

Refugee Education Initiatives 2: University of Vienna Open Learning Initiative (OLive Programme)

(Knowledge Transfer)

Project leads

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Abstract

The OLive programme part of the Refugee Education Initiatives offers the spaces for people of refugee and/or asylum status to bridge their prior skills, qualifications and knowledge in order to prepare for study at Higher Education in Austria and in European institutions. The programme in Vienna features a unique design that distinguishes it from those in partner universities in that it is offered in German and English, as a bilingual programme; it also offers three distinct routes, which can be integrated by participants or can be taken separately. The three routes are OLive Classic, which includes academic lectures, academic language courses, professional, creative and advocacy courses; Olive Women tailored for Women only and OLive Youth, which is tailored for youth between 15- 20 years old. The considerations of OLive Women and OLive Youth are based on the understanding that both groups are either under-represented in university settings and in some systemic gap in offering educational spaces for youth. This phase of OLive is the second programme financed by the European Commission, the first phase was from 2016-2019. Team Vienna has revised and developed its offer as above and moved from a weekend only programme to a weekdays programme, which allows for participants to be part of the normal day to day experience of the University. Until the COVID-19 measures took hold, the programme was delivered in situ at the University of Vienna and featured a wide range of academic topics, guest speakers and the opportunity for all participants to meet and network with each other and within the University Context. Due to COVID-19 public policy and health concerns, the programme switched to an online modus of asynchronous and synchronous teaching. It was delivered over two to three days a week offering a minimum of 13-15 hours per week over a period of 12 weeks. OLive has hosted over 250 people in this period (2019-2021). The principles of the OLive Programme delivered in Vienna focus around the idea of and commitment to honouring biographical experience and the skills and knowledges offered by participants with the aim to not only provide them with a preparation of how to understand and approach the Austrian and European University system, but also to offer an opportunity to host countries universities to

learn, open up and self-reflect about their own governing, pedagogical and academic cultures. For this reason, we have worked through the years with private sector, individuals and professionals, great sectors of civil society, such as Caritas and Diakonie, cooperated with international organisations and local and international NGOs. An army of volunteers has supported the project consistently as well as a lengthy list of experts from the University of Vienna and other universities from all academic ranks.

Keywords

refugees, migration, inclusion through higher education, human rights, the university as communicative space

Aims of the Third Mission activity

The aims of the OLLive Programme are to provide a preparatory space for people of refugee and/or asylum seeking status to enter Higher Education, by bridging prior knowledge and skills to the academic requirements of Austria as a host country, but also to offer the possibility of expanding one's own vision about the potential of long term meaningful inclusion and integration in Austria and in Europe.

Cooperation partners outside the university sector

NGOs and practitioners

Cooperation partners from the scientific/research field

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece; Bard College Berlin, Germany University of East London, UK Central European University

Faculty

led by Media Governance and Industries Research Lab, Department of Communication

Timeframe

2019 - 30.06.2021

Funding

Erasmus+ European Commission

Research basis

The project is based on research work by the project leader which examines the conditions of communicative spaces and human rights and in particular, within this context, work on processes of securitisation, representations of refugees in the public debate, the processes of silencing of detained people and in particular women, and the role of European integration in creating free spaces of movement, expression and civic life. It also builds on earlier work on questions around acceptance and belonging to academe.

Social/economic relevance

The programme fulfils all criteria of third mission. In particular it aims to provide a path for highly skilled and high potential individuals for academic study and showcase both their skills but also the possibility of an integrative, inclusive, hopeful and prosperous future in Austria and Europe. Hence it offers not simply a 'taster' of what it means to study at a University, alongside specific language training, but also training in advocacy and self-representation. We hope that as a matter of self-reflection, our colleagues, students and the more permanent population in Vienna as well as the University itself sees an opportunity for rightful exchange of learning experiences.

Integration into academic teaching/the curriculum

OLive Mentoring

Impact

Our participants have provided testimonies (through feedback and monitoring) to the ways in which the programme has benefited them personally and on the basis of community. Some graduates have pursued academic study, at all levels and some are recipients of scholarships; others are in employment. All have testified to the benefit of this project for expanding their horizons as a matter of dreaming of what is possible to do as a displaced and often traumatised person. Participants have testified to the sense of belonging, pride and respect they experience through their participation and the fact that the programme's everyday function is based on 'treating individuals with respect' and where participants can be 'themselves and not refugees'. The sense of belonging, hope, dignity and the cultivation of skills and development of knowledge and self-confidence this programme has offered are the by-products, which however point to an intangible sustainable level of standards. The gender sensitive approach has enabled women to find and/or express their voice and skilled them and ultimately all participants with better knowledge about the political system of Austria and the EU, rights, cultural history and linguistic competencies.

Transfer aspect of the activity

The programme functions as a bridge of potential students coming from non-traditional and from vulnerable backgrounds to the study at Higher Education, thereby contributing to the aim of meaningful integration of people's future important contributions to local societies. It actively promotes inclusion and integration and comes to fill the gap of educational provision for refugees, which is largely limited to obligatory basic education.

Future orientation & sustainability

A network of supporters is seeking to develop the possibility of continuing a form of this project in Austria and with selected partners across Europe. We are searching for further funding possibilities.

Achievement of objectives

The programme utilises a rolling programme of feedback from students/participants and tutors and can therefore verify its objectives as described before.

Measures to sustain this activity over the long term/expand it

Further collaboration with selected partners to provide a developed and more versatile programme is being pursued.

Visibility

The website includes everything: brochures, programmes, the team etc. It is important to know that the programme has been successfully recruited suitable participants through word of mouth.

Links/Publications

- olive.univie.ac.at
 - Guest Editors F Seoane Perez, Óscar Pérez de la Fuente K Sarikakis Revista de la Asociacion Espanola de Investigacion de la Comunicacion Los discursos del odio (Discourses of Hate) http://www.revistae-ic.eu/index.php/raeic/issue/view/discursos_del_odio
 - Sarikakis, K. (2017). Austria. Good and bad, but a lack of accountability when journalism fails the migration test. In Euromed Migration IV (Ed.), How does the media on both sides of the Mediterranean report on migration? (pp. 15-21) Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development.
 - Sarikakis, K. (2012). Access Denied: Gendered migration, immobilisation and the anatomy of silence. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(5), 800-816 (17)
 - Sarikakis, K., & Wessels, B. (2018): The dynamics of social media, political culture, and communication governance in civic participation. In Tobias Eberwein, Gabriele Melischek, Josef Seethaler & Corinna Wenzel (eds.): *Changing media - changing democracy? The democratic potential of social media*. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, pp. 219-235
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