



What is ARCAID?

As of June 2018, the Academic Medical Center (AMC) and the VU Medical Center (VUMC) in Amsterdam entered into a new alliance as the Amsterdam University Medical Centers (Amsterdam UMC). The Amsterdam Rheumatology & immunology Center (ARC), jointly with Reade, is a synergy of knowledge and expertise in the fields of autoimmune rheumatic diseases and immunology. Together with collaborating institutes and partners, the translational platforms for true bench-to-bedside development of the next generation of diagnostics and therapeutics for the autoimmune rheumatic diseases are being developed. These efforts do not only need to be reinforced but also provide a strong base to train the next generation of translational researchers. Therefore, a multidisciplinary research team of 10 principal investigators (PIs) from different research and clinical departments of the Amsterdam UMC applied for a Marie Skłodowska-Curie COFUND grant.

Amsterdam Rheumatology Center for AutoImmune Diseases (ARCAID) is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie COFUND action from January 2020 - December 2024. ARCAID aims to be a top-class European rheumatology school for Early Stage Researchers (ESRs) interested in excellent bench-to-bedside training. ARCAID features an international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach to train a diverse group of 20 Early stage researchers (ESRs) to become the future leaders in autoimmune

rheumatology research and creators of improved bench-to-bedside approaches. The multifaceted PhD training programme ensures that the ESRs will learn about the opportunities and obstacles in the domains of all the involved stakeholders.

Successful kick-off meeting of the ARCAID Network in Amsterdam!

The kick-off meeting of the ARCAID consortium was held January 20th 2020 at the Academic medical centre in Amsterdam. All PIs introduced themselves, their research and the plans for the research projects. Additionally, the partners that were present introduced themselves and indicated what their role could be in the project. We also gave a short update on the process of recruitment of the 20 early stage researchers (see also further below).



Launch of the website of the ARCAID network September 2019

The website of the ARCAID network was launched online from mid-September 2019

and we are continuing to improve it (<https://www.arcaid-h2020.eu/>). The main purpose of the website in the first important period of the network was to attract future ARCAID ESRs to the website and inform them on the possibilities in the Network. Under vacancies we explained the recruitment procedure and showcased all projects. Here applicants could also find the online application form, designed to pre-select according to the EU eligibility rules.

Furthermore, news on the beneficiaries and partners, principle investigators (and later the fellows), meetings, twitter and the immersion community will all be posted on the website.

Great interest in the ARCAID Network worldwide!

The recruitment of the ARCAID network started officially October 2019. With a targeted social media campaign and strict deadlines, we received 159 applications before the first deadline of November 1st. Although we prolonged the deadline, first to December 2nd and then once more to January 31st in order to attract more candidates (and we had 240 by the end of January), we did start with first and second round interviews after November 1st and we managed to fill 15 of the positions by the end of February. We are still busy with the last 5 positions, however, in view of the worldwide corona-crisis this has been temporarily slowed down. Figure 1 shows the country of birth of our applicants. It immediately shows we managed to attract a great diversity of applicants.

We are happy to say the first one, Sona Allaverdiyeva, started January 1st at the AMC, marking the real start of the ARCAID project. She has been followed by another 4 researchers, but due to the corona crisis and resulting travel and work restrictions, some start dates have been postponed. The fellows that did start during these weird times have

given a short impression of their ARCAID start below.

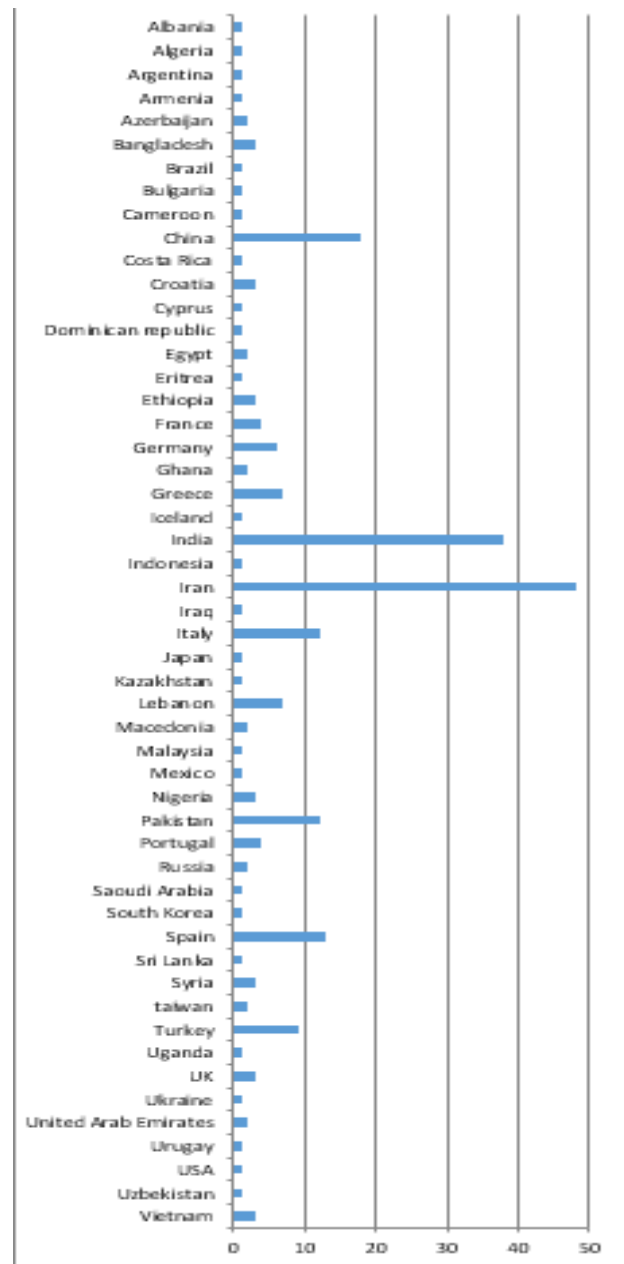


Figure 1. Country of birth of ARCAID applicants

Impressions on Amsterdam from the ARCAID fellows that have started during the first half of 2020.

Armando Olivieri- ESR3

We are living a weird time, I moved to Amsterdam from Rome one day before the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. As you know, at the beginning, Italy was the most affected country in Europe and was not easy to leave my family and my friends in this

delicate situation. In Netherlands I found, in general, a more relaxed situation compared what I was used to, and almost one month of sunny weather made easier to handle this situation. Amsterdam is one of the most amazing cities in Europe, a great place to live and work. One of the first thing that I did when I arrived, was to rent a bike to enjoy the hundreds of Km of cycle path around avoiding public transport but also because I love biking and the Amsterdammers' life style, although I still haven't been able to fully appreciate it because of the virus restrictions.

When I saw AMC for the first time I was really impressed by the size of the building and its organization. It was February and it was a very busy building, full of doctors, nurses, scientists and Hospital staff that ran far and wide. When I returned one month later, I was a little shocked to find this huge building almost empty, with no one walking along the corridors. It is almost a paradox that this bad period coincides with the flowering of tulips that gives a nice but at the same time terrible contrast.

To date, I haven't been able to start working properly in the lab, since all the activity research not related with COVID-19 have been suspended, and as well as for my colleagues It isn't an ideal start for our PhD projects. Despite this quite unusual situation I was lucky enough to find a very nice research group with amazing people that always helped me during my home-working, giving me stimuli and advices for my project. We have regular Team meeting to discuss the projects, plan the experiments, and stay up to date with everyone's work. It is an ideal working environment; everyone is free to talk and gives its opinion and its point of view.

I am really enthusiastic to be part of this great institution and I can't wait to see the people and start working with them in the lab.



Elham Mirfazeli, ESR 14

I started my work as ESR 14 from the beginning of February at Molecular Cell Biology and Immunology (MCBI) department located at the O|2 building. Because of the lockdown I was able to work only for a few weeks there, yet during that short period of time I enjoyed the friendly and vibrant environment of MCBI, the variety of meetings and events and the opportunity to interact and exchange thoughts with many different people.

During my stay, I also had the chance to visit a couple of places outside the lab. One of my favourite places for taking a stroll is "The Nine Streets" area. In the 9 narrow streets you can feel the old town of Amsterdam, enjoy the refreshing view of the crossing canals and visit several cosy cafés, tempting cheese stores and a variety of gift shops displaying clogs and other Dutch traditional products. A little further, in Dam Square, you can see Madame Tussauds museum which is smaller than the one in London but still is nice to visit and you can also enjoy a waddling walk with Charlie Chaplin there. I also had a short trip to The Hague where I enjoyed visiting the wide sandy beach of Scheveningen, the nice pier there and the beautiful view of the Kurhaus building which has remained from the 19th century.

The short time before lockdown did not leave enough time to experience, but when the current situation is over I enthusiastically look forward to being back again at MCBI labs and learning and working there again and also exploring more of the Netherlands itself with

visiting the water village of Giethoorn being the first on my to-do list!



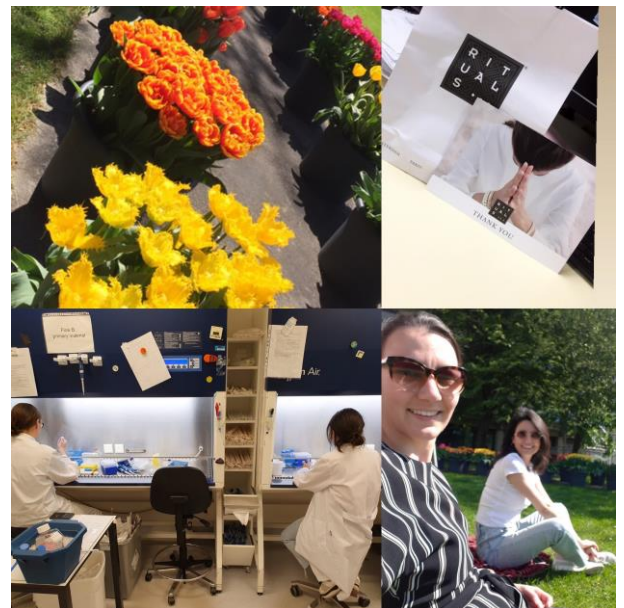
Sona Allaverdiyeva, ESR 15

I started my ARCAID project (ESR 15) on January 1st. I thereby became the first official ARCAID student to start, which makes me feel really lucky. In the beginning of my PhD I have done several important laboratory trainings, which allowed me to work on labs such as the ML-3 lab, where I will do much of my research. From mid-March, the lockdown due to coronavirus pandemic started and we were no longer allowed to work in the lab. It was a very stressful time for all of us, but with a little help from my supervisors I passed this time quite good. We continued to do our weekly meetings online and they motivated me to start writing a review.

Two weeks after the lockdown one of my supervisors (Jeroen den Dunnen) came up with the exciting news of a possibility to start working on COVID-19. The project focuses on severely ill COVID-19 patients, which show excessive immune activation around the second week that causes severe lung damage and can lead to death from respiratory failure. The goal of our project is to figure out what is driving this aberrant immune response, in order to find a way to counteract this using small molecule inhibitors. We were very glad to hear that our

grant proposal for a pilot study on this was awarded by the Amsterdam Infection & Immunity institute. And I am even happier to say that our first in vitro results look very promising, and that we are now even discussing the possibility to test our compound in a clinical trial. I am very proud to be part of this important project. I hope that we can also obtain a positive response for a clinical trial, which can hopefully benefit patients infected with SARS-CoV-2.

Working in the lab during this period felt exceptional and somewhat stressful, because there were many new rules. But we have received many gifts and kind messages from the AMC and from different departments, which really boosted our motivation to work.



Andrew Morrison, ESR 20

I don't think anyone a few months ago could have imagined the way the world is today, never mind starting your PhD journey working from home. While I was all set to move to Amsterdam for an April 1st start date (still suspicious that this was an April Fools), I have now found myself beginning this journey back in my family household up in Scotland, UK.

After one month already gone I really can't complain with how well everything is working out so far. As a member of the MCBI

department, I am kept busy through weekly Skype video chats with my two supervisors and I'm able to join their lab meetings to find out more about each group's work, more importantly prove to my future colleagues that I am in fact real. Everyone has become so welcoming and I feel part of the team already, especially SkinLab who have daily planking fitness sessions. Of course I can't do any experiments at home, so instead I spend most of my days reading through the literature to gain a better understanding of my project, contribute towards the introductory chapters of my thesis and try to map out the first experiments I can do in the lab when life returns to some kind of normality.

Thankfully, I have my work buddy to help me read some papers and pass the time quickly! I will miss her when I finally leave, but I am very much looking forward to meeting everyone part of ARCAID whenever in the future it will be.



5 positions still available in the ARCAID Network!

Spread the word! There are still 5 open positions in ARCAID. We have recently opened recruitment again, so if you know people within your network that are interested, please direct them to our website where they can find all information. Deadline 30th of May 2020.

<https://www.arcaid-h2020.eu/index.php/vacancies>

ARCAID fellow in the news!

Our first ARCAID fellow, Sona Allahverdiyeva, who introduced herself in this newsletter, was interviewed on public television in Azerbeidzjan, on her COVID-19 research! You can watch Sona [here](#). (English subtitles (very necessary for most..;-) are available in the configurations setting of the video)

For more information on the network and topics/input for the next newsletter please contact the project manager (Laurian Jongejan);

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