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Rafael worked as research trainee at International Institute for Software Technology of United Nations University (UNU-IIST) and now he is a guest research at no Imagery and Media Group of LIACS from Universiteit de Leiden and Brazilian Representative of [Associação de Pesquisadores Brasileiros na Holanda](#) (APEBNL).

Interview with Rafael Viana de Carvalho, Former PhD at Leiden Institute of Advanced Computer Science (LIACS), Universiteit Leiden, Netherlands

This interview is part of a focus on the Netherlands published in the [EURAXESS Brazil quarterly newsletter 2](#). Read more testimonials on [Nuffic Neso website](#).

Tell us a bit about yourself. Where are you from? What is your research about?

My name is Rafael Viana de Carvalho, I was born in Rio Branco, capital of the state of Acre in northern Brazil. After completing my BA and Master in Brazil, I completed my PhD in Computer Science at Leiden University in October 2015, working at Leiden Institute of Advanced Computer Science (LIACS). My research area is Computational Models and Simulation Process of Biological Systems and my PhD topic was Modeling of *Mycobacterium* Infection and Innate Immune Response in Zebrafish.

You are still involved in scientific cooperation between the Netherlands and Brazil. Where are you working at the moment?

I'm still associated with LIACS as a guest research and together with Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (FIOCRUZ), I am intermediating a collaboration project between the two institutions. At this moment we are preparing a grant proposal to support the project.

What kind of paperwork did you need to complete in order to get the grant and be able to work in Netherlands? Where did you find all the info you needed?

For my PhD I was awarded an Erasmus Mundus Scholarship for the first 36 months and benefitted of a Science without Borders Scholarship from CNPq for another 24 months.

For the Erasmus Mundus I applied for the MONESIA scholarship, an Erasmus Mundus External Cooperation Window that is not available anymore.

The paperwork was quite simple, consisting of an online application form where I could select two options of mobility from two different countries/areas of interest and this had to be submitted together with my CV. The institution/supervisor was the main instance responsible for the selection of the candidates. In my case, my first choice (Leiden University) was accepted. Once accepted, the paperwork becomes more difficult, expensive and stressful because you have to formalise your documents with sworn translations and deal with the embassy, various stamps and a bureaucratic process in general.

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For the Science Without Borders Scholarship from CNPq, the process was simpler and smoother, since I was already working and living in the Netherlands. The paperwork consisted of an online form, a letter from the institution confirming I was accepted, a work plan and a letter where I described my proposal requesting the grant to finish my PhD. A SwB dedicated person in Brazil guided me through the process.

For both scholarships, I had to send annual reports with the progress of my work and one final report. I also had to prove that I finished my PhD and returned to my country.

How long have you been working in the Netherlands? What made you decide to come to the Netherlands?

I worked in the Netherlands for 5 years. A friend of mine did his professional PhD in Eindhoven and was enthusiastic about living and working in the Netherlands. When I was looking for a PhD position, my first option was to find a topic which best matched my research field, in a renowned place. I was lucky to find an open position through the Erasmus Mundus Mobility program at LIACS. I didn't think twice about applying. Leiden was my first and only choice.

What are your impressions about the Netherlands' R&D system?

I was surprised with the level of the Dutch government's investments in R&D. The system works well, and one gets support from both the university and the government to focus only on his/her research. People are flexible and the only obligation is the productivity in your R&D.

What most surprised me was the fact that PhD candidates have the same rights as any other workers. You work for the university, you have employment benefits and people consider your "studies" as a job. In Brazil, a PhD student is merely a student, rights or employment benefits are limited. In my opinion, Brazil should learn from the Netherlands in this respect. On the other hand, since one is being treated as a professional, you have to work by yourself; Nobody tells you what to do or how to do it. You need to be more independent, organised and an autodidact, which is good for your work.

Regarding administrative and practical issues t daily problems like finding a place to live, dealing with (transportation, taxes, medical issues, etc) more support would have been helpful, especially if like me you don't know how things work in the Netherlands when you first arrive. I wish I had known about [EURAXESS services](#) at that time. It would have been very useful to help me solving several administrative difficulties and daily life issues.

How do you like the Netherlands outside of work?

Living in the Netherlands was a special and rewarding experience. The Netherlands is a country where visitors feel at home easily. The Dutch are generally very hospitable and friendly towards foreigners. With the abundance of social and cultural activities available, I was in contact with people from various countries, sharing different cultures and experiences.



It is a flat, organised and beautiful country with many parks, historical buildings and lovely cities. Despite the weather, which sometimes can annoy you (mainly if you come from a warm country), the quality of life, the security and organisation of the cities made me not miss my hometown.

What would you recommend to a Brazilian who is thinking about working in the Netherlands?

No matter which country you choose to work/live, my recommendation would be to pay attention to cultural differences. To adapt quickly you need to get involved in the Dutch culture and accept their way of living. Learning Dutch is a plus if you want to stay longer than your studies. Although the Dutch speak English (pretty well I must say) my advice is to blend in, find a good job. Learning the language and understanding the culture are essential.