

Report: EMN National Conference 2019

**14 November 2019,
House of Europe, The Hague**

The Future of the Netherlands and Europe in the Battle for Talent

The topic of this year's National Conference was student migration, which is connected to the EMN study which has been carried out earlier this year about attracting and retaining international students in the various EU Member States. The main purpose of the event is to exchange ideas and experience with the other participants. Therefore, EMN Netherlands had invited colleagues from other Member States, representatives from higher educational institutions and international student offices and some international students to tell their personal experiences with the policies of studying in the Netherlands. The conference was chaired by **Bahram Sadeghi**.

Welcome

The day was opened by the Acting Head of the Liaison Office of the European Parliament **Danny de Paepe** who gave everyone a warm welcome on behalf of the Europe House and briefly explained the role of the Liaison Office in the Netherlands. Additionally, **Petula Huising**, the Director of the Strategy and Implementation Advice Department of the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) underlined the importance of networks such as the EMN through creating the possibilities to exchange good practices with other Member States with the aim of being able to learn from each other.

Presentation

The first presentation was given by our colleagues from EMN Netherlands **Hanna van der Linden** and **Maren Stegink**. Hanna and Maren presented the main findings of the Synthesis Report which provided an overview on a European level of the policies of the participating Member States in the field of attracting and retaining international students.

Panel I

The first panel consisted of three international speakers who all gave a short presentation of the policies of their respective Member States (being France, Germany and Sweden):

- **Olivier Marichalar** of Campus France, the promotion office for studying in France, explained that a strategy is being developed. Some measures include simplifying visa procedures and increasing the amount of students learning French. There is a law that limits the amount of programmes at educational institutions to be taught in English. Due to strong links between France and the Maghreb region, there is a high level of mobility between France and the countries in this region. The French government has the intention to introduce more joint programmes between French and African educational institutions.
- **Janne Grote** of EMN Germany explained that the amount of international students differs strongly between the various regions within Germany. Therefore, promotion strategies are, besides the federal level, also often conducted on a regional level. Janne highlighted the good practices of Germany which are a special kind of residence permit for students in order for them to meet the requirements to enroll in a programme of a higher educational institution.
- **Marie Bengtsson** of EMN Sweden stressed that Sweden maintains a positive attitude towards international students. In terms of promoting to study in Sweden, universities take the lead with their own campaigns. When someone applies for a visa to study in Sweden, family members are allowed to accompany the international student and are allowed to stay and work in Sweden.

Both Germany and Sweden mentioned that it is a challenge to retain students after their studies, often due to the lack of knowledge of the local language among international students which is

often needed to successfully participate on the local labour market. Furthermore, Marie also mentioned the high financial resources to be able to study and live in Sweden and housing problems as difficulties to attract and retain international students. Olivier and Janne stated that one of the main challenges for their countries is the difficult visa application procedures. In France, besides simplifying visa applications, priority will be given to international students at visa centres, which fits within the policy aim of the French government to have an amount of 500000 international students studying in France in 2027.

Interview session with two international students

After the break, the start of the second part of the conference, **Hans Lemmens**, coordinator of EMN Netherlands interviewed international student **Susanna Ambartcumian** from Russia and international alumni **Rodrigo Velasco** from Mexico about their experiences of studying and working in the Netherlands. Both students praised the visa application, mostly because it was conducted by their respective universities. Rodrigo told that the application procedure for the 'zoekjaar hoogopgeleiden' (a year in which alumni are allowed to stay in the Netherlands after their study and look for employment) was rather smooth. When asked about what policy changes they would give, Susanna said that practical information about issues such as side jobs, the *zoekjaar* and other options for international students could be better provided by the universities. Both Susanna and Rodrigo acknowledged that learning Dutch is essential in integrating into the Netherlands.

Alumnus Rodrigo Velasco (Mexico) and International Student Susanna Ambartcumian (Russia/Armenia) interviewed by Hans Lemmens (Coordinator EMN Netherlands).



Panel II

The second panel of this conference tried to seek an answer to the question whether current developments in attracting and retaining international students should be considered good or bad. **Hélène Calers**, policy officer of the Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission, stated that there is a strong emphasis on international talent migration

at the EU level. However, she also stated that besides the joint efforts of the Member States to make it attractive to study in the EU, there is also a sense of competition between Member States, where national interests are sometimes prioritized above the EU perspective and what an EU collective could bring within an international context. This trend of 'inward looking' was also underlined by **Liefke Reitsma**, policy officer of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

The manager of Student Mobility of Nuffic, **Han Dommers**, stressed the importance to connect (international) students with each other and corporations and that the EC should invest more in information campaigns about studying in Europe.

Professor of European Migration Law at Radboud University Nijmegen **Tesseltje de Lange**, mentioned the policy shift in the Netherlands from the idea that students would return into an active policy of retention. This shift should make us cautious about issues like brain draining a country for the benefit of the Netherlands. This issue is also being acknowledged by Hélène, and she underlined the importance of including this balance within EU policy making. According to Liefke, the effect of brain draining is also important at the Dutch government. Next year, the EU presidency will draw the attention to the possible brain drain.