

International Migrants Day 2020

Universities have the potential to help building inclusive societies in the era of migration

As the world observes International Migrants Day, universities in Europe and globally are struggling to ensure continuity in education, and to build back better when the pandemic ends. In this context, efforts to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable and socio-economically disadvantaged make the issue of inclusion even higher on the agenda.

Higher Education can play a crucial role in providing solutions to societal challenges. As a matter of fact, since the outbreak of the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, European Higher Education Institutions have made considerable efforts to facilitate access for newcomers, through a constellation of actions in different domains: financial support, admission procedures, recognition of qualifications, language and psychological support, to mention a few.

In a context of increased xenophobia, cultural tensions, and toxic narratives on migrants and migration, European HEIs can act as social agents and help build inclusive societies, as called for in the UN Sustainable Development Goals Targets 10.2 and 4.7.

Building on a thousand-year tradition of international exchanges and openness to the world, universities are well positioned to lead the current societal transition and become the crucible of cosmopolitan societies that value cultural diversity and dialogue.

As recently remarked by the Rome Ministerial Communiqué “strengthening the social dimension of higher education and fostering equity and inclusion to reflect the diversity of society is the responsibility of a higher education system as a whole and should be regarded as a continuous commitment”. However, much remains to be done for universities to fully embrace a 360-degree approach to the phenomenon of migration, that goes beyond immediate initiatives and builds inclusive HEIs and societies, taking responsibility for the important societal challenges facing European countries.

Such approach includes strategic planning for providing equitable access for migrant and refugee students and staff, and reconsidering teaching and research activities, with a view to better serving the needs of increasingly diverse European societies.

Promoting socially-responsible universities in the era of migration implies forming citizens for life in multicultural societies and producing knowledge that is relevant to the societal challenges posed by the migration phenomenon. Building inclusive higher education systems for migrants and refugees is indeed a key aspect of HEIs’ contribution to social inclusion.

As partners in the UNI(di)VERSITY project, we are working to increase knowledge, inspire commitment, sensitise, and empower European HEIs leaders, managers and staff from different structures in relation to migration issues, to act as agents of change in their own institutions and academic community, and throughout Europe.

About UNI(di)VERSITY

UNI(di)VERSITY is a 2-years project focused on supporting EU Higher Education Institutions' strategic planning towards diversity and inclusion in relation to migration. It is funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.

More at: www.university.eu

General Enquiries: info@university.eu



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(coordinator)



(associate partner)



(associate partner)