the Humboldtian tradition of "research based teaching"), the so-called third mission of higher education has gradually grown out of co-operation with governments, industry and the society in general. (Etzkowitz, 1998.) Nowadays,

this third mission can be operationalised, on one hand, as commercialisation (such as patents or licences of technological innovations) of "outcomes" of teaching and research, and as contributions to the society and policy-making (research-based decision making) on the other. Montesinos, Carot, Martinez and Mora (2008) make the distinction between the social third mission, enterprising third mission and innovative third mission, suggesting that especially in the last thirty years, the "second academic revolution" has meant a transfer of the role of higher education from teaching and research to services to community and society, either with or without economic benefit to the institutions themselves. Laredo has criticized this "naturalization" (2007, p. 446) of industry-related third mission construction, presented as somewhat inevitable. He argues, in turn, that the traditional (teaching and research) roles could still be understood as the main societal functions of universities. The current industry-related "entrepreneurial" (Etzkowitz, 1998; Laredo, 2007) conceptualisation of the universities' third mission is entangled with policy initiatives that emerged since the 1970s, following decreases in public funding and new forms of demands for formal accountability, efficiency and effectiveness. This managerialist approach to the public sector has been called New Public Management (NPM), seen both as a tool to fixing problems of the bureaucratic institutions, and as a governmental assault on the values of public services (Broucker & De Wit, 2015.)

In Finland, demands for increased societal responsibility increased during the 1970s, with the massification of higher education, and particularly since the 1990s, with renewed higher education legislation and renegotiated social expectations on the role of higher education in society. Välimaa (2012) suggests that the Finnish understanding of third mission was defined by the strong national dependence on ICT technologies and the changes in administrative procedures at universities, creating new demands for personnel management and administration. The third mission was added into the tasks of universities in the renewal of the university law in 2004: "universities managing their tasks have to co-operate with the rest of the society and promote the societal impact of research findings and artistic activities". [*Tehtäviään hoitaessaan yliopistojen tulee toimia vuorovaikutuksessa muun yhteiskunnan kanssa sekä edistää tutkimustulosten ja taiteellisen toiminnan yhteiskunnallista vaikuttavuutta.*] (Act Amending Universities Act 715/2004).

The universities of applied sciences, in turn, have already since their foundation in the mid 1990s been expected to be active in the society and particularly the surrounding region. Thus, in Finland, the societal role of universities is defined through the impact of research and artistic outputs on society rather than through their service activities in the immediate community or the society at large (Kankaala et al., 2004).

## 2.2 *Emerging forms of societal activities of Finnish higher education*

According to their higher education legislation discussed above (Universities Act 558/2009; Polytechnics Act 351/2003) one of the higher education institutions missions is to interact with the society, which in Finland has been understood as a particular kind of industry co-operation and policy advice activities. As noted in the previous chapter, community service type of societal activity has not been part of the core third mission activities of higher education institutions in Finland. However, with the activities ignited by the increase in asylum seekers, new patterns of societal interaction seem to be emerging in Finland. These activities

are similar to community service and service learning activities that are typical in North American contexts (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

Under community service, we understand the voluntary work performed by group or individuals for the benefit of the public sector or its institutions. In this article, we are particularly interested in a particular type of community service; i.e. service learning. Service learning can be defined as a pedagogical development designed to enhance student learning and provide civic development by integrating classroom learning with community service (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Service learning provides an important means for increasing student participation in community service and enhancing the community service experiences for those already involved (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 231; Waterman, 1997, p. 2).

Service-learning brings together students, academics and the community whereby all become teaching resources, problem solvers and partners. In addition to enhancing academic and real world learning, the overall purpose of service-learning is to instil in students a sense of civic engagement and responsibility and work towards positive social change within society. (Europe Engage project, n.d.)

That said, the concept of service learning should not be seen in a normative way as something that inevitably strengthens the institutions' activities. Naturally, its implications have dark sides as well. The Nordic welfare state is understood as a system where the state undertakes to protect the health and well-being of its citizens, especially those in financial or social need, by means of grants, pensions and other benefits. From this point of view, service learning or community service can be criticized on two grounds: the societal and the individual. Societal factors are for instance the fact that if the institutions have volunteers through service learning-projects, they do not have to provide employment for salaried professionals. It can furthermore be asked, if the students working in service learning programs are well-equipped enough for their duties according to the prevailing circumstances. Are the students always there when they are needed? Don't tax payers have the right to receive professional services? It might be that the official authorities are not expected to function effectively because the volunteers carry out their work. From the individual side, service learning can be equally criticized. It can evoke power inequality, if the subject-object (helper – helped) relationship includes factors like education, class, race or language skills. (Shadduck-Hernández, 2006.) The service learners are likely more educated, white, native speakers of the target language and come from a higher socio-economic background. This contrasts with their vulnerable target group. Further, the volunteers are themselves vulnerable to the trauma that asylum seekers have possibly experienced.

There is ample research on the community service activities of higher education institutions in higher education literature internationally; for instance, in 2000–2016 there were 609 article hits with *community service* in the journal *Higher Education* alone. However, when we narrow the search down to refugees and asylum seekers, there seems to be very little research conducted on asylum seekers and refugees in higher education in general, and none that we could find from the point of view of reception of refugees, either from an educational or societal viewpoint. In language journals, the situation is analogical. *Language in Society* had in years 2000–2016 no hits for refugees, and three articles that mentioned asylum seekers. *Journal of multicultural and multilingual development*, *Language & Education* and the Nordic journal *Nordand* had articles from the

perspectives of language learning and testing of refugees and asylum seekers, but none from the point of view of societal reception. Thus, while the high numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in 2015 was a source for political and media attention across Europe, we could find no research on this particular aspect of higher education social mission.

There are indications, however, that higher education institutions across Europe have initiated activities in reaction to increasing numbers of refugees. However, the most activities relate to the teaching function of HE, as they appear to promote refugees' and asylum seekers' (higher) education access and career building. For instance, Gothenburg University has provided a web portal, offering information for refugees as potential interns, students and scholars at the university, as well as information on migration (Gothenburg University, 2016). The DAAD (Deutsche Akademischer Austauschdienst/German Academic Exchange Service) has been supporting universities with the integration of refugee students by means of several programs since 2015 when over one million fled to Germany (Kanning, 2016). In addition to this, DAAD has with other stakeholders (e.g. Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge) published a detailed guide for university advisors catering to refugees wanting to study in higher education institutions (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2016). An additional example is an interactive map, published by the European University Association (EUA), published in January 2017, where almost 250 mostly study-related initiatives from higher education institutions and related organizations in 31 countries have added their activities concerning asylum seekers and refugees (Refugees Welcome Map, 2017).

In addition to study related support, European higher education institutions have also provided service learning type activities. For instance, the University of Göttingen in Germany initiated a pilot project during the winter semester 2015–2016 based on the concept of service-learning between students of psychology and refugees. The project continues and includes five departments, but the article reporting the program does not take a stand on the third mission of higher education institutions. (Boos, Miosge, Fischer, Bögel & Abbasi, 2016.)

The ongoing Europe Engage project has conducted a survey to map policy, practice, funding and strategic vision for civic engagement and service-learning among universities in Europe. There is no formal acknowledgement of civic engagement and service-learning on the strategy level of, for instance, University of Helsinki. While the survey's response rate was low, it nonetheless gives some indication of how service-learning like activities are practiced in Finnish universities. It seems universities of applied sciences in Finland show more service-learning and civic engagement activities in their strategies than universities. According to the survey, however, more needs to be done at the higher education sector, especially at the universities particularly on communication and collaboration with civic community members in creating courses reflecting the both academic and societal objectives; on opening the principles of service-learning and on creating course content reflecting the quality standards of service-learning. (Europe Engage project, n.d.)

The Europe Engage survey was conducted before the year 2015, and thus, it does not take into account the activities of higher education institutions in reaction to the increased number of asylum seekers that year. It seems that the topic of reception of asylum seekers not only presents an emerging empirical

phenomenon in the Finnish context, but also an under-researched topic internationally.

To sum up, a number of activities have taken place at European universities, but research on the issue of refugees in higher education and particularly the effects of the refugee situation on the third mission aspects of higher education institutions is still lacking.

### **3 Data and methodology**

This article is a part of a larger study conducted at the Centre for Applied Language Studies in the University of Jyväskylä and commissioned by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The data of this study consists of documentation (statistics, degree descriptions and strategy documents) from Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences ( $N=39$ ), a survey sent to the Language Centres and Student Service Offices of all Finnish higher education institutions ( $N=78$ ) in spring 2016 (92% of higher education institutions answered at least the other survey), interviews and additional material in selected case institutions ( $N=9$ ) and the selection of media material. (Saarinen, Vaarala, Haapakangas & Kyckling, 2016, pp. 8, 14-17.)

The case studies were individual and group interviews at different types and sizes of higher education institutions in different parts of Finland. Altogether 32 people were interviewed, e.g. Heads of the International Offices, Heads of Language Centres, Heads of Student and Academic Services, Finnish as a second language teachers and international students. Media material was comprised of higher education institutions' announcements and news published in print and online newspapers and news websites. The collected media material (altogether 48 press releases, news, announcements and video clips) dates from September 2015 to May 2016. (Saarinen, Vaarala, Haapakangas & Kyckling, 2016, pp. 8, 14-17.) In this article we used 41 written news and announcements of the original data, because not all of the news pages were available at the time this article was written.

Survey data, case interview material and media data are quite different compared to each other. In our survey we asked, whether higher education institutions have initiated any refugee or asylum seeker related activities during academic year 2015–2016, and whether those activities were related to language teaching. We also asked, if higher education institutions have plans to organise or continue organising activities related to the asylum seeker situation. Mainly, survey data answers to the questions what and who. Some challenges were also enlightened shortly. In total, survey answers were quite limited and short.

Motives, goals, and challenges were presented in news and announcements with consideration, as news and announcements are published in higher education institutions' websites, newspapers etc. and represented a collective, public view of the higher education institutions. The case interviews, in turn, presented more diverse backgrounds, possibly focussing on the challenges presented by the situation, and may also represent only individual opinions or perspectives. Altogether, different material answer partly to different questions, and are emphasised differently in different parts of this article. The data used in this research is not always comparable: interviews underline more the questions of education, because it was often the main topic in them. The media-data

information, on the other hand, focusses on many other topics, e.g. connections to the working life. In the surveys, the questions considered the actions and there were no direct questions about the motives and goals. Our results are, thus conclusions of a combination of different kinds of data. This article focuses on the media material of higher education institutions and the results of case studies, and other material, e.g. higher education institutions Acts, was used secondarily, to explain primary analysis.

The survey data was analysed statistically; open ended answers and other textual data were analysed with content analysis (Saarinen, Vaarala, Haapakangas & Kyckling, 2016, pp. 8, 14-17.)

The media material and material of the case studies were analysed with content analysis. The process of our data analysis can be divided into five phases (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** The phases of data analysis.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
Grouping the data: WHAT? WHO? WHY?	Presentation in a conference: getting feedback	Further data coding and processing with Atlas.ti: special focus on WHY?	Regrouping the data: concentration on motives, goals and challenges behind the asylum seeker activities	Discussing the analysis with the research group, summing up the findings

The first phase of the analysis was done by roughly grouping the interview data, media material and survey data into three different categories, which answered to three basic questions: what, who and why. This phase formed the basis for a more in-depth analysis. As a result of the first phase, we found out what kind of activities have been organised by higher education institutions for asylum seekers, who organised the activities, and why these activities were done. In the second phase, we presented some results of our analysis in a conference. After getting feedback from that presentation, we continued our analysis, taking into consideration the comments and ideas from our audience.

In the third phase, the selected data pieces concerning the question why were more closely processed and coded by Atlas.ti computer software. While the first phase of the analysis was based on initial impressions and rough categorization (conducted manually by post-it notes and paper-pen-scissors combination), Atlas.ti was used in order to combine systematically interviews, survey data and media material in the analytical process and have a more detailed look at them. Phase 3 was an essential part of the analysis process, because the use of Atlas.ti provided us tools for managing the data as a whole. The interview data, media material and survey data were very different from each other and analysing them simultaneously was a great challenge for us. Having all the data available in a readable and easily codable form in Atlas.ti made the analysis process more manageable and organized. In the fourth phase, the data was again grouped into three sub-categories, those of motives, goals, and challenges. News, interview and survey extracts of each sub-category were once again intensively reread by the authors. The fifth and the final phase consisted of group discussion and meetings, in which we summed up our findings.

#### **4 Overview of asylum seeker related activities in Finnish higher education institutions**

The amount of all support activities for asylum seekers in higher education institutions is challenging to estimate. When talking about voluntary work in higher education institutions, the report of Europe Engage does not mention asylum seekers at all (Hopia, Grönlund, Seppänen & Spännäri, 2016). On the basis of data, we can estimate that 14 of 24 universities of applied sciences and 12 of 14 universities organised some activities for asylum seekers. Higher education institutions have spontaneously developed various kinds of courses, co-operation projects and other activities for the asylum seekers. These activities range from crisis work to medical clinics and sport events. Only a minority of the survey respondents mentioned language related activities organised in their institutions. (Saarinen, Vaarala, Haapakangas & Kyckling, 2016, pp. 86-87.)

It seems that particularly universities have initiated Finnish language teaching for asylum seekers, for example online courses and voluntary Finnish teaching in reception centres, such as teaching language with the help of sports. Other activities were, e.g. medical students teaching first aid skills, law students providing information about Finnish law, different art projects with language support, organising visits for asylum seekers to the higher education institutions, business courses in universities, and creating contacts between asylum seekers and companies.

The universities of applied sciences, in turn, developed activities involving fundraising, sport, health care information, medical check-ups, art projects (light installations and poetry reading), and the translation of food hygiene guidelines and tests. There were no big differences between the universities and the universities of applied sciences in organising activities, though compared to the universities of applied sciences, the universities seemed to emphasise language teaching. That said, language teaching was not the central focus of the majority of the activities.

Higher education institutions were collaborating with different organisations and actors: the third sector (non-governmental organisations, NGOs) were e.g. Teachers Without Borders, Finnish Red Cross and local parishes. Furthermore, liberal adult education with adult education centres and folk high schools were taken as partners in the different actions. Other educational institutions that took part in the activities were kindergartens, vocational schools and other higher education institutions. Authorities such as the Finnish Immigration Service and Ministry of Employment and the Economy were partners in co-operations. Some higher education institutions also worked close with different companies e.g. mobile service companies.

However, it needs to be pointed out that during our larger study in spring 2016, quite many higher education institution survey respondents did not know, whether their institution was organising some activities related to the asylum seeker situation or not. Nor did they know, whether their institution was going to organise some activities in the future. This unawareness may have several explanations. Firstly, the asylum seeker situation emerged quite quickly, and higher education institutions had to react accordingly. In many cases these activities were not coordinated in the administrative level, but in the grass roots level of departments and individual actors. The need for fast reaction to the situation, lack of coordination, lack of data and reporting, and the fact that in many institutions the activities were spread across several units and campuses, may explain why the survey respondents were often unaware of activities at their institution during the time of the survey.



## 5 Motives: values and reasons behind the higher education institutions' actions

In the following chapter we analyse how the higher education institutions justified their actions in developing activities for the asylum seekers and especially what their motives to act appeared to be.

### 5.1 Enthusiasm for volunteering

One major motive of the higher education institutions appeared to be the need to work for a common good co-operatively and to react immediately in the new situation. The higher education community members saw that in their voluntary work, they could together examine and build the role their institution plays in promoting a public service.

In many higher education institutions, different actors in the community took part in the activities: university management, students, students' union and staff members in a way participated in developing a kind of “popular movement”, as explained by one interviewee (see excerpt below). In addition to that, the actors especially seemed to see the activities as a possibility to contribute to the future of those asylum seekers, who had graduated or who had interrupted their education at the universities or at the universities of applied sciences in the crisis areas, linking the community service responses of Finnish higher education institutions to the economic debates on the “global mobility of talent” (see for instance Collings, 2014):

*[-] meilhän tuli semmonen, ku nyt tuli tää aalto viime vuonna ni, ni meilhän synty semmonen niinku kansanliike täällä, ja ja yliopiston johtokin kannusti siihen kovin et meillä sekä henkilökunnasta että erityisesti ylioppilaskunnasta ni, tuli semmosta vapaaehtoisuuintoa, ja ja meil on käyny siel erityisesti opiskelijoit myöskin jonkun verran henkilökunnan jäseniä on esimerkiks käyny sit pitämässä suomen kielen kerhoo ja kaikkee tämmöstä [-] me sillon jo niinku ajateltiin et tää on nyt niinku tavallaan yks vaihe tää vapaaehtoisuusvaihe ja se alkaa jo nyt sitte olla ohi paitsi jos tulee uusia aaltoja, mut sit toinen mitä alunperin aateltiin et. et meidän pitäis jotenkin voida sit osallistuu siihen, erityisesti näitten korkeakoulutettujen, tai osittain korkeakoulutettujen. jatkumahdollisuuksien lisäämiseen [-]*

*[-] we had this kind of, when this wave came last year, a kind of popular movement was born here and also the university management encouraged it too, so especially our students and also some staff both from staff and especially from the students' union there was **this kind of enthusiasm for volunteering** and especially our students and also some staff members have been there to organise Finnish language clubs and things like that [-] already then we sort of thought that **this volunteering stage is one stage** and now it is starting to pass unless there will be new waves, but **another thing that we originally thought that we should somehow be able to contribute to further possibilities of especially those with a higher education background** [-] (University C, interviewee; our emphasis)*

### 5.2 Humanity and ethics

The media data, in turn, presented ethical and humanitarian aspects of the events. In the news, the ethos was that while the helping of the asylum seekers was not directly a task of the higher education institutions, offering help to those who need it was, nonetheless, a task of every human being.

*Tämä toiminta ei tietenkään kuulu yliopiston perustehtäviin, mutta mielestämme se kuuluu perustehtäviimme ihmisinä.*

These actions do not of course belong to the basic tasks of the universities, but in our opinion it (helping) belongs to our tasks as human beings. (Lappeenranta University of Technology, 2015)

This kind of perception emphasises the traditional view of the societal role of the universities as an industry or government co-operation rather than community service, as discussed above. This raises the question of why humanitarian activities were hardly ever brought up in the news or in the interviews. At least some of the Finnish higher education institutions (and universities in particular) seemed to conceptualise their societal role based on the legislative view on research-and-teaching based societal impact rather than views of community activity, traditionally leaving welfare related activities to other societal actors. It is, however, possible, that the emerging activities brought by the increase in asylum seekers in 2015 challenge the legislative societal tasks of the higher education institutions.

However, ethical views were brought up as an important motive for the actors involved. According to some of the interviewees, the higher education institutions have an important role as promoters of societal interaction outside research-based impact activities. These, in turn, were presented as ways to impact attitudes, ideologies and ways of speaking about refugees and asylum seekers, and consequently make the integration process easier, as general understanding of the newcomers and their situation increases. In this view, the main motive of the activities was that the higher education institutions wanted to reduce prejudices among the Finnish population about the asylum seekers. Some of the higher education institutions wanted to organise meetings between individuals to reach this goal.

### *5.3 Two-way educational benefit*

Several activities initiated by the higher education institutions were apparently intended for a two-way benefit; i.e. to benefit both the institutions and the asylum seekers. The reception centres faced external pressures to arrange their acute situations in late 2015, leading them to ask for instance higher education institutions for assistance in order to organise the situation.

The higher education institutions saw here the possibility to offer their students possibilities for training in authentic situations. Earlier, the students' voluntary work had not necessary earned them credits, but in the new situation the students voluntary work was seen as comparable with practical training. Students were in some cases given credits for their voluntary work in reception centres, thus introducing previously less-used service-learning aspects into Finnish higher education.

One related motivation particularly in language teaching activities was that the teachers saw a possibility to develop and try out, how a theoretical understanding of language learning as usage-based would function in practice. For example, at the University of Jyväskylä, the university teachers wanted to offer the possibility to investigate teaching for language teacher students. The student teachers were offered a possibility to test the limits of their creativity with new kind of learners and learning surroundings. The learning of the language had to be observed from the needs of the learner. It was a two-way beneficial project, as while it added to the teaching of asylum seekers, this kind of field practice was also a possibility

for the students to test and work on different kind of pedagogical practices. (Koskinen, 2016.) In addition to language teacher student, also students of social work were active in service-learning type voluntary work.

#### 5.4 Societal impact and responsibility of higher education institutions

The higher education institutions justified their actions in different ways, positioning the focus either on the institutions themselves or on the society.

Particularly universities of applied sciences argued for taking up asylum seeker related activities as a part of their societal task, as stated in the law which requires universities of applied sciences to take part in regional co-operation and development. This aspect of the task of universities of applied sciences was specifically mentioned by a lecturer coordinating a tutoring project at Humak University of Applied Sciences (Honkonen-Seppälä, 2016).

The new activities also gave a possibility for higher education institutions to "show and tell" about their previous work on migration and integration to the general public, and thus to show their expertise and activities in this field. Thus, asylum seeker related activities could also be used to increase the visibility of the institutions and their prior research. In some cases, it appears that higher education institutions reflected on their societal role and saw the asylum seeker situation as a possibility to strengthen the societal and humanitarian role of the higher education institutions. Thus, one motive was possibly to strengthen the brand of the institution. The actions were mainly student-driven, but the voice of university leaders was present in the news. Some universities saw themselves as examples for other higher education institutions and hoped that they would follow their lead.

While some activities were specifically intended as internal, others were clearly directed at aiding the society to somehow cope with the challenging situation. Lahti University of Applied Sciences (2015) described how their actions would "lighten the financial workload and costs of the society" [*keventää kriisistä yhteiskunnalle koituvia kustannuksia*], implying a welfare impact of the activities. Researchers from the University of Helsinki were comparing the Finnish universities with the "top" international universities and argued that voluntary work and humanitarian activities are in Finland maybe too differentiated for the professionals and to the public sector, suggesting that higher education institutions should take a more active role. (Muurinen, 2015). In their opinion, it is necessary to co-operate with other institutions and sectors in addition to basic social security. Focus on the society and the idea of sharing was expressed also in the news clip from the University of Turku: "We want to help the asylum seekers and the Finnish society to survive this shared challenge" [*Me haluamme auttaa turvapaikanhakijoita ja suomalaista yhteiskuntaa selviämään tästä yhteisestä haasteesta*] (Hyytiäinen, 2015).

Here, the expected two-way benefit is seen from a societal viewpoint: the society benefits, while the higher education institutions enhance their reputation as societal actors.

#### 5.5 Research and documentation

The higher education institutions considered the asylum seeker situation to be important and motivating also from a research point of view, in order to document the societal change which was happening in Finland. "Diverse research

and documentation is necessary for the science as well as for political discussion" [*monipuolinen tarkastelu ja dokumentointi on tärkeää sekä tieteen että poliittisen keskustelun kannalta*] (Ruokangas, 2015). The combination of scientific, artistic and journalistic approach was seen as motivating.

The higher education institutions were highly motivated to take action to increase the research on immigration. They were ready to apply for grants and build up multidisciplinary co-operation concerning the research focusing on immigrants, and increase the impact of research. The higher education institutions contacted ministries and offered their help to solve the situation with their know-how.

The possible international benefits for Finland were also motivating the actions. "Finnish experiences of building educational paths are interesting also for international audience." [*Suomen niinku kokemukset tämmösen koulutuksellisten polkujen rakentamisesta kiinnostaa myös kansainvälisesti.*] (University A interviewee)

The higher education institutions wanted to understand the situation with the help of research and documentation. Their aim was to overcome the common societal challenge.

## 6 Goals and gainers of the higher education institutions' actions

Higher education institutions appeared to have a variety of goals in their actions for asylum seekers. In this section, these goals are divided into four thematic groups, on the basis of who gains of the activities: asylum seekers, higher education, economic life and the society at large. However, each thematic group includes many gainers, several goals and many activities. Many activities were beneficial to many groups and agents at the same time. Each thematic group is presented more specifically in following sub-chapters 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4.

Goals of the higher education institutions' activities can also be divided based on their time scale: some of the actions aimed only at helping the immediate situation, while some actions aimed at preparing the society for future's situations. In some cases it was hard to categorize the event as an immediate or long term activity, or maybe as both. Furthermore, our data concentrates only on the academic year 2015–2016, so in many cases we do not have information, whether all goals were achieved or actions are still continuing.

### 6.1 Benefit for asylum seekers

It seems that the most higher education institutions' actions aim at benefitting asylum seekers and refugees-to-be. Many activities, such as welcoming events and helping asylum seekers to start their life in Finland, were designed for the immediate situation. With these kinds of actions, higher education institutions apparently aimed at giving asylum seekers a positive feeling of the Finnish society, after hard and possibly traumatic times. For example, Aalto University designed a welcome package, which aimed at giving "some tools, e.g. for studying basics of Finnish language and culture" [*välineitä mm. Suomen kulttuurin ja kielen perusteiden opiskeluun*] (Aalto University, 2015).

Many activities had a wide time scale from the immediate situation to long-term future. Several actions in different higher education institutions aimed at promoting integration and acculturation e.g. by offering different kind of

education and information about future possibilities and networks in Finland. For example, University of Oulu designed a pilot training to educate asylum seekers to live in a cold climate (University of Oulu, 2015). In another example University of Eastern Finland aims at preventing immigrants' marginalisation and radicalisation by these kinds of actions (Koistinen, 2016).

Higher education institutions also aimed at supporting asylum seekers' professional or vocational skills. For example Savonia University of Applied Sciences offered a food hygiene pass testing for asylum seekers<sup>2</sup>. According to Savonia, "the certificate of Finnish hygiene know-how is a valuable document, even if the asylum seeker would need to return to their country or origin" [*todistus suomalaisesta hygienia-alan osaamisesta on arvokas paperi, vaikka turvapaikanhakija joutuisi palaamaan kotimaahansa*] (Savonia, 2016). As a larger project, Finnish University Partnership for International Development (UniPID) started the SIMHE-project (*Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland*), aiming at improving asylum seekers' employment and education possibilities. The project is a joint venture of the University of Jyväskylä and Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, offering for example guidance and recognition of prior learning for asylum seekers, with the aim of making this a nationwide model in the future. (UniPID, n.d.)

## 6.2 Two-way benefit for higher education and asylum seekers

In many occasions, the higher education institutions seemed to have several two-way educational goals, when they reacted to the asylum seeker situation. Not only language teaching in reception centres, but also many events and other activities were organised by students for asylum seekers. Higher education institutions students were offered advantage for their studies, such as credits, project work and internship possibilities. The students were also offered possibilities for getting professional experience and multicultural know-how:

*[--] on koitettu saada se näkyväksi myös alalle valmistuville, valmistuvien opintojen aikana että minkälaista työ siellä on ja minkälaista asiantuntemusta se vaatii ja miten tämmöinen nopea tilanne otetaan haltuun näin.*

[--] we have tried to make it visible for students graduating the field, during their studies, what kind of work this is and what kind of expertise it requires and how this kind of fast situation is taken under control like this. (University A, interviewee, our translation)

For example, the students of community pedagogy at the Humak University of Applied Sciences got possibility for professional development in working life in local co-operation (Honkonen-Seppälä, 2016). Also, as mentioned earlier, University of Jyväskylä organised a project for future teachers of Finnish as a second language (Koskinen, 2016).

Another example of a two-way benefit was related to research activities, as the higher education institutions' also had some research goals in their activities. On one hand, it seems that higher education institutions' activities could have increased the visibility of higher education institutions and their prior research in the field on a societal level. Since a lot of research in this field has already been conducted, the higher education institutions had specialized know-how of the challenging situation. For example, the University of Jyväskylä researchers gathered together to discuss "how research conducted at the university and the

researcher's know-how could be brought in a better way to benefit the society in this area" *[[keskustelun] siitä, kuinka yliopistossa tehtävä tutkimus ja tutkijoiden osaaminen saataisiin parhaiten esiin ja hyödyttämään yhteiskuntaa tälläkin alueella]* (Fadjukoff, 2016). On the other hand, new research projects were initiated to increase the understanding of the asylum seeker situation and to gather knowledge for the society and societal discussion. For example, Åbo Akademi University and the above mentioned University of Lapland started research projects to document and observe this unique situation in Finnish society (see Åbo Akademi University, 2016; Ruokangas, 2015).

### 6.3 Two-way benefit for economic life and asylum seekers

Another example of expected two-way benefits was related to working life and integration to society. Some higher education institutions explicitly wanted to enable two-way benefit for Finnish economic life and companies as well as for asylum seekers. Hanken School of Economics made a programme, in which they "offer educated asylum seekers a possibility to take first steps towards working life" *[[ohjelman puitteissa tarjoamme] koulutetuille turvapaikanhakijoille mahdollisuuden ottaa ensimmäiset askeleet työelämään]*. At the same time, this programme was presented as a possibility for the companies participating in this programme "to grab impulses from the international market" *[tarttua impulsseihin kansainvälisiltä markkinoilta]*. (Association for Business Schools Finland, 2016.) This programme seems to be a unique way for asylum seekers to take part in working life, framing them as "global talent" (Collings, 2014), linking discourses of global mobility flows with discourses of economic success of (particularly) multinational companies. On the other hand, it seems that there were only few concrete activities with economic life as a gainer.

### 6.4 Benefit for the society

In their activities, the higher education institutions had several ways to aim at benefitting the society. They motivated their activities with "lightening the financial workload of society" and promoting societal interaction, like reducing racist attitudes and supporting two-way integration. However, the activities assumed different time scales. Some of the activities aimed at helping the current situation in autumn 2015: e.g. University of Turku Faculty of Medicine offering ways for medical students to participate and ease the pressure of the public health care system (Hyytiäinen, 2015). Some higher education institutions, on the other hand, tried to create nationwide models for future. For example, the above mentioned SIMHE project aimed at helping immigrants' access in higher education, and the Lahti University of Applied Sciences created a crisis work project, which could become a nationwide model in the future to prepare better for sudden changes in global mobility (Lahti University of Applied Studies, 2015).

On one hand, this kind of activity in voluntary sector seems to be unconventional for higher education institutions, as researchers Anne Pessi and Henrietta Grönlund suggested in a piece of news at University of Helsinki website: "in Finland a strong trust in the welfare state has differentiated tasks maybe too much for the professionals in the field, whereas for example universities have concentrated on education" *[Suomessa vahva usko hyvinvointivaltioon on eriyttänyt auttamistehtäviä liikaakin alan ammattilaisille, kun taas esimerkiksi yliopistot ovat*

*keskittyneet koulutukseen]* (Muurinen, 2015). This implies that the volunteer and charity work, familiar for instance in North American higher education, has not had a place in the Finnish welfare ideology until now. However, in this asylum seeker situation higher education institutions have taken a different role than earlier, and co-operated with others with the aim of becoming more active in the society. On the other hand, creating and improving societal welfare seems already to be part of higher education institutions responsibility and tasks, as argued in chapter 5.4: e.g. University of Eastern Finland puts it this way: "There is a lot of special expertise in the university, which could be exploited in this refugee situation to help" [*Yliopistolla on paljon erityisosaamista, jota voitaisiin tässä pakolaistilanteessa hyödyntää ja jonka avulla voitaisiin auttaa*] (Suhonen, 2015).

Table 2 sums up the results of chapter 6 on the represented goals and gainers of the asylum seeker related activities.

**Table 2.** Different goals and gainers of the higher education institutions' actions.

<b>Thematic groups</b>	<b>Gainers</b>	<b>Goals</b>
<b>Benefit for asylum seekers</b>	- Asylum seekers - Refugees-to-be - (Immigrants)	- Welcoming - Helping to get to know society - Offering information and networks - Promoting integration - Increasing possibilities for future education and working life - Supporting professional know-how - Preventing marginalisation/radicalisation
<b>Two-way benefit for higher education and asylum seekers</b>	- Asylum seekers - Students - Researchers - Higher education institutions - Society	- For asylum seekers: language education, leisure time activities - For students: project work and internship possibilities, credits, professional development, multicultural know-how, new experiences - For higher education institutions and researchers: visibility for higher education institutions and research - For society: information and documentation of the situation
<b>Two-way benefit for economic life and asylum seekers</b>	- (Educated) asylum seekers - Refugees - Companies - Economic life - Society	- For asylum seekers: creating possibilities for working life - For companies: creating possibilities for "grabbing impulses from international market"
<b>Benefit for the society</b>	- Asylum seekers - Refugees - Immigrants - Public health care system - Co-operation partners - Welfare - Society	- Helping public health care system - Lightening the financial workload of the society - Making nationwide models for future - Promoting two-way integration - Promoting societal interaction - Societal impact - Creating better welfare state by (local) co-operation

## 7 Challenges and needs for future actions

Based on our analysis, the Finnish higher education institutions are facing several challenges in their support actions aimed for asylum seekers. These challenges are mainly related to the need for resources and funding, to the need to know more about the educational backgrounds of asylum seekers and, finally, to the unpredictable nature of changes in the asylum seeker situation. The following three sub-chapters discuss these challenges.

### 7.1 Extra resources and need for coordination

Lack of funding and resources turned out to be the most visible challenge which the higher education institutions were facing, especially when organising or planning long-term activities or projects that are related to asylum seekers. It seems that the unexpectedness of the refugee situation defined what kind of actions were organised and by whom they were implemented. Many of the higher education institutions reported about student or teacher-driven "single activities" and emphasised the need for more stable and long-term funding arrangements. The volunteer or teaching work done by students in reception centres was something that could be organised quickly, without huge amounts of extra funding. However, many mentioned financing problems and difficulties in long-term planning:

*Maahanmuuttajien (sis. turvapaikanhakijat) suomen kielen opetukseen on halukkuutta ja valmiuksia mutta tätä koskeva rahoitus olisi saatava järjestettyä pysyvällä tavalla. Vapaaehtoisuuteen ja kansalaisaktiivisuuteen perustuvat toimet ovat hyviä alku mutta toiminta täytyy voida vakiinnuttaa yliopistoissa [--]*

There is willingness and ability to organise Finnish language teaching for immigrants (including asylum seekers), but funding for this should be organised in a stable way. Activities based on volunteering and civic participation are a good start, but this activity should be built into universities [--] (Student Service Office questionnaire, university respondent)

*[--] mutta tota sellasta niinku eteenpäin katsovaa systemaattista suunnittelua niin niin tuota sitä ei oo tällä hetkellä vielä*

[--] at this moment there is not yet that kind of forward looking systematic planning (University B, interviewee)

Also rigid organisational structures and lack of prior modes of operation made it challenging for many higher education institutions to react quickly to the rapid increase in the numbers of asylum seekers. The higher education institutions described how support actions are "always dependent on persons and resources and, matters of several years" [*ne on aina. ihmisistä kiinni ja resurssoinnista ja, useamman vuoden asioita*] (University E interviewee) and that "firm grip on coordination is perhaps still needed" [*semmosta koordinaatio-otetta ehkä vielä tarvitaan*] (University A interviewee). A sudden change in the amount of asylum seekers created a situation where the higher education institutions were faced with new kinds of needs for coordinated volunteer work:

*[--] he [vastaanottokeskukset] on toivonu että jotenkin korkeakoulut koordinois sitä mahdollisuuksien mukaan sitä omien opiskelijoitensa työskentelyä vastaanottokeskuksissa [--]*



[--] they [reception centres] have made a wish that the higher education institutions would, if possible, somehow coordinate the work of their own students in reception centres [--] (University A, interviewee)

These kind of needs for coordination were challenging, because many of the Finnish higher education institutions had neither prior experiences nor action plans to implement, showing that, until now, the societal activities of higher education institutions have not included volunteer work. Instead, the higher education institutions had to adopt a reactive role, to create quick actions with limited resources, as this example from news media from the University of Jyväskylä describes:

*Kun valmiita suunnitelmia [--] tai strategioita ei ole ollut, on tähän asti lähinnä reaktiivisesti vastattu jo tapahtuneisiin asioihin[--]*

When there were no ready-made plans [--] or strategies, we have until now reacted to something that has already happened [--] (Fadjukoff, 2016)

## 7.2 Asylum seekers' educational background and needs

Insufficient information about asylum seekers' educational background made the planning of educational actions even more challenging for higher education institutions. The need for research and reporting about the educational needs of asylum seekers were mentioned:

*Vaikka maahanmuuttajista ja turvapaikanhakijoista puhutaan usein yhtenä ryhmänä, he ovat yksilöitä, joiden taustat, tarpeet ja kyvykkyydet ovat hyvin erilaisia. Vastaanottokeskuksissa ja oppilaitoksissa tulisi nykyistä paremmin selvittää ja tunnistaa maahanmuuttajien erilaisia osaamisprofiiileja ja järjestää kotoutumistoimia niiden mukaisesti.*

Even though immigrants and asylum seekers are often referred to as a homogeneous group, they are individuals, whose backgrounds, needs and abilities are very different. Reception centres and education institutions should be better able to identify and recognise the different know-how profiles of immigrants and organise the integration actions accordingly. (Fadjukoff, 2016)

*[--] me tiedetään jo nyt siis ihan, epävirallisesti haastatteluiden ja lehtikirjoittelujen perusteella että turvapaikanhakijoiden joukossa on hyvinkin korkeasti koulutettuja ja heitä on jopa hakeutunu niinku, tullu työhakemuksia, vasta tullu niinku meilekin, tunkee sähköpostiin että. et se nyt olis varmaa merkki siitä että siellä olis valmiutta myöskin niinku aika nopeesti kiinnittyä, korkea-asteen, öö joko tutkintoperustaiseen tai sit esimerkiksi kielikoulutukseen mutta,mutta se että. ne on kuitenkin edelleen vielä yksilöitä, ne on edelleen hyvin hajanaisesti siellä porukassa et me vaan, se niinku et me päästäs jotenkin järjestämään jotain ni se vaatis ensin, aika vahvan selvitysvaiheen [--]*

[--] we know already now, off the record from interviews and news that there are extremely highly educated individuals amongst the asylum seekers and they have even sought like, [we have] received job applications, recently, by email that. that would probably now be a sign that there is readiness to like quickly commit [in], higher education, um either in degree [studies] or for example language education but, but the thing is that they are still individuals, they are still very scattered in that group so that we, like in order for us to organise something it would first require a quite detailed gathering of information [--] (University E, interviewee)

The latter interview extract shows that the asylum seekers themselves were also active contacting the higher education institutions in the forms of work applications and questions about degrees or language education. Overall, this challenge was quite quickly grasped in spring 2015 by the SIMHE-project (Supporting Immigrants in Higher Education in Finland), which was introduced briefly in chapter 6.1. Some of the universities of applied sciences also mentioned that they already have courses for preparing immigrants for university of applied sciences studies, but these courses could be suitable for asylum seekers only after they have reached a certain level of Finnish language skills.

### 7.3 Uncertain future and unpredictable actions

When asked about whether the higher education institutions are planning to organise support actions in future, majority of the respondents of the both surveys brought out that the plans were still unclear. In Students Service Office survey, 16 out of 30 and in Language Centre survey 21 out of 32 answered that they didn't know if their institution is going to organise activities for asylum seekers in the future. The comments of the respondents revealed that planning of the activities was still at an early stage:

*[-] Kehitysideoita ja aloitteita on syntynyt [-] mutta toteuttaminen ei ole vielä edennyt niin konkreettiselle tasolle, että suunnitelmia kannattaisi tässä eritellä [-]*

Development ideas and initiatives have surfaced [-] but their implementation has not concretized in a way that it would worth it specifying them here. (Language Centre survey, University of Applied Sciences respondent)

*Todennäköisesti, mutta en vielä tiedä mitä. Aiheesta käydään keskustelua.*

Probably, but I don't know what. It's being discussed. (Student Service Office survey, university respondent)

*Eftersom antalet asylsökande ökar är det rimligt att anta att vår enhet kommer att ta dem mer i beaktande i framtiden, men just nu går det inte att svara på hur.*

Because the amount of asylum seekers is growing it is fair to assume that our unit will take them into account in the future, but just now it is impossible to answer how. (Language Centre survey, university respondent)

Same kind of uncertainty could be seen in the interview material. In fact, there were many of those who expressed uncertainty of the actions of their higher education institutions regarding the asylum seeker situation. Since our surveys were answered by individual representatives of large institutions, it might be that not all the respondents were aware of the activities or plans regarding asylum seekers in their institution. There might be activities and plans that have not been reported anywhere. As an interviewee of University A mentions "there should be reporting about what university [A] is doing, no one has the overall picture of it [-]" *[pitäis olla tiedotusta siitä mitä kaikkea yliopisto [A] tekee, ei kenelläkään oo siitä kokonaiskuva]*.

It is impossible to estimate the future needs for these actions as the refugee situation is in constant change. It is clear, however, that many of the support activities and co-operation models implemented by higher education institutions

can prove out to be useful in years to come. Despite of having challenges especially with funding and coordination resources, the higher education institutions were still able to develop quite diverse range of activities to support asylum seekers and their integration.

## **8 Discussion**

Finnish higher education institutions appeared to react quickly and spontaneously to a new situation that they had no experiences of in recent history. From the perspective of the institutions, the change from a policy and industry driven, research and teaching based societal impact towards a community service and service-learning system of societal activity is interesting. A new model of societal impact could, thus, be about to surface, if these activities remain and are strengthened as a part of the institutions' activities. The new societal situation made it possible for higher education institutions to integrate meaningful community service into the curriculum and offer credits for the students. Helping and/or teaching the asylum seekers brought students, university staff and the research community together in a new way to act though the asylum seekers themselves remained passive objects of these activities. The enhancing academic and real world learning gave the students the sense of civic engagement and changed the learning environment in an important way.

According to our analysis, it seems that higher education institutions' role as societal actors was stronger than their role as educational actors in the 2015 asylum seeker situation. It may be that the institutions were not yet able to see asylum seekers as future students, and thus societal responsibility and role as societal actor became more important. It even seems that some higher education institutions reacted to the asylum seeker situation like they would do temporary voluntary work and something, which is not part of their basic tasks. This may have connections to the wide media reporting: higher education institutions were giving announcements of their activities, because reactions to asylum seeker situation were seen something unusual.

Our analysis did, however, make visible an apparent paradox in the higher education institutions' activities. While there was no way of estimating how many of the asylum seekers would eventually be granted the residence permit and stay permanently in Finland, the higher education institutions organised activities which indicate the expectation of asylum seekers staying in Finland for a longer time; e.g. courses in Finnish language or information about Finnish business life. It seems that here higher education institutions could utilise their prior research and organisational structures, and organise activities based on their know-how and expertise; for example, language education is a way to start asylum seekers' integration to Finland. It also seems that higher education institutions did what they felt was within their hands to maintain societal peace and help Finnish society, for example by taking part in the work of NGOs, lightening the workload of the welfare sector and promoting interaction between the Finnish community and asylum seekers.

On the other hand, it can be argued that the higher education institutions themselves benefitted from the activities. They could easily promote their third mission as societal activity, as well as set educational and research goals, for example, by providing authentic trainee places for their students and collecting

data for research. Even though the societal responsibility was a major motive to start to work for asylum seekers, the universities and universities of applied sciences still managed to merge their own educational goals in their activities, while simultaneously promoting their specific brands in the situation. As our data focussed only on the institutional experiences, we have no information on the potential effects of these activities either on the individuals participating in them, or on the long-term effects of volunteer work on the public sector.

It seems that the rapid changes in asylum seeker numbers and the higher education institutions' responses to that situation made visible new kinds of societal challenges about the balance between the educational, research and societal tasks of higher education. It appears that the events of 2015 gave the Finnish universities and universities of applied sciences a possibility to profile particularly their societal task in a way new to the Finnish welfare state idea. It remains to be seen, whether these kinds of activities will be mainstreamed in the future, and whether they will permanently profile Finnish higher education institutions in a new as societal actors.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In 2016 the biggest groups in 2015 came from Iraq (20 500), Afghanistan (5 200), Somalia (2 000) and Syria (900) (Finnish Immigration Service, 2015). In 2016 the amount of asylum seekers declined significantly, to the point that only 4 827 asylum seekers had arrived by 16.10.2016. (Finnish Immigration Service, 2016a). The decisions concerning asylum seekers (including the positive and negative decisions, dismissed and expired applications) were made in the year 2015 in total 7 466 (Finnish Immigration Service, 2016b) and in the year 2016 (until 30.9.) 20 453 (Finnish Immigration Service, 2016c).

<sup>2</sup> A food hygiene pass is a requirement when working in Finnish food industry.

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