Integration of highly skilled refugees into the higher education in focus

GREET Project Peer Learning Activity Summary Report

Brussels

24-25 September 2018

Contents

ABOUT GREET

GREET – **Guiding Refugees via European Exchange and Training** – is an 18-month Horizon 2020 Science4Refugees project which aims to contribute to better integration of highly skilled refugees in higher education across Europe through mutual learning and exchange of good practices. Project activities bring together national-level support structures and higher education institutions (HEIs) in nine European countries (please see below) to share experiences in supporting refugee students and researchers and with a view to developing a community of practice at European level in order to that would advocate and inform policy making at national and European level which is based on real needs of HEIs and other stakeholders supporting or wanting to supporting the integration of highly skilled refugees in higher education. GREET will be implemented in the period **April 2018 – September 2019**.

TARGET COUNTRIES

- Austria
- Belgium/Flanders
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Norway
- Sweden
- The UK

The project is implemented by the consortium comprising the Academic Cooperation Association (**ACA**, coordinator) and its two members - German Academic Exchange Service (**DAAD**) and the Finnish National Agency for Education (**EDUFI**).

Picture 1 above: GREET team at the kick-off meeting in April 2018

In addition to the core consortium, the project is supported by the **Advisory Board** of prominent experts and networks comprising Scholars at Risk, IIE Scholar Rescue Fund and VUB's Dr Mohammad Salman. Apart from DAAD and EDUFI as partners, a number of other **ACA members** are part of the support network either as national-level actors involved in project activities or as advisory bodies for the consortium in preparation of project activities (Flanders Knowledge Area, Institute of International Education - IIE, State Scholarship Foundation-IKY, Swedish Council for Higher Education - UHR).

GREET PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY

Brussels, 24-25 September 2018

The main goal of the GREET Peer Learning Activity (PLA) was to provide the exchange of practice and mutual learning opportunities for **stakeholders** from different levels of implementation - representatives of national-level organisations and higher education institutions in the nine target countries, as well as to serve as a **discussion platform** to identify the most pertinent themes for the activities to be implemented in the next stages of GREET (please see under NEXT STEPS). These activities will continue with three thematic webinars in the first quarter of 2019 (January-March), followed by the final dissemination event on 13-14 June 2019 and finally, for the preparation of relevant material for the online compendium.

The PLA was a two-day activity, with distinct themes per day - the first day focusing on the integration of **refugee students** and presenting good practices in this area, starting from Germany (example of DAAD programmes and the experiences of the University of Cologne) and giving participants the floor to share their experiences in parallel sessions. The second day started with an introduction to the theme of the day i.e. **supporting threatened scholars** by Scholars at Risk and Scholar Rescue Fund, before moving to participants' experiences in two parallel sessions.

DAY 1 – Integrating student refugees into higher education (coordinator: DAAD)

The first day of the PLA focused on activities and policies targeting refugee students, more specifically – the content was respectively focused on the three stages of student experience: 1) entering university 2) being a student 3) leaving university. To open the discussion and to give a best practice example, DAAD presented the measures and programmes, which were set up in Germany to integrate refugees into higher education. Afterwards, the participants had an opportunity to go into in-depth discussions in small groups about their practices, challenges they face at institutional and national levels, existing and potential solutions as well as needs at national and European level in supporting students in different stages of their student experience.

Issues with the **recognition of prior learning** still persist when it comes to stage 1 – entering university, and participants agreed that more coordination at national and European level was highly recommended. Although (lacking) **language skills** remain as another challenge, participants noted that a lot has changed since 2015/2016 as the refugees, who started language training by then, are now well prepared. It was also noted that it is a good time to evaluate national-level measures and see what works and what doesn't.

Similar to discussions on access to higher education, recognition of prior learning, language and funding are challenges, which some institutions and countries face while hosting students with a refugee background. A commonly raised legal challenge is that the **financial support** provided to prospective

students with a refugee/asylum seeker status is not available anymore once they have enrolled at a university and obtained the status of student. Another – resulting – difficulty is to **track** them once they are incorporated in the student body and the system.

Discussions on socio-political circumstances and legal frameworks for integrating graduates into the labour market showed a wide variety across the participating countries in terms of what kind of support is possible or not: for example, in some countries, internships are seen as good models to support graduates in the transition process, whereas in other countries, the legal category of internships doesn't exist. Reaching out to employer groups as well as high unemployment rates in the host country are further challenges in some countries. The **main ideas and points of discussion** are presented in the tables below.

Entering university

Good practices	Challenges
• National level coordination / joint activities • Participation into European Qualifications Passport • All immigrants as target group (SIMHE activities)	• Lack of funding • Language skills • Validation of prior degree, recognition of prior learning • Legal issues around the different statuses (refugee/asylum seeker vs student) and resulting available support

Being a student

Good practices	Challenges
• Bottom-up joint activities and networks of HEIs • Support from volunteers • Engage community at local level	• Political situation • Danger of "refugee" label • Recognition of prior learning • Support services for refugee students (as a separate service) • Involvement of community

Leaving university

Good practices	Challenges
• Bridging programmes • HEIs offer internships to refugees (when legally possible) • Fast-track programmes to identify academic skills of refugees to **provide** them a qualified internship, improve their professional language and coach them to the profession • Networks of HEIs	• High unemployment rates in the host country • No or little cooperation among relevant stakeholders (HEIs, employers, state agencies, etc.) • Funding for staff • Tailored support for refugees (not only on technical aspects, but emotional and psychological)

After the wrap up of the main discussions in the groups during Day 1, moderators asked participants to select three main topics of highest relevance which they would like to see further tackled in the webinars. The following topics received the highest number of votes:

- **Recognition of prior learning** – discussing transferable models and frameworks (e.g. bridging courses, European Qualifications Passport for Refugees, etc.)
- **Cooperation among different stakeholders** – involvement of all relevant actors
- **Funding** – how to secure more funding, training on fundraising, joint fundraising, etc.

DAY 2 – Integrating scholar refugees into higher education (coordination: EDUFI)

The second day of the PLA – focusing on practices supporting threatened scholars – had two parallel sessions: 1) Funding models & networks and 2) Integration into academic community & sustainability.

As incentives for the discussions in the sessions on funding models & networks, Scholars at Risk network models in different countries were presented as well as the funding model to host threatened and displaced scholars in Finland in collaboration with IIE's Scholar Rescue Fund. In the sessions on integration into academic community & sustainability two country examples were presented – "PAUSE" programme from France and a Swedish project "Inclusive Internationalisation, Fast Track for university teachers and researchers". After these two country examples the themes of the session were reflected against the experience of Scholar Rescue Fund. In all the sessions, the presentations were followed by a discussion and exchange of experiences with all the participants as good practices and challenges were identified.

In the session **funding models & networks** different international and national funding models and cooperation structures supporting threatened scholars were discussed. It was a shared view among the participants, that there should be more awareness raising on the need of such activities focusing on threatened and/or displaced scholars to be able to on one hand secure the finances as well as to spread the information for relevant actors. The need for further communication and awareness raising activities was clear, as it was noted that not even the colleagues actively involved in the support initiatives for refugee students had necessarily heard of the support mechanisms available for refugee scholars. The importance of national level coordination as well as institutional level commitment were highlighted in the discussions.

The session **integration into academic community** focused on supporting scholars' smooth integration path into the institutional and national higher education system. The main findings concerning the good practices was the importance of language training and considering the integration not only at the university level but more widely into the community, including different stakeholders such as companies, agencies etc. as well as providing personal individual support, in other words – combining the humanitarian impulse with the academic need.

When discussing **sustainability** in the sense of post-scholarship options and career planning, one of the main topics was the academic versus non-academic track. The need for a realistic approach and realising the country-specific rules of the labour market was raised as a good practice. However, there can be a stigma on leaving academia especially for scholars with a longer career in academia. Country sections and international networks were considered to be very valuable and also allowing more possibilities for the scholars to transfer from one placement to another. At the same time this is also a challenge as it should be avoided that people become "scholar nomads". The main ideas and points of discussion are presented in the tables below.

Funding models & networks

Good practices	Challenges
• National level coordination / joint activities • Creative solutions and new cooperation structures • Institutional level commitment incl. involving HR-specialists from the beginning • External funding for salary, overheads covered by the HEI • Fundraising / including companies • Starting with awareness raising • Campaigning for commitment	• Lack of national level funding • Raising awareness • Post-scholarship options • Lack of institutional level commitment / support structures • Immigration policies and legislation • Lack of expertise on fundraising at the universities

- Networks on local, national and international levels

Integration into academic community

Good practices	Challenges
- Language training both national language (integration)and English (mobility) - Integration not only at university but also into the community - Personal individual support (to less persons but better quality) - Integration into the community of visiting scholars - Involvement of the different levels (leadership, international office, department) - Best results when there are both humanitarian impulse and academic need - Practicalities need to be taken into account (visa, flights, accommodation, start date, teaching, legal issues for staying in the country) - Cultural aspects to be clarified - Administrative host (different from academic contacts) - Professional networking (conferences etc) - Mutual learning process	- Very regional research areas, different academic traditions - Competitiveness in academia - The level of connections to academic networks in the home countries vary a lot

Sustainability

Good practices	Challenges
- Academic vs non-academic track (realistic approach & realising the country-specific rules of the labour market) - Cooperation between different actors (academia, companies, agencies etc) - Country sections and international networks are very useful (support and possibility to transfer) - Both individual approach and institutional support structures are needed - Successful academic placement makes everything easier - Integrating scholars in the funding applications and seeking funding	- Training for the way of advising - Realising the limits and realities - Try to avoid that people become "scholar-nomads" - Stigma on leaving academia > colleagues might help

At the end of Day 2, the compilation of good practices and main challenges was presented in the wrap-up session, discussed together and specified a bit more. These discussions and findings will serve as a basis when the topics for the webinars will be decided as well as provide an overview for the participants to reflect on the situation and context in their respective countries.

PLA MAIN CONCLUSIONS

As a general conclusion from the two days, the **value of networks** for support, advocacy and knowledge sharing was recognised as extremely high.

At **national level,** representatives from all the participating countries shared their experiences and ways of universities working together for a shared cause, showcasing good examples of university networks cooperating and advocating to regional and national governments.

At **European level,** the need for more joint efforts was equally highlighted as the participants strongly called for EU policymakers to provide more support in terms of funding and steering further initiatives at European level.

In summary, the following main items were identified by the majority of participants as areas that need more or better intervention at different levels.

> A lack of or a need for more:
>
> - **FUNDING**
> - **COORDINATION AT NATIONAL LEVEL**
> - **MULTISTAKEHOLDER COOPERATION**
> - **JOINT ADVOCACY AND AWARENESS RAISING**

What did the participants say?

Training around fundraising for university representatives seeking to host scholars is essential. As one participant noted, those engaged in this role often have no fundraising experience which creates a real barrier in terms of securing funds to host.

Networks at the national level are essential -- as is the exchange between national networks and initiatives in terms of what works, what doesn't and areas for shared learning and or collaboration.

It was very interesting to know about the practices in different countries as all are facing the same challenges. Good discussions and changing of ideas!

We need more joint approaches and solutions.

[There is a] need of common methodology and approach in EU where possible.

Exchanges of practices and experiences are very important to reinforce our own project, to have a larger network to ask for information or to share an issue.

We need to have a platform for sharing of experiences in order not to start all over again.

NEXT STEPS

The conclusions from the PLA will guide the preparation and delivery of both the **thematic webinars** and the **stakeholder event**. The consortium will use the exchange during the PLA and the themes identified there as the basis for the development of these activities, thus ensuring relevance in the same manner as the PLA was prepared. PLA participants who expressed interest and have the expertise in the relevant areas will be further engaged in the GREET activities. The **online compendium** will contain all relevant material collected in the course of GREET, including the information on the activities and research implemented by the PLA participants. In order to create synergies and develop complementary initiatives instead of repeating what is already being done, the stakeholder event of the GREET project is organised jointly with the consortium of the *Academic Refugee* project. The stakeholder event will be held in Brussels **13-14 June 2019**.

Below is an overview of the **major activities** in GREET.

PEER LEARNING ACTIVITY

Brussels, 24-25 September 2018

The PLA as the opportunity for exchange of practice and mutual learning for 30 participants, representatives of national-level organisations and HEIs in the nine target countries.

Leading partner: DAAD Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst German Academic Exchange Service

THREE EUROPEAN-LEVEL THEMATIC WEBINARS

January – March 2019

Three webinars will provide training support for HEIs in Europe and thematic guidance based on the PLA outcomes. It will address the most pertinent themes identified at the PLA by the participants.

Leading partner: FINNISH NATIONAL AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

STAKEHOLDER EVENT

Brussels, 13-14 June 2019

This is the dissemination event for the higher education community and relevant stakeholders (decision-makers, support structures and practitioners, researchers, students/scholars with a refugee background). The event will be organised jointly with the consortium of the Academic Refuge project.

Leading partner: ACA ACADEMIC COOPERATION ASSOCIATION

ONLINE COMPEDIUM

To be launched in September 2019

An online repository of project results, material & relevant information on inspiring practices and existing policies in Europe on the integration of highly skilled refugees.

Leading partner: ACA ACADEMIC COOPERATION ASSOCIATION

DAY 1 - Integrating student refugees into higher education

10.30	Welcome and coffee

11.00   **Welcome address**

Bernd Wächter & Marija Mitic, Academic Cooperation Association, ACA, Belgium

11.15   **Integration refugees into higher education: Successes and challenges**

Julia Kracht, German Academic Exchange Service, DAAD, Germany
Susanne Preuschoff, University of Cologne, Germany
Q&A

12.30   *Lunch*

13.30   **Breakout sessions "The student cycle" (round 1)**

1. Entering university – from recognition of prior learning to enrolling as a student
Moderation: Laura Wills, University of Nottingham, UK
2. Being a student – mastering the challenges: language a new university system
Moderation: Linda Lawrance, University of Bordeaux, France
3. Leaving university – internships, interviews and job-market research
Moderation: Anders Ahlstrand, The Swedish Council, Sweden; Cecilia Christersson, Malmö University, Sweden

15.00   *Coffee*

15.15   **Breakout sessions "The student cycle" (round 2)**

1. Entering university – from recognition of prior learning to enrolling as a student
Moderation: Katrien Debruyn, Flemish Interuniversity Council, Belgium;
Bie Strypens, UC Leuven-Limburg, Belgium
2. Being a student – mastering the challenges: language a new university system
Moderation: Marianne Autero, Metropolia University, Finland
3. Leaving university – internships, interviews and job-market research
 Moderation: Karen-Lise S. Knudsen, University of Agder, Norway

16.45   *Coffee*

17.00   **Presentation & Discussion of breakout session results**
Moderation: Julia Kracht, DAAD, Germany

17.45   **Greetings from SAR-Norway**
Karen-Lise Knudsen, University of Agder, Norway

18.00   **End of day 1**

DAY 2 - Integrating scholar refugees into higher education

09.00	**Integrating scholar refugees into HE - Introduction to the day**
	Sini Piippo, Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI)
	Supporting threatened scholars
	James King, IIE-Scholar Rescue Fund, USA
	Rose Anderson, Scholars at Risk, USA
	Q&A
10.15	*Coffee*
10.30	**Breakout sessions (round 1)**
	1. Funding models & networks
	Moderation:
	Sini Piippo, EDUFI, Finland
	Rose Anderson, Scholars at Risk, USA
	2. Integration into academic community & sustainability
	Moderation:
	Outi Tomperi, EDUFI, Finland
	James King, IIE-Scholar Rescue Fund, USA
	Karolina Catoni, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
	Sophie Wauquier, Université Paris 8, France
12.00	*Lunch*
13.00	**Breakout sessions (round 2)**
	1. Funding models & networks
	Moderation:
	Sini Piippo, EDUFI, Finland
	Rose Anderson, Scholars at Risk, USA
	2. Integration into academic community & sustainability
	Moderation:
	Outi Tomperi, EDUFI, Finland
	James King, IIE-Scholar Rescue Fund, USA
	Karolina Catoni, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
	Sophie Wauquier, Université Paris 8, France
14.30	*Coffee*
14.45	**Presentation & Discussion of breakout session results**
	Moderation: Sini Piippo, EDUFI, Finland
15.15	**Where do we go from here?**
	Comments by Marina Malgina, NOKUT, Norway
	Next steps by Marija Mitic, ACA, Belgium
16.15	**End of day 2**

CONTACT THE GREET TEAM

For any further information about the project please contact ACA at
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Join us on LinkedIn
GREET community of practice - supporting students and scholars with a refugee background

GREET webpage
http://www.aca-secretariat.be/index.php?id=1104