



## DISCUSSION PAPER

# In the search of good practices for hosting visitors in the Finnish higher education institutions

May 2023

### Introduction

The Finnish University Partnership for International Development (UniPID) is a network of Finnish universities<sup>1</sup> that supports higher education institutions (HEIs) in bringing global responsibility and Global South perspectives and partnerships into their education, research and societal impact activities. UniPID actively engages with different stakeholders and policy makers to promote the role and importance of higher education and research in global development.

In the fall 2021, UniPID was granted funding from the Global Innovation Network for Teaching and Learning<sup>2</sup> (GINTL) Africa Network for an initiative to channel collaboration with African HEIs. The initiative aimed to promote dialogue, discussions, co-learning and sharing experiences between Finnish and African colleagues. During the spring 2022, several African scholars were invited to Finland to discuss about the priority areas, expectations and future collaborations. According to the feedback from the invited African guests, as well as from the hosting colleagues in the Finnish HEIs, the visits were rewarding and benefitted the existing collaboration. Many of the participants hoped for similar visits to be arranged in the future. While there was a lot of enthusiasm towards the visits, some of the practical arrangements were creating obstacles for the visits and for the visitors. It was also noticed that different HEIs can have different practices for their visitors and therefore also better coordination and sharing of the existing good practices could be done. Additionally, it became clear that visitors from the Global South HEIs might require some arrangements that need extra attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Aalto University, Tampere University, University of Eastern Finland, University of Helsinki (coordinating member), University of Jyväskylä, University of Lapland, University of Oulu, University of Turku and Åbo Akademi University

<sup>2</sup> <https://gintl.org/>.

After the visits, UniPID got together with GINTL colleagues as well as colleagues from the Africa Research Forum for Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Helsinki (Afristadi)<sup>3</sup> to discuss the next steps and the lessons learned. Attention was drawn to the practical arrangements and the need for guidelines when organizing academic visits: What is my responsibility as the host? What should I do in order to support the visitor in the best possible way? Who should I contact in order to make all the payments in time? Who takes care of paying living allowance? These were some of the questions the group discussed. Additionally, it was noted that there are gaps in how different departments inside of the Universities communicate.

Meanwhile, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) has been developing the policies to promote internationalisation in Finnish higher education and research. The 'Better together for a better world – Policies to promote internationalisation in Finnish higher education and research 2017-2025' publication<sup>4</sup> promotes Finnish HEIs and aims to welcome more and more international students and scholars in Finland. One of the goals in the publication is that "It is easy to come to Finland to study and work." In order to find practices that make it "easy" to come to and stay in Finland, we would like to take a moment to reflect on the existing practices and find ways to improve the processes.

For this purpose, UniPID, GINTL and Afristadi started to develop a series of suggested guidelines to bear in mind when hosting international visitors. The first draft of these guidelines is now collected in this document. With these guidelines, we take the opportunity to highlight the need for careful and coordinated collaboration between individuals, departments and administration of the universities, as well as with wider communities and stakeholders relevant to these kinds of visits. This document is intended to be a starting point in finding good practices for those organizing visits and hosting visitors, especially from the Global South HEIs. We hope that the guidelines here suggested sparks critical thinking, discussion and coordinated collaboration for welcoming international students and scholars to Finland.

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<sup>3</sup> Afristadi was one of the collaborators and visitor hosts during the UniPID-GINTL initiative. Read more: <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/networks/africa-research-forum-social-sciences-and-humanities>.

<sup>4</sup>

<https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/79438/Better%20Together%20for%20Better%20World%20-%20Leaflet%202018.pdf?sequence=17&isAllowed=y>.

## Responsibly hosting international visitors

As part of the several universities' strategic plans, the HEIs are interested in building partnerships with actors, projects, and universities from all over the world. These alliances aim to take into consideration diverse perspectives that are the key for solving global challenges. As a result, in the framework of these collaborative initiatives, Universities have been hosting international students, researchers and other visitors during the past years and the volume seems to be just growing. Therefore, there is a need to discuss the practical arrangements in order to make the visits smooth and beneficial for all the participants. Here, we have collected some steps to reflect and think before, during and after the visits.

The host needs to take into account the following when organizing a visit:

- Time: start preparing the visit at least six months in advance. Steps pertaining to obtaining a visa/residence permit, and getting funds approved and sent by the university may require long waiting periods. It is strongly suggested to offer the visitor payment advances instead of reimbursements after the visit.
- The host should discuss with the visitor what their needs and expectations for the visit are, in order to organize the visit in a way that is both realistic and satisfactory for everyone. We encourage hosts to display hospitality during the visit, such as by accompanying the visitor at the airport, planning some time to show them around, etc.

The tables below show the steps to follow and the person responsible (H: host, V: visitor, H+V: host and visitor, H/V: host or visitor). The tables indicate general guidance for organizing visits and the steps to take may diverge depending on the purpose and length of the visit. The points made in this document are suggested to be used as a starting point. It is important to discuss and to cross-check the practicalities and instructions with the Human Resources office in each University's faculty/department.

### Steps prior to the visit:

Step	Note
H+V: Discuss how the visit will be organized & take place	Discussion topics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research &amp; teaching related activities;</li> <li>• Date &amp; duration of the visit;</li> <li>• Visitor expectations/preferences/needs</li> <li>• Host expectations</li> <li>• Designate the person to be in charge of this visit. This person must be informed of all arrangements regarding the visit.</li> </ul>
H: Prepare a hosting agreement + invitation	Hosting agreement (see an example from the University of Helsinki <a href="#">here.</a> )

	<p>The hosting agreement could also work as an invitation letter to submit to Migri. It is important to make clear about the grants, fundings, salary given to the scholars in order to support their stay in Finland. It is good to discuss the invitation letter content with the visitor in order to include all the needed information.</p>
H: Arrange living allowance with the university / apply for funding for the visit	<p>Payment advances are desirable and can vary from university to university/department to department. It is important to contact the HR services for details.</p>
V: Apply for a visa/residence permit	<p>Check visa requirements and travel documents accepted by country. See more information <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>Is there an Embassy in the home country of the visitor? If not, the host should bear in mind additional expenses when visitor needs to travel abroad to process the permit. See more <a href="#">here</a>.</p>
V: International insurance	<p>The visitor must get an insurance prior applying for the visa/residence permit.</p>
H/V: Book flights for the visit (and extra flights for the visa application, if needed)	<p>If the visit is planned for less than 3 months, the visitor will need to book the return ticket in advance.</p> <p>Discuss whether the visitor prefer to book the accommodation, flight tickets, and transfer from and to the airport on their own.</p> <p>Check possible stops when traveling to Finland. Do these countries require a transit visa? If so, take it into consideration when processing the required documents as well as additional expenses.</p>
H/V: Book accommodations	<p>Consider the host university's guest accommodation, if available.</p> <p>Desirable to offer accommodation in a convenient location to the working place (Walkable or easily reached by public transportation).</p>

<p>H: Prepare items needed for visitor's daily convenience (phone, sim card, travel card)</p>	<p>Phone:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a default, buy a local SIM card with some prepaid data &amp; call service.</li> <li>• Make it a card with unlimited international phone calls if the scholar needs it.</li> <li>• Ask the scholars if their phone accepts non-local SIM card; if not, also get a temporary phone.</li> </ul> <p>Prefer for a phone company that has customer service in English.</p>
<p>H+V: Prepare a travel itinerary</p>	
<p>H: Prepare some recommendations with relevant information about both the city and the host university. (Restaurant, places to visit, pharmacies, hospitals, what to do in case of emergency, etc.)</p>	

### Steps during & after the visit

<p><b>D U R I N G</b></p>	<p>H+V: pickup at the airport</p>	<p>Discuss the different options when arriving at the airport. Personal picking up is a nice gesture but it should be discussed with the visitor, as well as the apparel they might need for each season, especially winter.</p> <p>Keep in mind that some flights arrive very late or early, which might increase the waiting times in the airport when additional trains or buses are needed to reach the destination if not the city where the airport is located.</p>
	<p>V: Exchange currency</p>	<p>It is highly advisable to exchange currency in the airport in case the visitor is traveling somewhere else than Helsinki/capital area. There are some cities/towns in Finland where it is very difficult/impossible to exchange currency.</p>
	<p>H+V: Get a public transit card for the visitor, ensuring the living allowance (per diem) during the visit</p>	<p>It is good to discuss beforehand about the travel arrangements in Finland In the case of HSL (Helsinki region), the host cannot get a card on the visitor's behalf. Tickets can be bought from machines for immediate use without a card, &amp; the host can accompany the visitor to a HSL service point to get a card. The visitor will need to present their passport to get the card (no nameless cards anymore). For more</p>

		<p>information when traveling in Helsinki region, please see more <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p>For the Living allowance (or per diem) it is important to consult the HR and/or financial department about the possibilities. At some universities prepaid cards and/or travel advances can be used while in other universities cash can be used. It is important to get information about the payment dates. We recommend to start these discussions as early as possible.</p>
	V: Register at DVV	<p>Long-period visitors might need to register at the DVV. This is a compulsory step to follow previous opening a bank account. For further information <a href="https://dvv.fi/en/foreigner-registration">https://dvv.fi/en/foreigner-registration</a>.</p> <p>The processing times are usually long, so it is advisable to book an appointment in advance even before arriving.</p>
	V: Opening a bank account	Registration at the DVV is needed before booking an appointment in the bank.
	H: Arrange facilities for working at the university	This might include a laptop, headphones and microphone, internet/data, workstation, access to printer, etc.
<b>A F T E R</b>	H: Get souvenirs from the host university for the visitor	
	V: Fill feedback form for improving hospitality and practical arrangements	

#### Different existing material that can be useful

- [HEI Life project to support the integration of International academics and Staff](#)
- [Guide for International Researchers and Their Families](#)
- Scholars at Risk document: How to Host: [A Handbook for Higher Education Partners](#)
- Scholars at Risk video: [How to Host 2022 Workshop: Hosting Considerations](#)

## Questions for further discussion and consideration

While developing this document, it has been discussed what does hospitality mean. What is considered as reasonable level of hospitality? What kind of roles and responsibilities are needed when hosting visitors? It is encouraged that the host and the visitor openly discuss about their wishes, expectations and preferences while organizing the visit. Communication over the practical arrangements is needed in order to plan a smooth and fruitful visit that serves both parties. The administrative side of the visits can take surprisingly much time and therefore we recommend starting the planning well before the visit takes place.

Internationalization is encouraged in Finland which means that it is likely that the amount of the visits will increase in the near future. In our work, we have seen a lot of willingness to share experiences and perspectives and learn from one another, and we believe that international visits nurture these dialogues Finnish HEIs together with their partners from all over the world can leverage on their resources and competences to better support the delivery of different goals in academia. Therefore, we should also discuss what internationalization at home, in Finland, means. What kind of culture we want to have or create around the internationalization especially when the context is Finland?