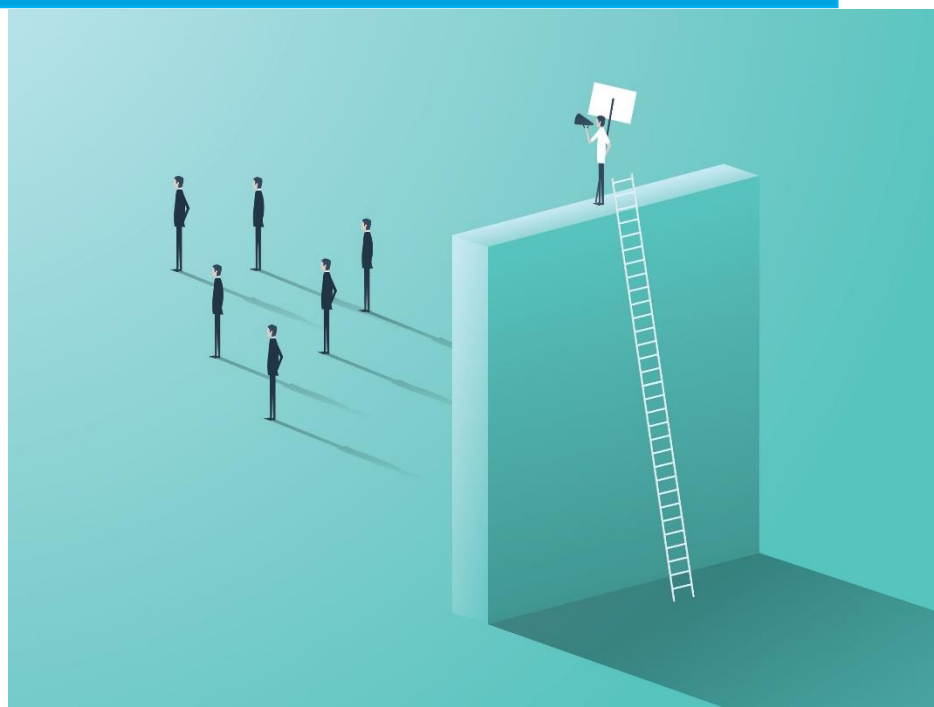


Report 5:2020

Supporting future change agents

An evaluation of the Students at Risk programme 2014-2020



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Preface

This report presents the results of an evaluation of the Students at Risk (StAR) programme 2014-2020. The evaluation was commissioned by the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (Diku) and has been carried out by ideas2evidence.

The main purposes of the evaluation have been to assess the StAR programme's design and objectives, its implementation and cost efficiency, and its achievements. The evaluator was also tasked with making recommendations regarding *whether* and if applicable, *how*, the programme should be continued.

Overall, the evaluation finds that the StAR programme to a large degree has been successful in achieving its objectives and goals. Therefore, we recommend that the programme is continued – on the condition that the weaknesses we have identified throughout the evaluation are addressed.

ideas2evidence would like to thank Diku for a very interesting mission, and good cooperation throughout the evaluation. We would also like to thank the informants who contributed to the evaluation by taking part in interviews. Lastly, we want to extend our gratitude to all the students who took the time to answer the student survey. Your answers provided us with invaluable information for the evaluation.

Bergen,

April 2020

Table of contents

Executive summary	6
1 Introduction	8
About the StAR programme	8
The purpose of the evaluation	8
Data and methods.....	9
2 Programme design	10
Impact model.....	10
Activities.....	12
Programme administration	12
Programme activities	16
Comparing the StAR programme to Scholars at Risk (SAR).....	16
Alternate models for supporting student human rights defenders	17
3 Implementation of nomination and selection processes.....	19
Nominated and accepted candidates	19
Gender balance?	20
Geographical spread	21
Is the nomination process designed to identify students at-risk?.....	21
Do current vetting procedures identify students who are truly at-risk?.....	23
Students' view on the nomination process	24
Should further control mechanisms be implemented?.....	25
Efficiency and thoroughness in the selection process	26
4 Administration and cost-efficiency.....	28
The role of Diku.....	28
The role of the embassies	28
Flow of information	29
Temporality and planning	29
Cost-efficiency	30
More cost-efficient?.....	31
5 Achievements	32
Outcomes.....	32
Completion of degree and return	32
Professional empowerment.....	34

Strengthen students as human rights activists and providing them with an extended network ...	36
Impact.....	36
Strengthen students as change agents in their home country.....	36
Strengthen the Norwegian government’s work on human rights.....	37
6 Conclusions and recommendations	39
Programme design and objectives.....	39
Nomination and selection processes	40
Administration and cost-efficiency	41
Achievements	41
Sources.....	43
Appendix 1: Response rates and questionnaire.....	44

Executive summary

Based on the overall findings of the evaluation, we recommend that the StAR programme is continued. However, we make this recommendation under the condition that the deficiencies we have identified are addressed. It is especially important that the implementation of the nomination and selection processes is improved.

Programme design and objectives

In addition to its stated overall goal, the StAR programme has several unspoken goals and objectives. We believe the impact of the programme could be increased if these were made explicit in the programme document. The programme contributes towards the overall goal of Norwegian foreign policy of providing support for human rights defenders, but its impact could be increased if the relationship between the programme and overall foreign policy was strengthened. Further, we have found that there lies an inherent conflict in the programme, between the goal of recruiting at-risk students, and the goal of students returning home after graduating. We recommend that the balance between the risk and returnability criteria is clarified at a political level.

To a large degree, the programme is well-designed to reach its objectives. The nomination mechanism and selection criteria are expedient for identifying and selecting relevant candidates for the programme. We believe, however, that there is a potential for increased impact if the programme implements activities that work to strengthen the Norwegian government's work on human rights, for instance through establishing an alumni network for StAR students.

Nomination and selection processes

The evaluation has identified several deficiencies in how the nomination and selection processes are implemented. Some nominators and embassies do not perform their role in the process as the programme document requires them to, both when it comes to verifying students' at-risk status, as well as controlling that the student meets the formal nomination criteria. This may be due to the fact that the programme document leaves it somewhat unclear where the responsibility lies. We therefore recommend that the programme document is further developed to clearly specify the responsibilities of nominators and embassies. Further, we have found that many embassies take on a minimal role in the programme, even though they should be well-positioned to make assessments of potential nominees. For StAR to gain higher priority at the embassies, we recommend that work with the programme is included in the annual letter of allocation from the MFA to the relevant embassies.

Administration and cost-efficiency

The division of labour in the StAR programme seems expedient and the evaluation has found few examples of superfluous tasks that could be changed to make the administration more cost-efficient. A feature that stands out, however, is the high share of students that are formally unqualified for nomination yet make it through the nomination phase. This causes unnecessary work for Diku and NOKUT, and prolonged wait and eventual disappointment for candidates. One option to consider is

that NOKUT is included in embassies' calls to candidates considered for nomination. This could contribute to identifying more of the unqualified candidates early in the process.

Achievements

The StAR programme to a large degree achieves the objective of students completing a degree. When it comes to the objective of students returning to their home country, the programme has been less successful so far. Half of the students who have completed their studies have returned home.

However, in our opinion it is premature to assess the programme's achievements related to return, because relatively few students from the later cohorts have graduated from the programme thus far. Also, there were more students from so-called red countries in the first student cohorts, than in the later. The returnability of students in the different cohorts may therefore differ. We also find that through their participation in the programme, most of the students are strengthened as change agents in their home country. This is true both for the students who return home after graduating as well as those who do not.

1 Introduction

On behalf of the Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (Diku), ideas2evidence has conducted an evaluation of the Students at Risk (StAR) programme. The purpose of the evaluation has been to assess the StAR programme's achievements, its objectives, programme design and implementation, and to give recommendations regarding whether, and if applicable how, the programme should be continued. This report presents the findings of the evaluation.

About the StAR programme

The StAR programme was established by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) in 2014 after an initiative from the Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH) and the Norwegian Student Organisation (NSO). It was first established as a pilot, and funding has later been extended for one year at a time. The programme is administrated by Diku.

According to the programme guidelines, the stated objective of the programme is: "to identify students who, due to their human rights activism, have been or are at risk of being formally or de facto denied educational and other rights in their home country, and to provide them with an opportunity to complete their education in Norway".

A total of 52 students have been accepted into the programme since its initiation through the 2018/2019 student intake.¹ Students cannot apply for a place in the programme but must be nominated. Approved nominators include SAIH, human rights associations such as Amnesty International, Norwegian higher education institutions (HEIs) partaking in the programme, and Norwegian embassies in developing countries.

The purpose of the evaluation

Our evaluation of the StAR programme is partly a programme evaluation and partly a process evaluation, as it assesses both the design and achievements of the programme as well as different processes in its operation programme (most importantly, the nomination and selection processes). We have structured the evaluation in three main evaluation areas:

- ◆ Programme design and objectives (chapter 2)
- ◆ Administration and cost-efficiency (chapter 3 and 4)
- ◆ Achievement of objectives (chapter 5)

The main question of the first evaluation area is whether the programme is adequately designed in order to achieve its objectives. In this chapter we investigate whether the programme has a clear and formalised goal hierarchy. We also discuss the relationship between the programme's stated and

¹ The 2019/2020 student intake had not yet been finished at the time of writing.

unspoken goals and objectives, which were uncovered in the previous evaluation. Finally, we assess whether the programme's activities seem expedient for achieving its objectives and goals.

The second evaluation area addresses the implementation of the nomination and selection processes, focusing especially on the nomination process as well as the division of labour and communication between stakeholders. In this part of the evaluation we also address the cost-efficiency of the programme and discuss other relevant ways of supporting human rights defenders.

In the third evaluation area we assess the programme's achievements. This includes a discussion of its achievements in relation to the stated objective of providing student human rights activists with an opportunity to complete a degree, as well as achievements in relation to the unspoken objectives and goals of the programme.

Data and methods

The main data sources used in the evaluation are:

A survey geared towards former and current students in the StAR programme: To provide generalisable knowledge about students' experiences with StAR, we conducted a survey among all students who have entered the programme from the start in 2015 until the student intake for the autumn of 2019. The response rate for the survey was 85 percent. Appendix 1 contains the questionnaire as well as more information on response rates.

Student intake data: We have used data on nominated and accepted candidates provided by Diku to provide a general overview of the programme's nominees and accepted candidates, and to identify possible imbalances in terms of gender and geography.

Case studies of the nomination process in two countries: In order to gain in-depth insight into the implementation of the programme, we have conducted case studies of the nomination process in two countries. A substantial share of the StAR students come from these two countries. The case studies include interviews with the administrative staff responsible for StAR at the relevant Norwegian embassy, one StAR student from each country, the person responsible for StAR at two HEIs which have received students from these countries, and a student from each case country who has been nominated but not accepted into the programme.

Stakeholder interviews: We have interviewed representatives from key stakeholders: the MFA, Diku, NOKUT, UDI and SAIH.

Additionally, we have conducted interviews with:

- ◆ Academic staff at three different HEIs that have received students through the programme. The purpose was to learn about their experiences with teaching students from the programme.
- ◆ A representative of the Scholars at risk (SAR) network, in order to compare the StAR programme to another support scheme for human rights defenders.

2 Programme design

The topic of this chapter is the relationship between the programme's design and objectives. The overall evaluation question guiding the inquiry is: Is the programme adequately designed in order to reach its objectives? In assessing the design of the programme, we will first investigate whether the goal hierarchy is clear and formalised, which is an important fundament to ensure that all involved parties agree on and work towards the same overall goals. Secondly, we will assess whether the activities are relevant to achieve the objectives and goals of the programme. Finally, we will consider the extent to which StAR is an expedient mechanism to support student human rights defenders vis-a-vis the Scholars at Risk programme and potential alternate programme models.

Impact model

In order to investigate whether the programme is adequately designed in order to reach its objectives, we must first investigate the programme's objectives and goals. The programme guidelines should be the guiding document for a programme and contain all its central elements: Overall goal, objectives, activities funded, and the responsibilities of involved parties. Well-developed programme guidelines increase the chances of achieving the programme's goals and objectives, as these are made explicit, and so are the activities intended to produce the results.

As mentioned in the previous evaluation, many aspects of the programme had to be established along the way as Diku was given limited time to develop the programme before it was launched. One of the consequences is that the programme guidelines are somewhat deficient. This is particularly true regarding the objectives and goals of the programme. According to the programme guidelines, the main objective of the programme is to *identify students who, due to their human rights' activism, are at risk of being denied educational or other rights in their home country, and to provide these students with an opportunity to complete their education in Norway*. The guidelines also state that the students will be encouraged to return to their home countries upon completion of their studies.

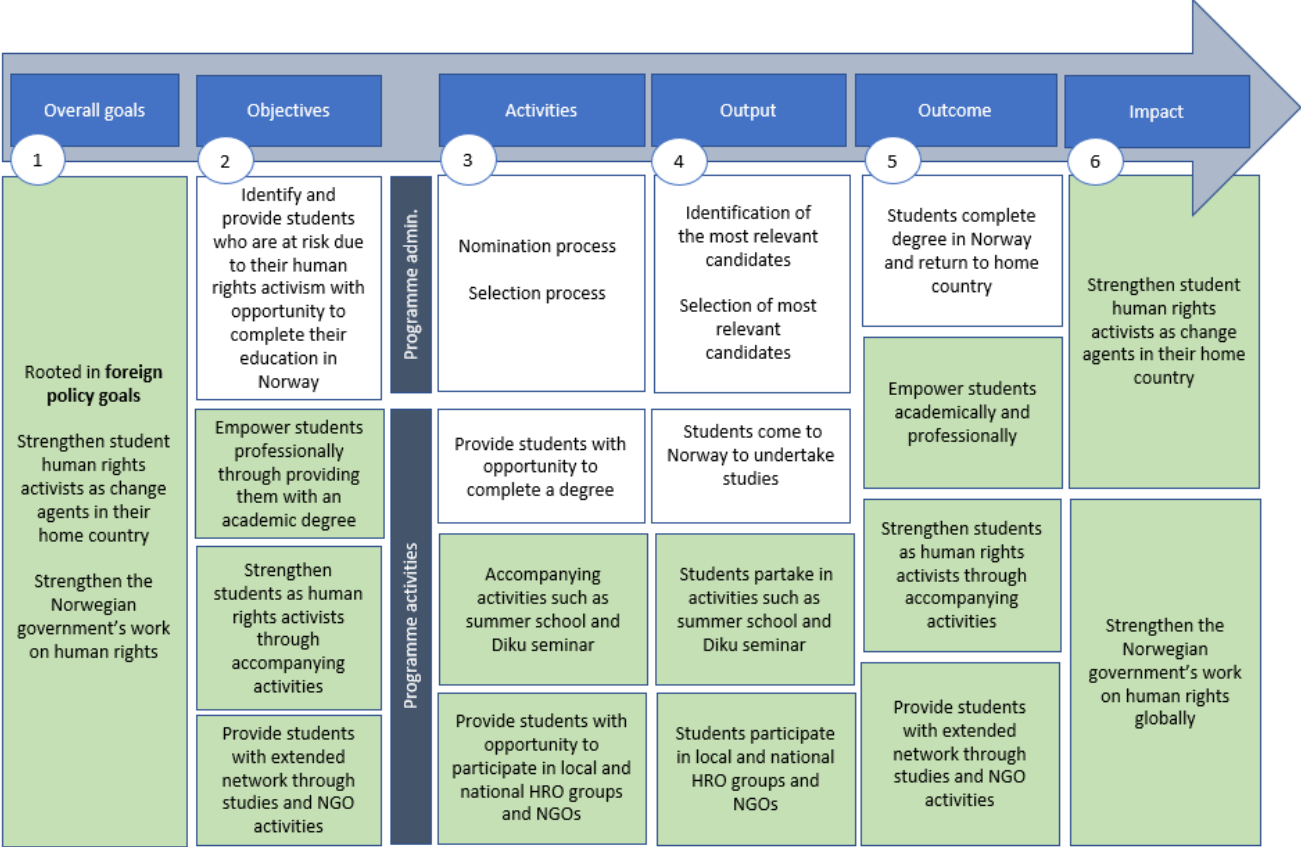
We find that this is a simplified understanding of the programme's objectives. The programme document does not place the programme in a larger political context, nor does it show how the programme will contribute to Norwegian foreign policy and human rights goals, thus reducing the potential impact of the programme. The relationship between activities and objectives and goals could be strengthened if objectives and goals were made explicit.

The previous evaluation found that in addition to the explicitly stated goal mentioned above, the programme has several unspoken goals and objectives, followed by a set of unspoken outputs and outcomes, which inform its design. These unspoken objectives have also been evident throughout this evaluation. In attempting to make the elements of the programme more explicit, we have developed an impact model which summarises what we perceive as the main elements of the programme.²

² This model is an adoption of the Norwegian Agency for and Financial Management (DFØ) and OECD's impact models.

The white elements in the model depict the programme as described in the programme guidelines, while the green elements depict our understanding of the programme, based on available documentation and interviews with stakeholders and findings from the previous evaluation.

Figure 1: Impact model for the StAR programme



Goals

In line with findings from the previous evaluation, several stakeholders interpret the overarching goal of the programme as *to strengthen student human rights activists as change agents in their home country*. This goal is rooted in Norwegian foreign policy and human rights policy. According to a 2014-2015 white paper, protection of human rights defenders is a main priority in Norwegian human rights policy, and the MFA seeks to intensify its efforts towards human rights activists “in light of increased pressure on human rights defenders throughout the world.”³

Another, more undefined goal that were mentioned in some interviews, and that was also alluded to in the previous evaluation, is to strengthen the Norwegian government’s efforts in the human rights field. We believe that including an explicit goal concerning synergies between the StAR programme and other Norwegian human rights efforts could broaden the impact of the programme, if relevant objectives and activities to support this goal are implemented. Establishing a network of StAR students with a connection to the Norwegian government may be one relevant measure to this end. The overall goals are listed in column 1 and mirrored in column 6 (impact).

³ White paper 10 (2014-15) Opportunities for all: Human rights in Norway’s Foreign Policy and Development Cooperation. Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Objectives

According to the programme guidelines, the *objective* of the programme is to identify students who are at risk due to their activism and providing them with an opportunity to complete their education in Norway. The guidelines also state that students should be encouraged to return home upon completion. We therefore interpret this as a part of the objective mentioned above. Herein lies one of the dilemmas of the programme. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the programme cannot be considered successful if the candidates do not return to their home country or region:

In order to say the programme is successful, candidates need to return to their home country or region and contribute to the development of democracy at home. [...] If they remain in Norway, or leave for other countries to pursue a doctorate, we are not satisfied.

MFA informant

An embassy informant pointed to the risk of brain drain or even worse, activist drain, in the relevant countries, if students do not return home. However, we will argue that students can still contribute towards the overall goals without returning home, e.g. by remaining active and organising from afar or by contributing to the Norwegian human rights efforts. Findings in our student survey indicate that students who have not returned home have maintained a strong relation to fellow activists in their home country and contribute from afar (see chapter 4). In the previous evaluation of the programme, we also found several examples of students who continued their fight for human rights during their stay in Norway, although by different means.

Further, we understand the return requirement not as the overall goal of the programme, rather as one of several objectives in order to achieve the programme's overall goal.

Unspoken objectives include empowering students professionally by providing them with an academic degree, strengthening them as human rights activists through accompanying activities and providing them with a network.

Activities

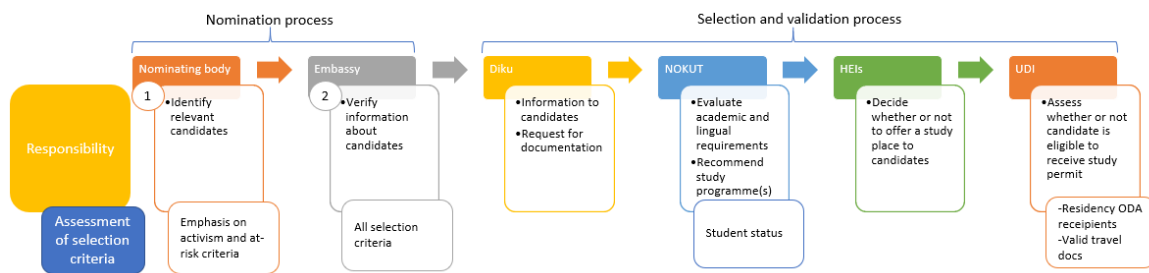
Based on our interpretation of the goal hierarchy above, we can ask whether the activities of the programme are adequately designed and relevant in order to reach its objectives and goals. The *activities* entail both the *programme activities*; to provide students access to enrol in a Norwegian study programme, and activities to strengthen the students as activists, such as participation in summer school, SAIH seminars and NGO activities, and *programme administration*, with a focus on two key design features; the nomination process and the selection criteria.

Programme administration

As figure 2 illustrates, the nomination and selection processes of the StAR programme involves several different agencies and organisations with partially different and partially overlapping responsibilities. We have defined the nomination process as the tasks performed by the nominating bodies (step 1) and the embassies (step 2), and the selection process as the steps following the nomination process,

i.e. from the point where the embassies send off their nominations to Diku until UDI has made its assessments.

Figure 2: Illustration of nomination and selection processes



According to the programme guidelines, a variety of institutions are eligible to nominate candidates for the programme.⁴ These institutions are encouraged to cooperate with human rights organisations, NGOs, and other relevant institutions or persons to identify candidates within the target group. All nominations should be made in strict adherence to the selection criteria stated in the programme guidelines.

The Norwegian Embassy in charge of diplomatic affairs in the nominated student's home country receives the nomination and makes the initial contact with the student. The purpose of this first contact is to inform the student that he or she is considered for nomination under the programme, and to confirm that the student meets the nomination criteria with regard to student status, age, residence and travel documents. According to the programme document, the risk criteria should be assessed by the nominating party/embassy prior to contacting the candidate. Risk assessments should be based on reliable evidence, e.g. the candidates' personal account, written records (official documents, social media posts etc.), or witness statements.

Diku plays a key role in the nomination and selection processes, as they are responsible for starting and coordinating these processes. They receive a list of candidates from embassies and make an evaluation of the criteria related to age and student status, forward candidates to NOKUT and contact the candidates that NOKUT considers to be unqualified for the programme. Further, they follow up on the students who are granted a place in the programme through providing them with information on how to apply for a study permit, granting scholarship letters, and provide assistance with acquiring travel documents.

NOKUT evaluates candidates' academic and language credentials and makes recommendations regarding potential study programmes for the candidates. HEIs review NOKUT's recommendations and decide whether they will offer candidates a place at the suggested study programme. UDI evaluates candidates' applications for study permits.

⁴ Norwegian Embassies in countries on the DAC List of ODA Recipients, Norwegian higher education institutions partaking in the programme, the Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH), the National Union of Students in Norway (NSO), The Scholars at Risk Network (SAR), Amnesty International, and the International Cities of Refuge Network (ICORN).

Nominated candidates must:

- Be between 18 and 35 years of age
- Have commenced a study programme at the BA or MA level in their home country, and not have discontinued such studies more than 2 years from the date of nomination
- Be actively involved in activism aimed at improving the conditions for one or more human rights in a country on the DAC list of ODA recipients, at a level deemed to entail personal risk (e.g. of physical violence, arrest, denial of civil rights, etc.)
- Reside and have a valid residency in a country on the DAC list of ODA recipients
 - Hold or be able to obtain valid travel documents

Selection criteria

Overall, stakeholders seem to find the selection criteria expedient and relevant. We agree with this assessment but suggest that the selection criteria also include English proficiency, which is not currently mentioned in the guidelines. We also find, however, that stakeholders have conflicting views on how to weight the various selection criteria, which seem to correspond to their mandates and their perceptions of the overall programme goal. We believe their views could become more coherent if the programme guidelines give further instructions on how to assess the criteria.

Activist and at-risk status versus academic record

Stakeholders are divided over how to weigh candidates' academic record against their activist and at-risk status. While the foreign policy sector puts most emphasis on the activist and at-risk status, informants from the educational sector underscore the importance of the students' academic merits. According to the MFA, the programme should prioritise the most engaged at-risk activists over the academically successful students. Our informant pointed out that some students who are particularly active might not be as successful academically as others, as they may have to put their education on hold because of their activism. He further states that:

If too much emphasis is put on academic criteria, we can miss out on someone who has to put their education on hold because of political activism. [But] these are the ones we want to reach, this is the target group.

MFA informant

An embassy informant pointed out that some activists may not fulfil the student/academic criteria because they lack relevant documents. Consequently, candidates who are less at risk, but have their papers in order, are more likely to be selected.

StAR must not become a scholarship programme for academically skilled students who aren't necessarily activists.

Embassy informant

On the other hand, several stakeholders in the educational sector argue that accepting candidates into the programme that do not meet the academic standards set by NOKUT and the HEIs is doing the candidates a disservice, and will not contribute towards the objectives and goals of the programme. Faculty at various HEIs involved in advising and teaching StAR students underscore the importance of

the students meeting the academic and linguistic requirements to be able to participate in their respective study programmes. Some relate stories of students who did not meet these standards, and whose chances of completing a study programme in English at a BA or MA level were slim. Diku relates that the HEIs often must stretch far to ensure that the StAR students complete their degree.

Clearly, the two selection criteria need to be balanced against each other; the students should be engaged at-risk activists, but at the same time have the prerequisites to complete the degree that is offered to them.

Risk status (versus returnability)

In order to be considered eligible for the programme, the candidate must be engaged in activism at a “level deemed to entail personal risk”. At the same time, the candidates are required to return to their home countries after completing their degree. However, returnability is not listed among the programme’s formal selection criteria.

According to the UDI guidelines for processing applications for a residence permit as a student, “[t]he immigration authorities shall assess the conditions for the applicant’s return. The probability of the applicant leaving Norway when the permit expires if he/she does not have other grounds for residence in Norway is therefore a key factor in the assessment of whether to grant him/her a residence permit”.⁵ When assessing whether to grant the candidate a study permit, UDI considers the purpose of the stay and the individual situation of the candidate, such as whether they have a family or a job in their home country, if they previously have been travelling outside their home country, if they have been to the Schengen area before, or other aspects that increase the likeliness that they will return home after finishing their studies. They also consider the general situation in each candidate’s home country, using a colourmap where some countries are categorised as “red” or “orange” countries, indicating that in general, applicants from these countries are less likely to return.

The mandate of the StAR programme is potentially at odds with the mandate of UDI. The target group of the programme is students who are at risk of facing persecution in their home country. Being under such a threat makes it less likely that the candidate will return home. Therefore, granting a study permit to such candidates can conflict with the mandate of UDI, and this is especially the case for students from red or orange countries. At the same time, the purpose of the stay in Norway is given considerable weight, and almost all the candidates have eventually been granted a study permit. It is worth noting, however, that several of the candidates were granted a permit first after appealing their decisions of rejection to the UDI or to the Immigration Appeals Board.

The MFA, too, puts great emphasis on the importance of students returning home upon completion of their degree. However, the more at-risk a candidate is, the greater the chance that he/she will not return home upon completion of the programme. Unless the political situation in their home country changes radically, it is unlikely that their risk-status will change over the course of the period away from their home country. The ultimate consequence of putting considerable weight on the objective of students returning home, is that students at great risk should not be selected for the programme. Herein lies a considerable dilemma. Ultimately, the MFA should decide which is more important: selecting the more at-risk students or ensure high return rates.

⁵ UDI (2010-101)

Programme activities

We find that the programme activities are well designed *to strengthen student human rights activists as change agents in their home country*. The programme provides opportunities for activists to complete a degree, and to empower them as activists through activities such as seminars with SAIH and summer school.

As mentioned above, we believe the impact of the programme could be strengthened if including an explicit goal concerning synergies between the StAR programme and other Norwegian human rights efforts. The goal should be supported by specific programme activities. One possibility would be to invite StAR students to talk to relevant members of parliament and the government. Another is to set up a system to keep in touch with StAR alumni. A StAR alumni network would be an asset for Norwegian authorities in the human rights field. Currently, Diku has little information on what becomes of the students once they return home. It is therefore difficult to assess whether the programme contributes to the overall goal. In designing relevant activities, however, the challenge of protecting the students' safety and anonymity is important to bear in mind.

Comparing the StAR programme to Scholars at Risk (SAR)

Diku has requested that the evaluation considers StAR in relation to other relevant support schemes for human rights defenders and assesses the extent to which StAR is an expedient mechanism to support student human rights defenders. As of today, there are no other support schemes which are relevant for direct comparison with StAR. However, as the Scholars at Risk (SAR) programme has similar goals and target group, we have conducted some interviews with representatives for the network in order to shed light on aspects of the SAR programme that could provide valuable input to the further development of the StAR programme.

Scholars at Risk works to protect threatened scholars and promote academic freedom around the world. The programme is organized through a voluntary network of organisations consisting of more than 500 HEIs from all over the world. SAR works to protect scholars suffering grave threats to their lives, liberty and well-being by arranging temporary research and teaching positions at institutions in their network as well as by providing advisory and referral services.

Several of our interviewees brought up the network organisation as a particularly positive aspect of the SAR programme, and as an inspiration for the StAR programme. Through the network, SAR scholars stay in touch with other SAR scholars and with the organisations and HEIs that the network is made up of. Although StAR is not network-organized and -funded, but rather a state-funded programme, the network idea is valuable input to the StAR programme, as a way of following up on students after they graduate, and strengthen the network between graduated candidates.

SAR does not explicitly encourage the scholars to return to their home country. In cases where the researcher is not able to return home, the programme utilizes its network of HEIs around the world to find further employment for the scholar, something several interviewees brought up as a point of inspiration for the StAR programme. One may argue that this aspect of SAR can contribute to brain drain. However, programmes that give temporary safe havens to persons at risk need to weigh the risk

of brain drain against each individual's safety. If scholars are at great risk of being tortured or killed upon return to their home country, the risk of brain drain may be of less importance.

The network of SAR seems to be the aspect of the programme with the most transfer value to StAR. Although SAR programme has similar goals and target group, the design and administration of the programme differs considerably.

Alternate models for supporting student human rights defenders

Through the stakeholder interviews, we have also identified other models for providing support for student human rights defenders in developing countries. These are:

- ◆ Expanding StAR to a Nordic or European cooperative programme
- ◆ Providing support for students to study in other countries in their region

In the following paragraphs we present some strengths and weaknesses of these alternate models.

A Nordic or European cooperation

Several stakeholders have lobbied for the establishment of a cooperation programme between Nordic or European countries to support student human rights defenders. This would increase the capacity to receive students as well as the number of available English language study programmes, which is a significant barrier today. Further, costs would be shared between more countries. SAIH's position is that the programme should be expanded to more countries, and the National Union of Students in Denmark has promoted the implementation of a similar programme there. The Mitten Group⁶ of the Nordic Council has brought up the establishment of similar programmes in other Nordic countries in the Council.⁷ At the EU level, the largest party group, the European People's Party (EPP) have supported the establishment of a European StAR programme within the Erasmus network in a resolution.⁸ None of these initiatives have led to expansions of the StAR programme as of yet, and though it has been discussed, it is not currently on the agenda of the MFA. As the MFA pointed out, different immigration policies, for instance between Norway and Denmark, could impede such a cooperation.

Support for studies in students' home region

Another relevant option is to provide support for at-risk student human rights defenders to take on studies in neighbouring countries that are considered safer than their home country. This idea has been discussed informally but has not yet been put forward as a serious proposal by any stakeholders. Providing such support could reduce the costs of the programme and enhance its ability to reach out to students in countries where English skills are generally low, such as in Latin America.

However, there are several objections against such an approach. As brought up by several interviewees, a degree from a Norwegian university has a high status and can be especially useful for

⁶ One of the party groups in the Nordic Council, for liberal, Christian democratic and green parties.

⁷ Mittengruppen (2018)

⁸ EPP (2015)

StAR students. A degree from the student's region will not necessarily have the same status, and therefore this option could reduce the programme's ability to fulfil the unspoken objective of empowering students academically. There is also the issue of the quality of the education provided at universities in students' home region. Diku argues that they must know that the education holds a certain standard in the relevant country, to provide financial support for studies (accredited study programmes/universities only). Further, it is not certain that moving to a nearby country provides students with the distance that they need to feel safe. If so, the programme risks not providing the safe haven that it currently does. The opportunity to experience the Norwegian democracy and welfare state, which has been brought up as an important benefit by many StAR students, would be lost in such a model. One stakeholder argued that regional support to activists should be a supplement to the existing programme, rather than a replacement.

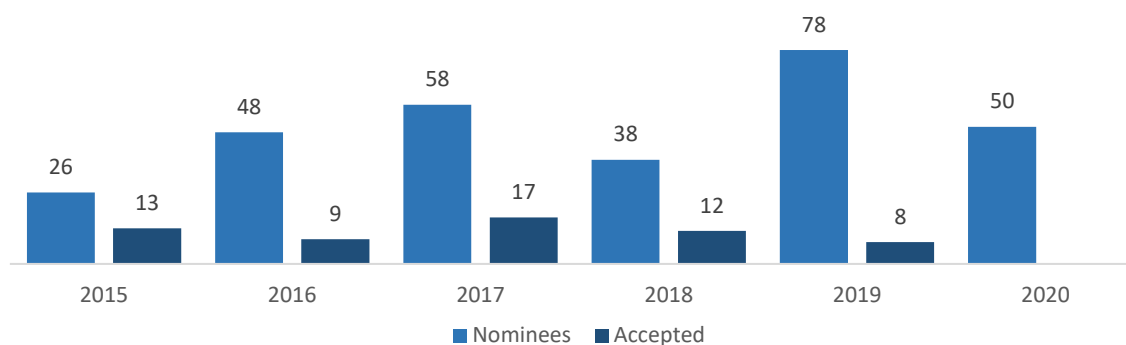
3 Implementation of nomination and selection processes

This chapter concerns the implementation of the StAR programme, emphasising the nomination and selection processes. The previous evaluation identified several challenges regarding these processes that needed follow up and more systematic investigation. First, we examine the nominations by number, in total and in terms of gender and geographical balance among nominees and selected candidates. Secondly, we discuss whether the nomination process is sufficiently tailored to identifying students at risk, and whether students' background is properly verified before accepting them to the programme. We have also examined the efficiency of the selection process and discuss points for improvement.

Nominated and accepted candidates

The graph below shows the number of nominated and accepted candidates between 2015 and 2020. Of the 243 persons nominated between 2015 and 2019⁹, only 59 persons have been offered a place in the programme.¹⁰ This gives an average acceptance rate of around 25 percent of originally nominated candidates. The high rejection rate is due to several factors, among them that many nominees fail to meet the selection criteria, that candidates' grades are insufficient, and the lack of BA programmes in English. There is no clear pattern in the development of acceptance rates from year to year. The highest acceptance rate was during the first round of nominations, with 50 percent, while for the 2019 student intake only 10 percent of nominated candidates were accepted.

Figure 3: Nominated and accepted candidates, StAR 2015-2020



⁹ As the 2019/2020 student intake had not yet been finished at the time of writing, we do not have information on how many candidates from this round will be offered a place in the programme.

¹⁰ Six candidates declined the offer or withdrew from the programme before starting their studies, and one candidate did not get a student visa, getting the total number of StAR students enrolled in the programme down to 52.

Gender balance?

A central finding from the previous evaluation was that the gender balance in the pool of nominees was uneven, and that more should be done to achieve a higher rate of female nominees. The MFA puts great emphasis on gender balance in the StAR agreement between the ministry and Diku.

Thus far, 210 males (70%) and 88 females (30%) have been nominated. However, it is worth noting that the gender distribution among nominated candidates has gradually become more equal, from a share of 15 percent women in 2015, via shares of 23, 38, 11¹¹ and 37 percent the following years, and finally a share of 40 percent among the nominated candidates for 2020.

At the time of the previous evaluation, Diku stated that gender balance had not yet been discussed with nominators. Since then, Diku has added the following sentence to the email going out to all nominators at the offset of each new nomination round: “Diku encourages all nominating parties to have a special focus on identifying female candidates for the programme.” At the same time, Diku acknowledges that more could be done to follow up on the gender imbalance. For instance, gender balance could have been emphasised in the programme document.

According to SAIH, the organisation encourages partner organisations to nominate women. Diku and SAIH’s encouragement may have contributed to the improved female nominee rate over time.

Informants from both Diku and SAIH believe the gender imbalance can be explained by the fact that the pool that the candidates are drawn from, has an overweight of men. In developing countries, - there are often more male than female students, especially at the MA level. Further, there are often more male than female activists, and more men hold leading positions in student activist groups and are therefore more exposed.

Outside of encouraging nominators to nominate more female candidates, no other measures have been implemented to increase the share of female nominees. In addition to adding the objective of gender balance to the programme document, a possible measure includes introducing a female quota among nominees or among students – in other words, earmarking some of the study places for women. However, several interviewees pointed out that the aim of gender balance causes a dilemma. As more men are leaders, they might more often be put in situations of precarious risk. One interviewee raised the question of whether a female candidate in a less at-risk situation should be prioritised over a male in order to attain gender balance, even though the male is at greater risk. At the same time, SAIH argued that female activists might be as oppressed as male activists, but that this oppression may be more subtle, and therefore harder to document. Consequently, it may be harder for females to provide the documentation of their risk situation which is needed to be considered for nomination.

The programme has accepted 42 men and 17 women, an acceptance rate of around 25 percent for both genders. Thus, as pointed out in the previous evaluation, the gender imbalance originates from the nomination phase.

¹¹ Diku has no explanation as to why the share of nominated female candidates was this low for 2018.

Geographical spread

The StAR agreement between the MFA and Diku also emphasises a balanced geographical spread between regions and countries. Of the 299 nominees, 141 are from Africa, 121 from Asia and 36 from Latin America. In other words, the number of African and Asian nominees are quite balanced, while there have been far fewer nominees from Latin America. In 2017, a person from Latin America was nominated for the first time. 2019 was a peak year with 27 nominations from Latin America, most likely related to the human rights situation in Nicaragua. For the 2020 round of nominations, there are five nominees from Latin America.

Applying a regional perspective¹², we find that Asian nominees have mainly come from Western Asia (99 of 121 nominations), and most African nominations come from Eastern Africa, with 89 of the 141 nominations. In Latin America, all but one nominated candidate have been from Central America.

The acceptance rates for African and Asian nominees equal around 25 percent, while it is lower for students from Latin America, 13 percent. A possible explanation may be low proficiency in English among many Latin American students, which was pointed out by several interviewees.

The 52 StAR candidates who have started studying in Norway come from 16 different countries. However, half of them come from two countries, one African and one Asian, while most of the other countries are represented with 1-3 candidates each. It seems that organisations in these two countries utilise their opportunity to nominate actively. One of the countries is a SAIH partner country, and in the other country, the situation for human rights defenders has deteriorated significantly since the initiation of the programme. We believe there is room for improvement in order to achieve the geographical spread called for by the MFA.

Is the nomination process designed to identify students at-risk?

One of our evaluation questions is whether the nomination process is adequately designed to identify students who are at risk of being denied access to education due to their human rights activism. The previous evaluation brought up several concerns regarding this matter. It was argued that in principle, a nomination process, as opposed to an open application procedure, may ensure that the “right” students are recruited, as the candidates are endorsed and approved by the nominating body. However, a nomination process is also vulnerable to corruption and false nominations, especially considering that students are recruited from some of the most corrupt countries in the world. Later in this chapter we will investigate more closely whether the current nomination process has safeguards in place to avoid or reveal false nominations. Using a nomination process also depend on the nominating bodies using their right to nominate. If not, the nomination mechanism is not working adequately, as the programme will fail to identify sufficient and relevant candidates. In the following paragraphs we will look at the nominating bodies, and to what extent they use their right to nominate.

Since its initiation, the StAR programme has not been at capacity, and more students could have been admitted to the programme. Several stakeholders point out that they probably just identify a fraction

¹² The definitions are based on the UN’s geoscheme.

of relevant candidates. The numbers of students nominated by each nominating body, indicate a potential for several nominators to take on a more active role in identifying relevant candidates.

Table 1: Number of students nominated per nominating body

Year/Nominating body	Embassies	SAIH	HEI	Amnesty	SAR	ICORN	Other	Total
2015*	13	1	3	0	1	0	0	26*
2016	32	11	2	0	2	1	0	48
2017	41	5	5	0	6	1	1 (NSO)	59
2018	12	22	1	0	2	0	1**	38
2019	20	53	0	3	0	2	0	78
2020	14	32	1	3	0	0	0	50
Total	132	124	12	6	11	4	2**	299*
Percent	44,2%	41,5 %	4,0 %	2,0 %	3,7 %	1,3 %	0,7 %	

Source: Diku

*For 2015, data for ten of the nominees is lacking. Two candidates were nominated by two different nominators.

**In 2018 a candidate was nominated by a local NGO that is not on the list of nominators.

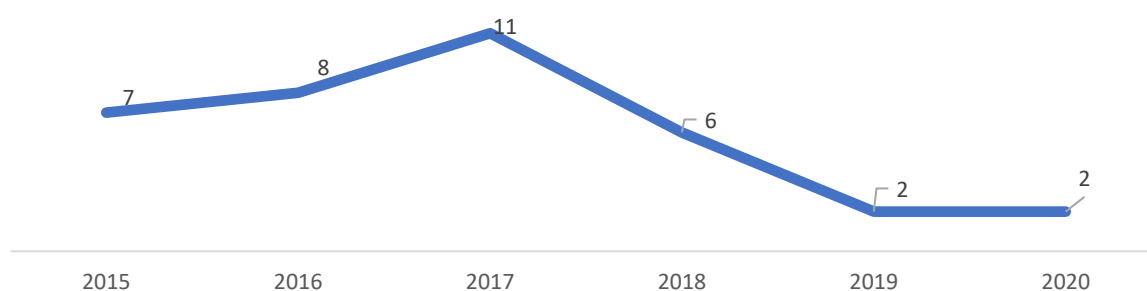
Table 1 shows the number and percent of students nominated by each nominating body. In total, embassies have nominated 44 percent and SAIH 41 percent of the candidates, while other nominators have been marginally involved, with HEIs being the third most nominating body at 4 percent. While the embassies were more active in nominating students the first three years, their nominations have declined the last three years, as SAIH has gradually nominated more students. In 2020, SAIH nominated 64 percent of nominees, while embassies nominated 28 percent.

One way to widen the catchment area of possible candidates is to engage more organisations and agencies in taking on a more active role in identifying activists. Stakeholders such as SAR, ICORN and higher education institutions utilise their right to nominate only to a limited degree.

Embassies should be well-positioned to make informed suggestions about nominees. According to a guide from the MFA to the foreign service, “*Norway’s efforts to support human rights defenders*”¹³, diplomatic missions should get “an overview of the situation for human rights defenders” including establishing who the human rights defenders are, and keep in regular contact with human rights defenders. In total, 19 embassies have nominated students to the programme. Ten of these have only nominated one year. The graph below shows that the number of embassies engaged in nominating candidates peaked in 2017 and has gradually declined since then. In 2019 and 2020, only two embassies nominated candidates to the programme.

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2010).

Figure 4: Number of embassies that made nominations each year



We have no data to explain the declining number of nominees from embassies, but there is clearly a potential for the embassies to become more involved. SAIH supports this argument, stating that their organisation alone is not able to identify all relevant candidates.

We wish that the embassies were considerably more active in nominating activists. They are on the ground in many more countries than we are. We wish they did more to reach out to students we can't reach.

SAIH informant

Do current vetting procedures identify students who are truly at-risk?

The previous evaluation raised concerns over the extent to which the candidates had been properly vetted before being selected to the programme. Several students expressed worry that the nomination and selection processes were vulnerable to false nominations, as they felt the process was lacking control mechanisms to ensure that the students were in fact at-risk. Important inquiries for this evaluation have therefore been to investigate whether improvements have been made to this process, and *how* and *where* in the process the assessment of students' activism and risk are made.

According to Diku, the responsibility of verifying the candidates' activism and risk status lies on the nominating body. However, interviews with nominating bodies and embassies indicate uncertainty as to whom is ultimately responsible for verifying this status. This uncertainty could make the process more vulnerable to false nominations. We believe the uncertainty stems from the programme guidelines, according to which "the requirement regarding activism and risk should be "assessed and concluded by the nominating party/embassy prior to contacting the candidate", leaving it unclear whether it is up to the nominating party (step 1) or the embassy (step 2) to ascertain the activism and risk status of the candidate. As the embassies can have a double role, in both steps 1 and 2, the formulation makes it unclear where the responsibility lies.¹⁴

As already mentioned, most of the nominations (step 1) come from SAIH or the embassies, the prior nominating 41 percent and the latter 44 percent of the students. Investigating SAIH and the embassies' procedures for vetting students is therefore particularly important.

¹⁴ The nomination form is clearer in this regard. In the form, the nominator has to confirm that there is sufficient evidence that the candidate meets the activism and risk criteria

According to informants in SAIH, they utilise their network of partner organisations around the world to identify relevant candidates. Sometimes candidates contact SAIH or partner organisations directly asking to be nominated. SAIH asks for supporting documentation to verify the candidates' stories before they send their lists off to the relevant embassies. However, this is at times difficult or impossible for students to provide, due to the oppressive nature of the regimes where they are based. Embassies we interviewed related that the information they receive about the candidates from SAIH and other nominators often is quite limited and insufficient to make an assessment about whether the candidate meets the activism and at-risk criteria. One informant stated that the information about certain candidates was limited to one line.

In interviews, several stakeholders stated that they wished the embassies would take on a more active role in verifying that the nominees indeed meet the selection criteria. Stakeholders also believed that the verification practices of the embassies varied. According to the programme guidelines, however, the embassies' role in step 2 is indeed quite limited. Formally, they are only required to make a phone call to the nominee to verify all selection criteria *minus* the activism and risk criteria. In interviews, the embassy informants' interpretation of their role was in line with the limited role described in the programme document. Outside of making the phone call to nominees, they reviewed the information from the nominating body and assessed which applications to send forward to Diku. One of the informants told us that he had gone above and beyond the responsibility of the embassy by contacting SAIH to obtain further information in cases where the information he received was insufficient.

The nomination process seems to a large degree to be based on trust between the different parties in the nomination chain. Both SAIH and the embassies relate that they to a large degree rely on information provided to them by the previous link in the nomination process and that their sending the nominations forward in the chain to a large degree is based on trust in the assessments made in the previous link. Embassies find that the information they receive from SAIH and other nominating bodies often is quite limited, and often wish they had more information about the candidates to make a better-informed decision. Similarly, SAIH finds that they need to trust the assessments made by their partner institutions.

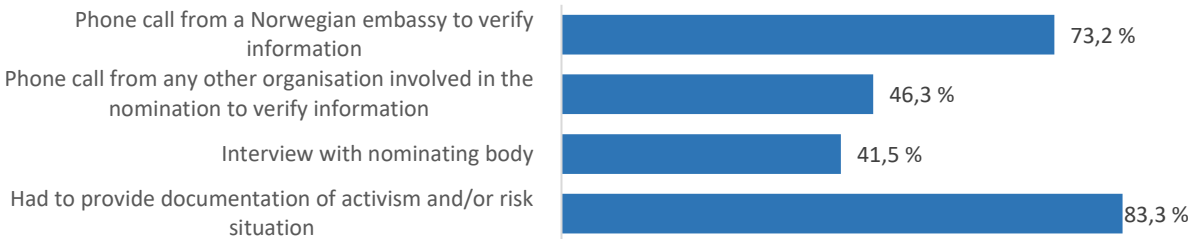
Based on our review of the programme guidelines and the nominating bodies and embassies' interpretation of their roles, we believe it is necessary to update the programme guidelines to further specify their responsibilities in the nomination process, in order to ensure that students meet the activism and at risk criteria.

Students' view on the nomination process

In order to investigate the vetting routines systematically, we included a question in the student survey asking them how their information was attempted verified during the nomination process (see figure 5). The findings show that most of the selected students were vetted through at least one instance: more than 80 percent of the students had to provide documentation of activism and/or risk situation and more than 70 percent received a phone call from a Norwegian embassy to verify their information. Still, some students have not had their information verified at all. One fourth of StAR students did not receive the required phone call from embassies, and four students were neither asked to provide documentation nor were called by an embassy. These findings indicate that in several cases, vetting procedures have not been in accordance with the programme guidelines. At the same

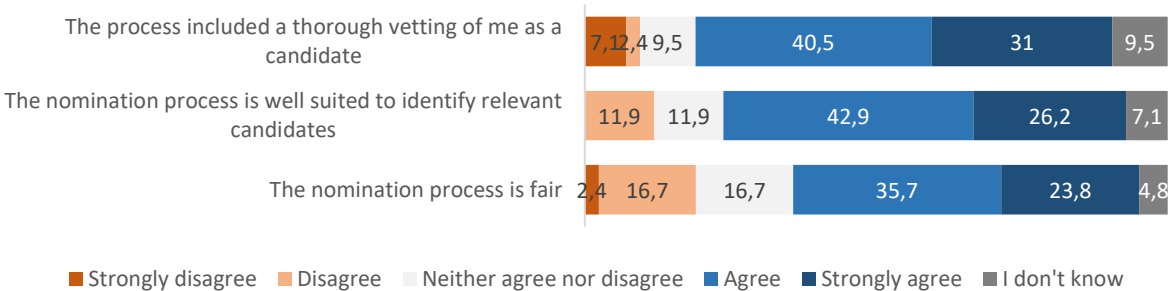
time, our data indicate that routines may have improved at the embassies. The share of students who have not been telephoned by the embassies dropped from 36 in the student group from 2015 to 6 percent in the 2019-student group.

Figure 5: During the nomination process, did you experience any of the following? (N=41)



Despite some students’ critique of the nomination process, the survey data shows that most of the students still consider the nomination process to be fair (figure 6). Two thirds of the students agree or strongly agree that the nomination process is well suited to identify relevant candidates, and that the nomination process included a thorough vetting of them as candidates.

Figure 6: The nomination process: Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement (N=42)



Still, several of the students voiced the same concern as expressed in the previous evaluation of the programme; that many of their fellow StAR students were not in fact at-risk, and that further control mechanisms are needed.

I have met some of the StAR students and they are here just because they were only a member of an activist group and I don't think they are at risk group because they can easily go to their country for holiday and come back to Norway

Student

Should further control mechanisms be implemented?

The evaluation suggests that there is potential for improvement in the implementation of the programme guidelines to ensure that students are properly vetted. Both embassy informants told us that StAR related tasks were not very high on their agenda, due to their general workload as well as the fact that it is not included in the annual letter of allocation from the MFA. One of the embassies

suggested that including operation of the StAR programme in the MFA's annual instructions to the embassies would give higher priority to these tasks.

Another question is whether further control mechanisms are needed to ensure proper vetting of the students. Informants at Diku and the MFA point out that the nomination process is long and labour intensive, and that implementing more control mechanisms may further prolong the process. Others, among them one embassy, argue that more information about the candidates and more vetting is necessary. The need for more thorough verification is also supported by some students, as "it's easy to lie".

At the same time, several stakeholders point out that the current vetting procedures risk aggravating the students' situation, and that further vetting mechanisms could worsen their case. One of the embassy informants found it problematic that they received lists of nominees in their email inbox, and that they are required to contact the candidates by email or phone to confirm information in a country where surveillance of activists is well-known. He/she argued that not only does it put the student further at risk, it also complicates the relationship between the embassy and the local government. Several of the students expressed similar concerns.

I got a phone call from the embassy... We were under cyber attacks If we make calls so that everyone can see, then that will expose our activities

Student

Ultimately, there is a dilemma between implementing more control mechanisms and ensuring the candidates' safety.

Efficiency and thoroughness in the selection process

The evaluation has revealed several aspects of the selection process that could be improved in order to make the process more efficient. In figure 2 (see page 12), we have defined the selection process as the steps following the nomination process, i.e. from the point where the embassies send off their nominations to Diku until UDI has made its assessment. However, one can argue that the selection process starts when the nominating bodies and the embassies assess the suitability of the candidates, as they are expected to ensure that the general selection criteria are met.

A main finding in our review of the selection process is that it is often discovered late in the process that there are nominees who do not meet the general selection criteria. Consequently, the selection body discovering the discrepancies (often Diku or NOKUT), experiences an additional workload that could have been avoided. Further, nominees that do not meet the requirements experience prolonged wait and false hopes.

According to NOKUT, every year they discover nominees that do not meet the general selection criteria. For instance, in 2019, 13 nominees had either not started higher education, or they had already finished their MA. These findings suggest a need to further specify the responsibilities of the various agencies and organisations involved in the nomination and selection process. NOKUT also suggested that they could be involved earlier in the process, by e.g. being involved in the embassies' call to candidates, as they have developed their own interview-based methods for validating education.

Another important finding that points to deficiencies in the selection process, is that in some instances, students who are not proficient in English or are otherwise academically unqualified for studying at a Norwegian university, have been accepted into the programme. According to NOKUT, they receive nominations every year of students who state explicitly in their application form that they are not proficient in English. One professor told us about the potential consequences of including students in the programme that are not fluent in English.

It's been a struggle. I can't wait for him to finish... It's completely unreasonable for higher education institutions and supervisors to be responsible for him when there is so much lacking.

Professor, Norwegian HEI

The professor describes the situation as very labour intensive and hard, also for the student, who was not able to show his potential and who could not connect with other students because they lacked a shared language. Another of the interviewed academic staff had also had a similar challenging experience with a candidate who lacked necessary academic qualifications to follow the programme the candidate was enrolled in, while a third supervisor only had positive experiences with StAR students. These examples serve as an illustration of the importance that the accepted students have the necessary prerequisites for studying in Norway. By accepting candidates who are not really qualified for studying at a Norwegian university, the programme is potentially doing them a disservice.

According to the programme document, it is NOKUT's responsibility to validate language requirements. NOKUT relates that they review *documented* English language skills. However, they encourage all HEIs to conduct an interview via Skype with potential candidates before accepting them to assess their actual English skills, as they find that the discrepancies between documented and actual language skills are sometimes quite substantial. According to NOKUT, some HEIs have incorporated such a practice into their routines, while others have not. The two supervisors that have had negative experiences, relate that these candidates were not interviewed by the department that received them before being accepted. Interestingly, these departments normally have routines for intake of international students that include interviews. We do not know the exact reason for this deficiency, but one of the professors held that the department does not receive contact information for the students. We have no other information to corroborate this claim.

4 Administration and cost-efficiency

In this chapter we discuss the administration of the programme, in terms of communication and cooperation between stakeholders, and identify challenges and points for improvement. We also discuss the cost-efficiency of the programme.

The overall impression from the stakeholder interviews is that stakeholders are fairly satisfied with the communication and cooperation in administering the programme. Stakeholders are easily available by phone or e-mail and do their best to make sure that the implementation of the programme runs as efficiently as possible. Several of the interviewees praise the efforts made by the StAR contact persons at HEIs. It is held that they are easy to get in touch with, and flexible when it comes to finding solutions if problems arise.

Several of the interviewees emphasise that the operation of the programme has become easier and more streamlined over the years, which may also have reduced costs. The different stakeholders have gained more insight into each other's role and needs for the process to run as efficiently as possible. For instance, UDI emphasises that they now get an early notice from Diku with the approximate number of anticipated visa applications. This routine makes it easier for UDI to estimate the workload related to the assessment of study visa applications.

Still, there are some issues that hamper the efficiency of the collaboration, related to Diku's role, the embassies' involvement, information flow, and the temporality of the programme.

The role of Diku

The StAR programme is complex, and involves many institutions, agencies and stakeholders. Diku is in many ways the nave in the programme, and much of the communication between the involved parties passes via Diku. Stakeholders and institutions are in general satisfied with Diku's job as a coordinator and administrator of the programme, as are students. Several stakeholders express that Diku is easy to collaborate with, and the MFA praises Diku for its flexibility and ability to find solutions to problems as they arise. However, some informants raised certain points of critique. A StAR contact person at one of the HEIs was calling on Diku to take on a more active role in addressing the issue of return, and how institutions are to deal with students who either do not wish to, or are not able to, return after completion of their degree. This person held that Diku could take more responsibility for solving the problems related to return that can arise when candidates have finished their studies. Several stakeholders also held that some of the information they receive from Diku does not seem to have been verified, as it is sometimes imprecise or outdated (f.ex. contact information).

The role of the embassies

One aspect that seems to constitute a challenge towards efficient administration and good cooperation between stakeholders is the role of the embassies. As previously discussed, many

embassies seem to take on a minimal role in the programme, perhaps because the programme is not included in their annual instructions from the MFA. Further, both Diku and SAIH have experienced that some embassies are not aware that the programme exists, or of their role. One nominator has even experienced that an embassy refused to receive a nomination, stating that it is not their job. Both Diku and SAIH expressed a wish that embassies were more active. The fact that some embassies lack knowledge about the programme or only perform a minimal role in it, may decelerate the work of other stakeholders involved in the process.

Flow of information

Several of the interviewed stakeholders believe the programme would run more smoothly if they had more information about the candidates. For instance, the interviewed HEI StAR contact persons call for more information about the candidates' academic background and their activism. More information about candidates' qualifications would, as one StAR contact person argues, make it easier to find a good match between candidate and study programme. Even though they receive a recommendation from NOKUT, the informant believe the choice of study programme for each candidate could have been better founded if they had more background information about the candidate. The StAR contact person at the other HEI argues that more background information about would be valuable in order to give the candidates a good reception at the HEI and adequate follow-up during their studies. Such information would, for example, allow them to provide help with psychosocial issues that may arise, as some of the candidates are struggling with tough experiences from their home country.

The academic staff we interviewed felt that they lacked information about the programme in general, as well as about the individual candidates. The need for information is perhaps especially important for staff who have close interaction with students, for instance supervisors. One interviewee who supervised the MA thesis of a StAR student wished she had been able to make a more informed decision when agreeing to supervise the candidate. She had hardly received any information about the programme or the candidate and held that the institution should have gathered more information about the candidate through a phone conversation before granting the candidate a place at the study programme.

Unquestionably, there is a dilemma between safeguarding candidates' privacy and providing all involved parties with enough information to perform their tasks in the programme as efficiently and targeted as possible. Information about candidates' previous experiences with activism and risk situation is personal and sensitive and should not be shared without the candidates' consent. Information about the formal academic qualifications of the candidate is less sensitive, and essential for the relevant departments and supervisors. At the same time, it is crucial that such information is shared through safe channels and that all involved parties handle the information with great care. The more persons who have access to information, the greater the risk of exposing information about a student.

Temporality and planning

An aspect that we find to somewhat hamper the administration of the programme and cooperation between stakeholders is the temporality of the programme. Several stakeholders emphasise that if

funding was awarded for several rounds of nominations at the time rather than just one, the programme would run more efficiently, and cooperation would improve further. Today, the process of nominating candidates can only start after the MFA has decided that the programme will receive funding for another year. This has ripple effects for the tasks performed by stakeholders who enter the programme later in the process. According to several stakeholders, the nomination process starts late in relation to all the tasks that must be performed before the accepted candidates arrive for the start of the school year.

For instance, NOKUT argues that they try to forward candidates to the HEIs as soon as possible for them to have enough time to find a good match between candidates and the available study programmes. At the same time candidates need time to gather all the documentation that NOKUT requires. If candidates were identified earlier, this would give NOKUT, HEIs and UDI more time to perform their tasks, and candidates more time to provide all the requested documentation. Diku also argues that a more long-term programme would allow them to plan more ahead, and thus make their job easier.

Both SAIH and one of the HEI StAR contact persons asked for more regular meeting points for the stakeholders to share experiences and information. This request was also brought up in the previous evaluation. However, the temporality of the programme may discourage stakeholders to set up such a meeting point.

Furthermore, the temporality of the programme may prevent stakeholders from implementing necessary improvements to their operations. If the programme were to be cancelled, implementing new measures to improve the programme would be a waste of resources. Thus, it can be argued that the short time-span of the programme where funding over the last number of years has been awarded for one year at the time to some degree hampers further development and strengthening of the programme, as stakeholders have little incentive to make changes to the way they work.

Cost-efficiency

In reviewing the cost-efficiency of the programme, we have asked stakeholders how they weigh the costs of running the programme vis-à-vis the benefits. We have also investigated whether the administration of the programme has become more cost-efficient over the years and considered steps that could be taken to improve the cost-efficiency of the programme.

At Diku, the costs of operating the StAR programme corresponds to a position of between 60 and 70 percent. Diku also pays NOKUT for the evaluation of applications and provides some financial support for HEIs supporting their administrative tasks related to the programme.

Overall, the interviewed stakeholders view the costs of running the programme as reasonable, seen in relation to the benefits of the programme. The *embassy* informants described the costs related to the StAR programme as small. One informant described that they only spent a few hours on contacting relevant candidates. For *Diku* the programme entails a substantial workload per candidate, according to their informant, but not more so than for other scholarship programmes that requires individual follow-up. Diku related that they do not see any way they could reduce the costs related to their part of the programme, as they hold a key role that hardly can be reduced. At *NOKUT* and *UDI*, the workload is primarily related to the number of candidates they evaluate.

At the administrative level at *HEIs*, the workload related to the programme varies depending on each HEI's apparatus for receiving international students. At one HEI, StAR students are followed up through the existing framework for reception of students from outside the EU at the institution. According to the StAR contact there, they have sufficient capacity to take on these tasks within their existing apparatus. The other StAR contact we interviewed spent considerable time following up on candidates, and related that in intensive periods such as at student reception, StAR related work is prioritised over other tasks, indicating that the capacity for following up on StAR students was insufficient at this institution. At the same time, she held that although the programme periodically generates considerable work, it is not unreasonable compared to other programmes.

At the *academic* level, the amount of work seems to vary considerably depending on the individual student. As pointed out previously, accepting unqualified students into the programme may generate an unreasonably large workload for the academic staff involved.

The MFA is of the opinion that the costs generated from administration of the programme are reasonable. SAIH holds that the programme has a small cost compared to the overall aid budget, but a strong symbolic value. They argue that it is important not only for the individual students who are enrolled in the programme, but also for the unions and movements they come from, because it signals that they have international attention and support.

More cost-efficient?

Based on interviews with stakeholders, we find reason to believe that the programme has become somewhat more cost-efficient over the years. As already discussed, better understanding among stakeholders of the tasks and needs of other parties has facilitated cooperation and made the programme more streamlined over the years. Hence, processes are smoother and more efficient.

At the same time, there are issues identified in the previous evaluation that could have contributed to improved cost-efficiency, but that have not yet been solved. Stakeholders point to the temporality of the programme as a barrier to invest in improvement of routines.

We believe that the area with the most room for improvement concerns the nomination process. The high number of unqualified candidates that are nominated to the programme generates unnecessary administrative costs. The group includes candidates who have not yet started higher education, students who have already completed a MA degree and students who do not speak English. Identifying more of the unqualified students earlier in the nomination process could reduce the workload for Diku to follow up nominees, and for NOKUT to evaluate all candidates. It would also spare these students from a long period of waiting.

The lack of available BA programmes in English (which was brought up in the previous evaluation), also contributes to the large share of nominated candidates rejected by NOKUT. Diku provides information about available BA programmes in English, but it is still a problem that many candidates are rejected late in the process because there is no relevant study programme for them. One possible measure to improve cost-efficiency would be to limit nominations to solely MA level.

5 Achievements

This chapter assesses the achievements of the StAR programme from its initiation in 2015 until the present – 2020. In chapter 2 we saw that the programme has several explicit and implicit objectives and goals. In this chapter we will investigate to what extent the programme contributes to these objectives and goals.

Outcomes

In this section we discuss the programme's achievement in relation to the desired outcomes. This includes the explicitly stated outcome of providing students with a degree, and encouraging them to return home, as well as the implicit outcomes of professional empowerment, strengthening students as human rights activists through accompanying activities and providing them with an extended network through studies and NGO activities.

Completion of degree and return

Completion of degree

The stated desired outcome of the StAR programme is that students complete an academic degree in Norway. Students who have finished their studies will be encouraged to return to their home country. Our findings show that thus far most of the StAR students complete their degree, but many need more than the designated time to complete. At the time of writing, of the 52 students admitted to the programme, 19 candidates had completed their degree, 30 were still studying in Norway, and only three left the programme without completing their degree. Those who have graduated so far are mainly from the 2015 and 2016 cohorts. Most of the students accepted in the 2017 student intake are still studying. They either have a semester left of the designated time for a BA or have been allowed to extend the delivery of their MA thesis. Of the 12 MA students from the 2017 cohort, only two had completed their degree as of January 2020. Consequently, data available for assessing programme achievements in terms of students completing a degree is still somewhat limited.

Compared to the general population of students in Norway, the StAR students have a lower rate of study progression. According to statistics from Statistics Norway (SSB), around 50 percent of MA students in Norway complete their degree in the designated time.^{15,16} For the 2017 cohort of students, the share is 16 percent. We do not have similar statistics available for the 2015 and 2016 cohorts, but several interviewees pointed out that it is very common for StAR students to postpone their studies.

The low study progression of the StAR students may be explained by the fact that many of them have had difficult experiences in the past that can make it extra challenging to focus on their studies. Therefore, when the StAR programme was established, it was decided that StAR students would have a right to receive an extension of their scholarship for a maximum of two semesters. They receive an

¹⁵ SSB (2020)

¹⁶ However, the share that completes a degree in the designated time varies significantly between different areas of study.

extended scholarship if the HEI decides to extend their right to study at the institution, and the student must have a recommendation from their supervisor or a similar person, confirming that they need the extra time to complete their degree. The extension is awarded for one semester at a time, and the MFA provides extended scholarship funding. It has happened that StAR students have lost their study right due to low study progression.

At the same time, several informants pointed out that other factors may influence students' wish to extend their studies. Informants from two different institutions pointed to a tendency that some StAR students ask for an extension because they want to stay in Norway as long as possible:

We [the institution] have no StAR students who have completed a degree in the allotted time. [...] If they don't complete their degree, they have a right to extend their stay as students in Norway.

StAR contact person

Return

According to the programme guidelines, students are encouraged to return to their home countries upon completion of their degree. As pointed out in chapter 2, several stakeholders emphasise the importance of this objective. So far, the programme's achievements in this regard are limited. Of the candidates who have completed a degree or withdrawn from the programme, around 50 per cent have returned to their home country as of January 2020, according to UDI. It is worth noting that the first cohorts included more students from so-called red countries than the later cohorts, which may impair their ability to return compared to students from yellow and green countries. Therefore, it is necessary to wait a few more semesters before a proper assessment of students' return rates can be made, as this may vary between the first and later cohorts of students.

The factors that aid or impede student return, seem to vary and include both the social and political context in the student's home country, as well as individual factors. SAIH pointed out that in some cases, the situation in the activists' home country might improve while the student is in Norway, for instance due to regime change, while in others it might deteriorate. One of the embassies pointed out that being in the programme also might put the student further at risk when returning home:

They [the students from this country] will likely be under attention from the intelligence services when they enter the programme, if they were not already.

Embassy informant

Several of the students are at risk of imprisonment upon return, while others are concerned that chances of getting a job in their home country are slim because they are activists. Some students are willing to take such risks and return, while others seek other options outside of their home country, depending on the situation and motivations of the individual student.

Graduation and the prospect of returning to the home country were brought up frequently in the student survey, as well as in the in-depth interviews with students. Many perceive it as a weakness that the programme does not explicitly acknowledge or address the challenges related to return. One of the interviewed students related that when she returns, the authorities will know she has been abroad, and that she is an activist. This may cause the student problems with the police, it can be hard

to find a job, and to be accepted by the general society. The interviewee argued that the programme lacks an “exit plan”, a system for following up on students when they return. This candidate had just started the programme, but already worried about what would happen to her upon return. Similar views are expressed by many students in the survey. In an open text field asking students for suggestions for improvements of the programme, addressing the issue of return more explicitly is the most frequent suggestion. One person wrote:

Even though the program is very well structured and empowering, it is proper to have an exit plan for those finishing the program. There is no point of empowering an individual and then dumping them back to the jaws of the oppressor.

Student

As of today, none of the stakeholders feel they have a mandate to address and improve the situation surrounding students’ return to their home country. From Diku’s point of view, their mandate in the programme ends when students have graduated. Both of the interviewed StAR contacts stated that the HEIs have no formal role after students graduate and that their options as to facilitate return are limited. From the embassies’ point of view, their following up on students’ return may escalate the students’ risk situation, as being in touch with a foreign embassy might draw extra attention to the student. Therefore, one embassy recommended that the students themselves should take initiative to stay in touch after graduation, if the embassy is to have a formal role in the return.

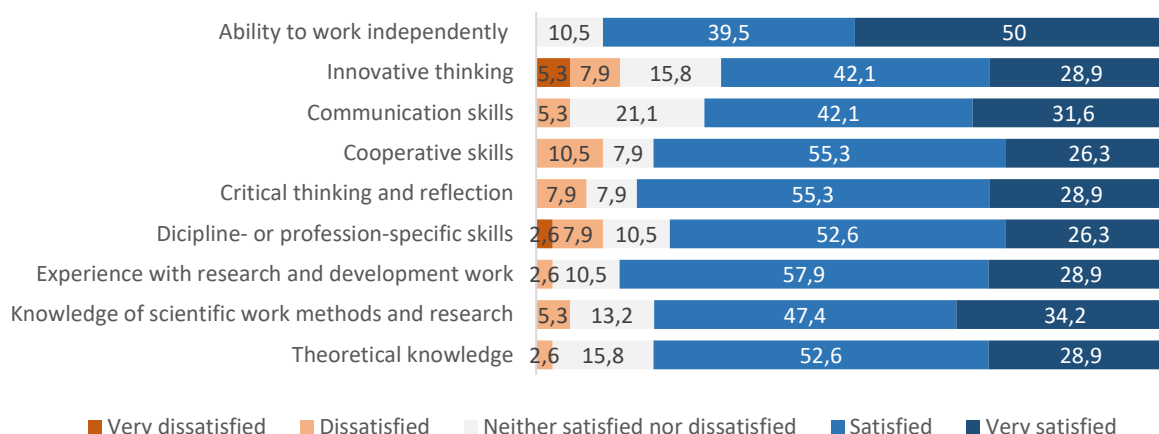
The dilemma concerning the return expectation was also brought up in the previous evaluation. Findings from the current evaluation indicates that it is no closer to being solved.

Professional empowerment

In addition to the quantifiable outcome of obtaining a degree, professional empowerment through an academic degree can contribute to the goal of strengthening the students as change agents in their home countries. Our findings indicate that the programme to a large degree contributes to this objective.

Results from the student survey show that most StAR students consider the programme they attend in Norway to be relevant for both their educational background and their future career – around 85 percent respond that it is relevant to a large or very large extent. They are also very satisfied with the quality of the education they receive. Three fourths find that the academic level of their Norwegian institution is higher or much higher than that of their home institution. A vast majority is satisfied or very satisfied with the learning outcomes of their studies (see figure 7). Several informants pointed out that having a Norwegian degree can strengthen the students’ opportunities in the future, as it has a higher status than one from students’ home countries.

Figure 7: How satisfied are you with the learning outcomes from the study programme you attend/attended in Norway, concerning: (N=38)



One of the findings of the previous evaluation was that students expressed a wish to be more involved with the choice of study programme. Further, several students were enrolled in study programmes not relevant to neither their educational background nor future career plans, as they had only been given the offer of one, irrelevant study programme. During recent years NOKUT has started sending a list of all qualified candidates to all the HEIs that are part of the programme, rather than each candidate only being forwarded to one HEI. Many students now receive more than one offer - about 50 per cent according to the student survey.

StAR contact persons as well as academic staff relate that most of the students are doing well academically. Many of the students are enrolled in study programmes which are relevant for their activism, and one interviewee described that when there is a good fit between the student and the study programme, it can be “*very meaningful*”. Several of the HEI informants brought up that StAR students can contribute to academic quality and the learning outcomes of other students at their institutions by sharing their experiences with human rights and academic freedom in their home countries. One of the StAR contact persons stated that:

They contribute academically. [...] A lot of Norwegian students have only read about it. StAR students contribute with first-hand experience. They can share their experiences as activists, democracy fighters, make others more conscious of the world outside.

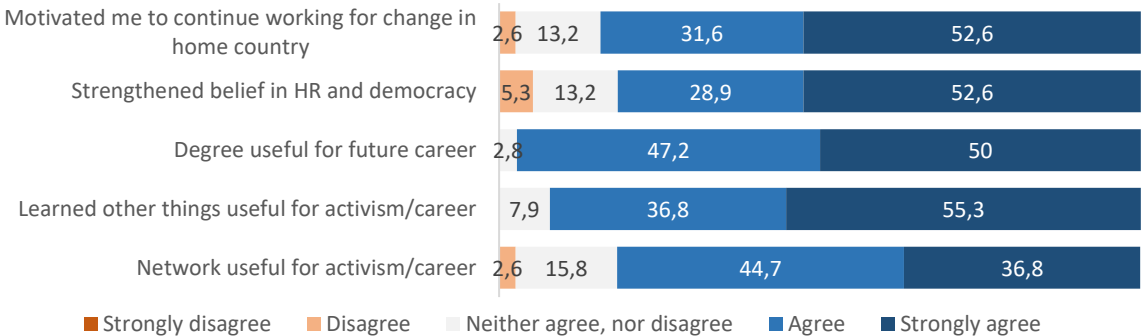
StAR contact person

The students value the degree they receive highly. In an open text field in the survey asking students to list their greatest personal benefits of the programme, the opportunity to complete their degree is mentioned the most frequently. One of the interviewed students held that if she had not been accepted into the programme, she would not have been able to complete a MA degree, as she had been banned from universities in the home country. Both former nominees who were not accepted into the programme expressed concern in interviews that they would not be able to complete a MA degree without the StAR programme.

Strengthen students as human rights activists and providing them with an extended network

Students, HEI StAR contact persons and academic staff all believe the programme is beneficial for students’ activism. All student survey questions concerning benefits of programme for students’ own activism receive high scores. More than 80 percent of the students agree or strongly agree that the participation in the programme has motivated them to keep working for change in their home country. An equal share express that it has strengthened their belief in human rights and democracy.

Figure 8: Listed below are several statements about your participation in the StAR programme. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement (N=38)



More than 75 percent also agree that the programme provides them with a network which can be useful for their future activism and/or career. In an open field in the survey, several students also express that their role as activists have been strengthened because they now have an international network.

While in Norway, most students participate in activities relevant for strengthening their activism: 90 percent have joined SAIH, and many have also joined other groups such as human rights NGOs or student unions. 90 percent of the students in the survey have participated in seminars/events hosted by Diku or SAIH, and the feedback on these events is mainly positive. One person wrote that the Diku seminar was “[...] instrumental for networking which enabled us to get to know each other”. Around 40 percent of the students have attended the Oslo University International Summer School, and those who have attended are very satisfied - several describe it as a highlight of their stay.

In interviews, students expressed that participating in the programme provides them with a break from harassment and threats in the home country. The students we interviewed, related that they had more freedom to engage in activism when they didn’t have to worry about their own safety.

Impact

Strengthen students as change agents in their home country

As the programme does not maintain contact with graduated students, information about what candidates do after they graduate is not gathered systematically. It is therefore hard to assess the

programme's achievements in relation to this overall goal. One of the StAR contacts called for an alumni survey or network to be put into place, in order to gather information about what students gain from their education in the longer run, after graduating from the programme. Systematic information would facilitate an evaluation of the programmes' achievements in the future.

Diku relates that they send an informal e-mail to all graduated candidates asking about their future plans, but many students do not reply. Diku's informant believes that many of the graduated candidates see no reason for staying in touch with Diku after graduation. Their impression is strengthened by the fact that only two of the graduated candidates who have returned to their home country responded to the student survey.¹⁷

Examples provided in interviews indicate that the programme, at least to some degree, has contributed to strengthening student human rights activists as change agents. Some graduates have entered politics as members of the opposition party, some work in NGOs or have started new ones, other work in international diplomacy.

We observe an underlying premise in the programme that for students to be change agents in their home countries, they must return home. As we pointed out in chapter 2, however, graduated students may contribute to change in their home country from the outside. Findings from both survey and interviews indicate that several of the students who have not returned home, have continued to stay in touch with human rights activists in their home country and to contribute from afar. Some have been employed in NGOs working with human rights, and some are active in the student organisation from Norway.

In short, the available evidence indicates that the StAR programme has contributed to strengthening student human rights activists as change agents in their home country. Our findings also indicate that students can contribute to change not only by returning, but also from afar.

Strengthen the Norwegian government's work on human rights

As pointed out in chapter 2, the programme has potential for a broader impact if it also feeds into the Norwegian government's efforts in the human rights field. We believe that for the programme to fulfil the goal of strengthening the Norwegian government's work on human rights, it should establish better mechanisms for staying connected with the StAR students. One of the embassy representatives describe the programme as "one of the most concrete things the MFA does [in their work for human rights]", and the representative from the MFA holds that the StAR programme is one of several initiatives that contributes to promoting Norway as a champion for human rights. Still, several interviewees pointed out that the programme does not have any system for maintaining a connection with the students after they graduate. The representative from Diku held that:

If there were more contact after their time as students is over, the programme could have played a bigger role. [...] As it is today, it does not maintain the network part. One could offer an alumnus network or something, connect the

¹⁷ However, the low response rate from graduates of the programme could also be due to other factors, such as outdated email addresses.

students to other work that Norway does in these countries, on human rights or education. But that clarification of responsibility, determining who should do that, we have not made that clarification yet.

Diku informant

6 Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, we find that the StAR programme is an expedient mechanism for providing support for student human rights activists. It has been able to reach out to many students with a potential for becoming change agents, and in most cases, students are strengthened as activists through their participation in the programme. We find that the programme contributes to the Norwegian foreign policy goal of supporting human rights defenders. At the same time, the programme would potentially have broader impact if it fed into the Norwegian government's efforts in the human rights field in a more systematic way.

There are, however, some significant weaknesses in the implementation of the programme that should be addressed. Many of the problems we have uncovered can be traced back to the fact that some nominators and embassies do not perform their tasks in accordance with the guidelines in the programme document. This may be explained by the lack of clarity in the programme guidelines as to where the ultimate responsibility lies. We also find that two of the main concerns brought up in the previous evaluation have not been followed up. Firstly, no additional control mechanisms have been implemented in the nomination process. Secondly, follow-up of students after they graduate has not been established.

Based on the overall findings of the evaluation, we recommend that the StAR programme is continued. However, we make this recommendation under the condition that the weaknesses we have identified are addressed, especially with regards to the implementation of the nomination and selection processes.

Below we present the main findings of chapters 2-4 and recommend changes to the programme that could be implemented in order to counteract the weaknesses and challenges we have identified throughout the evaluation.

Programme design and objectives

The stated goal of the programme is to provide a degree to at-risk student activists, while encouraging them to return home upon graduation. We also find a number of additional unspoken objectives and goals. Further, we argue that a less strict interpretation of the programme guidelines is possible: Students can be change agents in their home country *without* returning home.

Since its initiation, the programme has not been at capacity. More students could have been admitted every year, thus increasing the potential impact of the programme. For more relevant candidates to be identified, more of the organisations eligible for making nominations must play an active role in the programme. The Norwegian embassies should be well-positioned to make informed suggestions about nominees yet nominate fewer candidates each year.

We consider the selection criteria to be expedient and relevant for the goals of the programme but question the omission of English proficiency as a formal criterion in the programme document. Further, we have found two sets of conflicts in the criteria: firstly, between the activist and at-risk

criteria on the one hand and the academic and linguistic criteria on the other; secondly, between the at-risk criteria and the return requirement. The ultimate consequence of putting considerable weight on the objective of students returning home is that students at great risk should not be selected for the programme, because the likelihood of such students returning home is smaller than for students who are less at risk.

Based on these findings, we recommend that:

- ◆ **The programme guidelines are developed to encompass the unspoken objectives and goals of the programme.** This could increase the impact of the programme and ensure that all involved stakeholders work towards the same goals.
- ◆ **The tasks related to the StAR programme are included in the annual letter of allocation to the embassies.** Formally, embassies have a key role in the programme, but most do not take on an active role today. For embassies to prioritise StAR related tasks, formal instructions from the MFA concerning their role may be necessary.
- ◆ **English proficiency is included among the formal selection criteria.**
- ◆ **The question of how to balance the at-risk criteria and the returnability criteria is clarified.** How to meet this inherent contradiction in the programme is a political question. Therefore, we suggest that it is decided at a policy level, to ensure equal treatment of candidates.

Nomination and selection processes

The evaluation has identified some deficiencies in the nomination process. Firstly, the programme document is somewhat ambiguous concerning the responsibilities of nominators and embassies respectively in ascertaining the students' activist- and risk-status. Secondly, even though the formal guidelines are followed to a larger degree now than at the time of the previous evaluation, there is still room for improvement in the vetting of candidates.

Several stakeholders call for the implementation of more control in the nomination phase. We believe, however, that there is a potential for increased control in the nomination phase simply by making sure that all involved parties follow the existing routines. It is also important that the vetting of nominees is carried out with caution in order to avoid exposing nominees and putting them further at risk.

Even though there is still an overweight of male nominees, the gender balance has gradually become more equal. Further measures could be implemented, such as female quotas, but this could undermine other important concerns for the programme such as nominating the most at-risk students.

A cause for concern is that candidates are nominated who do not meet the general selection criteria, including candidates who have not yet started higher education, and candidates who have completed a MA degree. Further, some of the departments that accept StAR students do so without conducting an interview with the candidates, occasionally resulting in academically or linguistically unqualified candidates entering the programme.

The problems we have identified are not related to how the nomination mechanism is designed, but rather owe to the fact that nominators and embassies do not perform their tasks in accordance with the formal description in the programme document. Therefore, we recommend that:

- ◆ **The programme guidelines further specify the responsibility of nominators and embassies in the nomination process.** As the existing control mechanisms are not implemented as intended, control can be increased without implementing new routines.
- ◆ **HEIs are strongly encouraged to conduct an interview with candidates,** hence reducing the risk that candidates who are not proficient in English or academically qualified are offered a place in the programme.

Administration and cost-efficiency

Overall, the division of labour in the programme seem expedient. The administration of the programme has become more streamlined over the course of the programme period, which may have reduced administrative costs. We find, however, potential for some improvements. Embassies could take on a more active role in the programme, and HEIs/faculty could be provided with more information about the programme and the individual candidates. We also argue that lack of predictability and long-term planning due to the temporality of the programme affects the administrative costs.

The costs of the programme are considered reasonable in relation to its benefits. There are few examples of superfluous tasks that could be removed in order to reduce costs. However, we believe that the costs pertaining to validation of candidates could be reduced if unqualified candidates were identified earlier in the nomination phase. Costs could also be reduced if nominations of candidates at the BA level were discouraged. Based on these findings, we recommend that:

- ◆ **HEIs are provided with more information about candidates,** including the contact information necessary for conducting an interview, in a manner that does not expose the candidate.
- ◆ **Funding for the programme is awarded for several rounds at the time.** This would relieve the administrative burden for stakeholders and provide room for implementing improvements.
- ◆ **NOKUT is involved in the nomination phase.** If NOKUT conducted phone interviews earlier in the process, this could contribute to identifying more of the candidates that do not meet the academic or linguistic requirements, reducing costs later in the process.
- ◆ **Nominations at the BA level are discouraged.** The programme spends substantial resources on follow-up and evaluation of candidates at the BA level, but very few of these are granted a place in the programme.

Achievements

We conclude that the programme to a large degree achieves the objective of students completing a degree. However, most StAR students need an extension to complete their studies. The programme

also contributes strongly to the students' professional empowerment, to strengthening them as human rights activists and providing them with a network.

So far, the programme is less successful in achieving the objective of students returning to their home countries. This may be because more students from red countries were accepted in the first cohorts than in later rounds. It is therefore premature to conclude on the programme's achievements related to return. Even though addressing the return expectation was brought up as a main point of improvement in the previous evaluation, we find that little has been done to address this issue. We suggest steps are taken to follow up on the students who do return home as well as those who do not.

Based on the available evidence, we find that both returned and non-returned students have been strengthened as activists through the programme. We therefore question the assumption that students have to return home in order to be change agents.

We believe the programme has potential for broader impact if it also feeds into the Norwegian government's efforts in the human rights field. We suggest initiating an alumni network in order to increase the impact of the programme. The network approach in SAR may be a relevant model to look at.

Based on the findings regarding the programme's achievements, we recommend:

- ◆ **Establishing procedures for following up on students after graduation.** The system should address the needs of both the students who return home, and those who do not. Establishing an alumni network could be a first step, which could also contribute towards strengthening the Norwegian government's work on human rights.
- ◆ **Systematically gathering data on what students do after they graduate in terms of career and activism.** As long as such data does not exist, it is hard to assess the impact of the programme.

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Appendix 1: Response rates and questionnaire

The student survey was sent out to all 52 current or previous StAR students. The survey was in the field from the 3rd to the 26th of February 2020.

Response rate

The overall response rate for the survey was 85 percent (N=44). The response rate for each round of student intake is showed in table 1. The response rate is at the lowest for the first two rounds of student intake, with 60 and 75 percent, while the highest response rates are for 2017 and 2018, with 93 and 100 percent. This means that there is a somewhat lower representativity in the answers from the first two rounds of student intake but overall, this should still be considered a very good response rate.

The survey also achieved good representation of both candidates currently studying in Norway (N=25) as well as candidates who have completed their studies (N=15).¹⁸ However, among the graduated students who answered the survey only two have returned to their home country. According to numbers from UDI, there were 11 persons who had returned to their home country as of January 2020. This means that the survey data provides little information about the returned candidates.

Table 1: Response rate for student survey

	Students (N)	Survey responses (N)	Response rate
2015	10	6	60 %
2016	8	6	75 %
2017	14	13	93 %
2018	12	12	100 %
2019	8	7	88 %
Total	52	44	85 %

¹⁸ Four persons did not answer this question.

STUDENTS AT RISK

Welcome

Welcome to this survey about the Students at Risk programme

In this survey you will be asked about your experiences as a participant in the programme. The survey will take about 10-15 minutes to complete.

The nomination process

Listed below are several statements about the nomination process. By nomination process, we mean the process where you were identified as a candidate for the programme, and your position as an activist and your risk situation was verified.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	I don't know
The process included a thorough vetting of me as a candidate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are control mechanisms in place to discover false nominations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The nomination process is well suited to identify relevant candidates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The nomination process is fair	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Nomination process experience

During the nomination process, did you experience any of the following:

	Yes	No
Phone call from a Norwegian embassy to verify information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phone call from any other organisation involved in the nomination to verify information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Interview with nominating body	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Had to provide documentation of activism and/or risk situation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Candidacy was evaluated by expert or independent committee	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Feedback on nomination process

Do you have any feedback on how the nomination process could be improved?

Attended introductory week

Did you attend an introductory week at your university/college?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

Joined local groups

During your stay in Norway, have you joined/did you join any of the following local groups?

	Yes	No
SAIH	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Amnesty or other human rights NGO	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student union	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Music/theatre/arts group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other student group	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Participated in

During your stay in Norway, have you participated/did you participate in any of the following:

	Yes	No, but I wish to participate later	No, and I do not wish to participate	Have not heard of this activity
Seminars/events for StAR students hosted by Diku	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Seminars/events for StAR students hosted by SAIH	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The University of Oslo's International Summer School (ISS)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Benefit from seminars/events hosted by Diku

How did you benefit from your participation at seminars/events hosted by Diku? Could anything be improved?

Benefit from seminars/events hosted by SAIH

How did you benefit from your participation at seminars/events hosted by SAIH? Could anything be improved?

Benefit from ISS

How did you benefit from your participation at the University of Oslo's Summer School? Could anything be improved?

--

Choose between two or more study programmes

Before starting your studies in Norway, were you given the opportunity to choose between two or more study programmes?

- Yes
- No

Study programme relevant for educational background

To what extent is the study programme you attend/attended in Norway relevant for your educational background?

- To a very small extent
- To a small extent
- To some extent
- To a large extent
- To a very large extent

Study programme relevant for career

To what extent is the study programme you attend/attended in Norway relevant for your future career?

- To a very small extent
- To a small extent
- To some extent
- To a large extent
- To a very large extent

How satisfied with learning outcome

How satisfied are you with your learning outcomes from the study programme you attend/attended in Norway, concerning:

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Theoretical knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Knowledge of scientific work methods and research	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Experience with research and development work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Discipline- or profession-specific skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Critical thinking and reflection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cooperative skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
Innovative thinking	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to work independently	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Compared to your home institution

Compared to your home institution, how will you rate the academic level of your Norwegian institution?

- Much lower
- Lower
- About the same
- Higher
- Much higher
- I don't know

Statements about your participation in StAR

Listed below are several statements about your participation in the StAR programme.

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My participation in the programme has provided me with a network which is useful for my activism and/or future career	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
While in Norway, I have learned other things that are useful for my activism and/or future career	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The academic degree I gain through the programme will be useful for my future career	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My participation in the programme has made it safer for me to be an activist	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Experiencing the Norwegian system of government and the welfare state has strengthened my belief in human rights and democracy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My participation in the programme has motivated me to continue working for change in my home country	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Benefits of the programme for you personally

What are the greatest benefits of the programme for you personally?

Have you completed studies in Norway

Have you completed your studies in Norway?

With studies, we mean the study programme you participated in through the StAR programme.

- Yes
- No

What you have done since graduating

If possible, please describe what you have done since graduating from the programme:

Key words: Activism, education, work

Have you returned to your home country

Have you returned to your home country?

- Yes
- No

Reason why you have not returned

What is the reason why you have not returned to your home country?

Please select all relevant alternatives.

- The risk situation in my home country
- I have started another study programme in Norway
- I have started working in Norway
- I have left for a third country to study/work
- Other, please specify: _____

Describe how you experienced the return to home country

If possible, please describe how you experienced the process of return to your home country. Were there any factors aiding or impeding the return?

Role as an activist today, compared to before joining the StAR programme

How would you describe your role as an activist today, compared to before joining the StAR programme?

Suggestions for improvements of the programme

Do you have any suggestions for improvements of the programme?