

# 2019

Annual Report

The European voice of national organisations  
for internationalisation of higher education

**ACA**  
ACADEMIC  
COOPERATION  
ASSOCIATION





The Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is a Brussels-based stakeholder organisation active in the field of internationalisation of higher education. Since its launch, in 1993, the association has been combining a dual mission – that of being a **membership platform** (ACA's 'internal agenda') and in parallel a strong **'think tank'** (ACA's 'public agenda'), catering to the needs of the (European) higher education community more generally.

ACA's activities include research and analyses, evaluations, consultancy for private and public bodies, advocacy, publications and events. It is a not-for-profit organisation whose Secretariat is located in Brussels – a privileged position to create and maintain close working relations with the European Union institutions and the world beyond.



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## WHO WE ARE: OUR MEMBERS

The European voice of national organisations  
for internationalisation of higher education

ACA's strength as an organisation rests on the strong network of dynamic national-level bodies that comprise its membership. These organisations are involved in a broad range of activities in their respective countries in support of internationalisation of education, and play various key roles in terms of research, programme delivery, and policy formulation and implementation. ACA's role is to promote the interests and needs of its members in EU policy circles, and to influence the European higher education policy and research agenda in ways that support the work of the members. For their part, the members participate actively in the governance, decision-making and programmatic activities of the Association.

### FULL MEMBERS



Austrian Agency for International Cooperation in Education and Research (OeAD), Austria



Flanders Knowledge Area (FKA)/VLUHR, Belgium



Centre for International Cooperation in Education (DZS), Czech Republic



Archimedes Foundation, Estonia



Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI), Finland



German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Germany



State Scholarships Foundation (IKY), Greece



Tempus Public Foundation (TPF), Hungary



The Icelandic Centre for Research (RANNIS), Iceland



Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (Diku), Norway



NAWA, Poland



Slovak Academic Information Agency (SAIA), Slovakia



The Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training programmes (CMEPIUS), Slovenia



Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR), Sweden



Movetia – Swiss national Agency, Switzerland



Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities (swissuniversities), Switzerland

### ASSOCIATE MEMBERS



International Education Center (IEC), Georgia



ETS Global, The Netherlands



Institute of International Education (IIE), United States/Hungary

After 2016 and 2017, characterised by ACA reinventing itself, through a whole series of interventions and reflections involving primarily the ACA members, but also external experts and partners, ACA's modernisation process continued into 2018 and 2019. From more active online presence and advocacy initiatives to the exploration of new areas and forms of activity, ACA closed 2019 with a rich portfolio of achievements and contributions to national and EU policy agendas, specifically to the work of ACA members and their constituencies – through presentations, workshops, joint activities, projects and representation.

### WORKING GROUPS

As part of one of the Working Groups – Brussels Advocacy Events (ACA, DAAD, Diku and FKA), ACA hosted an **ACA Brussels Advocacy Event** on **21 February** for more than 100 invited participants. The event was followed by a separate bilateral meeting between top representatives of DG Education and Culture and the ACA leadership. On this occasion, the Working Group launched the "ACA Reflection Paper Internationalisation for All? Wider Inclusion in the internationalisation of higher education", which analyses policy developments and needs in the area of inclusion in higher education and features some examples of good practice among ACA members.

The second working group, on the joint participation of ACA and ACA members in major **international events**, has as its main task to systematise and enhance such joint presence which has always existed, but in an ad-hoc form. The group organised participation at the 2019 conferences of NAFSA, AIEA, and the EAIE Annual Conference in Helsinki, where ACA and EDUFI also held a joint lunch for invited high-level guests. The Working Group was also active in preparing joint sessions at these and other conferences for the year 2020.

The working group dedicated to **research** (in the area of internationalisation) met various times physically and online to advance their agenda. One of the focal activities of the group in 2019 was to define the main topics of interest for ACA members and plan joint activities under these headings. Three topics and meetings took place in the course of the autumn 2019:

1. *Student mobility data, methodologies, trends*
2. *Staff mobility enhancement & institutional impact*
3. *Outbound credit mobility drivers & obstacles*



### STATUTORY MEETINGS

As usual, ACA held two meetings each of its **Administrative Council** (Board) and its General Assembly. The Board, whose main function is to prepare the **General Assembly**, met on 4 April and on 16 October. The General Assembly came together on 12 and 13 June (Brussels) and on 7 and 8 November in Prague, on invitation of ACA's zech member DZS. The autumn AC as well as both GA meetings were organised back to back with relevant events by ACA and its members, respectively the ACA-CMEPIUS conference in Bled, the GREET project final event (ACA, DAAD and EDUFI) and CZEDUCON, a big international(isation) conference by DZS where the ACA Secretariat and some ACA members had speaking roles.

The recently introduced two half-day format of the General Assembly meetings continued to prove its benefits for interaction and discussions between the different members and between the members and the Secretariat, allowing enough time for exchange, brainstorming and joint decision-making on future activities and direction of the Association.

Bringing the expert community together for lively discussions, debates and deliberations on the current trends in innovation and internationalisation in higher education is one of ACA's core activities. ACA's flagship events – the **European Policy Seminars (EPSs)** – offer participants the opportunity to interact directly with colleagues and experts around a tightly defined topic, on a relatively small scale (facilitating effective networking) and in a highly collegial environment. Since 2018 ACA has been organising **joint events with one of the members**, typically in the country where the member is based.

In 2019, ACA organised **two EPSs, ACA-CMEPIUS conference**, co-organised with CMEPIUS – the Slovene National Erasmus+ Agency and ACA's member in Slovenia, and a **stakeholder forum** in Brussels to mark the closure of the GREET project (Science4Refugees).

**European Policy Seminar 1 - What's new in Brussels?**  
Recent developments in European policies and programmes

The 2019 cycle of ACA public events was – as tradition requires - opened by **What's new in Brussels? Recent developments in European policies and programmes**. This first ACA European Policy Seminar of the year was held on 1 February 2019 in Brussels. The ACA 'classic' drew a fantastic audience of around 120. The programme predominantly focused on the successor programme of the present Erasmus+ scheme and amongst others, questions of the budget and the higher education share of it, European universities' future, the programme's structure and logic, inclusiveness, simplification and international cooperation.

**European Policy Seminar 2 – From Physical to Virtual.**  
Internationalising higher education in the digital age?

The second European Policy Seminar of the year was held on 22 November 2019 in Brussels. The seminar entitled **From Physical to Virtual. Internationalising higher education in the digital age?**, was prepared based on members' interest in digitalisation and in line with ACA's target groups. The highly successful event, which gathered around 130 participants, looked into trends and ongoing initiatives related to virtual mobility, exchanges and online collaboration approaches.

**ACA-CMEPIUS conference – The engaged university. Linking the global and the local**

A joint event with ACA's member in Slovenia, the conference hosted a large international audience with ACA's member CMEPIUS as the host. **The engaged university. Linking the global and the local** took place on 17-18 October in Bled, back to back with the autumn meeting of ACA's Board. The conference focused on internationalisation and local/regional

(civic) engagement of higher education institutions. Excluding speakers, the event welcomed more than 130 delegates, coming from more than 30 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa and North America.



**GREET final event: ACA-UNICA joint stakeholder forum - Higher Education Values in Practice. Integration of highly skilled refugees and at-risk academics in Europe**

The ACA-UNICA stakeholder forum, co-organised by the GREET and Academic Refuge project teams, gathered an international audience of more than 140 delegates from 26 countries on **13-14 June at the European Committee of the Regions** for two-day exchanges on academic freedom, higher education role and values, internationalisation of higher education and support for highly skilled refugees, and cooperation at European level.

Every year, ACA pursues – and is invited to take part in – a broad range of research projects, studies, consultancy work and other activities related to its core areas of expertise in the field of internationalisation of higher education. ACA is renowned in European higher education policy circles for the top quality and relevance of its work, its ability to communicate rather technical information to non-specialist audiences, as well as its interest and capacity to follow and bring clarity to ongoing policy discourses at European level.

ACA's research work is carried out by its highly qualified and multinational Brussels-based Secretariat staff and in close partnership with a strong network of very qualified and knowledgeable professionals and academics from Europe and beyond, many of whom come from ACA member organisations.

In 2019, ACA was involved in **five projects, in two of which as the coordinator**, with additional **advisory roles** in stakeholder meetings and **speaking engagements** at international conferences globally.

#### CAMPUS MUNDI INTERNATIONALISATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT



ACA continued to be involved in the Campus Mundi project. ACA's role is to recruit, train and liaise with a pool of international higher

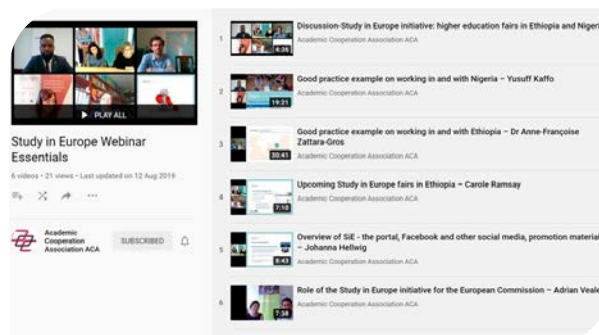
education experts whose task is to conduct and report on the reviews in the course of the project. Most of the non-hungarian experts come from ACA member organisations.

The project consists of peer assessments of the international strategies and activities of Hungarian universities, and has two 'tracks': full-scale quality assessments for higher education institutions participating for the first time, and a light-weight monitoring exercise for institutions already assessed during the Campus Hungary project. According to the project, funded via the European Social Fund, the experts will carry out approximately 15 assessments until 2021. The Hungarian version of the internationalisation quality assessment is characterised by a quality enhancement approach that takes into consideration the types of institutions and their specific characteristics and goals. Participating institutions are not benchmarked with their peers in the system, but are encouraged to set their own goals and benchmark against their own progress on a recurrent basis. In 2019 ACA and ACA experts conducted reviews at universities in Miskolc, Szeged and Pécs, as well as at the Budapest Business School.

#### STUDY IN EUROPE 2

In the second year of the Study in Europe II project – global promotion of Europe as a study destination (run by ACA, Archimedes Foundation, British Council, Campus France, DAAD and Nuffic) ACA was responsible for delivering two webinars – one for national promotion agencies and one for higher education institutions – HEIs.

The webinar for the promotion agencies, which took place on 6 June and focused on social media promotion, featured the ACA Secretariat and ACA members Archimedes Foundation (Estonia), CMEPIUS (Slovenia) and DAAD (Germany). It gathered over 40 participants, representatives of promotion agencies. The [webinar](#) for HEIs focused on cooperation with Ethiopia and Nigeria and gathered close to 100 participants.





## GREET – GUIDING REFUGEES VIA EUROPEAN EXCHANGE AND TRAINING

After the successful GREET Peer Learning Activity (September 2018), the project team (ACA, DAAD and EDUFI) delivered three GREET [webinars](#) in February and March 2019, developed an [online compendium](#) of good practices and organised, together with UNICA and the Academic Refuge project team, a [stakeholder forum](#) in Brussels to mark the end of the two projects. Hosted by the European Committee of the Regions on 13 and 14 June, the event gathered around 150 delegates representing EU, national and regional authorities, civil society organisations, European networks and associations, and last but not least, a sizeable group of students and researchers from the target groups.

Furthermore, GREET was featured in the [SWAFS achievements and recommendations report 2020](#), and specifically mentioned as an example of good practice in this line of funding.



## CARE – CAREER ADVANCEMENT FOR REFUGEE RESEARCHERS IN EUROPE



CARE is ACA's second Horizon 2020 project funded by Science4Refugees. It started in January 2019 and gathers

the same core consortium: ACA (coordinator), DAAD and EDUFI, but expands the scope of target countries to 10 this time and in all of them involves support networks such as Scholars at Risk and EURAXESS. The project aims at ensuring **needs-based guidance and targeted dissemination** of country-specific information on employment requirements and opportunities

for scholars at risk and with refugee background hosted in the 10 target countries. The main activities in 2019 towards this aim were 10 focus groups engaging refugee researchers and an employer survey, resulting in two separate and one comparative report, available [here](#).

## MICHE – MONITORING INTERNATIONALISATION OF CZECH HIGHER EDUCATION

After being invited by ACA's member DZS in 2018 to participate in an expert capacity in a pilot project in Czech Republic, very similar in nature to the Internationalisation Quality Assessment project in Hungary, ACA continued work in the project in the course of 2019 as well. The ACA Secretariat was involved in four out of a total of six HEIs visits in 2019, at the University of Ostrava, Tomas Bata University, Mendel University and Brno University of Technology, as well as in planning and monitoring meetings with DZS and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport in Czech Republic.

The MICHE initiative is funded by the latter ministry in Czech Republic, while organised and supervised by ACA member organisation – DZS (Centre for International Cooperation in Education). The main objective of the project is to increase the quality of internationalisation and global attractiveness and competitiveness of Czech higher education, by providing policy makers with information on the state of internationalisation at Czech HEIs and by equipping Czech HEIs with a complex tool to reflect, analyse, and improve internationalisation at the institutional level.

## PARTICIPATION IN STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

CA actively participates in policy-oriented meetings by other sister organisations and partners in the field, as well as in the working groups steered by the European Commission, contributing to the European-level discussion in the field of international higher education and research, EU programmes and policies and the future of education and research in Europe.

- *EU stakeholder consultation meeting on European Universities Initiative*
- *EURAXESS Bridgehead Organisations' meeting*
- *DG EAC's consultation meeting on the EU Inclusion Strategy*
- *Informal meeting with stakeholder organisations on the future Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)*
- *IGLO meeting on Academic research and innovation, European universities, Open science in academia, Horizon Europe*
- *Erasmus+ Coalition meetings hosted by the Lifelong Learning Platform*
- *EESC/CoR/DG REGIO European Week of Regions*





Apart from project-related missions, staff of the ACA Secretariat regularly present at international events, organised by ACA members and other stakeholders in the higher education community, as panellists, advisors or trainers. 2019 was another busy year for the Secretariat, also in terms of presence at external events. These are some of the highlights of the year:

- *ACA-DAAD Round Table on European Values in Higher Education – moderator*
- *Leadership Workshop for higher education delegation from Israel – trainer*
- *COIMBRA Group staff training on the recognition of prior learning of refugees – speaker*
- *SIHO International conference “Enhancing student experience: innovative support tools for students with disabilities” – panelist*
- *Meeting of the higher education promotion agencies – speaker and moderator*
- *HERE event in Yerevan, organised by the Armenian Erasmus+ Office – trainer*
- *Flanders Knowledge Area scholarship selection committee – evaluators*
- *EQuATIC policy seminar – Strategic university cooperation – data informed policy making in internationalisation - panelist*
- *Movetia Annual Higher Education Event – moderator*
- *CZEDUCON 2019 – speaker and moderator*
- *NAWA 2nd anniversary conference – panelist*
- *NAFSA, AIEA and EAIE - speakers, moderators and workshop facilitators*



#### ACA POSITIONS



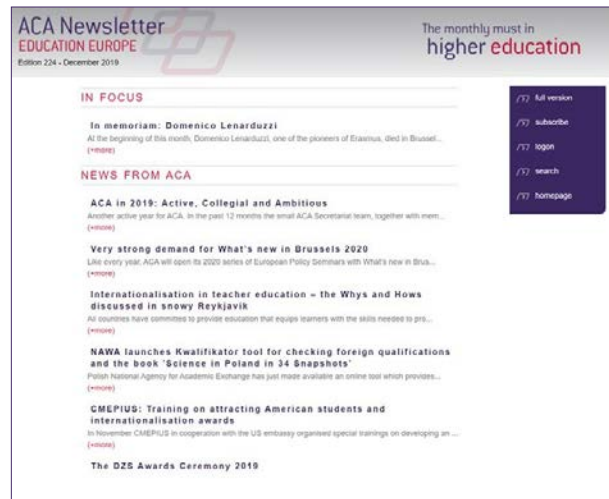
In early 2019 ACA issued the ACA Reflection Paper Internationalisation for all? Wider inclusion in the internationalisation of higher education contributing to the current debate around the growing need to increase inclusion in the internationalisation of higher education (activities) in general, and in the Erasmus 2021-2027 programme, in particular. ACA called for further reflecting on the topic of inclusion from an internationalisation perspective - as not only beneficial, but also necessary. The main points in the paper stem from internal reflections with and between the ACA members, conversations with inclusion experts, with the European Commission and student organisations representatives (from the Erasmus Student Network – ESN and the European Students’ Union – ESU), as well as from discussions that took place in the framework of the ACA seminar of 21 February 2019, under the same title.

WHAT WE DO  
V: ACA ONLINE PRESENCE AND  
NEWSLETTER

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ACA NEWSLETTER – EDUCATION EUROPE

One of the ACA flagship products, the monthly electronic news service [ACA Newsletter – Education Europe](#), is provided to more than 25,000 recipients in Europe and beyond with responsibilities for Europeanisation and internationalisation of higher education, working in international and supranational organisations, ministries, national, European and international associations, as well as, importantly, universities and colleges. In 2019, the newsletter featured a total of 367 articles on national, European and international developments, in the area of higher education and research. Out of this number, 62 articles featured news from the ACA Secretariat and ACA members, around 45 articles on European policy developments and 76 articles with a national focus. Around 50 publications were featured in the newsletter in 2019 and more than 60 calls for funding. ACA continues to receive congratulations and applause for this very well received news service. ACA would like to thank the loyal readers in France, Belgium, the US, Germany and the Netherlands – the countries which top the list by the numbers of visits to the ACA Newsletter.



SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITIES

In 2019 ACA intensified its online activities, increasing promotion and dissemination on its social media channels – Facebook (1045 followers, 1010 likes), Twitter (1755 followers) and LinkedIn (ACA group of over 1200 members). It regularly shares news from its members' activities, the activities of the ACA Secretariat and updates from the international higher education field. In relation to GREET and Study in Europe projects activities, ACA featured a number of webinars on its Youtube channel, which reached around 1317 views.

ACA is governed by its General Assembly (GA), its highest decision-making body on which all ACA members are represented. The decisions of the GA are based on proposals of the Administrative Council (AC). The AC consists of up to seven elected members who are elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly from amongst the senior staff of ACA member organisations. The Brussels-based ACA Secretariat handles the day-to-day affairs of the association, with a high priority placed on professionalism, cost efficiency, and high-quality service delivery. Very importantly, the association is represented externally by a key figure – the ACA President – who is elected for a 3-year mandate, once renewable.

#### ACA LEADERSHIP



President,  
Ulrich Grothus

During the whole of 2019, the ACA President was **Ulrich Grothus**, who took office in late 2017 for a 3-year term.

The following elected Administrators served on the ACA Administrative Council in the course of 2019:

- **Peter Tordai** (Tempus Public Foundation, Hungary), **Dana Petrova** (DZS, Czech Republic), **Christian Müller** (DAAD, Germany), **Olivier Tschopp** (Movetia, Switzerland), **Alenka Flander** (CMEPIUS, Slovenia): ACA Administrators.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

As usual, ACA held two meetings each of its Administrative Council (Board) and its General Assembly. The Board, whose main function it is to prepare the General Assembly, met on 4 April and on 16 October. The General Assembly came together on 12-13 June (Brussels) and on 7-8 November (in Prague), on invitation of Czech ACA member DZS.



Vice-President,  
(Kiisler, as of Nov 2018)

- **Katrin Kiisler** (Archimedes Foundation, Estonia): ACA Administrator and ACA Vice President.



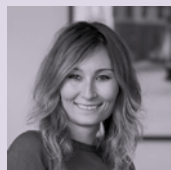
Treasurer,  
Ragnhild Solvi Berg

- **Ragnhild Solvi Berg** (Diku, ACA Treasurer): Ragnhild stood again and was re-elected as the ACA Treasurer for three more years.

## ACA SECRETARIAT

The ACA team continued to be formed of Bernd Wächter (Director), Irina Ferencz (Deputy Director), Marija Miti (Policy Officer) and Irina Malai (Office Manager). Project Manager Queenie K.H. Lam, who had been on a career break, started to work for ACA again, on a part-time basis and from her home in Trier/Germany. ACA also had the privilege to host two excellent trainees who contributed in a major way to the production of the much-cherished online news service, the ACA Newsletter – Education Europe and ACA's online presence overall. The ACA Newsletter trainees in 2019 were Elena Bizzi from Italy and Martin Bogdan, from Croatia. ACA's third trainee in 2019 was Yuwen Gu from China, a PhD student in Communications, who helped the Secretariat in a major way to boost ACA's online presence and communication strategy.

Bernd Wächter	Irina Ferencz	Queenie K.H. Lam
Marija Mitić	Irina Malai	Elena Bizzi
Yuwen Gu	Martin Bogdan	



## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

ACA Accounts 2019, 2018 and 2017 (EUR)

	2019	2018	2017
<b>Expenditure</b>			
Staff costs	455,143	418,654	404,259
Secretariat running costs/ infrastructure & equipment	157,718	153,620	159,199
Project expenditure	227,234	170,408	206,428
Travel, meeting & subs.	24,178	20,510	17,741
Provision	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>864,273</b>	<b>763,192</b>	<b>787,627</b>
<b>Income</b>			
Membership Fees	255,286	234,025	220,814
Project Income	563,692	471,388	512,320
Other Income	3,851	9,356	3,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>822,829</b>	<b>714,769</b>	<b>736,134</b>
<b>Net Result</b>	<b>-41,444</b>	<b>-48,423</b>	<b>-51,493</b>

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ACADEMIC  
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ASSOCIATION



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