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UID
UNITY IN DIVERSITY

PRESENTS

My University Cares Too (MUCT)

Report 2018

Stage 1- Research, Database
creation and Launch



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What is “My University Cares Too (MUCT)”?

MUCT is not simply an online platform, but it is a community – educators, diversity officers, admissions officers, student groups and associations, cultural groups, language schools, and non-profits joining their efforts to assist, promote inclusion, and inspire colleagues to do the same on their campuses.

MUCT was born from a gap identified in the needs of refugee university level students; oftentimes these students face challenges that lead to difficulties in connecting with the campus community. This in turn, is likely to affect their success rate in school.

Those who dropout oftentimes do so, not because they are not brilliant, but because they do not have the needed socio-cultural and educational support to reach their potential. Understanding therefore that students of today will be leaders of tomorrow, we want to promote inclusion in Dutch society for future generations, by contributing to the successful education of refugee students, which will in turn foster diversity across all Dutch institutions.

The goal of this project is to give refugees a better opportunity to start and finish their studies in Dutch institutions of higher education, thereby reducing the dropout rate, and to help build their social network for support and sustainable integration into the Dutch society.

Project Mission

All projects listed are aimed at refugees and other students who struggle with integration with the campus community, to encourage educational success, and to minimize dropout rates.

- Bridging the contact gap between new or old students (especially refugee students) and the campus community
- Providing social and educational network for refugee students to enhance their inclusion in the campus community, and transition into professional life.
- Providing access to programs that promote sustainable integration into Dutch society, both during and after studies.
- Assisting the UAF with advice on projects across higher institutions in The Netherlands that aim at helping refugees students' mental and social health. Reaching for holistic assistance to this population that reaches beyond initial enrolment, but also important next steps as how to thrive and succeed in their studies and amongst other students.

- Inspiring other institutions to initiate similar projects or new projects to benefit refugee students among them, or to attract potential refugees who may wish to study with them.
- Inspiring students to initiate similar projects or new projects.

Project design: Research & Findings

This project has been evolving in a way that we had to adapt the structure and content of the database every time we made new discoveries, to be able to arrive at a tool that will be generally impactful.

We initially commenced with searching for only socio-cultural projects in institutions of higher education, and as it evolved, we extended our reach to educational, financial and job related projects. Despite this adaptation to meet the needs of refugee students, MUCT maintains the same core purpose; a complete and durable integration for refugee students within and beyond the student community. Below we explain the findings we made, in the process of creating the database.



We set out searching for

a) initiatives for successful social integration of refugee students within the student community, and

b) initiatives led by refugees themselves; both intents in the educational framework within higher education institutions. However, there is no track of any project led by refugee students, either because it is not explicitly stated the origin of the projects, or there is a lack of refugee students' participation in the establishment of programmes for their own benefit. The causes of this gap are still unknown to us. Consequently, the objective was focused on the collection of initiatives conceived for the successful social integration of refugees within the student community. In doing this, we found that even though the number of these initiatives are relatively high (more than 50 found), the programmes are scattered in the web and

without a direct access from the main browser, instead, it was necessary to navigate to subpages of each institution's website in order to find information about the programmes dedicated to refugee students.

Likewise, when searching by the keywords related to the programmes the outcome varied from "international students", "migrants", "refugees", "newcomers" and other terms that limited the search results. Furthermore, the language was another factor to consider in searching for the programmes, while only a few institutions provide information in a wide range of languages -for example: Arabic, French, Spanish, English and Dutch-; the majority of the institutions only make use of the English and Dutch languages to present programmes for refugees; and in some specific cases, the information was only available in Dutch. For the purpose of this research, all findings were translated into English. It is our plan that in second phase after the launch of the project, we will proceed to translating the Database into Dutch language, perhaps in Arabic and Tigrinya, which are the two languages spoken by the largest group of refugees in The Netherlands.

Further into the research, we focused on institutions of higher education which do not have any programme or initiative concerned with refugee students' integration, or at least this information was not stated on the institutions' web pages, were not readily available online when we searched, or they didn't provide us with any response when we contacted them. Therefore, a list of 100 institutions were contacted through email or filling the contact forms available on the same web page. The challenge to collect information from these institutions still remains, our hope then is that with the launch of the database, such institutions will be able to submit these information themselves, by signing up as a member on the online database. As far as we know, no conclusions can be deduced from the lack of response of the institutions without inclusive or financial projects for refugee students.

Although the institutions described above represented some sort of discouragement for the research team due to a perception of lack of interest, as the project was evolving there were significant developments in the responses received. Higher education institutions became more cooperative and communicative, partly due to the assistance of Stichting UAF and also as they (institutions) recognized the practicality of a comprehensive database - the first of its kind in the Netherlands. Whilst the understanding of the education role in providing a background for integration and inclusion remains, we have also considered the

motivations that might drive refugee students to choose between these projects.

In brief, constraints around language, communication, accessibility, and information in real time, are still challenging to anyone interested in having a complete and comparable scenario on the programmes presented by higher education institutions for the inclusion of refugees. The research findings indicate that the educational market offers proposals for refugees in areas of economic support (such as scholarships), Dutch culture and language courses, spaces for integration and networking, access to specific lectures and activities, spiritual support, and business coaching. However, besides the descriptive information about the programmes, the team rarely found information on found reports which can show the duration, participants, registration processes, or another practical approach to the projects.

Throughout our research, we found that a lot was being done in the educational field, besides the socio-cultural integration which was the initial purpose of the MUCT project. It is our hope that more of such socio-cultural projects can be supported in institutions, as social and professional networks are very vital in the successful and sustainable integration of refugees within schools and in the society at large.

As a result of the exploratory research, we identified some challenges that refugees might face in their quest for opportunities that provide educational support and network within the academic field. Subsequently we have created this database with information organized and presented in a palpable way: the project My University Cares Too (MUCT). This database will serve as a one stop information point (in the context discussed) mainly for refugees, also for international students, stakeholders in the field and for everyone else who may benefit from it. As the project is still evolving and as we hope to have MUCT EU and worldwide, our dream is that it will generate a positive reaction, and inspire other institutions of higher education across the world, to get involved in their communities, in similar ways done by the institutions whose projects are currently represented in our database.

Furthermore, we hope to bridge the communication problem between us, refugee students, communities and institutions of higher education in the Netherlands, by providing free access to the catalogue of educational and socio-cultural possibilities for refugee students; and by giving individuals, groups, and institutions a space where they can post their projects to our target audience: the student community and other

stakeholders in the matter. We hope to make institutions more aware of their power of actions, and its impact on fruitful social coexistence.

Launch of muctoo.org

After more than eight months of intensive and exciting research, the first phase of MUCT was ready to be introduced. On the 18th of April the launch event took place in the Erasmus University campus Rotterdam from 15h00 to 19h00.

The quality of the attendees was very high since they represented stakeholders from different organizations, including refugee, a significant number of students, prospective students, and other participants that can benefit from MUCT. Around 90 people in total were participants of this important day.

Program

1. Opening Speech by Miracle C. Uche, UID Board Chairperson
2. Speakers: Refugees and education
3. Institutional presentations:
 - a. IOM
 - b. UAF
 - c. Right2Education
4. Panel sessions
5. MUCT website presentation
6. Closure
7. Drinks and networking

Speakers' profile

Professor Dick Douwes

Professor Douwes studied Arabic Language and Culture at Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands. In 1993 he received his PhD at Nijmegen University. He lectured on the history of the Middle East at the universities of Nijmegen and Leiden. From 1994 to 1998 he was coordinator of the programme Indonesian-Netherlands' Cooperation in Islamic Studies (INIS) at Leiden University. As of 1998 onwards he was academic coordinator - later executive director - of the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM) and editor of the ISIM Newsletter/Review and ISIM Papers series.



Mr. Paul Mbikayi



Paul is Director of the Refugee Talent Hub. Before working for the Refugee Talent Hub he used to be a civil servant at the ministry of infrastructure and environment. As former refugee, he knows what it takes to conquer your own space in the Dutch society and especially on the job market.

We all think that we could and should be successful if only we had a degree. Is that so? Does this apply to everybody? Paul thinks that it's a big waste when talents are being reduced to a degree.

The spokesmen were a great introduction for the panels and MUCT's presentation afterwards since they opened the space for discussion about refugees in the Netherlands, their needs and how institutions, mostly educational institution, should be aware of the refugees' capabilities in order to integrate them into the Dutch society.

Panels



First, the panel conducted by Dr Amanda Paz Alencar, Assistant Professor from Erasmus University, was directed to higher education institutions which have initiatives for the integration of refugees, and therefore, are included in the MUCT database. The goal of this panel was to learn about the motivations and challenges of these projects and initiatives, and how they reach their target groups, along with the experiences that each initiative have had in their field. Some of these practices were expressed in their own voices:



“I saw a gap and I really knew the gap was there; as a member of the civil society I got motivated to make the change”.

“We felt the need to do something as students, we had the resources; since we can do something, it meant that we should”.



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“We live in a very digital-oriented society and most of the refugees that want to apply for studies face difficulties on seeing what the requirements are”.



The second panel was with organizations that have worked with migrants, refugees, minorities, and participants with refugee background. This enriching panel was led by Naya Pessoa (UID Project Manager). The panel's goal was to explore the different perspectives from these stakeholders which have a long trajectory in migration. These are some of their opinions:

“with regards to the labour market, one of the main issues is the lack of recognition of refugee’s student background. Recruitment agents and entrepreneurs have a preference for the national (host country) education instead of a diploma coming from a third country outside EU”.



“It is important for refugee students to understand the Dutch Culture and to be part of it through social experience. The access to higher education institutions is still a tricky issue for someone who comes from a refugee background. The bureaucracy of diploma recognition and a non-EU diploma are primary factors that keep refugees away from the labour market concerning their study backgrounds” (IOM).

“Integration programme is valuable. Providing access to education in the Netherlands is the best way to integrate refugees in the labour market. Partnerships and collaboration among NGOs and higher education



institutions are one of the pathways to provide full social integration to refugees, and their insertion into the labour market”.

Networking Event

The networking session commenced immediately after the closure in the main auditorium. About 80% of the attendees stayed for a couple of hours to network, going from one booth to the other, learning about several initiatives, some of which are represented on MUCT website. The networking session was highly productive for the attendees and also for the UID staff; the guests enjoyed the catering service while gathering relevant information of their interest.



UID Volunteers

UID's mode of work is characterized by its high number of volunteers participating in each event. Of course, MUCT launch was not the exception. UID staff was organized in strategic teams to cover the registration, ushers, communication, UID Promotion, photo/Video production, and the database experts. Additionally, our team made sure to get people involved during the event, not only the attendees but also those who participated online through our live streaming on different social media channels. They achieved this by connecting people and projects together. As a result, we obtained a valuable feedback and testimonies which will make the MUCT experience more favourable for every user.



Testimonials



The networking session was also a platform to acknowledge the guest's reactions to the MUCT's website. Through short interviews and an open board to write and express different opinions, it was possible to collect suggestions and inspiring ideas from most of the participants. The result was an interactive space where people found an opportunity to connect.

"I got influenced by this database, because it deals with significant topics that are rising up in the Netherlands. The recognition of this project is very important" (Hogeschool Rotterdam student).

"I will use this tool (MUCT database) and I will also use this network (...). It actually delivers what it aims to and, from what I saw, it looks that way, it is very crucial. Because this is what we didn't have until now" (Marion, University of Groningen).

Partners, Sponsors and Supporters

This project would not have been possible without the cooperation of UID's partners, sponsors and supporters. We thank God for this. First, Professor Douwes, Dr Amanda Alencar, Dr Ana Uribe Sandoval and students from the Department of Media and Communications, Erasmus University, The Netherlands, who have worked closely with the MUCT Team up to the launch of the website. Secondly Stichting Voor Vluchteling Studenten UAF, our supporter, liaising with several institutions of higher education, to ensure that we received their projects for inclusion in the database. Thirdly, Wijdoenmee.nu funds, our main financial sponsor for the MUCT database. Fourthly, The Redeemed Christian Church of God (BTS Parish) who has provided us the space to work and made a financial donation to UID. Lastly, but not less important, this project has been encouraged by all the institutions and initiatives which contributed information, and are now part of the MUCT database.

MUCT is a space for everyone interested in contributing to, participating and taking part in a well-integrated community in the Netherlands, where each person –regardless of their status- has equal access to the opportunities offered across the country. The MUCT Team is committed to improving this space and appreciates everyone's active interaction, suggestions and support for the project.

With a grateful heart, we say thank you!

MUCT Team.

Diamanthorst 187, 2592 GD
The Hague, the Netherlands
+31(0)702147966



