



**D10.4 - Action Plan for Students and Scholars at Risk
with focus on Ukraine**

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D10.4 - Action Plan for Students and Scholars at Risk with focus on Ukraine

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INTRODUCTION

The current war against Ukraine is still shaking Europe, drastically influencing the lives and educational paths of both students and scholars. European universities are striving to fulfil their role as social actors in welcoming and supporting them.

The [Arqus European University Alliance](#) brings together the universities of Granada, Graz, Leipzig, Lyon1, Maynooth, Minho, Padua, Vilnius and Wroclaw. The principal driving ambition of the Arqus Alliance is the design, testing and gradual implementation of an innovative model for deep inter-university cooperation, which will serve as the basis for a truly European campus fulfilling all the missions of a university for the twenty-first century.

The mission of Arqus is to transform European higher education, research and innovation through deep cooperation and progressive integration, in pursuit of an equitable and sustainable future. Amongst others, one vision is to ensure and promote the core European values of democracy, the rule of law, respect for diversity and human rights, solidarity and the pursuit of peace and justice in Europe and the world ([Arqus Mission Statement 2022-2032](#), p. 5-6).

The Alliance jointly promotes widening access for diverse student and staff populations, facilitating inclusive admission and recruitment policies, and actively attracting talent from less represented groups. Arqus is especially committed to ensuring universal accessibility of its resources and activities ([Arqus Mission Statement 2022-2032](#), p. 8).

From the very beginning and with the tense political situation in place, Arqus has always been very committed to enabling **students at risk**. Within the “Arqus Inclusion & Diversity Hub” a task force was set up with the aim of developing inclusive strategies to help dismantle barriers in higher education and strengthen academic opportunities for students at risk. In this framework the “**Action Plan for Students and Scholars at Risks with focus on Ukraine**” was developed.

The term used, “**students and scholars at risk**”, is inspired by the [Scholars at Risk Network](#). As an outcome of the Arqus I task force within Action Line 2 “Widening Access, Inclusion & Diversity” (*see below for details*), this term is used to refer to all international students and scholars who choose to study abroad for reasons related to a perceived threat to their safety or academic freedom. Therefore, it serves as a framework to describe the situation for a broader range of addressees than “refugee” or “asylum seeker”. This decision takes into account that the terms “refugee” or “asylum seeker” do not apply as a self-description for all persons of the target group of this action plan, and furthermore, that it is problematic to bridge the gap between different legal descriptions in the different European countries. Hence, “Students and scholars at risk” works as a needs based, rather than a legal definition.

STRUCTURE OF THE ACTION PLAN

When drawing up the plan, the following **five steps of action planning** were taken into account (see e.g. the [Toolkit: Women & Diversity in Innovation](#)):

- (1) Define the Goals
- (2) Measure Resources and Determine Current State: collect and analyse data
- (3) Develop Action Plan: create action steps & select strategies or tools to achieve goals

These three steps serve as a structure to this document. The following steps are not yet part of this initial version, but will form a substantial part of the following Arqus Action Plan:

- (4) Implement Solutions: Implementation of the Action Plan
- (5) Monitor and Evaluate

STEP 1 – DEFINING THE GOALS

This Action Plan builds on the **conclusions drawn from the Arqus I “Enabling refugees”** task force and its outcome, the model of the **“Integrated Plan for Refugees and Students at Risk”**, but now with a special focus on the situation of students and scholars who have had to flee Ukraine.

This version of the Action Plan is developed **with a focus on students and scholars from Ukraine**, due to the urgency of the situation and the need to provide immediate support. It should be noted that **there will be a subsequent version with a wider perspective on the community of students and scholars at risk** at large across the Arqus Alliance.

The Action Plan **aims to promote equity and inclusivity in higher education** and to provide **practical solutions to the challenges faced by at-risk students and scholars throughout Europe**. It is intended to be a **valuable tool** for universities to ensure that students and scholars at risk **remain on the agenda**. In addition, the Action Plan should **focus on promoting cultural awareness and sensitivity in higher education institutions**, to ensure that at-risk students and scholars **feel welcome and supported**.

Bringing together **best practices, and evaluating challenges** faced by the target group, it serves as a **base to work collaboratively** on recommendations and actions **within the Alliance**. Additionally, the "Arqus Action Plan for Students and Scholars at risk" aims to provide other European universities and relevant stakeholders with the **necessary input and direction** in order to best support at-risk students and scholars.

STEP 2 – COLLECTING AND ANALYSING DATA

In this chapter, the focus is on the **collected data**, which serve as a base for the subsequent recommendations (Step 3) and action steps (Step 4) that need to be implemented in order to fulfil the goals of the Action Plan presented here.

Data from the participating universities was collected to acquire more information about:

- the **present state of support structures, resources and responsibilities** for students and scholars at risk from Ukraine within the Alliance (Section A of the survey)
- **evaluated needs** that it has not yet been possible to meet (Section B)
- the **number of Ukrainians** at universities within the Alliance (Section C)
- **challenges and recommendations** expressed by the universities (Section D)

The term “support structures” refers to actions that have been offered since 2022 by the host universities to students and scholars who had to flee Ukraine and who are currently based at the universities’ locations in Europe.

STEP 2.1 – APPROACH TO DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The data was collected between **April and May 2023** by using a **lime survey questionnaire** (see appendix). In Section A, respondents could choose from a given list of support structures as multiple-choice items. This set of questions makes it possible to descriptively compare the responses from all Arqus partner universities. Furthermore, comment fields allowed further exploration of the situation at different institutions.

In Section B, C and D the survey included items designed as open questions that did not imply a set of response options.

The survey was completed by **eight universities of the Arqus Alliance** (University of Padova, University of Graz, Leipzig University, University of Wrocław, Maynooth University, University of Minho, Vilnius University, University of Granada).

Subsequently a **combination of an evaluation of quantitative data and coding of qualitative data**, especially for the comments and open questions, was performed to analyse the data. Simple frequency analysis was used in the case of multiple-choice responses to provide frequencies and percentages of each response by total number of responses and by cases. The same method was used for coded responses to the comment fields and open questions.

STEP 2.2 – FIRST RESULTS – SUPPORT SERVICES AND INITIATIVES AT ARQUS UNIVERSITIES

In Section C of the survey, universities were asked to provide quantitative data about students and scholars affected by the war in Ukraine that were enrolled at the university or participated in their support programs. The evaluation shows that **more than 200 students and approximately 160 scholars take part in programs offered by Arqus universities**. Nearly **750 students with Ukrainian citizenship** have been enrolled at these universities since February 2022. In addition, **160 scholars** affected by the war have done research or work at Arqus universities since February 2022. Also, a **larger number of students from third countries, who studied in Ukraine or needed to leave Belarus**, are currently continuing their studies at

universities within the Alliance. For the latter group, no specific numbers are available because most institutions do not collect data on them.

The following overview of evaluated support programs at Arqus universities refers to the above-mentioned group of persons. Universities needed to specify their support programs in Section A of the survey. Firstly, it is notable that **various programs are open for all people who had to flee Ukraine** (mainly language courses, psychosocial support), whereas **some** (especially scholarships or newly implemented programs, like separate recruitment processes) **just target specific groups**, like Ukrainian citizens or third-country students.

Second, the evaluation of the data in Section A stresses that **support structures for students** from Ukraine at Arqus universities **mainly focus on the phase of study preparation** (involving preparatory language courses [mentioned by 7 universities], counselling on study possibilities [7] and preparatory courses for study programs [3]). For the phase of studying almost half of the universities provide their students with mentoring [3] and tutoring programs [3].

For **students and scholars** that needed to flee Ukraine, **financial support** (scholarships, bursaries and financial assistance advice about funding opportunities, employment, exemption from fees, research fellowships, dormitory fees support etc.) **was provided by all universities**.

One best practice example comes from Maynooth University: Their model "[Maynooth University \(MU\) Scholars at Risk \(SAR\) Fellowship 2021/22](#)" provides a fully funded 1-year Research Fellowship being offered under the 'Excellence in Exile' pillar of the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Interculturalism (EDI) Office. Potential candidates include researchers from all around the world who are experiencing threats to their life, liberty, and research career, and those who have been forced to flee because of such threats. So, financial support structures are an accessible low-threshold for all scholars that needed to flee the war in Ukraine. Additionally, they get an Academic Mentor and Office space provided to continue their research projects.

Accommodation services (involving information about on- and off-campus accommodation options) [7] and **psychosocial counselling** [6] are services **offered at almost all universities** for the target group as well.

Half of the responding universities organise cultural or societal activities (sporting activities, workshops, faculty celebrations, students events, recreational areas, etc.) and **cultural or societal activities** in collaboration with external or local organisations (local community events, festivities, museum, etc.) and three universities created spaces for students and scholars affected by the war in Ukraine as opportunities to meet, socialise, retreat, relax.

Funding for the described programs is **mainly secured through the universities' budgets** [7]. Four universities also got financial support from the **government or national ministries**, two from **national agencies** (like NAWA in Poland, DAAD in Germany), two used **EU funding** (especially ERASMUS+) and two got supported by **external partners** like banks.

All universities use a **specific unit as first address for requests** from scholars and students (mainly HelpDesks, International Offices, Welcome Offices, general mail account), as well as different units for specific requests concerning individual programs (like language courses and psycho-social support).

More than half of the universities [5] **collaborate with external or local organisations and partners** to provide support to students and scholars at risk from Ukraine, e.g. the Red Cross, Caritas, Save the Children, City Councils, migratory service counselling centres, Volunteer Centre, Students' Association, Psychology Associations, Language Centre, and several civil initiatives.

It is to note that the **measurements to lower barriers for students at risk**, evaluated in the "Model of an Integrated ARQUS Plan for Refugees and Students at Risk" during the term of Arqus I, have been mainly

implemented to support students from Ukraine. This might be caused by the fact that **most of the universities used already existing structures**, e.g., general programs for refugees or students at risk, and **opened them for the target group** of students and scholars from Ukraine.

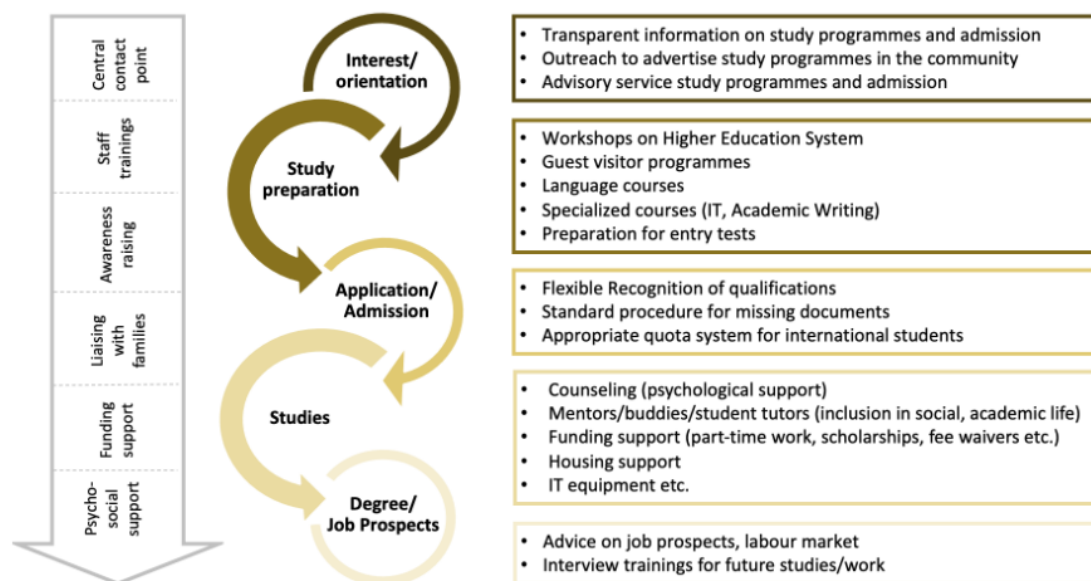


Figure 1: "Model of an Integrated ARQUS Plan for Refugees and Students at Risk", elaborated during ARQUS 1

However, the results of the questionnaire show that compared to actions for students and scholars at risk taken within the last years, some **additional, new measurements** were implemented distinctly involving students and scholars at risk from Ukraine. These measures can be assigned primarily to the following categories:

- information infrastructure:**

For example platforms for support exchange were built (1) with national and local partners, for instance in the case of [Maynooth University](#), a Helpdesk partnered with Irish Translation Services and Duolingo to provide translation services for documentation and a central resource for the assessment of English language for academic purposes free of charge to students or (2) for the coordination of activities and offers at the University, e.g. [Leipzig University, Vilnius University](#). Third, in order to enable peer-to-peer exchange between local and Ukrainian students/scholars, for example the "[Chance for Science](#)" conference took place at Leipzig University.
- admission procedures:**

[University of Wroclaw](#) for example uses a special separate recruitment process for full time studies for Ukrainian students. As another example, [University of Minho](#) established a flexible system for the recognition of qualifications, including a possible exemption from verifying the specific academic qualification for admission to the study cycle and verification of knowledge of the language(s) in which the teaching will be provided, as well as the possibility of alternative procedures for verifying the accreditation of the previous training of students at risk that cannot be documented.

- **accommodation:**
In order to support students and their families, [Vilnius University](#) organized temporary accommodations within the University community. Students of Ukrainian universities were exempted from tuition fees while continuing their studies at VU, could apply for other types of financial support, live in VU dormitories for free.
- **supporting scholars:**
The survey results also show that guest professorships at faculties and language institutes of the universities were offered to a larger extent than before. Additional support actions for the Ukrainian academic community were implemented. For example, [Vilnius University](#) supported scholars to continue research in Lithuania, but also in Ukraine.

The last example shows that **collaborations with Ukrainian universities** exist to support students and scholars at universities within the Alliance. Contrary to past actions for other students at risk that were following the aim of supporting the continuation of their educational path in the host country, support programs for Ukrainian students additionally concentrate on educational inquiries enabling them to continue studying or working in Ukraine. It is especially important to focus on a partnership of equals and to prevent a brain drain.

For example, [Leipzig University](#) provides the infrastructure for Ukrainian University Entrance Exams with the aim to qualify students to study at Ukrainian universities. Vilnius and Wroclaw University offer collaborative teaching programs with Ukrainian universities, whereas Maynooth University provides the digital infrastructure for participation in online teaching at universities in Ukraine for students to continue their studies. Also various Arqus universities, like Vilnius, Padova, Granada, Leipzig and Minho included NaUKMA and other Ukrainian institutions in their international credit mobility programs (Erasmus+ KA171) in order to expand mobility opportunities for students. To allow general networking and the initiation of in-depth cooperations between Ukrainian and Arqus universities, Wroclaw University implemented the project "[Arqus for Ukraine](#)", including summer schools, workshops and study visits.

After describing support structures already in place, universities were asked to identify the **biggest challenges for students and scholars at risk from Ukraine** in Section B of the survey. Participating universities mentioned the following (sorted by frequency of mentioned answers):

- **language barriers** [5]
- **financing** [4] (tuition fees, semester fees, unclear if grants/scholarships will be available for the next semesters)
- **admission process** [3] (preparatory courses needed before being allowed to study/ restricted admission, not enough study places/ difficult proceedings with recognition of former studies, especially for Medicine)
- **mental health issues and psycho-social support** [3]
- **socio-cultural integration** [2] (isolationism, prejudice and discrimination, difficulties with integration into local community)
- **other:** accommodation [1], double burden: language courses and parallel online studies in Ukraine [1], third country nationals, that studied in Ukraine: legal status and finances [1]

Following the identified challenges, universities were asked to specify **needed support structures, that did not get implemented yet** and that could meet the identified challenges:

- collaboration with universities in Ukraine to provide joint teaching programs [2]
- digital infrastructure for teaching/learning online in Ukraine [1]
- support for third country nationals, that needed to flee Ukraine [1]
- study and evaluation support [1], e.g. assessment tests in English or native language

- more collaboration with external entities or local organisations to assist in the integration of students and scholars at risk [1]
- need for specific training for teaching and administrative/support staff [1]
- more staff needed for support structures [1]

These results could serve as an input for the next steps of the action plan and should be cross-checked with the actual needs, noted by students and scholars themselves as well as other relevant stakeholders - both in the process of collecting information and in the process of developing solutions. Therefore, the results of this survey will be compared with results of a currently ongoing survey targeting Ukrainian students who have studied abroad during the 2022-23 academic year. This second survey was sent to 1,500 students at Arqus universities and those associated with [National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy](#) (Kyiv, Ukraine), as an associated partner of the Arqus European University Alliance. The students' experiences of studying abroad under very particular circumstances and their recommendations will be considered for incorporation into the continuing process of the Action Plan and practices of the Arqus Alliance.

STEP 3 - RECOMMENDATIONS

By its mere existence the ARQUS Alliance shares the same core values and, therefore, we can assume that we are united around the same diversity and inclusion principles, even if each member University develops its own specific strategies.

In addition to the objectives formulated by ARQUS and the survey results, an updated background analysis and some desk research on (1) European policy documents, (2) tools and standards emerged from international organisations and (3) the outputs and best practices from relevant European projects on equality, diversity and inclusion in higher education, integration mechanisms, and holistic support to migrants and “at risk” background groups have allowed the identification of the following open ground recommendations and considerations:

1. Governance I Strategies I Policies

Linking support for migrants with an “at risk” background to institutional strategies for diversity – even if only in principle – enables a more systematic, integrated approach.

The equality, diversity and inclusion strategies of higher education institutions (when existent) are mostly of a “catch-all” nature, with a focus on mainstreaming and non-discrimination. In most cases, strategies do not explicitly target (potential) students and scholars with an “at risk” background. However, this does not need to be a disadvantage per se for the inclusion of students and scholars with such a background.

Studies demonstrate that at institutions where diversity and inclusion have become a core element of the organisational culture, work surrounding the integration of students and scholars at risk has also improved.

To enhance diversity and inclusion – and support for those with an “at risk” background – in the future, it is also important that strategies, policies and measures are continuously revised and adapted.

This recommended high-level perspective will also allow a shift from the single focus on sharing field practices towards sustaining institutional strategic planning, tailored according to the Institution’s starting point, profile, needs and objectives.

2. Changing the Narrative

A change of narrative is recommended, acknowledging that equality, diversity and inclusion, considered as a democratic imperative, are not merely a matter of the institutions’ third mission, but are central to institutional excellence, contributing to the overall quality of higher education.

The distinct experiences of students and scholars at risk should be recognised as assets rather than deficiencies.

3. Academic Community Joint Collaborative Effort

When all members of the academic community combine their efforts, diversity and inclusion are transversally addressed and the organisational culture can change more cohesively and sustainably.

Irrespective of the organisational structure in place, engagement across the institution – including leadership, students and their associations, staff and their community bodies and representatives of the target group itself – is important for the successful promotion and implementation of diversity and inclusion strategies and related activities.

Therefore, collaboration between all internal stakeholders must be ensured in the process so as to create a welcoming, safe and supportive environment.

4. Strategic Partnerships to increase sustained response capacity

Ongoing strategic partnerships should be extended and new ones established to strengthen the University's support and facilitate integration of students and scholars at risk.

Engagement and a structured collaboration beyond the institution are widely considered as important factors. Some examples of relevant external entities: municipalities, NGOs, private companies, local/national/international agencies, civil society, human rights groups, legal aid organisations, faith-based associations, governmental bodies, public administration, secondary schools, among others.

Particular attention should be given to building and reinforcing partnerships with:

- migrant /"at-risk" background organisations: to better understand the needs and particular vulnerabilities of students, scholars and staff at risk and to collaborate on providing complementary support services and networks;
- Higher Education Institutions from the scholars and students at risk home countries whenever feasible and appropriate, in order to contribute to a more systemic action plan and avoid brain drain (despite effective inclusion in the host University/country).

5. Enable flexible pathways in Higher Education

Less privileged and vulnerable groups OR Migrants with an "at risk" background have special needs, and offering them flexibility and complementary learning pathways can give them a real chance to succeed and (re)build a better life.

The University should have or create tools for widening access, facilitating recognition of prior studies, accrediting prior experiential learning, flexibility in admission procedures and assessment of qualifications, special entry requirements and points, personalised programmes, short programmes, bridging courses, adoption of Universal Design for Learning for addressing different learning styles, among others.

It would be important to have knowledge-based information regarding the main obstacles of students and scholars at risk to access the university/further studies/research positions. Therefore, any individual or collective data gathering exercise should also take this under consideration.

6. Provide Support Services

To ensure adequate support for all education stakeholders' actions to understand and navigate the complexities of inclusion and diversity.

Collaboration among key actors and an adequate allocation of resources can make the difference between a hostile, and a more committed and caring academic community towards students and scholars at risk. If only existing resources, structures, and programmes at the University are made available, guarantee a strong central support and orchestrate a coordinated response of all advisory, academic and administrative services.

Be aware of intersectional characteristics that increase/aggravate inequalities and be prepared to take into account the specific diversities within diversity.

Check the comprehensive list of recommended support services in section Step 2.2.

7. Raising Awareness and Capacity Building

To offer staff specific capacity building and raising awareness training at all hierarchical levels.

Training individuals (teaching staff, administration/support staff to management and leadership) will help them to understand better the challenges of diversity and inclusion, recognise the particular vulnerabilities and challenges students and scholars at risk face and prevent unconscious bias. It will also contribute to institutional culture transformation.

Topics to be addressed: intercultural competence, cultural codes, conflict management, anti-harassment legislation, self-awareness on unconscious bias, diversity and inclusion, anti-racism, specific vulnerability of students and scholars at risk, refugees and migrants legal frameworks, among others.

The provision of a toolkit/short training resources to capacitate all ARQUS member institutions and their communities to act more inclusively with students and scholars at risk is highly recommended.

8. Acknowledging Structural Barriers

Address the **structural barriers** in academic systems in the host country, paying particular attention to those affecting students and scholars with an “at risk” background.

Underlying issues: need for a more stable labour market for scholars; recognition of diploma; less individual authority within academic system; equal opportunities given to students and scholars at risk in higher education and in the academic workforce as those of host communities; access to funding; among others.

Take into account students and scholars at risk’s perspectives when designing projects – including the **impact** that the project may have on their lives – and to raise awareness about the challenges students and scholars at risk may face and the need to protect their rights. In resettlement situations they are faced with: sudden change and lack of preparation; interrupted education/professional career; lack of documentation; patchwork biographies; cultural and social discrimination; gender-based violence; continuing psychological and emotional effects of experience and trauma; dealing with one or more foreign languages; social crisis (e.g. poverty, homelessness, or being at risk of homelessness); general difficulties with balancing family responsibility and HE study, etc...

Explore how research can be used as a **tool** to improve asylum systems;

Give the opportunity to refugee scholars, academics and researchers to **engage in academia** as they have lived experience that is so essential;

Encourage participatory, actionable research by inviting scholars at risk to be involved in the design and implementation of research projects.

9. National Frameworks

National frameworks for enhancing access for disadvantaged learners **further strengthen** the work carried out by institutions in this field. Increased emphasis on the social dimension in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) could positively impact national policy support for universities’ diversity and inclusion work in the near future, and in turn might also benefit the work they carry out for migrants with an “at risk” background.

There is a need for **enhanced national support** and active collaboration with national administrative structures, for instance in order to streamline procedures for asylum and academic recognition.

Involve Universities as **social intermediaries** between Governments, international organisations, students, students and scholars at risk and host populations, and as key stakeholders in the inclusion process of students and scholars at risk in their host communities.

Articulate policies that allow HEIs to offer flexible pathways to disadvantaged groups in particular.

Enable an agile VPL/APEL system that recognises experiences and deals with possible lack of formal documentation.

10. Funding

Funding to run support programmes remains a huge challenge and it is very much dependent on national frameworks and external financing. Some recommended measures/actions:

Identify and use inclusion and diversity-oriented **funding opportunities** such as institutional funding and student funding. Only by making a proper provision for inclusion will institutions and organisations be able to promote, support and give visibility to diversity effectively.

Share information on funding streams accessible to universities.

Collect, centralise and **disseminate** updated information on financial support (scholarships and grants).

Encourage staff to review and advocate for European and national funding incentives to provide inclusion and diversity-oriented courses or programmes for disadvantaged students.

Review if current institutional funding possibilities can be related to inclusive actions.

Integrate funding opportunities in the traditional institutional financial budgeting.

11. Information and Increased Visibility

Inclusion and diversity should be incorporated in institutional communication. The University should have a policy of transparency and widely publicise the actions and results of the inclusion and diversity policies in the area of migration and students and scholars at risk.

Widespread information will promote active engagement and advocacy towards diversity and inclusion in society at multiple scales. By involving citizens and giving visibility to the challenges of students and scholars at risk we facilitate not only the process by which they become accepted by society, both as individuals and as groups, but also the two-way process of adaptation by migrants and host societies.

12. Matched Comparable Data

Need for real monitoring to map the causes, current state and impact of students and scholars at risk's situations across the alliance.

Need to overcome data privacy challenge and complexity. Matched comparable data is essential for taking evidence-based decisions and finding evidence-based solutions to create an ecosystem that provides protection for students and scholars at risk and empower them to thrive.

Sources:

- (1) [*SMILE - Social Meaning Impact through LLL universities in Europe*](#)
- (2) [*UNI\(di\)VERSITY - Socially responsible university for inclusive societies in the era of migration*](#)
- (3) [*Report of Survey 2022: Ukrainian Students Abroad*](#), Erasmus Student Network, Ukraine
- (4) [*Recommendations Workshop on "European Collaboration with Low- and Middle-Income Countries"*](#), 26/04/2023. European Academic Refugee Interdisciplinary Network (EARIN), UNCHR (UN Refugee Agency).
- (5) [*Scholars at Risk, Europe*](#)
- (6) [*Higher Education for Diversity, Social Inclusion and Community: A Democratic Imperative*](#), Council of Europe, 2018.

STEP 4 - ACTION STEPS

This section of the 'Arqus Action Plan to support students and scholars at risk' aims at providing an overview of the "interim" steps that Arqus is going to take between the first and second versions of the Action Plan.

As described in Step 2.2 - First Results - Support Services and Initiatives at Arqus Universities, in fact, this is a living document. Due to the effects that the war against Ukraine is having on Europe and specifically on its higher education sector, with large numbers of students and scholars fleeing the country and the subsequent need of providing immediate support and arranging quick institutional responses, this first version focuses on Ukraine.

By June 2025, a second version will have been developed with a wider perspective on the community of students and scholars at risk at large across the Arqus Alliance.

In the timespan between the two versions, we have the unique opportunity to implement a number of actions, as detailed below. Arqus' associated partner - the National University of Kyiv - Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA) has been fully integrated into the working group on an equal footing with the Alliance's full partner institutions. NaUKMA has taken an active role in proposing, planning and implementing some of the activities, one of them being the Survey targeting Ukrainian students (*see below for details*). The integration of NaUKMA in the working group and the partnerships that tie many of Arqus' partners with Ukrainian HEIs represent a very unique feature of this Action Plan: unlike what usually happens with international crises and conflicts, we have the chance to incorporate their perspective into our work. This brings a complete change of vision, as their experience becomes one of the core assets of our work with students and scholars at risk.

The actions that will be implemented between the first and second versions of the Action Plan will aim at testing and monitoring some of the Recommendations formulated in the document (*see Step 3 - Recommendations*), striving to overcome some of the challenges identified in the analysis of the data collected from Arqus partner universities and in the [Framework for an Integrated Arqus Plan for Refugees and Students at Risk](#) (produced during Arqus' pilot phase), further expanding the reflection and putting into practice some of the recommended actions.

In particular, we refer here to the mentioned recommendations (2) Changing the Narrative; (3) Academic Community Joint Collaborative Effort; (7) Raising awareness and capacity building; (8) Acknowledging structural barriers; (11) Information and increased visibility.

Due to the short timespan, we cannot have a relevant impact on the support services offered throughout the Alliance, on the institutional strategies or on the national frameworks -although these remain as long-term objectives. In the next two years, we aim at implementing a small number of integrated actions within the whole Arqus Alliance and beyond, with the overall goal of changing the narrative around students and scholars at risk, mainly through community-building and awareness-raising activities. All initiatives targeting these groups will not be taken in isolation, but as a part of a wider strategy at the Alliance level, where we consider equality, diversity as inclusion as being "central to institutional excellence, contributing to the overall quality of higher education. The distinct experiences of students and scholars at risk should be recognised as assets" (Recommendation 2).

We strongly believe in the engagement of the whole university community in order to create a "welcoming, safe and supportive environment" (Recommendation 3) -and in the case of students, especially in peer support.

This engagement will be stimulated through awareness raising initiatives to encourage a better understanding of "the particular vulnerabilities and challenges students and scholars at risk face" and to "prevent unconscious bias" (Recommendation 7).

As mentioned above, the perspectives of students and scholars at risk will be taken into account both in the process of collecting information and researching the challenges and needs of these groups, and when designing projects and searching for solutions to such challenges (Recommendation 8).

Finally, we aim at giving students and scholars at risk greater visibility, widely publicising the initiatives and actions taken in this field (Recommendation 11).

The actions undertaken will be closely monitored, and the results of the implementation of such actions will feed into the second version of the Action Plan, where evidence-based recommendations from our direct experience - incorporating Ukrainian students and scholars at risk's advice and experience - will be presented.

The analysis of the information collected across Arqus (*see Step 2.2 - First Results - Support Services and Initiatives at Arqus Universities*) shows that many of the challenges, barriers and needs experienced by Ukrainian students and scholars hosted by our institutions also apply to the community of students and scholars at risk at large and will thus be extremely important in the development of the second version of the Action Plan.

The planned Action Steps will aim at integrating the current findings with new insights: we aim at working with students and scholars at risk starting from the same items analysed in the preparation of this Action Plan (*as detailed in Step 2.2 - First Results - Support Services and Initiatives at Arqus Universities*), in order to integrate the initial Recommendations.

The Action Steps revolve around three main areas:

- (1) Research
- (2) Awareness raising / community building
- (3) Public engagement and advocacy

Area (1): Research

Objectives: Collect sound data to make informed decisions around the support for students and scholars at risk. Include the voice of students at risk in order to take evidence-based decisions.

→ **Activity: student survey** for Ukrainian students who studied abroad during the 2022-2023 academic year

The survey -which is being disseminated at the moment of delivering the Action Plan- has been developed with the contribution of various Arqus partner universities, based on the initiative of NaUKMA. It targets Ukrainian students who have studied abroad during the 2022-23 academic year. The objective of the survey is to analyse in depth:

- their situation in terms of the support they received by the hosting institutions - within and outside of Arqus (i.e., general induction, psychological support, linguistic support, housing support, financial support / assistance, tutoring programmes, cultural activities, provision of digital tools etc.);
- the relationship they have with their home institutions (i.e., enrolled at HEI abroad; enrolled at home university in Ukraine; abroad on international credit mobility etc.);
- their plans for the immediate future.

About 1,500 Ukrainian students will be receiving the survey, so even in the case of a relatively low percentage of respondents, we expect the results to be statistically significant. The results will be analysed in the following months and feed into the second version of the Action Plan.

→ **Activity: focus groups** with students at risk

The recipients of the survey will be asked whether they would like to engage further in the development of the Action Plan, starting from their participation in focus groups. The participation of other students at risk will be encouraged as well. The focus groups will be conducted locally at least at three Arqus partner universities. They will focus on the main challenges, resources, and thoughts of students at risk about their daily life at their hosting institutions - especially around support networks, social life, etc., starting from the items analysed in the survey. They will complement the analysis of the results of the survey and they will allow for more practice-based recommendations. Moreover, they will themselves become an occasion for community building at the local level. The focus groups will be moderated by specialised local staff and overseen by local Arqus staff, who will also take care of the follow-up and of the involvement of the participants in other events and initiatives. They will be followed by at least one online meeting where all participants from the different Arqus institutions will meet, thus starting the process of building a community across the Alliance (*connecting to the activity below*).

Area (2): Awareness raising and community building

Objectives: Raise the level of **awareness** of all members of the university community about students and scholars at risk. **Build a community** of, and around, students and scholars at risk at the local level in each Arqus partner university and across the Alliance.

→ **Activity: at least 3 events / meetings / gatherings / sport events organised at the local level**

These events will involve students at risk along with their peers from the very start of the planning phase and will be held locally. It is not possible to provide details on the events at this stage, as they will be planned together with the students.

The objectives of these events are to stimulate the development of relationships among the students at risk, who often feel isolated in their host institutions, and among the students at risk and the local student community. The aim is to create a facilitating context for students at risk, through the engagement and support of their peer students.

The events will also be open to any staff member who is interested. The promotion and dissemination will target not only the local Arqus community but the university community at large.

Area (3): Public engagement and advocacy

Objectives: disseminate the Arqus Action Plan outside of the Alliance, in international networks and fora. Engage the citizenship and civil society organizations.

→ **Activity: 2 awareness-raising webinars**

They will feature the participation of students and scholars at risk as speakers and will target the whole university community - peer students, administrative staff, academic staff. They will be also open to the participation of anyone interested, with the aim of involving a wider public and of creating networks and synergies. The participation of civil society organisations will be encouraged (i.e. Scholars At Risk - both national chapters and SAR Europe, hosted by Maynooth University; organisations that operate locally with refugees and asylum seekers, municipalities etc.). Wherever possible, other Alliances and / or international networks will be invited to join. The aim is to disseminate the Action Plan, discuss current developments, exchange best practices, share challenges, keep the attention on the topic high on the agenda.

- **Activity: Participation in international networks** (i.e. the former FOR-EU “EDI subgroup”, currently “Inclusion & Diversity Hub” (inter-Alliance network); the informal network of Italian Universities participating in European University Alliances; etc.), where we are planning to discuss inclusion and diversity in general and specifically the topic of students and scholars at risk. As a result, we expect the university community across Arqus and outside the Alliance to become more aware of the challenges that students and scholars at risk face and of the asset they represent for the enhancement of the whole institution.

All the above-mentioned activities are complementary to others that are being implemented across Arqus: i.e., the “[Arqus for Ukraine](#)” project run by the University of Wroclaw, and the joint teaching opportunities created by the KA171 projects (involving Ukrainian HEIs) submitted by Arqus partner universities. Other activities might be promoted based on students and scholars at risk’s initiative. Their impact will be closely monitored, and their results will feed into the subsequent version of the Action Plan.

APPENDIX

- [Survey for Arqus partner institutions to collect information about support services](#) (see section Step 2 – Collecting and analysing data)
- [Arqus I – Framework for an Integrated Arqus Plan for refugees and students at risk](#)
- [Survey targeting students from Ukraine who studied abroad during the 2022-23 academic year](#)

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