

Internationalisation
in Higher Education
for Society

>>> Students' legal aid office for Ukrainian refugees

#IHES project

The project was created to help Ukrainian refugees after Russia invaded Ukraine. The counselling centre was created as part of the wave of solidarity that emerged in the Czech Republic after the invasion. There was an expectation of increased demand from Ukrainians for legal assistance in specific areas, and it was uncertain who would provide such assistance. The project was created as a combination of a few volunteers with the concept of the Student Legal Advice Centre already existing at the Palacky University Faculty of Law. This was adapted for the current needs. The basic idea was to provide legal advice to incoming refugees via email, where they would send their questions. The answers to the questions were to be drafted by the students under the supervision of supervisors (Faculty of Law lectu-

1 WHAT IS THE GOAL OR REASON FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT?

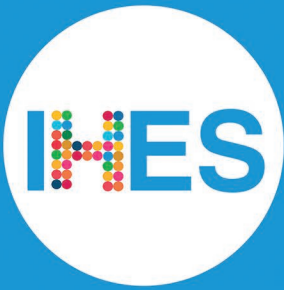
The primary goal was to provide help with legal questions for refugees from Ukraine. At the same time, the project also had an educational objective, i.e., to enable the students of the Law Faculty to search for a solution to a real legal problem and to present this solution to the client understandably.

2 WHO ARE THE BENEFICIARIES?

The project has two target groups: The primary beneficiaries are Ukrainian refugees, whom the project aims to help solve their current specific legal problem and thus orient them in the Czech legal environment. Czech university law students, who are well-versed in the Czech legal system, are to help them in this process. Connecting a real person with a legal problem is important for law students to be motivated to solve such a problem with a view to helping a real person. Furthermore, a real legal problem allows law students to imagine situations in which they will help people in their profession after graduation.

3 WHO ARE YOUR PARTNERS IN YOUR UNIVERSITY?

In principle, at the university level, it is necessary to have two types of partners: on the one hand, the law students themselves, and on the other hand, the lecturers who will act as supervisors of the student's work. In some cases, it will also be necessary to have the approval of the faculty management; however, at the Law Faculty, this is a traditional teaching activity that the department can manage independently. However, the support of the faculty or university management is certainly not detrimental in this respect



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HOW DID YOU REALISE THIS PROJECT?

First, it was necessary to assemble a team of lecturers from the Faculty of Law who would be willing to guarantee supervision over the various fields of law in which refugee questions might arise. These volunteers were needed because the counselling activities were not part of any running course but had to be considered an extra activity. Consequently, it was necessary to find student volunteers. The project involved both current students and graduates of the faculty. A coordinator was appointed from among the lecturers, whose task was to monitor the created email address, evaluate the incoming queries and distribute them among the individual experts - supervisors. After receiving a query, the coordinator contacted the relevant lecturer and students were contacted to ask who would be dealing with the question. Once the student had developed a response, it was evaluated by the supervisor. Subsequently, the answer was again emailed to the refugee.

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WHAT ARE THE MOST RELEVANT ENABLERS OF THIS PROJECT AND HOW DID YOU CONVINCE THEM TO PARTICIPATE?

The basic prerequisite was to have willing teachers and students. It was then necessary to choose a coordinator to take on the burden of organising the whole system (distributing cases and coordinating the work between teachers and students). At the Faculty of Law, we were able to find motivated teachers and the situation and the wave of solidarity that emerged created, as if automatically, enough motivation to involve the few teachers needed. The same motivation was also on the side of the students. An email was sent to both groups asking if they wanted to be involved in such an activity. We were pleasantly surprised by the interest of the students in particular, as dozens of students willing to help came forward quickly.



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WHAT WERE THE MAIN OBSTACLES YOU ENCOUNTERED AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

The fundamental problem that could not be avoided was the lack of interest from refugees. This problem resulted from establishing the so-called KACPU (Contact Centre for Refugee Assistance), which the Olomouc Region was set up to help refugees. All forms of assistance were centralised here; refugees were instructed to come here upon arrival and were informed that they would be provided with comprehensive assistance. Therefore, they did not need to seek help elsewhere, as they found it at KACPU, including legal advice. In general, the existence of KACPU and the comprehensiveness of the services provided can only be assessed positively. Therefore, it is only a perceived problem. Another reason for the refugees' lack of interest in our help was the broad existing social network of fellow Ukrainians in the Czech Republic. Thus, the incoming refugees may have preferred to seek advice from members of their own community rather than at the university. However, we managed to solve this "problem" differently. We were contacted by Ukrainian university colleagues who have set up a central advice point for all refugees from Ukraine fleeing to different countries in Europe. This web interface is managed by Ukrainian colleagues, whom Ukrainians can contact in their native language. According to the query, Ukrainian colleagues further contact the national coordinators in each European country, depending on which legal system the problem concerns. Then the help works according to the rules we have set, i.e. the query is directed to the student and the supervisor, who answers the query and then forwards the answer to the Ukrainian coordinators.

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WHAT WERE THE KEY "DO'S AND DON'T'S" THAT YOU LEARNED WHILE SETTING UP AND RUNNING THIS PROJECT?

The basic recommendation on what to do is to set detailed rules for the functioning of the counselling room so that no query goes unanswered. It is important that everyone knows their duties and tasks, with whom they should primarily cooperate and communicate, and what the procedures for communication are. This will also avoid any potential inaccuracies in legal advice. In this specific situation, it was difficult to know what assistance the refugees would need and to what extent, and which were channels through which important information about assistance options would flow to them. Coordination with the state authorities that initiated and operated the comprehensive, organised assistance was also important.