

International virtual mobility program

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

Globalisation and Cooperation Area

<https://www.uoc.edu/portal/ca/news/actualitat/2016/201-mobilitat-internacional.html>

Programme description

The Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (Open University of Catalonia, UOC) international virtual mobility programme was created in 2015 to offer an online experience to students from other universities around the world, and especially in Latin America, thereby providing the opportunity to take a course in one global classroom with students from all around the world.

The UOC, in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the 2030 Agenda, set up this programme to train professionals and the general public in the skills required to face the global and social challenges of our society. SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The UOC collaborates with other universities in order for their students take certain degree subjects at the UOC. These subjects are recognised by their home universities. The programme gives students a chance to enjoy an academic experience in another educational system, in a different university and country, without the need to travel, and while continuing to study at their own university.

The UOC is strategically committed to establishing long-term academic and research partnerships with foreign universities, beyond strictly commercial relationships. The intention is for this way of implementing the UOC's new globalisation strategy to bring about improvements in the quality of education in the form of academic benefits for students at the UOC and the other university, and contributions to the general and professional development of people.

An additional challenge is the establishment of new strategic alliances not only with universities but also with the countries where they are located, offering this programme as a complement to their students' university education and their academic curricula.

Since the outset, there have been partnerships with a number of universities from different countries in Latin America: Minuto de Dios University Corporation, in Colombia; University of Talca, in Chile; DUOC-UC Professional Institute, in Chile; Cooperative University of Colombia, and Cayetano Heredia University, in Peru.

The beneficiaries have been undergraduates who have taken a subject on their education programme at the UOC (degree and English subjects), with this subject subsequently being recognised by their own education system.

Impact

Approximately 1,000 students have participated, taking degree and English subjects with the UOC as the target university. The UOC is working with other Latin American universities to set up new international virtual mobility programs.

In the future, the programme will hopefully be able to offer in&out virtual mobility whereby UOC students will be able to do reverse exchanges with other universities (UOC students take subjects at foreign universities).

Reception programme for for refugees and asylum seekers

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<https://www.uoc.edu/portal/ca/news/actualitat/2017/029-beca-refugiats.html>

<https://www.uoc.edu/portal/ca/news/actualitat/2017/213-refugiats-uoc.html>

Programme description

The UOC's reception programme for refugees and asylum seekers was created in the light of the possibilities offered by e-learning when it comes to facilitating access to higher education for vulnerable groups that find it hard to access a quality university education.

In line with contributing to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, the main objective of the programme is for refugees and asylum seekers, whether resident in our country or abroad, to be able to study at the UOC through 100% scholarships, and to receive the necessary accompaniment in the form of a mentoring service and special reception classrooms. Another of the ideas is to raise awareness among the university community of social justice, the culture of peace and non-violence, and society's respect for human rights.

Scholarship programme for refugees

The UOC offers scholarships to refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons to study languages, postgraduate specialisations and open subjects. This programme is financed entirely by the University's own funds.

The scholarships are aimed at people who have been forced to leave their countries of origin due to humanitarian crises, armed conflicts or other socio-political situations, and who have found no support within the mechanisms provided by the competent public administrations.

The scholarships are designed as a resource to make it possible for people to begin or continue their studies when they have difficulty doing so by ordinary means, whereby 100% of their fees are covered for half-year specialised courses on UOC-specific master's degrees, open subjects and languages. These grants are global in scope, but to date the beneficiaries (a total of sixty-one) have mainly been based in different Spanish cities, settlements in Greece and refugee camps in the Sahara.

Networking with social entities that provide direct care to refugees is fundamental for helping with dissemination and the detection of people with an interest in the programme, considering the characteristics of the UOC's educational model, which is completely virtual and accessible from anywhere in the world.

Mentoring programme for refugee students

Meanwhile, given the uniqueness of the UOC and the psychosocial situation of the beneficiaries of these scholarships, the need for personalised accompaniment has been detected, and which is covered by the mentoring programme: UOC students, alumni and staff are the kinds of people that have voluntarily participated in this service.

The objective is to host and accompany students, fostering their autonomy and integration in the university community and to be a support not only on an academic level but also on a social one.

Impact

Since its creation in 2015, the refugee scholarship programme has issued grants to a total of sixty-one people.

In the first edition, most of the participants came from Syria, while in the second scholarships were granted to people of eleven different nationalities: Angola, Cameroon, Colombia, Ivory Coast, El Salvador, Mali, Western Sahara, Syria, Somalia, Ukraine and Mozambique. The people that have received aid are aged between 26 and 30 years and more than half of them have completed university studies.

After holding two editions, the target group of these scholarships has progressed from being addressed at people on settlements in Greece to a more global outlook in future editions.

As for the continuity and scalability of the project, the involvement of the university community (teaching staff, admin and service staff, students and alumni) in the mentoring service and the contribution to the funding of the programme through solidarity enrolment should both be stressed.