



Newsletter December - 2020

Cluster Meeting on the impact of Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) projects in Central Asia

Since 2014, with the support of the Erasmus+ Programme, universities and organizations in Europe and Central Asia work in international partnership to share innovative developments and practice. The Programme provides substantial investments in the key areas of international mobility, joint degrees, international cooperation partnerships for innovation, and supporting the reforms of higher education policies. The activities financed by Erasmus+ are expected to have positive effects on the internationalisation strategies of higher education institutions and thus contribute to a higher quality of teaching and learning, research and other support activities.

The grants provided for Erasmus+ CBHE facilitate students and academics to enhance their knowledge and employment opportunities: the budget received for CBHE projects since 2014 is 14.7 billion Euros. Compared to previous, the budget has been increased by 40%, confirming the EU's commitments to invest in these areas during seven years. About 32% of the annual global budget for CBHE projects is allocated to the countries of Central Asia, among these projects more than 10% are coordinated by CA uni-

versities.

Since 2015, Erasmus+ CBHE projects have shown a steady increase in the number of applications from Central Asia countries. In total, during five Erasmus+ Calls, the number of received applications was – 983 with 150 financed projects: Kazakhstan - 61, Kyrgyzstan - 21, Uzbekistan - 44, Tajikistan - 17, Turkmenistan - 7.

Most of the CBHE projects, in which CA universities are involved, are collaborative projects on curriculum development. This is traditional type of projects where teachers, working together in international consortia, develop, revise and update courses and curricula. The overwhelming majority of project developments have been accredited by universities and ministries of Central Asia which indicates a high level of their quality, compliance with modern trends and the needs of universities.



The CBHE projects have contributed to increasing the number of university disciplines and specialties, introduction of new teaching methods, improving the university governance and strengthening the links between higher education institutions and enterprises.

On November 19-20, 2020 the Education, Culture and Audiovisual Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission initiated a Regional Cluster Meeting on the impact of Erasmus+ projects in the field of Capacity Building of Higher Education in Central Asia. The Meeting was held in the online format and organized by EACEA, the DG for Education, Youth, Sports and Culture and the National Erasmus+ Offices in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.



The Cluster Meeting was opened by the welcoming speeches of Sophie Bernaerts, Head of Department Erasmus+, EACEA, and representatives of Ministers of Education and Sciences of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan.

Head of the Erasmus + CBHE International Sector (EACEA), Anila Troshani, opened the Plenary session of the first Conference day with a presentation on the impact of CBHE projects on higher education in Central Asia. The second speaker, Nicholas Taylor, Team Leader for Central Asian countries and Mongolia, DG for International Cooperation and Development made a speech on the regional cooperation in Central Asia.

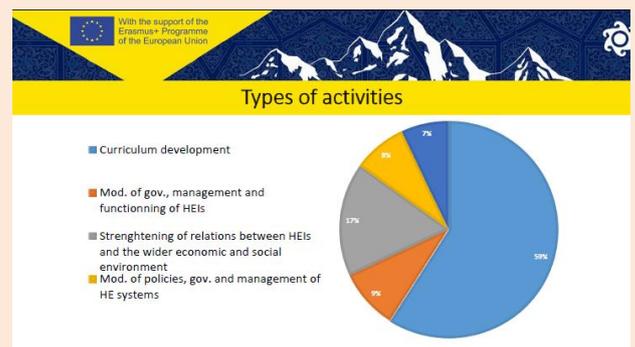
During Workshop sessions, followed the Plenary, the participants discussed the CBHE projects results of 2015-2017, the management and implementation issues of projects during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the expanding of re-

gional and interregional cooperation, as well as developed recommendations for the new Erasmus+ Program for the period 2021-2027.

The first 2 parallel working groups joined members and coordinators of 2015-2017 CBHE projects supporting quality, accessibility and internationalisation of universities in Central Asia to discuss the project impact on higher education systems and promoting reforms at national and regional levels.

The participants of the following 3 parallel Workshops discussed the results of the CBHE and ICM (International Credit Mobility) projects supporting modernization, curriculum reform and the Bologna Process in Central Asian universities, compared and analyzed the impact of CBHE projects on the development of cooperation between the countries of the region and summarize the results of CBHE projects worked to develop cooperation between universities and the business sector, and creation of new employment opportunities for university graduates.

The first Conference day was completed with discussion and sum up of five Workshops and with brainstorming for the the future activities of CBHE action for the period of 2021-2027.



Adrian Veale, Desk officer for CA, Directorate-General Education, Youth, Sport and Culture opened the Second day of the Meeting upon financing the upcoming competition of international projects and Mobility Erasmus+ 2021, as well as for the period up to 2027.

Workshop 5, coordinated by the NEO Turkmeni-

stan, addressed the topic **“CBHE projects promoting University & Business cooperation and employability”**. On behalf of Turkmenistan Ya. Jumamuradov (the International University of Humanities and Development of Turkmenistan, Erasmus+ project Coordinator), welcomed the conference.



The Workshop participants discussed the impact of Erasmus+ projects aimed at developing cooperation between higher education institutions and business partners. The implementation of CBHE projects has increased the employment opportunities of university graduates. Within the project frameworks, the teams worked on the development and adaptation of new higher education curricula and have implemented training courses targeted to develop the students’ entrepreneurial competencies, based on their involvement in business environment, and to provide them with internships and jobs attracting to work on fulfilling real business orders.

Almost all speakers noted that the creation of new curricula, implementation of long-term and short-term professional development courses for teachers, which influenced on increasing the level of teaching and training students, were among the projects’ important results. The participants also discussed the project challenges and recommendations for increasing the impact of projects in the future.

The ROAD project (Regional Objectives for Administrative Development) was noted as one of the successful Erasmus+ projects that have contributed to the formation of a university-entrepreneurial cooperation model in Turkmen-

istan. The established counselling centers operate currently in accordance with the regulations of the Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan and in coordination with the Academy of Civil Servants of Turkmenistan. Conducted trainings opened for teachers possibilities to increase their academic potential, and to modernize curricula, using advanced ICT-based teaching and pedagogical approaches. Through the project activities, the members have created contacts with CA regional professionals and established a research community on a mutually interested basis to support and disseminate the ideas of the project. However, the centers have not currently received license for paid training services, thus operate on a free basis and are entirely supported by the universities.

Unfortunately, as speakers noted, the problem with centers certification remained relevant and required further development of mechanisms for the interaction of higher education and the labor market.

As a result of CBHE activities, the new training quality standards have been developed and implemented in curricula. The knowledge gained has created additional opportunities for young specialists’ employment. For example, it was noted that CBHE projects made possible to develop curricula for engineers with economist skills who are in high demands for the private sector.

Successful examples of business-university cooperation in research field were presented as a result of the project activities by the Bukhara Medical University (Uzbekistan): the university undergraduates were able to continue their studies in a foreign educational institution to obtain a PhD.

The participants of the ENINEDU project (System Standard Cooperation Practice of University and Business Sector) from Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, noted that the student selection process should include business partners requirements, and educational programs should be updated on the requests of employers, taking into account skills and abilities of university

graduates. As a result, employers could receive specialists who are in demand in the labor market.

The CBHE projects have contributed to the development of university libraries of Turkmenistan. The library is an important resource of the educational system, which requires constant updating and improvement, and the modern library is not only the opportunity to increase the level of knowledge of teachers and students in general sense and digital skills, it is also a place of meeting for all participants of the educational process - support for the development and strengthening of intercultural dialogue.

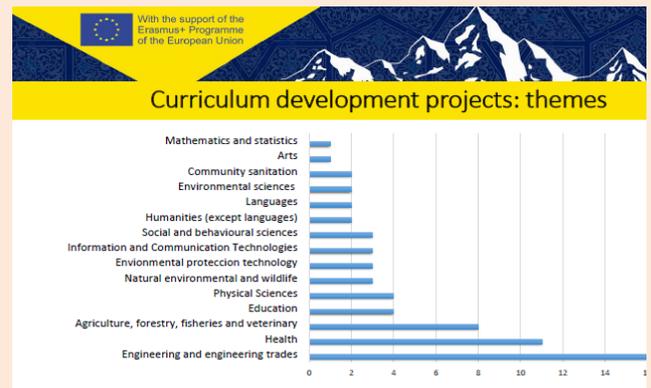
Within the framework of CBHE, the project teams developed virtual university libraries, studied the Moodle program, and could create digital knowledge portals (Sanly Bilim Portaly), which are currently actively used in the educational process and have contributed to the system of advanced training.

From the projects' experience on the study of computer science as second competence, the project members presented the project practice of cooperation with industry employers. According to the survey results, they could determine the employees' needs to improve knowledge of computer science and IT technologies, and organized seminars for them on the basis of the faculty of advanced training.



The Turkmen representatives also mentioned the latest TEMPUS CBHE projects (UNIWORK and INOCAST) on the cooperation practice of universities and private companies. During the implementation of the UNIWORK project (Strengthening Career Centers in Central Asia Higher Education Institutions to Empower Graduates in Obtaining and Creating Quality Em-

ployment) they studied the experience of Spain, England, Austria, and Central Asian university career centers, consulting centers, volunteer departments, and fairs' work. As the main projects' outcomes, the career centers were created on the basis of two Turkmen universities, the teams could establish close contacts with private business which created new engaging opportunities for graduates, and also studied specific problems in the area.



The participants also discussed the project challenges and recommendations for increasing the impact of projects in the future:

- When developing curricula and plans, there were difficulties in understanding the goals and objectives on the part of university participants and business partners.
- There is no methodology for developing joint educational programs of universities and enterprises.
- The culture of interaction with employers in the implementation of training programs has not been studied yet.
- There is a problem of institutionalization of training centers created as a result of projects, for example, centers of continuing education, since the state imposes strict requirements on such institutions.
- There is no feedback from business partners.

The Workshop made the following recommendations:

- Develop a mechanism for creating joint curricula for training specialists in cooperation

between universities and business structures

- Include employers in the project consortium
- Pay attention to strengthening long-term business contacts between universities and business partners
- Develop clear and transparent employment questionnaires to increase the employability of university graduates
- Move to a new level of work with projects, specifically, after the project completion, study the possibility of licensing the activities/services created during the project life in order to increase its sustainability
- It is necessary to train project participants to protect their knowledge and skills as intellectual property rights
- Study the problems of graduates' employment and develop recommendations to solve these problems, as well as learn to envisage their future opportunities and carrier development

The participants emphasized the importance of interaction problems between the higher education and the labor market. The problem is not simple and requires special attention: on the one hand, it is necessary to meet the requirements of a rapidly changing and developing market, and, on the other hand, many enterprises need highly qualified specialists to raise their productivity to the proper level.

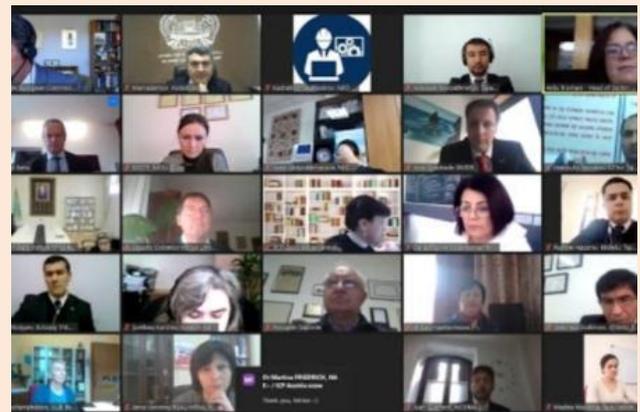
Concluding remarks

The Cluster Meeting on the impact of the Erasmus + CBHE projects in Central Asia brought together a large number of participants and stakeholders. All participants expressed great attention and supported the event with their active involvement. In particular, the Cluster Meeting provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the impact of CBHE projects on regional cooperation, modernization, accessibil-

ity and internationalization of higher education. The meeting facilitated the exchange of best practices and interacting, and was used as a platform for identifying challenges in the implementation of CBHE projects and finding practical solutions.

The Cluster Meeting promoted the activities and results of CBHE projects in Central Asia which increased their visibility at different levels, and also would influence the advancement of their quality, impact and sustainability.

The conclusions drawn from the cluster meeting will be useful for all CBHE project participants, administrations of higher education institutions, higher education authorities, ministries and other stakeholders, as well as for the European Commission. These findings will contribute to re-assessing the actual needs of the higher education sector in Central Asia and deciding them more effectively.



The NEO of Turkmenistan expresses gratitude to all representatives of Turkmen universities for their assistance and support before and during the conference, in particular to:

- A. Jumaev (State Power Engineering Institute of Turkmenistan, Vice-Rector, project Coordinator)
- M. Meredova (International University for the Humanities and Development of Turkmenistan, Dean, NEO TM Expert, project Coordinator)
- Ya. Jumamyradow (International University for the Humanities and Development of Turkmenistan, NEO TM Expert, project Coordinator)
- Sh. Byashimov (Turkmen State Institute of Finance, Expert of NEO TM, project Coordinator)
- S. Valieva (Turkmen Institute of Telecommunications and Informatics, Head Department, pro-

ject Coordinator)

- O. Durdyev (Turkmen Agricultural University, project Coordinator)
- O. Nazarova (Turkmen State University, NEO TM Expert)



FOR MORE INFORMATION

National Erasmus+ Office
(NEO) in Turkmenistan

Visiting Address:

182, 1958 (Andalyp Ave.)
744005 Ashgabat Turkmeni-
stan

E-mail: info@erasmusplus.org.tm

Website: www.erasmusplus.org.tm