

Public statement

DRU – Democratic Roles of Universities is an international project financed by Horizon Europe whose main objective is to explore new ways in which universities can strengthen the democratic fabric of society.

The European Commission and Parliament recognise that democracy – the cultural ‘glue’ that holds Europe together – is increasingly under threat. The European Education Area, and particularly higher education institutions, are therefore called upon to engage with their communities, promote inclusion of students from disadvantaged and migrant backgrounds, and uphold democratic values in everyday life.

DRU’s consortium, coordinated by UPORTO, brings together partners from northern, southern, eastern and western Europe, as well as from South Africa and Australia. It comprises universities and non-academic organisations, all committed to collaborative action to promote democracy – from grassroots community initiatives to international policy engagement.

DRU brings cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral and international expertise to critically analyse existing knowledge on the relationship between universities and democracy.

This issue is structured in five work packages. Three of them address practical ways in which universities, academics and students engage with their local communities through research and civic action and create a thriving educational environment for refugees and all students. Two observe how these practices are fostered or hindered by institutional frameworks and systems of governance.

WP2 | Democratic values and their institutionalisation | Lead by Amélia Veiga - PI (UPORTO, Portugal)

WP3 | Governance instruments | Lead by Tim Seidenschnur (UNI-Kassel, Germany)

WP4 | Participatory research and citizen science | Lead by Zsuzsanna Géring (Budapest University of Economics and Business, Hungary)

WP5 | Education in a hospitable university | Lead by Marie-Agnès Détourbe (University of Toulouse-Jean Jaurès, France)

WP6 | Civic engagement by neighbourly university | Lead by Susan Wright (Aarhus University, Denmark)

The project’s practical outcomes will be disseminated as toolkits, training materials and policy briefings aimed at students, academics, stakeholders, institutional leaders and policy-makers – with the ultimate goal of enhancing the democratic impact of universities.

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