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INTRODUCTION

The Arqus European University Alliance brings together nine institutions which share academic, scientific and cultural objectives, a common vision of the role of higher education and research and mutual fields of interests.

The alliance was established in November 2018 to promote cooperation, joint research and high-quality education through international collaboration.

The current member universities of the Arqus Alliance are: the University of Granada, the University of Graz, the Leipzig University, the University of Lyon 1, Maynooth University, the University of Minho, the University of Padua, Vilnius University and the University of Wrocław.

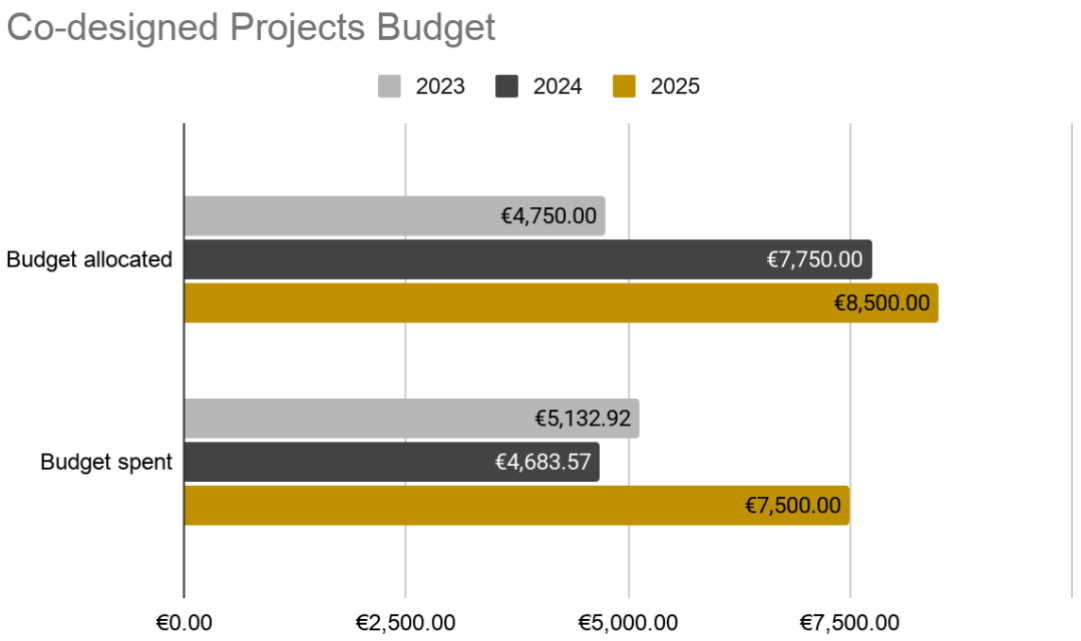
Together, these universities represent a vibrant and diverse community of scholars, students and staff who work collaboratively to advance knowledge and promote mutual understanding. Through the Arqus Alliance, they have established a wide range of joint activities, including research collaborations, joint degree programmes, student and staff mobility programmes and joint outreach and engagement initiatives while promoting openness, diversity and excellence in research and education. It seeks to foster international cooperation and to provide students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in an increasingly globalised world.

WHAT IS THE STUDENT AGORA

The Arqus Student Agora is an umbrella initiative for diverse student-led groupings conceived as drivers for students to act as co-creators,in academic, social and cultural affairs. The Arqus Student Agora is conceived as a safer and inclusive space for students at partner universities to actively improve their European University experience. It promotes student participation and engagement across the Alliance, supports student-led creative projects, fosters personal and professional development and improves student services within Arqus. The students become the actors by shaping tomorrow's universities.

THE ARQUS CHANGE MAKERS SPACE (ACMS) PROGRAMME

Arqus Student Co-designed Projects are innovative and collaborative initiatives that promote cultural exchange and strengthen the integration of international students across the Arqus member universities. These projects were funded by the Arqus Student Council (21.000 euro allocated), with the Student Agora responsible for the implementation and management of the calls. Across three calls launched between 2023 and 2025, 18 projects were approved and 13 implemented, each contributing to the shaping of the Alliance's educational environment by enhancing student engagement, consolidating the community and supporting students' personal and professional development.



This report aims to demonstrate how student-led innovation within the Arqus Alliance drives educational transformation, intercultural exchange and civic engagement at all partner institutions. By showcasing the diversity of initiatives developed through the Arqus Student Co-Designed Projects, it illustrates the ways in which students actively influence both the academic and social dimensions of the Alliance, reflecting its values of openness, collaboration, and inclusivity.

The projects described not only enrich student participation but also play a vital role in developing participants' skills, preparing them for future academic, civic and professional pathways. In documenting these achievements, the report highlights the transformative potential of student agency in building a more connected, inclusive and forward-looking European University.

As a whole, the Arqus Student Co-designed Projects stand as a cornerstone of the Alliance's commitment to co-creation and creativity. By bringing together students from diverse cultural and academic backgrounds to develop meaningful solutions, these initiatives foster cultural exchange, reinforce community ties and enhance the shared learning experience across the Arqus universities.

Executive Summary

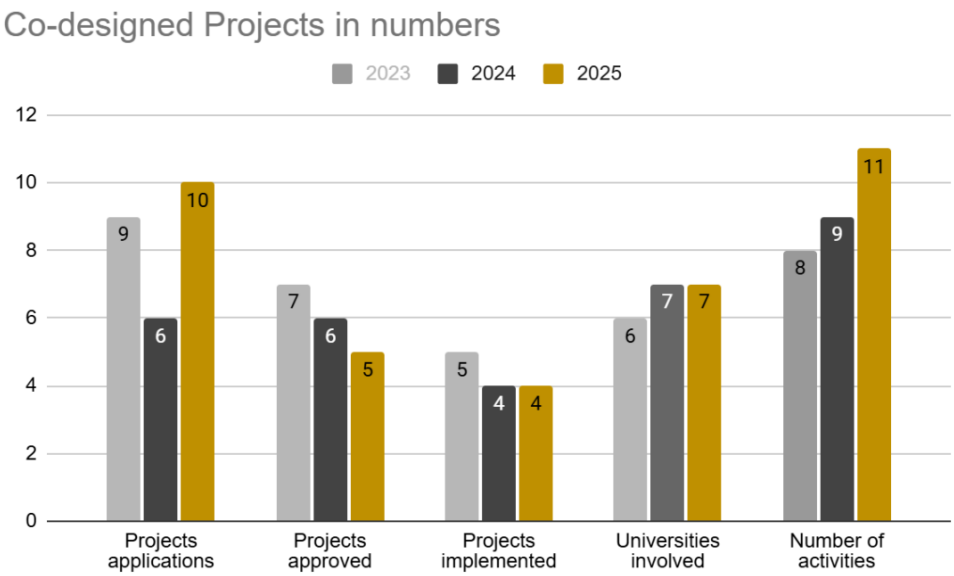
This report seeks to demonstrate how student-led innovation within the Arqus Alliance contributes to educational transformation, intercultural exchange and civic engagement across all partner institutions. By presenting the diversity of initiatives developed through the Arqus Student Co-designed Projects, it illustrates ways in which students actively contribute to both the academic and social dimensions of the Alliance, reflecting its core values of openness, collaboration and inclusivity.

In addition to enriching student participation, the projects play a significant role in developing participants' skills and in preparing them for future personal, academic and professional pathways. By documenting these outcomes, the report highlights the transformative potential of student agency in building a more connected, inclusive and forward-looking European University.

Overall, the Arqus Student Co-Designed Projects constitute a central element of the Alliance's commitment to co-creation and creativity. By bringing together students from diverse cultural and

academic backgrounds to jointly develop meaningful initiatives, these projects foster intercultural dialogue, reinforce community ties and enhance the shared learning experience across the Arqus universities.

As shown in the Figure below, the number of applications exceeded the number of awarded grants across all calls between 2023 and 2025.



METHODOLOGY & PROCESS

METHODOLOGY

The Arqus Change Makers programme operates through annual open calls that support student-led, transnational initiatives designed to enhance the academic and social dimensions of the Arqus European University Alliance. Across the three calls implemented between 2023 and 2025, the programme followed a flexible yet robust framework that prioritised collaboration, inclusion and student agency.

A defining feature of the programme is its emphasis on cross-border cooperation. All supported projects required collaboration between students from at least two Arqus member universities, encouraging participants to move beyond institutional and disciplinary boundaries. This transnational structure fostered intercultural learning, mutual understanding and the co-creation of shared European perspectives.

Rather than imposing narrowly defined priority areas, the programme allowed students to propose initiatives aligned with the broader mission and values of the Arqus Alliance. As a result, several cross-cutting thematic clusters emerged organically across the three cycles, including European identity, sustainability, digital transformation, intercultural learning and inclusion and diversity. This bottom-up approach ensured that the supported projects reflected students' lived experiences, interests and societal concerns, while remaining closely connected to the Alliance's strategic objectives.

The programme was intentionally designed to accommodate a wide range of formats and methodologies. Students implemented their projects through seminars, workshops, conferences, field visits, creative productions, digital campaigns and blended mobility activities. This methodological flexibility enabled participants to adapt their initiatives to local contexts, available resources and diverse target audiences, while maintaining a shared commitment to transnational engagement and impact.

A core objective and, as a consequence, requirement of the selection process is the demonstration of cross-border collaboration. The program moves beyond traditional academic silos by emphasising:

- Mandatory Collaboration: Projects must involve students from at least two different Arqus member universities.
- Broad Eligibility: The call is open to students at all levels - Bachelor's, Master's, Single-cycle, Specialisation, or PhD programs—ensuring a multidisciplinary mix of perspectives.
- Society Integration: Students are actively encouraged to partner with local associations and society organisations to ensure their projects have a tangible impact on the community.
- Networking Support: For students with ideas but no team, the Alliance provides dedicated channels (such as the Zulip platform) to find partners across the nine member universities.

To be selected, projects must align with "transformational ideas" that strengthen the Alliance's educational environment. Across the three calls implemented between 2023 and 2025, the student co-designed projects addressed a diverse range of thematic areas aligned with the objectives of the Arqus Alliance. In the 2024 and 2025 calls, these areas were articulated through five thematic pillars, presented in detail in the Annex. All the calls focused broadly on the Arqus Mission and Vision.

Selection Process

Project proposals are evaluated by a joint selection committee composed of representatives of both the Arqus Student Council and the Student Agora. Applications are assessed according to transparent criteria, including relevance to the student experience, innovation, feasibility, sustainability and the quality of transnational collaboration. This shared governance structure combines peer-to-peer evaluation with organisational oversight, strengthening both the legitimacy and effectiveness of the programme.

Each proposal is assessed based on five standardised criteria:

1. **Relevance:** How the project improves the student experience across the Alliance.
2. **Innovation:** The level of originality and creativity in the approach.
3. **Feasibility:** Practicality within the allocated timeframe and budget.
4. **Reusability/Sustainability:** Potential for long-term impact or repetition.
5. **Collaboration:** The depth of partnership between universities and local stakeholders.

Implementation Framework

The implementation framework for the (Arqus Change Makers) programme is designed to be highly flexible, allowing students to translate their "transformational ideas" into diverse, actionable formats that strengthen the Alliance's community. The projects are characterized by a "hands-on" approach that bridges the gap between different European campuses through both physical and digital engagement.

Key implementation formats and activities supported by the programme include:

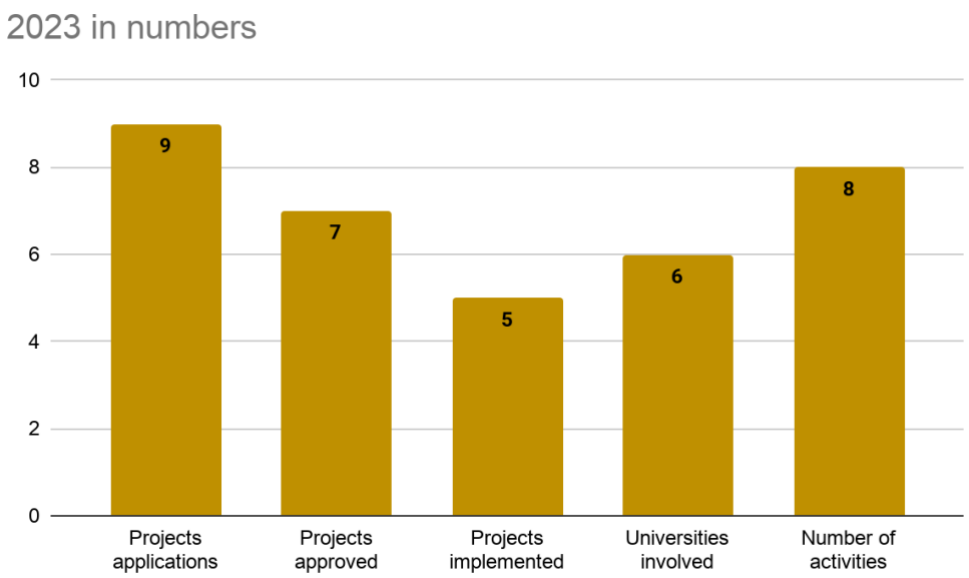
- **Workshops and Seminars**: Projects frequently utilise these formats to facilitate knowledge exchange. The programme specifically provides funding for external experts and speakers, as well as necessary implementation materials.
- **Inter-Institutional Partner Collaborations**: At the core of every project is a mandatory partnership between students from at least two member universities. This framework often extends to include local associations and civil society organisations, ensuring that student initiatives are grounded in real-world societal needs.
- **Field Visits and Mobility:** To foster genuine intercultural relationships, the framework supports physical mobility. Eligible funding covers travel and accommodation, enabling students to organise field visits, joint meetings, or local events that connect their respective universities.
- **Digital Campaigns and Social Media:** Recognising the importance of visibility, the programme encourages and funds social media campaigns. These are used not only to promote the project's activities but also to disseminate findings through creative digital storytelling .
- **Publications and Creative Outputs:** The implementation cycle concludes with the requirement for at least one "creative product." These outputs often take the form of articles, photo brochures, blog posts, or short videos, serving as a lasting record of the project's impact and lessons learned.

This diverse range of formats ensures that projects can address themes such as digital transformation, climate change, or plurilingualism through the method most suited to their specific goals.

GOVERNANCE

The governance of the Arqus Change Makers programme reflects a collaborative model that places students at the centre while ensuring institutional support and accountability. Funding for the projects is provided by the Arqus Student Council, underscoring the commitment to student-driven initiatives within the Alliance. The Arqus Student Agora is responsible for coordinating the calls, supporting applicants and overseeing the implementation and follow-up of selected projects.

CYCLE I – 2023 CALL



AL4ALL: APPLIED LINGUISTICS FOR ALL A SPECIALISED FORUM ON METHODS FOR LANGUAGE LOVERS AND STUDENTS OF ALL DISCIPLINES

- **Main applicant:** Angelica Peccini, University of Vilnius
- **Budget:** 500 €
- **Objective:** To foster cross-disciplinary exchange and multiperspectivity by bridging the gap between applied linguistics and other research fields, allowing different methodologies to cross-fertilize and enrich each other.
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Vilnius, University of Graz
- **Format:** An online video conferencing platform designed for seminars and discussion forums, co-designed and managed by and for PhD candidates and young researchers across various disciplines.
- **Link:**
  https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/join-al4all-seminars-applied-linguistics/
  https://arqus-alliance.eu/call/arqus-al4all-forum-on-applied-linguistic-methods/

HUMAN RIGHTS CAFÉ – "SOUTHERN EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES WORK"

- **Main applicant:** Alessia Ruta, University of Padua
- **Budget:** 750 €
- **Objective:** To create an inclusive, accessible space for discussion to foster a culture of human rights, facilitate networking, and tackle contemporary issues (ranging from job market navigation to mental health and LGBTQIA+ rights) while expanding the initiative internationally to Granada, Minho and Padua.

- **Involved Institutions:** University of Padua, University of Granada, University of Minho
- **Format**: Informal, student-led discussion meetings bringing together a diverse audience: Bachelor, Master, and doctoral students, graduates, professors, professionals, and citizens. Each session is dedicated to a different, rotating topic related to human rights.
- **Link:** https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/join-the-arqus-human-rights-cafe-on-southern-democracies/

ARQUS COUNTRIES' 2023 HUMAN RIGHTS RECORDS REVIEW

- **Main applicant:** Katarina Stanisavljevic, University of Padua
- **Budget:** 750 €
- **Objective:** To actively engage students in academic research regarding the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, allowing them to critically evaluate and review the human rights status of their own countries.
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Padua, University of Wroclaw, University of Granada
- **Format:** A collaborative, transnational research project. Students across Arqus alliance universities collect and analyse data regarding their respective states' human rights performances, utilising the 6th edition of the Padova Model UPR (a UN simulation) as a practical catalyst.
- **Link:**
https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/students-ugr-visit-padua/
https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/consultation-human-rights-arqus-upr-implementation-collaborative-project/

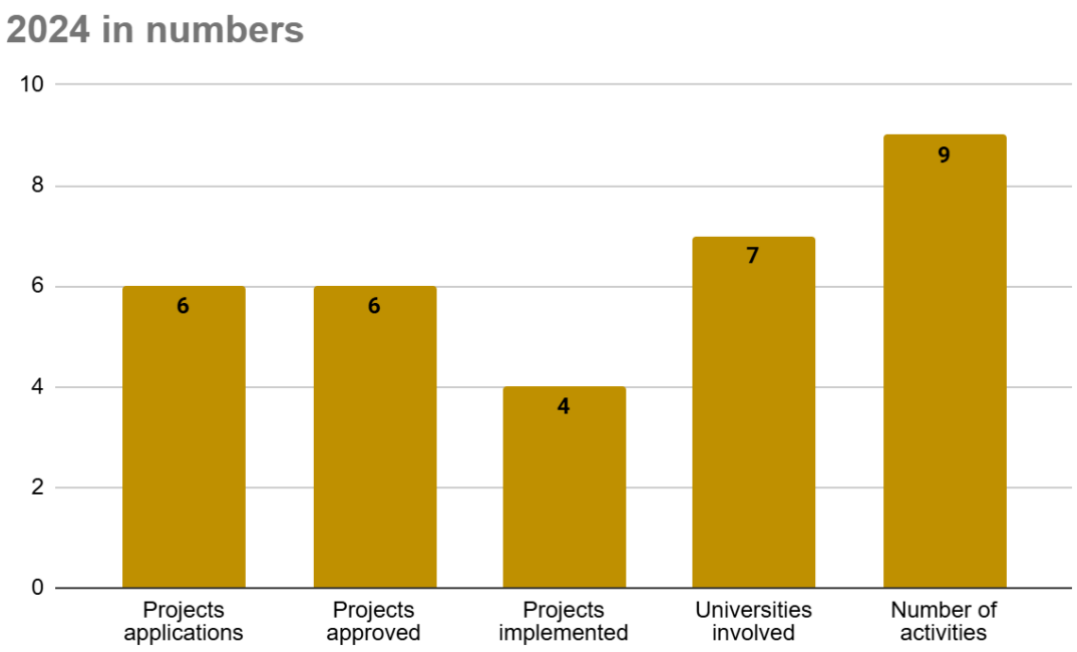
INTERGENERATIONALABS: TRANSGENERATIONAL PEDAGOGIES AND TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURES

- **Main applicant:** Nicole Haring, University of Graz
- **Budget:** 500 €
- **Objective:** To challenge traditional, passive educational models (the "banking system of education") by developing transgenerational pedagogies, using literature as a critical tool to negotiate the complexities and uncertainties of our interconnected global era.
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Graz, University of Granada
- **Format:** Collaborative workshops ("IntergenerationaLabs") hosted at the Universities of Graz and Granada, where students and researchers work together on the study of transnational literatures.
- **Link:** https://interamerikanistik.uni-graz.at/de/neuigkeiten/interdisciplinary-workshop-intersectionalabs-transgressive-pedagogies-transnational-literatures-and-cinematic-representations-1/

WHO VOTES FOR EMERGENT PARTIES IN EUROPEAN ELECTIONS? A JOINT ANALYSIS ON BIAS AND SAMPLING

- **Main applicant:** Alberto Arletti, University of Padua
- **Budget:** 1000 €
- **Objective:** To evaluate current selection bias correction methods for election polls, with a specific focus on rapidly rising emergent parties, in order to provide the scientific community with robust tools for making more valid and accurate political predictions.
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Padua, University of Granada, University of Vilnius, University of Minho
- **Format:** A quantitative, methodological research study involving the collection of historical electoral poll samples from past European national elections and a comparative analysis of different statistical bias correction techniques.
- **Link:** https://arqus-alliance.eu/our-communities/arqus-student-agora/arqus-student-co-designed-projects/

CYCLE II – 2024 CALL



UNDERSTANDING HUMAN TRAFFICKING: A RESOURCE FOR AWARENESS AND PREVENTION

- **Main applicant:** Caroline Massareli De Carvalho Morales, University of Padua
- **Budget:** 750 €
- **Objective:** To shed light on the often-overlooked issue of human trafficking, with a particular focus on its impact in Italy and Spain. Through a combination of research, collaboration and fieldwork, it sought to provide practical tools to empower individuals to better understand and address this critical problem.

- **Involved Institutions:** University of Padua, University of Granada
- **Format:** A two-phase research and public-outreach initiative. The first phase focuses on comprehensive data collection and comparative analysis of Italian and Spanish state strategies. This culminates in the creation of a multilingual booklet (Italian, English, Spanish, Portuguese) designed for local action, which will later feed into a detailed, region-specific digital mapping project of human trafficking in Italy.
- **Link:** https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/arqus-student-codesigned-projects-students-report/

Intercultural Dialogue Circles – A bridge towards Arqus members alliance

- **Main applicant:** Hoang Khang Du, University of Wroclaw
- **Budget:** 1500 €
- **Objective:** To help international students overcome culture shock, integrate smoothly into life abroad, and build a stronger sense of belonging and inclusivity within the broader Arqus academic community.
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Wroclaw, Maynooth University and University of Padua
- **Format:** A structured, two-phase cross-cultural exchange program implemented across the three universities involved. It begins with informal online preparatory meetings where students introduce themselves and share motivations, and concludes with a public, campus-wide "Arqus' Intercultural Day" featuring cultural customs, food, and student showcase performances.
- **Link:** https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/join-the-intercultural-dialogue-circle/

Human Rights Café – European democracies at the crossroads: which future for human rights?

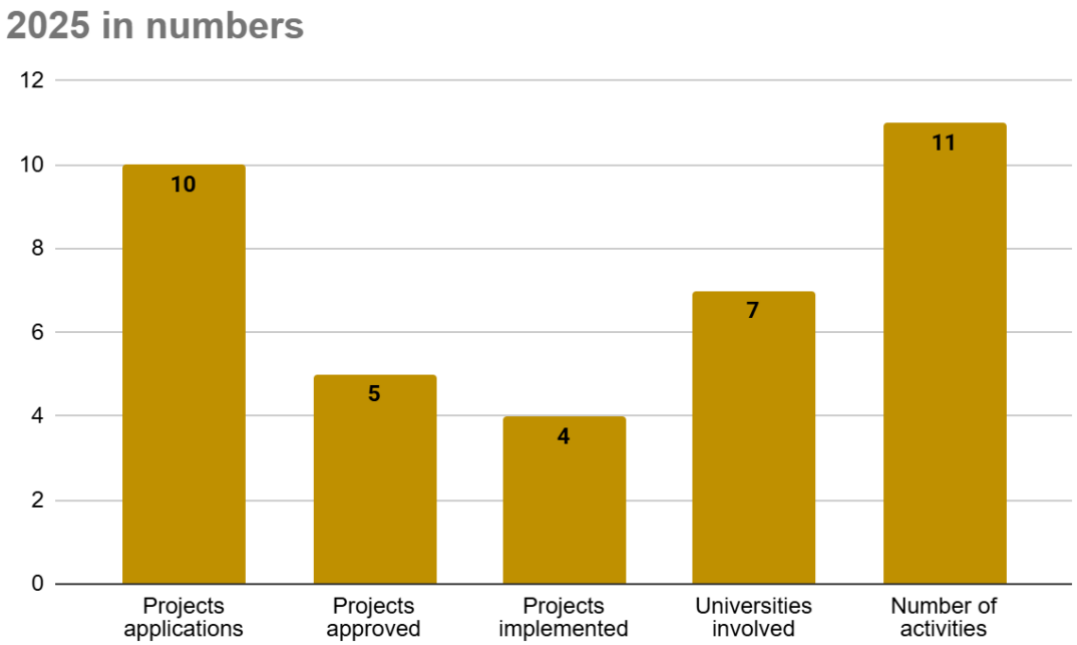
- **Main applicant:** Ilaria Rossi, University of Padua
- **Budget:** 2000 €
- **Objective:** To spark grassroots academic and civic debate on the contemporary threats facing European democracies and human rights by drawing historical parallels with 20th-century authoritarian regimes, while actively boosting student mobility across the alliance.
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Padua, University of Granada, University of Minho, University of Graz and Leipzig University
- **Format:** An expanded transnational expansion of a student-led discussion forum. Operating as a 2-week seminar series during the first semester, it features informal debate sessions run by local volunteer teams and international student representatives who travel between the partner campuses involved in.
- **Link**: https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/participate-human-rights-cafe-2024/

STEM students music-wandering through Europe

- **Main applicant:** Nunzio Borra, University of Padua
- **Budget:** 1000 €

- **Objective:** To foster "edutainment" (educational entertainment) and non-formal learning among STEM students, using choral music and team-focused artistic expression to develop soft skills, combat academic burnout, and build self-esteem in an increasingly high-pressure academic world.
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Padua and University of Granada
- **Format:** A cross-border choral residency and exchange program connecting two science-based student choirs ("Coro de la Facultad de Ciencias" from Granada and "Corollario" from Padua). Inspired by medieval travelling scholars, the project brings together science and tech students for shared musical rehearsals, cultural meetings, and discussions.
- **Link:** https://fciencias.ugr.es/34-noticias/4597-performance-del-coro-de-la-facultad-de-ciencias

CYCLE III – 2025 CALL



WHAT DO MINORITIES REALLY NEED?

- **Main applicant:** Arume Morales Aparicio, University of Granada
- **Budget:** 1500 €
- **Objective:** The project focuses on gathering and amplifying the voices of marginalised communities within academic settings. These communities include LGBTQIA+ individuals, persons with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities and students with limited economic resources. The core idea is to explore how these communities experience inclusion and exclusion within our universities and societies, to identify the challenges they face and to ask, in their own words, what do minorities truly need and what should true inclusion look like for them?
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Granada, University of Graz, University of Lyon 1

- **Format:** The project uses a multidisciplinary and multisensory approach tailored to each location: Lyon: Cinema-based dialogue (film screenings followed by structured debates/recordings); Leipzig: Oral history and qualitative research (intimate personal interviews); Granada: Action-oriented workshops (participatory sessions with community organizations to find solutions); Final Output: A collective "digital or visual record" (podcast, magazine, or exhibit) to inform future Arqus Widening Access, Inclusion and Diversity policies.
- **Link:** https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/when-you-cant-go-back-refugee-film-screening-discussion-university-lyon-1/

P.A.G.E.S: Picture Books As Gateways to European Society

- **Main applicant:** Chang Li, University of Padua
- **Budget:** 1500 €
- **Objective:** To utilize the universal, language-transcending nature of picture books as a visual catalyst to spark critical dialogue on complex European values (inclusion, diversity, sustainability), while equipping students and faculty with essential cross-cultural communication and visual analysis skills that they can replicate in their broader communities.
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Wrocław, University of Padua, University of Minho
- **Format:** A series of 2–3 interactive, cross-disciplinary workshops held across the two institutions involved, over a 9-month period. The sessions use a curated collection of picture books as visual prompts, structured in two distinct phases: an initial free-exploration phase of visual storytelling, followed by guided group discussions and training in visual text analysis. Permanent access to the book collections is maintained post-workshop via institutional research groups (LETIN and CYPLC).
- **Link**: https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/re-imagining-europe-space-for-cross-cultural-dialogue/

TRACE: Territorial Representation of Affective and Cultural Experiences

- **Main applicant:** Valentina Rossi, University of Padova
- **Budget:** 1000 €
- **Objective:** To address a key gap in the student mobility experience by focusing on emotional engagement and well-being within host cities, thereby fostering empathy, intercultural understanding, and a stronger sense of local belonging. By bridging geography, psychology, and digital technology, the project aims to help universities understand how students relate to urban spaces, providing data-driven insights to create more welcoming campus environments while establishing a scalable, transferable framework that can be easily adopted by other Arqus Alliance universities.
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Granada, University of Padua
- **Format:** The project is a hybrid initiative combining digital crowdsourcing with in-person activities across the Universities of Padova and Granada. It centers around an online web application where international and local students anonymously pin locations of emotional significance, labelling them by type and emotional response to generate collective urban heatmaps. This digital phase is supplemented by in-person workshops in both cities to analyse

the data and explore cultural patterns, culminating in guided city tours organised with the local Erasmus Student Network (ESN) to physically visit the most emotionally resonant locations.

- **Link:** https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/mapping-student-life-padua-trace-project-lands-unipd/

Human Rights Café – Voices from the peripheries: insights on human rights and democracy

- **Main applicant:** Sofia Tamagni, University of Padua
- **Budget:** 2500 €
- **Objective:** To foster cross-border academic and civic dialogue on human rights and democratic challenges by analysing these issues specifically through the unique lens of provincial and peripheral European regions, rather than major capital cities. By bringing together a diverse community of students, academics, professionals, and local citizens, the project aims to build strong transnational networks, cultivate active student leadership, and identify community-level solutions to shared European democratic anxieties.
- **Involved Institutions:** University of Padua, University of Minho, University of Granada, Leipzig University, University of Graz, Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, University of Wrocław
- **Format:** The project is an expanded transnational series of 7 informal, student-led discussion events running across the 7 universities involved over a two-week period. Each 3.5-hour event follows a specific structured timeline: a 30-minute introduction, a 1-hour local problem-identification group session, a 15-minute break with refreshments, a 1-hour solution-oriented group session, and a 45-minute final plenary debate. The initiative also includes an advanced training period for project volunteers to prepare them for managing the discussions, alongside a mobility exchange that allows team leaders to travel and participate in a café hosted by a partner university.
- **Link:** https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/participate-human-rights-cafe-new-edition-voices-peripheries/

Cross-Cycle Outcomes & Impact

Between 2023 and 2026, the Arqus Change Makers programme generated a wide range of tangible and intangible outcomes that collectively strengthened student engagement, transnational collaboration, and community building within the Arqus European University Alliance. By implementing 13 student-led, co-designed projects involving participants from all Arqus partner universities, the programme enabled students to actively engage, reinforcing their role as co-creators of Arqus.

Tangible Outcomes

At an operational level, the supported projects resulted in a diverse set of concrete outputs distributed across the Alliance. Indicative outcomes across the three cycles include:

- 20–25 transnational events organised, including seminars, workshops, conferences, and public dialogue formats, delivered in online, blended, and face-to-face formats;
- Direct engagement of an estimated 250–300 students actively involved in project conception, coordination, research, organisation, and facilitation;

- Indirect engagement of several hundred additional students and citizens through attendance at public events, dissemination activities, exhibitions, screenings, and digital campaigns;
- Structured collaboration with external stakeholders, including NGOs, cultural associations, local initiatives, and research centres;
- The production of a diverse suite of reusable outputs, such as educational booklets, toolkits, podcasts, videos, creative publications, online platforms, and digital resources.

The variety of implementation formats enabled projects to adapt to local contexts while maintaining a strong transnational dimension. The use of blended and digital formats, combined with targeted physical mobility, contributed to broad participation across campuses and increased the visibility of student-led initiatives both within and beyond the Alliance.

Intangible Outcomes and European Added Value

In addition to these measurable outputs, the Change Makers programme generated significant intangible impact. Participation in transnational teams strengthened students' sense of belonging to a shared European academic space and enhanced peer-to-peer learning across disciplines and national contexts. For example, mixed teams from partner Universities developed local sustainability prototypes addressing challenges such as inclusive urban mobility, human rights in the different countries or how minorities are treated in every Arqus city. Informal and participatory formats, such as cafés, dialogue circles, creative labs and community-based initiatives, created inclusive environments in which students could engage critically with complex societal challenges. In several partner institutions, the students organised intercultural dialogue events and collaborative workshops with local NGOs and municipalities, such as Red Cross in Granada or Student Engagement Team in Padua. This created direct interaction between universities and local communities. All the projects also encouraged experimentation with interdisciplinary problem-solving methods, including design thinking or participatory facilitation approaches. Students later transferred this into their academic and professional context.

The programme also fostered long-lasting interpersonal and institutional networks, many of which continued collaboration beyond the funding period. These relational outcomes represent a key aspect of the European added value of the initiative, as they support sustained cooperation, trust and knowledge exchange across partner universities. Concrete initiatives, such as Human Rights Café, included student-led cross-border projects, continued peer mentoring between participants and new university cooperation proposals developed by the members of the university community.

This initiative also contributed to strengthening a common European approach to some of the values of the European Union such as democracy, civic engagement and inclusive higher education. Shared methodologies could be transferred and adapted across diverse institutional and cultural contexts. It also combines local implementation and transnational exchange reinforcing students' active participation in an European academic space.

Skills Development and Competences

Across all cycles, participation in the Change Makers projects contributed to the development of key transversal competences aligned with Erasmus+ priorities, including:

- **Civic and democratic competences**, developed through engagement with themes such as human rights, inclusion, sustainability, digital ethics and social responsibility;
- **Intercultural and multilingual competences**, strengthened by collaboration in diverse, transnational teams and interaction with different academic cultures and societal contexts;
- **Entrepreneurial and organisational skills**, including project management, teamwork, leadership, budgeting, problem-solving and initiative-taking;
- **Digital competences**, including online collaboration, digital communication, content creation and the responsible use of digital tools and platforms.

These competences are directly transferable to students' academic pathways and future professional environments, further enhancing the long-term educational and societal value of the programme.

Cross-Cycle Impact

Taken together, the cumulative outcomes of the three calls demonstrate that the Arqus Change Makers programme has matured into a stable and effective mechanism for promoting student agency, innovation and European cooperation. The scale and diversity of the initiatives, combined with their thematic relevance and transnational reach, underline the programme's contribution to building a more connected, inclusive and forward-looking European University. By integrating tangible outputs, meaningful competence development and durable networks, the initiative has delivered sustained impact across cycles and across the Alliance**.**

Best Practical Example: Human Right Café-Fostering Transnational Dialogue on Human Rights and Democracy

The Human Rights Café, a student-led initiative originally developed by the Student Engagement Team (SET Padova) at the University of Padua, has emerged within the Arqus Student Co-Designed Projects. Over the funding period the Café has grown from a local event into a transnational series, engaging students, academics, professionals and citizens across multiple Arqus member universities. Between 2023 and 2026, the Human Rights Café has successfully hosted thematic sessions at the Universities of Granada, Graz, Leipzig, Lyon, Minho, Padua and Wrocław, each focusing on critical issues of democracy and human rights in Europe.

The Human Rights Café is designed as an informal, inclusive space for open dialogue. Its unique format brings together participants from diverse backgrounds—undergraduate, master's and doctoral students, graduates, professors, professionals and members of the wider community—to discuss human rights-related topics. The sessions are guided by principles of mutual respect and openness, encouraging

participants to share their views and experiences freely, regardless of their field of study or level of expertise.

Each year, the Café adopts a **new theme** relevant to contemporary European challenges:

- **Study year 2023/24: "Making Southern European Democracies Work"** – Comparative discussions on the evolution of democracy in Italy, Spain and Portugal after their 20th-century dictatorships and following their EU membership.
- **Study year 2024/25: "European Democracies at the Crossroads**: Which Future for Human Rights?" – Transnational sessions across five universities, exploring the future of human rights in European democracies.
- **Study year 2025/26: "Voices from the Peripheries"** – Sessions across seven universities, focused on the unique perspectives and challenges faced by peripheral regions in Europe, highlighting how geographical, social and political distance can influence whose voices are heard.

The Human Rights Café has generated significant **outcomes and impact** at multiple levels:

- **Student Engagement and Empowerment:** The initiative has mobilized over 30 volunteers annually, providing students with opportunities to co-design, organize and facilitate events. This hands-on involvement has fostered leadership, project management and intercultural communication skills.
- **Transnational Collaboration:** By connecting the universities Granada, Graz, Leipzig, Lyon, Minho, Padua and Wrocław, the Café has strengthened cross-border cooperation and built lasting networks among students and staff. Participants have engaged in critical, comparative conversations, deepening their understanding of democratic evolution and human rights across different European contexts.
- **Community Integration:** The Café's open format has successfully involved not only university members but also local citizens and professionals, bridging the gap between academia and society. This has promoted civic engagement and raised awareness of human rights issues at the local and European levels.
- **Inclusive Dialogue:** The focus on peripheries and non-capital cities has brought attention to often-overlooked perspectives, enriching the discourse on democracy and human rights. The Café has provided a platform for marginalised voices, contributing to a more inclusive and representative European conversation.

The Human Rights Café exemplifies the **European added value** of the student-led initiatives within the Arqus Alliance:

- **Promoting European Identity and Values:** By facilitating dialogue on democracy and human rights, the Café reinforces core European values and fosters a sense of shared identity among participants from diverse backgrounds.

- Enhancing Mobility and Exchange: The transnational nature of the initiative encourages mobility, both physical and virtual and supports the integration of international students within the Arqus community.
- **Supporting Personal and Professional Development:** The project offers students practical experience in event management, intercultural communication and civic engagement, preparing them for active citizenship and professional life in a European context.
- **Contributing to Policy and Practice:** The insights and outcomes from the Café sessions inform university policies and practices, supporting the development of more inclusive and democratic educational environments.

The Human Rights Café stands out as a best practice example of student-driven, transnational collaboration within the Arqus Student Co-designed Projects. It has had a sustained impact on student engagement, community integration and European dialogue. The initiative's adaptability, inclusivity and focus on contemporary challenges make it a model for future projects aiming to promote human rights, democracy and European values.

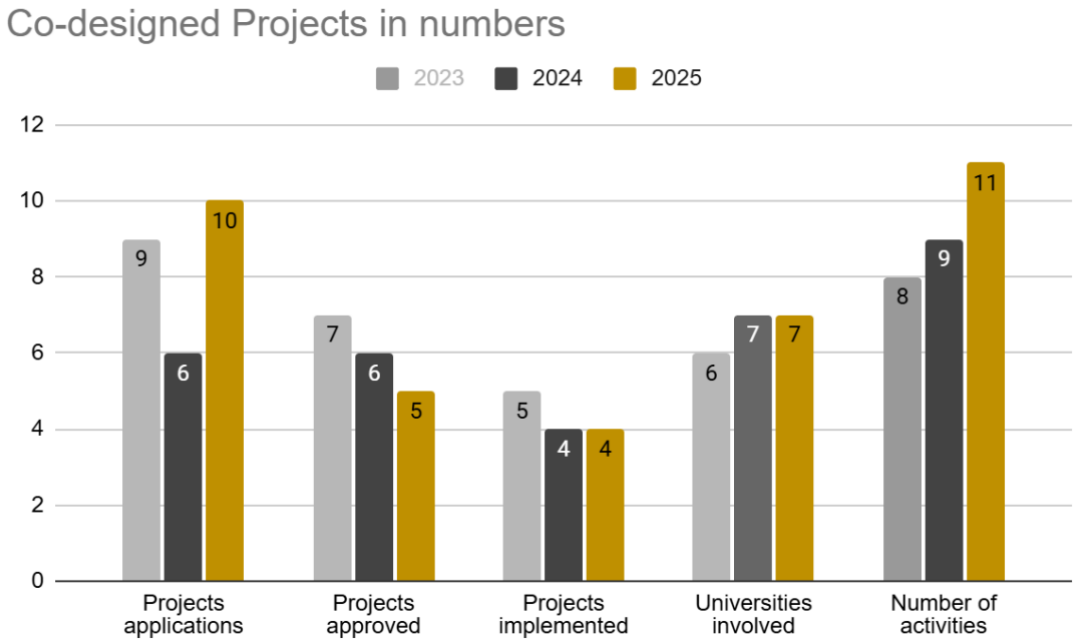
IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

Despite the overall success of the initiative, managing three consecutive cycles of grassroots, cross-border projects under the Arqus Student Agora revealed specific operational constraints and structural challenges.

A major challenge was implementation gaps: out of the 18 projects originally approved by the joint selection committee, 5 could not be fully realised. Because these activities were entirely student-led, they suffered heavily from the temporary nature of student status. Main applicants frequently graduated, entered intensive exam periods, or relocated for exchange semesters mid-cycle, leaving a leadership vacuum that partner universities found difficult to fill dynamically.

Financial and administrative friction also posed a significant hurdle. Managing a centralized €21,000 budget funded by the Arqus Student Council introduced complex institutional procedures. In many cases, rigid university regulations required students to pre-finance travel, accommodation, or event materials, creating an immediate entry barrier for low-income participants. Furthermore, these standardised fiscal rules struggled to accommodate the flexible, small-scale expenses required by informal student formats, such as purchasing refreshments for a local *Human Rights Café* workshop or printing visual materials for the *Intercultural Day*.

Finally, ensuring balanced diversity and genuine inclusion across the nine member universities remained a struggle. Early application cycles were heavily dominated by a few highly active hubs, particularly Padua and Granada, creating a geographical imbalance. While digital networking tools helped bridge these gaps in later calls, reaching truly marginalised student groups proved difficult without institutionalised support at the local campus level. This occasionally limited project outreach to already highly engaged student elites, highlighting the need for more targeted local inclusion strategies in future work plans.



CONCLUSIONS

Across the three cycles of co-designed projects implemented between 2023 and 2026, the Arqus Change Makers initiative has demonstrated the transformative potential of student agency within the Arqus European University Alliance. The diversity and depth of the supported projects reveal not only the creativity and commitment of Arqus students but also the effectiveness of an operational framework that promotes collaboration across disciplines, institutions, and cultures. By engaging students directly in shaping the Alliance's educational, cultural, and civic landscape, the Student Agora has strengthened intercultural understanding, expanded learning opportunities, and fostered a dynamic community built on shared values of openness, inclusion, and innovation.

The outcomes highlighted in this report show clear evidence of the added value produced by the programme: enriched academic experiences, strengthened cross-university collaboration, increased social awareness, and the development of essential competencies for active European citizenship. These student-led initiatives have generated meaningful contributions to critical debates on human rights, sustainability, technology, migration, and cultural identity, demonstrating that student perspectives are indispensable to the evolution of a future-oriented European University.

Furthermore, the success of the Change Makers programme reflects the strength of its governance model, which effectively integrates student leadership, faculty partnership, and institutional support. The growing visibility of these initiatives, the establishment of shared practices, and the consolidation of transnational cooperation among participants underscore the long-term sustainability of this approach. The cumulative outcomes across cycles show that the initiative has matured into a stable driver of educational innovation and community building within Arqus.

Looking ahead, continued investment in student-led, transnational collaboration will be essential to sustaining this momentum. To maximise future impact, the Alliance should focus on continuing and scaling its support for these grassroots initiatives while expanding the visibility and dissemination of their concrete outcomes. Moreover, future iterations must actively promote inclusivity to widen participation among underrepresented student groups and further support hybrid and digital collaboration formats to mitigate logistical barriers. By maintaining and scaling this commitment to co-creation, the Arqus Alliance reaffirms its dedication to nurturing a new generation of engaged, collaborative, and socially responsible European citizens.

If you have any inquiries, reach the Arqus Student Agora at student-agora@arqus-alliance.eu

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The Arqus European University Alliance is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or EACEA. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

ANNEX I: DIGITAL FOOTPRINT AND WEB DISSEMINATION LINKS

Cycle I - 2023

Call - https://arqus-alliance.eu/call/student-co-designed-projects-2023/

Results- https://arqus-alliance.eu/our-communities/arqus-student-agora/arqus-student-co-designed-projects/

Cycle II - 2024

Call - https://arqus-alliance.eu/call/call-for-students-co-designed-projects-2024/

Results- https://arqus-alliance.eu/our-communities/arqus-student-agora/arqus-student-co-designed-projects/

Cycle III - 2025

Call https://arqus-alliance.eu/call/student-co-designed-projects-2025/

Results https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/results-arqus-student-co-designed-projects-2025/

ANNEX II: MEDIA GALLERY – PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EVENT DISSEMINATION

The impact of this programme is best understood through the energy and creativity of the people who made it happen. This section offers a comprehensive look at our journey between 2023 and 2026. To give you the full picture, we have paired live snapshots of our student workshops and community events with the official promotional posters and flyers designed by the student teams. This curated mix showcases both the vibrant atmosphere on our campuses and the unique visual identity created for each initiative across the Arqus Alliance.

2023-2024:









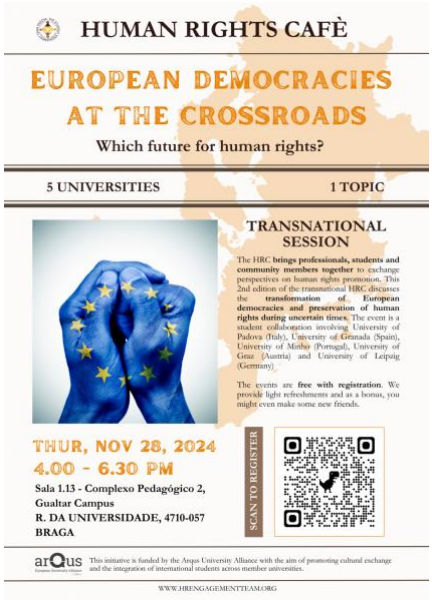


2024-2025:

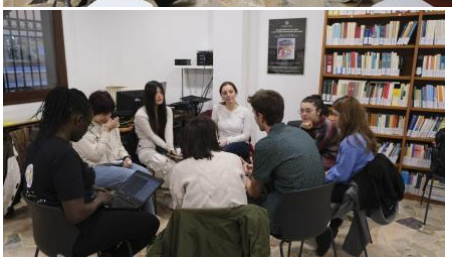

On the Road




FACULDADE DE CIÊNCIAS
UNIVERSIDADE DE GRANADA


HUMAN RIGHTS CAFÈ
EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES AT THE CROSSROADS
Which future for human rights?
5 UNIVERSITIES
1 TOPIC
TRANSNATIONAL SESSION
The HRC brings professionals, students and community members together to exchange perspectives on human rights promotion. This 2nd edition of the transnational HRC discusses the transformation of European democracies and preservation of human rights during uncertain times. The event is a student collaboration involving University of Padova (Italy), University of Granada (Spain), University of Minho (Portugal), University of Graz (Austria) and University of Leipzig (Germany).
The events are free with registration. We provide light refreshments and as a bonus, you might even make some new friends.
THUR, NOV 28, 2024
4.00 - 6.30 PM
Sala 1.13 - Complexo Pedagógico 2,
Gualtar Campus
R. DA UNIVERSIDADE, 4710-057
BRAGA
SCAN TO REGISTER
arQus This initiative is funded by the Arqus University Alliance with the aim of promoting cultural exchange and the integration of international students across member universities.
WWW.HRENGAGEMENTTEAM.ORG







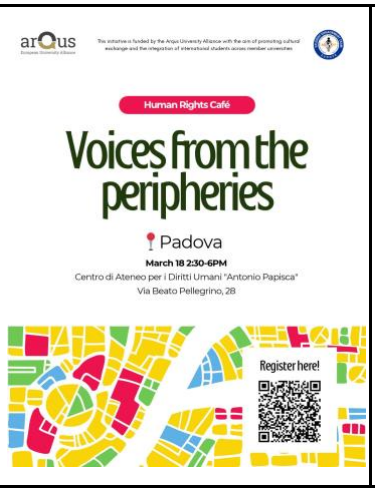
2025-2026:










arQus
Human Rights Café
Voices from the peripheries
Padova
March 18 2:30-6PM
Centro di Ateneo per i Diritti Umani "Antonio Papisca"
Via Beato Pellegrino, 28
Register here!


Voices from the peripheries