MODEL OF SUPPORT
FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT'S ADAPTATION

IO1: Model of support for international student adaptation

Project: International students' Action for Adapting Cross-Cultural activities (ISAAC)

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Contents

1. Introduction

The growth of education-related migration has led many countries to consider international student migration as the strategic core of their internationalization policy. The objective of this mobility is to establish a European Education Area (EEA) with a global outreach and to strengthen the link between education and research aimed at strengthening economic and political influence in the world. According to UNESCO, in 2016 the total number of students enrolled in post-secondary institutions participating in the research increased by 65% and the number of international students in the world by 80% since 2010. In 2020, Key Action 1, Learning Mobility of Individuals, the largest Erasmus+ action, received 48% of the Erasmus+ total budget. The activity was by the Erasmus+ National Agencies. The EU committed €1.80 billion under Heading 1 for Key Action 1, which represents an increase of 1,6% compared to 2019.

According to EUROSTAT, at least 1.6 million students participated in international mobility at the tertiary education level across the European Union (EU) in 2016. For 35 years, the European Union (EU) has been funding research and mobility programmes, which have enabled over 3 million European students to spend part of their studies at another higher education institution or organisation in Europe. These are internationally mobile students enrolled in a degree programme in a country other than the one where they completed their upper secondary education. More than 2/5 (43%) of the international students at the tertiary education level in the EU in 2016 originated from Europe, 30% from Asia and 12% from Africa.

Higher education around the globe faces considerable expectations from society at large. Those expectations are currently evolving into imperatives for internationalisation, employability, global citizenship, democratic culture, addressing change, providing inclusive learning and others. Fostering richer mobility opportunities and promoting mobility attractiveness in tertiary education at the local, regional, national and international levels are key strategies for achieving these urgent needs. The Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study (2018) reports that students who participated in exchange programs improved their skills in-line with labour market needs. Opportunities for educational mobility abroad increase tolerance and openness to diversity. Mobility opportunities are available to both staff working in the education sector and to individuals working outside the sector invited to share their knowledge and experience. The participation of university staff in mobility enhances professional skills and opens access to more satisfying career evolution. Furthermore, it promotes interaction and the development of relationships in the European and global educational ecosystem. This collaboration enhances the development of innovative pedagogical and curriculum design skills and enriches teaching skills, especially in innovative pedagogical methods. Training periods abroad may consist of job shadowing, observation periods or specific training courses.

As part of the EEA, the European Universities initiative is paving the way for transformation of higher education by building the universities of the future. On July 9, 2020, the European Commission announced that 24 additional European Universities would participate in Erasmus+ mobility. A total of 41 European Universities and more than 280 higher education institutions across Europe are now part of this flagship initiative, with the ambition to enhance the quality and attractiveness of European higher education and boost cooperation between institutions, students and staff (Erasmus+ Annual

Report, 2021). Mobility participants have reported improvement of inter-cultural and social skills (European Commission, 2019).

Project ISAAC aims to develop an intervention that helps students adapt in an international academic setting in the context of mobility. Specifically, the project aims to develop good practice guidelines targeting university staff and tools for helping students adapt in the new host environment. This report constitutes an analysis of information on current internationalization practices at ISAAC project partner sites and the countries in which they are located. The analysis aims to inform the design of the proposed ISAAC intervention for supporting internationalization. It is based on a review of policies, strategies and activities at the organizational and national level. It is also based on questionnaire-driven research that documents and helps evaluate the expectations and needs of educators, international students, domestic students and staff at partner organizations in relation to internationalization. This document is complemented by country reports implemented in Poland, Spain, North Macedonia, Greece and Portugal, which provide further insight on current practices and highlight internationalization needs. The country reports are attached as annexes to this document.

2. European internationalization policies

Internationalization is a phenomenon that has increased significantly over the last 30 years (JRC, 2012). It has become increasingly important as collaboration across borders helps advance research and promotes development. According to De Wit (2011), internationalization contributes to humanistic ideas against a world of pure economic benefit. Internationalization has resulted in high mobility of skilled personnel, students and scholars. This has led to the introduction of educational programs that have an international perspective, R&D collaboration, increased networking and the establishment of regional and national policies for education-related mobility (OECD, 2008). The mobility of students and skilled professionals diffuses knowledge across borders, promotes integration and triggers innovation benefiting both the sending and the receiving country.

Mobility is important for personal development and employability. It fosters respect for diversity and openness to diverse cultures. It encourages linguistic pluralism, underpinning the multilingual tradition of the European Higher Education Area. It increases cooperation and competition between higher education institutions. For all of the above reasons, mobility is the hallmark of the European Higher Education Area. In 2009 the Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education claimed that in 2020 at least 20% of individuals graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have engaged in a study or training period abroad.

Internationalisation is becoming more mainstream in the European and global higher education agenda. In today's global knowledge economy, internationalisation is strongly linked to innovation, interdisciplinarity and interculturality. An estimated 17 million individuals in Europe work in another member state. In addition, 1.4 million individuals commute to another member state daily for work. In relation to student mobility, the experience for participants is overwhelmingly positive. Over 80% of former Erasmus+ students comment that they have a better understanding of what they want to do in their future careers, 80% are employed within 3 months of graduation and 72% state that the mobility experience contributed to getting their first job (Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study, 2018).

The number of participants in higher education mobility was negatively impacted in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Related European-wide travel restrictions resulted in a reduction in the number of higher education students and staff taking part in mobility between Programme Countries. Mobility participants faced various issues, including restrictions to return home or uncertainty on the status of their ongoing or future mobility periods. Additional guidance was necessary to support students and university staff engaged in mobility.

Mobility and international cooperation can contribute to the alleviation of skills gaps by helping develop the competencies that industry and society need today. The benefits of internationalization have led the European Commission, as well as individual countries, to introduce policies for encouraging it. The Digital Opportunities Trainee Initiative (2021), for example, helps develop digital skills.

On the other hand, the European Commission has introduced frameworks that support student mobility. In the Bologna Declaration (Bologna Declaration, 1999) and the Lisbon Strategy (Lisbon

Strategy, 2000) the two dimensions of internationalisation, namely cooperation and competition, meet. Related initiatives include the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS, 2021), which allows the recognition of courses completed in a different member state than the one where a student's university is located. The Diploma Supplement (2021) accompanies a higher education degree and provides standardized information on the content of the completed studies. The European Quality Assurance Registrar (2021) promotes the development of trust by providing assurances through reliable information on European higher education. Furthermore, the European Council recommends the automatic mutual recognition of diplomas and the outcomes of training periods abroad for member states (European Council, 2021). Finally, the European Student Card Initiative (2021) facilitates the exchange of student information. Finally, alliances between European Universities help enrich research and educational activities, promoting the competitiveness of European Higher Education institutions globally.

3. Internationalization challenges

As described by Knight (2008, p. 21), internationalisation is a process that introduces intercultural, international and global dimensions in higher education to improve the goals, functions and delivery of higher education. It contributes to the improvement of the quality of education and research. As a result, internationalization of higher education brings new opportunities, benefits and also challenges.

3.1 Criteria by which international students select a country of study

The most important criteria that students take into consideration while selecting an Erasmus+ destination are:

- The possibility of remaining and working in the host country after completing their studies. According to worldwide statistic, 25% of international students settle in the country of their studies. It is worth noting that Erasmus+ students have a 50% higher possibility of becoming employed compared to university students who do not take part in mobility programs. In the case of Eastern European countries, the probabilities reach as high as 83%. Within 5-10 years of graduating college alumni from Southern Europe, and specifically countries such as Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece, are up to 56% less likely than students who studied completely in their home countries to stay unemployed.

- The possibility of studying at a specific higher education institution that offers financial support, for example through a loan, a scholarship or a grant.

- Student linguistic abilities. Students self-evaluate the adequacy of their linguistic abilities for working or attending an under- or postgraduate program. During their Erasmus+ studies, students immerse in other languages. Often, English is the dominant language and the medium of communication in research. Over the past years there has been a tendency in higher education to teach in English as an alternative for teaching in one's native language. This is the case in The Netherlands, Czech Republic, Poland, Greece, Norway and Sweden among other countries. The availability of learning offerings in English, combined with the limited time and resources available for language learning, discourages students from becoming familiar with another foreign language. Rather, students often use English as a vehicular language. In fact, Erasmus+ courses are available in English. However, the availability of courses in vehicular languages, such as English, his is not universally the case. In countries such as Italy, France, Portugal or Germany students attend courses in the local language, thus enriching their linguistic skills.

- The available opportunities for networking in the host institution. As the Erasmus+ programme offers the opportunity to spend an extended period of time immersed in a different culture it is important to build a personal Erasmus+ network to make the most out of this experience. Networking helps students and university staff to integrate into the academic, social and everyday activities of the host institution and country. Networking may encourage students and staff to participate in cultural and social events, language projects and more as well as to connect to individuals with similar interests. Furthermore, the establishment of networks provides opportunities for developing friendships with classmates and colleagues from around

the world that will outlast the duration of the Erasmus+ mobility. On the other hand, networking helps students overcome homesickness. In Switzerland and Hong Kong, on-campus societies for international students are common. In other countries, such as Spain or Australia, wide off-campus societies of expats exist.

- The official curriculum of the host university and its links to curricula in the home institution (Spriggs, 2019).
- The application and the recruitment procedures of the host institution.
- The culture, the educational quality standards and the applied teaching and learning methods in the host country.
- Recommendations by friends and family (Bilton, 2018).
- The opportunity to visit a country that is appealing or interesting.
- Student ability and courage to leave their comfort zone and live in a foreign country, sometimes far away from their home, for educational purposes. For example, German universities boast renowned engineering programs while New Zealand ones offer advanced agriculture and farming courses (HCA Editorial, 2019).
- The European Union visa rules. Students examine whether entering a country requires a visa or not.
- Entrance examinations. In the case that students do not have a diploma that provides immediate eligibility for registration, they examine the possibility of becoming eligible by successfully completing entrance examinations.
- The possibility of experiencing a culture shock (StudyLink). Experiencing a culture shock does not manifest in all students, however it is a possible consequence of exposure to a new culture, food and local habits.

3.2 Challenges that universities face on implementing internationalization

The Europe 2020 Strategy highlighted the internationalisation of European higher education institutions as one of the important goals on international collaboration. In each country, universities adopt diverse methods of supporting student adaptation and assimilation in international studies. The Integrating Asylum Seekers and Refugees into Higher Education in Europe: National Policies and Measures (2019) report presents a collection of these initiatives. Although the report focuses on asylum seekers and refuges, it provides a good discussion on the challenges that universities must address for fostering internationalization. The challenges addressed in the report include the need for language training and linguistic support in the national language or English, special grants and scholarships for students, additional training for higher education institution staff and guidance services for students. In addition, the report highlights the need for a supportive digital enrolment environment, which may also serve as a dissemination point for useful information. Effective integration of students is not only beneficial to themselves; it further underpins the international character of an organization and can increase the attractiveness of an educational institution in international marketing strategies.

As the inadequacy of language skills remains one of the main barriers to participation in European education, training and youth mobility opportunities, services such as Online Language Support (OLS, 2021) provide easy and ubiquitous access to language learning. They contribute to linguistic diversity, which is one of the key objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme.

Several European Commission funded studies focus on internationalization of education in Europe, including reports on the Impact of Erasmus on European Higher Education: Quality, Openness and Internationalisation (2008), the External Evaluation of Erasmus Institutional and National Impact (2004) and Effects of Mobility on the Skills and Employability of Students and the Internationalisation of Higher Education Institutions (2014). Each of these studies focuses on various aspects of internationalization. The 2008 study addressed the impact of internationalization on educational quality at the institutional and systemic level through literature reviews, surveys and case studies. The results of this research demonstrated an improvement in student support services for outcoming and incoming students and intensification of efforts on internationalisation and promotion of student and staff mobility. The study revealed that the Erasmus+ Programme played a leading role in the internationalisation of higher education institutions in Europe. In addition, the 2004 study examined the impact on institutional policy before the introduction of University Charter. Results revealed even greater and systemic efforts and strategies on internationalisation, improvement of qualifications recognition and focus on student mobility. The 2014 study revealed that staff mobility and intensive programmes are of utmost importance in the improvement of the cooperation between higher education institutions. All studies demonstrated that the Erasmus+ Programme enabled collaborative and international work. They further showed that the new European Union member states gained more through internationalisation efforts and participation in the Erasmus+ Programme. Student and staff mobility increased internationalisation and openness of higher education institutions by promoting networking and the establishment of partnerships. It further helped improve the quality of educational services offered. The studies, excluding the one that took place in 2014, underscored that the improvement of the international reputation of higher education institutions was a significant motivator for internationalisation, although according to a European Commission Communiqué on European Higher Education in the World reputation abroad is only affected by the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning. Thus, the improvement of teaching methods and curriculum through internationalisation should be the goal for higher education institutions, not internationalisation itself. Other research from 2004 and 2008 focused on either institution or students but not on both (European Commission, 2014; European Commission, 2019).

The cooperation between universities grows thanks to the number of exchanges between them. Although there is a significant rise in the internationalisation level of universities, the type and quality of support services offered to students may still improve. Higher education institutions offer educational services that support students in all aspects of their lives in the host environment, such as finding accommodation or becoming employed. However, the quality of the support services strongly depends on the English language proficiency of staff. Moreover, staff members indicated that they focus more on incoming students rather than outgoing. The increase of international student numbers has raised the pressure on higher education institutions to formulate updated internationalisation strategies. Not only do universities need to address the conflict of offering courses in English, as

opposed to promoting local languages, but they also must introduce criteria for selecting international partners and decide on the form of internationalisation that would fit the organization's mission and vision (European Commission - Education and Culture, 2014).

The openness of the host country can also play a key role on the internationalisation of institutions that are located in it. For example, according to research conducted by Fundacja Edukacyjna Perspektywy in 2012 international students in Poland amount to only 1% of the entire student body. The reason for this low percentage is the lack of closeness of Poles to diverse cultures and insufficient global promotion of Polish universities. According to the study, Polish culture is too homogenous for individuals to understand other cultures. Moreover, Polish educational institutions offer no intercultural classes in early education. Having a diversity in the offered courses and supporting quality courses in English is also of foremost importance for internationalisation. Polish universities do not offer courses in English in the same quality level as universities in other countries in the European Union do. Finally, there is a need for common body promoting national universities on the global scale (Gąsior, 2021).

4. Project ISAAC internationalization support goals

4.1 Project ISAAC priorities

Project ISAAC aims to promote internationalisation and the creation of inclusive higher education systems. The project objective is to foster an international academic environment, to increase the number of mobile students and academic staff and to promote cooperation with other universities and research institutes with a view to exchanging experiences and sharing teaching, research and development capacities. The project develops holistic solutions for supporting educators, youth workers, educational leaders and support staff by addressing the main challenges that inhibit internationalisation. More specifically, the project aims at strengthening international cooperation, increasing knowledge exchange and developing ubiquitous tools and methods for supporting staff as well as domestic and international students.

4.2 Project ISAAC specific aims

Project ISAAC aims to identify the key challenges faced by foreign and domestic students towards adapting to a new academic environment. The project aims to address gaps and potential areas of improvement in the student support system and developing the capacity of staff members in cross-cultural management and cross-cultural communication. The key outcome of the project is models and tools that target students, educators and university staff aiming to enhance student international mobility experiences and to foster strategic networking of higher education institutions towards internationalization. By strengthening the communication and reducing the obstacles that inhibit internationalization, the project supports students and staff through a valuable international experience, in which they develop soft skills and gain knowledge.

More specifically, the project aims to empower students to respond to new situations, to appreciate diverse cultures and to be open and prepared for new challenges. It further aims to boost university staff capacity to adapt to a new international academic environment, to enrich professional contacts, to strengthen cooperation with partner institutions and to build competences through the sharing of good practices. To achieve these high-level goals, the project aims to:

- Develop of a model of support for international student adaptation based on interactions with target groups as well as on best practices recognized in consortium countries.
- Develop a Guidebook of "Dos and don'ts" for university staff working with foreign students
- Develop a Welcome Guide for foreign students.
- Develop interactive materials in the form of edugraphics and infographics.
- Adjust university services that address the foreign student needs.
- Support the development of academic staff skills in the field of the international cooperation.
- Develop of a system and/or proposal of good practices recognised in Europe.
- Support the participation of university employees in the process of university internationalisation.

- Stimulate creativity and increasing competences and skills among academic staff, students and graduates.

5. Project ISAAC target groups

Following is a description of project ISAAC target groups and their engagement in project activities.

5.1 Incoming students from foreign countries

Project ISAAC targets international students that engage in mobility in a foreign university. The actual participation of foreign students in project activities contributes to the assessment of good practices, areas of improvement and organisational gaps on international student support. The perspectives of students are documented through a survey, which helps recognise the main factors that influenced their decision to select a specific place of study. Incoming students are the direct beneficiaries of project outcomes, and specifically guidelines on maximizing their positive experiences in the host university in another country.

5.2 Outgoing students engaging in mobility in foreign universities

Project ISAAC targets domestic students that wish to engage in mobility abroad. The actual participation of domestic students in project activities supports the collection of data related to the level of integration in academic society, cross cultural understanding and interest in participating in mobility initiatives. Outgoing students are the direct beneficiaries of project outcomes, and specifically guidelines on maximizing their positive experiences in the host university in another country.

5.3 Educators

Project ISAAC targets educators who teach classes in which international students are enrolled. Lecturers need to be prepared for addressing cultural differences in student groups and have the capacity to help newcomers to adjust to a study program and academic environment. Educators must have the capacity to prepare educational content and activities that addresses the needs and interests of both domestic and incoming students. Educators are the direct beneficiaries of guidelines that help make the classroom an inclusive, harmonious and welcoming space that fosters learning in intercultural contexts.

5.4 Erasmus+ coordinators and administrative staff working with incoming and outgoing students

Project ISAAC targets administrative staff that are engaged directly in the support of incoming and outgoing students participating in mobility. The participation in project activities of university administrative staff will support the assessment of the university's preparedness for internationalisation, hosting foreign students and supporting students' adaptation. It will further help identify gaps in the organisational structure within the organisation. Administrative staff are the direct beneficiaries of guidelines for supporting the integration of incoming and outgoing students in the new academic environment as well as life in a new country.

6. Internationalization impact indicators in higher education

Internationalisation is a process in which a university changes the level of internationality, namely the current status of international activities. Internationalization plays an important role for nearly all higher education institutions. Internationalization is not a goal but a means for promoting the competitiveness of an educational institution, enriching learning and research initiatives, making an impact to a broader audience, improving scholarship, producing globally aware, competent graduates and improving the quality of education as a whole.

There are few notions on how to measure internationalisation. Hudzik and Sothl (2009, 14) use three indicators:

- Inputs, namely resources supporting internationalisation efforts, such as funding, human resources, policies and more.
- Outputs, namely the number of various types of activities undertaken to support internationalisation efforts.
- Outcomes, namely impact or end results.

Deardorff, Thorndike Pysarchik and Yun (2009) categorize indicators into 5 components, namely inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. In both approaches outputs provide information of achievement of specified goals, such as student learning, quality of education programs, benefits to students and faculty and increased reputation.

Few tools have been designed to map or assess internationalisation levels. One example is IMPI, a toolbox of indicators for higher education institutions that allows measuring their performance in internationalisation. Another is Nuffic's checklist that details different levels of internationalisation for different aspects (Brandenburg et al., 2007; Green, 2012).

Internationalization indicators are incorporated into daily practices of higher education institutions for measuring the effectiveness of internationalization efforts and the impact of related activities on the quality and excellence of educational practices as well as their extroversion. In fact, statistics on indicators are collected and analysed during the periodic evaluation of educational institutions and departments, the results of which have a direct impact on international ratings that help attract talent, academic standing and reputation, and national funding. More specifically, the following data are collected during departmental evaluation:

- Number of international projects funded, in which the department is a partner.
- Number of scientific publications authored in collaboration with researchers from organizations located abroad and published in journals or scientific conferences with review.
- Total funding achieved through research and development projects.
- Funding per staff or research fellow, which is calculated as total funding divided by available academic staff.
- Number of students and staff members engaged in academic mobility.

This information becomes public through the evaluation report of each academic department. It is further communicated to the ministries of education. In some countries, such as Greece, this

information affects future national funding received by public universities from the government through a competitive process that ranks all higher education institutions. Specifically, in Greece 20% of the total funding of a higher education organization is determined through its competitive ranking based on several indicators, including the above that are related to internationalization.

The objectives on project ISAAC on developing a model of support for international and domestic students engaging in mobility contribute to the enhancement of internationalization of higher education institutions through the deployment of experiences of European Universities and supporting tools developed through project activities. By identifying barriers and challenges in the internationalisation process and introducing good practice guidelines on educational mobility, including organizational preparation of staff members, internal procedures, strategies, internal and external communication and public relations campaigns targeting foreign students and academic staff, the project supports higher education institutions to achieve their internationalization impact indicators.

7. Internationalization strategies and activities at partner sites

Following is a summary of best practices and models deployed by project ISAAC partners for promoting internationalization. This is a summary of information analysed in national level reports performed at each partner site (see ANNEX II).

7.1 University of Economics and Innovation in Lublin

The University of Economics and Innovation in Lublin, Poland (WSEI) includes internationalisation in the organization's vision and high-level strategy, which states that scientific international cooperation and promotion of international scientific networks are new paths for development. The focus on internationalization stems from the observation that it impacts all other aspects of proper functioning of the institution and is necessary in today's world. The actions undertaken to increase the internationalisation level of WSEI include opening 4 study programmes delivered fully in English to boost the number of foreign students, establishing cooperation with foreign public bodies and obtaining international certificates of high quality of education.

Internationalization activities are undertaken in various departments of the university. The main unit responsible for such activities is the Centre of Projects and International Cooperation, which is not only responsible for managing Erasmus+ mobilities, but also for managing European Commission funded projects and establishing contacts, networks and connections with international partners. Specific departments of the university are active in terms of internationalization due to their engagement in the implementation of development projects as well as due to the participation of their academic staff in international research initiatives. WSEI is closely connected to the business sector. Based on its organizational mission, the university is a bridge between the educational sector and the labour market. One of the examples of university's links with the business sector is the Dual Studies programme, in which students are obliged to intern in companies.

The university promotes internationalisation through various activities such as:

- Creating opportunities of academic staff exchanges, for example as visiting professors or respondents of international training activities.
- Organizing summer schools, including cultural preparation, for incoming students.
- Organizing different types of initiatives related to development of innovative products at the international level within European projects.

7.2 Lusófona University

Lusófona University's internationalization policy, specifically oriented towards the Lusophone world, is centred around the organization's European outlook and its responsibility towards the region, in particular with regards to the development of the city of Lisbon, Portugal by providing successful services within its scope of action, namely teaching, research and community building. The international and simultaneously European regional dimension of Lusófona University is expressed in the considerable list of international agreements with partners from the European Union and other regions that the university updates annually, fully determined to make every effort based on a policy

of transparency towards strengthening cooperation relations and the implementation of action plans of good practices.

The Lusophone Institute for Research and Development (ILIND) is the university's central structure for the implementation of the internationalisation strategy in the research area. ILIND's main goals are:

- Promoting research and development and disseminating knowledge in broad scientific areas.
- Coordinating and systematizing research activities carried out by research and development units and centres.
- Following-up on the process of preparing, submitting and managing research projects.
- Supporting research projects undertaken by individual researchers.
- Organizing training sessions for researchers, lecturers and staff related to research.
- Disseminating the results of ongoing or completed projects.
- Establishing partnerships with other organizations, such as higher education institutions, research centres and managing entities of international projects for enhancing participation and collaboration in national and international projects and exploiting the synergies that arise from partnerships with local entities.

Lusófona University has established a creative and technological incubator named PLAY: Projects Lab Alliance for You. This unit acts as a support platform for the development of new projects and businesses benefiting not only the Lusófona Education community but also to the general public.

7.3 Panepistimio Thessalias

The internationalisation strategy of the University of Thessaly, Greece aims to enrich educational experiences and quality of learning offerings through collaboration at the educational and research level with organizations in the European Union and beyond. The internationalization policy focuses on developing the capacity of human resources for supporting international collaboration, fostering an international academic community, creating international study programs and research strategies, promoting global reach and strengthening links with society. Internationalization is evident in all academic practices of the institution and is based on the principles of osmosis, reciprocity and pedagogical empowerment of diversity. Since 2018, the university offers an increasing number of undergraduate courses in English. These courses are aimed at both incoming international and Greek students. As a public academic institution, the University of Thessaly ensures that all facilities and services offered to domestic students are also available to international students. All available information for students is provided in English and Greek.

The University of Thessaly participates in and is committed to the successful implementation of a wealth European and international programs aimed at serving the needs of the various target groups and to the implementation of various activities, such as:

- Strengthening the cooperation and networking between organizations.
- Promoting the development, testing and implementation of innovative practices.
- Facilitating the recognition and certification of knowledge, skills and competences.

- Strengthening the cooperation between regional authorities for the development of new education, training and youth systems.
- Supporting students with disabilities and special needs and facilitating their integration into the labour market.
- Supporting education and training professionals to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in the learning environment.
- Promoting the entrepreneurship of young people and their active participation in public.

The University of Thessaly has experience in various European Initiatives, such as Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships, DG Employment, EASME, Interreg, Erasmus+ Sports, Knowledge Alliances and more both as a coordinator or as a key partner. Projects are supported by the academic community of the university. The quality of the implemented projects is verified at the national and international level as well as through experts of the institution, educators, trainers and others.

7.4 Loyola University

Loyola University, Spain integrates internationalisation into its mission to create thinking for the best and greatest service of humanity, to educate men and women for others, not the best in the world, but the best at solving the world's problems and make their entire pursuit a place of dialogue and fruitful meaning in which people from different cultures, beliefs and ideologies can live an inspired and committed life with others and with creation. The institutional vision reflects the global character of a university that researches and promotes the creation of knowledge about the needs and problems of today's world. A university that trains people to be agents of change, professionals committed to the development of a more humane, just and sustainable society. A university at the service of society at large and of those who live in oppressed societies.

Loyola University reflects its level of internationalisation in the following main activities:

- Establishing links with active higher education partner institutions.
- Promoting language skills.
- Promoting student, educator and staff mobility.

Loyola University participates in numerous international projects that promote international relations research and innovation as well as international cooperation.

To help international students make the most of their stay at the university, Loyola SRI addresses issues such as familiarizing students with academic offerings, accommodation, visa, Spanish classes, summer programs and access to a set of tutorials on university student services. Loyola University further offers a 360º Buddy Program. This is an initiative that brings together Loyola students who have already participated in a foreign exchange program or are currently planning on participating in one in the near future and are motivated to help and integrate international students into the university community. The members of the Loyola 360° Buddy Program organize fun cultural activities throughout the academic year to bring international students closer to the Spanish and Andalusian culture.

7.5 Proficio Skopje

With the signing of the Bologna Declaration in September 2003 in Berlin the Republic of North Macedonia joined the Bologna Process. This has influenced the internationalisation in university's vision and high-level strategy. Proficio Skopje University, North Macedonia supports mobility of students and academic staff. It further recognizes diplomas that use the ECTS system as a universal tool of certification. The university adopts 3 cycle studies upon the completion of which students receive diplomas. This raises the level of quality of educational services in the academic institution and strengthens the importance of scientific research for promoting quality educational offerings. In 2014, the Republic of North Macedonia along with 4 other Western Balkan countries joined the Horizon 2020 program and became an associate member with equal participation in all segments of the initiative. This enables mobility for prominent scientists and strengthens domestic research systems.

Proficio Skopje pays special attention to the internationalisation of the teaching process, science, outgoing and incoming student and academic staff mobility, strengthening administrative capacity for addressing challenges related to internationalisation and participation in relevant regional, European and international networks through:

- Promoting mobility of teachers and researchers for study, stay and training abroad.
- Promoting the participation of Erasmus + administrative staff in mobility training programs.
- Enriching the ability of educators to teach in a foreign language through modern educational design.

8. Main results of research on student and educator internationalization needs

Following is a summary of results from the questionnaire-based study conducted in the context of project ISAAC to identify internationalization process challenges at European universities in Poland, Spain, North Macedonia, Greece and Portugal. The analysis constitutes a summary of research work that is documented in national reports that have been developed by each project partner (see ANNEX II).

The information summarized in this section refers to:

- The preparation of the university's administration to international working environment.
- The organization of support services targeting foreign as well as domestic students towards better integration, communication and mutual understanding.
- Additional measures that help foreign students adapt to a new academic environment more efficiently.
- The organization of support services targeting domestic students in mobility programmes.
- The preparation of the university in terms of the internationalisation.

A total of 495 participants responded to the 3 questionnaires of project ISAAC (see ANNEX I). From these, 122 were foreign students, 177 were domestic students and 160 were academic and administrative staff.

The data was collected via on-line surveys supported by Google® Surveys, separately for each of the group of respondents, namely students, educators and administrative staff. Each survey consists of sociodemographic questions, followed by a list of 78 questions for foreign students, 88 questions for domestic students and 52 questions for university staff. The questionnaires consist of closed single choice and multiple-choice questions.

The table below summarizes participant engagement in the study.

	Foreign students	Domestic students	University staff
University of Economics and Innovation in Lublin, Poland	78	68	52
Lusófona University, Portugal	21	54	42
Panepistimio Thessalias, Greece	3	19	36
Loyola University, Spain	12	19	17
Proficio Skopje, North Macedonia	8	17	13
TOTAL	122	177	160

Table 1. Summarized results of ISAAC questionnaires.

The following sections provide deeper insight of the findings, which constitute an institutional perspective on internationalization needs.

8.1 Gaps and problems identified in the organization of the support for foreign students, domestic students and staff members

8.1.1 Foreign students

Most foreign students that responded to the questionnaire agreed that the language barrier and not knowing the local language are the biggest challenges when living abroad. Most responded that expressing their point of view and emotions in a foreign language is also a difficult aspect while communicating with academic or administrative staff and domestic students. Foreign students furthermore added that another difficult issue regarding communication with academic or administrative staff and domestic students, is stereotypes and prejudice. However, despite the apparent difficulties, students have the perception that they can establish effective communication with national students, lecturers and administrative staff. In terms of challenges faced in a new environment, students listed being alone away from family, communicating in a different language and finding housing. All of the students responded that their adaptation in the country of studies was good.

Most foreign students responded that recruitment and registration procedures for mobility programmes at the host university were very easy. In relation to the delivery of information on the study programme, foreign students identified a gap in the availability of useful information. Most respondents furthermore commented that the information provided by the host university is clear and understandable for them. Most foreign students responded that the support given by the university before their arrival was very good, apart from information on how to get the student card and information on student clubs and organizations within the university and in the local area, with the majority saying the support was bad. In terms of the preparedness of university departments to accept foreign students, participants identified the university library as the best prepared service.

In general, the foreign students that responded to the questionnaire were satisfied with their mobility experience and they would recommend engagement in mobility to their friends, because, among other reasons, it is an interesting experience. They furthermore stated that their participation in a study program at a foreign university enabled them to become more aware of social and political concepts like democracy, justice, civil rights, being more tolerant towards others' values and behavior and understanding better their strengths and weaknesses. All students rated their participation in mobility positively and commented that it helped them become more adaptable to new situations and to think critically and analytically. In general, the majority of them are very satisfied with their mobility experience.

8.1.2 Domestic students

Most domestic students that responded to the questionnaire perceived that communication in a language other than their mother tongue is not a problem and does not cause misunderstandings. The challenges they identified in communicating with foreign students include expressing one's point of view in a foreign language, understanding the behaviour and expectations of foreign students and overcoming stereotypes and prejudices. Most domestic students agreed that organizations such as the European Students Network have positive impact on the integration of international students at the

host university. The vast majority commented that they would like to be members of an international student association. Even though most participants see the benefit of student's organisations, most are reluctant to join any kind of students' associations.

The majority of domestic students acknowledged that they frequently help foreign students with their every-day problems, that they have a good relationship with them and that they are fairly treated at the host university. Moreover, domestic students commented that they more frequently help international students in everyday challenges, such as finding housing, rather than in academic activities. Almost all participants responded that they are interested to become familiar with other cultures and most of them stated that they maintain contact with students they have met in international mobility.

Unfortunately, most domestic students stated that they have not taken part in any mobility program, but those who have participated were satisfied by their mobility experience and stated that they will definitely recommend it to their colleagues and friends. Those who have participated in mobility programs believe that information on study and internship opportunities abroad is readily available to every student. Respondents concluded that their experience in adapting to live in another country was good or very good.

8.1.3   Staff members

Most university staff participants that responded to the questionnaire agreed that staff mobility has positive impact on establishing new and strengthening existing cooperation with partner institutions and that it contributes to the internationalisation of their university. They also agreed that the participation of students and staff from other countries has in general a positive effect on the promotion of the university abroad. They furthermore commented that the participation of foreign students contributes to the development of the university's resources in other languages and added that cooperation with foreign lecturers encourages the development of academic staff. Most respondents stated that workshops on effective communication in a multicultural environment would be helpful to improve efficiency of cooperation with foreign students. However, staff commented that they would like to have more preparatory meetings and access to mobility-related content over the internet.

Most participants declared to have participated in a mobility program and agreed that their participation allowed them to increase their self-confidence, knowledge and professional skills. They agreed that they are adequately prepared to work in an international environment and commented that they easily adjusted to the new environment and did not perceive to face challenges because of cultural differences. In terms of challenges in living abroad, the identified as the most significant difficulty communication in a foreign language. Regarding the benefits of participating in a mobility program, most participants agreed that mobility enriched their abilities and competencies, helped develop know-how and appreciation of the cultural richness of Europe, promoted their capacity to support the deployment of emerging learning design and helped further strengthen international collaboration. In general, staff believe that mobility was positive for their career and development.

Staff members believe that establishing new professional contacts and enhancing cooperation with the host institution are some of the main benefits respectively.

Most staff members felt that the university offers all the resources needed for international collaboration and that the university is prepared to receive foreign students. They believed that the university is prepared to receive foreign staff. In general, they commented that the participation of staff in mobility programs has the significant positive impact on the application of new teaching methods, approaches and good practices at the home university and also contributes to the greater development of the curriculum. They further agreed that offering joint classes with national students is a good way to integrate foreign students. All of them would recommend to their colleagues to participate in mobility programs.

8.2 Summary of institutional perspectives

Following is a discussion of participant feedback in relation to institutional internationalization needs.

The discussion is based on the results of the national reports on the perceptions and attitudes of students and academic staff on educational mobility at the University of Economic and Innovation in Lublin, Lusófona University, Panepistimio Thessalias, Loyola University and Proficio Skopje.

8.2.1 Transparency of the organisational structure

The enhancement of communication among internal departments and the clear division of the responsibilities among departments along with transparent information for students could enrich the quality of cooperation within the organisation and enhance the quality of students' support.

8.2.2 Internationalisation of curricula

The widespread use of English as a tool for research and teaching, especially in postgraduate studies, may increase interest in international study programs offered by English-language universities as foreign students would feel more comfortable during classes. An effective internationalisation strategy would increase the number of institutional partnerships with other regions and countries, which would consequently increase the number of incoming foreign students as well as the number of students who wish to study abroad. Internationalization would result in the increase of educational offerings in English. As a result, institutions will need to hire more staff and researchers from other countries, opening new opportunities for collaboration and expansion.

8.2.3 Cooperation with external organisations

Different kinds of student organisations exist the at national, regional and local level aiming to support students through activities that range from cultural exchanges to organisation of free time and student integration and support, both psychological and legal. Strong cooperation of the university with external bodies may lead to the better integration of domestic and foreign students outside the university and increase the recognition of the university as an international organisation.

8.2.4 Promotion for mobility

Mobility is overwhelmingly a positive experience for participants, who feel that it helps them grow academically and professionally, be open-minded and become familiar with other cultures. As a result, participants would overwhelmingly recommend mobility to colleagues and peers. Unfortunately, not many staff members have taken part in a mobility programme. That said, the solution could be to organize activities such as conferences and other more informal events where foreign students and staff members may share feelings on their life abroad and introduce their cultures. In general, national students and staff members have a good perception of foreign students and foreign staff. They are also satisfied with their stays abroad and the vast majority of them would recommend it to others. A good solution is delivering more institutional promotion for staff members to participate in mobility programs as well as planning daytrips and leisure activities organized by the university.

8.2.5 Dissemination and networking

It is important to promote and publicize university services that manage mobility and further exploit the internet and social media for disseminating information to students. Another good approach to networking is to organize extracurricular activities. Foreign students feel like that there are no support events and measures upon their arrival and during their stay. However, the universities organize events such as the Welcome Week, follow-up activities led by student associations as well as the national language courses for international students.

8.2.6 Communication support

Communication is the most important element of enhancing the preparation of the organization for the internationalisation process. Methods that can help increase the visibility of the university to a wider public include the more effective preparation of academic staff in intercultural communication, fostering cooperation and common understanding among domestic and foreign students, organising extra curricula activities for foreign and domestic students and evaluating the effectiveness of different kind marketing and communication means.

8.2.7 Language support

Poor language skills can be a big problem for the integration of foreign students. A good solution is to deliver more courses in vehicular languages that are broadly understood as well as to deliver foreign language courses as preparation of mobility participants before their placement in a new environment. Moreover, domestic students perceive that they have a good relationship with foreign students and the latter seem to agree in this respect. Nevertheless, language seems to be a barrier for students and staff when studying or working abroad. There is still space of improvement, for example by making available language classes for foreign students.

8.3 Stakeholder perspectives

The following table highlights the main impact areas that were the focus of the study. The table demonstrates the target groups for which each impact area is relevant and the objectives of research

for each. These impact areas drove the design of questionnaires through which information was gathered.

Target groups	Impact area	Relevant goals
Domestic students Foreign students Academic staff Administrative staff	Access to information and sources of the information	To analyse the extent to which target groups are informed about the procedures, internal rules in national and foreign language
Domestic students Foreign students Academic staff Administrative staff	Means of communication	To analyse the extent to which the communication measures are suitable for the target groups
Domestic students Foreign students Academic staff Administrative staff	Internal communication	To analyse the extent to which the internal communication facilitates effective support to domestic students, foreign students and staff
Domestic students Foreign students Academic staff Administrative staff	External communication	To analyse the extent to which the external communication facilitates effective support to domestic students, foreign students and staff
Foreign students Academic staff Administrative staff	Culture	To analyse the extent to which universities facilitate the conditions suitable for the adaptation of foreign students and staff members in the academic community
Domestic students And staff members	Culture	To analyse the extent to which universities facilitate the conditions suitable for the integration of incomers and academic society
Domestic students Foreign students Academic staff Administrative staff	The reasons of participation in mobility/exchange programmes	To analyse the extent to which support of the university impacts the number of the mobility exchanges

Academic staff Administrative staff	Benefits from the international cooperation	To analyse the extent to which support of the organisation impacts the satisfaction of domestic and foreign academic staff
Domestic students Foreign students	Benefits from the participation in mobility exchanges	To analyse the extent to which support of the organisation impacts the satisfaction of domestic and foreign students
Academic staff Administrative staff	Networking mechanisms	To analyse the best practices in cooperation among units responsible for international cooperation

Table 2. Impact areas targeted by the questionnaire-based study.

9. Project ISAAC research framework for student adaptation in the context of internationalization

Internationalization offers significant benefits towards developing knowledge, skills and competencies for employability, widening the perspectives of students and educators and promoting growth by helping bridge the skills gaps between academia and industry needs. For this reason, it is desirable to establish models that support internationalization and encourage members of the academic community to work in an international environment.

The ISAAC project aims to develop strategies and good practices that promote student and educator mobility by helping participants adapt in the country of destination. In this context, this report introduces a model for analysing internationalization needs and policies in higher education. The analysis focuses on European and national level initiatives for fostering mobility of educators and students.

More specifically, at the national level a study has taken place engaging all stakeholders in the internationalization process, namely students, educators and administrative personnel. The study demonstrated that participating organizations already have established processes that address a wide range of mobility issues, including adaptation to the academic environment, socialization and everyday life support in a new country.

In order to establish a framework for student adaptation in the context of internationalization project ISAAC has furthermore established focus groups in each country that the consortium has partners for evaluating the best and worst practices considering 3 aspects for the cross-cultural adaptation:

- University needs, challenges and good practices.
- National student perspectives.
- Foreign student perspectives.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, it was not possible for the consortium to organize in-person focus group activities. Rather, data was collected on-line with the objective of generating as broad feedback as possible. Data collection targeted both students and academic staff. The work was summarized in national reports in countries in which the consortium has project partners aiming to document the preparedness of participating organizations for internationalization (see ANNEX II). The national reports were compiled through literature research on good practices and initiatives as a well as the questionnaire-based study that was distributed to academic staff and students, both domestic and international. Specifically, the analysis focused on:

1. What kind of measures can be used to help understand the educational and academic culture of the organization? [Staff survey, see ANNEX I]
2. How the preparation of the staff members of the university can influence the visibility of the HEI abroad and strengthen the process of the internationalisation? [Staff survey, see ANNEX I]
3. What kind of measures could be used to mitigate adaptation of foreign students into a different environment (in terms of culture)? [Foreign students survey, see ANNEX I]

4. What kind of measures can be used to support integration of the foreign and domestic students? [Foreign students survey, see ANNEX I]

5. What kind of measures provided by host university support more effective foreign student's adaptation? [Foreign students survey, Domestic student survey, see ANNEX I]

6. What kind of factors make the host university recognised at international level? [Foreign students survey, see ANNEX I]

7. What kind of good practices in internationalisation and supporting activities for students can be implemented in other EU country? [based on desk research and best practices of the partner's organisations, see ANNEX I]

The collected data will be the basis for the design of the ISAAC model of support of student internationalization, which consists of:

Guidebook of "Dos and don'ts" for university staff working with foreign students (IO2), targeting university staff to help organize activities for welcoming international students. The guide targets Erasmus+ mobility offices, staff and coordinators at partner sites. It provides a rich collection of suggestions on how to enrich incoming and outgoing student experiences in international mobility activities. The recommendations are based on partner past experiences as well as the know-how collectively developed in the context of ISAAC. The guidebook is concise, attractive and easy to understand. It aims to help university staff to better understand cultural differences and how to address them. It provides useful information on how to help newcomers integrate into a new academic environment. Since each incoming student is a different individual, university staff must consider and adapt to different student profiles. They must also be prepared to manage any kind of crisis that may occur and always communicate in a clear manner, promoting a safe multicultural environment.

Welcome guide for foreign and domestic students (IO3), targeting students as a complementary guide that supports their adaptation in their new environment in the context of mobility. The guide is to be shared with Erasmus+ mobility offices at partner sites and to be distributed to incoming and outgoing students. It provides information that allows students to become better integrated into a new academic environment and to actively engage in everyday life including social, athletic and other activities during their mobility stay. The guide aims to support exchange students with their abroad experience. It provides important information about their planning of the journey abroad, selecting their location of study, understanding the culture, being aware of weather conditions and more. It provides information on how to get familiarized with mobility procedures, admission process, contacting the host university and collecting necessary documents for travelling and entering a country upon arrival. It helps them with practical information, such as finding accommodation, finding work, having access to health care services, enjoying the destination city, culture, traditions and food and making plans for returning home.

Interactive material for foreign and domestic students (IO3), targeting students. The interactive material will present in a graphical and easy to understand way the information collected in the previous guides. The material will be presented in the form of infographics, namely visual storyboards that guide students in navigating different scenarios during their mobility stay. It will be in the form of cards with concise information and graphical presentations of key concepts, guidelines and advice for

maximizing the benefits of educational mobility in terms of academic, culture and life abroad. It will be an on-line learning aid to visually and vividly present conceptual content in a manner that is functional and engaging.

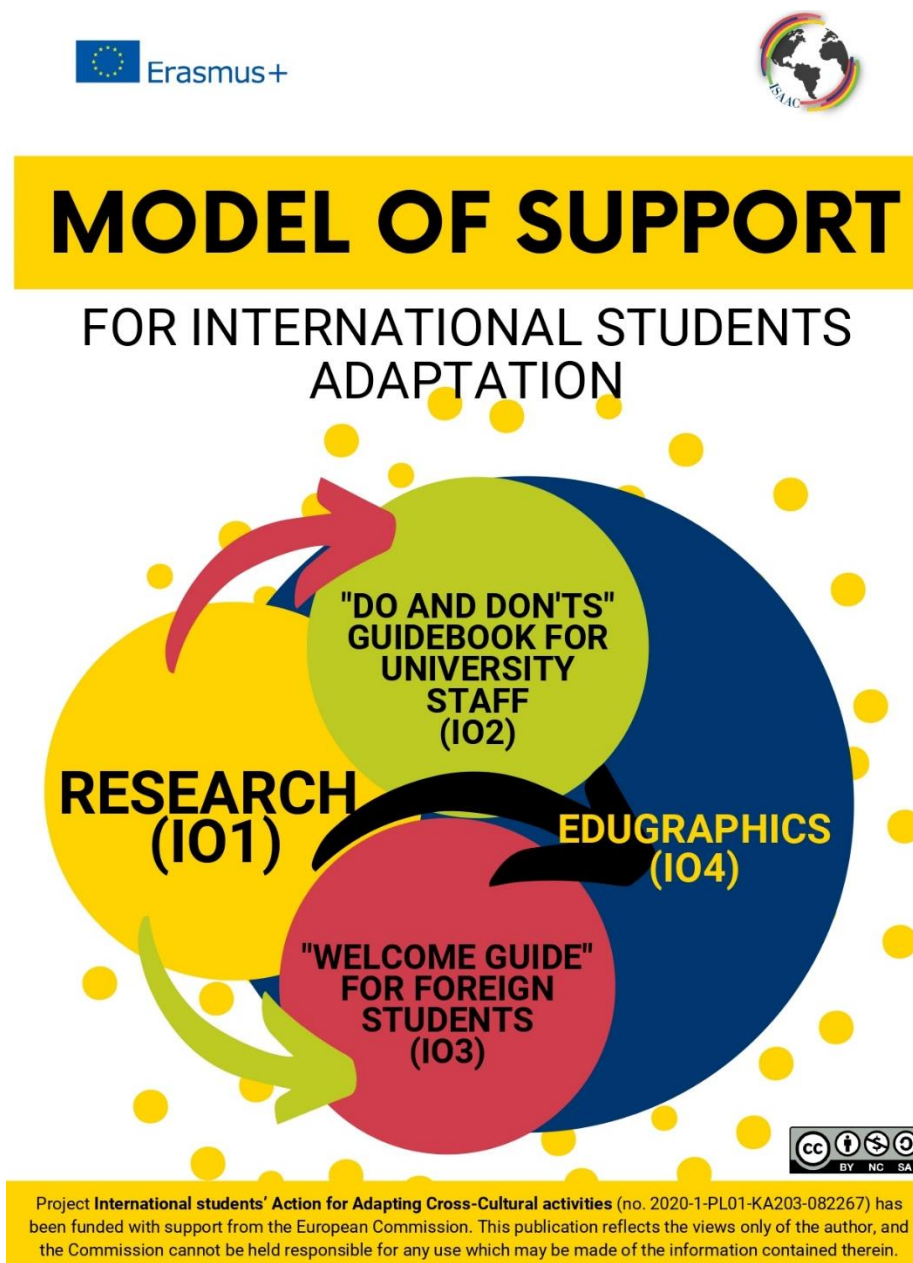The model of support of project ISAAC is presented in the following figure.

Figure 1. The ISAAC project vision for supporting internationalization in higher education.

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Annex I – Tools for analysis internationalization needs of students, staff and organizations

Following are the tools that were used for gathering feedback the needs of educators, students and administrative staff towards supporting internationalization initiatives. These tools allowed the consortium to collect data that was subsequently analysed and documented in this report.

Foreign students survey

URL link to the template of the questionnaire in English: https://forms.gle/S4qdCHRj8dUsjtoc7

Domestic student survey

URL link to the template of the questionnaire in English: https://forms.gle/r4cvpR1mSAgZCsU99

Staff survey

URL link to the template of the questionnaire in English: https://forms.gle/mNgd8vWARY6MvicZA

ANNEX II – National reports

Greece

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QkWz1blh5SfIuqW0Jh1cYWHqKD6qJg44/view?usp=sharing

North Macedonia

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1w1bMHkYvLfCgNr3Qjwf7e__Xkso-2Xzh/view?usp=sharing

Poland

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sNO7XfRYRS5kbK1CZSrzm-sOlCyEJ9xr/view?usp=sharing

Portugal

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HmM_QMi5HmWJ7tQStjSNc5CrNL5M8bfq/view?usp=sharing

Spain

https://drive.google.com/file/d/16FYNrsj6esaHh2-2PFR6j_KQzct-G6wl/view?usp=sharing

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