

**Master thesis**

**Barriers, functionings and capabilities  
in dropout among refugee students in higher  
education institutions**

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*Studie en werk voor hoger  
opgeleide vluchtelingen*

## Preface

In February 2013, the time had come to finish my Master and student life with the final thesis. After a long search for an interesting internship to do my Master research at, I could start at the University Assistance Fund (UAF). I would like to thank my supervisor prof. dr. G.C.M. Knijn for her help with finding this interesting organization. I am glad I could do my research for an organization that supports a minority group in the Netherlands in a non-profit manner. I support their goals and believes and with this research I hope to contribute to improvements of their policies. The UAF had four different areas in which they wanted research and I chose to research dropout in higher education institutions, because of my interest in the higher education system.

During the five months I spent carrying out my research and writing my thesis I learned a lot. The interviews with the refugee students put my own study period in a different perspective. Most of their stories were very inspiring and I would like to thank them for their time and openness. During the research process, I experienced some setbacks as well. It was very difficult to gather enough refugee students who dropped out for the interviews and some ideas I had for the research did not work out in the end. The interviews with the employees of the higher education institutions, on the other hand, were easily arranged and at every institution I found employees who were willing to talk openly about the visions of their institution and their experiences with refugee students. I would like to thank all of them as well for their time and openness.

Next to my supervisor from the university and the participants, I would like to thank Brenda Teunissen, my supervisor from the UAF for her time and help with finding participants for this research. Also, I would like to thank my fellow students who did their internship at the UAF, especially Marieke van der Burg with whom I spent many hours figuring out our methods and analyses. And most of all, I would like to thank my friends and parents for their endless support during the whole process. Also, Miriam Frantzen, my parents and my brother Freek van Velzen for checking and adding improvements to the final version of my thesis. Lette van den Berg, Sandra Muis, Hélène Phoa and my most reliable study partner, Jeanine van Dijk, for their motivation and willingness to spend many days with me in the library writing our theses. I could not have done it without all of you.

Loes van Velzen

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## **Abstract**

In the Netherlands refugees request asylum every year, in 2011 the amount of requests was 11.590 (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2012). Among these refugees, there are individuals that pursue a degree in the higher education. For refugees it is often difficult to enter and stay in the Dutch education system, due to factors related to their refugee status. Therefore, the University Assistance Fund (UAF) helps refugees, because they believe that higher educated refugees can be of added value for the Dutch society. Due to specific barriers refugees encounter, dropout among this group is high and happens for different reasons than dropout among native Dutch students. The goal of this research is to find which constraints refugee students encounter in certain higher education institutions, in order to be able to decrease the dropout rate.

The research question is: How do specific barriers, functionings and capabilities lead to dropout among refugee students in four Dutch higher education institutions? The four institutions are the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Hogeschool van Amsterdam, the Universiteit Utrecht and Fontys Hogeschool Eindhoven. To answer the question an integrated theoretical framework, combining Sen's capability approach (1979) and Bean and Metzner persistence theory (1985) has been used. The methods used are in-depth interviews with several employees from the four institutions and with twelve refugee students who have dropped out at one of these institutions.

The results of the interviews have been analyzed by applying the theoretical framework and is based on Boeije's coding method for qualitative research (2005). The results of the interviews with the employees provide the vision on refugee students and diversity of every institution. Due to the embedded core values of the institutions, the VU has a diversity policy and the HvA has arrangements for refugee students. The UU is a large university with a relatively small non-western and refugee student population. Therefore, they do not deem it necessary to provide special arrangements. Fontys has a decentralized way of policy-making. Only for the most important values they have policies on the institution level and refugee students are a too small group to make policies for.

The interviews with the dropouts show a diversity in reasons for dropout and opinions about arrangements at the institutions. The main reasons for dropout were care responsibilities, language problems and lack of counseling at institutions. Refugee students indicate the need for extra arrangements, but on the other hand refugee students say that it is their own responsibility to succeed in their study. It turns out that at least part of the refugee students would benefit from special arrangements.

The recommendations of this study are mainly for the UAF, because the UAF, sometimes in cooperation with institutions, can provide the best resources for refugee students. The organization of an introduction day for new refugee students at an institution, in collaboration with the UAF, is considered useful. Meeting fellow refugee students and knowing where to find help is something the interviewees missed. Better communication between the institutions and the UAF can lead to better

organized activities for refugee students at institutions. Also, a mentor system where older UAF students help new students with adjusting to the new institution and prevent them from the mistakes they might have made is considered useful. Furthermore, keeping better track of their dropout students and the reasons for dropping out are the main recommendations for the UAF to decrease the dropout rate among their students.

**Keywords:** Refugee students; higher education institutions; dropout; diversity policy; UAF

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# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Refugees and asylum seekers**

In the Netherlands in 2011, 11.590 refugees requested asylum. This number is 4,2% of the total amount of requests in the EU27 in 2011. 42% of these requests were granted and 58% were denied (Vluchtelingenwerk, 2012). According to the definition of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), asylum seekers are individuals who are seeking international protection because it is unsafe to stay in their own countries for different reasons. Their request for asylum has not yet been granted or rejected by the country in which the request is submitted. Not every asylum seeker will be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee has initially been an asylum seeker (UNHCR, 2006). The definition of a refugee is “a person who is outside their own country and is unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” (UNHCR, 1967).

Among the groups of asylum seekers and refugees there are higher educated individuals, or individuals who want to pursue a higher educational degree. Due to factors such as the different language and cultural habits in the Netherlands and their often traumatic flight experiences, it is complicated for these individuals to pursue their goals without help. Therefore, in the Netherlands, the University Assistant Fund (UAF) supports motivated asylum seekers and refugees by helping them to find and finance their studies and to find work after their studies. The UAF is the oldest refugee organization in the Netherlands and has been established following the take down of student demonstrations in Prague in 1948, which caused uproar in the Netherlands. The original goal of the UAF was to support 50 Czech students to study in the Netherlands. In 1956, during the folk uprising in Hungary, many Hungarian students fled to the Netherlands where they were supported by the UAF as well. In the following years, the UAF changed their goals from only supporting university students, to their current goals of including all students who want to participate in the higher education and helping them with finding a job. The UAF believes it is important that higher educated talent does not get lost, and therefore helps refugees to get a diploma (UAF-1, 2013; UAF-2, 2013).

## **1.2 Education and dropout**

Regardless of cultural or ethnical background, education is important for everyone to create better opportunities and to participate in society (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2012). Several factors play a role in the achievable education level of an individual. Intelligence and motivation play a role on the individual level and the social-economical status of the family on group level. The cultural and economical factors in the country of origin are also important, but most important are the quality of and access to education (SCP, 2012).

In every higher education institution in the Netherlands students drop out, of which the highest amount drops out during the first year. The term dropout means students who do not have a diploma

and are not signed in for a new study program the next study year. The rate of early school leavers of 18 to 25 year olds in the Netherlands is 9.1%. Compared to the European average, which is 13.5%, the Netherlands scores well. The guidelines provided by the European commission, the Europe 2020 education targets, state that early school leaving rates should be less than 10%. Already in 2011 the Netherlands met these standards (European Commission, 2012).

The dropout rate among UAF students is higher than the 9.1%. Although UAF students are not directly comparable with the total population of 18 to 25 year olds, because UAF students are generally older than 25 when they start studying, the rates do show a difference. In the preparation phase 50% drops out. This preparation phase is a trajectory provided by the UAF in which students acquire basic skills and knowledge and gain specific skills to meet the entry requirements to study. The dropout rate among refugees who actually started studying is 30% (UAF, 2012).

After evaluation of the four year policy plan of the UAF 2009-2012, it showed that the general dropout rate has not decreased, the rate in the preparation phase actually increased. Partly due to external factors, such as the widening of the admission criteria and the higher demands of higher education institutions, the UAF could not decrease the percentage of dropouts. In their yearly report of 2011, the UAF mentions the development of a learning ability test to decrease dropout. For the UAF it is important to reduce dropout, not only because their goal is to help refugee students finish their studies, but also because the UAF receives money from donators, which they want to spend as efficiently and effectively as possible. Since dropouts cost money and do not provide results, reducing dropout is a way to accomplish this goal (UAF, 2011).

In their new four year plan, 2013-2016, the UAF sets reducing dropout among refugee students as one of their top priorities. A sharper selection procedure, together with implementing other arrangements, such as investing more in language courses, should reduce dropout from 50% to 20% in the preparation phase. This procedure is an internal process. By putting higher demands on the motivation and commitment of refugee students the UAF wants to decrease the dropout rate in the study period from 30% to 25% (UAF, 2012). To reduce dropout among clients who already started studying, the UAF also depends on external factors, such as whether higher education institutions have diversity policies or special help for refugee students.

### **1.3 Diversity policies**

Considering the demographic changes in society, the student population in the Netherlands will increasingly become more culturally diverse. The Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics expects a fifth of the Dutch citizens to be of non-western origin in 2050. This development asks for different means to handle the demands of a society that becomes more and more diverse (Severiens, Wolff & Rezai, 2006).

Diversity can be defined as “referring to all thinkable differences that can exist between people living together in our society, in the area of gender, skin colour, social background, sexual

preference, physical and mental possibilities, religion, ideologies, age, demographic features, etc. Except all possible differences, diversity also refers to processes of renewal and ways of coping with difference, equality and equivalence" (van Remoortere, Simons, de Graef & Bastiaens, 2009, p.17-18).

In 2008, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) stated that the Netherlands needs "to lift educational and social achievement among immigrant "non-western" populations" (Marginson, Weko, Channon, Luukkonen & Ober, 2008, p.104). Non-western immigrants need extra attention when it comes to education and integration. Their partaking in the higher education system and their study success are important factors in integration and in utilizing their knowledge and work potential (Marginson, et al., 2008). Furthermore, in 2007 and 2009, the Dutch education inspection concluded that at most institutions diversity policies were lacking. It is deemed necessary that attention for non-western immigrants form a structural part of the policy of all higher education institutions (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2007; 2009).

The focus of the recommendations from the OECD and the Dutch education inspection lies on non-western immigrants. However, according to others (Henderikse, van Doorn-Huiskes & Schippers, 2007; Hellemans & Merckx, 2004, Waterval & Meziani, 2009), the basic idea of diversity policies is that individuals are different from each other, the differences are taken into account but do not differentiations between groups are made. The purpose of a diversity policy is to accept, understand and appreciate the differences and to implement arrangements of which everyone will benefit. Diversity policies should focus on study success for all students (Henderikse et al., 2007; Hellemans & Merckx, 2004; Waterval & Meziani, 2009).

The Dutch Inspection of Education (2009), provided five guidelines for higher education institutions that explain what diversity policies are and should contain. First, general measures focused on binding are important. An individual approach, good contact between students and teachers and good study-career counseling are important for study success. Second, general measures focussing on bottlenecks for different students, such as extra language lessons, will contribute to study success. Third, study success can be increased by responding to the needs and wishes of students and by positively valuing diversity. Fourth, commitment from the Executive board, the general institution policy and policy on faculty level are important. Fifth, more insight in study success related to certain background variables, such as age, sex, ethnicity and preschool education, should be available. If this is available, an institution can see which effect their policies have on different students and adjust them in order to help every student successfully finish the study (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2009).

#### **1.4 Current research**

Up until now, not much research exists regarding dropout among refugee students in higher education institutions. Also, among UAF students, little research exists about dropout reasons. Therefore, this research will focus on both relevant policies at higher education institutions and UAF dropouts. By knowing the situation and reasons for dropping out, the UAF, together with the higher education

institutions will be able to adjust their policies and cooperate better, which will lead to better integration of refugee students and give them better opportunities in their lives. This research includes dropouts in the study phase and will not include dropouts in the preparation phase, because, as mentioned before, the UAF tries to improve this with internal policies.

In the current research, the target group is refugee students. However, research on dropout among refugee students is scarce. Research on dropout among non-western immigrants is carried out more often. An assumption of this research is that similarities and differences exist in the problems non-western immigrants and refugee students experience while studying in the Netherlands. For example, the Dutch language and culture are different from the language and culture of both groups. Furthermore, both groups lack a network in the Netherlands, non-western immigrants because they are usually first generation students (students whose parents did not study) and refugee students because they often had to leave their family and friends behind. Differences can be found in that refugee students often have a traumatic flight background, are generally older and are usually not first generation students (UAF, 2008). Because more research is available on non-western immigrants, and overlap on important features exists, research on non-western immigrants will be included.

## 2. Theoretical approach

### 2.1 Higher education persistence and dropout theories

An influential model of the persistence process in the higher education is developed by Tinto (1975). He stated that successful persistence can be determined by first, experiences prior to attending higher education and individual student characteristics and second, by experiences at higher education institutions (Rovai, 2003). Tinto's model can be applied to the average undergraduate student. Bean and Metzner (1985), therefore, added factors to explain persistence for the so called 'non-traditional' student. These students are generally older and followed different paths into higher education than 'traditional' students who entered straight after high school. According to Bean and Metzner (1985), the factors that affect persistence are: academic variables, background and defining variables, environmental variables, academic outcomes and psychological outcomes (Figure 1.).

The model can be interpreted as following: when both environmental and academic factors are positive, students will most likely not dropout. When they are both unfavorable, students will probably dropout. When academic variables are favorable, but environmental factors are not, the positive effects of academic factors on student goal attainment are attenuated or suppressed. When students perceive low levels of satisfaction, goal commitment or utility, or experience high stress levels, they may drop out, despite strong academic performance (Henry & Smith, 1993).

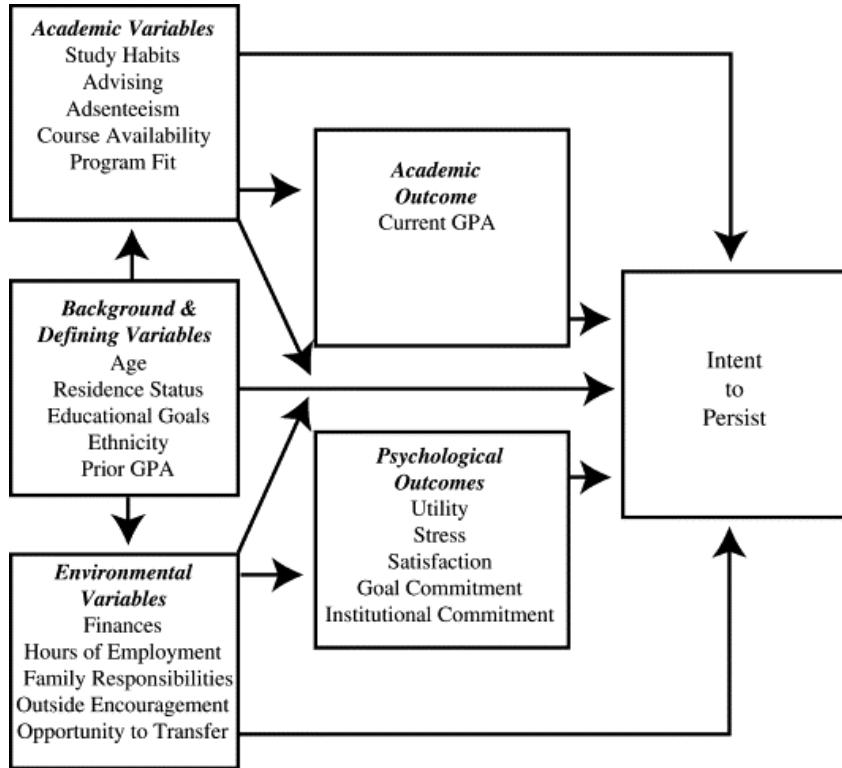


Figure 1. Persistence model of Bean and Metzner.

## 2.2 The capability approach

Together with the persistence theory, Sen's capability approach (1979) will be used to form an integrated theoretical framework. The capability approach provides a framework for evaluating and assessing individual well-being and social arrangements (Robeyns, 2005). Sen states that real freedom to live the life an individual wants is based on the right set of resources, functionings and capabilities. Resources are the things that are available to a person, for example: education, income and health. Functionings are the actual 'beings and doings', in other words, the states and activities that constitute an individual's well-being. For example, being healthy and having self-esteem are functionings (Séverine & Shahani, 2009).

The freedom, or choice, to enjoy different functionings is called capability. "The various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that the individual can achieve. Capability is, thus, a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another... to choose from possible livings" (Sen, 1992, p. 40). In other words, capabilities are the real freedom an individual has to lead the life he or she wants (Séverine & Shahani, 2009). Figure 2. explains the approach in a model. Conversion factors are social structures, in this stage of the approach, the structural effects have to be included to determine which and how resources can be turned into functionings (Goerne, 2010). Conversion factors are seen as external structures, while the concept of choice refers to internal limitations. Internal constraints can be, for example, lack of desire to attain

certain functionings. This is called the ‘adaptive preference formation’ and means that “individuals living in situations of deprivation or oppression often adjust their expectations downwards” (Goerne, 2010, p. 8).

The capability approach explains why two individuals with the same set of means can have different opportunities (Sen, 2005). For example, a refugee living in the Netherlands can have less opportunities to study than a native Dutch individual, both having equal intellectual capacities. Their set of means is equal, but they do not have the same opportunities to accomplish their goals, because refugees encounter more barriers which might prevent them from finishing.

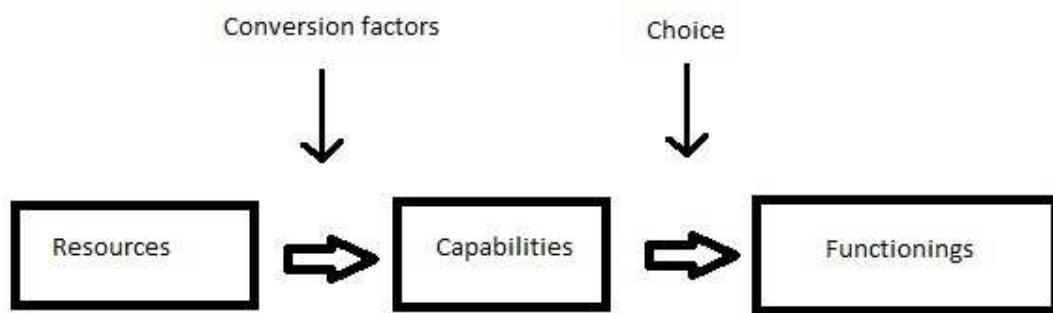


Figure 2. Model Capability Approach

Several empirical researches have applied the capability approach. Robeyns (2003), conducted research about how the capability approach can be applied to conceptualize and assess gender inequality in Western societies. Sen (2005) argues that capabilities should be context depended, because the application of the capability approach can vary. Robeyns (2003), agrees and proposed criteria to select relevant capabilities. She started with unconstrained brainstorming, then engaged with already existing literature on socio-economics and debates on gender inequality. Next, the list, which was generated after the first two steps, was compared with existing lists. Finally, the list was debated at several conferences, feminist activist networks etc. The comments she got on the list led to several revisions and will continue to do this in the future (Robeyns, 2003).

Furthermore, Robeyns (2003) argued that the starting position when looking at inequalities in groups should be that achieved functionings mirror inequalities in functionings, “unless there is a good reason to expect one group to systematically choose different functionings from its capability set relative to another group.” (Robeyns, 2003, p. 87). In her 2005 research, Robeyns links the capability approach to education. She argues that “being knowledgeable and having access to an education that allows a person to flourish is generally argued to be a valuable capability” (Robeyns, 2005, p. 78). Also, this capability can be important for the development of other capabilities.

Van Wel, Knijn, Abma and Peeters-Bijlsma (2012) applied the capability approach in their research about partially disabled employees in the Netherlands. They provide a theoretical framework

which assumes that “it is an individual’s experience of being free to choose that influences his or her return to work” (van Wel, et al., 2012, p. 91.). According to their earning capacity, partly disabled workers will be able to work if social and/or institutional support is experienced, if there is acceptance of their disability, if they can cope with having a job while being partly disabled and if they feel that they are recognized as having the capacities to work. If this is the case, according to Sen (1999), it is a practical choice for them to use their specific combination of capabilities. In line with Sen’s approach, social support, chance to return to work and the capability to work positively influenced well-being the most. Besides institutional support, a combination of institutional pressure and financial compensation for the assessed degrees of sickness also contributes to the participation of the respondents on the labour market. Finally, they found that next to perceived health and low disability status, acceptance of institutional pressure and experienced support for reintegration contributes to the capability to work (van Wel, et al., 2012).

### **2.3 Previous research**

*In this section research is included related to general dropout in the Netherlands, dropout among non-western immigrants, dropout among refugee students and diversity policies.*

#### *2.3.1 General dropout in the Dutch higher education system*

In their research about dropout in the Dutch higher education, Wartenbergh and van der Broek (2008), found that students with a low socio-economic background, first generation students and non-western immigrants are at higher risk to drop out. The main reasons to dropout were personal circumstances, lack of motivation and displeasure with the institution (Wartenbergh & van der Broek, 2008). Furthermore, students who enter the higher education through non-traditional routes drop out more often (Crul, Pasztor & Lelie, 2008). Non-western immigrants and refugee students enter through non-traditional routes more often than native Dutch students (Hulsker, 2001; Marginson, et al., 2008).

#### *2.3.2 Dropout among non-western immigrants*

Next to studies on general dropout, several studies on the performance of non-western immigrants exist. These studies show that they drop out more often (Wolff, 2007) and gain less study progress in the first year (Severiens, Wolff & Rezai, 2006) than native Dutch students from the same age group or with the same background studies. The lack of a connection with the institution is an important reason among non-western immigrants to drop out. With the lack of a connection, it is meant that non-western immigrants do not feel comfortable or at home at their institution (Crul & Wolff, 2002). Furthermore, dropout among non-western immigrants at universities is lower than at UAS institutions, because the preparation of university students is generally better, the inflow is more homogenous and

the difference in age at universities is lower, which in turn leads to smaller differences in dropout (Wolff, 2007). Also, Severiens et al. (2006), found that native Dutch students gain a higher grade point average (GPA) than non-western immigrants. Their explanation lies in differences in starting position. More often non-western immigrants have lower educated parents, lower language skills, a distorted school career and find it more complicated to combine school and work. Also, more often a good and quiet study place is not available. It can be concluded that non-western immigrants are depending more on their learning environment, while native Dutch students have a more favourable starting position (Severiens, et al., 2006).

### *2.3.3 Dropout among refugee students*

Research on dropout among refugee students in Great Britain shows that they experience several barriers while entering the higher education system. These barriers include their bad financial situation, lack of information and guidance, the often low language level, difficulties with the recognition of qualifications, care responsibilities and socio-cultural influences upon their attitudes and aspirations towards education. These barriers also relate to non-traditional students, as mentioned in Bean and Metzner's model (1985). Only the language level and recognition of previous qualifications are specific for refugee students (Banks & MacDonald, 2003).

Research including only UAF students (Hulsker, 2001; UAF, 2008), indicate that dropout among refugee students at universities is less than at UAS institutions. Dropout reasons turn out to be 'personal circumstances' including: the obligation for individuals above 30 to apply for jobs, the pressure from the Social Service, that is pushing these individuals to find a job, the combination of studying with work and/or care responsibilities, physical and mental problems and not being able to follow the study trajectory of choice. Problems with adaptation in the Netherlands, the language barrier and the study pace also play a role, but are not considered to be decisive (Hulsker, 2001; UAF, 2008).

### *2.3.4 Diversity policies*

Several researches stress the importance of diversity policies at higher education institutions (Waterval & Meziana, 2009; Inspection of Education 2007; 2009). The majority of studies researched does not succeed in diminishing the gap in study success between non-western and Dutch students (Marginson, Weko, Channon, Luukonen and Ober, 2008). According to Waterval & Meziana (2009), integral diversity policies are the only solution to diminish the gap and to establish a better connection for non-western immigrants with their institution.

The focus of the Inspection of Education (2007; 2009) is mainly on non-western immigrants, however, a diversity policy should help all students at a higher education institution to improve their study success and understanding of diversity (Waterval & Meziana, 2009). This statement indicates that diversity policies should help all kinds of students. Therefore, it can be expected that refugee

students will also gain from diversity policies, not in the last place because of the previously mentioned similarities with non-western immigrants.

#### 2.4 Conclusion

The theories and researches are combined in an integrated theoretical framework. By applying the persistence model (figure 1.) on the situation of refugee students and combining it with the capability approach (figure 2.), four categories and their including concepts that are expected to influence the intent to persist are defined and depicted (figure 3.). To every concept it is added whether it is a barrier, resource, functioning or capability.

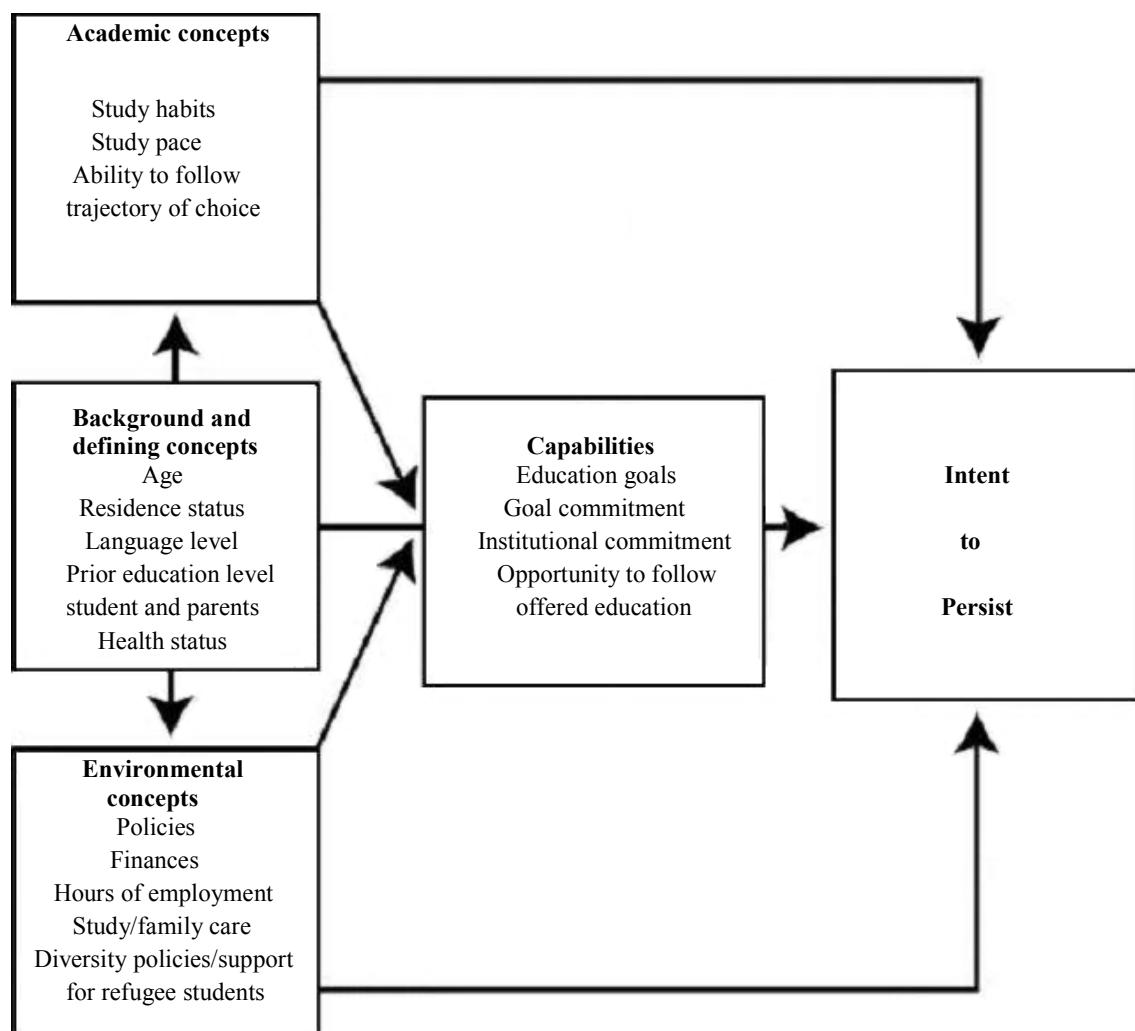


Figure 3. The persistence model and the capability approach combined.

##### 1. Academic concepts

Academic concepts include a student's study habits. Students who persist spend more time studying and report more satisfaction with their study habits than dropout students (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

Study habits are an example of a functioning, the actual beings and doings of a student. Study pace can be a barrier in persistence. The study pace can be either too fast or too slow, which both lead to less persistence. For refugee students, the pace is often too fast, because they are not used to the Dutch system, might have language problems etc. (Hulscher, 2001). The final important concept is the ability to follow the trajectory of choice. Refugee students who are more persistent usually feel as though they independently made their study choice and were not forced by family, friends or the UAF. Furthermore, when they choose independently, they feel a better study fit and more motivation to get their degree (Hulscher, 2001). This concept is an example of a capability, it shows the actual freedom of a student to lead the life he or she wants.

## *2. Background and defining concepts*

Background and defining concepts include individual features that could influence persistence. The age and related responsibilities and feelings can be barriers. Refugee students generally start later than native Dutch students, often due to bureaucratic and policy related factors. Refugee students often have to start again, because their diploma is not valid here or because of long stays in asylum seekers centres where there is not always a possibility to study (Hulscher, 2001). Age is a barrier when refugee students feel they do not fit in with their fellow, younger, students. Furthermore, older students who were away from the formal learning system for a long time lack confidence in ability to succeed (Bean & Metzner, 1985).

The residence permit is a resource for refugee students. When they do not have a permanent permit, the doubt of whether they will receive this might lead to fear and stress which hinders the study. Furthermore, when refugee students do not receive a permit, they inevitably drop out, because they have to leave the country. Also, students without a valid permit are not allowed to follow an internship and without this, it is impossible to graduate from some institutions (Hulscher, 2001).

Furthermore, the language level can influence drop out. Refugee students have to take a Dutch language test before entering the higher education institute, but it turns out that students who pass this test can still have troubles with understanding the content of their study (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Hulscher, 2001). Language level falls in the resources category, because the availability of and access to language lessons is necessary to get the language on a higher level.

The prior education levels of both the student and the parents influence persistence. Refugee students can already have studied in their country of origin and a high prior education level is an indicator for persistence (Hulscher, 2001). Also, second generation student are more persistent in getting their degree. They often have grown up with the idea of going to college and are, therefore, better prepared (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Wartenbergh & van der Broek, 2008). These concepts are resources, because previous knowledge and knowledge about student life is expected to help refugee students succeed.

Mental and physical problems in general are barriers for students. Refugee students can have more severe mental problems due to traumatic flight experiences (Hulsker, 2001). These health related problems are functionings, because it is a state that constitutes an individual's well-being. Feeling healthy is an important functioning in being able to finish a study.

### *3. Environmental concepts*

Environmental concepts include non-academic concepts in the student's environment that might influence persistence. The Dutch application policy is an example. After a refugee student has a permanent residence permit and is older than 30 years, they have the obligation to apply for jobs and if they do not, the Social Services will pressure them to start. This obligation and pressure could lead to stress and less time for studying, and lead to a higher chance to dropout. Also, students in the Netherlands do not receive financial help from the government after they turn 30. Because refugee students are usually older, the chances are higher that this applies to them (Hulsker, 2001). Policies are an example of resources, they either help or form a barrier for refugee students.

Finances are another environmental concept. Refugee students often deal with a weak financial situation, because they had to leave everything behind during their flight and their parents are not able to help financially. The UAF helps financially, but do not cover everything. If a student is not able to get money from other sources, the chance of dropout increases (Hulsker, 2001; UAF, 2008). The finances are resources, because, to follow education, money is needed.

Some refugee students work to finance their study and living costs. This often means there is less time for studying. The more hours a student works, the more likely a student drops out (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Hulsker, 2001). Work is a functioning, it is an actual 'doing' of a student.

Family responsibilities form another problem. Sick family members or relatives who do not speak the language and need help with appointments at official institutions take up a lot of time. When a refugee student has to take care of the family, the chance of dropout increases (Hulsker, 2001; UAF, 2008). This concept can be seen as a functioning as well as a capability. The student is taking care, but on the other hand, the care for family members hinders the freedom to choose the life the student wants.

Finally, diversity policies have shown to have a good influence on study success of non-western immigrants (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 2007; 2009). Special support for refugee students is, therefore, expected to have a good influence on their study success. This concept is a resource, because it helps refugee students during their study period.

### *4. Capabilities*

The fourth category includes the main capabilities that influence persistence. The previous concepts all might influence these capabilities.

Capabilities include education goals, goal commitment and institutional commitment. When students set high education goals, it means that they are motivated and determined to get a degree on the level they think is possible. If this is the case, the chances are higher that a student will graduate on this level. When a student starts studying with other intentions, such as pressure from the family, they do not experience the freedom to choose the study life they achieve and chances of dropout increase (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Refugee students are in general goal committed. In the Netherlands they get the opportunity to study, something they could not have done in their home country and without help (Hulsker, 2001). The previous mentioned concepts, however, could get in the way of their commitment. Institutional commitment is influenced by diversity policies, special arrangements and general counseling. When a student feels heard and helped at the institution, in other words, when a student is satisfied with the offered resources, chances are high that the student is committed to continue studying there. The commitment levels, influenced by the functionings, reflect the student's freedom to lead one type of life or another.

Finally the most important capability in this research is the opportunity to make use of the offered education. When refugee students have the right set resources and functionings to deal with the barriers they might encounter, it gives them the opportunity to follow the study path they want.

Several concepts from figure 1. are not used in the four categories. For example, the academic outcome is not relevant, because the model is used for dropouts whose current GPA is not always available. The concepts 'advising', 'absenteeism' and 'course availability' are combined to 'ability to follow trajectory of choice', because this is the overarching concept that consists of these sub concepts. 'Prior GPA' and 'Ethnicity' are removed, because the first is not applicable to all refugee students, because students who have not studied before do not have a prior GPA. The second concept is removed, because ethnicity in Bean and Metzner's (1985) model means whether a student is native or non-native and refugee students are all non-natives. 'Outside encouragement' is replaced by 'Diversity policies and special support at higher education institution', because this research focusses mostly on support from institutions. The concept 'Opportunity to transfer' is left out, because in the Netherlands, every student has the same opportunity to transfer from one institution to another on the same level. 'Satisfaction' is put under the concept 'Institutional commitment', because satisfaction with the institution is supposed to lead to commitment. The psychological outcomes are named capabilities and 'Utility' and 'Stress' are left out and replaced by 'Opportunity to follow offered education', because the utility and stress levels at the moment of dropout are too complex to measure and the opportunity to follow the offered education is an important capability for study success.

### **3. Research question**

Based on the theoretical framework the following research question is formulated:

*How do specific barriers, functionings and capabilities lead to dropout among refugee students in four Dutch higher education institutions?*

Based on Sen's capability approach, this research will be carried out to see whether refugee students face certain barriers on the one hand and have the right set of functionings to improve their capabilities on the other. No research has been carried out yet that has applied this approach to this topic. Therefore, this research is scientifically relevant, because it explores a new field of linking theory with explanations for dropout among refugee students and offers a new way to apply the capability approach.

The following sub questions will be used to answer the research question:

1. *Do the four higher education institutions have diversity policies and/or arrangements for non-western immigrants and refugee students?*
2. *What is the vision of the four higher education institutions on diversity and help for refugee students?*
3. *What are the main reasons refugee students drop out?*
4. *How satisfied were refugee student dropouts with the support at their higher education institution?*

#### **3.1 Expectations**

Derived from the theoretical framework and previous empirical studies, several expectations are made. Following Robeyns (2003), it is expected that the achieved functionings mirror inequalities in functionings between the group of refugee students and native Dutch students, because it is expected that refugee students do not have specific reasons to systematically choose different functionings from their capability set than native Dutch students. This is assumed because refugee students are expected to have the same motivation to accomplish their study, but that due to several barriers, they do not have the same starting position.

The barriers that could lead to dropout among refugee students are expected to be difficulties with language, lack of support from the higher education institution, the combination of studying with care and/or work responsibilities, policies regarding application obligations, physical and mental problems and not being able to follow the study trajectory of choice. Based on the adaptive preference formation (Goerne, 2010), it is expected that because of the barriers refugee students encounter while studying in the Netherlands, they adjust their expectations and aspirations downwards, which might explain the high dropout. Finally, diversity policies and other arrangements for refugee students are

expected to improve their functionings, which in turn leads to an increase in capabilities and a decrease in dropouts.

## 4. Research design

*The results are based on website analyses and in-depth interviews. The higher education institutions are chosen in consultation with the UAF, based on their experiences. Two UAS institutions and two universities that either work well or less well with the UAF are chosen to be able to make a comparison between the situations the UAF encounters.*

*The Hogeschool van Amsterdam (HvA) and the Vrije Universiteit (VU) are institutions that work well with the UAF. With Fontys Hogescholen, the UAF has less contact and at the Utrecht University (UU), communication is scattered and few UAF students go there. At this moment 66 UAF students are enrolled at the HvA, 36 at Fontys Eindhoven (from the different locations of Fontys, Eindhoven is chosen, because the largest number of UAF students are enrolled here), 19 at the UU and 49 at the VU.*

### 4.1 Methods

#### 4.1.1 Website analysis

To find the available diversity policies and/or arrangements for refugee students, the websites of the four institutions were analysed. The search terms were: ‘diversity’, ‘immigrant’, ‘non-western immigrant’, ‘G5 project’, ‘UAF’, ‘refugee’, and ‘refugee student’. In the G5 project, the Dutch government provided funds for five Dutch universities to decrease the dropout rate among first generation students. Both the VU and the UU were participating in this project.

#### 4.1.2 In-depth interviews at higher education institutions

To find both the vision on and the content of possible diversity policies and/or arrangements for refugee students, in-depth interviews with employees of the institutions were held.

The interviews were semi-structured and a topic list was used. The topics included the role of the interviewee at the institution, the availability and content of diversity policies, the availability and content of arrangements for refugee students, the vision of the institution on diversity and refugee students, the personal opinions of the interviewees and finally, topics about the implementation and improvements for policies and arrangements were included (annex 1).

The in-depth interviews were used because this enabled the interviewer to examine the interviewees thoroughly and decipher deeper motivations, feelings and ideas. By using a topic list, the interviewer is given enough freedom to analyse specific subjects that come up during the interview

more thoroughly, but it also provides a guideline with topics that need to be discussed at some point (Boeije, 2005).

At Fontys, an exception was made. Due to logistical matters, the four language teachers working with refugee students received a questionnaire about their experiences with and vision on refugee students and the policies at Fontys (annex 3.).

#### *4.1.3 In-depth interviews with dropout refugee students*

To find the main reasons for dropout and the satisfaction with the institution, in-depth interviews with dropout refugee students were held. The questions were based on the four categories (figure 3.) and the answers were labelled and named after the following concepts in each category (annex 2.):

- *Background and defining concepts:* The interviews started with background questions about the age, residence status, language level, prior education level of the interviewee and the parents, their health status, reasons to study in the Netherlands etc. The labels related to the questions in the category ‘background and defining concepts’ were: ‘age’; ‘residence status’; ‘language level’; ‘prior education’; ‘education level parents’; ‘health status’.
- *Academic concepts:* Questions about the time spent studying, the study habits, the study pace and the ability to follow the study trajectory of choice followed. The labels related to the questions in the category ‘academic concepts’ were: ‘study habits’; ‘study pace’; ‘ability to follow trajectory of choice’.
- *Environmental concepts:* The interviewees were asked how they financed their studies, whether they worked and how many hours they worked next to their study, whether they had to take financial or health care of family members and how they experienced counseling at their institution. The labels related to the questions in the category ‘environmental concepts’ were: ‘finances’; ‘policies’; ‘hours of employment’; ‘family responsibilities’; ‘diversity policies and special support at higher education institutions’.
- *Capabilities:* The capabilities were found by combining the answers on the previous questions and by asking questions about the motivation to study, the reasons to study at the particular institution and the satisfaction with the counseling at the institution. The labels related to the questions in the category ‘capabilities’ were: ‘education goals’; ‘goal commitment’; ‘institutional commitment’.

When the main reasons to drop out did not become clear, the interviewer asked for clarification. With all concepts, the personal opinion of the interviewee was important. For example, questions about the *perceived* language level were asked, because an interviewee can pass a language test, but can still experience problems due to, for example, study jargon. Because the interviewees had different stories, the questions were used as a guideline and enough room for personal stories was left. Furthermore, due to possible traumatic experiences, the questions were asked with extra care. If a participant was not willing to talk about certain topics, the participant was not pushed. This method has not led to information loss, because not all participants were willing to share everything, but all

answered the most important questions. To make sure that the interviewees understood the questions in the same way, the interviewer explained the questions when the participant did not understand it or when the interviewer got the impression that the participant did not understand it.

The interviews were typed out in Word and the answers coded under the labels explained above. This method is based on the coding method of Boeije (2005). Also, the dropout students were asked to give suggestions for improvements –if necessary- for higher education institutions. These suggestions were taken into account in the final recommendations.

## **4.2 Participants and participant selection**

### *4.2.1 Employees at higher education institutions*

The UAF provided contacts of two employees working with the UAF per institution. These eight employees received an e-mail asking whether they were willing to participate in an in-depth interview, whether their institution has policies or arrangements for non-western and/or refugee students and whether they could provide contact information of policymakers at their institution. Finally, six interviews took place and four employees at Fontys filled in a questionnaire.

At the VU, a student dean working with refugee students and the coordinator Diversity were interviewed. Both interviews took place at the VU and lasted respectively 40 minutes and 1 hour and 15 minutes. With the HvA, the UAF has a covenant. The covenant program coordinator and a colleague from the language department, who works with refugee students, were interviewed. Both interviews took place at the HvA and lasted 45 minutes. At the UU there are no policies or arrangements for non-western immigrants or refugee students. Therefore, an interview was planned with the head of the student counseling to find out the stand the UU takes regarding student counseling and why no policies and arrangements exist. The interview took place at the UU and lasted 30 minutes. At Fontys there is also no diversity policy or arrangements for refugee students, therefore, the consultant Internationalization from the department of Education & Research was interviewed. This interview lasted 30 minutes. A questionnaire was sent to four Dutch language teachers at Fontys, working with refugee students. The questions asked about their vision and experiences with refugee students (annex 3). All four returned the questionnaire.

### *4.2.2 Dropped out refugee students*

The participants of the in-depth interviews with dropouts were selected based on three criteria. First, only dropouts from the four institutions were included. Second, students who dropped out more than five years ago have been excluded, because the chances of them wanting to participate were minimal and the contact information the UAF has is not up to date anymore. Third, the clients in the UAF database were checked on relevance for the current research, which means that students who dropped out for reasons such as graduation, (forced) move abroad, switch to a study offered at the workplace etc. have been left out. The UAF database did not contain information on dropout reasons of all

clients, therefore, only clients with registered reasons were taken into account. Finally, 46 students met these criteria and were asked by e-mail to participate. The UAF does not provide contact information, therefore, a student counsellor from the UAF sent the e-mail (annex 4). Because the response was low, a reminder e-mail was sent a week later. Finally, nine students replied, of which five did not have time and four participated in an interview.

The four participants were asked to come to the UAF and get their travel costs reimbursed or to meet at a suitable other location. Three interviews took place at the UAF and one at the HvA. The interviews lasted 45-60 minutes. Because the response was low, the snowball method was used (Boeije, 2005). The participants were asked whether they knew other dropouts so they could be contacted. However, none of the participants knew other refugee students, let alone dropouts. Because the non-response was too high, students who did not reply were contacted by phone to participate in a telephonic interview. It was a disadvantage that two different interviewing methods had to be used, because this could lead to different results. However, the benefits of this method were that a larger group could participate in a short time. For the participants it was both easier and less time consuming to answer questions on the phone than to participate in an interview on location. This was also seen in the number of participants, more clients participated in the interviews by phone than replied to the e-mails. Finally, 35 students were called and eight participated. All interviews lasted around 30 minutes.

Finally, twelve interviews took place. Four students dropped out at the VU, four at the HvA, two at the UU and two at Fontys Eindhoven. The interviewees were given a code which was used in the data analyses (annex 5).

#### **4.3 Main question**

The barriers refugee students encounter, the satisfaction with their institution, together with the available policies and/or arrangements for refugee students and the vision of the institutions provided an answer to the main question: "How do specific barriers, functionings and capabilities lead to dropout among refugee students in four Dutch higher education institutions?". Because the research mainly consisted of in-depth interviews, the results are not generalizable to the whole refugee student population at the four institutions. However, the results explained the different visions on diversity and refugee students and the results from the interviews with dropouts showed their motivations, barriers, feelings and ideas of how refugee students should be treated in the higher education system.

## **5. Results**

### **5.1 Sub question 1**

Do the four higher education institutions have diversity policies and/or arrangements for non-western immigrants and refugee students?

*From the website analysis (annex 6.), it turns out that the VU is the only institution with a diversity policy and the HvA is the only institution with arrangements for refugee students (VU-1, 2013; HvA-1, 2013). At the UU there used to be diversity policies, but currently only some faculties are working with diversity (UU-1, 2013). At Fontys Eindhoven, no diversity policies and/or arrangements for refugee students exist (Fontys, 2013). Therefore, Fontys is left out in this section. In this section, the content of the policies and arrangements are explained based on the online information and the interviews.*

#### VU

The main concepts of the diversity policy at the VU are, first, a collaboration with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). For 35 years, the UCLA has been developing their diversity policies. The VU uses their good practices to organize their own activities. Also, the collaboration led to exchange programs mainly for first generation students of the VU and UCLA. Second, a Summer course for first generation students is offered, in order to help them adjust at university more easily. Third, student involvement is important to establish a deeper understanding between students about their different backgrounds and religions. By including all students at the university, the VU tries to accomplish this. For example, at the Summer course, Dutch students are asked to become a buddy for a first generation student. Fourth, the joint research program ‘Diversity in Higher Education’, is an initiative of the VU, UCLA and two South-African universities. The faculty of Social Sciences functions as the precursor of the university-broad research program. And fifth, the VU On Campus, organizes several activities together with student organizations at the VU. These activities include sport-days and activities at the start and end of the college year (VU-2, 2013).

#### UU

The UU does not have diversity policies or arrangements for refugee students on the university level at the moment. In 2003, the UU started to develop diversity policies and in 2007 an evaluation was carried out among students. The results indicated that students with different backgrounds did not experience more problems than native Dutch students. Also, the majority of the UU students had the opinion that diversity policies were not necessary (Stichting Onderwijs Evaluatie Rapport, 2008).

The UU participated in the G5 project and, in light of this project, carried out research on differences between first and second generation students. Differences between the groups were found, but were not as large as expected. Both groups obtain the same amount of study points and struggle

with the same kind of problems regarding their study and motivation (Nooijens, Rietdijk & Wijngaards-de Meij, 2013a,b,c).

Furthermore, a collaboration between the vocational education in Utrecht, the Utrecht UAS and the UU, called the ‘Utrecht Bridge’, was founded. This collaboration was supposed to help first generation students at all education institutions. In 2009, the project was canceled, because according to the head of the student counseling, the counseling cycle at the UU improved and there were no major problems found at the UU regarding first generation students.

At the moment there are no diversity policies at the UU. However, some faculties continue working with this theme, for example, the humanities faculty has a diversity advising group (UU-2, 2013).

### HvA

At the HvA no diversity policies exist. However, it is the only institution with a covenant with the UAF. For around 20 years the HvA is working together with the UAF. Because the HvA believes in the good cause of the UAF, the collaboration became stronger. Since last year, a pilot with the name ‘Students that matter’ has started. This program contains three sub programs: education, research and learning to live together. During the past year activities are organized to help refugee students adjust to the different life, habits and language in the Netherlands (HvA-2).

Based on the interviews about the covenant, it turns out that the number of participants in the activities has not been high. All refugee students were invited to an intake conversation. From the 75 students, 30 showed up and from these 30, about 25 liked to have more support. The low turnout could indicate that the majority of refugee students is not interested it could also mean that they are not aware of the available facilities. Most importantly, the HvA is willing to improve their services for refugee students. An official evaluation of the pilot year will be carried out and based on these results improvements will be made. For now they strive to at least have every refugee student come to the intake conversation, in order to find out why most refugee students do not participate in the activities.

### **5.2 Sub question 2**

What is the vision of the four higher education institutions on diversity and help for refugee students?

*In this section, the interviews with the employees of the institutions and the online information are combined to define the visions and reasons behind the visions of the four institutions.*

### VU

The VU has a diverse student population, after the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, the VU has the highest percentage of non-western students. In their opinion, an excellent university can only be a diverse university. One of the three core values of the VU is “Openness for diversity in disciplines, nationalities, ideologies and societal convictions.” (VU-3, 2013). From origin the VU is a university

with a Christian foundation. Together with the diversity in the student population of the VU these Christian values might be the reason for the extended diversity policies at the VU. Equality regardless of any characteristics is one of the goals the VU wants to achieve. Diversity is seen as a source of creativity and innovation and viewed as an enrichment for their university (VU-4, 2013).

When it comes to refugee students, the VU does not have specific policies. Their diversity policy does not focus on target groups, but should help all students in some way. The fundamental statement of the policy is that people can always look for differences, but can also look for similarities which can help all groups. Therefore, the VU considers refugee students as part of the student population that might need more help with, for example, language. But refugee students are not the only ones that might need help with the language, therefore, counseling exists for all students. The VU does have a student dean who is more involved in refugee students and knows about possible difficulties these students might encounter, for example traumatic experiences and language problems.

*“I know, for example, that refugee students are also part of the clientele of our student deans. So it is not the case that refugee students do not get any extra attention. It is just that it is not the primary goal of our diversity policy to hand this group special privileges.”*

The type of policies the VU applies are a combination of ‘universalism’ and ‘selectivism’ policies, not to be confused with the previously explained preference policies. In universalistic policies, the whole population benefits from arrangements as a basic right, while in selectivistic policies, social benefits are for the ‘truly deserving’ (Mkandawire, 2005). The diversity policy at the VU helps the whole student and employee population on the one hand, but also focusses on the non-western population.

## UU

At the UU the opinions on diversity differ. The general opinion seems to be that preference policies for specific groups are undesirable. Because at the UU diversity policies are seen as a form of preference policies, these policies do not exist on university level.

*“(… ) and I also think ‘why would you help this small group more than other groups?’ . Because, of course they have problems, and I’m not saying it is all so easy, but is it worse than a top sportsman who needs to reschedule exams because of an important match? Well, we also do not allow that.”*

Furthermore, the population of non-western and refugee students is small at the UU. Therefore, it is not deemed necessary to provide special arrangements for these groups on university level, because it would not contribute much to decrease the overall dropout. However, the university does want to use research to improve counseling for students. If it is known which groups might need extra help, the

university can focus on that. But since some groups are so diverse, specific counseling is not easy to develop.

Also, the UU participated in the G5 project, which resulted in several activities on faculty level. These activities did not lead to diversity policies in the participating faculties, but at the moment a diversity advising group still exists at the humanities faculty (UU-2). It seems therefore, that on the general student counseling level, based on the interview with the head of the student counseling, special attention for minority groups is not deemed necessary. On the faculty level, on the other hand, there are employees who think that attention for diversity is important and the UU offers room for them to develop activities.

Furthermore, student counseling is seen as an important aspect to help all students graduate. The policies at the UU are, therefore, universalistic policies, because the whole population should benefit from it. The head of the student counseling has a very clear opinion that if a –refugee- student behaves professionally, help is available. Exceptions for refugees and other students with a non-traditional background are not made on a regular basis, they are treated the same way as all students.

*"It is about people. It is about that as you, as a student, come here and you behave professionally, we have professional counselors that can easily help you. We don't need policies for that, because these people go to their work every morning to do this."*

### HvA

At the HvA, the vision about refugee students is the most clear. Last year a covenant with the UAF was signed, declaring that they will provide extra help for refugee students by organizing several activities throughout the year. The collaboration started a long time ago, but up until now it was not so intensive. The student population at the HvA is getting more diverse and the HvA wants to stand out on this diversity theme. This is why the collaboration with the UAF was extended. It is seen as a good example to promote diversity. Furthermore, the HvA wants to help refugee students in different ways to succeed, but also awareness among the other students is a major part in their program.

For non-western immigrants, however, there are no special arrangements. The reason for this is because, in their opinion, within the non-western immigrant group it is too difficult to define who fits and who does not.

*"Refugee students have a more specific problem situation. Furthermore, there is an organization, the UAF, who specifically focusses on this group. This makes it easier to define and to help this group. It is a small group of students, but their problems can be found all over our society. Therefore, we also have the awareness program, all students at the HvA should be aware of who they are studying with and with whom they could end up working in a diverse city as Amsterdam. Also, refugee students are often seen as piteous people, but we want to*

*show them that they are not, that they are very strong people. When I hear what someone has been through and the way they look at their lives, it really inspires me.”*

The policies regarding refugee students at the HvA are selectivism policies. This group is seen as ‘truly deserving’ to have special benefits.

#### Fontys Hogeschool Eindhoven

At Fontys Eindhoven the policy organization is decentralized. This is in contrary to the other researched institutions, where policies are more made on a central level. Faculties at Fontys can develop their own policies, and only when the quality of education itself comes in danger or university wide goals are involved, central policies are developed. Non-western immigrants and refugee students are not groups which are very visible at Fontys, therefore, no central policies are available. Due to the decentralization and the lack of policies for refugee students, no relevant policies at Fontys can be put in the ‘universalism’ or ‘selectivism’ categories.

Because faculties can make their own policies, it could be possible that diversity policies or special arrangements for refugee students exist on the faculty level. However, it seems that only at the language department special attention exists. The contacted language teachers all mention differences between refugee students and other students.

*“Our refugee students find it more difficult to feel at home at this study, they find it more difficult to find their way to the secretariat and the computer environment in which they have to work. Also I think that the study pace is very high for them and they don’t easily connect with the other students.”*

The language teachers also mention their collaboration with the UAF. They report their findings to the UAF, but would like to extend and improve this collaboration further. Also, they would like to have more arrangements for these students at Fontys.

*“I would like to see that special attention for these students becomes available by means of, for example, supervised homework hours, extra computer trainings or prolonged course duration.”*

At the language department refugee students get help and support, however, language lessons are usually in the preparation phase, before studying. During the actual study process, refugee students do not receive extra help, because this target group is not considered large enough by the faculties.

### **5.3 Sub question 3**

#### What are the main reasons refugee students drop out?

*In this section, the analysis of the interviews can be found. The labels (annex 2) are used to cluster the concepts in the four categories. The questions and answers all relate to the study and the institution the interviewees dropped out at, but because the majority continued studying, the answers can contain references to their current study.*

#### **Academic concepts**

##### Study habits

To find the influence of study habits, questions were asked about how much time the interviewees spent studying, whether this was enough and whether they had good study habits in their opinion. The refugee students said they spent enough time studying but found it difficult to say whether their study habits were sufficient. However, they did not mention bad study habits as a reason to drop out. Some interviewees mentioned that because they lived in asylum seekers centres during their studies, they did not have a quiet environment to study and often they did not have access to a computer or the internet. This made it harder for them to study.

##### Study pace

The question ‘could you keep up with the pace of your study?’ was used to find the influence of study pace on dropout. Mainly due to external factors, such as the scientific jargon, the interviewees had difficulties with keeping up. Furthermore, they experienced difficulties due to the different system. In their countries, they were not used to the practical working groups, but only followed theoretical lectures. They did not know how to discuss the subject-matters with their fellow students in a working group.

*RsHvA1: “I was not prepared at all. In Africa we don’t have working groups, I didn’t know how to behave in this situation. The theoretical courses and exams were fine, I passed all of them. But I failed the practical assignments, because I had problems with communicating in the Netherlands and I didn’t understand the system.”*

Not all refugee students had problems with the study pace, they could keep up with the other students and could adjust to the Dutch system without any major problems.

##### Ability to follow trajectory of choice

The interviewees were asked whether they chose their own study, whether they were satisfied with the information available beforehand and whether they got enough help with the decision. Most of the interviewees said they chose their studies independently. For some this turned out well, they chose

what they wanted and were satisfied. Others wished that they received more help, they feel as if they could have made better choices if they had more information about the content and their own abilities.

*RsUu2: "I started my Master in Science at the UU, but it was a lot more scientific than I imagined. After a year the UAF and the UU decided I had to quit and that I could continue a bachelor in Science. I am happy that they gave me this change, but it had cost me a year. I would've liked to know before how scientific university is here."*

Not all interviewees made their study choice independently, some got advice from friends, family and the UAF. With these advices, interviewees were satisfied and it had helped them to choose the right study. However, bad advice also led refugee students to make the wrong decision.

*RsHvA4: "If I could go back a couple of years, when I did the preparation year at the VU, I would have chosen to study Informatics there and not at the HvA. I didn't do that at the time, because of the wrong opinion of others. My friends and family said it was better if I would do a UAS study. They said it is too much science at the VU, with an UAS diploma it is easier to find a job. So I chose UAS, but now I regret that and I want to do my Master at the VU."*

## **Background and defining concepts**

### Age

The age concept is usually influenced by other concepts. For example, policies which are age-related can lead to barriers, but this concept will be analysed later. In this section, the personal age-related feelings and barriers are analysed. The interviewees were asked if their age at the time of their drop out was influencing their study success positively, negatively or was of no influence. Some of the interviewees said that their age was only a difficulty because of age-related policy factors. The interviewees did not experience that they did not fit in due to their age.

### Residence status

The interviewees were asked about their residence status during the study they dropped out at and the ones that did not have a permit were asked whether it complicated their study success. Difficulties due to this concept, the same as with the age concept, are also related to policy factors. Students without a valid permit cannot follow an internship and students without a permanent permit can experience insecurities about their stay in the Netherlands, which in turn can distract them from their studies. These concepts relate to the student having a permanent permit or not, and are therefore placed under this concept.

Not all of the interviewees had a permanent residence permit. Their answers indicate that it is difficult for refugee students without a permit to study, but that some institutions help these students. This means that it depends on the situation of the refugee student and at which institution they study.

*RsVu4: "When I did my UAS study in Groningen I didn't have a residence permit. They knew my situation there and the teachers were really nice and involved. They made me feel comfortable and allowed me to study."*

*RsHvA4: "My residence status was unsure, I had problems, I was afraid I had to leave the Netherlands. My future didn't make sense for me anymore. So I didn't feel motivated to continue anymore."*

*RsVu1: "I started at the Utrecht UAS and I passed all the theoretical courses, but I had to quit, because I didn't have a residence permit. I wasn't allowed to do an internship. The same happened again at the VU, I had a temporary residence permit, but it was expired so I had to quit again."*

Refugee students who either had a temporary or permanent permit did not experience difficulties due to their residence status.

#### Language level

Refugee students have to do a mandatory language test before entering the higher education, but it turns out that students who pass this test can still have trouble understanding the study content. Therefore, the students are not asked about their official language level, but about their own experiences.

Language turned out to be a problem among the interviewees. During the interviews, the interviewer noticed that some of the interviewees who claimed to have a good language level were difficult to understand and did not understand all the questions. This might be because they are ashamed to admit they do not understand it, or they overestimate their own language level.

Furthermore, differences between the ability to speak Dutch on conversation level and on scientific level exist. Refugee students are able to speak the language on conversation level well, but can experience problems during their study with the special jargon.

*RsFon1: "I understand the language and I can speak it, but these scientific names... It is difficult to understand in a different language."*

For refugee students, learning the language can also be a way of trying to fit in with their fellow students. It is important for them to be able to understand everything correctly, in daily life as well as in class.

*RsVu4: "I don't want to be seen as 'the refugee student', I am a normal student and I studied hard to learn the language. If you really want to learn it, you will find your own way, it is your responsibility."*

#### Prior education level

The interviewees were asked whether they studied in their country of origin, what they studied, if they finished it, if their diploma was accredited in the Netherlands and at which level they studied. The prior education levels of refugee students differ. Refugee students who arrived in the Netherlands at an early age went to high school here. Others have not been able to finish education in their country of origin because of wars and their flight and had to start again in the Netherlands. Another possibility is that refugee students finished higher education in the country of origin and got their diploma accredited in the Netherlands. Not every refugee student strives to get the diploma accredited, because they do not think that it will help them study in the Netherlands.

*RsHvA4: "In Iran I finished high school and I studied Electricity. I didn't like it so much and I didn't want to do this in the Netherlands, I wanted to study Informatics. So I didn't see why I had to get my Electricity diploma accredited here."*

#### Education level parents

The education level of the parents was measured by asking whether the parents of the interviewees had studied and by asking them to describe this in terms of the Dutch education system. Fathers of the refugee students have most often studied at either university or UAS, while the mothers had only finished primary or high school. The education levels of the parents were not seen as a reason to make the decision to study.

#### Mental and physical status

To find out whether the mental and/or physical status of the students influenced the dropout process, the interviewees were asked to recall their health status. If they mentioned they had health problems, questions about the severity and whether it influenced their study process were asked.

The health status of the refugee students in general was good. However, the flight background could lead to mental problems that stood in the way of their study success.

*RsHvA3: "I do have sleeping problems, I have it since 2007. I have been in prison for a year, and I was afraid to sleep there. I have these problems ever since. The doctor said I should read a book and try to sleep, but that really doesn't help. I'm used to it now, but in the beginning it was really hard for me to focus on my study and still I don't feel very active."*

Also, the physical status was sometimes seen as a reason for difficulties to continue studying. Pains and diseases made it hard to focus on studying.

*RsVu2: "It is the Dutch weather... my resistance is so low because of this bad weather the whole year. My body hurts and I'm sick a lot. This makes it complicated for me to study."*

## **Environmental concepts**

### Policies

The questions about Dutch policies applied to the interviewees of almost 30 years or older, because they were old enough to be addressed by these policies. The refugee students did not experience problems with the application obligation and pressure from the Social Service. The bigger problem was that they are applying, but cannot find a job. Difficulties because of the study-financing policy were also experienced in this age group.

*RsVu3: "At the VU they told me to stop and get my things together and I could start the same program again next year. I thought it was a good idea at the time and I stopped. But I will be 30 soon. They did not tell me I do not get study financing after I am 30. How am I supposed to finance my study now? Now it is not possible to start again, I don't have money."*

### Finances and hours of employment

The financial situation and hours of employment are closely related concepts. The interviewees were asked questions about how they financed their study, whether this was enough, whether they had to work to finance their study and living costs and whether the amount of working hours affected the study success. The financial situation of the interviewees was not good, but they had enough income to study. The students got their finances by receiving study financing or state benefits, by working next to their study, by UAF funds and/or financed their study and living costs with a combination of these resources. Working next to studying is usually seen as impossible, because of the limited time the students have next to studying.

*RsUu2: "We don't have a lot of money, and my parents are also poor. But I've been studying full-time, it's not possible to work for me."*

Students who did work during their studies said that they had to work to survive, but that their study was the most important. Therefore, they made sure that they worked limited hours.

*RsHvA3: "Study financing is not enough to pay my study, you know. But I don't work that much, only in the weekends I work."*

Very rarely having a job was more important than finishing a study on the achievable capability level. In these cases the working hours were also the main reason for dropout.

*RsVu2: "When I studied at the VU, it was too difficult for me to combine all the exams with my part time job. I lost interest in the subject, but I also needed a study program that I could combine with my job. So I went to a vocational education school, here it is easy."*

#### Family responsibilities

The interviewees were asked whether they had to provide financial and/or health care to children or other family members. The care for family was a major reason to drop out or temporarily quit studying for the students who had family to take care of. Much time was put into the care of sick parents and going to important meetings with family members who did not speak Dutch well enough.

*RsVu3: "My wife came to the Netherlands and she didn't speak a word of Dutch. I had to go with her to every appointment with the municipality and I had to take care of all her administrative business. Because I had to be everywhere with her, I missed too many classes and I had to stop studying after two months."*

The financial care of family members was seen as less of a problem. Some interviewees said they could not afford to take financial care and did not have time to work, which led to a feeling of guilt. However, they did not think it hindered them in their study process.

#### Diversity policies and special support at higher education institutions

Questions about whether the interviewees noticed diversity policies and/or special attention for refugee students at their institution were asked. It turned out that the interviewees did not know about diversity policies or special arrangements at their institution. The students who participated in a preparation year for non-native Dutch students at one of the institutions mentioned that they did get support in that year. However, during their study period, they did not see any special activities or arrangements. For Fontys, this can easily be explained, because it does not exist. Also at the UU, only a few faculties work with diversity and the interviewees studied at different faculties. At the HvA, the covenant with the UAF was signed only after the HvA interviewees dropped out.

*RsHvA1: "I passed everything besides the practical exam. I understood the written language but I could not speak it well enough. I see that the HvA offers language help now, but not in my time, I needed it too."*

Only at the VU it is remarkable that none of the interviewees knew the diversity policy, because there are supposed to be many diversity activities.

### **Capabilities**

#### Education goals

To find out the education goals of the interviewees, they were asked about their motivation to finish a study on the level they think they can achieve. The motivation to get a degree among the refugee students is high. The dropouts who had to start at a lower level seemed to have accepted this fact and did not mention having regrets. This means that they had to adjust their education goals, but realized their current study level fits better with their capabilities. Some, however, said they are determined to continue studying at university after they finish their UAS study.

*RsHvA4: "I made the wrong choice to study at an UAS institution. I'm able to go to university. So I will finish this first and do a pre-master and then a Master. I'm going for it, no matter what."*

Education goals were not found for everyone. Sometimes being able to have a job next to studying was more important for the student than finishing education on the level he or she was able to finish.

*RsVu2: University was too difficult to combine with my part time job. I looked at UAS studies, but I thought it was also too much theory to combine. Now I'm studying at a vocational education school and it is easy for me and I'm able to work."*

#### Goal commitment

From the answers on the question about how committed the interviewees were to reach their goal of graduating, it seemed that the barriers the interviewees encountered did not influence their commitment.

*RsVu4: "I was very demotivated when I didn't get support for my thesis and I had to quit. Now I regret it and I want to finish what I started. I started to contact my supervisor again, to ask what I have to do to finish my thesis. Because I worked hard and I know I can do it"*

Even though refugee students might feel as if they had to work harder than other students and that their institution should have helped them more, they are determined to get a degree eventually. Some students adjusted their goal, for example they went from university to UAS or to vocational education, but all of the interviewees started a new study or are planning to start when their circumstances will allow it. Students who do not receive financial help from the UAF anymore have more difficulties with their finances, but they continued studying on their own, which also shows their commitment to graduate.

#### Institutional commitment

The lack of counseling from the institution is one of the main reasons the refugee students dropped out. Refugee students did not know where to find the counseling they needed at the different institutions. Also, they experienced that students deans and mentors were not aware of their situation and could, therefore, not offer the proper help.

However, refugee students also take their own responsibility when it comes to counseling.

*RsVu2: "I quit my study program without talking to a student dean. I searched for them, but I couldn't find anyone. I guess I didn't really care enough to try harder to find someone to talk to. I'd made my decision already, so I don't blame the VU for not helping me."*

Most of the interviewees who dropped out at one institution continued at another. They went from university to UAS or vocational education, or the other way around. However, some switched from institution on the same level, because they were not satisfied and experienced low institutional commitment.

#### Opportunity to follow offered education

All previous mentioned concepts can get in the way of the capability ‘opportunity or freedom to follow the education which is offered by the higher education institutions’. The concepts which turn out to be the main barriers in the freedom to follow the offered education are the resources language level and arrangements for refugee students at higher education institutions and the functioning family responsibilities. Mainly due to these concepts, refugee students do not have the freedom to choose the life they want.

### **5.4 Sub question 4**

How satisfied were refugee student dropouts with the support at their higher education institution?

*The interviewees were asked about the personal experiences at their institution, in order to compare the vision of the institution with the actual student experiences.*

## VU

The VU has a diversity policy, but no special help for refugee students, besides a student dean who is more involved in this group. The main problem the interviewees at the VU encountered was lack of counseling. All four mentioned that they did not receive much support when they dropped out. Some did not ask for support, but others who did, could not find it.

*RsVu 1: "In the preparation year I did at the VU, the counseling was very good. I knew where to go to ask questions and there were always people helping me. When I started studying at the VU, I didn't get counseling anymore. I needed it, but maybe I also didn't get it, because I didn't ask for it."*

*RsVu4: "I didn't experience any form of counseling at the VU. My thesis supervisor got an accident during my internship, so I had no supervisor anymore. Nobody ever said 'we see you always worked hard and you have a good list of grades, what is going wrong now? Why are you delayed?'. Nobody asked if I was planning to finish it and how it was going. Nothing, from their side there was nothing."*

The interviewees stated that lack of support is a general problem, not specifically for refugee students. They also said that extra help for refugee students is not necessary, because they do not want to be seen as a group that needs extra attention. Despite the lack of counseling, they do see the VU as a good university.

## UU

At the UU there are no diversity policies or arrangements for refugee students. The interviewees did not miss this. A problem at the UU, in combination with problems with the UAF, was the lack of support with choosing the right study.

*RsUu1: "The UAF allowed me to change studies, but they didn't want to give me a year to figure out what I really wanted. I want to study, but it is also very important for me that I make the right decision, and I need help with that. I did a study-choice test at the UAF, and I called often for the results, but I never got them. Also at the UU I expected more help and information available to make the right decision, but they didn't help me as well."*

On the other hand, the UU did offer support to refugee students when it came to study problems. Therefore, it seems that it depends more on the employees the refugee students encounter than the situations.

## HvA

The HvA has no diversity policy, but a covenant with the UAF since a year. The dropouts have not been studying at the HvA in the past year and have not experienced the possible improvements. The interviewees have mixed opinions about the counseling. Some claim that extra arrangements, such as language help, were necessary for them, while others were satisfied.

*RsHvA3: "I didn't notice I got a lot of extra help at the HvA. They gave me a bit more time at exams, because of my language level, but nothing more. I continued at the UAS-Utrecht and there I got extra exams and more possibilities."*

*RsHvA4: "If it is necessary, we get extra time for exams. This is good, it is support, an opportunity, but it is for everybody. Which is good. We don't need extra support, there already is support for everybody who needs it."*

*RsHvA2: "My parents live in Eindhoven and they needed someone to take care of them. I had to move to Eindhoven, so it wasn't possible to keep studying at the HvA. I explained the situation at the HvA and they advised me to switch to another institution, because my future was the most important. I am very pleased with the help they gave me."*

## Fontys

At Fontys Eindhoven, there are no diversity policies and arrangements for refugee students. According to the dropouts, the general counseling was not sufficient. They did not feel at home at the UAS and did not feel helped.

*RsFon1: "There was support for me, but the mentor only looked at my grades and made a study program. There was no follow up and no attention for the problems behind my low grades. Special attention for refugee students is necessary, especially in the first year, in the second year they should get the same attention as the others."*

*RsFon2: "I sent many e-mails to the student deans from Fontys, because I want to switch to the Hague to study. They hardly reply to my e-mails and they promise things that they don't do. I don't know any other refugee students here, so I feel as if I am the only one with these kind of problems and I don't know how to get help."*

## Recommendations from dropouts

When the interviewees were asked to provide recommendations for their institutions to, if deemed necessary, improve arrangements for refugee students, the answers differed.

Some interviewees mentioned that institutions should provide extra help, because refugee students have different and often difficult backgrounds. Interviewees suggested that an institution should have an employee who knows about their refugee background and to whom they can talk to about personal problems. Also, language help is necessary, for example by providing extra language lessons or offering more time during an exam. Furthermore, a better introduction before they start studying is mentioned as an improvement. Some students feel as though they are not prepared for Dutch student life.

*RsUu1: “More guidance in study choice is very important. I noticed that many students drop out in the first year, because they made the wrong choice. Enough information is important for every student, but we are new in this country, I think we need extra help from the UAF and the institution to make the right decisions.”*

*RsHvA3: “(...) because when I was in class, I got general attention from my mentor. But they don’t know anything about me and my flight background. So it is better when mentors give more attention to refugee students. Not just for the language, but also for the background, for the person.”*

*RsVu3: “When the student is flexible and takes action, no extra support is needed for a refugee student. But it was difficult for me to adjust to the ‘rules’ at a Dutch university, how do you behave?, where do you have to go for help?, etc. These things should be made clear with a good introduction for refugee students. I think more support is not necessary.”*

On the other hand, some interviewees think that refugee students should be able to take care of themselves, just as any other student. If an individual needs extra support, it should be available at an institution, but they do not agree with ‘their group of refugee students’ needing extra attention.

*RsVu1: “Refugee students are ‘so called’ dependent and need to get extra help, but that is not true, it has to come from the student. They have to search and look and undertake action themselves. The Netherlands is a beautiful country, we have so many possibilities here, they should realize this.”*

## 6. Conclusion

In this research the results of the study on reasons for dropout among refugee students at four Dutch higher education institutions are presented. The main question was: How do specific barriers,

functionings and capabilities lead to dropout among refugee students in four Dutch higher education institutions? In order to find the deeper lying reasons and barriers refugee students have and encounter when they drop out, Sen's capability approach (1979) was combined with Bean and Metzner's persistence theory (1985) to form an integrated theoretical framework for establishing the methods and interpreting the findings.

Derived from the theoretical framework, several expectations were made. It was expected that the achieved functionings mirror inequalities in functionings between the groups of refugee students and native Dutch students. The inequalities in functionings lie in specific barriers refugee students encounter while studying in the Netherlands. In line with Sen's capability approach, it was expected that because of these barries, refugee students are not free to choose the functionings and related capabilities they desire, which leads to more dropouts. Based on the adaptive preference formation (Goerne, 2010), it was expected that because of the constraints refugee students encounter, they adjust their expectations and aspirations downwards, which might explain the high dropout. Furthermore, diversity policies and other forms of support for refugee students at higher education institutions are expected to improve the functionings, which in turn leads to an increase in the capabilities of these students. And well implemented diversity policies and support will, therefore, lead to a decrease in dropouts.

The results of the study show that one factor all students agreed on was the importance of pursuing a degree. All interviewed dropouts started studying somewhere else, some part-time, some on a lower or higher level and some at a different institution, but all were determined to graduate eventually. This is in line with the expectation that refugee students will not choose different functionings from their capability set than native Dutch students, but that the difference in dropout mirrors an inequality in functionings. On the other hand, the expectation that due to the constraints refugee students encounter they will adjust their expectations and desires downwards does not seem to hold true. Only some students went to a lower study level, but they indicated that they could not handle the higher level, they did not switch due to the constraints. Also, the other way around: some of the students went from UAS to university, which shows that they adjusted their expectations and desires upwards. Their goal commitment is high, which indicates that other factors should explain why they were not able to choose the right functionings from their capability set to finish their previous studies.

The results from this study indicate that the following factors explain why refugee students might not have the opportunity to follow the offered education (capability): language problems, problems with counseling at the institution and care responsibilities. Because the refugee students felt obliged to take care of their sick parents or family members who do not speak the language, they did not experience having the possibility to choose this functioning. Furthermore, the majority of refugee students stated that lack of resources in the form of language support, lack of information about the content of the study and study counseling at their institution were major reasons to dropout, because

they did not feel as if there were enough resources available to be free to choose their own functionings from their capability set.

Here the issue is if it is the institution's responsibility to provide these resources, because the refugee students indicate that extra help and attention is needed to get to the same starting position as their fellow Dutch students. However, other refugee students claim that they have the obligation to find their own resources to choose their functionings and succeed in the higher education system. In other words, refugee students have the responsibility to learn the language and find information about the study content and study counseling themselves. Overall it can be concluded that at least part of the refugee students would benefit from special arrangements at institutions. The barrier of care responsibilities is more complicated to tackle, because again it is the issue whether it is the institution's responsibility to provide help. Most institutions have counseling for students with problems in the private sphere and Dutch students can also be in a situation where they have to take care of family members. Therefore, the recommendations of this research will focus less on care responsibilities and mainly on study related counseling for refugee students.

No big differences in satisfaction between the institutions with or without extra support came up in the results. Only at the VU there was little awareness that a student dean specialised in refugee student support worked there. At the other institutions, the refugee students did not encounter extra support. From the current analysis, it turns out that the embedded vision of an institution is important in policy making. The VU and the HvA are both located in a city with much diversity. Because of the core values of both institutions, they want to profile themselves as institutions that are open for all students, regardless of background. This leads to the extended policies of the VU and the HvA regarding non-western immigrants and refugee students. The UU is a large university with a small population of refugee students scattered over the faculties. An extended policy for refugee students is, therefore, not a priority at the UU. The main reasons for Fontys to not have policies on the institution level is the decentralized way of policy making and the low percentage of refugee students. Only the most important values at Fontys have policies on the institution level and extra care for refugee students is, considering the percentage, not a core value.

Furthermore, differences in type of policy exist between the institutions. Whereas the HvA has selectivistic policies, the UU has universalistic policies regarding student counseling. The HvA thinks that refugee students deserve special benefits, whereas the UU has the opinion that all students should receive equal forms of counseling. At the VU the policies lie somewhere in the middle between universalism and selectivism. At Fontys, due to the decentralising policy making and the non-existence of diversity policies, applying the categories is irrelevant.

What further complicates the situation are privacy reasons. Higher education institutions are not allowed to keep track of their refugee students. Even at the HvA, where there are special arrangements, refugee students have to be contacted by an UAF counselor and only when they show

up at activities they can be asked if the HvA can register them as a refugee. Higher education institutions are not aware of who is in the target group, what makes it complicated to form policies.

## **6.1 Discussion**

The current research is mainly based on interviews with dropouts and employees from higher education institutions. The interviews provide the deeper lying reasons and thoughts behind the policies at the institutions and behind the reasons the students dropout. However, the response among dropouts to participate was low. After sending e-mails, reminder e-mails and contacting the students by phone, the limit for participants was reached. Therefore, part of the students who did not reply to the e-mails have been interviewed by telephone. The same questions have been asked and both methods have their own advantages and disadvantages, but the different methods of face-to-face and telephone interviews might have influenced the results.

Furthermore, using in-depth interviews provides results for a very small group. The results, therefore, give an indication of the thoughts and constraints refugee students have, but are not generalizable to the whole population. A larger sample would have provided more reliable results. In the next section, recommendations for the policy field and for future research will be given to complement the current research.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

*Ideally, a higher education institution should offer extra language lessons and special counseling for refugee students. Because most institutions are not aware of their refugee student population and do not see the reason to implement arrangements, the recommendations are made easy to accomplish for the institutions. The UAF has to take the lead in providing better resources for refugee students and institutions.*

### *1. Collaboration between the UAF and higher education institutions*

It turned out that refugee students can benefit from extra counseling during their study process. Refugee students also found it harder than their fellow students to know where to find counseling at their institution, because they experience difficulties with adjusting and finding their way in the Dutch system.

Therefore, a recommendation for both the UAF and the institutions is to organize an introduction day for new refugee students at the institution. The UAF has the contact information and the institution can provide the required information for general student counseling or, if available, special help for refugee students. The participants would have liked this kind of information activity, because, according to them, the normal introduction did not suffice. Also, they would have liked to meet other refugee students during such activities. Furthermore, a mentoring system of older refugee students at an institution, who help the new to adjust in the new environment and to whom new students can ask questions, can help to decrease drop out. Receiving information from refugee students

who have been in the same new situation at an institution is considered helpful by the interviewees, and some also indicate that they would not mind being a mentor for new refugee students.

Another recommendation is to improve the communication between the UAF and the institutions. Due to privacy reasons, most institutions are not aware of their refugee student population. However, the UAF is aware of the population of every institution and has the contacts of every student. When an improvement in communication is established, an institution can become more aware of their refugee student population and organize activities more easily. A good example is the HvA, they organize activities for refugee students and let the UAF invite the students. This is possible due to the good communication between the organizations.

### *2. UAF database*

An important recommendation for the UAF is to make a greater effort to find the reasons for dropout and to keep better track of their dropped out clients. In the database in which the UAF keeps track of their clients, the reasons for dropout are not filled in for every student. In order to get a clearer picture of the reasons students dropout, a personal conversation with the dropout student and the UAF study counselor should be held and a summary with these reasons should be included in the database. Future research can be carried out to make a guideline for these conversations and to instruct the student counselors about how to carry out the conversation and how to report the findings. With this guideline, the UAF can have its own internal research. The UAF can keep track of refugee students and can find personal reasons and background characteristics of all students who dropout to improve their counseling.

Another reason for the importance of proper registration directly after a student drops out is the low response rate of clients to participate in research. The UAF has noticed this already in the contacts with their clients and also in this research the response rate was very low. If the UAF builds an extensive database, this information can be used in future research when dropouts are difficult to reach.

### *3. Future research*

Besides a more extensive database for research purposes, another recommendation for future research is to include more students from different higher education institutions. The current research was focused on the four institutions and the group of dropout refugee students was, therefore, too small to carry out a survey. However, when all dropouts in the past five years are taken into account, a survey among this group, together with in-depth interviews can be used to provide more data on dropout reasons, which can lead to better intervention methods to decrease dropout.

Also, current refugee students can be asked to participate in future research. Because the current research only included participants who dropped out, their characteristics are not compared to students who remained studying. Therefore, a longitudinal study which follows refugee students who are studying throughout a longer period can provide better results for characteristics of students who drop out and who persist.

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## **Annexes**

### **Annex 1. Topic list interviews at higher education institutions**

#### Introductie

- Uitleggen waar het onderzoek over gaat.
- Uitleggen waarom deze deelnemer is gevraagd om mee te werken.
- Vragen of het gesprek opgenomen mag worden en aangeven dat de resultaten anoniem worden verwerkt.

#### Achtergrond vragen

- Wat is uw rol binnen de universiteit/hogeschool?

#### Diversiteitsbeleid & visie onderwijsinstelling

- Diversiteitbeleid aanwezig of niet?
  - Ja → totstandkoming, aspecten en reden voor het beleid
  - Nee → waarom niet?
  - Persoonlijke mening over de aan- of afwezigheid van diversiteitbeleid

#### Regelingen voor vluchtelings studenten & visie onderwijsinstelling

- Beleid en/of andere regelingen/ondersteuning beschikbaar voor vluchtelings studenten?
  - Ja → totstandkoming, aspecten en reden hiervoor
  - Nee → waarom niet?
  - Persoonlijke mening over de aan- of afwezigheid hiervan

Worden de huidige activiteiten op de juiste manier geïmplementeerd? Zou er verbetering nodig zijn om uitval te voorkomen? Indien nodig, wat zou er mogelijk verbeterd kunnen worden?

**Annex 2. Interview checklist for refugee student dropouts and the corresponding questions per label**

Introductie

- Uitleggen waar het onderzoek over gaat en waarom deze deelnemer is gevraagd.
- Mag het gesprek worden opgenomen? De resultaten blijven anoniem.
- Uitleggen dat de vragen gaan over de studie waarbij de deelnemer is uitgevallen.

Achtergrond vragen

▪ **Label: Background questions**

- Waar heeft u gestudeerd?
- Waar komt u oorspronkelijk vandaan?
- Wanneer bent u in Nederland aangekomen?
- Heeft u op dit moment een relatie?
- Wat is uw huidige situatie qua werk of studie?
- Waarom bent u gaan studeren in Nederland?
  - Wat wilde u bereiken?

Category: Background and defining factors

▪ **Label: Age**

- Wat is uw leeftijd?
  - Heeft uw leeftijd u op enige manier geholpen dan wel in de weg gezeten tijdens uw studie?

▪ **Label: Residence status**

- Wat is uw huidige verblijfsstatus?
- Wat was uw verblijfsstatus toen u uitviel?
  - Als het antwoord ‘geen vaste verblijfsvergunning’ is: heeft u tijdens uw studie moeite ondervonden doordat u geen vaste verblijfsvergunning had?

▪ **Label: Health status**

- Hoe is uw huidige mentale en fysieke gezondheidstoestand?
- Hoe was uw mentale en fysieke gezondheidstoestand toe u studeerde?
  - Heeft deze gezondheidstoestand invloed gehad op uw studie?
- Heeft u tijdens uw studie last gehad van stress?
  - Heeft u het idee dat dit meer of minder stress was dan uw medestudenten hadden?

▪ **Label: Language level**

- Hoe is uw niveau van de Nederlandse taal?

- Heeft u tijdens uw studie moeite ondervonden met de stof begrijpen en mee te komen tijdens werkgroepen door uw niveau van de Nederlandse taal?
  - **Label: Education level parents**
- Hebben uw ouders gestudeerd?
  - Wat hebben ze gedaan als u het vergelijkt met het Nederlandse onderwijsysteem?
  - Wat is hun huidige situatie qua werk en/of studie?
  - **Label: Prior education**
- Wat was uw opleiding in uw land van herkomst → richting, niveau, afgerond, diploma erkent in Nederland?

**Category: Academic concepts:**

- **Label: Study habits**
- Hoeveel tijd besteedde u gemiddeld aan uw studie?
  - Was dit naar uw eigen mening genoeg om goede resultaten te halen?
- Had u volgens uzelf een goede manier van studeren?
  - **Label: Study pace**
- Kon u het tempo van uw studie goed bijhouden?
  - **Label: Ability to follow trajectory of choice**
- Heeft u uw studie zelf kunnen kiezen?
  - Bent u tevreden met de informatie die vooraf beschikbaar was over uw studie?
  - Heeft u, indien dit nodig was, genoeg hulp gekregen om de juiste keuze te maken?

**Category: Environmental concepts**

- **Label: Finances**
- Hoe bekostigde u uw studie?
  - Kon u uw studie en levensonderhoud betalen?
  - **Label: Hours of employment**
- Heeft u gewerkt naast uw studie?
  - Zo ja, hoe veel uur gemiddeld per week?
  - Had u genoeg tijd over om te studeren?
  - **Label: Family responsibilities**
- Heeft u kinderen en/of andere familieleden die van u afhankelijk waren tijdens uw studie?
  - Qua zorg
  - Financieel

- **Label: Diversity policies and special support at higher education institutions**
  - Hoe ervoer u de begeleiding vanuit uw onderwijsinstituut?
    - Algemene begeleiding voor studenten?
    - Diversiteitbeleid?
    - Speciale aandacht of regelingen voor vluchtelingsstudenten?

**Category: Capabilities**

- **Label: Goal commitment**
  - Hoe gemotiveerd was u tijdens uw studie om uw diploma te halen?
    - **Label: Institutional commitment**
  - Waarom bent u bij uw onderwijsinstelling gaan studeren?
    - Voordelen/nadelen?
    - Zou u uw instelling aanraden aan andere studenten? Waarom wel/niet?

*Als dit nog niet naar voren is gekomen uit voorgaande vragen:*

- Waarom bent u gestopt met uw opleiding?
- Heeft u tijdens uw studie contact gehad met andere vluchtelingsstudenten?
  - Zo ja, kent u andere vluchtelingsstudenten die zijn uitgevallen? (*sneeuwbalmethode*)
  - Zo nee, had u behoefte gehad aan contact met andere vluchtelingsstudenten?

### **Annex 3. Questionnaire for language teachers at Fontys Eindhoven**

**Hartelijk dank voor uw medewerking aan het onderzoek over uitval onder vluchtelingsstudenten. Zou u zo uitgebreid mogelijk de onderstaande vragen willen beantwoorden en terug willen mailen. Uw eigen ervaringen en meningen met en over vluchtelingsstudenten en voorzieningen aan de Fontys hogeschool zijn belangrijk voor het onderzoek. De antwoorden die u geeft zullen volkomen anoniem worden verwerkt in het onderzoek.**

Kunt u omschrijven wat uw functie inhoudt en hoe u hiermee in aanraking komt met vluchtelingsstudenten?

Merkt u in een gemengde klas verschil tussen vluchtelingsstudenten, andere allochtone leerlingen en Nederlandse leerlingen, zo ja kunt u dat omschrijven? Denkt u hierbij aan verschil in aandacht, moeite met de stof, vragen, studietempo etc.

Heeft Fontys Hogeschool, voor zover u weet, speciale voorzieningen of beleid voor vluchtelingsstudenten en/of niet-westerse allochtonen?

Als Fontys Hogeschool speciale voorzieningen of beleid heeft, wat houdt dit in, hoe wordt het uitgevoerd en heeft het volgens u een toegevoegde waarde?

Als Fontys Hogeschool geen speciale voorzieningen of beleid heeft voor vluchtelingsstudenten en/of niet-westerse allochtonen, denkt u dat dit inderdaad niet nodig is, of zou u liever zien dat er wel speciale aandacht is voor deze groepen?

Heeft u nog op- of aanmerkingen op het beleid van Fontys Hogeschool en/of het werken met deze groep studenten?

#### **Annex 4. E-mail to dropouts for participation in the interviews**

Beste student,

Het UAF is bezig met een onderzoek naar uitval van vluchting-studenten tijdens de studie. Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door Loes van Velzen, masterstudent aan de UU. Centraal staat de vraag wat de redenen zijn voor uitval en of verschillende onderwijsinstellingen beleid hebben opgesteld om deze uitval te voorkomen. De onderwijsinstellingen die in het onderzoek worden meegenomen zijn de Vrije Universiteit, de Universiteit Utrecht, Fontys Eindhoven en de Hogeschool van Amsterdam.

Omdat je tijdens je studie aan 1 van deze instellingen bent gestopt met de opleiding, zou Loes van Velzen graag een afspraak met je maken voor een gesprek over je ervaringen tijdens je studie en met de instelling waar je gestudeerd hebt en de redenen dat je met de studie bent gestopt. Met de resultaten van het onderzoek hoopt het UAF in de toekomst invloed uit te kunnen oefenen op uitval- en diversiteitsbeleid van de onderwijsinstellingen. Jouw ervaringen zijn daarom heel belangrijk voor het UAF!

De interviews zullen plaatsvinden in de eerste twee weken van mei en zullen een half uur tot een uur duren. De exacte dag en locatie worden in overleg afgesproken. Eventuele reiskosten worden vergoed. Je gegevens worden volledig anoniem behandeld.

Als je wilt meewerken aan dit onderzoek, stuur dan een email naar [loesvanelzen@gmail.com](mailto:loesvanelzen@gmail.com) en zij zal contact opnemen voor een afspraak. Mocht je geen belangstelling hebben om mee te werken, laat me dat dan ook even weten.

Vast bedankt voor de medewerking!

Groeten,

Brenda Teunissen  
Teamleider afdeling Studentenbegeleiding  
Stichting voor Vluchting-studenten UAF

**Annex 5. Features of the student participants**

Participant	Higher education institution	Age	Sex	Analysis code	Country of origin	Years in the Netherlands
1	VU	25	F	RsVu1	Uzbekistan	12
2	VU	25	F	RsVu2	Burma	5
3	VU	29	M	RsVu3	South-Africa	7
4	VU	29	F	RsVu4	Iran	18
5	UU	37	M	RsUu1	Iran	14
6	UU	36	M	RsUu2	Afghanistan	5
7	HvA	43	F	RsHvA1	Rwanda	15
8	HvA	31	F	RsHvA2	Afghanistan	8
9	HvA	23	M	RsHvA3	Sri Lanka	5
10	HvA	32	M	RsHvA4	Iran	7
11	Fontys	34	M	RsFon1	Sudan	9
12	Fontys	31	F	RsFon2	Pakistan	8

## Annex 6. Website analyses

Search terms: 'diversity'; 'immigrant'; 'non-western immigrant'; 'G5 project'		
Higher education institution	Available information	Accessibility and clarity
VU	Diversity policy exists and a special section is available at the website, that explains the vision, content and contact information of the coordinator Diversity	Very good
UU	- No specific diversity policies come up, the search leads to, mostly, old research and the participation in the G5 project. - Evaluation reports of the G5 project are available for the three participating faculties.	It was difficult to search on the UU website, therefore the accessibility and clarity are not good.
HvA	No special diversity policy, but the website explains the vision and activities they offer for non-western immigrants.	Good
Fontys Eindhoven	No results.	Easily accessible, but no information was available.

Search terms 'UAF'; 'refugee'; 'refugee students'		
Higher education Instituton	Available information	Accessibility and clarity
VU	- A collaboration between the UAF and the VU to place refugee scientists exist. - One student dean specifically helps UAF students and (former) asylum seekers. - Some researches have been carried out for the UAF in 2010	- Good. The contact information of the student dean is clear. And information about the projects of the VU and the UAF are available.
UU	The search terms showed no results	It is not easy to find information on the website.
HvA	- The HvA has a covenant with the UAF - A section on the website explains the covenant and the activities organized by the HvA	Very good
Fontys Eindhoven	No results	Accessible website, but no information was available.