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UNIVERSITY
OF THESSALONIKI



Supporting **U**niversity **C**ommunity pathways for **RE**fugees-migrants

A SUMMARY OF RESULTS



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On behalf of the administration of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, I am proud to greet the Final Multiplier Event of the **S.U.C.RE. Project** “Integrating refugees in Higher Education and Europe Challenges and best Practices”.

Our University’s particular triptych is specified as Interdisciplinarity, Internationalization and Intercultural Education. Ever mindful of rapid change and progress, we constantly update our strategy, policies and everyday practices, in order to meet contemporary local and global demands. By assessing our experience, we have been able to determine our strengths and weaknesses, and we have adopted a holistic internationalization strategy, whose main objectives can be briefly described as follows:

- Strengthen our role in the European and international knowledge community, by building upon collective and personal academic achievements.
- Enhance our visibility among the traditionally prestigious academic institutions all over the world, by establishing long-term cooperation schemes at all research, education and training levels.
- Reinforce our traditional presence as leading education and research institution in Southeastern Europe and Eastern Mediterranean, by building focused strategic partnerships in the area.
- Play a decisive role in academic exchange, good practices dissemination, and knowledge diffusion.
- Support multicultural co-existence, social and cultural cohesion, and sustainable regional development.
- Make multilateral rather than unilateral approach a core aspect of our work -at education, research and administrative level.
- Enhance and reinforce our interaction with Greek society.
- Make our graduates able to think and act across traditional academic boundaries and across national borders.
- Properly equip them, so that they may benefit from international knowledge and experience, and support national and local dynamic development.

It is, therefore, evident that the **S.U.C.RE. Project** was adopted with enthusiasm from its early preparation stage. We promise to support all related activities and we are certain that such a dynamic and innovative network will bring many more fruits.

The Vice Rector for Academic & Student Affairs

Ariadni Stogiannidou

Professor of the School of Psychology



SUMMARY ON IO1:

Admission Procedures and Preparatory Programs

This output critically analyzes and further develops admissions criteria established by European universities, looks into preparatory programs for higher education that can serve as intermediary solutions for refugees on the road to integration in university degree programs. The main interest group is refugee applicants looking to be admitted to an institution of higher education or seeking support from such an institution.

The objective of the research regarding IO1 is to **identify** the main **challenges** that stand in the way of refugee student access to higher education and identify and further **develop tools** to overcome them. The output should be a framework that describes and analyzes these challenges, coupled with best practices to address them. Societies, as well as HEIs, have invested interest in students being able to build a new support system in their host country in order to ensure their success throughout their educational pathway. **Impacts** of the implementations would be that students feel supported and understood, and are in a position to take advantage of already existing opportunities at HEIs. The aim is to enable students to make informed decisions about their educational pathway. As well as, from the institutional perspective, to create diverse and inclusive programs which foster quality educational experiences for students. It would also allow universities to have better access to student concerns and wishes.

This Intellectual Output categorizes the problematic surrounding access to higher education for refugee students and applicants in Europe into **two main perspectives**: That of **higher education institutions** (HEIs) and that of **refugee students** themselves. In order to better understand the current status quo of issues regarding admissions and preparatory programs, a desk study was conducted. Over 120 European universities were researched online to find information on current programs that target prospective refugee students. An online survey for universities was also developed, in order to gain insight on their experiences with refugee students, and the ways their institutions cater to this target group. In-depth semi-structured interviews were also conducted with university advisors and with advisors from NGOs that work with refugees. Additionally, an online round-table discussion in which different HEIs participated was organized in order to discuss challenges and best practices from an institutional perspective. An online survey for students was also designed. This survey combined open-ended and close-ended questions about their educational journey and experiences in preparatory courses. In-depth semi-structured interviews with students were also conducted in order to gain more detailed insight into their experiences at the university.



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Throughout this process, a variety of challenges hindering refugee students in starting their academic careers were identified.

The main **challenges** of **systemic nature** are:

Information Barriers, Non-recognition of “foreign” Education, Linguistic Barriers and Financial Barriers.

Refugee students also face a number of more **personal and interpersonal challenges** like:

Transition into Adulthood, Shifting Support Structures, Lack of Administrative Harmonization, Intercultural Gap, and Social Discrimination.

In trying to find a solution for those challenges, universities have taken various approaches to tackling these challenges. However, it is important to note that the challenges and best practices flow into one another, because of the multifaceted and intersectional nature of this problematic.

Best Practices:

Comprehensive “all encompassing” advising ■ Psychosocially Sensitive Advising ■ Staff Training ■ Human Perspective ■ Structured Buddy Programs ■ Long-term Advising ■ Create an inclusive and informative website ■ Make Use of Community Resources ■ Talk and Listen to Refugee Students ■ Comprehensive information about the educational system and general opportunities ■ Transparent Evaluation Procedures ■ Alternative Evaluation Pathways ■ Respect and Appreciation for Applicants ■ Language Courses ■ Translated Information ■ Multi-lingual Advisors ■ Comprehensive Information about Funding Opportunities ■ Creative Funds ■ Transparency Is the Best Policy ■ Create Clear Communication Channels ■ Establish Networks ■ Intercultural Training for Students and Staff ■ Feedback Sessions ■ Auditing Classes ■ Openness and Acknowledgement ■ Staff Training ■ Deconstructing the Refugee Identity: Destigmatization Through Integrated Activities

For a detailed overview of both, the challenges and best practices, have a look into the S.U.C.RE analytical 41 page **freely available publication *Accessing Higher Education in Europe: Challenges for Refugee Students & Strategies to Overcome Them***, which also includes links to Initiatives around European HEIs: at <http://sucre.auth.gr/en/outputs> and at

<https://www.portal.uni-koeln.de/sites/international/aaa/92/92pdf/SUCRE-IO1-Publication180118.pdf>



SUMMARY ON IO2:

Institutional Support for Refugee Students in Higher Education

This output is concerned with refugee students that have successfully been admitted to a university program. All new students have a learning curve when adjusting to higher education. It is understood, however, that this student group may have additional challenges in navigating the European university structure be it because of language challenges, financial hurdles, cultural differences and the newness of the actual university structure. This output looks into the university structure and student support systems, to be able to identify and improve upon the needs of this particular student population.

This Intellectual Output categorizes the problematic surrounding academic performance of refugee students in Europe into two main perspectives: That of higher education institutions (HEIs) and that of refugee students themselves. In order to better understand the current status quo of issues regarding **complementary support structures** and **programs**, a desk study was conducted. Over 120 European universities were researched online to find information on current programs that target refugee students' special needs. An online survey for universities was also developed, in order to gain insight on their experiences with refugee students, opinions on academic success, and the ways their institutions cater to this target group. In-depth semi-structured interviews were also conducted with university advisors and with advisors from NGOs that work with refugees. An online survey for students was also designed about their experiences during their studies. In-depth semi-structured interviews with students were also conducted. Additionally, a focus group on support structures in general, financial support and social interactions and integration was organized. Based on the pattern of IO1, a **framework of challenges** and **best practices** was developed in order to better provide continued support for refugee students through their academic journey and to **curb potential drop-out rates** due to lack of institutional support.

The **main challenges** identified are:

Financing, Law Issues, Language (university jargon, and technical terms of respective subject), and Interaction with local students.

To provide a visible and simple network that refugee students can turn to when in need of support, a **handbook of recommendations** has been developed; a plan for universities on how to establish a support system, how to **improve** upon **existing structures**, **evaluations** for programs as well as **ideas** and **inspirations** from **university staff** and **refugee students** alike. [This handbook will soon be freely available.](#)



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The study shows that the European community has been very active in striving to create new programs and to overcome challenges that stand in the way of refugee students' academic success. While this is commendable and inspiring, the challenges outlined in IO1 and IO2 publications show that there is **still much work to be done**, and are indicative of both **policy** and **institutional** failures.

The increasing number of challenges refugee students face when it comes to accessing as well as accomplishing HEI programs, as well as the challenges faced by institution trying to overcome them, require attention.

These programs need to be invested in, if their impact is to broaden and be long-lasting.

- It would not be realistic to expect universities to address each and every challenge with their initiatives, however by cooperating with other HEIs and stakeholders, creating a network of comprehensive expertise, initiatives can become more holistic.
- Advisors must be adequately trained and be provided with enough time and resources to properly respond to student concerns.
- Funding for structured buddy programs could make a world of a difference in helping refugee students improve their language skills and build their support structures in their host countries.
- Strategies for recognition of foreign documents can be shared and should be transparent.
- Social discrimination can be fought with trained staff and an informed and aware student body.

Creating an inclusive, diverse and international academic community should be in the interest of all stakeholders involved in education, be it HEIs, NGOs, refugee initiatives, and, most importantly, refugee students themselves.

Achieving this goal is challenging, yet rewarding. As a group of competent individuals, prospective refugee students can enrich HEIs and the European academic community. Although intercultural and administrative challenges are inevitable, these must not prevent the European academic community from striving to be an inclusive and excellent academic society. It is precisely this **interdisciplinary**, **intercultural** and **academic exchange** that can break down bureaucratic barriers and lead to innovation in the content of research, educational strategies and in administrative structures.

The S.U.C.RE team hopes to inspire more stakeholders to contribute to overcoming the challenges for refugee students to access HEIs and accomplish an academic career in those institutions in Europe and to encourage further dialogue between other stakeholders.



SUMMARY ON IO3:

Institutional Support for Refugee Scholars in Higher Education

IO3 is concerned with refugee scholars hosted at a university department. All new scholars have a learning curve when settling in at a higher education institute. It is understood, however, that this group may have additional challenges compared to students such as, for example, bringing families, having already begun an academic career and being engaged in academic research and teaching. It is important to be clear on differences in needs of groups of scholars. This output will look into the university structure and scholar support systems to be able to identify and improve upon the needs of refugee scholars.

The overall aim of IO3 is to **improve support structures** and **integrative capacities of science** and research institutions – and, ultimately, to **improve the academic career paths of Refugee Academics** in Europe. The specific objectives of IO3 are to prepare participating HEI’s to provide support for refugee scholars during their academic stay; and to **equip partners** for **building bridges** with other European peer institutions in the social integration efforts of refugee scholars.

We have elaborated and implemented 3 instruments, a combination of **quantitative surveys** and **qualitative interviews**. The **three** surveys addressed **different angles**, e.g., the **institutional perspective**, the **scholars’ perspective** and that from the **academic host**. The surveys were conducted, respectively, in mid-2017, late 2017 and early 2018. We received responses from more than 60 institutions across North-Western Europe, from 50+ scholars and from 30 academic hosts.

The leading questions in each survey were the following:

- **Scholars:** needs, expectations and perceptions on personal & family life and research development
- **Institutions:** service & support; motivations; funding opportunities; best practices
- **Academic hosts:** motivation, experiences & expectations, institutional support, career awareness & prognosis of scholars

Some scholars’ responses about issues in their personal and family are:

	<p><i>In my mother tongue, I'm a famous and beloved writer but in English ... everything is different</i></p> <p><i>... I need more time than my colleagues who write in their mother language</i></p> <p><i>... friendly and welcoming colleagues but little support in making clear the workings of the system, which is too complicated for a newcomer</i></p> <p><i>Thanks for asking my opinions and experiences; we would like to get the final results of this survey</i></p> <p><i>I hope that the war will end quickly, that calm will return, that I will go home and actively participate in the reconstruction of my country</i></p>
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The IO3 Deliverable ([soon to be available](#)) will formulate suggestions and recommendations in a number of domains:

- Placements: duration of (initial) placement should be at least 18 to 24 months.
- Uncertainty about the future and insecure continuity. Guidance and counselling of scholars into follow-up placements of more secured positions is essential and should get proper attention.
- Language: academic writing in a 2nd or 3rd idiom; the need of learning the language of a NW-European country other than the UK or Ireland.
- Acculturation into new academic environments which in many respects differ from home.
- Family concerns for accompanying partners and children as well as for relatives that stayed behind.
- Practical issues: support in dealing with socio-economic and administrative issues, accommodation, income, insurance, visa and residence permits.
- Psychosocial issues that need attention, i.e. loss of self-esteem and authority, dealing with traumas.
- Employability: scholars ask for support to promote self-employment and entrepreneurial skills.

Best Practices

Family Support at the University of Cologne in Germany

The University of Cologne *Welcome Centre* (that supports scholars in all administrative matters) soon realized that families of refugee scholars need more support than families of “regular” visiting scholars. Therefore, the International Office started a project for family support. A position funded by the Philipp Schwartz Initiative was established February 2018. The goals are to help scholars’ families overcome language barriers and escape isolation, connect families and enable social contacts, to get to know the city, explore interesting places and enable them to solve everyday problems on their own. We want to take some weight off the shoulders of the scholars making their life less stressful so that they can focus on academia.

Academic Dugnad in Norway at the University of Oslo

The University of Oslo and Akershus University of Applied Sciences were partners from the very beginning in 2015 and more universities and colleges have joined since. A number of interventions have been developed and implemented: (a) Academic Practice an internship (with the Municipality of Oslo) for refugees with an academic background; (b) through the Academic Network refugees and asylum seekers get to know local students from a similar academic background to begin building networks in Norway; (c) recognition of previous education is being addressed together with NOKUT, the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance; (d) the university offers two low-threshold, online courses for refugees who want to work with language training on their own: one in Norwegian as a MOOC and one in English.

Scholars at Risk (SAR) Mentoring at the University of Cologne in Germany

SAR mentoring began in 2017 and is open to scholars from the UpC and surrounding partner universities. Finding their place in a work / research surrounding very different from the one in the home country can be extremely challenging. At the same time, it is important for the scholars to find their place quickly, as most grants and job opportunities are temporarily limited and follow-up opportunities need to be found very soon. The main goal of SAR Mentoring is to introduce refugee scholars to the German scientific system, promote their careers, and help them integrate in the community of the UoC and the Society.



SUMMARY ON IO4:

IO4-Psychosocial Support through Communities' engagement & mobilization

IO4 aimed to facilitate young refugees' educational integration and in particular integration into Higher Education through the construction of educational material on refugee psychosocial support. Its general rationale/objective was a) to take into account the perspective of both refugees and the NGO professionals and b) to move away both from a narrow policy-driven focus and from a problem focused perspective. The promotion of refugees' social integration through Cooperative Movement Games is also amongst the aims of IO4.

Towards the above mentioned objectives, we conducted: a) A needs survey (interviews and focus groups with practitioners), and b) Desk research on relevant literature and in particular on existing good practices. The IO4 Deliverables include a) an online educational module and monitoring/recommendations guidelines for trainers regarding the psychosocial support of refugees b) an online educational module and monitoring/recommendations guidelines for trainers regarding the role of Sport in refugees' social integration.

The educational material concerned with the psychosocial support of refugees has the following structure:

Section 1 includes the main thematic categories that emerged by the analysis of needs survey data:

1. Professionals supporting refugees expressed concerns regarding their **professional identity** which can be specified to: i) Uncertainty and precariousness (continuous transfers from one place (camp) to another or from one NGO to another, Precarity/Lack of a stable working context and of a sense of belonging) ii) Discrepancy among professionals and volunteers (blaming the other, excessive labour burden) iii) Lack of relevant (focused) training/ need for legal and medical training
2. Difficulties related to the **organizational-administrative context** (collaboration issues within NGOs and state services, limited information sharing and exchange between services, issues of confidentiality)
3. **Refugees' reception by the local communities** (positive but also negative reactions: exotic view of refugee population/ fearful reactions/ racism/ stereotypes about refugees)
4. **Other challenges/difficulties** i) Constant movement and fluidity, ii) Educational integration, iii) Need for cultural awareness, and iv) Asylum procedures (slow/ineffective)
5. **Groups with specific needs and difficulties** (Adolescents and youth facing double transitory processes, Unaccompanied minors' detention in prison, guardianship issues)
6. **Psychological problems** (trauma/ separations).



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Section 2 contains findings, assumptions and considerations from the relevant literature.

In particular, it discusses the consequences of constructing the refugee movement as crisis and of applying the rhetoric of emergency and temporality. It reviews debates over:

- Securitization and Border politics (debates on border security within Europe)
- Legal/administrative definitions of refugee population and category fluidity
- The homogeneity of refugee experience (refugee experience as an “epistemic object in construction”)

It emphasizes the relevance of constructs:

- Racialisation: race (and ethnicity) changes over time and is different in different situations. It is made socially significant, rather than being natural or fixed
- Intersectionality: thinking about belonging into several social groups (such as gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity) at the same time. Different groups have varied amounts of power in relation to other groups
- Transnationalism

Section 3 includes good practices and cites widely used examples

Best Practices

- To consider migration as a continuum
- To approach refugee children through a community based psychosocial perspective (assessing needs in relation to the community of refugees, developing community based, resilience)
- To approach Integration as a multifaceted and dynamic process that involves a continuous inter-play between self and socio-political and historical forces
- To consider refugees’ agency

Amongst the cited examples are: IRC’s Guiding Principles for Psychosocial Programs, The ‘Trauma Grid’ approach (Papadopoulos, 2007, 2018) Reception and living in families (RLF), Nidos, Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (2015), The British Psychological Society’s Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009)

The educational model concerned with the role of Sport in refugees’ social integration is also based on survey results and includes a variety of good practices.

Survey results indicated the usefulness of **sport as an important means of promoting social integration** among refugees in the camps and **the need to educate people working in the refugees’ camps on the content of sport activities** in order to promote social inclusion. The participants also reported a **number of difficulties that may hinder the effective implementation of sport activities** in the camps.

Best practices

- Ensure the socio-cultural suitability of the games of the program:
- Recognize and demonstrate sensitivity to diversity - Strengthen individual and collaborative work - Promote integration
- Ensure safety and health – Establish functional and safe venues
- Establish appropriate and acceptable physical contact with children
- Define the terms of participation - Rules of conduct
- Schedule program - Effective time management
- Ensure appropriate and adequate equipment - Modify the games – Offer variations



SUMMARY ON IO5: Supporting Refugees on Health and Law Issues

This intellectual output concerns the creation of an online digital module on health and legal issues regarding refugees aiming to provide training to trainers of people involved in their health-care and legal support in the reception countries. Moreover, good practices and recommendations are proposed regarding health and legal support of refugee/immigrants in the host country.

The objectives of IO5 are: a) to provide **legal training** on the current **EU and national legal framework** on **immigration** and **asylum** addressed to persons and organizations (governmental, NGOs, local) involved in the reception of migrants/asylum seekers; b) To train trainers involved in providing **health care services/support** to refugees/immigrants in the reception country; c) to train trainers on **health insurance** and **social protection** of refugees/immigrants in the reception country. The deliverables of this output are: a) An online module and recommendations for trainers regarding health support of refugees; b) An online module and recommendations for trainers regarding legal support of refugees.

For the IO5 part concerned with Health, on the trainer's side (professionals) a **First Aid course** was developed with common emergency occurrences (how to approach, evaluate and help accident victims, how to deal with : choking, bleeding, heart attack, stroke, fractures, soft tissue lesions, drowning, burns, poisonings, electrocution) alongside with emphasis on CPR. Expanding further, sections were included on **sexually transmitted disease prevention** as well as **basic hygiene rules**, and **national vaccination program**. This was designed and delivered in as a **concise presentation** accompanied by referrals to **videos** documenting the techniques described. Relevant material in the form of extensive and descriptive notes ("booklet" format) was also created expanding on procedures described in the presentation. Finally, we organized a presentation on the structure and function of the Greek Health System utilizing the relevant Official Government Gazette issues. This includes information on the organization and stratification of the **Greek Health System**, **how to navigate through it** when medical attention is required (where to go, what are the standard procedures for admission etc.) as well as information on the procurement of medical supplies and drugs through pharmacies. Throughout the material we used **simple language**, and descriptive illustrations, aiming to yield a **practical, easily applicable "manual"** useful even to the layman.

On the refugee/immigrant's side, apart from the material described above, we further procured pamphlets for distribution, documenting ways of **personal protection in emergency situations**, common for camp residents and/or travelling parties (e.g. fires, earthquakes and floods.). Taking a step further, material was amassed concerning **basic personal hygiene, use of toilet facilities, disease prevention measures for people living in close quarters** and an effort was made to **bridge probable intercultural differences** on medical matters in order to achieve maximum impact of the information provided.



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The material provided, supplies both the trainers and the immigrants with useful information that helps in the prevention and, if that fails, treatment of emergency medical situations faced during entry to first line country, accommodation in camps as well as exit from the country.

The above educational approach addresses the needs of both immigrants/refugees and healthcare professionals for basic first aid knowledge that seems to be lacking or not available in an easy to use form for use on the field.

The **material regarding IO5 activity on legal issues** consists of five parts:

1. Useful Definitions on Asylum Law;
2. The Refugee Status Determination;
3. Asylum Procedures;
4. Reception Conditions;
5. Administrative Detention of Asylum seekers.

The material regarding the IO5 activity on issues of social security consists of the following parts:

1. Access to Health;
2. Pension for Uninsured Adults;
3. Recognized Refugee Rights;
4. Benefits and Allowances for Refugees.

Moreover, the bibliography and links to useful educational material, such as relevant case-law and legislative texts are annexed at the end of the material.

The first **impact** of the project in the context of a focus groups organized for both health and legal support of refugees has been **positive**. There was a consensus among the participants of the focus group that there is **generally a lack of organized training material on supporting refugees on health and legal issues**. Furthermore, the IO5 educational material has already been tested and evaluated positively in the context of training workshops organized during the second year of the project.

It is now freely available at <http://sucre.auth.gr/en/outputs>

Best Practices :

Reception conditions for asylum seekers including housing, healthcare and education should be provided by the State in conformity with International, European and EU Law ■ Alternative to detention measures should be used ■ Children should never be detained ■ Gender and Sexuality issues pertaining to the refugees and immigrants, should be brought forth and addressed ■ Issues with official document translations and interviewing refugees should be resolved. Universities with their respective language and psychology departments can contribute in this process ■ Camp life should be organized on the basis of professional expertise. There should be: a) Decentralization of the camp life. Bodies should be formed according to the expertise of the camp residents, through supply of voluntary work. b) The tasks of each team should be documented c) A Code of conduct should be followed according to central guidelines ■ There should be education and training on first aid matters but also on how medicine is stored based on its active substance ■ There should be education/training of the refugees/immigrants concerning disease prevention ■ There is a need for training on health and legal issues. In this way, the service quality given to immigrants/refugees may be upgraded.



Acknowledgements

S.U.C.RE. has productively united the energy and forces of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the University of Cologne, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the Greek Council for Refugees on an important cause. We believe we have contributed to the discussions in Higher Education in Europe about the challenges and the paths needed to be taken to integrate refugee/migrant Students and Scholars. We have also supported practitioners working in the field to better assist refugees in need.

I owe so much to everyone for their work and enthusiasm in this project, but I would like to give some extra personal thank you's. So firstly, I want to thank Vice Rector for Academic & Student Affairs A. Stogiannidou and on her behalf all rectorate authorities of AUTH for supporting us and even showing the way to other Greek Universities. I thank the Department of European Educational Programmes (especially E. Gonida, I. Georgiadou, S. Fournali, K. Tolia, A. Selalmazidis) because we all started together from here and for their important contributions and advice. I thank all the Teaching staff (A. Bibou, L Figgou, A. Baka, A.-M. Konsta, D. Kapoukranidou, V. Barkoukis) and the PhD graduates/students (T. Anastasiadis, D. Kiltidou, M. Sourvinou, T. Vavilis) that produced the IOs of AUTH, because we were just a great team 😊 and because we do care. My sincerest and deepest from the heart thanks to M. Mylona and M. Tsapoutzoglou. I was extremely lucky to have such administrative support (it was much more than that). Finally, I thank all workers from the Research Committee of AUTH for giving solutions to the financial issues encountered with a smile.

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Our partners GCR have repeatedly proven to be the best link to the refugee population. I thank P. Sergi her for the trust in AUTH – GCR bond. My warmest thanks to E. Koutsouraki and D. Voutirakis for their hard work as well their participation to the multiplier events.

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Finally I would like to thank all the outside contributors to the project for their honest help throughout these years. The interest of the practitioners and the workers in Ministries, Municipalities and NGOs has undoubtedly proven the need for the deliverables of this project.

This has been a two year road for us, much shorter than the time that migrants need to really feel part of a new society. As a team we strongly believe that European Universities' role in assisting is crucial. Universities' role in sustaining Democracy and Equality is not to be forgotten. Our obligation is to strengthen it by giving more of ourselves to this greater cause.

Alexandros Triantafyllidis

S.U.C.RE. Project Coordinator



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