

Mid-Term Evaluation of the project

HERAS Plus – Higher Education, Research and Applied Science  
(Kosovo)

**Evaluation Report (FINAL)**

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## List of Acronyms

ADA	Austrian Development Agency
ADC	Austrian Development Cooperation
ADO	Academic Development Office
AI	Administrative Instruction
ALLED	Project Aligning Education with Labour Market Needs
APPEAR	Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development
BMBWF	Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Research
CAF	Common Assessment Framework
DAC OECD	Development Assistance Committee – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
EGSS	Environmental, Gender and Social Standards
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENQA	European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies
EQAR	European Register of Quality Assurance Agencies
ERA	European Research Area
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
HERAS+	Higher Education, Research and Applied Science Plus (Project)
Higher KOS	Promoting Institutional Development in Higher Education and Research
KAS	Kosovo Agency of Statistics
KAIP	Kosovo-Austria Institutional Partnership
KAA	Kosovo Accreditation Agency
KEO	Kosovo Erasmus+ Office
KESP	Kosovo Education Strategic Plan
KRIS	Kosovo Research Information System <sup>1</sup>
KWN	Kosovo Women Network
MESTI	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation
NCP	National Contact Points
NDS	National Development Strategy
NQF	National Qualification Framework
NSC	National Scientific Council/National Council of Science
OeAD	Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation
OKAA	Organization of Kosovar-Austrian Alumni
ORCA	Organization for Increasing Quality of Education
PBF	Performance Based Funding
PD	Project Document

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<sup>1</sup> KRIS used to be called CRIS (Current Research Information System) and was renamed by MESTI.

PPs	Programmatic Partnerships
QAIN	Quality Accountability, Integrity and Transparency in Higher Education
RAE	Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian
SD	Social Dimension of the Bologna Process
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SPO	Strategy Planning Office
TOC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UASF	University of Applied Science in Ferizaj
UFAGJ	University of Fehm Agani in Gjakova
UHZ	University of Haxhi Zeka in Peja
UIBM	University Isa Boletini in Mitrovica
UKZ	University Kadri Zeka in Gjilan
UP	University of Prishtina
UUHP	University of Ukshin Hoti in Prizren
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WUS	World University Service Austria
ZSI	Zentrum für Soziale Innovation GmbH

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## 1. Executive Summary

In the last two decades, the Higher Education and Research sector in Kosovo experienced a rapid expansion in terms of education providers and student numbers. Despite these dynamics, the sector faces a number of challenges with regard to legal and economic measures. More precisely, revised legislation is not yet approved and/or implemented, research and innovation policy remain nascent, the sector continues to be severely underfunded with constant unfavorable academic staff - student ratio. These shortcomings add to the low quality of study programmes with regards to labour market needs as well as low capacity for participation in research (including international research).

Taking into the account this situation, the Higher Education Research and Applied Science Plus (HERAS Plus) project was launched in November 2020 with the long-term objective to contribute to the socio-economic and cultural development of the country by delivering three specific outputs which in turn should support the achievement of the general **outcome**:

“The higher education and research system in Kosovo is better governed, more international, coherent, effective and efficient, fostering students’ employability and the third mission of universities”.

The mid-term evaluation of HERAS Plus was conducted during October 2022 to February 2023 by a qualified team consisting of an international evaluation and national expert. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess and present results, to provide findings, conclusions, and recommendations for the remaining implementation period until December 2023 project duration and to identify potential priorities for the development of a follow-up phase or a new project. Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered through a wide range of data collection methods (including on-site face-to-face and online interviews, focus group discussions and a verification workshop), then analysed and later cross-checked through triangulation. In total, 56 respondents (26 women/30 men) were interviewed or participated in a focus group discussion while, 15 respondents (9 men / 6 women) actively participated in the verification workshop. The findings of this evaluation cover all the evaluation criteria agreed upon with the Project Consortium and demonstrate that:

In regard to **relevance** and alignment of HERAS Plus with policies of the target groups and the overall policy objectives such as the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the SDGs the HERAS Plus outputs and outcomes are in line with the priorities of the Kosovar HE and research development policies, the needs of its key stakeholders and beneficiaries (MESTI, KAA and public universities) and the principles of the EHEA, and SDGs.

Due to the change in Government the initial focus of the project in “applied science” shifted more towards “performance-based funding” during the implementation period. The project was flexible and able to adapt its activities to meet this emerging need but some planned initiatives regarding applied science also continued as planned.

In regard to **project design** and planning, referring to target groups, beneficiaries and partners, different approaches and interventions are clearly presented. With respect to project objectives, HERAS Plus is quite ambitious and complex with an overall and specific outcome, three outputs and seven sub-outcomes. There are some conceptual gaps how the three outputs will contribute to the outcome and the seven-sub-outcomes to the main outcome. In addition, indicators and target value(s) could have been designed using a more SMART (specific, measurable achievable and time bound) approach. Nevertheless, the overall project design is also informed by feedback provided by different ADA representatives.

With regards to **effectiveness**, due to its complexity HERAS Plus will not be able to fully achieve the outcome and the seven sub-outcomes. Yet, the majority of the three outputs and 16 activities have already been largely achieved by the end of November 2022 and it is anticipated that a good number will most likely be achieved by the end of 2023 when the project ends.

At the institutional level (output 1) the contributions of HERAS Plus with the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) and the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) were widely recognised and appreciated. These efforts related to drafting the law on higher education, law on Accreditation Agency, the roadmap for performance-based funding approach, and the Kosovo Research Information System (KRIS). In respect to research planning and legislation, the applied research component is partially completed where HERAS Plus contributed to the drafting of the Administrative Instruction (AI) for Applied Science and the Roadmap for Applied Sciences, but the AI is not yet approved by MESTI. The AI on the transfer and forms of transfer of knowledge and technology transfer is available now whereas, the AI of the registration of research and innovation of R&I institutions has been drafted and pending approval by MESTI, whilst the smart specialization strategy (S3) is currently being drafted.

At the university level (output 2) the project was very successful, engaging universities in self-assessment activities through base line assessments which led to the revision of legal frameworks, policies, programme, operational guidelines and the establishment of teaching excellence and research offices. All public universities claimed to have benefitted tremendously from the base-line assessments. In terms of increasing research capacities, the project contributed at the individual level (students and staff) through ten social dimension, ten applied science and nine research grants. In addition, research grants have contributed towards enhancing research capacities at the institutional level as well. Staff and students also participated in university initiatives, workshops for programme design, project management and monitoring. Five programmatic partnerships at the institutional level were also implemented as planned.

At the research level (output 3) the project contributed to improved human capacities and the internationalisation of research because it sponsored 17 PhD and post-Docs stipends (by end of Nov. 2022). There were also staff and student mobilities resulting from Erasmus + agreement through which nine outgoing student mobilities from Kosovo to Austria, eight outgoing mobilities from Kosovo to Austria and six incoming mobilities from Austria to Kosovo were granted.

The project also contributed to internationaliation through a funding scheme for nine regional research networks and seven applications for Horizon Europe so far. The capacities of staff engaged in both schemes have improved their networking, research, and grant application skills.

Regarding the National Contact Point (NCP) system, nine NCPs have been assigned, trained and a portal (website) has been developed. However, there is still a need to strengthen the NCP capacities further since the NCP system has a potential to play an important future role in the internationalisation of research if appropriate implementation strategies are designed. The NCP system is called for by the European Commission and should be professionalized nonetheless, it is MESTI's responsibility to ensure that it functions properly.

The project also contributed to Kosovo's association to Horizon Europe through carrying out ongoing clarification and background work for the MESTI and consulting the European Commission in this regard.

The Kosovo Austrian Alumni Association has not yet achieved the planned results lacking organisational and financial capacities for sustainability in the future. But a study-visit of six OKAA

members in Austria is planned to take place in January 2023 aimed to provide a clear view on the organisation's positive development. The remaining time of HERAS+ will be used intensively to make OKAA more sustainable and self-reliant.

Regarding **capacity development** the project developed and applied a tailor-made concept encompassing different tools and measures at the policy, university, and research levels. The approach of engaging international but also an increasing number of national consultants can be determined as highly effective. Considering the findings, it is suggested, that the capacity building measures have been fully achieved so far, even though some activities are still planned for the remaining period.

**Gender mainstreaming** was considered in the project design and implementation. All three outputs including strategic documents, interventions, and activities, provided evidence for the inclusion of gender mainstreaming. In regard to direct instruments to implement gender mainstreaming in public universities, the report "Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions" provides a useful instrument to measure and monitor gender mainstreaming. At this point it can be regarded that gender related interventions have been largely achieved.

Regarding the **human rights-based approach (HBRA) / social dimension** the project contributed by fostering relevant debates to include the HRBA into relevant university regulations and developed a tool on "Integration and Mainstreaming of Human Rights in Public Institutions in Kosovo". The respective measures seem to be fully achieved for the project period analyzed.

Regarding monitoring the **social standards** of the Environmental, Gender and Social Standards (EGSS), it can be concluded that it has been monitored but eight standards out of 13 were not considered as applicable, but the remaining ones are followed-up with.

With regards to **efficiency**, HERAS Plus appeared to have been well managed and there was an efficient use of the inputs with the main activities focusing directly on achieving the project's outputs. In terms of time, the project started on time but due to the COVID 19 pandemic situation, it had to adjust its timeline of activities during an early stage of the project initiation. With respect to the budget, taking into consideration the scope of the project the budget allocation and distribution regarding the three outputs and other budget lines, seemed realistic and justified. Cooperation among the consortium partners was observed as very fruitful whereas the division of labour and project management was detailed clearly and carried out successfully. With regard to overlap with other ADC funded projects, in the beginning, there were some activity overlaps among the QAIN project and HERAS Plus however, this has been addressed but potential synergies should be further explored.

With regards to **sustainability**, benefits deriving from improved capacity and knowledge at the higher education sector with HERAS Plus support is believed to last beyond the timeframe of the project. An active engagement of the target groups (MESTI, KAA and universities) and a number of improved capacities is a direct contribution to local ownership and sustainability. In regard to the NCP system, they lack capacities to offer support with Horizon Europe programmes requests which questions their functionality of the prevailing system. Additionally, the voluntary based functioning of the Organization of Kosovar-Austrian Alumni is not found to be sustainable in the future. An **exit strategy** has been developed to ensure project sustainability yet, better conceptualizations of the hand-over process for seven interventions in the remaining period of the project or in a potentially new project is required.

The analysis of all collected evidence and the feedback shared by workshop participants in Prishtina have led the evaluation team to the following **recommendations** addressed at different partners:

### **ADC Coordination Office**

- If requested support MESTI in the process of strengthening its higher education capacities at the national level. (Links to findings, 5.1 relevance, EQ 1).
- Ensure a good division of labour especially between the newly planned QAIN project, the current HERAS Plus and the new project. Encourage and offer a positive learning environment for all project staff to share and build on each other's project experiences and approaches. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 8).
- Ensure that staff of all ADC supported projects have respective job classifications and remunerations are equally comparable in the next project. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 8).

### **ADC Project Team and Consortium**

- Develop a structured time-plan for developing a new project based on reflections from previous experiences from HERAS Plus including the findings, conclusions and recommendations from this evaluation, and other ADC projects. (Links to findings, 5.5 follow-up phase, EQ 12).
- Keep the demand driven approach since it contributes to ownership and sustainability and the multi-level intervention strategy (policy - university – research/private sector). (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 5).
- Continue supporting MESTI and HEIs, also see points below, and increase the project's facilitation role in bringing different partners/stakeholders together such as different ministries, public and private HEIs, private sector (industries, SMEs, chamber of commerce) and other relevant HE institutions (e.g., Kosovo ERASMUS Plus Office, National Council of Science). (Links to findings 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4, output 1-output 3).
- If agreed with MESTI and other stakeholders continue with supporting the performance-based funding approach considering the applied science approach, if still required, support KRIS and mainly focus on strengthening research capacities at the policy, university, and research/private sector levels. (Links to findings 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4, output 1-output 3).
- Conceptually, disentangle the human rights-based approach (HRBA) and gender mainstreaming and define them clearly for all relevant outputs and for all relevant project activities in the project implementation, where applicable. (Links to findings, effectiveness 5.2, EQ 6)
- In a new project design present a clear and comprehensible Theory of Change. Simplify the project outcome, develop appropriate indicators, and define the outcome details in the Project Document. Avoid developing sub-outcomes with additional indicators. Ensure that all outputs are well explained and link to each other, indicators are SMART and contribute to a well formulated, realistic, and achievable project outcome. (Links to findings 5.1 relevance, EQ 3).



- Continue the support of different grants with increased budgets, e.g., social dimension grants, specific grants on minorities, gender mainstreaming and disability, applied science and grants for Horizon Europe proposals. Links to findings, effectiveness 5.2, EQ 4, Output 3).
- Continue with scholarships at PhD level, but also consider some for Master's programmes. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4, activity 3.3).

## **MESTI**

- Strengthen donor coordination on a quarterly base to remain informed on all HE donor initiatives in the country. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 9).
- Lead and continue the support on the drafting and implementation of relevant HE laws, policies, regulations, strategies, regulations, etc. and the Kosovo Research Information System (KRIS). (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness output 1).
- Lead and continue the support on the performance-based funding approach considering the applied science approach too. (Links to findings, relevance 5.1, EQ 2.1 and 5.2 effectiveness, output 1 & and 2).
- Considering the international demands and requests in higher education, especially in research (Horizon Europe), ensure that capacities at relevant MESTI units are strengthened timely. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness EQ 4, Output 3).
- Based on previous and on-going, strengthen the existing research governance structure at national level in order to absorb current and future research funds as well as proposal management (e.g., research funding and promotion agency or explore realistic and sustainable alternatives). (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness EQ 4, Output 3).

## **Public and Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**

- Focus on the implementation and monitoring of the strategic plans, sharpen their institutional profiles considering the applied science approach, initiate changes required for the performance-based funding approach, strengthen the Research/International Offices and others based on the baseline assessments. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness output 2).
- On the basis of the report of the "Gender Equality in HEIs in Kosovo" strengthen gender mainstreaming at the institutional but also at the study programme level. Ensure that gender equality plans are available which are a requirement for Horizon Europe. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness EQ 6).
- Exchange experience on human rights issues including different vulnerable and marginalized groups (e.g., minorities, disable people) based on the workshop experiences and its publication of mainstreaming and integrating human rights in HEIs. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, output 2, activity 2.5 & 5.2 effectiveness EQ 6).

## Private Sector

- Based on previous discussions and experiences explore potential cooperations with HEIs and the private sector particularly considering “green jobs”, the circular economy, and the European Green Deal. (Links to EQ 12, Follow-up Phase).
- HEIs should consider how to attract guest lectures, conduct study visits to businesses, and organize internships and cooperation through R&D measures. (Links to findings, EQ 15, Follow-up Phase)

In a nutshell, there was a general consensus among the interviewees that HERAS Plus was indeed a “flagship project” that left an important mark in Kosovo’s higher education. The project has unquestionably contributed towards capacity building at individual and institutional levels and other important processes in the sector especially with the performance based-approach roadmap and the foreseen AI support, but these components are not yet sufficient.

Therefore, more support is needed to establish proper capacities and infrastructure both at university and central levels to allow its implementation. Besides that, the project supported some critical initiatives such as the Kosovo Research Information System (KRIS) to strengthen the research information system as evidence-base for strategic decision-making which is an important step towards an improvement of the research infrastructure but further support in enhancing research capacities at both individual and institutional levels is required.

## 2. Introduction

As stated in the Terms of Reference, the **purpose** of this evaluation is *“to contribute to the accountability towards stakeholders as well as to provide evidence for institutional development and learning. As such, it will also provide recommendations for the remainder of the project implementation and assess the overall situation and the remaining needs for further support in higher education.”*

The evaluation serves a learning function to understand why particular interventions have worked or not and an accountability function towards the donors, i.e., the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and the Kosovan Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI).

The main **objective** of the evaluation is to assess and present results, to provide findings, conclusions, and recommendations for the remaining implementation period until December 2023 and to identify potential priorities for the development of a follow-up phase of a new project. This development process will begin soon after this evaluation will be submitted.

This evaluation was carried out after two years of project implementation, because it was believed that this would be a good timing to evaluate the project interventions and learn for the future.

The direct users of this evaluation are the implementing consortium (WUS Austria, ZSI and OeAD) and the donors (ADA and MESTI) but indirectly all stakeholders should benefit from the findings of the evaluation.

The evaluation **scope** relates to the outcome(s) and all three outputs of the “Higher Education, Research and Applied Science Plus (HERAS Plus) project for the project period from June 2020- November 2022.

As requested in the TOR, the evaluation contacted all major project stakeholders and encompassed all seven public universities in Prishtina, Peja, Prizren, Gjilan, Ferizaj, Gjakova and Mitrovica (South), also, see Annex 8.4.

The evaluation team also adhered to the “Guidelines for Project and Programme Evaluations” developed by the Austrian Development Agency<sup>2</sup> and to the OECD DAC evaluation criteria<sup>3</sup>, also, see chapter 4.1.

## 3. Background and Context Analysis

Higher Education providers in Kosovo have rapidly expanded from 2001, reaching its peak by 2018 counting 9 public and 22 private providers. In the last five years the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) decreased after changes in the organisation and management of the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA). In 2022 the KAA accredited 9 public HEIs<sup>4</sup> and 12 private HEIs<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.entwicklung.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumente/Evaluierung/Evaluierungs\\_Leitfaeden/Guidelines\\_for\\_Programme\\_and\\_Project\\_Evaluations\\_ADA\\_2020.pdf](https://www.entwicklung.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Evaluierung/Evaluierungs_Leitfaeden/Guidelines_for_Programme_and_Project_Evaluations_ADA_2020.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> OECD DC Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use, 2019

<sup>4</sup> HERAS Plus supports seven public universities in Prishtina, Peja, Prizren, Gjilan, Ferizaj, Gjakova and Mitrovica (South),

<sup>5</sup> Kosovo Agency of Statistics. (2022). Public Universities Data Set - Series 2018-2021. Prishtina. Retrieved from [https://askdata.rks-gov.net/pxweb/sq/ASKdata/ASKdata\\_\\_Education/](https://askdata.rks-gov.net/pxweb/sq/ASKdata/ASKdata__Education/).

Public and private providers have equal rights according to the Higher Education Law<sup>6</sup> (Kosovo Assembly, 2011) which can be established by Parliament, Municipality, private companies, foundations and trusts and undergo accreditation and licensing procedures outlined in this law. The only difference lays in the establishment, statute approval process, financing, and organisation. Private providers are also not allowed to offer teaching qualifications.

In terms of participation to higher education, Kosovo enjoys a high participation rate compared to other European countries, and higher enrolment rates and graduation rates for women in bachelor, master, and graduate level. In the academic year 2020/21<sup>7</sup>, MESTI (2022, p. 46) in the Kosovo Education Strategy 2022-2026 counted for “95,335 students (57.4% in the public sector and 42.6% in private sector, out of which 58.5% were women”. There are still concerns about access of marginalised groups such as the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) communities and students with special needs.

For the overall number of students over three years, the Education Statistics in Kosovo from the data set of the Kosovo Agency of Statistics show a decrease in student numbers in Public HE in general for all public HEIs with the exception of the University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj, which is interesting because this is the only Applied Science University in Kosovo.

**Table 1** Number of students in public universities in academic years 2018/2019-2020/2021

	2018/2019			2019/2020			2020/2021		
	F	M	T	F	M	T	F	M	T
Universiteti i Prishtinës BA	19160	13858	33025	17898	11633	29531	16860	10264	27124
Universiteti i Prishtinës MA	1301	841	2142	1276	689	1965	1291	725	2016
Universiteti i Prishtinës PhD	35	31	66	53	25	78	21	18	39
<b>Universiteti i Prishtinës Total</b>	<b>20496</b>	<b>14730</b>	<b>35233</b>	<b>19227</b>	<b>12347</b>	<b>31574</b>	<b>18172</b>	<b>11007</b>	<b>29179</b>
Universiteti i Prizrenit BA	3703	1685	5378	2776	1000	3776	2750	1232	3982
Universiteti i Prizrenit MA	74	91	165	:	:	:	82	92	174
<b>Universiteti i Prizrenit Total</b>	<b>3777</b>	<b>1776</b>	<b>5543</b>	<b>2776</b>	<b>1000</b>	<b>3776</b>	<b>2832</b>	<b>1324</b>	<b>4156</b>
Universiteti i Pejës BA	4248	6231	10479	3916	5697	9613	2867	4905	7772
Universiteti i Pejës MA	167	104	271	:	:	:	149	98	247
<b>Universiteti i Pejes Total</b>	<b>4415</b>	<b>6335</b>	<b>10750</b>	<b>3916</b>	<b>5697</b>	<b>9613</b>	<b>3016</b>	<b>5003</b>	<b>8019</b>
Universiteti i Gjakovës BA	1854	565	2419	1399	254	1653	1303	214	1517
Universiteti i Gjakovës MA	-	-	-	:	:	:	-	-	-
<b>Universiteti i Gjakoves Total</b>	<b>1854</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>2419</b>	<b>1399</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>1653</b>	<b>1303</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>1517</b>
Universiteti i Gjilanit BA	1896	935	2831	1694	828	2522	1603	747	2350
Universiteti i Gjilanit MA	33	42	75	30	29	59	39	37	76
<b>Universiteti i Gjilanit Total</b>	<b>1929</b>	<b>977</b>	<b>2906</b>	<b>1724</b>	<b>857</b>	<b>2581</b>	<b>1642</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>2426</b>
Universiteti i Mitrovices BA	1606	1070	2676	1126	534	1660	1316	717	2033
Universiteti i Mitrovices MA	25	33	58	:	:	:	31	31	62
<b>Universiteti i Mitrovices Total</b>	<b>1631</b>	<b>1103</b>	<b>2734</b>	<b>1126</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>1660</b>	<b>1347</b>	<b>748</b>	<b>2095</b>
Universiteti i Shkencave të Aplikuara, Ferizaj BA	709	619	1328	719	617	1336	739	510	1249
Universiteti i Shkencave të Aplikuara, Ferizaj MA	-	-	-	44	29	73	65	65	130

<sup>6</sup> Kosovo Assembly. (2011). LAW No.04/L-037 ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC KOSOVO. Prishtina: OFFICIAL GAZETTE OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO. Retrieved from <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=2761>.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. (2022). Education Strategy 2022-2026. Prishtina. Retrieved from <https://masht.rks-gov.net/en/education-strategy2022-2026/>.

<b>Universiteti i Shkencave te Aplikuara Ferizaj Total</b>	<b>709</b>	<b>619</b>	<b>1328</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>1409</b>	<b>804</b>	<b>575</b>	<b>1379</b>
Fakulteti i Studimeve Islame BA	113	200	313	113	161	274	109	157	266
Fakulteti i Studimeve Islame MA	5	10	15	5	15	20	8	17	25
<b>Fakulteti i Studimeve Islame Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>294</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>291</b>
Akademia e Kosovës për Siguri Publike BA	20	210	230	18	210	228	14	163	177
Akademia e Kosovës për Siguri Publike MA	-	-	-	:	:	:	-	-	-
<b>Akademia e Kosoves per Siguri Publike</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>177</b>
<b>Total BA</b>	<b>33309</b>	<b>25373</b>	<b>58679</b>	<b>29659</b>	<b>20934</b>	<b>50593</b>	<b>27561</b>	<b>18909</b>	<b>46470</b>
<b>Total MA</b>	<b>1605</b>	<b>1121</b>	<b>2726</b>	<b>1355</b>	<b>762</b>	<b>2117</b>	<b>1665</b>	<b>1065</b>	<b>2730</b>
<b>Total PhD</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Total Public</b>	<b>34949</b>	<b>26525</b>	<b>61471</b>	<b>31067</b>	<b>21721</b>	<b>52788</b>	<b>29247</b>	<b>19992</b>	<b>49239</b>

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics Data Base

Despite the high number of HE institutions and student enrolment, the number of students graduating with bachelor level degrees remains low. According to the education statistics 2020/2021, this number was 6,193<sup>8</sup> in total which may be one of the factors why Kosovo still remains a country with a high proportion of youth unemployment. In 2021 Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) reported a decrease in youth unemployment to 34% in the fourth trimester from 57.3% in the fourth trimester in 2018, and a decrease to 43.1 % for young women from 69.3% in 2018. The general unemployment rate in the end of 2021 reported by the KAS is 19%.

**Table 2** Unemployment rate in the period 2018-2021

	TM4 2021			TM4 2020			TM4 2019			TM4 2018		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
<b>15-24</b>	30.6	43.1	34.6	48.0	53.7	49.9	44.8	57.6	49.1	51.4	69.3	57.3
<b>25-34</b>	23.6	25.6	24.2	28.0	41.8	32.2	25.5	46.6	31.7	35.7	47.4	38.7
<b>35-44</b>	14.0	24.4	16.9	17.4	25.8	20.1	18.5	23.6	19.9	28.7	23.4	27.5
<b>45-54</b>	11.5	14.3	12.3	17.6	21.4	18.6	13.2	20.9	14.9	16.6	17.0	16.7
<b>55-64</b>	5.9	10.0	6.8	10.5	6.1	9.6	5.5	1.4	4.8	11.4	3.3	10.1
<b>15-64</b>	17.0	24.1	19.0	24.3	33.5	27.0	22.0	36.6	25.9	29.2	38.0	31.4

Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Labour Force Survey 2021

Some of the factors contributing to the decrease in youth unemployment may be attributed to the formalisation of employment instigated by assistance schemes during and post pandemic period. As 2022 statistics are not published yet, there is a difficulty to conclude for any sustainable increase in employment.

In 2021, the Kosovo Government has abolished all student fees in bachelor level in public universities, however, this has not resulted in an increase of student enrolments, necessitating several public universities to recruit students even in September. The assistance scheme for students in 2022, has covered over 50.000 students in December 2022. There is no complete data of student applications according to their status (public/private, and year of study). However, data from KAS

<sup>8</sup> Kosovo Agency of Statistics. (2022). The number of graduated students at Bachelor level 2018-2021. Prishtina. Retrieved January 15, 2023, from <https://askdata.rks-gov.net/sq/4f54bda9-cc1b-4d3f-aa49-ec6d68d7f579>.

show low graduation rates for the period of three years ranging from 35% in 2018 to 27% in 2021. Further mechanisms should be put in place to decrease the period of study and graduation rates at the university.

While there is a general supposition that higher education programmes and curricula are not relevant for labour market needs, there is no reliable information on market needs published by the Kosovo Government or relevant national/public agencies to fully substantiate this but there some studies available from private institutions<sup>9</sup> or donors<sup>10</sup>.

HEIs have been going through continuous programme accreditation processes which are designed to also quality assure the processes universities undertake to stay up to date with market and social needs in society. In addition to the quality assurance processes, there have been several initiatives to support HEIs to develop entrepreneurial and innovation skills.

Regardless of wider participation rates for women in HE, women are still behind in gaining management and leadership positions in academia and generally in employment. In a recent Women Study Conducted by FES Kosovo, 30% of women with higher education degrees are unemployed<sup>11</sup>.

In the context of higher education, HERAS Plus study on “Gender Equality in Higher Education” reveals that although there have been some improvements on women positions in academia, there is a domination of men in upper-level management positions compared to women. Therefore, further strengthening of the gender component for women in academia and women employment should be a priority for public HEIs.

In general, the reduction of some higher education institutions in Kosovo is resulting from the loss of accreditation of HEIs and their study programmes due to new measures applied by the KAA. This impacted the quality of academic staff appointed as programme leaders with the aim of strengthening main fields of teaching and research in HEIs. This impact has been recognized by all stakeholders and beneficiaries as the process has pressurized HEIs to focus on strategic staff and infrastructure development to comply with the accreditation criteria.

The University of Prishtina remains the major player in the sector, with regional universities improving some of their strategic objectives. Some private colleges (UBT<sup>12</sup>, AAB<sup>13</sup>) and non-public institutions (RIT Kosovo<sup>14</sup>, IBCM Mitrovica<sup>15</sup>) have also consolidated their profile and student and staff membership.

The 2022 EC Report on Kosovo, contends that “Little progress was made on improving the quality of education and addressing skill gaps in the labour market” and that “Kosovo’s research and innovation policy remains nascent, lacking a strategic approach to develop, prioritize and promote research activities.”

Despite some new guidelines on doctoral programmes, the number and quality of doctoral programmes is low. The same report mentions that institutions should invest more on research and carefully evaluate academic achievements, publications, and academic staff performance.

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<sup>9</sup> Employment and Labor Market Analysis in Kosovo, Riinvest Institute, 2019

<https://www.riinvestinstitute.org/uploads/files/2021/October/05/Employment-and-Labour-Market-Analysis-ENG1633434888.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> EC and ADC (2019) Labour Market and Skills Needs Analysis. Perspective for the future. Aligning Education for Employment (ALLED 2)

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Kosovo. (2022). Women Study Data SET. Prishtina

<sup>12</sup> University for Business and Technology (UBT)

<sup>13</sup> AAB College

<sup>14</sup> Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT Kosovo)

<sup>15</sup> International Business College Mitrovica (IBCM Mitrovica)

The 2022 budget distribution for HEIs, still focuses on staff costs, goods and services, utilities, subsidies, and capital investment. Kosovo's public spending on science and innovations in 2022 is foreseen to be less than 0.1% of GDP<sup>16</sup> which includes research grants and the support for three institutes, the National University Library, Center for Innovation and Transfer of Technology and the Academy of Science. This is considered as a very low investment to expect any major developments in the research area.

Overall, the research situation remains severe in the country due to several factors such as the lack of research funding, research call management capacities proper infrastructure and vague research requirements in the teaching contracts as those are based mainly on teaching hours not taking into consideration the hours that academic staff would need to spend on research, science, and innovation.

Most of the research taking place is based on an individual initiative by individual researchers / academicians, but it is not an institutionalized process yet. This is an area that would require further attention and improvements in the future.

### **Project Information**

The HERAS Plus project started on June 2020, despite the Covid-19 Government restrictions and protocols, the project managed to be fully operational, and its first official launching transpired on 25<sup>th</sup> of November 2020<sup>17</sup>.

Its aim was to continue supporting development of the HE and research systems in pursuit of the previous ADC interventions in the country (KAIP<sup>18</sup>, Higher KOS<sup>19</sup> and HERAS<sup>20</sup>). More precisely, HERAS Plus was designed to address *“the long-lasting structural challenges within Kosovo's HE and research landscape”* by emphasizing on key national sector stakeholders: the Kosovar Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), Strategic Planning Office (SPO) the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA), and the seven public universities.

The HERAS Plus project is implemented by a Project Consortium consisting of: World University Service (WUS) Austria (lead), Zentrum für Soziale Innovation GmbH (ZSI), Österreichischer Austauschdienst (OeAD) GmbH (renamed to Agency for Education and Internalisation). The total project budget is: €2.800.000 (€ 2.500.000 from the Austrian Development Cooperation or 89% of the total budget and € 300.000 from the Kosovar Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation or 11% of the total budget)<sup>21</sup>.

Consequently, over the period of the three years, HERAS Plus is expected to have contributed towards a higher education and the research system in Kosovo that is better governed, more international, coherent, effective and efficient, fostering students' employability and the third mission of universities (outcome statement)<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> EC Report on Kosovo (2022).

<sup>17</sup> Progress Report #1\_28\_01\_2021

<sup>18</sup> The KAIP ('Kosovo-Austria Institutional Partnership') project was financed by ADC and implemented by the Agency for European Integration and Economic Development between 2006 and 2010.

<sup>19</sup> The Higher KOS ('Promoting Institutional Development in Higher Education and Research in Kosovo') project was also funded by Austrian Development Cooperation and implemented between December 2011 and July 2015. Its aim was to "contribute to the well-functioning of the public higher education institutions in Kosovo along European values and standards and therefore supports the European integration process as well as democratisation and sustainable economic growth" (Review of the Higher KOS project, Report by Kosova

<sup>20</sup> The three-year project "HERAS – Higher Education, Research and Applied Science" was implemented from 2017 – 2019. The project was funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) with funds of Austrian Development Cooperation, and co-financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Republic of Kosovo (MEST)

<sup>21</sup> Annex 3a\_Summary Budget 3b Detailed Budget

<sup>22</sup> Project Document

In particular, through achievements of the following sub-outcomes:

1. The governance in the fields of higher education, quality assurance, applied science and research and innovation improved along European standards.
2. The interactions of universities with the regional economy and the public sector are based on existing needs and intensified through structural science industry/society programmes.
3. The quality and effectiveness in planning, decision-making and implementation improved in the HE sector.
4. The employability of graduates from public universities enhanced.
5. The Social Dimension and the 3rd mission of universities enhanced.
6. The political integration of Kosovo in the field of European R&I policies improved.
7. Kosovo's HE, SME etc. have more networking opportunities and knowledge to access EU R&I and mobility programmes<sup>23</sup>.

By producing three specific outputs:

1. Policy Level: MESTI is enabled to effectively develop and implement policies along European standards in HE and research adapted to the national context. KAA has satisfactorily addressed and implemented key ENQA recommendations.
2. University Level: Strategic plans of public universities are reviewed, developed, and decision-making processes are based on these strategies and better contribution to a competitive HE sector as well as to economic, social and cultural development of Kosovo (in line with the 3rd mission of universities)
3. Research Level: Kosovo has further advanced the quality of its research capacities and the internationalisation/ Europeanisation of its higher education and research system.

The successful achievement of the general outcome, the series of sub-outcomes and the three specific outputs, should advance the well-functioning of higher education and research in Kosovo. It will lead towards the alignment with the principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 9 related to quality assurance, economy, and labour market relevance. Moreover, it will improve international cooperation and the Social Dimension of higher education with the long-term objective to support the socio-economic development of the country.

Therefore, HERAS Plus leverages on a multilevel intervention strategy by addressing local, regional, national, and European potentials to efficiently reach the above-mentioned targets in the given timeframe:

- At system level, HERAS Plus targets key actors of the HE sector in Kosovo: MESTI, KAA, Strategic Planning Office, all seven public universities with special focus on their Quality Assurance offices.
- At institutional level, HERAS Plus focuses on all seven public universities with special focus on their strategic development and implementation of their action/regulatory plans.
- At individual level, HERAS Plus involves individual fellowships, programmatic partnerships, and research projects. Particular emphasis is placed on inclusion and promoting of the vulnerable people and communities such as women and students with RAE ethnic backgrounds<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> HERAS+ Logframe Matrix

<sup>24</sup> Project Document, p. 28.



As stated in the Terms of Reference the **key stakeholders** in the implementation of this project and beneficiaries are (in alphabetical order):

- HEIs: Higher Education Institutions/ seven public universities.
- KAA: Kosovo Accreditation Agency, mandated and responsible for ensuring quality assurance and control in higher education.
- MESTI<sup>25</sup>: Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, the main responsible institution for education and research in Kosovo.
- Individual academic (PhD) and PostDoc staff and students including from underrepresented groups.
- Strategy Planning (SPO). The Prime Minister Office. Key institution for the development, implementation, and monitoring of the Smart Specialization Strategy.

Some other partners are:

- ADC: Austrian Development Coordination Office. ADC has supported post-war higher education in Kosovo through various projects in the past (e.g., KAIP<sup>26</sup>, Higher KOS<sup>27</sup>, HERAS, QAIN<sup>28</sup>, HERAS Plus).
- BMBWF: Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research. Participates in the Steering Board meetings and provides technical expertise.
- KEO: Kosovo Erasmus+ Office (KEO). Provides information on Erasmus+.
- National and international higher education experts.
- NCPs: National Contact Points for Horizon Europe. The NCP system established by MESTI provides information on Horizon Europe in order to increase the participation of Kosovo.
- Other national institutions, donors, and projects.

According to the **Logical Framework** (Logframe), HERAS Plus tries to achieve the following:

**Impact:** More competitive and diversified public higher education and research sector in Kosovo in line with the principles of EHEA, ERA, SDG 4 and SDG 9 related to quality assurance, economy and labour market relevance, international cooperation and the Social Dimension of HE

**Indicators:** By the end of the project better integration of Kosovo into EHEA and ERA (especially through increased participation in European Programmes on Research Technology and Innovation, such as Horizon Europe and COST)

**Outcomes Overall:** The higher education and research system in Kosovo is better governed, more international, coherent, effective and efficient, fostering students' employability and the third mission of universities

In particular / sub-outcomes:

1. The governance in the fields of higher education, quality assurance, applied science and research and innovation improved along European standards.
2. The interactions of universities with the regional economy and the public sector are based on existing needs and intensified through structural science industry/society programmes.
3. The quality and effectiveness in planning, decision-making and implementation improved in the HE sector.

<sup>25</sup> With the establishment of new Government in 2021, MEST became MESTI, including the innovation component.

<sup>26</sup> Kosovo-Austria Institutional Partnership

<sup>27</sup> Promoting Institutional Development in Higher Education and Research

<sup>28</sup> Quality Accountability, Integrity and Transparency in Higher Education

4. The employability of graduates from public universities enhanced.
5. The Social Dimension and the 3rd mission of universities enhanced.
6. The political integration of Kosovo in the field of European R&I policies improved.
7. Kosovo's HE, SME etc. have more networking opportunities and knowledge to access EU R&I and mobility programmes.

**Output 1:** Policy level MESTI is enabled to effectively develop and implement policies along European standards in HE and research adapted to the national context. KAA has satisfactorily addressed and implemented key ENQA recommendations.

*Act.1.1: Support to MESTI for the development of policies, laws, regulations and strategies in the areas of higher education and applied science*

- Law on higher education
- Roadmap and Administrative Instruction for applied science
- Roadmap and Administrative Instruction for performance-based funding of public HEIs

*Act.1.2: Support to KAA in implementing selected ENQA recommendations and development of new standards and procedures for accreditation process*

- ENQA recommendations (KAA was granted status of "ENQA affiliate" for the period Sept. 2022 - Sept. 2027)
- Revised Standards for institutional and programme accreditation
- Kosovo Accreditation Agency Strategic Plan 2021-2025
- KAA law

*Act.1.3: Support to the implementation of the Law on innovation and knowledge transfer by developing and implementing instruments to build bridges between universities and the economy*

- Law on innovation and knowledge transfer
- National Science Council (NEC) & National Scientific Program in Kosovo
- Administrative Instruction on registration of research and innovation of R&I institutions

*Act. 1.4: Implementation of a basic research information system (KRIS) as evidence-base for strategic decision making of the MESTI and public HEIs*

- Research information system (KRIS)

*Act. 1.5: Supporting the development and piloting of a Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) for Kosovo*

- Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) for Kosovo
- S3 web-platform

*Act. 1.6: Implementation of at least 2 key instruments for applying a HRBA in HE / ⇒ **Handed over to MESTI, public HEIs & CSOs (exit strategy)***

- Instrument 1: HRBA at the university level
- Instrument 2: Gender-analysis of higher education

**Output 2:** University level Strategic plans of public universities are reviewed, developed, and decision-making processes are based on these strategies and better contribution to a competitive HE sector as well as to economic, social and cultural development of Kosovo (in line with the 3rd mission of universities)

*Act. 2.1: Develop capacities of public universities for conducting their own baseline assessments and strategic plans*

- Baseline assessments of public universities
- New or revised strategic plans of public universities

*Act. 2.2: Development and implementation of a competitive fund for strategic development of public universities*

- Competitive fund for strategic development of public universities based on baseline

*Act. 2.3: Support to internationalisation and mobility (e.g., through Erasmus+) ⇒ **Phase-out / hand-over to Erasmus+ Office in Prishtina***

- Public HEIs are well informed about Erasmus+
- Kosovo Erasmus+ Office in Prishtina (hand-over)

*Act. 2.4: Development and implementation of programmatic partnerships (5 grants) to foster labour market relevance, the Social Dimension of HE (institutional level) and HRBA ⇒ **This will end with HERAS + and public HEIs will apply for other funding schemes (e.g., Erasmus+)***

- Five new or advanced programme partnerships between Kosovan & Austrian partners

*Act. 2.5: Development and implementation of Social Dimension (SD) small grant scheme for students, CSOs, schools and HEIs ⇒ **This activity will be handed over to public HEIs and MESTI.***

- Ten small scale grants scheme for students, CSOs, schools and HEIs

*Act. 2.6: Implementation of recommendations identified during HERAS workshops on applied science approaches. ⇒ **This activity will be handed over to public HEIs and MESTI.***

- Applied science approaches & roadmap

*Act. 2.7: Development and implementation of applied science small grant scheme. ⇒ **This activity could be handed over to students.** Before the hand-over, a broader discussion with local beneficiaries incl. students needs to be initiated to share good practices, lessons learnt and other aspects of grant management from a HERAS+ perspective.*

- 10 small-scale grants for students

**Output 3:** Kosovo has further advanced the quality of its research capacities and the internationalisation/ Europeanisation of its higher education and research system

*Act. 3.1: Improved structural integration of Kosovo in Horizon Europe through an adjusted NCP system, a deliberate decision on the association of Kosovo to Horizon Europe and facilitated access of Kosovan researchers to European R&I programmes.*

- Guidelines and application kit for the Horizon Europe proposal application fund

- Twenty grants (each EUR 1500) to Kosovan applicants
- National Contact Points System/MESTI revision of NCP regulations (working group)
- Train-the-Trainer courses for all NCPs and selected researchers
- New NCP platform

*Act. 3.2: International R&I cooperation support is provided to Kosovan researchers both at regional and European level through two dedicated support mechanisms. ⇒ After pilot testing both schemes will be handed over to MESTI.* Kosovo is providing funding for these schemes already from its own contribution

- Scheme 1: 20 applications (minimum) to Horizon Europe
- Scheme 2: 8 regional research networks

*Act. 3.3: Development and implementation of system of fellowship grants (300 months) including set up of alumni system.*

- Scholarships/fellowship grants (300 months) in Austria
- Kosovar-Austrian Alumni association

## 4. Evaluation Design and Approach

### 4.1. Methodological Approach

This mid-term evaluation was conducted during October 2022 to February 2023.

The ToR specified **15 evaluation questions** under four OECD DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability<sup>29</sup> (Annex 8.7). The evaluation team suggested one additional evaluation question under “relevance” in order to better capture the “Project Design/Intervention Logic”.

Additionally, the ToR specified the following points to be addressed in the evaluation:

- a) The extent to which the project as already achieved its outcome and outputs.
- b) Strengths and areas of improvement in terms of planning, management, implementation, and monitoring
- c) The extent to which cross-cutting issues (gender, principles outlined in the Social Standard Assessment) were applied.
- d) Special focus should be put on sustainability of results including the institutionalization. A reflection on the Exit Strategy - Annex 12 of the project document must be done.
- e) Finally, an assessment of the current status in Higher Education should be done in order to identify the need for potential further interventions which are to be endorsed by ADA management.

During the Kick-Off Meeting on 25.10.2022, it was agreed that “Efficiency” will only be discussed considering the audit reports and the engagement of local experts.

It was also agreed with the Consortium that the evaluation would not report against all activities in detail and adheres to the evaluation questions in a consolidated manner.

<sup>29</sup> „Impact” was also stated in the TOR, but there was an inconsistency since no evaluation questions were proposed. This was clarified in the inception phase. Therefore, the evaluation focused on outcomes and outputs.

In order to ensure that all evaluation questions will be covered an evaluation matrix (Annex 8.2) was developed which identified different evaluation methods for data collection.

## 4.2. Data Collection and Analysis Tools

The evaluation applied the following mixed-method data collection methods and tools:

- A) Project documentation review
- B) Wider literature review
- C) Key informant interviews
- D) Face-to-face and online interviews
- E) Focus group discussions (FGDs)
- F) In-depth analysis of two programmatic partnerships
- G) Verification workshop

A) The systematic **review of project documentation** covered the Project Document, the four successive Progress Reports **including 146 Annexes**, documents outlining the project activities implemented between June 2020 and November 2022 such as the: Exit Strategy, Gender and Social Standards Assessments, Risk Mitigation Strategy, tools and techniques for capacity development, audit reports, statistics on budget allocation, expenditure, monitoring data and specific deliverables / products prepared by national and international experts. The Evaluation Team also considered sources and obtained information from the project website and social platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn (Annex 8.5).

B) The **wider literature review** included the analysis of relevant policies, strategies, studies and reports in order to assess the socio-economic and legal context of the HERAS+ project in regard to higher education and research (Annex 8.5).

C) **Key informants** were defined as experts with unique knowledge of the project and were important interview partners such as: WUS, ZSI, OeAD (Consortium), HERAS Plus project team, BMBWF and ADC (Annex 8.4).

D) **Face-to-face / and online interviews** were conducted with stakeholders from all HERAS Plus three project levels such as policy, university and research (Annex 8.4).

In general, conducting interviews was the main method for collecting primary data on different aspects of the project delivery across all target fields (higher education, research and applied sciences). Based on the stakeholders identified in the TOR a **stakeholder analysis** was included in the Inception Report and deviated from this overview and the list of interview partners presented by the HERAS Plus project team relevant partners were identified. For the evaluation team it was of utter importance that all institutions engaged in the HERAS Plus project had the opportunity to participate in this evaluation

In summary 44 people (21 women/23 men) were engaged in a total of 37 face-to-face or on-line interviews.

E) Additionally, three **focus-group discussions** were conducted for the grantees of research, social dimension and applied science in order to gather their in-depth perspectives and verify or falsify some of the other information gathered. All grantees were contacted and invited by the evaluation team and 12 people (5 women/7 men) were able to participate. (Annex 8.4)

The TOR estimated that 30-40 people will need to be interviewed in this evaluation. Due to the complexity of the project, **56 people in total (26 women/30 men)** were interviewed or participated in a focus group discussion, (Annex 8.3, Annex 8.4).

F) Out of the **five programmatic partnerships** (Output 2) two were selected for an in-depth analysis according to the following criteria:

- Two different themes (one related to applied science and another one)
- Two different implementation paths (one with smooth implementation, other one with challenges)
- Two different types of PPs - one advanced PP (HERAS) and a new PP (HERAS Plus)
- Four different universities/cities in total (Kosovo and Austria)

The two programmatic partnerships selected were:

- *“Upscaling university-industry cooperation through education-knowledge transfer.”* Salzburg University of Applied Sciences (Austria) and the University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj (Kosovo).
- *“Professional development for engineers of tomorrow – PDET”.* University of Leoben, Montanuniversitaet (Austria) and the University of Mitrovica (Kosovo)

G) At the end of the field mission a **verification workshop** was organized where the evaluation team discussed and validated findings and areas for recommendations. 15 interviewees (9 men / 6 women) excluding the evaluation team members participated.

### **Human Rights-Issues and Cross-Cutting Issues**

Human-rights issues and gender mainstreaming will be incorporated in chapter 5 were relevant and separately discussed under EQ 6 and EQ 7, also chapter 5.

In general, the evaluation analyzed the monitoring and implementation of the HRBA approach, gender mainstreaming and the social standards for which the project has set up a HRBA plan / monitoring tool and a progress report on environmental, gender and social risk management and sustainability<sup>30</sup>.

The evaluation team ensured that the methodology was **gender responsive**. During the collection of primary and secondary data and its analysis the evaluation team incorporated a gender lens included the following:

1. Desk review - collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data, from various sources, project documents and others.
2. Data collection - emphasis on equal participation of men and women, where possible, during interviews and focus group discussions.
3. Data analysis - assessed the project performance from a gender perspective and formulated recommendations to further promote gender equality.

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<sup>30</sup> The latter also includes information regarding the Environmental, Gender and Social Standards (EGSS) Checklist.

Regarding under-represented/vulnerable groups/minorities, the evaluation team analysed documents and considered the topic in interviews and focus group discussions.

### **Data Analysis**

For efficient data management and data analysis, the evaluation team followed a multi-step process.

In a first step, during all interviews and focus group discussions notes were taken by the two evaluators. With the permission of the participants, the three FGDs were also recorded with a mobile phone. The evaluation assistant who supported the evaluation team in this process, transcribed the FGDs and the recordings were immediately deleted after the note taking process was completed.

In a second step, at the end of each day, while impressions were still fresh, interview notes were reviewed. All interview-questions were linked to the evaluation questions in the respective questionnaires, and where necessary, additional references/categories to other themes were added in the notes.

In a third step information from all interviews and FGDs was then transferred into a compilation matrix which adhered to the evaluation questions.

In a fourth step based on this compilation, information and data from project documents and the additional literature, the information was triangulated. Data was analyzed and interpreted in relation to the evaluation questions (Annex 8.2).

An overall profoundness was ensured through the wealth of information gathered through interviews, FDGs, large number of project documents, additional literature, the triangulation process and the fact that two experienced evaluators analyzed and interpreted data in an iterative process.

### **Data triangulation**

Data collected for each evaluation question was triangulated and triangulation was ensured through:

- Different data collection methods: interviews, focus group discussions, document review, verification workshop.
- Different types of stakeholders interviewed: policy level/university level/research level, Ministry officials, academic staff/students, HERAS Plus project team, donors, etc.

## **4.3. Limitations, Risks and Mitigation Measures**

The evaluation team did not face any particular limitations, and the potential risks expressed in the Inception Report<sup>31</sup> did not occur. The only issue was the availability of a few interviewees. Since the field mission had to be conducted in December some interview partners were out of the country but were interviewed via zoom a few weeks later.

The project provided four Progress Reports, but the Progress Report No. 4 only included information on project implementation until 31. May 2022. Therefore, no more recent monitoring report / information was easily available, and the evaluation had to follow-up on specific project implementation details for the evaluation period up to November 2022. The four Progress Reports

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<sup>31</sup> Outbreak of Covid-19, another health crisis or political unrest / emergency in the country or unavailability of evaluation team member.

also, did not include data disaggregated by sex in the main report and therefore, separate data needed to be requested and followed up with separately.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Relevance

**EQ 1: To what extent are the objectives of the project still valid for the partner country, its stakeholders and beneficiaries?**

The Kosovo Government Plan (2021-2025)<sup>32</sup> focuses on quality of education, digitalisation, effective management, integrity and improvement of research and innovation environment. The Kosovo Education Strategy 2022-2026 builds on strategic priorities of the KESP 2017-2021 and in terms of higher education focuses on improving the quality, integrity, and competitiveness of higher education through four main specific objectives:

1. **Quality:** apply higher standards of institutional and program evaluations, promotion of teaching and research excellence, and advancement of academic infrastructure.
2. **Governance and Funding:** review of legislation, development of Education Management Information Systems, increase professional capacities and accountability.
3. **Align HEI programmes with Labour Market:** harmonisation of study programmes, increase internships and Cooperation with Industry, increase interdisciplinary and STEM programmes.
4. **Internationalisation:** develop joint study programs, international academic and Research Cooperation and integration in the European Higher Education Area.

Based on these priorities, the HERAS Plus general outcome “education and research system in Kosovo is better governed, more international, coherent, effective and efficient, fostering students’ employability and the third mission of universities” is highly relevant for the higher education sector in Kosovo.

When interviewees were asked about the project relevance there was a broad consensus about the relevance of its interventions and activities, categorized as contributions to the “*national and institutional level*” and as a “*major actor*” in Higher Education. Most contributions at national level fall into the support for improving legislation and governance, mainly mentioning the support HERAS Plus provided to drafting or development of the:

- Administrative Instruction and roadmap for applied science
- Drafting of the KAA Law
- Revision of the accreditation standards
- Roadmap of performance-based funding of public HEI
- Administrative Instruction on “Transfer and forms of transfer of knowledge and technology transfer

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<sup>32</sup> Programi I Qeverisë së Republikës së Kosovës 2021-2025, <https://masht.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Programi-i-Qeverise-se-Kosoves-2021-2025.pdf>



- Administrative Instruction on “Registration of Research and Innovation (R&I) Institutions”
- Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) for Kosovo and a web-based platform
- Roadmap Towards a Research Information System (KRIS) in Kosovo

This was confirmed by the majority of interviewees, including representatives of parliament, government, and donors.

In regard to relevance the two most significant initiatives considered were the Kosovo Research Information System (KRIS) and the Performance Based Budgeting (PBF). While substantial work on KRIS took place during 2022, the PBF initiative is at the initial stage. There were expressed needs by interviewees to follow up and further support the implementation of both initiatives. But the evaluation team also found that academic staff are not fully aware of these two major initiatives yet. Also, see chapter 5.2, Output 1.

At the institutional level for HEIs, interviewees argued that project interventions were based on their needs and processed through base-line assessments to contribute in developing policies, strategies, assessments and other important staff capacity development initiatives specific for their institutions. Examples of policies include:

- Support for development of strategic documents and their action plans followed monitoring and evaluation of their implementation.
- Revision, harmonising the regulatory framework of the public HEIs in line with their statutes.
- Building a quality assurance system that ensures compatibility with the accreditation standards.
- Support for establishment of training centres and others within HEIs designed to deliver continuous capacity building programmes related to teaching, learning, researcher and other relevant matters.

Considering the focus of the Higher Education Research and Applied Science Project (HERAS Plus), the findings of the evaluation team point towards mixed reactions.

The majority of interviewees acknowledged the importance of applied science in general. The public universities, in particular, are well aware that they need to adapt their study programmes to attract more students in future. The applied science approach was perceived as one option to better position the public universities in the HE landscape.

In this regard it needs to be pointed out that the Applied Science University in Ferizaj is the only public university which does not suffer from declining student numbers, also, see chapter 1, which would indicate that the concept of applied science approach is well accepted by students and successful. It was also reported that *“students from Ferizaj easily find jobs”*.

At the same time the concept of applied science was not clear to all interviewees and the practical implementation seem to overstrain current institutional capacities. It was noted that its implementation will require more time and efforts since there are other competing priorities too.

Even though the HERAS Plus was focused on applied science, this seems to have somehow changed due to the new Government and the focus shifted from “applied science” more towards “performance-based funding” (also, see EQ 2.1). Nevertheless, some of the important groundwork for applied science was completed (Administrative Instruction on applied science & roadmap) during this project phase.

For, further details on the implementation of the applied science approach see chapter 5.2.

The project was also referred to as a “flagship” project and also adheres to the priorities of the Austrian Development Cooperation<sup>33</sup> and the EC took note of the project’s progress in one of its progress reports.

**EQ 2.1: Is the project still corresponding to the priorities and policies of the beneficiaries? And if not, how can a potential follow-up project ensure relevance?**

Related to targeted beneficiaries at system and institutional level, HERAS Plus project was appraised as very relevant and demand-driven by all interviewees. For instance, some interview participants stated that this was “a star project” with incredible adaption capabilities regardless of the Government structures and changes.

*“They have been supporting all the needs in dire. HERAS is doing a great job in supporting Government priorities and of course it is making change”.*

Moreover, the project was found as a very reliable partner also for new priorities such as the performance-based funding approach. This new priority appears as a strategic move to increase accountability and transparency of HEIs.

The performance-based funding (PBF) system is a model that provides an overview on how successfully institutions have used government funds to reach their intended objectives and performance goals. Furthermore, this funding structure incorporates both enrolment and specific performance metrics as incentives for universities to continue to make progress on their intended objectives<sup>34</sup>. The respective Administrative Instruction has not been drafted yet; however, the Ministry interest remains high viewing this as an opportunity to ensure autonomy of universities and at the same time accountability.

In regard to the PBF approach there was a general agreement from all interviewees that further support at policy and institutional level for drafting legal framework, documentations, training and evaluation aspect to build capacities for proper implementation is needed.

At university level, there was an unanimous agreement among all interviewees that this was the most flexible project of all HE donor projects offering support that addressed university issues based on their needs.

*“For sure the HERAS voice is heard in Kosovo. There are many projects that their voices are not heard. Their voice is heard at all levels, national, university and policy. All-inclusive and comprehensive in the HE”.*

Yet, when it comes to specific target groups, the relevance of HERAS Plus was observed in different manners by interviewees. More specifically, interviewees, mentioned that although the project aimed to ensure participation of women and individuals from vulnerable/under-represented groups in a number of its activities, it was more challenging than expected despite their efforts to involve students from minority communities into planned activities.

Some stated that this may be a result of their poor social and economic backgrounds and lack of awareness on education importance. Other reasons identified were lack of proper infrastructure within the universities to support access for students with special needs recommending alternative

<sup>33</sup> Austrian Development Cooperation. (2013). Kosovo Country Strategy 2013–2020, extended until the end of 2021.

<sup>34</sup> The Roadmap for Performance Based Funding of Public Higher Education Institutions, 2022.

forms of teaching such as hybrid or online lectures and improved infrastructure facilitating access to education for these groups.

In regard to female students, the Education Statistics Report 2020-2021 presents that women are quite numerous in higher education, representing 58.5 % of all students enrolled in public universities. But what seems to be more apparent is, the need for a better integration of women in HE and research for senior academic positions and after graduation, when women enter the labour market. This was voiced by several interviewees.

As specified in the HERAS Plus Project Document the gender balance and participation of under-represented groups will be taken into account when selecting candidates for research, applied science and social dimension grants. In addition, the small projects undertaken under Sub-outcome (5) are intended to foster the implementation of the Social Dimension in Kosovo, especially the ability of under-represented groups to participate in and complete higher education. All these small projects are specifically tackling the issue of marginalization, namely students with disabilities, students from RAE communities, returned migrants and other relevant groups. In that sense, HERAS Plus is relevant to the need for a better integration and employability of underrepresented groups whereas gender equality was a criterion as a cross-cutting topic in programmatic partnerships and research projects, also, see chapter 5.2 for further details.

**EQ 2.2: Is the project in line with the latest developments in the EHEA and the relevant SDGs?**

The **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)** at present comprises of 49 countries that act in accordance with the Bologna Process<sup>35</sup>. To become a member of the EHEA, countries are required to adhere to the following principles:

- International mobility of students and staff
- Autonomous higher education institutions
- Student participation in the governance of higher education
- Public responsibility for higher education
- The social dimension of the Bologna Process

HERAS Plus efforts to enhance the internalisation of students and staff and supports activities for the country's international cooperations and partnerships are in line with the EHEA's first principle.

Moreover, capacity development activities through supporting strategic planning and decision making, mapping of internal regulations, will most likely lead towards better governed and autonomous HEI which is in line with the EHEA's second principle.

In addition, support with establishing and enhancing quality assurance systems along with the new Performance-Based Budgeting approach contribute directly to EHEA's third and fourth principle and lastly, attempts of inclusion and participation of underrepresented groups in HERAS+ activities at all levels addresses the Social Dimension principle of the Bologna Process, referring to the fifth EHEA principle.

The **Sustainable Development Goals** are a set of 17 goals stemming from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. HERAS Plus outputs and outcomes are directly connected to the SDG Goal

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<sup>35</sup> Source: <http://www.ehea.info/page-members>

4: *“Quality education”* and Goal 9: *“Industry, innovation, and infrastructure”* (through advancing the quality of research capacities).

But HERAS Plus also contributes indirectly to the following Goals: Goal 5: *“Gender equality”* (through promoting human rights and gender equality within the HE system), Goal 8: *“Decent work and economic growth”* (student employability, increased economy and labour market relevance), and Goal 16: *“Peace, justice and strong institutions”* (through capacity building within MESTI, KAA and public HEIs).

A number of activities within the project such as the: inclusion of labour market relevance in HEIs strategic documents and action plans; revision of accreditation standards to include student employability emphasizing entrepreneurship, technical and vocational skills; the new performance-based formula of HEIs relying on labour market relevance; awarded grants in applied science, and trainings for HEIs to improve study programme learning outcomes that foster labour market relevance, education and skills of students and young professional have contributed towards the improvement of the HE responsiveness to labour market needs and link to an extent with (SDG 4.4 target<sup>36</sup>).

Nevertheless, there are issues of cause and effect-chains between HERAS Plus activities and achievements on these higher-level goals.

Overall, the HERAS Plus targeted outputs and outcomes are in line with the priorities of the Kosovar Education Strategy 2022-2026 and the Kosovo Government Plan 2021-2025, the needs of its key stakeholders and beneficiaries (MESTI, KAA and public universities) and the principles of the EHEA, ERA and SDGs.

### EQ 3: Project Design / Intervention Logic

In general, the **design of the HERAS Plus project** referring to target groups, beneficiaries and partners, different approaches and interventions is clearly presented in the Project Document. The 13 Annexes of the Project Document also provide useful information.

The project consists of a distinct impact statement, an overall and specific outcome statements and three outputs and a total of 39 indicators.

What appears striking is that the overall project outcome statement was further elaborated into seven “sub-outcomes” including 14 indicators<sup>37</sup>, intended to provide a more comprehensible definition of the project outcome.

These seven “sub-outcomes” and respective indicators were included in the logframe matrix which makes it more challenging to comprehend the project objectives, results and indicators at different levels.

There are several assumptions behind the seven “sub-outcomes” but they are not elaborated in the Project Document, especially, how exactly the three outputs will lead to or contribute to the “sub-

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<sup>36</sup> SDG target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

<sup>37</sup> Project Document, p.34, 50-51 and logframe matrix.

outcomes". There is a "conceptual" gap because the three outputs and its 16 activities will not automatically lead to the achievements of the outcome and sub-outcomes.

It is also challenging to fully comprehend the "sub-outcomes" since some of them can be linked more towards "impact" and some more towards the "outputs".

The three project outputs are divided at policy level, university level and research level and has been referred to as "multilevel intervention strategy"<sup>38</sup>. They are found to be aligned with each other, also see chapter 5.2.

All three outputs encompass 16 major activities which appear extensive looking at their scope and the number of institutions and partners involved. All of these 16 activities include additional sub-activities each which leads to about 127 activities stated in an overview for the project period of Sept. 2020 - Nov. 2022<sup>39</sup>.

Looking at the indicators and target value(s) stated in the logframe matrix (Annex 8.6), some of them look very similar and not all indicators are SMART - specific, measurable achievable and time bound. Human rights and gender are also referred to in the logframe matrix but separately, even though the thematic issues are part of the activity & indicator stated before.

Also, the baseline information presented in the logframe matrix is quite narrative. Details are useful but could or should be explicated in the Project Document.

The Project Document also includes a Theory of Change (TOC) graphic<sup>40</sup>, which includes the 16 project activities (called outputs) and also, breaks down the seven outcomes into nine. The graph does not include project assumptions which are requested in TOC graphs and the text is too small, to be user-friendly. Generally, a well-presented ToC graph can also be a useful management, monitoring and communication tool, additionally, to the logframe matrix.

Regarding the **development of the HERAS Plus project**, relevant project stakeholders noted that they were involved in the consultative process and expressed strong ownership. Based on the mid-term evaluation of HERAS, the project team developed a HERAS Plus Draft Concept Note and shared it with different partners, conducted a desk analysis, organized several meetings and consultations, and implemented a stakeholder workshop. The evidence found by the evaluation team suggests a very participatory approach having included different project stakeholders at different entry points in the project planning phase<sup>41</sup>.

The differentiation between the three levels: policy, university, and research, was articulated as "highly appropriate" since it provided a useful structure and orientation to see where and how all the different project activities and initiatives are connected.

In general, the majority of interviewees acknowledged the complexity of the project, and they were impressed how the HERAS Plus project team managed all the different assignments and requests.

The project team was portrayed as "*dedicated, pushes things forward, are polite but insists on results*".

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<sup>38</sup> Project Document, p. 50-52, p. 29.

<sup>39</sup> Separate excel shared by the project team on 20.1.2023 via email.

<sup>40</sup> Project Document, Annex 13.

<sup>41</sup> Project Document, p. 25 and „Minutes from Stakeholder workshop: Development of the HERAS follow-up phase, 13.6.2019, Project Document, Annex 6.

The holistic approach of the project and its continuity was highlighted as well, looking at respective regulations first. One interviewee mentioned that *“other donors come with ready made products, but this is not what we need”*.

But some concerns were also raised how the different strategies, policy documents and Administrative Instructions developed and supported will be implemented, further utilized and potentially will lead to change in the higher education sector.

Some interviewees were also critical stating that there are *“too many activities to make a difference”*. *“The project is everywhere and nowhere”*. *“HERAS Plus mission is confusing. They want to be everywhere, they are not specialized. They need to narrow and should be focused on research or universities”*.

The HERAS Plus project applied a “demand driven approach” followed a multilevel intervention strategy, applied a human rights-based approach (also, see chapter 5.2, activity 1.6) as well as considered gender mainstreaming (also, see chapter 5.2, EQ 6 and EQ 7).

**5.2. Effectiveness**

**EQ 4: To what extent has the project already achieved its outcome and output(s) or will be likely to achieve it/them?**

Overall, and despite the Covid-19 pandemic, the project demonstrated and reported on notable achievements in its Progress Reports which were validated through interviews.

The following overview below presents the linkages between the outcome/ seven “sub-outcomes” their indicators and the three outputs followed by findings and achievements.

Due to the complexity of the seven sub-outcomes not all of them will be achieved, see the brief summary below.

But the majority of the three outputs and 16 activities have been largely achieved by the end of November 2022 and it is anticipated that a good number will most likely be achieved by the end of 2023 when the project ends.

**Outcome:** The higher education and research system in Kosovo is better governed, more international, coherent, effective and efficient, fostering students’ employability and the third mission of universities

Sub-Outcomes (SO)	Indicators	Relevant Output(s)/Activities
SO 1: The governance in the fields of higher education, quality assurance, applied science and research and innovation improved along European standards	1a. A positive interim review of ENQA 1b. Adopted law or administrative instructions for applied science. 1c. Adopted administrative instructions which operationalise the research support programmes of MESTI until 2022.	Output 1  Activities 1.1, 1.2, 1.4

Looking at the SO1 indicators it can be stated that KAA has satisfactorily addressed and implemented the key ENQA recommendations and was granted the “affiliate” status by the ENQA Board for the

period Sept. 2022 – Sept. 2027. This can be considered as good progress towards the future aim of becoming an ENQA member.

Regarding applied science some important steps were taken, an Administrative Instruction and a roadmap for applied science were developed. But in general, it seems that the Government’s interest and priority has shifted towards the performance-based funding approach. Therefore, it remains to be seen to what extent applied science will remain important in the near future.

Regarding the operationalization of research support, the project contributed with engaging experts establishing the Kosovo research information (KRIS) system including the development of an Administrative Instruction. Work on KRIS needs to be continued.

SO 2: The interactions of universities with the regional economy and the public sector are based on existing needs and intensified through structural science industry / society programmes.	MESTI is increasingly supporting science-industry and science-society cooperation through dedicated support programme / instruments. One is successfully piloted by MESTI leading to at least 10 new science-economy partnerships.	Output 1  Activities 1.3
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In order to strengthen science-industry-society cooperations two “instruments” were developed, the Administrative Instruction (AI) on “Transfer and forms of transfer of knowledge and technology transfer”, and the AI on “Registration of Research and Innovation (R&I) Institutions”.

A pilot partnership under the leadership of MESTI and 10 new new science-economy partnerships are yet to be developed.

SO 3: The quality and effectiveness in planning, decision-making and implementation improved in the HE sector.	Public universities have enhanced the quality and effectiveness through the development and implementation of strategic plans.	Output 2  Activities 2.1, 2.2
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In general, it can be stated that the quality and effectiveness in planning, decision-making and implementation at the public universities has improved through the revision and development of their strategic plans, update of their statutes, establishment of new offices, capacity development measures, new guidelines, etc.

SO 4: The employability of graduates from public universities enhanced	Labour market relevance of higher education enhanced through 2 developed and implemented support/ programme/ instruments for applied science.	Output 1 & 2  Activities 1.1, 2.6, 2.7
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Regarding SO 4, the overall assumption behind “enhancing employability of graduates from public universities” refers to quality teaching based on research, considers applied science approaches/ instruments and is based on labour market requirements.

It implies that study programs are less theoretical and more practical geared towards developing research capabilities, practical skills in general, knowledge and technical expertise required in the labour market and link to solving societal challenges.

Linking it to applied science, the project supported several activities (Administrative Instruction on applied science, developed a roadmap, workshop-follow ups and ten applied science grants), but at this stage it cannot be concluded that the “employability of graduates has already been enhanced” due to the project interventions.

This is also more an “impact” related objective and the contribution of the project regarding “employability” needs to be well conceptualized in the Project Document.

SO 5: The Social Dimension and the 3rd mission of universities enhanced.	5a. The Social Dimension in HE is increasingly supported by MESTI through structural interventions. 5b. The 3 <sup>rd</sup> mission is reflected in university strategies. 5c. At least one HRBA instrument is successfully implemented leading to an increased number and percentage of persons from vulnerable groups entering/ participating/ successfully completing HE	Output 1  Activities 1.3  Output 2  Activities 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5
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In general, it can be noted that the social dimension and the 3<sup>rd</sup> mission of universities were enhanced through some project interventions and awareness raising measures. The 3<sup>rd</sup> mission is reflected in university strategies, but a continuous engagement will be required of not losing sight of these themes in future. It also needs to be questioned, if the implementation of one project related HRBA instrument can realistically lead to an increase of people from vulnerable groups entering, participating, or successfully completing HE.

SO 6: The political integration of Kosovo in the field of European R&I policies improved.	6a. The Kosovan S3 strategy, which focuses on structured interactions of universities with the regional economy and the public sector, is adopted by the Parliament (also relates to outcome 2). 6b. Accession of Kosovo to Horizon Europe is endorsed by the EU.	Output 1  Activity 1.5  Output 3  Activity 3.1
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Overall, it can be stated that the political integration of Kosovo in the field of European R&I policies has taken important steps and most likely will be improved in future. The Smart Specialization Strategy (S3) will support this process in future. The accession of Kosovo to Horizon Europe was endorsed by the EU.

SO 7: Kosovo’s HE, SME etc. have more networking opportunities and knowledge to access EU R&I and mobility programmes.	7.a. 15% more proposals with Kosovan researchers are submitted to the European Framework programme between 2021 and 2022 than between 2019 and 2020. 7.b. Gender balance in proposals (minimum 40% of the disadvantaged gender).	Output 3  Activities 3.2
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At this moment it is too early to draw some conclusions on indicators 7a) and 7b) but the project has supported several proposals which will be submitted to Horizon Europe.



The **outcome/sub-outcome-level** analysis would suggest that in summary they have been **partially achieved** at this point in time (status November 2022). Some of the additional and more detailed findings and evidence are provided below under the project outputs.

**Output 1 - Policy Level. MESTI is enabled to effectively develop and implement policies along European standards in HE and research adapted to the national context.**

To support MESTI in developing and implementing policies on higher education, quality assurance and research according to European Standards, HERAS Plus project implemented six types of activities:

1. Support to MESTI with development and implementation of legislation, strategies, platforms, and instrument (Activity 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5)
2. Support to KAA to implement ENQA recommendation and development of new standards and procedures for accreditation process (Activity 1.2)
3. Implementation of Human Rights based Approach Instruments (Activity 1.6)

**Activity 1.1.** addressed the Law on Higher education, Roadmap and Administrative Instruction for applied sciences and Roadmap and Administrative Instruction for performance-based funding of public HEI.

In July 2020, MESTI established a working group to revise the Higher Education Law<sup>42</sup>. In August 2020 one on creating policies on applied sciences<sup>43</sup> and in May 2021, one for the development of the Administrative Instruction on Programmes of Applied Sciences<sup>44</sup>.

Whereas the Administrative Instruction on applied science although supported by external project expertise, is still not approved by MESTI, the Higher Education Law was approved by the Government in 2022. The new law has improved the description of Universities of Applied Sciences, allowing for the current University of Applied Sciences or other HEIs of this type in the future to be accommodated in the Higher Education Law. But the main challenge for the Higher Education Law is now getting the approval in the Parliament by 2/3 of the MPs, including those of the Serbian Minority.

According to interviewees, the initial interest in applied sciences regulatory frameworks seemed to have shifted with the change of Government, which is mainly focusing on the completing the Higher Education Law and is prioritising the performance-based funding approach.

The performance-based funding approach was and still is supported by the HERAS Plus supporting MESTI with the know-how of an international expert, working at the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Research. A roadmap for the performance-based funding which was presented in an official kick-off in November 2022<sup>45</sup>.

The roadmap foresees agreements between MESTI and HEI regarding performance-based funding according to two types of universities: teaching focused and research focused. The roadmap does not make a clear description at this point how the status of the universities will be affected as the Higher Education Law requires all HEI institutions with denomination universities to have a research

<sup>42</sup> Progress Report 1, Annex 4: "MESTI Decision on establishment of working group to revise the Higher Education Law".

<sup>43</sup> Progress Report 1, Annex 5: "MESTI decision on establishment of working group on policies regarding applied sciences".

<sup>44</sup> Progress Report 2, Annex 6: "MESTI decision on establishment of working group on AI on applied sciences programmes"

<sup>45</sup> <https://www.heraskosovo.org/the-roadmap-for-performance-based-funding-of-public-higher-education-institutions-was-launched/>

component and offer PhD programmes in at least five fields of study. For the moment only the University of Prishtina offers PhD programmes.

In addition to the roadmap for performance-based funding, the project is also supporting MESTI with a new Administrative Instruction in this regard. This work derives from the findings and recommendations of the roadmap. Support will also be provided for MESTI and the public HEIs to build capacities for entering into performance-based funding arrangements until the end of the project (December 2023).

The majority of the interviewees are aware of the performance-based funding (PBF) approach and were in favour of it. But some potential “threads/challenges” of possible misuse were also stated. The view on the PBF approach to universities was observed as a way to punish universities rather than support them.

*“It will be misused by the Kosovo authorities. It will not work similar to Austria. We are applying with different projects issued by MESTI. You may win those projects only if you know people to win those projects. I am worried and I am very sure that it will not work.”*

Another interviewee was concerned that MESTI may apply certain indicators or targets that will be hard to achieve considering their institutional capacities.

*“The only risk with PBF is such that you put it certain criteria/target that are not well thought of and hard to improve”.*

Although the majority of interviewees (MESTI representative, project team, project partners and donors, some HEIs) were in support of the PBF approach, they also agreed that further capacities should be developed at MESTI to implement the PBF process.

Further, HERAS Plus support to Ministry foreseen in **activity 1.3** are:

- Law on innovation and knowledge transfer
- National Science Council (NEC) & National Scientific Program in Kosovo
- Administrative Instruction on registration of research and innovation of R&I institutions

Support with these activities is important as it builds the legal infrastructure that allows enhancement and promotion of scientific research and innovation and for driving the country’s economic development.

The law on scientific innovation and transfer of knowledge and technology was approved in 2018 (Kosovo Assembly, 2018). The law provisions 0.7 % (of the yearly budget for research. The law also regulates conditions for establishing research institutes for which minimum seven fulltime researchers are required, including appropriate research facilities.

The Administrative Instruction on organization, activity, and composition of the council for the scientific innovation and transfer of knowledge and technology has been approved and will lead to or improve research and innovation but also to build bridges between science and economy, respectively society.

The Administrative Instruction on transfer and forms of knowledge and technology was completed in 2021 but its implementation is considered complex. For example, although there are a few initiatives to establish technology transfer offices (TTOs), there are no officially registered TTOs yet, which have applied these procedures and instruments due to their complexity.

In this regard HEI representatives interviewed claimed that awareness was raised regarding the necessity and utility of the third mission<sup>46</sup> at universities, but with further support required to increase the understanding and implementation at institutional level let alone business and government level. Therefore, applied science component and technology transfer needs to be further strengthened in future projects.

The National Council for Science (NSC) has been established and its 15 members appointed by the Kosovo Assembly in 2022<sup>47</sup>. Following its establishment, the HERAS Plus project supported the work of the NSC through the organization of the first Forum on 'Development of the National Scientific Program in Kosovo and the role of stakeholders and partnership in science' in April 2022<sup>48</sup>. The NSC just recently completed the national research programme which has still not been approved and published. This research programme will be of strategic importance since it will identify national research priorities and will supersede the current research programme from 2011 which was perceived as quite outdated by some interviewees.

The Administrative Instruction on the registration of research and innovation of R&I institutions has been drafted with HERAS Plus support but it is pending approval by MESTI and reliant to the further revision of the existing law on scientific work for additional adjustments if needed. This is important because it regulates, conditions/requirements that institutions must meet for issuing/obtaining licenses, institutional obligations related to the national interest, international documents and directives, dissolution of the Institutions, etc. HERAS Plus has provided national and international expertise in drafting this document.

**Activity 1.4** relates to the Kosovo Research Information System (KRIS) and is based on HERAS Plus synergy efforts with the project Research Cult which was formalised through a Memorandum of Cooperation to avoid overlaps<sup>49</sup>.

KRIS is an Information Management system that "gathers data systematically on research indicators in Kosovo and its Diaspora community, which then enables the possibility to generate research data outputs for all researchers, students, and further for policy makers, and other groups of interest"<sup>50</sup>.

Identified in the tender document as a content management system, it is designed to manage information from different contributors and provide information on research and innovation related activities. It includes information on Researchers, projects, Research Infrastructure, Institutions, Scientific Publications, List of Scientific Journals, Fundings and Research Results<sup>51</sup>. The platform is supposed to communicate with other MESTI platforms such as SMIAL, E akreditimi, public HEI and private HEI repositories as a tool for decision making based on data regarding research productivity and Results.

Most interviewees expressed that once KRIS is operational and fully functional it will make a big difference for research in Kosovo, since it will also be used for registration of research institutes, keep research repositories such as PhD and Master thesis and is considered as an important component for the implementation of the S3 strategy, see activity 1.5 below.

The project developed a roadmap on the development of KRIS, IT specifications for the development of KRIS and the tender documentation.

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<sup>46</sup> Further elaborated under Output 2, activity 2.2

<sup>47</sup> <https://kosovapress.com/en/the-assembly-appoints-the-members-of-the-national-council-of-science/>

<sup>48</sup> Progress Report 4 Heras Plus

<sup>49</sup> Progress Report 2, Annex 14 "MoU between ResearchCult and HERAS Plus"

<sup>50</sup> Progress Report 3, Annex 17 "TORs for KRIS specifications"

<sup>51</sup> Progress Report 3: Annex 18 „Tender dossier for KRIS“

**Activity 1.5** is related to support at national level regarding smart specialisation strategy (S3) and S3 platform.

HERAS Plus supported the development of the S3 platform<sup>52</sup> along with a user manual. This platform is designed to facilitate awareness-raising about smart specializations and growth potentials, consultations, and stakeholder involvement in the Smart Specialization Strategy Development, and Implementation.

The smart specialisation strategy which is still under development at the Strategic Planning Office will be an important tool in the future as it presents an opportunity for the country to focus on building on assets and resources available to tackle socio economic challenges through identifying opportunities for growth and development. Thus, having such a strategy would mean making choices for investment by focusing on competitive strengths and realistic growth potentials supported by a critical mass of activities and entrepreneurial resources.

Moreover, according to the Progress Report 4, the S3 platform is constantly being updated with information/articles by the Strategic Planning Office. Additionally, a study visit of a Kosovan delegation to Austria<sup>53</sup> was organized. Three members of the S3 National Team had the opportunity to participate and benefit from a curated Program with a visit to different institutions concerning the cooperation, interplay, and implementation of the S3 and regional strategies with higher education institutions and industry.

However, the main issue which still remains is the coordination between different activities that are spread across three ministries namely, MESTI<sup>54</sup>, MEIT<sup>55</sup> and the Ministry of Economy and to prioritize domains and activities with a potential to generate knowledge driven growth.

It is also not clear, if the S3 has been tackled in the national research plan/national scientific program to cover cross cutting sectors or clusters including social, cultural, and creative industries or different application of technology to specific social, environmental health and security problems among many.

In general, it was expressed that there is no coordination for innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives organized by the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade. This misalignment is one of the main problems for difficulties in drafting and/or implementing the law on innovation and knowledge transfer, the smart specialisation strategy and the applied research initiatives. Thus, there is an ongoing process to assign one of the ministries as a leader in this process.

**Activity 1.6** planned support in developing 2 key instruments for applying the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) in HE.

- Instrument 1: HRBA at the university level
- Instrument 2: Gender-analysis of higher education

A HRBA approach can be understood as a framework that HE actors use to ensure the students' rights to education and within education institutions. It also includes approaches in management, study programmes and other university activities undertaken to promote human rights, prevent

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<sup>52</sup> <https://smartkosova.rks-gov.net/en/>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.heraskosovo.org/support-to-the-smart-specialization-strategy-development-study-visit-to-austria/>

<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Education Science, Technology and Innovation

<sup>55</sup> Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade

abuse and develop a just society. According to the Progress Reports two research reports are produced that address HRBA:

1. An exploration of status and good practices regarding the integration of HRBA in public HEI<sup>56</sup>
2. Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo

The first research report focuses to identify the extent to which the human-based approach is embedded in the teaching, learning and research processes in HEIs, mechanisms that are in place to protect human rights and identifies best practices used in HEIs. It includes guidance, survey results, good practices, and recommendations. The study concludes that the HEIs are in the initial phases of applying a systematic HRBA. But the changes instigated by the KAA evaluation practices have prompted greater considerations of rights issues regarding HEI regulations and mechanisms.

The most important changes are the inclusion of the approach in the statutes, study regulations, code of ethics, staff performance regulation, strategic planning and other. For example, the HEI baseline assessments have made references to this dimension, and several changes in the HEI policies and regulations have addressed it.

The second research report uses a framework approach to analyze gender equality in HEIs. As such, although this was the first report, methodologically it has provided an instrument to measure, report and improve gender equality. The report offers recommendations in line with the framework, resources and tools that could assist HEIs to better address gender inequality in future.

**Activity 1.2** relates to the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) and is perceived as an important element of the HERAS Plus project. Its support was formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)<sup>57</sup> which listed 10 activities including:

- Appointment of one contact person for daily communication with KAA in the implementation of the join activities.
- Support in the establishment of KAA appeals committee.
- Support in drafting the new Law on KAA with international and national expertise.
- Supporting the drafting of the guidelines and handbook for training of experts<sup>58</sup>
- Take part in working groups established by MES/KAA regarding revision of legislation.
- Provide expert advice for the revision of the accreditation/standards manual.
- Support the development of the Strategic plan.
- Development of guidelines and processes for external QA for applied sciences institutions and programmes.
- Support in the development of five workshops for the above-mentioned support.
- Organise one study visit for KAA staff<sup>59</sup>.

The activities in the project documentation address the following support:

- Address ENQA recommendations
- Revise Standards for institutional and programme accreditation

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<sup>56</sup>Progress Report 3, Annex 20 "Integration and mainstreaming of human rights in public higher education institutions in Kosovo"

<sup>57</sup> Progress report 1, Annex 7 "MoU between KAA and HERAS Plus"

<sup>58</sup> For example, the "Manual for induction of the international evaluation experts".

<sup>59</sup> The support provided as agreed in the MoU can be validated by the project reports, project website, deliverables, photos, etc.

- Develop Kosovo Accreditation Agency Strategic Plan 2021-2025
- Draft KAA law

The ENQA recommendations were addressed through a workshop organized by the project and resulted in an KAA Action Plan<sup>60</sup>. This Action Plan listed recommendation by ENQA, actions to address these recommendations, responsibilities of actors involved, deliverables, decisions from the National Qualifications Council and timelines. Subsequently, the KAA became an affiliate member of ENQA for the period of Sept. 2022 – Sept. 2027 four years after it was expelled<sup>61</sup>. Being an affiliate member can be considered as good progress towards the future aim of becoming a full ENQA member.

Overall, the project pointed out that it has provided support as agreed in the MOU, but the evaluation team found that there are different perceptions about the completion of the different tasks stated in the MOU.

**Output 2 - University Level. Strategic plans of public universities are reviewed, developed, and decision-making processes are based on these strategies and better contribution to a competitive HE sector as well as to economic, social and cultural development of Kosovo (in line with the 3rd mission of universities)**

In order to improve the quality and effectiveness of public universities in planning, decision-making and implementation the project provided support in the review, revision and update of their strategic plans.

This was achieved by **activity 2.1** inviting universities to conduct baseline assessments analyzing their current institutional structures, legal frameworks (laws, by-laws, statutes, etc.) strategic documents (strategic plans, action plans, annual plans, etc.) operational documents (guidelines, reports, websites, etc.) study programs and general needs. Six HEIs (all except University of Prishtina) completed the baseline assessments<sup>62</sup> which were conducted by national education experts.

In order to further provide tailor-made support, the institutional development of HEIs, the project developed a competitive fund with clear guidelines<sup>63</sup>, **activity 2.2**. According to interviewees, it was *“very easy to access the fund”* and *“the application was very user-friendly”*. Based on the baseline assessments findings, the HEIs identified concrete activities/measures (tailor-made), utilized the fund for the strategic development and MOUs were signed between the project and the public universities.

Some examples of the institutional and organizational actions being implemented through the project are summarized in the following table and additional information can also be retrieved from the HERAS Plus website<sup>64</sup>:

<sup>60</sup>Annex 6 Action Plan for addressing ENQA Recommendations and Areas for Development of KAA

<sup>61</sup> Kosovo Accreditation Agency. <https://akreditimi.rks-gov.net/en/2022/10/28/president-of-enqa-handed-over-to-the-director-of-aka-the-decision-on-the-new-status-of-the-accreditation-agency/>

<sup>62</sup> Progress Report 2, Annexes 17, 19, 21, 22, 23, 25 “Baseline Assessments for Institutional Capacity Development”.

<sup>63</sup> Progress Report 1, Annex 14 “Steps and procedures: Competitive Fund for Strategic Development of Public Universities”

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.heraskosovo.org/>

**Table 3:** Examples of Institutional and Organizational Actions at Public HEIs

University	Some Examples
University of Prishtina (UP)	Project Cycle Management trainings (three days tailor made trainings, coaching sessions for 20 selected academic staff; Roadmap for measuring the performance evaluation system for academic staff; One-day training for improving the design of the learning outcomes of study programmes and courses.
University of “Isa Boletini”, Mitrovica (UIBM)	Two-day workshop for senior management, members of the Steering Council, Deans and academic staff; Two-day workshop on project cycle management for academic staff.
University “Ukshin Hoti” Prizren (UUHP)	Revision and update of two regulations; Developed new QA standards and QA materials. Two-day workshop on project cycle management for academic and administrative staff. Established a Center for Excellence and Teaching
University of Applied Science, Ferizaj (UASF)	UASF Strategic Plan 2022-2026; Workshops for developing a modern system of performance evaluation of academic staff (PEAS); UASF Digitalization strategy 2022-2026, Self-evaluation report (SER)
University “Fehmi Agani”, Gjakova (UFAGJ)	Support for the establishment of the Didactic Center for Teaching and Excellence (DCTE) – regulations, trainings fir DCTE; Two-day workshop on “Effective Mechanisms for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategic Plan”
University “Haxhi Zeka”, Peja (UHZ)	Support provided for the harmonization of existing regulations, respective workshop organized; Training on achieving strategic educational goals embedding the concept of learning outcomes of study programmes and courses; Study on relevance of existing study programmes from a labour market perspective. Established a Center for Excellence and an Office for Scientific Research
University “Kadri Zeka”, Gjilan (UKZ)	Support provided for the harmonization of existing regulations; Workshop on strategic intervention measures to improve the research capacities of academic staff; Study on relevance of existing study programmes from a labour market perspective

Source: Progress Report No. 4

Some interviewees stated:

*“The public universities benefitted a lot from HERAS Plus, since we had the opportunities to analyze and revise our statues, regulations and other guidelines”.*

*“The base-line assessment helped us a lot for prioritization, especially in understanding “quality”. We have been pushed by the national expert to go into depth and we got a very objective picture”.*

*“Through a meeting with the project team, we defined the main areas of support. The baseline-assessment enabled us to see the bigger picture, it was a very deep study”.*

*“The most fruitful cooperation was the support in creating the center for excellence in teaching”.*

*“The amended legislation was the result of the HERAS Plus project. We could not have done these changes without HERAS since we do not have enough staff”.*

*“The MOU was very helpful. HERAS Plus is a strategic partner for us, and it is necessary to continue with this cooperation”.*

*“The third mission has been addressed through establishing the center for research, innovation and knowledge transfer”.*

Additionally, to the support already received, the HERAS Plus plans to assist the HEIs with equipment in the remaining project period. This was appreciated by some public HEIs and the evaluation team was informed that clear guidelines will be developed within the next few months.

Applying the “demand-driven approach” where HEIs decide on priorities and institutional changes was highly appreciated by project stakeholders because this approach engages, enables, and motivates stakeholders to analyze, reflect and to take decisions for and by themselves. This is an important element and contribution to “sustainability”.

In order to also facilitate “learning from each other”, the project prepared a policy brief paper on “*Institutional Development of Public Universities in Kosovo*”<sup>65</sup> which summarized major concerns and challenges of HEIs and organized two conferences on higher education which took place for the first time in Kosovo<sup>66</sup>:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Kosovo Higher Education Conference (Sept 2021)<sup>67 68</sup>
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference (Oct. 2022) focused on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of Strategic Documents of the Public Higher Education Institutions<sup>69</sup>

These two conferences were found extremely useful since relevant HE experts participated, provided a good opportunity for networking but also for transparency and sharing information particularly on HE strategic and institutional issues.

Different stakeholders from HEIs mentioned that they have contacts to other public universities on a more individual level and therefore, highly appreciate the efforts made by the HERAS Plus project to provide opportunities to meet from an institutional perspective, get to know each other and exchange information and experience. This is particularly important since the public universities also “compete” with each other especially on research grants and projects. There seem to be no other institutional arrangements or opportunities to meet for public HEIs besides the “Rector’s Conference.

Joint conferences, workshops, trainings, etc., therefore, provide good networking opportunities to enhance and pave the way for potential cooperations and joint endeavors in future. All HEIs are aware that declining numbers of students are a big risk and offering joint-study programmes and other cooperations could be a way forward.

Interviewees also stated that it would be important and interesting to engage with private HEIs too. It was even requested “*to abolish the differentiation between public and private HEIs*” in future, it is regarded as an “*outdated approach*”.

Contacts and communication between public and private HEIs seem to be very rare and mainly take place in the framework of Erasmus Plus projects but once they are completed the cooperation is not continued. On one side this is comprehensible since there is even a greater element of competition between public and private HEIs than amongst public ones but on the other side it misses the opportunities to develop further informal or formal partnerships.

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<sup>65</sup> Progress Report 3, Annex 22, “Institutional Development of Public Universities in Kosovo”.

<sup>66</sup> Other scientific conferences take place regularly in Kosovo.

<sup>67</sup> <https://www.heraskosovo.org/kosovo-higher-education-conference-2021/>

<sup>68</sup> Progress Report 3, Annex 23, “Policy Brief from the Kosovo Higher Education Conference, 7. Sept. 2021.”

<sup>69</sup> <https://www.heraskosovo.org/heras-plus-organizes-the-2nd-annual-conference-focused-on-monitoring-and-evaluation-me-of-strategic-documents-of-the-public-higher-education-institutions/>



Output 2 also contain some measures to contribute to a “... better contribution to a competitive HE sector as well as to economic, social and cultural development of Kosovo (in line with the 3rd mission of universities)”.

With the following activities and interventions (see below) the project envisages to contribute to a competitive HE sector. Even though these attempts were acknowledged and regarded as extremely useful by interviewees, it is conceptually not quite entirely comprehensible, how a “few” partnership programmes and small grants will make a large contribution to the “competitiveness” in the HE sector. It seems to lack conceptual clarity.

These interventions seem to better link to the efforts made by universities to increase “internationalisation” and improving “research” capacities in line with the third dimension of universities than “competitiveness”.

The **third dimension** reflects the engagement of universities with society and mainly consists of two priorities: “1. targeted use and transfer of academic knowledge to help resolve diverse societal challenges; and 2 transfer of technologies and innovations in the form of cooperation with public and private enterprises”<sup>70</sup>.

**Activity 2.3** links to the **Erasmus+ international mobility proposals** submitted by HEIs involving 15 student and 5 staff mobilities.

In order to support the **internationalisation and mobility efforts through ERASMUS+**, HERAS Plus organized two workshops as planned at the public universities to build capacities of academic staff to remain well informed about Erasmus+. One workshop was organized for UP and the second one for the other six public HEIs in close cooperation with the ERASMUS+ Office in Prishtina. Such workshops were perceived as very important by academic staff.

*“The Workshop on Horizon Europe Project Proposal Writing concluded successful proceedings. Alongside the support provided to the capacity building of the Kosovo National Contact Points (NCP) structure and training of young professionals on Horizon Europe, HERAS Plus is also enhancing Kosovo’s participation in Horizon Europe through tailor-made training on the collaborative projects under Horizon Europe.*

*The Workshop on Horizon Europe Project Proposal Writing attracted a wide range of professionals from public and private Higher Education Institutions and civil society organizations. The training offered an overview of the Horizon Europe collaborative project actions and practical guidance on the entire application process, including Project Idea, Call Decoding, Implementation Part: Activities- and Excellence Part; Task description and Work Packages, Project Budget and Eligible Costs, Deliverables and Milestones; Impact Pathways, Exploitation and Dissemination, Communication. Through group work and practical exercises, participants engaged in developing concepts and received feedback from the HERAS Plus experts.*

*HERAS Plus will continue to support participants with individual consultations to upgrade the project concepts/ideas developed during the training through feedback and guidance for application to Horizon Europe calls.”<sup>71</sup>*

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<sup>70</sup> <https://thirdmission.univie.ac.at/en/>

<sup>71</sup> <https://www.heraskosovo.org/workshop-on-horizon-europe-project-proposal-writing-collaborative-projects/>

According to interviews, the project keeps good relationships with the ERASMUS+ Office and there is further potential to further collaborate with and complement each other's efforts.

In general, different interviews indicated that public HEIs are well informed about different opportunities and projects offered under the ERASMUS+ programme. Therefore, it could be considered to phase-out of ERASMUS+ related activities but explore future collaborations or synergies with the ERASMUS+ Office on Horizon Europe.

The ERASMUS+ Office is well established, well recognized and very active.

Some interviewees also pointed out that *“the newer generation of academics are more eager, more interested and more open in getting involved in research and participating in international calls but the first is knowing how to write research proposals”*.

Additionally, besides learning how to write research proposals, academic staff also expressed that they lack project management skills and require future trainings in project cycle management and implementation skills even though some courses were already supported under this project. The question arises how such trainings could be further institutionalized at the university level.

In order to support internationalisation, enhance the social dimension, research and in particular “proposal writing”, HERAS Plus conducted several calls: 5 programmatic partnerships, 10 social dimension small grants and 10 applied science grants.

**Activity 2. 4** considers the **5 programmatic partnerships** to foster labour market relevance, the Social Dimension of HE (institutional level) and HRBA implemented in line with project guidelines.

As planned the project developed guidelines<sup>72</sup> and conducted a call for **Programmatic Partnerships (PPs)** including options for advanced and new PPs. A budget of max. EUR 40,000 was allocated for a PP. The PP objectives were defined as following:

*“The programmatic partnership shall strengthen the capacities of the partner institutions in higher education, research, and management. In order to unite scientific questions with specific needs of Kosovo, the partners have to embed a developmental approach in the theoretical, methodological and empirical design of the proposed activities”<sup>73</sup>.*

The expectations are that the PPs will lead to partnerships between the Kosovan and Austrian partners with sustainable results beyond the project lifetime<sup>74</sup>.

Six PPs were submitted and the following five PPs were selected according to the respective selection criteria:

**Table 4** Overview of Programmatic Partnerships

Title of Programmatic Partnership	Implementing Partner
<i>PP_1_ Upscaling University-Industry cooperation through education-knowledge transfer</i>	Austria: Salzburg University of Applied Sciences, Kosovo: University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj
<i>PP_2_ Treatment of paediatric acute lymphoblastic leukaemia with a modified resource-conserved BFM protocol in Kosovo</i>	Austria: Medical University of Graz, Kosovo: Medical Faculty of the University of Prishtina:

<sup>72</sup> Progress Report 1, Annex 15, “PP Guidelines”.

<sup>73</sup> Progress Report 1, Annex 15, “PP Guidelines”.

<sup>74</sup> Project Document, Annex 12, “Exit Strategy”.

<p><i>PP_3_ Research capacity building to strengthen Empirical Education Research on Social Cohesion and Equity in Kosovo</i></p>	<p>Austria: University of Graz, Faculty of Environmental, Regional and Educational Sciences, Institute of Education Research and Teacher Education, Empirical Education Research Unit. Kosovo: Three partners: 1. University "Isa Boletini" in Mitrovica; 2. University "Ukshin Hoti" in Prizren; and 3. The University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina".</p>
<p><i>PP_4_ Professional development for engineers of tomorrow (PDET)</i></p>	<p>Austria: <i>Montanuniversitaet Leoben</i> Kosovo: University of "Isa Boletini", Mitrovica</p>
<p><i>PP_5_ Programmatic Partnership between the Kosovo Accreditation Agency and the Austrian Accreditation Agency</i></p>	<p>Austria: <i>Austrian Accreditation Agency</i> Kosovo: <i>Kosovo Accreditation Agency</i></p>

Source: Progress Report 4

The Progress Report 4 and interviewees suggest that all five programmatic partnerships are currently in the process of implementation and are monitored by the project.

Two programmatic partnerships<sup>75</sup> were analyzed in greater detail and revealed the following:

*PP 1: "Upscaling university-industry cooperation through education-knowledge transfer."* Salzburg University of Applied Sciences (Austria) and the University of Applied Sciences in Ferizaj (Kosovo)<sup>76</sup>.

The first objective of the PP, the revision of the Masters' programme in Interior Architecture and Design with Wooden Products has already been achieved. This was important to gain reaccreditation with the Kosovo Accreditation Agency. With the support and inputs of the University of Salzburg the study programme was updated and accredited successfully for the next five years. 40 students have been enrolled in this programme, which is the maximum number asked for<sup>77</sup>.

The second initiative supports the establishment of the Industry & Education Transfer Centre Ferizaj (IETF) which is still on-going. Through this center, UASF will have the opportunity to strengthen its cooperation with the industry. The project will support the piloting of new services and knowledge transferred to five companies in the different industries. Five groups of students will be identified to closely work in and with these five companies. The cooperation will include: Testing usability of products, merchandising products to industry, design and visualisation. The university plans to transfer competences and knowledge to companies and bridge potential knowledge gaps.

Transfer of knowledge is perceived as a challenge *"because industries will never come and tell you what they need in three years. You have to find ways to know what they need in the future."* This also, links to the third mission of universities.

The third activity will present the results of the outcomes of the newly established cooperation with piloted companies during an annual event organized by UASF called "Professionals of the Future", this is related to the above and is planned for the end of this PP.

The PP objectives and activities are well presented in the application format and are comprehensible.

According to interview partners the PP application process was referred to as *"very straight forward and the template was easy to work with"*. The financial support was highly appreciated by Ferizaj, because it helped with *"overstretched resources of a small university"*.

Overall, the PP between the Salzbug and Ferizaj Universities of Applied Science was described as *"very good"*, *"participants benefitted a lot from the joint workshops"*, and in general *"we are very proud to*

<sup>75</sup> Selection criteria were presented in chapter 4.2.

<sup>76</sup> Application Document of PP 1

<sup>77</sup> Interim Report PP 1.

*have this cooperation". "Students benefit from this multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary exchange and learn how to work together. They also learn how to work in and with different cultures."*

Salzburg and Ferizaj have a long tradition of more than ten years cooperating with each other which started with previous ADC projects (KAIP, Higher Kos) and grew into a long-term professional partnership. Both partners know that they can trust each other and that their work plan will be implemented. The cooperation with Salzburg also assisted Ferizaj in remaining informed on international trends in applied science. It was stated that a lot of the *"good work in Ferizaj can be attributed to the cooperation with Salzburg"*.

The HERAS Plus and previous ADC projects created spin-offs and led to other successful grants/projects and post-docs. A new idea for 2025 is currently being discussed where the two universities could potentially cooperate in a large fair in Tokyo where companies and different institutions present themselves and some space will be allocated to Kosovo.

As presented in the Interim Report, one particular spin-off related to the successful application of an Erasmus+ project (KA 171 application). Kosovan partners helped to define the project for the application and all mobilities that were applied for were granted.

- 9 Incoming-student mobilities (study/training) from Kosovo to Austria
- 8 Incoming staff mobilities (2x Teaching und 6x Training) from Kosovo to Austria
- 6 Outgoing staff mobilities (Teaching) from Austria to Kosovo

*PP 4: "Professional development for engineers of tomorrow – PDET". University of Leoben, Montanuniversitaet (Austria) and the University of Mitrovica (Kosovo).*

The aim of this PP is to:

- Enhance employability and entrepreneurship of graduates of the University of "Isa Boletini", Mitrovica.
- Establish and functionalized the UIBM entrepreneurship start-up hub.
- Increase the number of graduates who are entrepreneurs.
- Bridge the gap between academia and the labour market.

Altogether six work packages have been identified and are presented in the application document, but the PP is described in a rather narrative manner, and it is not easy to comprehend the planned interventions and results.

This PP is a new cooperation and the two universities, University of Leoben, Montanuniversitaet and the University of Mitrovica have not yet worked together. Despite the good intentions and the enthusiasm by staff from Mitrovica the PP got seriously delayed. There were some administrative hurdles with signing the contract but according to the interviewees, the HERAS Plus team helped a lot in sorting out these challenges and a partnership agreement was finally signed. The PP is currently working on its second work package "Labour Market Survey".

Both partners agreed that time was too short, and it remains to be seen, how many work packages can be completed in 2023.

Regarding the application process, the feedback also resonates with other interviewees and was described as *"not very complex"*. The option of asking and meeting HERAS Plus team member was highly appreciated. It was also acknowledged that the time required to establish a professional relationship was underestimated especially when International Offices are reluctant working with new partners. It was suggested to establish an official online "Get to know each other" session and discuss expectations and different working approaches and modalities.

In general, the instrument of programmatic partnerships was welcomed by the respective HEIs involved and the KAA, but it was also noted by the project team that the interest in PPs has decreased over the last few years. Most likely this could be linked to the availability of other funding opportunities in Kosovo. The HERAS Plus Exit Strategy reveals that this intervention will end with this project and some interviewees also noted that the project “*should phase out of PPs*”. It is anticipated that public HEIs will apply for other funding schemes, e.g., Erasmus Plus<sup>78</sup>.

The evaluation findings suggest that the PPs played an important role in networking, developing long-term partnerships and created spin-offs. Some of them were stated above under PP\_1. Additionally, PP\_3 “Research Capacity Building to Strengthen Empirical Education Research on Social Cohesion and Equity in Kosovo” also, generated several collaborations and new projects such as an application to the APPEAR<sup>79</sup> project and a post/doc application (HERAS Plus), two ERASMUS + mobility applications and one ERASMUS+ capacity development project<sup>80</sup>. For other PPs it is probably too early to assess whether or not a long-term partnership will continue beyond this project, e.g., PP\_4.

**Activity 2.5** refers to the **10 Social Dimension small grants** for students and NGOs implemented in line with project guidelines.

The objectives of the Social Dimension Small Grant Scheme aim to contribute to an enhanced implementation of the Social Dimension of Higher Education in Kosovo in line with the Bologna Principles. This should be achieved by developing capacities of relevant institutions and students, addressing existing needs of underrepresented/marginalized groups<sup>81</sup> in accessing, participating, and completing higher education. The project was responsible for the development of the application kit, the implementation of the call, the dissemination of the brochure and the development of the reporting and monitoring templates.

The **social dimension** in higher education is defined in the London Communiqué as follows:

*"We share the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations. We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity."<sup>82</sup>*

Considering the definition above, the social dimension is linked to the human rights-based approach. The project developed guidelines<sup>83</sup> and conducted a call for the social dimension small grants as planned. For each SD a grant of max. EUR 3,000 was provided. The project received 40 applications

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<sup>78</sup> Project Document, Annex 11 “Exit Strategy”.

<sup>79</sup> Austrian Partnership Programme in Higher Education and Research for Development.

<sup>80</sup> Progress Report 4.

<sup>81</sup> These are defined in the SD Guidelines: Persons with lower socio-economic background including from rural areas; Minorities including from the Bosniak, Roma, Egyptian, Ashkali and Turkish communities; Returning migrants; Students with a disability; Non-traditional students (mature students, part-time students). In each category, women are considered as particularly vulnerable.

<sup>82</sup> EHEA, Rome Ministerial Communiqué, Annex II, 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Progress Report 3, Annex 40 “Application package for the Social Dimension Small Grant Scheme”.

from students, CSOs and universities which were much more than expected and the ten best ones were selected by the project<sup>84</sup>.

**Table 5** Overview of Social Dimension Grants

Title of Social Dimension Grant	Implementing Partner
SD-01-2022, "Research on the number of students of RAE communities and mediation in the enrolment of new students in the university using the reserved quotas for minority communities"	Group of two students from University "Ukshin Hoti" Prizren
SD-02-2022, Promotion of Gender Equality and War against Bullying in RAE Community"	Group of four students from University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina"
SD-03-2022, "Student Support and Development Service"	Faculty of Education of University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina"
SD-04-2022, "Students, University and Dealing with the Past Processes in Kosovo"	Human Rights Center of University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina"
SD-05-2022, "Raising awareness on the inclusion of marginalized groups in University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina"	Head of Academic Development Office of University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina"
SD-06-2022, "Equality through education - raising awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities"	University "Isa Boletini" in Mitrovica
SD-07-2022, "Increase higher education opportunities through equal access to e-learning and technology"	Kosova Center for Distance Education - Mëso Online (KCDE) NGO
SD-08-2022, "Promoting Austrian involvement in state-building in Kosovo" (OKAA).	Organization of Kosovar-Austrian Alumni, NGO
SD-09-2022, "P2P Mentoring Program"	ETEA NGO
SD-10-2022, "Building Psychological Capacities for Returning Migrants"	Psycho-Social and Medical Research Center NGO

Source: Progress Report 4

Discussants from the FDG and other interviewees stated the social dimension grants were found extremely useful to practice research on a small scale, analyse concerns and problems of different groups in society, increase awareness of the social dimension in general and go promote diversity and inclusiveness. These themes were found to be underrepresented in study programs of public HEIs.

Academic staff stated that students are very interested in these topics and are willing to participate in extra curricula activities, especially if there are small grants associated with them. For the discussants and interviewees, the SD grant was a good opportunity to either start getting engaged in a new thematic area or strengthening further collaborations and networking opportunities. The small financial contribution was found crucial as it provided the opportunity to invite guest speakers, for example, or to organise interactive discussions outside the classroom teaching environment. Interviewees suggested to increase the number of social dimension grants, increase the budget and also encourage cooperations of different university units in the call.

*"I was not very familiar with the process of applying for project grants or managing and finishing, so I was introduced to many precoders. Some of them I didn't know they existed. I also became more constant on keeping track of everything so until now I just completed my task but for this project, we had to keep track of everything what was going on."*

<sup>84</sup> Progress Report 4, p. 27.

It was also stated that it would be more beneficial if the call could start in January and not in May / June, since students are very busy and the timing conflicts with the examination period. More follow-up sessions were also believed beneficial. In some cases, it was also felt challenging where academic staff wanted to cooperate with NGOs but only engaged them in a later stage of the proposal or even later. Building or strengthening professional relationships require time and efforts. It was suggested to raise this particular issue in the “SD Guidelines” in future. In general, the SD guidelines and the requirements were found very clear, and it was easy to apply for the SD grant.

But some social dimension grants also do need more assistance and technical expertise than others. OKAA, for example, also see Output 3, activity 3.2, envisages establishing an alumni foundation but human and financial resources are currently not available to set up a professional organization. It is all based on voluntary work and individual networks, its sustainability needs to be seriously questioned.

In general, regarding the **social dimension** it was elaborated that different initiatives and organisations exist in the countries but gaps between the implementation and policy level were pointed out as well as its “theory and practice”.

Regarding **minorities**, for example, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) the evaluation team was informed that a special Administrative Instruction (AI 09-16) exists to ensure their access to HE. But in practice the respective quota system was abused since it only operates on “self-declaration” with no official identification document requested. This misuse was taken up seriously by one public HEI and resolved. In discussion with a social dimension grant it was suggested that such misuse could be avoided by some minor changes in this particular AI. This could have a big impact in future.

Access for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities to public HEIs was not perceived as a “big issue” in several interviews. It was referred to that there is financial support (scholarships) already, a quota of 10% being dedicated, and Administrative Instructions which consider their concerns. But it was also raised that their lack of participation in HE is related to their socio-economic background, the low number of RAE students completing high school and the competition between different minority groups. In general, it was observed that the HEIs situated closer to the RAE communities have a better understanding of their real concerns and challenges others, just pointed at the theoretical policy level. It was raised that a separate call for “minority groups” could be useful.

Another specific topic raised was **disability** which is about physical access to HEIs but also about awareness that there are different forms of disabilities.

Overall, it can be stated that the large number of applications indicates a great interest in social dimension issues in Kosovo. The Exit Strategy<sup>85</sup> considers handing over the grant management to MESTI at the end of the project, but this needs to be further conceptualized or considered for a new project.

**Activity 2.6** considers key recommendations implemented as identified during HERAS and HERAS+ workshops on **applied science approaches**.

This activity also links to Output 1, activity 1.1 and is envisaged to further support the implementation of applied science measures by MESTI. A working group was established, a roadmap and an Administrative Instruction were produced, and international and national experts provided inputs into debates on applied science. As stated before even though the AI was finalized (but not yet

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<sup>85</sup> Project Document, Annex 11 “Exit Strategy”.

approved) it is not yet evident how applied science will be further considered at policy level since the performance-based funding approach has been prioritized.

As one interviewee expressed: *“We need to move more towards interdisciplinarity and need to work closer with universities, industries and society. We need applied science research and not more papers that nobody reads and only serves the individual career”*.

**Activity 2.7** relates to the **10 grants** for students to promote **applied science** approaches implemented in line with project guidelines.

The HERAS Plus Project engages in efforts to motivate public HEIs, students and civil society organizations (CSOs), to increase the use of applied science approaches in higher education. In this context, the project decided to provide seed funding in the form of small grants (max. EUR 1,500,-) with the objective to promote applied study programme approaches. The project was responsible for the development of the application kit, a study visit of grantees to Austria and the development of reporting and monitoring templates.

Grants were supported focusing on the implementation or promotion of applied study programme approaches in the frame of existing curricula, revision of existing or development of new curricula of applied science approaches, development of professional skills, and improvement of communication between academics and entrepreneurs, and at the institutional level between HEIs and enterprises<sup>86</sup>.

Regarding the applied science grants, the project developed guidelines<sup>87</sup> and implemented a call as envisaged. 38 applications were received and ten were selected by the project<sup>88</sup>.

**Table 6:** Overview of Applied Science Grants

<b>Title of Applied Science Grant</b>	<b>Implementing Partner</b>
AS-01-2022, <i>“Concrete Applications of Algorithms and Data Structures in modern Web and Mobile Development”</i>	Student at University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”
AS-02-2022, <i>“Transformational learning through study visits and internships in various sectors of the tourism industry”</i>	Professor Assistant at University “Haxhi Zeka” in Peja
AS-03-2022, <i>“Strengthening links between academic and professional development for students of the Faculty of Economics”</i>	Professor Assistant at University 'Isa Boletini' in Mitrovica
AS-04-2022, <i>“Career orientation and skills needed for professional work for students that come from marginalized communities’ backgrounds”</i>	NGO OPIMA
AS-05-2022, <i>“Juristify – a network for jurists”</i>	Student at University of Prishtina
AS-06-2022, <i>“The relation of the diploma of the graduates at the University of Prishtina with their current occupations”</i>	Student at University of Prishtina
AS-07-2022, <i>“An examination of the access to employability skills and future career choices, of the students of the Faculty of Philosophy”</i>	NGO SpaceSyntaKS

<sup>86</sup> Progress Report 4, Annex 26 “Application Package of Applied Science Small Grant Scheme”

<sup>87</sup> Progress Report 4, Annex 26 “Application Package of Applied Science Small Grant Scheme”

<sup>88</sup> Progress Report 4



AS-08-2022, "How relevant is the Faculty of Education of University of Prishtina with teachers' pedagogical needs?"	NGO EdGuard Institute
AS-09-2022, "Climate Changes in Higher Education Curricula- CCHEC"	Professor at University of Prishtina
AS-10-2022, "Bridging the Gap Between Industry and Academia"	Professor at University of Prishtina

Source: Overview shared by the Project Team via email.

Feedback from the FDG and interviewees suggest that applied science grants were used to either transform teaching methods through integrating study visits and internships, strengthen their research skills with conducting surveys, engaging with private businesses/industries, creating synergies with partners regarding internships, following up with former graduates, etc.

In the framework of one specific applied science grant, it may even lead to one or two MOUs between the respective HEI and some companies.

The cooperation with HERAS Plus was perceived very positive: *"I had a lot of cooperation with HERAS Plus which was excellent in my opinion"*.

Other comments raised were: *"We learned how to promote the students work, how to design and how to manage projects."* *"The HERAS Plus project helped us a lot in enhancing applied science research. Anyway, we can do much more"*.

Like other HERAS Plus grants the applied science grant application process was perceived as easy. If questions appeared the project team was very supportive.

Challenges noted were raised in connection with the administrative process of receiving the HERAS fund from the university side. It was suggested to send the funds directly to the project managers' account. It was also mentioned that a great number of students have not heard about these grant opportunities, and it was suggested to further strengthen its promotion at university websites and social media channels.

Interviewees and documents evidence that the selected grants are aligned with the thematic focus of the project.

The Exit Strategy comments that the applied science grants will be phased-out with this project and that the activity should be handed over to students. A broader discussion with beneficiaries including students is anticipated, but this hand-over would need to be further conceptualized or considered in a new project.

In general, according to the project 110 (66 women, 44 men) PostDoc staff and students received grants and were engaged in the programmatic partnership, social development, applied science grant<sup>89</sup>.

Considering the feedback from different grantees / interviewees the HERAS Plus project contributed to the improvements of HEIs since the project offers "larger and smaller grants". Academic staff and students can "practice", develop or strengthen their research skills since project proposal for Horizon Europe are much more complex. One person stated:

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<sup>89</sup> Data shared by the project on 20.1.2023 via email. Further data disaggregated by sex will be considered in the final Progress Report June 2023.

*“Applying for small grants provides is a good experience for students of getting the feeling that they can do it and that even small projects can lead to something concrete. It gives students confidence, if they win that they can do it and are encouraged to further develop their skills.”*

*“They (different tools) are very useful because through these types of projects we can increase awareness about social dimension”.*

*“The small grants are a good mechanism as you can promote and place themes that do not get proper attention otherwise”.*

Since the involvement in research is mainly perceived as an activity to foster an individual academic career, interviewees appreciated the different grants which also demonstrate that research projects can be linked to the institutional level, societal themes and to the private sector.

As stated in the Exit Strategy<sup>90</sup> and expressed by interviewees, MESTI could or should conduct such grant schemes in the long-term but currently, it is felt that there are not sufficient capacities. Also, see chapter 5.4.

**Output 3 – Research Level. Kosovo has further advanced the quality of its research capacities and the internationalisation / Europeanisation of its higher education and research system**

In order to advance the quality of research and internationalisation, the project provided support in three main areas: capacity development for the National Contact Points (NCP), promotion of Horizon Europe and the increase of academic mobility.

The NCP system is called for by the European Commission and it is MESTI’s responsibility to ensure that it functions properly.

**Activity 3.1** includes the following:

- Revising of the NCP regulations
- Offering Train-the-Trainer courses for all NCPs and selected researchers
- A new NCP platform

Regarding the function of the **NCP system and a platform**<sup>91</sup> there are mixed perceptions from interviewees. At the MESTI and donor level, the supported activities addressed long term problems of lack of capacities at central and institutional level. The NCP selection, training and platform were initial steps to improve the NCP system.

They all agreed that further capacity development is required to capacitate NCPs in order that they can offer support to HEIs. But from the institutional and academic staff level, it was voiced that NCPs are not very visible and reachable. A lack of structure, meetings, communication, visits, and activities are perceived.

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<sup>90</sup> Project Document, Annex 12, HERAS Plus Exit Strategy.

<sup>91</sup> <https://kosovoncp.rks-gov.net/inform-and-raise-awareness/>

There are no events announced for the next months on the NCP platform, for example and generally, stakeholders believe that further capacity development measures are needed for NCPs to fulfil their mission.

According to the NCP platform, there are 9 NCPs appointed at the national level. But they all have full time jobs in other institutions and are not compensated for their engagement as NCPs presenting challenges for a productive engagement.

Nevertheless, since 2017, it was foreseen for NCPs to receive some remuneration of an amount of €150 every three months. It was also criticized that NCPs have not applied for a Horizon Europe project themselves and therefore lack practical experiences. *"They just show up and show a few slides but follow up actions are taken after that"*. Interviewees stated that relying on the NCPs is not sufficient and that the universities need to be more proactive and establish or improve their own research offices.

Despite trainings provided it does not seem that the NCP system is adjusted yet to fully respond to the required needs. Considering the feedback above this would suggest that Horizon Europe and other research information need to be further decentralized to the HEIs.

Another option expressed was that a potential Research Promotion Agency, could also take over other research management tasks of MESTI, but for this to happen, Kosovo would finally have to put more budget into research promotion overall, so that such an agency would make sense.

**Activity 3.2** links to the further support provided through **two funding scheme mechanism** aiming to foster participation in Horizon Europe Programme and strengthen regional networks.

- Scheme 1: 20 applications (minimum) to Horizon Europe, offering twenty grants (each EUR 1500) to Kosovan applicants.
- Scheme 2: 9 regional research networks.

According to the Annex 28 of the Progress Report 4, the project provided a lump sum of EUR 1 500 to any Kosovan application to Horizon Europe (up to now seven lump sums paid). Applicants revealed that the process for applying in Horizon Europe funds was very complex and they have learned a lot from feedback which they received from the project.

It is expected that the research grant will have a great impact and hopefully, will increase the number of Horizon Europe proposals in future.

As one person stated in general: *"Without HERAS plus the Horizon Europe would not have happened"*. But it was also raised in an interview that especially the Horizon pillar III<sup>92</sup> seem to be less known in Kosovo.

Additionally, the project awarded nine research project grants aiming to promote international scientific cooperations and networking between researchers from Europe, Kosovo and from the Western Balkan region. As the table below reveals, the regional component was achieved in five cases by involving a regional partner from Albania or Serbia and the European component was accomplished in eight cases by involving an Austrian partner. The researchers benefitted from the

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<sup>92</sup> Pillar III addresses innovation performance, innovation transfer and innovation scale-up in Europe. <https://Horizoneuropeni.com/pillar-three/>

support of partners or participation in workshops and publishing and presenting their research. At least in three projects, students were involved in the research project.

**Table 7** Overview of Research Grants

Project Nr	Project Name	Short Description	Partners
K-02-2021	Air Pollution in Kosovo - impact on human health, behaviour change, and policy recommendations	The data collection consists of a time-series analysis based on daily health data (hospital admissions, ambulatory hospital visits, and deaths), air quality data, and meteorological data (daily temperatures). The survey on "Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices (KAP) and Perception on air pollution" is finalized and will be used to collect additional data.	Austrian Partner involved in literature review
K-03-2021	Historical demography in Kosovo -	Identifying the existing resources of demographical data from the Civil Registration religious register books of events.	University of Graz, Institute of History University of Prishtina, Faculty of Philosophy University of Tirana, Department of History
K-05-2021	The impact of COVID19 on consumer food safety perception in Kosovo and Albania –	International comparison with developed countries. 500 consumer interviews	Kosovo, Albania, Austria, Joint research publication
K-06-2021	Community-based multilingualism meets internationalisation: the University of Prizren as a nexus of intercommunity contact in Kosovo	Design of the empirical study, training on methods, data collection, transcriptions, and data analysis. Literature review, analysis of the Curricula of the UPZ Faculty of Economics and Faculty of Education, training of young researchers on qualitative and quantitative research methods and a workshop on data analysis using MaxQDA. visit to Vienna from 9-13 May to finalize the study analysis. Symposium will take place in Prizren (and online) on July 12-13, 2022.	Kosovo, Austria, research outcomes presented at the ICLHE Conference in Maastricht (NL), 18-21 October 2022.
K-07-2021	Building a post-war justice system in Kosovo: The independence, impartiality, fairness, and accountability of the internationalized judiciary	Document analysis, analysing five EULEX judgments which will be compared with case files from the ICTY and HUDOC databases. Interview with stakeholders.	University of Graz, University of Haxhi Zeka, Law Faculty
K-08-2021	Physical fitness, anthropometric and nutritional status of young Kosovan adults - an 8-yr follow-up study	Medical Research/Development of a Knowledge Based Society	University Vienna, University of Prishtina, University Tirana of Tirana
K-09-2021	The Testimonies of State Reprisals: Experiences of Imprisonment, Work Dismissals, and Social Exclusion. Narratives of Kosovan Educators, Students, and Artists between 1989 and 1999 –education system in Kosovo during the 1990s.	Archival research, interviews, mapping of actors, collection of written materials, press and archive sources, interviews with actors/ witnesses, and have drafted a research paper. Validation workshop in Serbia	Kosovo, Serbia
K-12-2021	Automated Examination Timetabling in the Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering - University of Prishtina – At the project's current stage,	Development of three working variants of the automated methods for the examination timetabling problem. Seven bachelor students have graduated with the empirical research work conducted in the project's scope. Five master's students (including a university assistant) have developed advanced machine learning solutions and will be presenting their work at two international conferences: 1. The "13th International Conference on the Practice and Theory of Timetabling", in Leuven, Belgium, August/September 2022, 2. The 14th	University of Vienna Coordinator, two Joint Publications

		Metaheuristics International Conference", on 11-14 July 2022 in Ortigia-Syracuse, Italy.	
K-13-2021	Farmer's Handbook as a tool to improve pig welfare in Kosovo and Albania – Three workshops were held in Vienna, Tirana, and finally in Prishtina. During the event the	"Handbook for Farmers" was disseminated in Albanian and Serbian language to pig farmers in both countries in order to improve health and welfare. The implementation/intervention phase will follow for 20 pig farms by selecting (1-3) individual farm improvements and related measures.	Kosovo, Albania, Austria

Source: Progress Reports 3 and 4.

The evaluation team was also informed that the Law Faculty of the University of Graz awarded the Heras Plus project "Building a post-war justice system in Kosovo: the independence, impartiality, fairness and accountability of the internationalized judiciary", coordinated by the Uni-ETC, with the Excellent Research Award<sup>93</sup>.

**Activity 3.3** aims at providing support at the individual researchers' capacity development at Austrian Universities and supporting the alumni interaction. This was achieved through:

- Scholarships/fellowship grants (300 months) in Austria
- Kosovar-Austrian Alumni association

The **scholarship grants** were organized in two rounds during the evaluation period and 17 scholarships (13 women/4 men) were granted to students of public HEI. The third round (outside the evaluation period) also opened its call to private HEIs.

**Table 8** Scholarship Applications and Awards for Call 1 and 2

Round	Applications			Awards			Receiving Institutions (Austria)	Sending Institutions (Kosovo)
	F	M	Total	F	M	Total		
1	11	2	13	7	2	9	1. University of Vienna(3) 2. University College of Teacher Education Styria 3. Technical University Vienna 4. University of Salzburg 5. University of Graz (2) 6. University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna	1. University of Gjilan 2. University of Mitrovica 3. University of Prishtina (4) 4. University of Prizren 5. University of Peja(2)
2	9	2	11	6	2	8	1. Salzburg University of Applied Sciences 2. University of Vienna (3) 3. University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences Vienna (BOKU) 4. University of Graz (3)	1. University of Mitrovica(1) 2. University of Applied Science in Ferizaj(2) 3. University of Prishtina (4) 4. University of Peja(1)

The project also determined that 50% of the fellowship months will be granted to women. Looking at the data for the first and second call this will be achieved.

The project team reported having received many phone calls regarding scholarships, although the number applications received was lower and not in proportion to the number of calls.

<sup>93</sup> <https://trainingszentrum-menschenrechte.uni-graz.at/en/news/detail/article/forschungspreis-der-rewi-fuers-uni-etc/>

It was also suggested to open the scholarship to master programmes to further support the development of priority programmes for the country. But scholarships for Master programmes have to be prepared with very concrete and detailed criteria as the number of applicants could be very high. Scholarships should be restricted to few subjects very relevant to Kosovo, e.g., human rights, environment, etc.

The main barriers in reaching a higher number of scholarships were related to having difficulties finding a mentor in Austria, visa issues and age limitation. This was particularly an issue for women since their career path is often influenced by family obligations. But once the age limitation was increased from 40 to 50 years, the number of women applicants and awardees increased substantially.

Awardees and home institutions (universities) all agreed that the requirements to apply for the scholarship must be linked through their universities. It was beneficial for both, the applicants and the universities, as in this way their employment, promotion and contribution were directly linked to the sending institution.

The HERAS Plus project also supported the establishment of the first Organization of Kosovar-Austrian Alumni Association (OKAA) with a social dimension grant. Through previous ADC projects about 100 Kosovars received a scholarship. Creating a network, an alumni association, is perceived as a useful tool establishing professional relationships, exchanging information and experiences, connecting to business partners, informing interested students and graduates how to proceed on their careers, etc.

Currently, OKAA is comprised of three individuals also founders and a board of seven members all alumni from Austrian universities who work on a voluntary basis. It aims to assist students who are interested in pursuing their studies in Austrian universities with finding a mentor and increasing networking. However, the organization seriously lacks human and financial resources to function properly. A study visit is planned for January 2023 where six OKAA members could establish contacts to Austrian Alumni associations and representatives of universities and Ministries. This could potentially contribute to a sustainable base for the future activities of OKAA. Future support will be required.

Looking at the evidence and feedback from different stakeholders for **all three outputs**, it can overall be concluded that they have been **largely achieved** at this point in time (status November 2022).

#### **EQ 5: Did the project contribute to capacity development as planned?**

The HERAS Plus project envisages to develop tailor-made capacity development measures at different levels. The entire project is directed towards increasing and strengthening stakeholders' capacities and responsibilities for the institutional development and national ownership in higher education. All outputs and activities aim at developing and strengthening institutions at different policy, university and research levels including capacities and skills of individuals to ensure sustainability in the long-term.

In general capacity development is defined as *“The process by which individuals, groups and organisations, institutions and countries, develop, enhance and organise their systems, resources and*

knowledge; all reflected in their abilities, individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems and achieve objectives”<sup>94</sup>.

The project developed different tools and techniques for capacity developed<sup>95</sup> which encompasses the following measures:

**Table 9** Different Capacity Development Tools and Techniques

Knowledge sharing/management	Coaching & mentoring	Common Assessment Framework in education (CAF) <sup>96</sup>
Co-designed workshops	Training seminars	Study visits
Promotion and dissemination activities	Proactive participation at the working groups established by beneficiaries	Alignment with EU and national policies
Strengthening capabilities and sustainability	Applying the OCED DAC “Do No Harm” approach	Management and awarding grants
Physical investments	Accountability mechanism and processes	

Source: Project Document, Annex 9, “HERAS+ Tools and techniques for capacity developed”

The evaluation team found that the project addressed capacity development at the policy, university, and research levels as planned. The project organized different workshops, training seminars, study visits, shared information, and encouraged the establishments of working groups, etc. and engaged relevant stakeholders in these capacity development measures.

For the project period between Sept. 2020 - Nov. 2022, evidence<sup>97</sup> suggests that the project organized and supported 48 workshops, 20 trainings, 12 working group meetings, online meetings, promotion, and dissemination activities and other events. Different interview partners also confirmed their participation in several capacity development measures.

The Common Assessment Framework and the “Do No Harm” approach can be regarded more as management than capacity development tools.

Interviewees noted that meeting outside their offices for a few days focusing on strategic issues provided the opportunity for all participants to input into discussions and deepen the understanding of certain institutional rules and regulations. But with regards to workshops which lasted several days especially at the public HEIs, the evidence suggests that more men than women participated, also, see analysis EQ 6.

HEIs also emphasized that it was very important offering an opportunity for bringing senior management, academic and administrative staff together. This also helps breaking down barriers between different institutional layers. It was pointed out that administrative staff get sometimes overlooked but are regarded important in the daily life of HEIs.

The engagement and participation of different project stakeholders are comprehensible and also well documented in the Progress Reports 1-4, minutes, participation lists and were referred to in different interviews.

<sup>94</sup> OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms, <https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=7230>

<sup>95</sup> Project Document, Annex 9, “HERAS+ Tools and techniques for capacity developed”

<sup>96</sup> The CAF as a technique was foreseen in the Project Document but did not take place due to pandemic circumstances.

<sup>97</sup> Separate excel shared by the project team on 20.1.2023 via email.

In general, stakeholder appreciated the various opportunities of getting engaged in the project, having had the opportunity for professional reflections and to gain further skills and knowledge. Some interviewees stated:

*“Through HERAS Plus we aimed to develop ourselves. We participated in workshops and round tables, worked face-to-face, sat together and had very close interactions with the project team, this was extremely valuable”.*

*“HERAS plus helped us a lot, especially with the self-evaluation report (SER), without HERAS Plus we may have lost the accreditation”.*

*“In the past there was a lot of talking about “change” in HE, but due to the HERAS Plus project interventions relevant people and institutions address the problems and try to solve them, e.g., adapting statutes”.*

At the **policy level**, MESTI’s and KAA’s capacities were strengthened by respective staff members being engaged in drafting and reviewing policies/strategies, Administrative Instructions, quality assurance, guidelines and standards, programme & support instruments / tools often based on inputs from national and international experts, in developing the Kosovo research information system (KRIS) and in participating in workshops on HRBA and gender mainstreaming, for example.

But in general, and this is beyond the HERAS Plus project, MESTI and KAA lack capacities, mainly in number of qualified staff, as indicated earlier. This was repeatedly commented by interview partners. Stakeholders are deeply concerned that MESTI’s lack of capacities seriously hampers progress in higher education; especially the *“lack of technical skills”* and the *“lack of English language skills”* were raised as concerns for working in an increased international environment.

The evaluation team was made aware that a new MESTI organigram including an increase of number of staff for MESTI and KAA is currently awaiting approval, by the Government but it appears that it is not yet clear if or when these proposals will be approved.

The question arises whether, or not, the Austrian Development Corporation and/or the Austrian Ministry for Education, Science and Research could engage in a dialogue with the Government underlining that MESTI’s and KAA’s capacities need to be strengthened timely in order to fulfill the current and increasing demands by EHEA and ERA in future.

At the **university level**, the capacities of different public universities were strengthened by supporting different initiatives and activities which were mainly based on the baseline assessments conducted by six out of seven public universities<sup>98</sup>. Also, see chapter 5.2, EQ 4.2. These assessments were the *“key to success”* as stated by one interviewee. Based on these baselines the universities reviewed and revised their strategic university plans, which is perceived will lead to more competitiveness and diversity.

One interviewee mentioned: *“One advanced training, ToT training and the creation of the first module to be delivered by the center for excellence in teaching, enabled capacity development”.*

In regard to quality of teaching one particular issue was highlighted relating to the improvement of teaching research methodology. Academic staff and students need to be acquainted with different research methodologies, methods, modern research instruments, tools, and approaches, such as using artificial intelligence in research, for example.

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<sup>98</sup> The University of Prishtina decided that they do not need such an assessment.



As stated before, the project supported academic (PhD) and PostDoc staff and students at the individual level but embedded and linked this support to the institutional level by providing 5 programmatic partnership grants, 10 social dimension grants and 10 applied science grants.

At the **research level**, the project was and still is engaged in building capacity of the National Contact Point System where 13 people (7 women, 6 men) participated in a TOT training workshops, etc.

The project supported 9 research grants and 20 grants for Horizon Europe proposal applications, and the Kosovar-Austrian Alumni Association. By the end of the project, it will also have provided 300 months of fellowship grants. Scholarships were provided to 17 people (13 women, 4 men) during the first and second call.

Almost all stakeholders interviewed raised the issue of needing further capacities in writing research proposals. It was pointed out that: *“This cannot be easily achieved with 2-3 activities only but also needs support from senior management and requires leadership.”*

Even though the HERAS Plus project supports capacity building measures, interviewees expressed great concerns regarding research at national level. MESTI’s lack of research capacities is perceived hampering great research opportunities such as Horizon Europe. At the university institutional level, the lack of project coordination offices or project coordination units at international or research offices were also raised.

Additionally, the HERAS Plus project further supported capacities by involving a larger number of national experts than in the predecessor project, HERAS, in order to strengthen long-term sustainability. This attempt is evident by the number of planned national expert days, allocated with 689 working days<sup>99</sup>, whereas the number for the international pool experts was 133. Regarding the competitive fund for public HEIs, an additional 505 national expert days were considered (related to activities 2.1, 2.2)<sup>100</sup>.

It was also originally planned to apply a “tandem approach” engaging international and national experts in teams but due to Covid-19 this approach needed to be adapted. Therefore, more tasks were assigned to and conducted by national experts only, such as the university base-line assessments. In order to further build on national expertise, the project also conducted a call for an expert roster<sup>101</sup>. About 100 national experts applied and most of them were eligible. The current roster also including experts from previous projects and public HEIs were invited to forward names of experts. The roster currently encompasses about 150 national experts.

An issue which could be anticipated as a challenge in future is a potential “conflict of interest” being a national expert on one side but also receiving a grant, scholarship, or another support on the other side, from the same ADC project. This will need to be tackled and well communicated to others in order to ensure transparency.

Different stakeholders commented very positively on the increased participation of national experts since they *“know the local context very well”* and are familiar with the *“untold stories”*.

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<sup>99</sup> This includes days for national expert trainers (40), national KRIS experts (240), national pool experts (409). The number of the Austrian consortium working days are extra and amount to 1044 days. Source: Human Resource Allocation Plan, Project Document, Annex 3c.

<sup>100</sup> This information was shared additionally by the project team in an email on 15.2.2023.

<sup>101</sup> Progress Report 1, Annex 22 “Call for expert roster”.

One national expert stated: *“I provided advice, facilitated discussions, discussed, and invited them to reflect themselves. I wanted to trigger reflections. I also had lots of discussions with staff, and they did a mapping on their tasks and different topics.”*

But it was also acknowledged that it is still highly valuable to gain expertise from international experts from Austria, Croatia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Estonia, and other countries.

As stated by one interviewee: *“The HERAS Plus project provided international expertise from which words cannot express the great contributions, the modification of the HE law, for example, had expert inputs.”*

It was also suggested to consider and invite talented professors from the diaspora outside the country which potentially could lead to multiplier effects in regard to further cooperations.

From feedback of interviewees, the evaluation team found that the “demand driven approach” was a key contributing factor to strengthening capacity development, which also strongly links to “ownership”.

Looking at the different interventions, activities, and approaches, it can be summarized that the HERAS Plus project contributed to capacity development at the policy, university, and research levels. Even though acknowledged as a challenge, it was requested that a HERAS Plus project team member should participate in all HERAS Plus related events. This would further strengthen the engagement of participants.

As one interviewee phrased it *“HERAS Plus is a sparkling initiative, the community loves it because it often starts with ideas, puts them in place with tools and mechanism and starts with procedures. It is also sparking because it brings together Austrian and national experts ...but also institutions in general”.*

Considering the evidence, it is suggested, that the capacity building measures have been fully achieved so far, even though some others are still planned for the remaining period.

**EQ 6: To what extent was gender mainstreaming included in the project and to what extent were recommendations from the ADA gender-assessment considered and implemented?**

The Project Document states that *“cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, social dimension, minority rights and rights of persons with disabilities are reflected in activities such as conferences, workshops, trainings, study visits, working groups and others” (Project Document: P.31).*

The project design/logframe considers gender indicators, some are stated separately and requests for data disaggregated by sex.

From a project management perspective, the project uses different tools ensuring that gender mainstreaming is considered throughout the various project activities. These are:

- HRBA Checklist for Deliverables: Assessing a Gender/Vulnerable Groups’ Perspective (PD: Annex 7)
- HRBA Monitoring Plan (Annexes in Progress Reports)
- Environmental, Gender and Social Standards (EGSS) Checklist (PD: Annex 8)
- Progress Report on the Environmental, Gender and Social Risk Management and Sustainability Plan (Annexes in Progress Reports)

Overall, all four Progress Reports consider and present relevant gender related information. Some of these Annexes are more narrative in this context. It could be useful to also include data disaggregated by sex in the main Progress Reports in regard to the outputs and activities.

In general, the HERAS Plus project ensured that gender/gender mainstreaming issues were included in relevant HE policies, strategies, working papers, university baseline assessments, university strategic plans and other documents.

Mainstreaming gender/human rights was also a requirement in the selection criterion for the programmatic partnerships, the social dimensions projects and the research grants or Horizon Europe. For example, one programmatic partnership was earmarked to have human rights and/or gender equality as main objective; HRBA and SD aspects form two of three priority areas for PPs. Regarding the SD grant scheme at least three grants were earmarked to address access to education for girls/women. The applied science grant guidelines did not consider a gender/human selection criterion.

Regarding the scholarships during the first call scholarships awarded to seven women, two men and in the second call: scholarships awarded to six women and two men. So far, 13 women and 4 men received scholarships.

According to interviewees the project tried to ensure equal participation of women and men in different interventions and activities such as working groups, meetings, workshops, trainings, study visits and capacity building activities in general. But it was also remarked that in some more senior level meetings this was not fully achieved due to the dominance of senior positions mainly held by men.

Data disaggregated by sex on this is not included in the four main Progress Reports, but a separate overview table was shared with the evaluation team suggesting that 1350 men and 1092 women have participated in 120 different project related activities for the time period Sept. 2020 - Nov. 2022<sup>102</sup>.

A brief analysis of this overview table suggests that out of the 120 activities stated, 30 had at minimum 50% or more men participating than women, 14 events had almost 50% more men than women and 12 activities had at minimum 50% or more women than men participating. The rest of the activities had either equal participation or the difference does not seem that striking.

Overall, it seems interesting but maybe not surprising that events especially, scheduled for 2-3 days were more attended by men and online sessions more by women than men. This can be related to the fact that women did not wish to participate sine they have family care responsibilities. Ensuring a more equal participation of women and men should be taken into consideration in the future. This will require a little reflection on current event practices.

The project also published a document called "*Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo*"<sup>103</sup> which include very useful recommendations. Also, a workshop was implemented in October 2022<sup>104</sup> with more than 40 participants from relevant HE and gender related institutions<sup>105</sup>. It was stated that "*the workshop was found very beneficial to actually address gender issues*". This is

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<sup>102</sup> Excel Sheet on participation ow women and men shared by the project team on 20.1.2023 via email. Calculations include activities until the end of Nov. 2022 (evaluation period)

<sup>103</sup> <https://www.heraskosovo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Gender-Equality-in-Higher-Education-Institutions-in-Kosovo.pdf>

<sup>104</sup> <https://www.heraskosovo.org/workshop-on-gender-equality-in-higher-education/>

<sup>105</sup> This also links to Output 1, Activity 1.6, see "Relevance" EQ 4.1

particularly important since Horizon Europe proposals require mandatory gender plans<sup>106</sup>. It can be expected that this will have a big impact on considering gender issues in future research. In this regard the thematic debates on gender mainstreaming were very timely and need to be continued in future. The further utilization of the publication, its findings and recommendations should be envisaged.

When referring to gender mainstreaming, it was interesting to see which themes were emphasized by interviewees. These points are summarized as follows:

- Gender issues were mainly related to the number of female and male students and staff.
- Low number of female academic staff in higher position even though there are some female vice-rectors in some public HEIs.
- No female rector<sup>107</sup> yet at a public university which was related to exposure to public and media attention and pressure.
- Lack of gender / gender mainstreaming as theme in research in general.
- Lack of understanding of the theoretical concepts of gender and lack of gender research and analysis skills.
- Knowledge about gender rights seem to be known to some degree but not what they mean for in society.
- Engaging more men in gender related research will also help.
- In general, different roles and particular the roles of women are not much analyzed.
- 3-4 years ago, MESTI's research funding was assigned mainly to male researchers.
- CSOs / private institutions were perceived as focusing more on gender related research than public HEIs.
- Academic staff write their papers focusing on their thematic field but do not explore related gender dimensions.

During the interviews it was also noticed that stakeholders often diverted the discussions from "gender/gender mainstreaming" to human-rights issues such as disadvantaged groups in society or minorities. This was striking and could possibly be linked to the fact that gender mainstreaming is referred to as "cross-cutting" issue under the HRBA approach in the HERAS Plus project. This approach is also comprehensible from the Project Document and the gender analysis presentation (Jan. 2022)<sup>108</sup>. As stated by one interviewee integrating gender mainstreaming into the HRBA approach seemed a good entry point for these discussions at the time. Even so this motive is comprehensible it also "blurs" HRBA and gender mainstreaming efforts.

The ADA Gender Assessment / Analysis of the Higher Education, Research and Applied Science in Kosovo (HERAS)<sup>109</sup> developed recommendations for the HERAS Plus. From interviews and evidence available (Progress Reports and relevant Annexes) it can be concluded that these recommendations have been considered.

At the national level gender related themes such as domestic violence, for example, have gained increased publicity due to the growth of violence against women. Interviewees linked gender issues

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<sup>106</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ffcb06c3-200a-11ec-bd8e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-232129669>

<sup>107</sup> Only for a few weeks one female rector was appointed for UP in 2022 after the previous one was dismissed and a new one found.

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.heraskosovo.org/gender-analysis-kick-off-meeting/>

<sup>109</sup> Project Document, Annex 11 „Assessment / Analysis of the Higher Education, Research and Applied Science in Kosovo (HERAS)“

to the fact that *“Kosovo is still perceived as a very patriarchal society”*. At the public universities only two gender study programmes currently exist (UP and Peja).

Considering the findings from the gender publication and the Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2021-2024<sup>110</sup>, this would offer a good opportunity to link and further strengthen HEIs with the third mission.

Overall, gender mainstreaming was considered in the project design, different outputs including strategic documents, interventions, and activities. At this point it can be regarded that gender related interventions for this project have been “largely achieved”.

**EQ 7: To what extent were the social standards monitored? Have any issues emerged, if so which ones and why?**

The HERAS Plus project does not consider “social standards” as a separate category but addresses them in the Environmental, Gender and Social Standards (EGSS) checklist. Out of the 13 standards (11 plus two sub-divisions) mentioned under the heading “Human Rights and Social Standards”, eight were identified as “not applicable” and five as “applicable”.

Comments and explanatory notes from the EGSS checklist all seem relevant and have been incorporated by the project. The EGSS suggestions are monitored and presented in the Progress Reports.

Considering the completion of the planned interventions regarding the human-rights based approach and the social dimension efforts presented before, the measures seem to be fully achieved for the project period analyzed.

### 5.3. Efficiency

**EQ 8: Was the project implemented in the most efficient way (time, personnel resources, budget)? Have any issues emerged, if so which ones and why?**

As mentioned before, HERAS Plus project is implemented by a Project Consortium consisting of: World University Service (WUS) Austria (lead), Zentrum für Soziale Innovation GmbH (ZSI), Österreichischer Austauschdienst (OeAD) GmbH. The total project budget is: €2.800.000 (€ 2.500.000 from the Austrian Development Cooperation or 89% of the total budget and € 300.000 from the Kosovar Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation or 11% of the total budget)<sup>111</sup>.

The policy level, (Output 1) was allocated the smallest percentage of the total budget of 4%. The evaluation team found that this allocation is in line with planned capacity development support at this level.

The university level, (Output 2) which includes the review of strategic plans of universities and creation of other relevant tools aiming to build institutional capacities, is allocated the largest portion of the budget with 59% of the total value. However, this is expected since this output involved

<sup>110</sup> <https://abgj.rks-gov.net/assets/cms/uploads/files/Programi%20i%20Kosov%C3%ABs%20p%C3%ABr%20Barazi%20Gjinore%202020-2024%20-%20ANGLISHT.pdf>

<sup>111</sup> Annex\_3\_Revised Budget-Project Budget Reallocation Heras Plus

numerous support activities and a great amount of the budget was dedicated to grant schemes, internationalisation, programmatic partnerships along with the earmarked fund for strategic development of the universities and other capacity development initiatives.

The research level, (Output 3) accounts for 37% of the total budget which corresponds with activities and support initiatives foreseen at this level.

Altogether, the three outputs account for 51.47 % of the total project budget. The rest of the funds were dedicated to personnel costs (project team and engagement of the national and international expertise) the actual paid salaries including social contribution and taxes, operational costs, visibility and other related costs. Considering the scope of the project the budget allocation and distribution regarding the three outputs and other budget lines, it seems realistic and justified.

The two audit reports on project expenditure for the period covering 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022<sup>112</sup>, and 1 June 2020 – 31 May 2021<sup>113</sup> verified that the declared expenditures were in accordance with the contract.

Despite the COVID19 pandemic situation, the project managed to start on time however, it had to constantly adjust the time plan of its activities accordingly during the initial phases of the project. A number of activities were initially conducted online, later adjusted to hybrid format (semi-virtual) and physical presence with limited number of participants. Some activities that required physical presence of experts were moved for a later stage completed after the situation with pandemics has improved.

Frequent changes in Government structures and early elections affected the project as it resulted in a delayed signing of the co-financing agreement which in return led to a late arrival of the MESTI funds in the project account, 1.5 years later than originally planned. The project was flexible to manage these barriers, but it impacted on the utilization rate of the project funds. In addition, it required alignments of planned activities with the new Government structures as well as emerging priorities of MESTI and other beneficiaries.

Due to the issues mentioned above in the beginning, project expenditures were lower than originally anticipated. However, this was mitigated efficiently through a project prolongation request and budget reallocation among budget lines.

Additionally, expenditures are expected to increase as the project plans to support the HEIs with equipment through some earmarked funds. The need for support with equipment arose from the baselines assessments. The project team will develop clear guidelines on funding eligibility.

Engagement of local expertise was highly valued by the HEIs and considered as an added value of this project as they are more familiar with the Kosovo context, but they also welcomed the support and know-how received from the international experts. Initially, the project planned an equal engagement, however, due to the COVID 19 situation and travel restrictions, more tasks were assigned to and completed by national experts. Both national and international experts engaged in this project are highly qualified with extensive background and knowledge in the areas of their expertise.

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<sup>112</sup> 816-00-2020, Heras Plus Audited Report, 1 June 2021 to 31 May 2022

<sup>113</sup> 816-00-2020, Heras Plus Audited Report, 1 June 2020 to 31 May 2021

According to the Project Document, the HERAS Plus project consists of a ‘local’ team of five people (one international Team Leader, two local Thematic Coordinators (one for HE and one for R&I) one local Office Manager and one local Project Assistant) supporting different HEIs by contributing to laws, methodologies, instruments, tools, and procedures on one side and supporting the activities of the three project outputs. The team is located at MESTI premises and is supported by experts from the Project Consortium as well as other national and international consultants.

The project team assigned to coordinate activities within this project was highly qualified, professional, cooperative, and well respected by all stakeholders. However, retaining such qualified staff may be challenging in the future mainly because the compensation for national project staff is different and lower in comparison to other ADC projects and also, highly competitive remuneration packages are offered by other donors.

So far, the evaluation team found that the project was managed well and that there was an efficient use of the inputs with the main activities focusing directly on achieving the project’s outputs.

**EQ 9: How well does the cooperation work between the consortium, the local team, the beneficiaries and donors (e.g., workflows, division of labour, participation and local ownership)?**

From the feedback received the cooperation between the Project Team, other stakeholders and donors is perceived as “*very good*”. Interviewees stated that they highly appreciate their professionalism, sector and technical knowledge, their availability to respond timely, their preparedness for meetings, workshops, etc., their cooperation and their willingness to support in general as well as to listen and communicate with all relevant stakeholders. The project team was referred to as “*facilitators*” and sometimes even “*bridge makers*” between different institutions and organizational entities.

One person mentioned: “*The cooperation is quite good. Somehow, it supported us to have more cooperation among universities. We have created more personal recognition among universities now*”.

It was also stated that the increase of staff members at the Project Office has been very beneficial. But it was also indicated that the remuneration of national staff varies between different ADC projects. Keeping highly qualified and experienced staff when there are other projects and donors willing to pay higher salaries was pointed out as a serious challenge.

Also, the various inputs and support from other Consortium members (OEAD, WUS, ZSI) were found extremely useful and valuable. Regarding the division of labour and project management in general, the project developed a detailed work plan based on the outputs and activities outlined in the Project Document and the logframe matrix. It reports bi-annually in Progress Reports against all outputs and activities and has an excellent documentation and filing system, but it would be useful to also include data disaggregated by sex into the Progress Reports.

Overall, the HERAS Plus project is supported by the “Steering Committee Board” which has an advisory and monitoring function. It meets twice a year in person and/or online after the distribution of the respective Progress Report. Its members are: ADA/ADC Office, MESTI and the Austrian Federal

Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)<sup>114</sup>. Since the beginning of the project the Steering Committee met four times as planned. According to the different Steering Board minutes the Project Team, and the Consortium members regularly participated all meetings. In this regard it was also suggested to invite a second person from the Austrian BMBWF.

The project still perceives it as advantageous that its office is situated in MESTI which facilitates easy access, communication, and cooperation. Feedback suggests that the cooperation with MESTI is well established and both sides are very clear on the division of labour. Overall, MESTI is “struggling” with capacities and different demands, as stated before.

In order to coordinate the different ADC interventions such as HERAS Plus, QAINTE and ALLED II, the ADC office conducts monthly coordination meetings and ensures a clear division of labour, avoid duplications and create synergies. This seemed particularly important for the cooperation with KAA since there were different perceptions about the work engagement and the completion of the activities from the MOU between KAA and HERAS Plus project. Looking at past experiences between HERAS Plus and QAINTE and the current steps towards developing a new QAINTE project there seem to be a further potential to align different ADC efforts.

Overall, it seems that the project was very transparent about its planned and implemented activities. Information was shared on time and is regularly updated on the website and social media (Facebook and LinkedIn) is widely used.

The project also produced a useful brochure which summarizes project interventions from June 2020 to December 2021 and is made available to the public<sup>115</sup>.

Some donor coordination seems to take place by MESTI, but it remains challenging due to the lack of institutional capacities. Exchange between donors appears to take place on an informal basis. Despite good relationships with GIZ, the HERAS Plus project was not invited to participate in the working group for drafting the HE chapter of the new Education Strategy 2022-2026. This is surprising but the project provided written feedback, which was apparently not considered. Surely, this can be regarded as a missed opportunity from a strategic point of view. Considering that GIZ will also strengthen its efforts on supporting research in future, it will be important to further strengthen institutional ties.

## 5.4. Sustainability

### EQ 10: To what extent has local ownership been developed?

At the institutional level all three main target stakeholder/ beneficiary groups (MESTI, KAA, public universities) have reported and commented on their active participation and engagement in the project interventions.

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<sup>114</sup> Progress Report 2, Annex 36 “Terms of Reference for the Steering Board”.

<sup>115</sup> <https://www.heraskosovo.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/HERAS-Plus-Brochure-for-the-period-June-2020-December-2021.pdf>



As reported earlier under “capacity development”, see chapter 5.2, EQ 5, certain capacities have been built and have contributed to local ownership and sustainability for MESTI, KAA and HEIs.

The local ownership of HEIs needs to be particularly highlighted since the capacities and local ownership built deriving from the baseline-assessment can be regarded as a big step towards sustainability.

The KAA has been supported too by HERAS Plus and the interviews suggest a very strong local ownership. The approval of the pending KAA law and additional staff will further strengthen it in future.

MESTI’s ownership can be observed at the level of some very committed individuals working in higher education but its current structure cannot deal and respond quickly enough to the requests, changes, and international demands.

Especially the National Contact Point system, even though a revision of the current NCP guidelines were anticipated, and training provided under this project it, is not fully convincing that the NCPs will be able to respond to the requirements of Horizon Europe.

Also, as stated earlier, the establishment of the Organization of Kosovar-Austrian Alumni based on the current concept of “volunteers” developing and managing it may not be sustainable in the long-term.

In general, sustainability and ownership were raised as concerns, but it was also felt that there is more ownership now in MESTI than before under previous ADC projects. At the university level positive developments were also observed in this regard where university management are better understanding that they have to become active members and agents of internationalisation projects themselves.

## **Exit Strategy**

The evaluation was also requested to reflect on the Project’s Exit Strategy which commented on all three outputs and the 16 activities. The Exit Strategy reflects on the “rationale”, “status at project end”, “hand over to” and “capacities in place” and provides a comprehensible overview.

Overall, it can be assessed that the Exit Strategy appears comprehensible and feasible.

But there are about seven interventions where the evaluation team currently envisages that hand-over processes will need to be further conceptualized, strengthened, revised in the remaining phase or newly developed in a new project in order to be successfully institutionalized. These are:

1.6: HRBA instruments ⇒ Handed over to MESTI, public HEIs and CSO’s.

2.5 Social Dimension Grants ⇒ This activity will be handed over to public HEIs and MESTI. The grant management (criteria’s for development of call and other documents developed within the HERAS+) will be included in the handover packages.

2.6 Applied Science Approach ⇒ By the end of the project, the applied science approaches are implemented in line with the roadmap. Handed over to MESTI and public HEIs.

2.7 Applied Science Grants ⇒ This activity could be handed over to students. Before the hand-over, a broader discussion with local beneficiaries incl. students needs to be initiated to share good practices, lessons learnt and other aspects of grant management from a HERAS+ perspective.

3.1 National Contact Point system as discussed above.

3.2 Two research schemes 20 applications for Horizon Europe and 8 regional research networks. ⇒ After pilot testing both schemes will be handed over to MESTI.

3.3 Kosovar-Austrian Alumni association as discussed above.

The exit strategy was developed in the drafting process of HERAS Plus in 2019 on the assumption to handover to local stakeholders after completion of the HERAS Plus project. In fact, the capacities of MESTI are limited at this stage to hand over the management of funds (such as the social dimension grants and others.) Also, it is doubted that a handover of applied science grants to students would be realistic at this stage.

Therefore, it is considered important to follow-up on the implementation of developed and revised strategies/policies and Administrative Instructions in the remaining phase or in a new project.

**EQ 11: To what extent are the benefits of the project expected to continue after the end of the project?**

The association of Kosovo to Horizon Europe is probably the most sustainable and politically important aspect for research and innovation in Kosovo during the last few years. The HERAS Plus project contributed with supporting the NCP system, consultations with the European Commission and other measures mentioned below.

At system level, HERAS Plus legacy is expected to be multiple, ranging from improved capacity and knowledge (particularly regarding HE, quality assurance and accreditation processes) within institutions (MESTI, KAA, universities) to actual laws and regulations, concept documents and administrative instructions. For universities, the accomplishments in terms of improved quality, strategic planning, decision making, creation and revision of internal regulations, know-how on revising institutional self-evaluation documentations needed for accreditation and improvement of study programmes tailored to meet market needs are expected to last beyond 2023.

The centers for teaching excellence established at University of Fehmi Agani of Gjakova and University Haxhi Zeka in Peja have a potential to last beyond the project end if proper support mechanisms are in place. Such mechanisms would include an operating budget for trainers and credit/point recognition for academic promotion for teaching staff that participate in the trainings.

More generally, the newly created partnerships among local and Austrian universities under the programmatic partnerships may potentially continue after the project ends in new initiatives such as applying for Horizon Europe funds as Kosovo is now eligible for these funds and can take part in joint research projects in the future. Other initiatives may include staff and student mobilities. So far, the partnership between the Fachhochschule Salzburg and the University of Applied Sciences Ferizaj has again proved to be sustainable and will continue after the project ends especially the second activity for establishment of the Industry & Education Transfer Centre Ferizaj (IETF) which is still on-going. This center provides an excellent opportunity for UASF to enhance its cooperation with industry which is foreseen to provide product testing and other relevant services to the wood industry more so since no similar services in country are available for businesses of that specific industry. This also presents and excellent example and opportunity for applied science research.

## 5.5. Follow-Up Phase

**EQ 12: Based on the evaluation of the project along the OECD DAC criteria and the specific evaluation questions listed above, what could be the focus and outputs of a follow-up phase/ project?**

According to the findings of this evaluation a **potential new project** could focus more on research and consider the following suggestions to stimulate first discussions:

### **In general:**

- (1) Develop a structured time-plan for developing a new project.
- (2) Relate and link to national priorities (Kosovo National Plan, National Education Strategy, new Research Programme, Gender Program, others) and international strategies (EHEA, EU Green Deal, etc.)
- (3) Follow-up with donors and projects about their plans in the next three to five years. Consider and conceptualize potential synergies.
- (4) Build on previous experiences from HERAS Plus and other ADC projects. Continue with detailed reporting but also integrate sex disaggregate data in the main Progress Reports for all respective outputs and activities.
- (5) Overall, keep the demand driven approach since it contributes to ownership and sustainability.
- (6) In a new project design present a clear and comprehensible Theory of Change. Simplify the project outcome, develop appropriate indicators, and define the outcome details in the Project Document. Avoid developing sub-outcomes with additional indicators like in HERAS Plus.
- (7) In a new project design ensure that all outputs are well explained and link to each other, indicators are SMART and contribute to a well formulated, realistic, and achievable project outcome.
- (8) Continue with the roadmap of the performance-based funding approach ensuring that applied science is integrated as well.
- (9) Disentangle the human rights-based approach and gender mainstreaming and define them clearly for all relevant outputs and the project implementation in general.
- (10) Keep the multilevel intervention strategy considering the following different levels: a) policy, b) university and c) research and private sector/labour market.
- (11) Increase the project's facilitation role in bringing different partners/stakeholders together and determine clear targets and objectives for these interventions (different ministries, public and private HEIs, private sector especially in relation to the S3 strategy).

## Policy Level

- (12) Reflect on the involvement of current stakeholders but also consider potential new partner. Depending on the thematic priorities, especially strengthen links with other Ministries such as the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade or the Chamber of Commerce.
- (13) Since the KAA is well established and most likely will be supported by a new QAIN project and other donors, it could be considered to pause on a direct engagement.
- (14) In case existing or new laws, policies, strategies, or Administrative Instructions will be supported, define clearly, and communicate how their implementation will eventually lead to improvements and change in the HE sector.
- (15) Focus on the performance-based funding approach ensuring that the applied science approach will be integrated.
- (16) If requested, support MESTI in strengthening the existing research governance structure at national level in order to absorb current and future research funds as well as proposal management (e.g., research funding and promotion agency or explore sustainable alternatives) and other research matters.
- (17) Continue to support the Kosovo Research Information System (KRIS).

## University Level

- (18) If required, provide support in the monitoring process of the strategic plans of the public HEIs.
- (19) If required, support public HEIs in the process of profiling based on their base-line assessments to institutionalize and/or further strengthen research-based teaching and research methods / methodologies, in particular.
- (20) If required, support Research Offices/International Offices at the public HEIs in order to strengthen structures ensuring that courses/workshops on proposal writing are institutionalized to increase the number of Horizon Europe proposals in the long-term.
- (21) If required, provide support on institutional learning/exchange between public and private HEIs (e.g., on the utility of different types of offices, study programs, specific themes, etc.) and offer “space” for exploring potential collaborations between them, also, beyond ERASMUS+.
- (22) If required, support public and private HEIs in developing their gender equality plans and strengthening gender study programs (link to national gender strategies, the EU Gender Action Plan III: towards a gender-equal world<sup>116</sup> and consider recommendations from the gender workshop and its publication on gender equality in HEIs.

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<sup>116</sup> [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gender-action-plan-iii-towards-gender-equal-world\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gender-action-plan-iii-towards-gender-equal-world_en)

- (23) If required, facilitate opportunities among public and private HEIs to exchange experience on human rights issues including different vulnerable and marginalized groups (e.g., minorities, disable people) based on the workshop experiences and its publication of mainstreaming and integrating human rights in HEIs.

### **Research and Private Sector/Labour Market Level**

- (24) Strengthening collaboration with the Erasmus+ Office in regard to Horizon Europe.
- (25) If applicable, and based on experience, continue supporting Horizon Europe proposals.
- (26) Continue the support of different research grants with increased budgets, e.g., social dimension grants, specific grants on minorities, gender mainstreaming and disability, and applied science.
- (27) Continue with scholarships at PhD level, but also consider some for Master programmes. Scholarships for Master programmes would require very concrete and detailed criteria and should be restricted to few subjects very relevant to Kosovo, e.g., human rights, environment, etc.
- (28) Based on the S3 strategy and the knowledge transfer strategy and / or thematic priorities such as environmental issues, energy efficiency, pollution, waste management, traffic management, recycling, circular economy, “green jobs”, health, and others, facilitate an exchange between industries, SMEs, public and private HEIs and other institutions such as the different Chambers of Commerce. Could also, be considered as theme for a HE Conference.
- (29) Enhance collaboration such as bringing business practitioners as guest lectures.
- (30) Support the Organization of Kosovar-Austrian Alumni (OKAA) with some basic funding to cover the costs of setting up and office and at least one office coordinator to coordinate organizational activities members, follow open on calls or grant scouting for a year or two until the organization is self- sustainable.

**EQ 13: Are there follow-up measures needed in order to further sustain the HERAS Plus outputs?**  
**EQ 14: Are there outputs/activities in HERAS Plus that should be followed-up, phased out or even further expanded?**

Follow-up measures to further sustain the HERAS Plus approach will strongly depend on the progress of project implementation achieved until the end of the project period (Dec. 2023).

As stated before, some of the envisaged hand-over processes would need to be re-visited.

For a new project the grant for the public partnerships and the ERASMUS+ related activities could be phased out. Some initiatives like the establishment of the Organization for Kosovan Alumni Association need to be better conceptualized otherwise they may not succeed.

**EQ 15: What are the current gaps in higher education and research that could/should be tackled in a follow-up project in order to further contribute to the well-functioning of Higher Education and Research in Kosovo along the principles of the EHEA and the ERA taking into account national policies and other international interventions/ projects?**

The **EC Progress Report on Kosovo**, (2022) recognizes that there has been progress in higher education, but more improvement is required, and Kosovo should particularly focus on:

- Improving the quality of education at all levels.
- Strengthen the autonomy and academic integrity of higher education institutions, improve quality assurance and adopt the new Law on Higher Education.
- Strengthen and continue post accreditation monitoring of programmes and adopt the Law on Accreditation Agency, to strengthen its operational independence and transparency of appointments of the KAA management.
- Develop a strategic approach to prioritise and promote research and scientific activities, increase investment on research and complete the Smart Specialisation Strategy to inspire investment from the private sector.
- Continue efforts to increase participation in the Horizon Europe programme.

*The EC report states: “The sector continues to be severely underfunded, with public research spending amounting to only 0.01% of GDP, despite a 0.7% target mandated by law. An increased budget in this area is key for the economic recovery, also given the relevance of innovation for the implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans. The quality of programmes preparing postgraduates for research careers remains unsatisfactory. The cooperation among private sector and academia continues to be distant. Provisions of the Law on Performance-Based Funding for Public Higher Education Institutions are not implemented. Kosovo is now an associate member of the Horizon Europe however, its performance in the program remained limited with only two proposals receiving a total EU funding of EUR 0.2 million in 2021. First figures for 2022 indicate already a much better performance”.*

Likewise, the **Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2022-2026**, identifies the following gaps:

- The provisions of study programmes do not reflect the real needs of the labour market.
- Limited offer of interdisciplinary study programs.
- Limited opportunities for practical work of students.
- Limited capacity of quality assurance.
- Limited capacity for professional development of academic staff.
- Limited number of publications in international journals.
- Unfavorable academic staff - student ratio.
- The academic infrastructure is considered outdated and insufficient to ensure delivery of qualitative academic services.
- Lack of national indicators for higher education.
- Limited capacities to address academic integrity and ethics.
- Scientific is still not sufficiently integrated in the activities of higher education institutions.
- Insufficient capacities for scientific research and international networking
- HEIs in Kosovo lack Open Access to the use of laboratories and technological equipment.
- Limited capacities of HEIs for project development and management and building international partnerships.
- Absence of comprehensive labour market research at university and national level.

For a potential follow-up phase, it will be useful to consider the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2022-2026 and the related Action Plan.

Additionally, **interview partners** raised issues which overlap or complement the gaps stated above. Analyzing the responses, most of them stated the gaps only more generally, emphasizing that existing regulations in the HE lacks clarity whereas relevant AIs are not being implemented.

In addition, there was a general consensus among the interviewees that there is no comprehensive data on HEIs and scientific research presenting a barrier for evidence-based strategic decisions for the sector. The higher education institutions are all teaching oriented institutions, meaning that they do not prioritise nor promote scientific research. Whereas even the teaching methods were characterized as conventional primarily due to the lack of staff development initiatives in HE since the budget allocated for the HE's is focused mainly on salaries and operational costs. Given this fact, academic staff lack encouragement for engaging in scientific and research activities.

Further issues related to research were lack of proper research infrastructure for conducting research activities. While the National Council for Science has been established and has just recently presented the national research programme to MESTI, there is no Research Funding Law yet and the existing Law on Research Activities is not yet amended. In addition, a Research Promotion Agency and an Ethics Council for Research have not yet been established.

Consequently, the interviewees also pointed out that academic staff lack necessary capacities for drafting and implementation of international research projects missing out on a number of opportunities in this area. On top of that, MESTI and KAA lack capacities to offer support, coordinate or monitor the quality of research or research activities. Besides, limited international cooperation with other universities was also observed as a missed opportunity for student and staff mobility.

Moreover, interviewees acknowledged that recently, student enrollment in public universities has been declining and mentioned that it is crucial for HEI's to reflect on this ongoing trend and take proper reforming measures in the future to address this issue. Besides, the sector is faced with low number of graduates which may link to the increasing student immigration or brain-drain of students. Finally, another very important issue highlighted by interview participants was the lack of professional practice (internship) for students. This is due to the lack of interaction and closer coordination between private sector and universities. While most of the universities have signed cooperation agreements with businesses and relevant institutions for student internships, study visits, as this is one of the criteria for accreditation, the signed MoUs are very rarely implemented in practice.

**EQ 16: What are the upcoming trends and developments in higher education and research, and the emerging needs of the MESTI, KAA and public universities (and possible other stakeholders/beneficiaries) that could/should be followed up?**

Each institution has its own agendas and priorities, but in general, they all seemed valid and in line with their needs. The following trends and developments were identified:

- Build capacities for applying in Horizon Europe funds.
- Prepare staff from HEIs to absorb more funds from different platforms available in Kosovo.
- Increase international cooperation.
- Further develop inter- and institutional cooperation.
- Advance research and orientation towards innovation.
- Support research projects (writing & implementing).

- Establish and/or strengthen project coordination / research / international offices within universities to assist researchers with project implementation.
- Continue with the internationalisation of curricula.
- Link curricula to themes and challenges in society.
- Set an institutional budget for scientific research, including equipment and space for scientific research.
- Seek to stimulate investment from the private sector by completing the smart specialisation strategy.
- Build capacities for implementing the performance-based funding at the MESTI and university levels.
- Support PhD study program.
- Support profilization of universities.
- Increase collaboration with private universities to learn from each other.
- Increase scholarships also for Master students.
- Improve collaboration with local / regional businesses to facilitate opportunities for knowledge transfer and applied research – Increase institutional efforts and provide relevant support to staff so that research, together with other important field research developments, is more integrated into the teaching process.
- Request and formalize different types of incentives to encourage scientific research among academic staff (sabbatical year, reduction of teaching load, etc.).
- Support universities with creating gender equality plans required for Horizon Europe
- Continue with improving methodologies for teaching and learning.
- Implement and fully functionalize KRIS.
- Include internships, extra curriculum activities and soft skills (social, communication and other interdisciplinary skills) in curriculum.
- Engage students in research.
- Motivate students to get involved in voluntary work or any work that is oriented towards social activities.



## 6. Conclusions

The aim of this chapter is to round-off the findings of all respective DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability) and conclude on the evaluation.

### Relevance

As it has been indicated before, the needs identified originally by HERAS Plus with respect to the HE situation in Kosovo are still valid and have not changed meaningfully during the project implementation except in one circumstance with the new change in Government, the initial focus in “applied science” shifted more towards “performance-based funding” during the project implementation. Yet, the project was flexible and able to adapt its activities to meet this emerging need. (Links to findings, 5.1 relevance, EQ 1 & EQ 2.1).

With regards to the project objectives, it is obvious that the HERAS Plus project is quite ambitious and complex. The logframe matrix comprises of a distinct impact statement, an overall and specific outcome statement and three outputs, a total of 39 indicators and 16 activities (leading to about 127 sub-activities). The overall project outcome statement alienated into seven sub-outcomes including 14 indicators intended to provide a more comprehensible definition of the main project outcome. The complexity increases with different institutions and partners involved in different levels. (Links to findings, 5.1 relevance, EQ 3).

From the point of view of programme/project design with respect to target groups, beneficiaries and partners, different approaches and interventions are clearly presented. However, a better conceptualizing of the three outputs and their contributions to the outcomes would have been advisable. Including additional sub-outcomes and the way they were defined was not perceived useful. In addition, indicators and target value(s) could have been designed using a more advanced SMART approach. (Links to findings, 5.1 relevance, EQ 3).

In regard to the alignment of HERAS Plus with policies of the target groups and overall policy objectives such as the European Higher Education Area and the SDGs: Overall, HERAS Plus targeted outputs and outcome are in line with the priorities of the Kosovar HE and research development policies, the needs of its key stakeholders and beneficiaries (MESTI, KAA and public universities) and the principles of the EHEA, and SDGs. (Links to findings, 5.1 relevance, EQ 2.2).

In regard to the SDG achievements, HERAS Plus directly addressed SDG number 4 and 9 and contributed to three others (5, 8, and 16) mainly indirectly due to the issue of the cause-effect chain between the HERAS Plus activities and the achievement of these goals. (Links to findings, 5.1 relevance, EQ 2.2).

### Effectiveness

Overall, the evidence gathered and analysed suggests that HERAS Plus has contributed largely to the achievement of the three outputs, but some issues were beyond the project’s control mainly identified as: delays in law approvals, limited capacities at the MESTI level in the implementation and monitoring, limited coordination to enhance environment for science-university-society cooperation and employment offers in the current economy. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4)

#### Output 1 (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4, Output 1)

Regarding output 1 the contribution of HERAS Plus in governance improvement at MESTI are recognised and appreciated and pending their approval and implementation. The effectiveness of the intervention would be measured if the changes and results of the higher education reform are attributed to the legislative changes and how new legislation interacts with other related Administrative Instructions, legal acts and administrative practices.

In terms of quality assurance, the intervention directed to support KAA the project documentation reveals effective support to KAA in general.

In relation to improvements in the research and innovation governance, the project played an important role at the systems level, although the intervention directed to KRIS a is not fully implemented at this stage of the project and further support is needed in the implementation phase.

In respect to research planning and legislation, HERAS contribution to drafting laws and administrative instruction have been generally completed however, there is a need for further support to strengthen the applied science and research component.

#### Output 2 (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4, Output 2)

The project contributed to an overall awareness of the third mission of universities creating possibilities for universities to connect with each other and with private sector in the revision of study programmes which resulted with successful accreditation.

In terms of increasing research capacities, the project contributed at the individual level (students and staff) through small research grants aimed at improving the social dimension in university initiatives and staff development capacity workshops for programme design, project management, strategy monitoring, and programme harmonisation with the labour market.

Regarding capacity development there have been numerous activities to foster and stimulate changes in HEI. The tools and techniques used aimed changes at policy level, the university level and individual level. It is clear from these activities that the majority have been implemented, where HERAS Plus mainly played a facilitator's role through provision of national and international expertise. The same is valid for programmatic cooperations between Austrian and Kosovo based HEIs in term of their future cooperation in teaching and research measured in mobility agreements, joint academic and research projects. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 5).

At the level of HEIs, the project was very successful, engaging universities in self-assessment activities through base line assessments, revision of legal framework, policies, programme, and operations and establishing centers of teaching excellence and research offices. Several measures integrated in the strategic plans addressed the quality of programmes, performance evaluation, internship process improvement and graduation of students. At this stage the employability of graduates cannot be measured, however HEIs have improved their data collection and reporting methods in general to measure these indicators in the future.

#### Output 3 (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4, Output 3)

The HERAS Plus project contributed to improved human capacities and the internationalisation of research through scholarships for PhD and post-Docs, and through funding scheme for regional

research networks and training and support for applications for Horizon Europe. The capacities of staff engaged in applying to Horizon Europe projects and implementing grants for regional research networks have improved their networking, research and grant application skills.

Regarding the NCP system, the NCPs have been assigned and a portal has been developed. However, there is still a need to strengthen the capacities of NCPs further to offer the planned support.

Similarly, the Kosovo Austrian Alumni Association has not achieved the planned results lacking organisational and financial capacities for sustainability in the future.

Regarding gender mainstreaming the overall participation in project activities was overall balanced but for some activities more men have participated than women. Details are presented in the main findings. In order to better assess the gender dimension in the project implementation, further data gender disaggregated is required in project reporting. In regard to direct instruments to implement gender mainstreaming in HEI, the report “Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions” provides a useful instrument to measure and monitor gender mainstreaming. Further support in the implementation of the approach would be useful in the future. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 6).

Regarding the human rights-based approach (HBRA) / social dimension the project contributed by fostering relevant debates to include the HRBA into relevant university regulations (statutes, code of ethics, staff performance regulations), study programmes, and developing a document called “Integration and Mainstreaming of Human Rights in Public Institutions in Kosovo”, organizing a workshop and addressing the social dimension in different calls. Further support for the implementation of this approach would also be useful in future. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4, Output 1, Activity 1.6).

And finally, regarding monitoring the social standards/ EGSS, it can be concluded that the checklist has been monitored but 8 standards out of 13 in total were considered as not applicable, but the remaining ones were considered. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 7).

## **Efficiency**

With respect to timely project implementation, the project started as planned however, due to COVID 19 pandemic situation, it had to constantly adjust its timeline of activities during the early stage of the project initiation. The mode of some activities also had to adjust to online or hybrid setting depending on the health measures and instructions in place during that time. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 8).

With respect to the budget, taking into consideration the scope of the project the budget allocation and distribution regarding the three outputs and other budget lines, seemed realistic and justified. The two audit reports verified that the declared expenditures were correct and in line with the project contract. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 8).

Elections and frequent change in government structures caused delays in signing the co-finance agreement and allotted MESTI funds impacting on the utilization rate of the project funds. Yet, the project team was able to efficiently overcome these barriers. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 8).

Engagement of national experts is considered an added value as they are familiar with the local context and needs but involvement international experts especially was very important too. The project team assigned to coordinate activities within this project was highly qualified, professional,

and praised however, in a potential new project in the future, a more attractive remuneration package should be considered for the local project staff. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 8).

Cooperation among the consortium partners was observed as very fruitful whereas the division of labour and project management were detailed clearly and carried out successfully. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 9).

The project office is located within MESTI premises which it is perceived as advantage as it enables easy access, communication, and cooperation. The cooperation with MESTI is well established and both sides are very clear on the division of labour. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 9).

With respect to synergies with other ADC funded projects, the evaluation team found that in the beginning, there were some activity overlaps among the QAIN project and HERAS Plus however, this has been addressed and both project teams now have a coordination mechanism through regular meetings in place, but potential synergies should be further explored. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 9).

In regard to other donor activities, the evaluation team observed that there are few current or foreseen initiatives by international donors in support of the sector therefore, in a follow up phase or a new project, it is important to follow-up with them and conceptualize potential synergies. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 9).

## **Sustainability**

The main sustainable element stemming from HERAS Plus is certainly the improved capacity and knowledge (in particular regarding HE, quality assurance and accreditation processes) within institutions (MESTI, KAA, universities) to actual laws and regulations, concept documents and administrative instructions. All three stakeholders have been actively engaged in the project interventions. A number of capacities have been developed which is a direct contribution to local ownership and sustainability for targeted beneficiary groups. The demand-driven approach was found to have been a direct contribution towards ownership and sustainability and should be considered in the potential follow-up phase or a new project. (Links to findings, 5.4 sustainability, EQ 10).

In regard to the National Contact Point system, even though HERAS Plus provided support, the evaluation team is not fully convinced yet that the NCPs have the required capacities to offer relevant assistance to the Horizon Europe program requests which overall, questions their functionality of the prevailing system. (Links to findings, 5.4 sustainability, EQ 10).

Additionally, the voluntary based functioning of the Organization of Kosovar-Austrian Alumni is not found to be sustainable in the future. (Links to findings, 5.4 sustainability, EQ 10).

HERAS Plus has developed an exit strategy to ensure sustainability of the project achievements, the three outputs and the 16 activities. The exit strategy was observed as comprehensible and feasible. Yet, the evaluation team highlighted the need for better conceptualizations of the hand-over process for seven interventions in the remaining project period or in a potential new project. (Links to findings, 5.4 sustainability, EQ 10).

## 7. Recommendations

As requested under EQ 11, detailed suggestions including potential outputs for a new project were presented under chapter 5.5.

General recommendations specifically addressing different partners are listed below:

### ADC Coordination Office

- If requested support MESTI in the process of strengthening its higher education capacities at the national level. (Links to findings, 5.1 relevance, EQ 1).
- Ensure a good division of labour especially between the newly planned QAIN project, the current HERAS Plus and the new project. Encourage and offer a positive learning environment for all project staff to share and build on each other's project experiences and approaches. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 8).
- Ensure that staff of all ADC supported projects have respective job classifications and remunerations are equally comparable in the next project. (Links to findings, 5.3 efficiency, EQ 8).

### ADC Project Team and Consortium

- Develop a structured time-plan for developing a new project based on reflections from previous experiences from HERAS Plus including the findings, conclusions and recommendations from this evaluation, and other ADC projects. (Links to findings, 5.5 follow-up phase, EQ 12).
- Keep the demand driven approach since it contributes to ownership and sustainability and the multi-level intervention strategy (policy - university – research/private sector). (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 5).
- Continue supporting MESTI and HEIs, also see points below, and increase the project's facilitation role in bringing different partners/stakeholders together such as different ministries, public and private HEIs, private sector (industries, SMEs, chamber of commerce) and other relevant HE institutions (e.g., Kosovo ERASMUS Plus Office, National Council of Science). (Links to findings 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4, output 1-output 3).
- If agreed with MESTI and other stakeholders continue with supporting the performance-based funding approach considering the applied science approach, if still required, support KRIS and mainly focus on strengthening research capacities at the policy, university, and research/private sector levels. (Links to findings 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4, output 1-output 3).
- Conceptually, disentangle the human rights-based approach (HRBA) and gender mainstreaming and define them clearly for all relevant outputs and for all relevant project activities in the project implementation, where applicable. (Links to findings, effectiveness 5.2, EQ 6)

- In a new project design present a clear and comprehensible Theory of Change. Simplify the project outcome, develop appropriate indicators, and define the outcome details in the Project Document. Avoid developing sub-outcomes with additional indicators. Ensure that all outputs are well explained and link to each other, indicators are SMART and contribute to a well formulated, realistic, and achievable project outcome. (Links to findings 5.1 relevance, EQ 3).
- Continue the support of different grants with increased budgets, e.g., social dimension grants, specific grants on minorities, gender mainstreaming and disability, applied science and grants for Horizon Europe proposals. Links to findings, effectiveness 5.2, EQ 4, Output 3).
- Continue with scholarships at PhD level, but also consider some for Master's programmes. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 4, activity 3.3).

## **MESTI**

- Strengthen donor coordination on a quarterly base to remain informed on all HE donor initiatives in the country. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, EQ 9).
- Lead and continue the support on the drafting and implementation of relevant HE laws, policies, regulations, strategies, regulations, etc. and the Kosovo Research Information System (KRIS). (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness output 1).
- Lead and continue the support on the performance-based funding approach considering the applied science approach too. (Links to findings, relevance 5.1, EQ 2.1 and 5.2 effectiveness, output 1 & and 2).
- Considering the international demands and requests in higher education, especially in research (Horizon Europe), ensure that capacities at relevant MESTI units are strengthened timely. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness EQ 4, Output 3).
- Based on previous and on-going, strengthen the existing research governance structure at national level in order to absorb current and future research funds as well as proposal management (e.g., research funding and promotion agency or explore realistic and sustainable alternatives). (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness EQ 4, Output 3).

## **Public and Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)**

- Focus on the implementation and monitoring of the strategic plans, sharpen their institutional profiles considering the applied science approach, initiate changes required for the performance-based funding approach, strengthen the Research/International Offices and others based on the baseline assessments. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness output 2).
- On the basis of the report of the "Gender Equality in HEIs in Kosovo" strengthen gender mainstreaming at the institutional but also at the study programme level. Ensure that gender equality plans are available which are a requirement for Horizon Europe. (Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness EQ 6).

- Exchange experience on human rights issues including different vulnerable and marginalized groups (e.g., minorities, disable people) based on the workshop experiences and its publication of mainstreaming and integrating human rights in HEIs. Links to findings, 5.2 effectiveness, output 2, activity 2.5 & 5.2 effectiveness EQ 6).

### **Private Sector**

- Based on previous discussions and experiences explore potential cooperations with HEIs and the private sector particularly considering “green jobs”, the circular economy, and the European Green Deal. (Links to EQ 12, Follow-up Phase).
- HEIs should consider how to attract guest lectures, conduct study visits to businesses, and organize internships and cooperation through R&D measures. (Links to EQ 15, Follow-up Phase).

## **8. Annexes**

- 8.1.** Results Assessment Form
- 8.2.** Evaluation Matrix - Evidence Grid
- 8.3.** Instruments for data collection
- 8.4.** List of interview partners (anonymized)
- 8.5.** Bibliography
- 8.6.** Logframe Matrix - HERAS Plus Project
- 8.7.** Evaluation TOR

## Annex 8.1: Results Assessment Form (RAF)<sup>117</sup>

Assessment of results - key aspects	Score (choose only one answer for each aspect assessed)	Justify score. Include finding and reference page/s in evaluation report.
1. The extent to which the planned output/s (as defined in the project document/logframe/Theory of Change) has/have been achieved taking into account the causal link between inputs and outputs.	Largely achieved	<p>The project has defined three outputs in the project document. Considering the inputs and the activities, the outputs can be considered as largely achieved by end of November 2022. See chapter 5.2 “Effectiveness”,</p> <p>The project will continue until the end of 2023 and it can be assumed that most of the outputs will most likely be fully achieved.</p>
2. The extent to which the planned outcome/s (as defined in the project document/logframe/Theory of Change) has/have been achieved taking into account the causal link between outputs and outcomes.	Partially achieved	<p>Since there is a lack of some causal links between some outputs and the outcome and the outcome being further into seven sub-outcomes, it can be overall concluded that the outcome &amp; sub-outcomes will be partially achieved. See chapter 5.2 “Effectiveness”, evaluation question 4 and other sub-chapters.</p>
3. The extent to which the PP contributed to the objectives at impact level (as defined in the project document/logframe/ToC).	Not assessed	<p>The Terms of Reference did not require to assess the impact level since no respective evaluation questions were formulated.</p>
4. The extent to which the outputs, outcomes and impact achieved contributed to results related to the relevant cross-cutting issues. Please add a justification for each relevant cross-cutting issue.	Largely achieved	<p>Analyzing the cross-cutting interventions planned and results on gender mainstreaming and the human rights-based approach, the evaluation findings and evidence suggest that both have been largely achieved. See chapter 5.2, “Effectiveness” and in particular the evaluation questions 6 and 7.</p>
5. Have the right approaches - with a view to implementing ADA's overarching principles - been adopted to ensure results achievement?	Fully achieved	<p>The project applies a demand-driven approach, follows a multilevel intervention strategy and a capacity development approach. The evaluation found substantial evidence concluding that the project has successfully applied these three approaches. See chapter 5.2 “Effectiveness” and for capacity development, chapter 5.2, evaluation question 5.</p>

<sup>117</sup> The same information will also be provided in an excel sheet as requested and submitted separately to the final evaluation report.



## Annex 8.2: Evaluation Matrix – Evidence Grid

Evaluation Questions <sup>118</sup>	Sub-Questions	Indicators	Sources	Data Collection Methods
<b>Relevance</b>				
EQ 1: To what extent are the objectives of the project still valid for the partner country, its stakeholders and beneficiaries <sup>119</sup> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent is the project and its objectives still relevant for the HE sector of Kosovo (challenges, needs, priorities)?</li> <li>To what extent are the project objectives still relevant to its key stakeholders (MESTI, Office of Planning (SPO), KAA, universities)?</li> <li>To what extent is the project still relevant considering other HE projects or new initiatives by donors?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project alignment with national HE priorities</li> <li>Project alignment with key stakeholders &amp; beneficiaries</li> <li>Project alignment with other HE projects/donors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Kosovo Government. (2022). DRAFT LAW ON HIGHER EDUCATION</li> <li>Kosovo Assembly. (2011). LAW No.04/L-037 ON HIGHER EDUCATION</li> <li>Ministry of Education Science and Technology. (2022). Kosovo Education Strategy 2022-2026.</li> <li>Kosovo Agency of Statistics. (2022). Public Universities Data Set - Series 2018-2021</li> <li>The Kosovo Government. (2022). DRAFT LAW ON THE KOSOVA ACCREDITATION AGENCY</li> <li>Kosovo Accreditation Agency. (2022). Accredited Programms 202272023. Prishtina.</li> <li>European Commission (2022). Kosovo 2022 Report.</li> <li>European Commission (2020). Overview of the Higher Education System Kosovo.</li> <li>HERAS Plus Project Document</li> <li>HERAS Plus Progress Reports 1-4 incl. 146 Annexes</li> <li>ADC Kosovo Country Strategy 2013–2020</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews</li> <li>MESTI, SPO, KAA, 7 universities, donors, Consortium<sup>120</sup>, ADC</li> </ul>
EQ 2.1: Is the project still corresponding to the priorities and policies of the beneficiaries? And if not, how can a potential follow-up project ensure relevance?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent is the project still relevant to the seven public universities, research agencies and academic staff (PhD and PostDoc)?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project alignment with priorities and policies of beneficiaries</li> <li>Consideration and access of beneficiaries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>University baseline assessments, Progress Report 2, university strategies from university websites</li> <li>Grant guidelines for programmatic partnerships, social, dimension, applied science and research projects. Respective Annexes in Progress Reports and data disaggregated by sex</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews, FGDs</li> <li>7 universities, research agencies (NCPs, academic staff (PhD and PostDoc), students</li> </ul>
EQ 2.2: Is the project in line with the latest developments in the EHEA and the relevant SDGs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent is the project in line with the latest development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)?</li> <li>To what extent is the project in line with the SDGs?</li> </ul>	Project alignment with EHEA and SDGs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Also, see documents from EQ 1</li> <li>ESG (2015), Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> </ul>

<sup>118</sup> All evaluation questions from the TOR are considered in the Evaluation Matrix and one question was added, see EQ 3.

<sup>119</sup> According to the TOR the beneficiaries of this project are: the Ministry for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI), the Government Strategic Planning Office (SPO), the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA), public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as well as research organizations, individual academic staff (PhD and PostDoc staff) and students including from underrepresented groups.

<sup>120</sup> The term “Consortium” also includes the local HERAS+ Project Team and where applicable, also national and international HERAS+ experts.

<p><b>EQ 3: Project design / intervention logic (new question), stated in TOR under “Design and Approach”</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent are the project outcomes(s), outputs, indicators, and targets (intervention logic) well defined, comprehensible, realistic and achievable?</li> <li>To what extent were the project assumptions sufficiently anticipated?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project design and intervention logic (links between outcome &amp; outputs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Document</li> <li>Logframe</li> <li>Exit Strategy</li> <li>TOC graph</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews</li> <li>Consortium, ADC</li> </ul>
<b>Effectiveness</b>				
<p>EQ 4: To what extent has the project already achieved its outcome and output(s) or will be likely to achieve it/them?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent has the project already achieved its outcome(s) and outputs? (Also, see EQ 4.1-4.3)</li> <li>To what extent will the project achieve the outcome(s) and outputs until 12/2023?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achievements of outcome(s) and outputs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Document</li> <li>Logframe</li> <li>Exit Strategy</li> <li>Progress Reports 1- 4 &amp; Annexes</li> <li>Other project reports (see 4.1-4.3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews</li> <li>MESTI, KAA, 7 universities, Consortium, ADC</li> </ul>
<p>EQ 4.1: Output 1 - MESTI is enabled to effectively develop and implement policies along European standards in HE and research adapted to the national context. KAA has satisfactorily addressed and implemented key ENQA recommendations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent has MESTI improved its planning &amp; implementation capacities?</li> <li>Overall, are the revised strategies, policies and regulations being implemented? What are the main expected shortcomings in the implementation?</li> <li>Which of the planned activities are already completed by MESTI/project?</li> <li>To what extent is KAA functioning and relevant procedures, guidelines, etc. are in place?</li> <li>To what extent has KKA implemented the key ENQA recommendations?</li> <li>Which of the planned activities are already completed by KAA/project?</li> <li>To what extent is the basic Kosovo research information system (CRIS) already developed and piloted? To what extent is CRIS aligned with other education information systems in Kosovo?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achievements of output 1, link to activities 1.1 to 1.6</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ESG. (2015). Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area</li> <li>The Kosovo Government. (2022). DRAFT LAW ON THE KOSOVA ACCREDITATION AGENCY</li> <li>Ministry of Education Science and Technoloy. (2022). Kosovo Education Strategy 2022-2026.</li> <li>Kosovo Accreditation Agency. (2022). Accredited Programms 202272023. Prishtina.</li> <li>Kosovo Accreditation Agency. (2022). Accreditation Manual. Prishtina: Kosovo Accrediation Agency.</li> <li>Kosovo Accreditation Agency. (2021).The Manual of External Evaluation of Higher Education Institutions.</li> <li>Project Document</li> <li>Progress Reports 1- 4 &amp; Annexes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews</li> <li>MESTI, SPO, KAA, Consortium, 7 universities</li> </ul>
<p>EQ 4.2: Output 2 - Strategic plans of public universities are reviewed, developed, and decision-making processes are based on these strategies and better contribution to a competitive HE sector as well as to economic, social and cultural development of Kosovo (in line with the 3rd mission of universities)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent have the seven public universities benefitted from the project? To what extent have they improved their planning and research capabilities due to the project?</li> <li>To what extent were social dimensions and the 3<sup>rd</sup> missions enhanced at universities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achievements of output 2,</li> <li>link to activities 2.1 to 2.7</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EHEA (2020), Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA</li> <li>Project document</li> <li>Logframe</li> <li>Progress Reports 1- 4 &amp; Annexes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews, FGDS</li> <li>7 universities, Austrian universities, Consortium, academic staff (PhD and PostDoc), students</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which of the planned activities are already completed by the seven public universities / project?</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HERAS Plus (2021) Integration and Mainstreaming of Human Rights in Public Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo</li> <li>• <i>Relevant data disaggregated by sex</i></li> </ul>	
EQ 4.3: Output 3 - Kosovo has further advanced the quality of its research capacities and the internationalisation / Europeanisation of its higher education and research system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent is the National Coordination Points (NCP) system functioning as planned and is adjusted to the structure of Horizon Europe?</li> <li>• To what extent has the alumni system (Organization of Kosovar-Austrian Alumni) been developed?</li> <li>• Which of the planned activities are already completed in output 3?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achievements of output 3,</li> <li>• link to activities 3.1 to 3.3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Document</li> <li>• Logframe</li> <li>• Progress Reports 1- 4 &amp; Annexes</li> <li>• <i>Relevant data disaggregated by sex</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review</li> <li>• Semi-structured personal / online interviews</li> <li>• <i>7 Universities, NCPs, National Scientific Council, Erasmus + Office, Consortium</i></li> </ul>
EQ 5: Did the project contribute to capacity development as planned?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent were the capacities of the institutions and direct beneficiaries developed (three levels: individual, institutional, enabling environment)?</li> <li>• To what extent were the tools and techniques used sufficient to bring about the envisaged change for different stakeholders?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribution of capacity development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Document (PD)</li> <li>• Tools and Techniques used for Capacity Development (PD Annex 9)</li> <li>• Logframe</li> <li>• Progress Reports 1- 4 &amp; Annexes</li> <li>• Participation lists</li> <li>• <i>Relevant data disaggregated by sex</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review</li> <li>• Semi-structured personal / online interviews, FGDs</li> <li>• <i>MESTI, KAA, 7 universities, staff, students, NCPs, Consortium, ADC, academic staff (PhD and PostDoc), students</i></li> </ul>
EQ 6: To what extent was gender mainstreaming included in the project and to what extent were recommendations from the ADA gender-assessment considered and implemented?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent was gender mainstreaming included in the project design and implementation?</li> <li>• To what extent were recommendations from the ADA gender-assessment considered and implemented?</li> <li>• To what extent do women, men, diverse benefit from the project?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of gender mainstreaming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Document (PD)</li> <li>• ADA Gender Analysis /Assessment (PD Annex 11)</li> <li>• Environmental, Gender and Social Standards (EGSS) Checklist (PD: Annex 8)</li> <li>• Progress Report on the Environmental, gender and Social Risk Management and Sustainability</li> <li>• HRBA Checklist for Deliverables: Assessing a Gender/Vulnerable Groups' Perspective (PD: Annex 7)</li> <li>• HRBA Monitoring Plan (Annexes in Progress Reports)</li> <li>• Plan (Annexes in Progress Reports)</li> <li>• Progress Reports 1- 4 &amp; Annexes</li> <li>• HERAS Plus (2022) Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo.</li> <li>• <i>Relevant data disaggregated by sex</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review</li> <li>• Semi-structured personal / online interviews, FGDs</li> <li>• <i>7 universities, Consortium, ADC, KWN, academic staff (PhD and PostDoc, students)</i></li> </ul>
EQ 7: To what extent were the social standards monitored? Have any issues emerged, if so which ones and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent were the social standards included and monitored?</li> <li>• Have any issues emerged, if so which ones and why?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of social standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Document (PD)</li> <li>• Environmental, Gender and Social Standards (EGSS) Checklist (PD: Annex 8)</li> <li>• <i>Relevant data disaggregated by sex</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review</li> <li>• Semi-structured personal / online interviews, FGDs</li> <li>• <i>7 universities, Consortium, ADC academic staff (PhD and PostDoc), students</i></li> </ul>

<b>Efficiency</b>				
EQ 8: Was the project implemented in the most efficient way (time, personnel resources, budget)? Have any issues emerged, if so which ones and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent was the project implemented in the most efficient way (time, personnel resources, budget)?</li> <li>Did any issues emerge, if so, which ones?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance project management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Document</li> <li>Logframe</li> <li>Progress Reports 1- 4 &amp; Annexes</li> <li><i>Relevant data disaggregated by sex</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews. Consortium/national &amp; international experts.</li> </ul>
EQ 9: How well does the cooperation work between the consortium, the local team, the beneficiaries and donors (e.g. work flows, division of labour, participation and local ownership)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How well does the cooperation work between the consortium, the local team, MESTI, the Government Strategic Planning Office, KAA, the seven universities and donors (e.g., workflow division of labour, exchange, participation and local ownership)?</li> <li>How well do the seven public universities cooperate with and learn from each other?</li> <li>How well do the public universities work together with Austrian universities?</li> <li>To what extent do the seven public universities also cooperate with private universities in Kosovo?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder cooperation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Document</li> <li>Logframe</li> <li>Progress Reports 1- 4 &amp; Annexes</li> <li>TOR of Steering Board</li> <li>Steering Board minutes</li> <li>Participation lists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews</li> <li>MESTI, KAA, 7 universities, Consortium/ national &amp; international experts. ADC, donors</li> </ul>
<b>Sustainability</b>				
EQ 10: To what extent has local ownership been developed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent have MESTI, KAA and the seven public universities demonstrated local ownership by leading and completing relevant HE and project related activities?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribution to local ownership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Document (PD)</li> <li>Exit Strategy (PD Annex 12)</li> <li>Progress Reports 1- 4 &amp; Annexes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews</li> <li>MESTI, KAA, 7 universities, Consortium, ADC</li> </ul>
EQ 11: To what extent are the benefits of the project expected to continue after the end of the project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What exactly will remain after this project will have ended in 12/2023? Which benefits will continue?</li> <li>Reflection of Exit Strategy (also see TOR, p.3 "Evaluation Questions"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Legacy of project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Document (PD)</li> <li>Exit Strategy (PD Annex 12)</li> <li>Progress Reports 1- 4 &amp; Annexes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews</li> <li>MESTI, KAA, 7 universities, Consortium</li> </ul>
<b>Questions for a potential follow-up phase</b>				
EQ 12: Based on the evaluation of the project along the OECD DAC criteria and the specific evaluation questions listed above, what could be the focus and outputs of a follow-up phase/project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on the evaluation findings, what could be the focus and outputs of a follow-up phase/project?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Considerations for follow-up phase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National &amp; international strategic education / HE documents.</li> <li>Project documents, e.g., Exit Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Document review</li> <li>Semi-structured personal / online interviews &amp; verification workshop</li> <li><b>For all EQs / follow up phase:</b> MESTI, KAA, 7 universities, Consortium, ADC</li> </ul>

EQ 13: Are there follow-up measures needed in order to further sustain the HERAS Plus outputs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a potential follow-up phase, would there be any follow-up measures or activities needed to further sustain the current HERAS+ project? If so, which ones?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considerations for follow-up phase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National &amp; international strategic education / HE documents.</li> <li>• Project documents, e.g., Exit Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review.</li> <li>• Semi-structured personal / online interviews &amp; verification workshop</li> </ul>
EQ 14: Are there outputs/activities in HERAS Plus that should be followed-up, phased out or even further expanded?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a potential follow-up phase, are there any outputs or activities in HERAS+ that should be phased out, further expanded, or newly developed?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considerations for follow-up phase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National &amp; international strategic education / HE documents.</li> <li>• Project documents, e.g., Exit Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review.</li> <li>• Semi-structured personal / online interviews &amp; verification workshop</li> </ul>
EQ 15: What are the current gaps in higher education and research that could/should be tackled in a follow-up project in order to further contribute to the well-functioning of Higher Education and Research in Kosovo along the principles of the EHEA and the ERA taking into account national policies and other international interventions/ projects?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the current gaps in higher education and research in Kosovo?</li> <li>• Comment: Gaps in HE and research will be presented in the “Background” chapter in the evaluation report and relevant findings will be considered for suggestions of the follow-up phase.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gaps in HE and research in Kosovo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National &amp; international strategic education / HE documents.</li> <li>• Project documents, e.g., Exit Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review</li> <li>• Semi-structured personal / online interviews &amp; verification workshop</li> </ul>
EQ 16: What are the upcoming trends and developments in higher education and research, and the emerging needs of the MESTI, KAA and public universities (and possible other stakeholders/ beneficiaries) that could/should be followed up?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the priorities of MEST, KAA and seven public universities regarding HE and research for the next three to five years?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future priorities in HE and research in Kosovo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National &amp; international strategic education / HE documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document review. Semi-structured personal / online interviews &amp; verification workshop</li> </ul>

## Annex 8.3: Data Collection Instruments (Interview Guidelines - Some Examples-)

### Interview Guideline – Universities

For us: HERAS supports them with university plans/strategies, scholarships, 9 Research project grant (UP, Prizren, Peja), 10 Social dimension grant (UP, Prizren, Mitrovica), 10 Applied science grant (UP, Peja, Mitrovica), 5 Project partnerships (UP, Ferizaj, Mitrovica & together Mitrovica/Prizren/UP)

#### Introduction

##### General:

- Could you just briefly describe the role and tasks of your department/office?

##### EQ 2.1) Relevance

- Talking about HERAS+ how is your university engaged in the project?
- How did you select these activities and why? What about the MOU, is that somehow useful?
- How do you think HERAS+ is addressing the challenges, needs and priorities in HE?

**EQ 4.2) Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 3** / Effective planning of HEIs. Activity 2.1 & 2.2: Baseline-assessments, competitive fund for universities set up, funds distributed to all universities

- HERAS+ has supported the process of the universities updating or developing their strategic strategies or plans. What do you think about this process? Included local experts?
- Did you use the Competitive Fund for the strategic development?

**EQ 4.2) Effectiveness** Activity 2.4 PPs (UP, Ferizaj, Mitrovica & together Mitrovica/Prizren/UP), activity 2.5 social dimension fund (UP, Prizren, Mitrovica), activity 2.6 applied science grant (UP, Peja, Mitrovica)

- Some universities got engaged in certain instruments/tools which HERAS+ offered, such as the project partnerships, the social dimension fund, research cooperation/networking grant, the small applied science grant. What do you think about these tools? *Probe, if necessary:* Are they useful? Will they change anything? If yes, what exactly?
- Currently, HERAS+ offers these initiatives but in the long term which institution should be responsible for managing such grants/funds?

**EQ 4.3 Effectiveness** Activity 3.2 research grant (6 research grants, 20 applications to Horizon Europe) *Only: UP, Prizren, Peja*

- What do you know about HERAS+ support to the research grants to stimulate project proposals for Horizon Europe? Again, should that be the role of a project?

##### EQ 1 Relevance / Donor Coordination / Other Projects

- There are several other projects in HE, one is QAIN, for example, how do you work together with them (*Note: Prizren & Peja do*)?
- What is the difference working with HERAS+ & QAIN?

##### EQ 4.1) Effectiveness / Activity 1.1 performance-based funding initiative

- What is your opinion about the performance-based funding initiative by MESTI, there was also a workshop recently?
- It seems that the focus on performance-based funding shifted the focus away from applied science. What is your perception on that?

**EQ 4.1) Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 2** / Activity 1.3 (2 AIs were developed, workshops held, should *lead to at least 10 new science-economy partnerships*)

- The project also tries to build bridges between universities and the economy? This should lead to at least 10 new science-economy partnerships? What do you know about this?
- Where do you see the role of the National Science Council in future in this regard & in general?

##### EQ 4.1) Effectiveness / Activity 1.4 Current Research Information System (CRIS)

- HERAS+ is also supporting the Current Research Information System (CRIS). Do you know anything about that? What will that mean for your university?

**EQ 4.2) Effectiveness.** Activity 2.3: Support to internationalisation & mobility (through Erasmus+)

*Internal: The aim is to submit 3 Erasmus+ international mobility proposals involving 15 student and 5 staff mobilities*

- The project also supports academic staff for Erasmus+ Calls? Where do you see the greatest challenges with Erasmus+?

**EQ 4.3 Effectiveness** Activity 3.1 Support to NCP system (9 people on the list)

- What do you know about the NCP system ? *Probe, if necessary.* Is it functioning?
- Overall, what do you think needs to change to improve research in Kosovo?

**EQ 4.3 Effectiveness** Activity 3.3 Scholarships / Organization of Kosovar Austrian Alumni (OKAA)

- Do you have any observations regarding the scholarships to Austria?
- HERAS+ is supporting a Kosovar-Austrian Alumni database, have you heard about that?

**EQ 4. Effectiveness – Strengths and Challenges**

- Overall, what do you think are the strengths of and challenges for HERAS+?

**EQ 4. / EQ 5 Effectiveness – Involvement / Improvements / Impact**

- *If not yet stated: So far, how has your university benefitted from HERAS+ so far?*
- What exactly has changed or improved because of the involvement of HERAS+? *Probe: Any further impacts?*
- HERAS+ is also using different tools & techniques in capacity development<sup>121</sup>. Which ones do you think are more useful than others?

**EQ 4.2) Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 4 / Employability of graduates**

- Overall, how do you think the project contributes to the employability of graduates?

**E6) Gender mainstreaming**

- How is gender mainstreaming anchored at your university? Which kind of gender related issues/ challenges do you see in HE?
- How do you think that the gender dimensions could be strengthened in research?

**E1) Relevance / If not yet asked (also links to Social Dimension – EQ 4.2)**

- HERAS+ specifically targets students from underrepresented/vulnerable groups? In your opinion, where and how exactly are these groups being addressed in the project?
- *What do you think about the 3<sup>rd</sup> mission of universities, engaging with the society? Has the HERAS+ project made a contribution to that?*
- What are the particular challenges in this regard?

**EQ 9) Efficiency**

- How would you describe the cooperation between different stakeholders in HERAS+? *Probe: consortium, the local team, MESTI, universities and donors?*
- How does your university cooperate with other public universities? How do you learn from each other?
- Do you have contacts & an exchange with private universities in Kosovo too? Which ones
- What are your experiences with Austrian universities?

**EQ 10) Sustainability**

- Regarding sustainability, where do you think the universities have demonstrated local ownership?

**Follow-Up Questions**

- **EQ 13:** In a potential new project, are there any activities needed to sustain the current HERAS+ efforts? If so, which ones?
- **EQ 14:** Also, related, in a potential new project what could or should be the priorities? Do you have any suggestions?
- **EQ 16:** What do you think could or should be the priorities of MESTI, KAA and the public universities regarding HE and research in the next three to five years?
- *Probe, if necessary:* When you think about teaching and research are there any particular themes or topics where universities should get engaged in?
- What would be your recommendations for the remaining implementation period (Dec. 2023)?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

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<sup>121</sup> Knowledge sharing, coaching/mentoring, workshops, training seminars, study visits, etc.

## **Interview- Guideline for MESTI**

### **Introduction**

#### **EQ 1) Relevance**

- Could you briefly describe your role & involvement in HERAS+?
- Looking at HERAS+ how does it address the current needs, challenges and priorities in HE?
- Since there are several donor projects in HE, how would you describe the role of MESTI in donor coordination? *Probe:* especially with QAIN, USAID, GIZ, others? Do you see any potential overlaps? Do you meet with different donors to arrange activities and priorities?

#### **EQ 4. Effectiveness – Strengths and Challenges**

- Overall, what do you think are the strengths and challenges of the project?

#### **EQ 4.1 Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 1**

- *If not yet stated: So far, how has MESTI benefitted from HERAS+?*
- What exactly has changed or improved because of HERAS+? *Probe:* Any further impacts?

#### **EQ 4.1 Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 1 / Activity 1.1. performance-based funding**

- HERAS+ was initially designed to support MESTI in enhancing applied science and already assisted with the administrative instruction and roadmap. But then there was a shift in approach towards the performance-based funding. What do you think about this shift?

#### **EQ 4.1 Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 1, Activity 1.3. National Science Council / strategy / AU**

- The project also organized a first Forum on the development of the National Science Program. What do you expect from the National Science Council in future?
- How would you describe the role of MESTI with the NSC?

#### **EQ 4.1 Effectiveness Activity 1.3. New instrument on research, innovation & knowledge transfer**

- What do you think will the new strategy on “Transfer and forms of transfer of knowledge and technology transfer”, will change?
- What will the AI on Registration of Research and Innovation Institutions” change?

#### **EQ 4.1 Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 1, Activity 1.5. S3**

- HERAS+ has also supported the Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) and a web platform. What do you think this strategy will change? How will this platform be used and maintained in future?

#### **EQ 4.1 Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 1, Activity 1.4. CRIS**

- HERAS+ also supports the current research information system (CRIS). What is your opinion about this initiative? What will CRIS change in future?

#### **EQ 4.1 Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 1, Activity 1.6. (2 instruments, HRBA & gender analysis)**

- Together with MESTI, the project organized workshops & publication on the human rights-based approach and one gender? What were the results of these activities?

#### **EQ 4.3 Effectiveness Activity 3.1 Support to NCP system & Erasmus+Office**

*Note, if not stated before:* You are also a National Contact Point, right? What can you tell me about the NCP system? Is it already fit for Horizon Europe?

- MESTI also offers research opportunities and calls but we were also told that the budget is not always spent. What is your perception on that?
- Overall, what do you think needs to change to improve research in general in Kosovo? *Probe:* Some countries have research promotion/funding agencies, is that something which would be useful in Kosovo?

#### **E5) Effectiveness / capacity development**

- *Note, if not yet stated before:* HERAS+ also tries to improve capacities in HE institutions using different tools and techniques<sup>122</sup>. Which ones do you think are more useful than others?

#### **EQ 9) Efficiency**

- How would you describe the cooperation between different stakeholders? *Probe:* between the consortium, the local team, MESTI, the Government Strategic Planning Office, KAA, the seven universities and donors? Where do you see the greatest challenges here?
- You also participate in the Steering Board meetings, what could you tell me about these meetings?

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<sup>122</sup> Knowledge sharing, coaching/mentoring, workshops, training seminars, study visits, etc.



## EQ 10) Sustainability

- The HERAS+ project will come to an end in Dec. 2023 which benefits will continue after that?

### Follow-Up Questions

- **EQ 13:** In a potential new project, are there any activities needed to sustain the current HERAS+ efforts? If so, which ones?
- **EQ 14:** Also, related, in a potential new project what could or should be the priorities? Do you have any suggestions? *Probe, if necessary:* Which outputs or activities from the current project should be phased out, further expanded, or newly developed?
- **EQ 16:** What do you think could or should be the priorities of MESTI, KAA and the public universities regarding HE and research in the next three to five years?
- What would be your recommendations for the remaining implementation period (Dec. 2023)?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

## Interview- Guideline for KAA

### Introduction

#### EQ 1) Relevance

- To our understanding, KAA was supported by HERAS+ in several activities (*internal:* KAA law, KAA plan manual, etc.), so in general what do you think about support provided by HERAS+?
- The KAA law is still waiting for the AOK approval? When do you think this decision will be taken?
- Overall, what are the current challenges of KAA?
- There are several donor projects in HE, which other donors / project support KAA? Which are these? *Probe:* Especially with QAINTEC, USAID, others? How do they support KAA? Are there any potential overlaps?
- *Note, if still applicable:* In your opinion what is the difference between QAINTEC and HERAS+?
- Looking at HERAS+ in general, how does it address the current needs, challenges, and priorities in HE in general?

#### EQ 4. Effectiveness – Strengths and Challenges

- Overall, what do you think are the strengths and challenges of HERAS+?

#### EQ 4.1 Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 1

- *If not yet stated:* So far, how has KAA benefitted from HERAS+?
- What exactly has changed or improved because of HERAS+? *Probe:* Any further impacts?
- KAA was granted the status of “ENQA affiliate”. In your opinion, what do you think, should be the next steps for KAA?

#### EQ 4.2) Effectiveness & Sub-Outcome 3 / Effective planning of HEIs. Activity 2.1 & 2.2: Baseline-assessments, competitive fund for universities set up, funds distributed to all universities

- In your opinion how, have the public universities benefitted from HERAS+? What has changed for them?
- What do you think about the current QA system at the seven public universities? Which of QA measures need to be further improved? How can this be achieved?

### Follow-Up Questions

- **EQ 14:** Also, related, in a potential new project what could or should be the priorities? Do you have any suggestions? *Probe, if necessary:* Which outputs or activities from the current project should be phased out, further expanded, or newly developed?
- **EQ 16:** What do you think could or should be the priorities of KAA and regarding HE and research in the next three to five years?
- What would be your recommendations for the remaining implementation period (Dec. 2023)?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

## Interview- Guideline for NCP-Erasmus+ Office

### Introduction

#### General

- To start with could you please, describe your role & function in the Erasmus+ Office?
- What do you know about the HERAS+ project?

#### **EQ 4.3 Effectiveness** Activity 3.1 Support to NCP system & Erasmus Office

- Since you are also a National Contact Point, right? What can you tell me about the NCP system in general?
- HERAS+ supports the NCP system in the revision process of clarifying roles and responsibilities of NCPs. Can you tell us more about this? Which changes can be expected after this process?
- The project also, organized 2 train-the trainer seminars and 2 trainings took place, is that right? In which ones did you participate? Overall, what has changed for the participants after these trainings?
- The project also supports MESTI in establishing a new NCP platform. Can you tell us more about the platform? What exactly is meant by “platform”? How will the NCP system benefit from it?
- HERAS+ also supports Horizon Europe with 9 research grants and 20 researchers will receive financial support for that? What are your impressions on that?
- *Note, if not yet stated before:* There are currently 9 NCPs, right?
- Overall, what are the biggest challenges for the NCPs system in general?
- If you think about the Erasmus+ Office in particular, what would you say are the major challenges here?
- Would you have any suggestions for improvements?

#### **Research in general**

- Overall, what do think should change or need to be improved to strengthen research in Kosovo?
- Also, related what needs to change to increase the number of Horizon Europe proposals?
- In general, what do you expect from the National Science Council (NSC) and the new National Scientific Program?
- What do you think should be the priorities for the new research programme? Which topics & themes do you think will be important for Kosovo?

#### **EQ 6) Gender – in research**

- We also came across perceptions that gender needs to be further included in research, would you agree to that? How can this be achieved in future?

#### **EQ 4.3) Effectiveness**

- HERAS+ is also supporting MESTI, KAA and the public universities? Do you know of any other initiatives and activities?

#### **Follow-Up Questions**

- **EQ 14:** In a potential new project supported by the Austrian Development Cooperation what do you think could be important to consider? Would you have any suggestions?
- **EQ 16:** What do you think could or should be the priorities of MESTI, KAA and the public & private universities / colleges regarding HE and research in the next three to five years?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

### **Interview- Guideline – Local Experts**

#### **Introduction**

- You have been working in HE for quite some time, right? What is your current position?
- How did you get engaged in HERAS+? How long have you been a local expert for the project? *Probe, if necessary:* Also in the predecessor project HERAS?
- What are your roles and tasks in HERAS+?
- Who is your contact person in the project?
- Overall, what were your experiences with the project, so far?
- Would you have any suggestions in regard to your assignment/cooperation?

#### **EQ 4) Effectiveness**

*Note, if needed:* Could you describe the activities you have been involved in a bit more detail?

#### **EQ 1) Relevance**

- From your perspective what do you think are the greatest challenges in HE at the moment?
- Follow up question, how do you think these challenges can be addressed?
- As you know HERAS + provides support on the policy, university, and research level. In your opinion, how does HERAS+ addresses some of these current needs, challenges, and priorities?
- If yes, which ones, what do you think about them? *Note: Follow-up questions, if useful.*

- Which other institutions do you regard as important in the HE sector in Kosovo?

#### **EQ 4) Effectiveness – Outcome 4 / Employability of students**

- Looking at the employability of students, in particular, where do you see the challenges here?
- From your experience what should be done or improved to increase the employability of students? Which stakeholders would need to work together?

#### **EQ 4) Effectiveness – General**

- In general, what do you think has changed or improved because of the HERAS+ project? *Probe: Any further impacts?*

#### **EQ 4) Effectiveness – Strengths and Challenges**

- Overall, what do you think are the strengths of and challenges for HERAS+?

#### **Follow-Up Questions**

- **EQ 14:** In a potential new project supported by the Austrian Development Cooperation what could be the priorities? Would you have any suggestions?
- **EQ 16:** What do you think should be the priorities of MESTI, KAA and the public universities regarding HE and research in the next three to five years?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

## **Interview - Guideline for National Science Council**

### **Introduction**

#### **EQ 1) Relevance**

- To start with could you please, describe your role in the National Science Council?
- *Note, if not yet stated before:* To our understanding, the National Science Council (NSC) was supported by HERAS+ in organizing the first Forum on “Development of the National Scientific Program” in Kosovo in April 2022. What can you tell us about it?
- *Note, if not yet stated:* The Council has developed a draft of the next National Science Programme for Kosovo (old one expired in 06/2010), how was this organized?
- How did you go about selecting new priorities for the new research programme? Which topics & themes do you think will be important for Kosovo in future?
- Was HERAS+ part of this process in any way?
- When and how will the final Program be presented?

#### **EQ 6) Gender – in research**

- We also came across perceptions that gender needs to be further included in research, what is your opinion about this? How can this be achieved in future?

#### **Research in general**

- *Note, if not yet stated.* Overall, what do think should change or need to be improved to strengthen research in Kosovo?

#### **EQ 4.3) Effectiveness, activity 2.5-2.7, 3.2**

- HERAS+ is also supporting grants for social dimension, applied science and research, and is involved in the administration of this. But in the long term which institution should be responsible for managing such research grants?

#### **EQ 4) Effectiveness – activity 2.1 & others**

- The project also supports public universities, do you know of any of these initiatives? Which ones?
- Since you are a director of a private college, what are your general perceptions about the public universities in Kosovo?
- Are you in contact / exchange with a public or other private universities in Kosovo? If yes, which ones and how?
- Do you see a potential that public and private HEI could benefit from each other? If so, how could this be done exactly & also institutionalized? How could they work together?

#### **EQ 4.3 Effectiveness Activity 3.1 Support to NCP system (9 people on the list)**

- *Note, if not yet mentioned before:* What is your opinion on the National Contact Point system? *Probe, if necessary.* Is it already fit for Horizon Europe? Are there any issues? *Probe: NCP, Horizon Europe or the Erasmus Office*

### **Follow-Up Questions**

- **EQ 14:** In a potential new project supported by the Austrian Development Cooperation what do you think could be important to consider? Would you have any suggestions?
- **EQ 16:** What do you think could or should be the priorities of MESTI, KAA and the public & private universities / colleges regarding HE and research in the next three to five years?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

### **FGD – Guideline Questionnaire for the Research Grants**

Welcome and general introduction.

- 1) I guess you all know each other, but could you please, briefly introduce yourself?
- 2) Could you briefly describe your research proposal which you have submitted to the HERAS Plus project?
- 3) How would you describe the application process? *Note, probe, if necessary:* Was it complex to apply in these Heras+ grant scheme?
- 4) How did you hear about this call?
- 5) Did you face any challenges or constraints in this research grant?
- 6) Do you have any suggestions how to improve the scheme?
- 7) Looking at your project how was the university third mission addressed in your research?
- 8) In your project, how did you treat gender issues?
- 9) In general, what can be done to enhance gender studies?
- 10) Talking more in general, what do you think are the main research gaps in HE in Kosovo?
- 11) In general, how do you think the Heras plus project has already contributed to a better environment for research or could do in future?

#### Annex 8.4: List of Interview Partners (anonymized<sup>123</sup>)

Institutions in alphabetical order	No of women participated	No of men participated	No of interviews
Austrian Development Coordination Office (ADC)	1		1
Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF)		2	2
Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)		1	1
HERAS Plus Project Team	3	2	2
Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA)		2	2
Kosovo Erasmus+ Office (KEO)	1		1
Kosovo Parliament/Education Committee at the Parliament		1	1
Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI)	2	1	3
National experts	2	3	5
National Council of Science/Nat. Scientific Council	1		1
Organization of Kosovar-Austrian Alumni (OKAA)	1		1
Österreichischer Austauschdienst GmbH (OeAD)	2	1	1
Quality Accountability, Integrity and Transparency in Higher Education Project (QAIN)	1		1
Strategy Planning Office (SPO)		1	1
University of Applied Science Salzburg, Austria	1		1
University of Applied Science, (UASF) Ferizaj		1	1
University of Fehm Agani (UFAGJ), Gjakova		1	1
University of Haxhi Zeka (UHZ), Peja	1		1
University Isa Boletini (UIBM), Mitrovica South	1		1
University Kadri Zeka (UKZ), Gjilan		1	1
University of Prishtina (UP)	1	3	4
University of Ukshin Hoti (UUHP), Prizren		2	1
University of Leoben (Montanuniversität), Austria	1		1
World University Service (WUS)	2		1
Zentrum für Soziale Innovation GmbH (ZSI)		1	1
<b>Participation of women and men in interviews &amp; total no. of interviews</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>37</b>
Some people interviewed above were also interviewed in their capacities as National Contact Points, international experts, and grantees (additional to the FGDs below).			

	No of women participated	No of men participated	Total no. of participants
<b>Three Focus Group Discussions</b> (Social Dimension, Applied Science, Research Grants) including academic (PhD) staff, PostDoc staff, students, NGOs	5	7	12

<sup>123</sup> As indicated in the Guidelines for Project and Programme Evaluations by ADA, the list of interviewees needs to be anonymized, p. 50.

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## ANNEX 8.6: Logframe Matrix HERAS Plus Project

Intervention Logic	Indicators	Target value for each indicator	Sources of Verification List the source of verification / information for each indicator	Risks & Assumptions
<p><b>Impact</b> More competitive and diversified public higher education and research sector in Kosovo in line with the principles of EHEA, ERA,SDG 4 and SDG 9 related to quality assurance, economy and labour market relevance, international cooperation and the Social Dimension of HE</p>	<p><b>Indicators</b> By the end of the project better integration of Kosovo into EHEA and ERA (especially through increased participation in European Programmes on Research Technology and Innovation, such as Horizon Europe and COST)</p>	<p><b>Target value(s) until end of project:</b> Positive evaluation of developments in the Kosovo Higher Education and Research System by international bodies such as the EC, ENQA and EQAR until the end of the project.</p> <p>The number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment and decent jobs and entrepreneurship has increased substantially in line with SDG 4 (SDG 4/ target 4.4) until 2030.<sup>124</sup></p> <p>The higher education system is more responsive to labour market needs through:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Revisions of the national regulatory framework for higher education with the aim to better equip graduates with skills relevant for employment, including entrepreneurship, technical and vocational skills (SDG 4.4.).</li> <li>b. Development and putting in place of mechanisms at public HEIs to foster labour market relevant education and skills of students and young professionals relevant for employment, including entrepreneurship, technical and vocational skills in line with SDG 4.4..</li> </ol> <p><b>Baseline:</b></p>	<p><b>Data source:</b> Reports from international bodies including the EC, ENQA, EQAR and WBC-RTI Platform for research and innovation for Western Balkans, thematic and analytical reports on education developments from MESTI, KAA, national statistical reports,</p> <p><b>Collection method:</b> Collection of data from web and other sources Frequency: end of project Responsibility: WUS, ZSI, OeAD</p>	

<sup>124</sup> Data will be disaggregated by sex throughout the project which will be reflected in monitoring and reporting.

		<p>EU Kosovo report 2018 &amp; 2019 are critical in relation to developments in the Higher Education and Science and Research fields, in particular regarding slow progress and lack of implementation of previous recommendations.</p> <p>The EU Kosovo report 2019 also states a mismatch between higher education programmes and labour market needs:</p> <p>The higher education system is not responsive to labour market needs with graduates lacking relevant skills for employment, including entrepreneurship, technical and vocational skills (in line with SDG 4.4.).</p> <p>EQAR in 2018 has dismissed KAA from its membership and as a result ENQA in 2019 has reviewed the KAA capacity to remain in ENQA and possibly re-join the EQAR. The first draft report from ENQA indicates lack of compliance with the ESG on quality assurances in higher education.</p>		
<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <p>Overall: The higher education and research system in Kosovo is better governed, more international, coherent, effective and efficient, fostering students' employability and the third mission of universities.</p> <p>In particular:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The governance in the fields of higher education, quality assurance, applied science and research and innovation improved along European standards</li> </ol>	<p><b>Indicators:</b></p> <p>Overall: By the end of the project the quality, effectiveness and good governance of public HE sector and research in Kosovo will be increased along European standards and values by the means of development of new policies, regulations and strategies in HE, especially considering the human rights and gender perspective; by supporting the institutions in implementation of measures; and by developing guidelines and processes for quality assurance. Moreover, international cooperation has increased.</p>	<p><b>Target value(s) until end of project:</b></p> <p>Instruments designed for strategic development of the public HEIs, enhanced quality, effectiveness and good governance of HE and research planning, decision-making processes and policies (ref.: sub-outcomes 1,3).</p> <p>Structural science industry/society programmes developed, at national level prepared and one piloted (ref.: sub-outcome 2).</p> <p>Employability<sup>125</sup> of students and the third mission of universities are enhanced through a strengthened interaction and</p>	<p><b>Data source:</b> Reports from EC, MESTI, KAA, ENQA and other relevant stakeholders</p> <p><b>Collection method:</b> desk review, meeting minutes, interviews etc</p> <p>Frequency: end of project</p> <p>Responsibility: WUS, ZSI, OeAD</p>	<p><b>Assumptions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prospects for political stability and sustainable economic progress.</li> <li>Commitment of Kosovo beneficiaries and authorities to support quality of education and research and actively shape and implement the necessary reforms along European values and standards.</li> <li>Commitment and understanding of Kosovo's beneficiaries on EHEA, ERA policies and SDG 4 and 9.</li> <li>Interest of key actors, relevant institutions and other stakeholders in a multi-stakeholder dialogue in</li> </ul>

<sup>125</sup> Ability to participate in the labour market (in German Beschäftigungsfähigkeit or Arbeitsmarktfähigkeit), capability to survive in the labour market (Duden). In the context of HERAS+ it specifically refers to the capability of students to be prepared/to be fit for the labour market once they have finished their studies.

<p>2. The interactions of universities with the regional economy and the public sector are based on existing needs and intensified through structural science-industry/society programmes.</p> <p>3. The quality and effectiveness in planning, decision-making and implementation improved in the HE sector.</p> <p>4. The employability of graduates from public universities enhanced</p> <p>5. The Social Dimension and the 3<sup>rd</sup> mission of universities enhanced.</p> <p>6. The political integration of Kosovo in the field of European R&amp;I policies improved.</p> <p>7. Kosovo's HE, SME etc. have more networking opportunities and knowledge to access EU R&amp;I and mobility programmes.</p>	<p><b>Indicators related to sub-outcomes:</b></p> <p>1a. A positive interim review of ENQA</p> <p>1b. Adopted law or administrative instructions for applied science</p> <p>1c. Adopted administrative instructions which operationalise the research support programmes of MESTI until 2022.</p> <p>2. MESTI is increasingly supporting science-industry and science-society cooperation through dedicated support programme/instruments. One is successfully piloted by MESTI leading to at least 10 new science-economy partnerships.</p> <p>3. Public universities have enhanced the quality and effectiveness through the development and implementation of strategic plans.</p> <p>4. Labour market relevance of higher education enhanced through 2 developed and implemented support/programme/instruments for applied science.</p> <p>5a. The Social Dimension in HE is increasingly supported by MESTI through structural interventions.</p> <p>5b. The 3<sup>rd</sup> mission is reflected in university strategies.</p> <p>5c. At least one HRBA instrument is successfully implemented leading to an increased number and percentage of persons from vulnerable groups entering/participating/ successfully completing HE.</p> <p>6a. The Kosovan S3 strategy, which focuses on structured interactions of universities with the regional economy and the public sector, is adopted by the Parliament (also relates to outcome 2).</p> <p>6b. Accession of Kosovo to Horizon Europe is endorsed by the EU.</p>	<p>dialogue among universities, and with economy and society until the end of the project (ref.: sub-outcomes 4,5).</p> <p>Kosovo has a functional NCP system for Horizon Europe in place and supports the application of researchers for international research cooperation (ref.: sub-outcomes 6,7).</p> <p>Human capacities improved for teaching and research and increased participation of HEIs and individual researchers (men/women) in international research cooperation (ref.: sub-outcomes 6,7).</p> <p>Measures are designed to support students from marginalized groups in order to access/participate in and successfully complete their studies without obstacles related to their gender, social, cultural and economic background (ref.: sub-outcome 5).</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b> Confronted with the challenge of numerous parallel HE and research reforms, MESTI and HEIs often lack capacities and resources for systematic planning, implementation and monitoring of HE (ref.: sub-outcomes 1,3).</p> <p>Limited measures in place for structural science industry/society cooperation at national level (ref.: sub-outcome 2).</p> <p>Quality assurance (standards, instruments, capacities, course evaluation) has been introduced at the public universities, but their implementation requires further improvement (ref.: sub-outcomes 1,3,4).</p> <p>Labour market relevance of all study programmes is limited and teaching and</p>		<p>the field of higher education and research and outreach to economy and society.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The EU and its Member States are willing to accept the accession of Kosovo to the European Framework Programme</li> </ul> <p><b>Risks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Elections may impact the MESTI structures.</li> <li>- Changes in university management and/or political leadership could influence the continuity of the project and its priorities.</li> <li>- Lack of institutional accreditation may lead to hastened decisions regarding the status of affected universities.</li> <li>- Rejected perspective of Kosovo to associate to Horizon Europe because of its international status</li> </ul>
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	<p>7.a. 15% more proposals with Kosovan researchers are submitted to the European Framework programme between 2021 and 2022 than between 2019 and 2020.</p> <p>7.b. Gender balance in proposals (minimum 40% of the disadvantaged gender).</p> <p>Cross-cutting: Increase in gender equal representation in all fields of higher education and research (refers to all sub-outcomes).</p>	<p>learning is to a large extent not state-of-the-art. Regulations for applied study programmes/approaches do not exist (ref.: sub-outcome 4).</p> <p>Lack of employability of students after graduation. Lack of stakeholder dialogue among university, economy and society in the field of HE and research (ref.: sub-outcomes 2,4,6).</p> <p>Research capacities and research intensity are very limited and only 0.19% of GDP is invested in research (instead of foreseen 0,7%) (ref.: sub-outcomes 2,7).</p> <p>The student body entering, participating and completing higher education does not reflect the diversity of the populations<sup>126</sup> (ref.: sub-outcome 5).</p> <p>55.9% of all students are women (66% of Bachelor students, 59% of MA students, 53% of PhD students). Women remain underrepresented as academic staff in public universities across Kosovo (35%). Fewer women than men have received MESTI scholarships for research activities for the past three years (2016-2018). No gender disaggregated data available on researchers in Kosovo (ref.: all sub-outcomes/cross-cutting)</p>		
<p><b>Output 1</b></p> <p><b>Policy level</b></p> <p>MESTI is enabled to effectively develop and implement policies along European</p>	<p><b>Indicators:</b></p> <p>MESTI supported in at least 2 initiatives for developing policies, regulations and strategies in the</p>	<p><b>Target value(s) until end of project:</b></p> <p>Kosovo has developed at least 2 relevant policies, regulations and strategies in the areas of higher education with a focus on applied science.</p>	<p><b>Data source:</b> MESTI, ENQA / EQAR, KAA, public universities, other stakeholders</p> <p><b>Collection method:</b> Website, reports from KAA, ENQA and EQAR and other</p>	<p><b>Assumptions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– MESTI is committed to European values and standards in educational planning and research promotion and values international support.</li> </ul>

<sup>126</sup> As per data from the Kosovo Statistics Agency (<http://askdata.rks-gov.net/PXWeb/pxweb/sq/askdata/>) the participation of minority community members in the academic year 2017/2018 range from 0,53% at the University of Mitrovica, 1.11% percent in the University of Prishtina, 3,62% at the University of Gjakova, 3,75% percent at the University of Gjilan, up to 6,95% percent at the University of Prizren, (No data are available for University of Peja and University of Ferizaj). Even the high nominal percentage given for the University of Prizren is comparatively low given the relatively high (over 18 percent) share of participation of non-Albanian and non-Serb minority communities in this region. It can be concluded that the student population does not reflect the diversity of the population.

<p>standards in HE and research adapted to the national context. KAA has satisfactorily addressed and implemented key ENQA recommendations<sup>127</sup>.</p>	<p>areas of higher education with a focus on applied science (act 1.1.).<sup>128</sup></p> <p>Human rights and gender equality perspective are provided in the development of above instruments as relevant (act.1.1.)</p> <p>At least one third of selected ENQA recommendations (as identified in the first progress report) implemented by KAA (act 1.2).</p> <p>Guidelines and processes for external QA for applied sciences institutions and programmes developed (act. 1.2.)</p> <p>New instruments on research, innovation and knowledge transfer to build bridges between universities and the economy are elaborated (act. 1.3.)</p> <p>A basic Kosovo research information system (CRIS) developed and piloted (act. 1.4.)</p> <p>The integration of higher education, science and research within the Smart Specialisation Strategy developed by the Kosovo's Council for Innovation and Entrepreneurship was put in effect according to European practices and procedures (act 1.5)</p> <p>At least 2 instruments implemented based on recommendations from</p>	<p>Gender and human rights are mainstreamed in the development of policies, regulations and strategies in the areas of higher education and research and affirmative measures adopted where necessary/ feasible.</p> <p>KAA is assessed to have implemented selected ENQA recommendations (as identified in the first progress report).</p> <p>KAA has new standards and procedures for institutional programme accreditation of applied study institutions and programmes The Kosovo standards on QA are reviewed to be in line with the ESGs.</p> <p>The new law on KAA is finalised and effective.</p> <p>Three new support instruments for bridging between science and economy respectively society are designed, instructions for the implementation of two of them are finalised until 2021, and one of them is piloted until 2022.</p> <p>The basic Kosovan CRIS is designed and programmed in 2020 and piloted in 2021. A manual is available, and a core team is trained to work with it.</p> <p>A Smart Specialisation Strategy for Kosovo has been developed, consolidated and consulted with the input from higher education, science and research institutions and submitted for adoption</p>	<p>stakeholders, surveys, meeting minutes, reports Frequency: upon publication Responsibility: WUS, ZSI, OeAD</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– MESTI is willing to respond to the recommendations of the European Commission on the further development of the science system as stipulated in the progress report 2019</li> <li>– Readiness of MESTI and public HEIs to foster university-economy-society cooperation (third mission)</li> <li>– KAA remains committed to achieve ENQA membership and EQAR listing.</li> <li>– The new law for KAA is enacted.</li> <li>– MESTI and other stakeholders are interested and committed to apply a HRBA.</li> </ul> <p><b>Risks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Numerous ongoing reforms and capacity development measures might limit MESTI and KAA absorption capacities.</li> <li>– Relevant stakeholders in Kosovo might fail to provide enough instruments for monitoring the implementation of policies and regulations, mechanisms to provide incentives for complying with regulatory frameworks to implement policies and regulations.</li> <li>– MESTI and other stakeholders may lack capacities to apply a HRBA in HE.</li> <li>– MESTI cannot allocate the necessary budget to roll out the new science-economy-schemes and support the implementation of S3</li> <li>– The universities refuse to secure resources for implementing and maintaining the CRIS</li> </ul>
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<sup>127</sup> At the beginning of the project, the project team together with KAA will decide on key recommendations to focus on throughout HERAS+.

<sup>128</sup> HERAS+ will closely follow relevant developments and provide technical support in line with needs and actions jointly identified with MESTI.

	<p>HERAS and HERAS+ workshops on HRBA in HE (act. 1.6.)</p> <p>At least 1 of these HRBA instruments addresses gender equality as main objective (act. 1.6.)</p>	<p>MESTI and other stakeholders have further strengthened their capacities in the field of HRBA and gender mainstreaming and are enabled to design and implement relevant measures/instruments.</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b> Lack of participatory involvement and lack of policy dialogue between MESTI, KAA and other stakeholders when planning, developing and implementing new policies. Human rights and gender perspectives are reflected only to some extent in the development of policies, regulations and strategies. New policies, regulations and strategies in the areas of higher education, research, innovation and applied science are needed and required to fulfil alignment with EHEA and ERA principles.</p> <p>KAA is currently assessed as only partially compliant with the ESG in 7 areas.</p> <p>ESG Manual is not in line with needs and capacities of HEIs.</p> <p>Strategic document of KAA as recommended by ENQA is currently under development.</p> <p>Kosovo is developing new law for KAA to ensure full independency of the KAA</p> <p>The cooperation between HEIs and economy/society and public sector is still weak and not systematically supported by funding instruments and programmes.</p> <p>Kosovo has no national CRIS (Research and Information System) in place.</p> <p>Kosovo has no Smart Specialisation Strategy in place.</p>		
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		MESTI and other stakeholders have some capacities in the field of HRBA and gender mainstreaming and have identified their needs in these fields to some extent.		
<p><b>Output 2</b></p> <p><b>University level</b></p> <p>Strategic plans of public universities are reviewed, developed, and decision-making processes are based on these strategies and better contribution to a competitive HE sector as well as to economic, social and cultural development of Kosovo (in line with the 3<sup>rd</sup> mission of universities)</p>	<p><b>Indicators:</b></p> <p>7 baseline assessments conducted, and strategic action plans developed (act 2.1 and 2.2.)</p> <p>Gender equality and human rights are reflected in baseline assessments and strategic action plans (act. 2.1. and 2.2.)</p> <p>7 competitive funds (earmarked) for implementation of strategic action plans by public HEIs realized (act 2.2)</p> <p>3 Erasmus+ international mobility proposals submitted by HEIs (act 2.3) involving 15 student and 5 staff mobilities</p> <p>5 programmatic partnerships to foster labour market relevance, the Social Dimension of HE (institutional level) and HRBA implemented in line with project guidelines (act. 2.4.).<sup>129</sup></p> <p>At least 1 programmatic partnership has human rights and/or gender equality as main objective (act. 2.4)</p>	<p><b>Target value(s) until end of project:</b></p> <p>Universities have reviewed and developed their strategic plans on the basis of improved missions and started implementing these, thereby increasing the competitiveness and diversity of HE offerings in the country, reflecting relevant gender and human rights aspects. Increased incoming and outgoing mobility and internationalisation of institutions are part of the strategic plans.</p> <p>Labour market relevance, Social Dimension of HE<sup>130</sup>, HRBA and gender dimensions of study programmes<sup>131</sup> are enhanced through programmatic partnerships with Austrian institutions.</p> <p>Social Dimension of HE including gender dimension enhanced through targeted measures (SD grants) designed and implemented by CSOs and students including from vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Applied science approach fostered and promoted among HEIs, students and economy.</p>	<p><b>Data source:</b> University strategy plans and implementation reports, application packages, reports and minutes from PP, AS and SD grant schemes, Erasmus+ reports, results of HERAS+ selection panels</p> <p><b>Collection method:</b> directly from universities and beneficiaries, websites, own reports</p> <p><b>Frequency:</b> annual</p> <p><b>Responsibility:</b> WUS, ZSI, OeAD</p>	<p><b>Assumptions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– All public universities are committed for an active cooperation in the project</li> <li>– Support by the MESTI</li> <li>– Cross-cutting topics (gender equality, human rights, interethnic cooperation) are understood and incorporated by public universities in strategy development and implementation.</li> <li>– All public universities are committed to strengthen internationalisation.</li> <li>– Austrian universities are willing to cooperate with HE institutions in Kosovo in ERASMUS+</li> </ul> <p><b>Risks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Absorption capacities of beneficiaries might limit the scope of the impact of the project</li> <li>– Existing beneficiaries' procedures and standards might limit the scope of the impact of the project and dissemination of its results.</li> </ul>

<sup>129</sup> In all grant schemes, gender will be mainstreamed into application guidelines and forms. The extent, to which gender aspects are addressed, will be also a selection criterion for the evaluation of applications.

<sup>130</sup> Generally speaking, the Social Dimension of Higher Education of the Bologna Process refers to the goal of removing inequalities when it comes to access, participation and successful completion of higher education in the European Area of Higher Education (EAHEA). It was first developed within the Bologna Process in the Prague Communiqué of 2001 and was most clearly defined in the London Communiqué of 2007 where Member States stated: "We share the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations. We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity." For more information on the Social Dimension of Higher Education of the Bologna Process see <http://www.ehea.info/page-social-dimension>.

<sup>131</sup> HRBA and gender dimensions of study programmes may be enhanced, for example, through mainstreaming of gender/human rights into existing study programmes (i.e. review of existing programmes from a gender/human rights perspective) or the development of new study programmes/courses etc related to gender equality and/or human rights (such as the course on peace-building and human rights which was developed and implemented at UP in HERAS). The exact topics/dimensions to be covered would depend on the topic(s) chosen by the respective applicant.



	<p>10 Social Dimension small grants for students and NGOs implemented in line with project guidelines (act. 2.5.)</p> <p>At least 3 grants address access to education for girls/women (act 2.5.)</p> <p>Key recommendations implemented as identified during HERAS and HERAS+ workshops on applied science approaches (act. 2.6.)</p> <p>10 grants for students to promote applied science approaches implemented in line with project guidelines (act. 2.7.)</p>	<p><b>Baseline:</b> Universities have currently weak strategic planning processes, which do not allow for systematic and targeted decision-making in line with their missions.</p> <p>Internationalisation of Kosovar HEIs is still limited and lacking a systematic approach with slowly increasing participation in programmes such as Erasmus+.</p> <p>Lack of instruments in place to enhance labour market relevance, Social Dimension of HE (including gender dimensions) and HRBA at the institutional level of HEIs.</p> <p>Lack of understanding on applied science approaches; a systematic development of AS approaches is missing.</p> <p>Basic capacities developed in HERAS to address HRBA related aspects of HE. Needs identified on HRBA during HERAS that require further action, including on curriculum development, teaching, institutionalisation and dialogue between universities and society.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Changes in the management of public universities could slow down relevant processes.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Output 3</b> Kosovo has further advanced the quality of its research capacities and the internationalisation/ Europeanisation of its higher education and research system</p>	<p><b>Indicators</b> One functional NCP system is in place (act. 3.1.)</p> <p>Kosovo supports the international cooperation of its researchers both at regional and European level (act. 3.2.)</p> <p>300 months of fellowship grants implemented in line with project guidelines (act 3.3.)</p> <p>At least 50% of fellowship months will be granted to women (act. 3.3)</p>	<p><b>Target value(s) until:</b> 100% of the National Coordination Points (NCPs) are trained about the regulations and rules of participation in Horizon Europe and how to apply thereunder for funding until 2022. The NCP system is adjusted to the structure of Horizon Europe and is sent to the European Commission in 2021 for information. Kosovo has prepared a deliberate and informed decision about the association to Horizon Europe until 2023 ('go' or 'no go').</p> <p>International R&amp;I cooperation support is provided through two dedicated support</p>	<p><b>Data source:</b> MESTI, RCC, SPO Government, EC Collection method: data generated from CRIS Frequency: annual (once web platform is established) Responsibility: ZSI, OeAD</p> <p>NCP: Data source: EC, project progress reports, NCP newsletters Collection method: desk review Frequency: annual Responsibility: ZSI, OeAD</p> <p>International Cooperation:</p>	<p><b>Assumptions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public universities are committed for an active cooperation in the project.</li> <li>Austrian universities continue to offer PhD and research positions for Kosovar scholars.</li> <li>Kosovo considers application for Horizon Europe membership (unclear status)</li> <li>MESTI has financial resources to compensate the work of the NCPs.</li> </ul> <p><b>Risks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The scholars might get visa for Austria/EU only with intense</li> </ul>

	<p>Alumni system set up consisting of KAIP, HKOS, HERAS and HERAS+ alumni from Kosovo at Austrian HEIs (act. 3.3)</p>	<p>mechanisms (regional networking programme in 2020 and Horizon Europe application fund in 2021), which are implemented in HERAS+. In addition, 20 researchers and intermediary staff from at least three universities in Kosovo are trained in proposal writing for Horizon Europe (min. 40% are male or female), 20 applications to Horizon Europe and 8 regional research networks are supported until 2023</p> <p>Increased quality of teaching and research by developing human capacities and networks on national and international level. Active promotion of women's participation in research activities and gender equality as a topic of research.</p> <p><b>Baseline:</b> The 2019 EC progress report on Kosovo highlights three recommendations, which are partly taken-up by</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ensuring higher government spending on research and seek to stimulate investment from the private sector by completing a Smart Specialisation Strategy;</li> <li>2. focusing efforts on increasing participation in the EU's Horizon 2020 programme;</li> <li>3. providing statistical data on numbers of researchers, percentage of GDP spent on research and innovation, and performance related to the European Research Area priorities.</li> </ol> <p>Point 1 and 2 are addressed in Output 1 (act. 1.4 and act. 1.5). As regards the 2<sup>nd</sup> bullet point, the existing NCP system needs to be adjusted and professionalised for Horizon Europe, the</p>	<p>Data source: MESTI, EC, project progress reports Collection method: desk review Frequency: annual Responsibility: WUS, ZSI, OeAD</p> <p>Association to Horizon Europe Data source: MESTI, EC, project progress reports Collection method: desk review Frequency: annual Responsibility: WUS, ZSI, OeAD</p>	<p>support from the project management/ADC office.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Universities from Kosovo might have too limited capacities to implement collaborative research projects at regional or European level</li> <li>– The question about the international status of Kosovo prohibits a decision on association to Horizon Europe</li> </ul>
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		<p>EC's next European Framework Programme for R&amp;I, which starts in 2021.</p> <p>All NCPs need to be trained to be able to provide advisory services for Horizon Europe to the interested Kosovan researchers.</p> <p>In the first years of Horizon 2020, 11 participations from Kosovo were funded. This number should be increased. Therefore, a new Horizon Europe application fund will be introduced and capacity development activities implemented.</p> <p>Provided that the international status of Kosovo is resolved, Kosovo might get the opportunity to associate to Horizon Europe for the first time, which needs a clear financial and systemic commitment, which should be based on a deliberate and informed decision.</p> <p>Lack of human capacities for teaching and research. Less women than men as recipients of research support by MESTI.<sup>132</sup> Need identified by CSOs to address gender equality more extensively as separate research topic.<sup>133</sup></p> <p>Limited networking among HKOS/HERAS alumni.</p>		
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<sup>132</sup> This includes support in the form of PhD scholarships, research projects and the participation in conferences. See *KWN*, Gender Analysis. Higher Education, Research and Applied Science in Kosovo (HERAS), August 2019, p.9 (table 6).

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, p.13.

## **Annex 8.7: Terms of Reference (TOR)**

### **Mid-Term Evaluation**

**Project: “Higher Education, Research and Applied Science Plus (HERAS Plus)”**

**Country:** Kosovo

**Project Number:** OEZA 8116-00/2020

**Project Consortium consisting of:** World University Service (WUS) Austria (lead), Zentrum für Soziale Innovation GmbH (ZSI), Österreichischer Austauschdienst (OeAD) GmbH

**Budget:** EUR 2.800.000 (EUR 2.500.000 Austrian Development Cooperation/ EUR 300.000 Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation Kosovo)

**Duration:** 1/6/2020 – 31/5/2023, with prolongation 31/12/2023

#### **1) Context and Background**

The project Higher Education Research and Applied Science Plus (HERAS Plus) aims at a more competitive and diversified public higher education and research sector in Kosovo in line with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), European Research Area (ERA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 9 related to quality assurance, economy and labour market relevance, international cooperation and the Social Dimension of higher education.

The beneficiaries of the project are the Ministry for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) as the main responsible institution for education and research in Kosovo, the Government Strategic Planning Office, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA), public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Kosovo as well as research organizations, individual academic staff (PhD and PostDoc staff) and students including from underrepresented groups.

They will benefit from the Outcome of the project (as stated in the Logframe Matrix): The higher education and research system in Kosovo is better governed, more international, coherent, effective and efficient, fostering students’ employability and the third mission of universities.

HERAS Plus aims to reach the following outputs:

- At the Policy level, MESTI is enabled to effectively develop and implement policies along European standards in HE and research adapted to the national context. KAA has satisfactorily addressed and implemented key recommendations from the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA);
- At the University level, strategic plans of public universities are reviewed, developed, and decision-making processes are based on these strategies and better contribute to a competitive HE sector as well as to economic, social and cultural development of Kosovo (in line with the third mission of universities);
- At the research level, Kosovo has further advanced the quality of its research capacities and the internationalisation / Europeanisation of its higher education and research system.

#### **2) Purpose and Objectives**

**The purpose of this evaluation is to contribute to the accountability towards stakeholders as well as to provide evidence for institutional development and learning. As such, it will also provide recommendations for the remainder of the project implementation and assess the overall situation and the remaining needs for further support in higher education.**

In this regard the evaluation is about **learning** and **accountability**: **Learning** for the consortium and the donors that will benefit from the **lessons learnt** and **recommendations** in the remaining implementation period of the project as well as in identifying the remaining needs. **Accountability** towards the donors, i.e. the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) and the Kosovan Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI).

**The main objective of the evaluation is to assess and present results, to provide conclusions, lessons learnt and recommendations for the remaining project duration and identification of the remaining needs potential for a possible follow-up as well as its design and focus, in order to sustain the outcomes and outputs so far and to further contribute to the well-functioning of Higher Education and Research in Kosovo along the principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA) in the future..**

The evaluation is going to be carried out after two years of project implementation, because this is a good timing in order to evaluate the project progress, identify concrete results, stipulate improvements until project end as well as to look beyond the project lifetime.

The direct users of this evaluation are the members of the implementing consortium (WUS Austria, ZSI and OeAD) and the donors (ADA and MESTI). Indirectly all stakeholders should benefit from the findings of the evaluation.

### 3) Scope

**The subject of the evaluation is the mid-term evaluation of the project “Higher Education, Research and Applied Science Plus (HERAS Plus)” (OEZA 8116-00/2020) in accordance with the contract.**

As stated above, the evaluation of the project is analysing the intermediate effects and efficiency as well as sustainability and impact at the time the evaluation takes place. In this regard the following **OECD DAC evaluation criteria** will be used: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability.

#### **Area of Coverage:**

The evaluation will cover **Kosovo**. Besides the capital Prishtina it will be necessary to visit the following university towns once: Peja, Prizren, Gjilan, Ferizaj, Gjakova and South Mitrovica.

The evaluation process should involve **all key project stakeholders**: the main direct beneficiaries as listed in section 1) Background as well as the involved Austrian institutions (consortium members and ADA). Additionally, other actors and donors in the field of higher education and research in Kosovo should be consulted. The project consortium will assist the evaluators in identifying relevant contact persons in these institutions.

### 4) Evaluation Questions

Under the relevant OECD DAC evaluation criteria, the evaluation team has to analyse the following points and evaluation questions outlined further below:

- a) The extent to which the project has already achieved its outcome and outputs (taking into consideration also the impact of COVID on the project's implementation) or is likely to achieve them, including the extent to which the supported institutions have already benefited.
- b) Strengths and areas of improvement in terms of planning, management, implementation and monitoring.
- c) The extent to which cross-cutting issues (gender, principles outlined in the Social Standard Assessment) were applied.
- d) Special focus should be put on sustainability of results including the institutionalization. A reflection on the Exit Strategy - Annex 12 of the project document must be done. Finally, and as indicated above, an assessment of the current status in Higher Education should be done in order to identify the need for potential further interventions which are to be endorsed by ADA management.

### **Relevance**

- To what extent are the objectives of the project still valid for the partner country, its stakeholders and beneficiaries?
- Is the project still corresponding to the priorities and policies of the beneficiaries? And if not, how can a potential follow-up project ensure relevance? Is the project in line with the latest developments in the EHEA and the relevant SDGs?

### **Effectiveness**

- To what extent has the project already achieved its outcome and output(s) or will be likely to achieve it/them?
- Did the project contribute to capacity development as planned?
- To what extent was gender mainstreaming included in the project and to what extent were recommendations from the ADA gender-assessment considered and implemented?
- To what extent were the social standards monitored? Have any issues emerged, if so which ones and why?

### **Efficiency**

- Was the project implemented in the most efficient way (time, personnel resources, budget)? Have any issues emerged, if so which ones and why?
- How well does the cooperation work between the consortium, the local team, the beneficiaries and donors (e.g. work flows, division of labour, participation and local ownership)?

### **Sustainability**

- To what extent has local ownership been developed?

- To what extent are the benefits of the project expected to continue after the end of the project?

### **Questions concerning follow up:**

The following questions form the basis for concrete and practical recommendations for a continuation of an ADC engagement in the field of higher education and research after the end of the HERAS Plus project.

- Based on the evaluation of the project along the OECD DAC criteria and the specific evaluation questions listed above, what could be the focus and outputs of a follow-up phase/project?
- Are there follow-up measures needed in order to further sustain the HERAS Plus outputs?
- Are there outputs/activities in HERAS Plus that should be followed-up, phased out or even further expanded?
- What are the current gaps in higher education and research that could/should be tackled in a follow-up project in order to further contribute to the well-functioning of Higher Education and Research in Kosovo along the principles of the EHEA and the ERA taking into account national policies and other international interventions/projects?
- What are the upcoming trends and developments in higher education and research, and the emerging needs of the MESTI, KAA and public universities (and possible other stakeholders/beneficiaries) that could/should be followed up?

## **5) Design and Approach**

The evaluation itself consists of several phases:

Contract and Kick-off meeting: Contract is signed, and a discussion of the assignment takes place. First set of documents, including available data, are provided to the evaluation team.

Desk Study: The evaluation team studies all necessary project documents; re-construct and analyse the intervention logic and its assumptions. Existing data needs to be analysed and interpreted.

Inception-Phase: In the inception report the evaluators will describe the design of the evaluation and will elaborate on how data will be obtained and analysed. The use of a data collection planning worksheet or a similar tool is required. First set of interviews take place. Data triangulation and quality control are very important and need to be discussed in the inception report.

The field trip will only take place upon official approval of the inception report by the contractor and the ADA.

Field-phase: Data needs to be gathered, analysed and interpreted. It is expected that the evaluation will include quantitative and qualitative data disaggregated by sex.

Presentation: Presentation of key findings (feedback workshop) at the end of the field trip.

Draft Report: Submission and presentation of draft report, inclusion of comments from partners and contractor: Evaluator(s) shall either incorporate the feedback or briefly explain, why they have not (fully) incorporated feedback.

Final Report: Submission of final report, see reporting requirements under point 9).

For the different phases it is expected that data and information will be obtained through different qualitative and quantitative methods such as: analysis of documents, semi-structured interviews, semi-structured interviews face-to face or by phone, focus group discussions, others.

Sex-disaggregated data (qualitative and quantitative) shall be collected, analysed, and reported whenever feasible and useful.

It is expected that the evaluation team will present concrete recommendations which are addressed to the specific stakeholders, including the HERAS Plus consortium.

It is currently estimated that approx. 30 - 40 people need to be interviewed.

## Reporting

The evaluators need to submit the following reports:

- an inception report (10-15 pages without annexes),
- a final draft evaluation report (about 25-30 pages without annexes), including a draft executive summary and the results-assessment form (part of the reporting requirement)
- and the final evaluation report (25-30 pages without annexes), the final executive summary and the results-assessment form (part of the reporting requirement)

All reports need to be written in English. They need to be structured in line with the requirements set in the ADA Guidelines for Project and Programme Evaluations (2020)<sup>134</sup>.

The executive summary should summarize key findings and recommendations (three to five pages) and needs to be submitted as part of the final draft report.

The findings and recommendations of the draft final report and final report have to be structured according to the evaluation questions. An outline of the report's structure needs to be agreed upon with the contractor during the inception phase.

The quality of the reports will be judged according to the following criteria:

- Are the results assessment form and the evaluation matrix part of the report?
- Does the report contain a comprehensive and clear executive summary?
- Were the Terms of Reference fulfilled and is this reflected in the report?
- Is the report structured according to the OECD/DAC criteria?
- Are all evaluation questions answered?
- Are the methods and processes of the evaluation sufficiently documented in the evaluation report?
- Does the report describe and assess the intervention logic (logframe) and present/analyse a theory of change and its underlying assumptions?
- Are cross-cutting issues analyzed in the report?
- Are the conclusions and recommendations based on findings and are they clearly stated in the report?
- Does the report clearly differentiate between conclusions, lessons learnt and recommendations?
- Are the recommendations realistic and is it clearly expressed to whom the recommendations are addressed to?
- Were the most significant stakeholders involved consulted?

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<sup>134</sup> See in particular Annex and 5 and 6 of the Guidelines (Quality Checklists for the Inception and Evaluation Report).



- Does the report present the information contained in a presentable and clearly arranged form?
- Is the report free from spelling mistakes and unclear linguistic formulations?
- Can the report be distributed in the delivered form?

The Guidelines for Project and Programme Evaluations developed by the Austrian Development Agency (2020) need to be considered throughout the entire evaluation process.

Also see:

[https://www.entwicklung.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumente/Evaluierung/Evaluierungs\\_Leitfaeden/Guidelines\\_for\\_Programme\\_and\\_Project\\_Evaluations\\_ADA\\_2020.pdf](https://www.entwicklung.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Evaluierung/Evaluierungs_Leitfaeden/Guidelines_for_Programme_and_Project_Evaluations_ADA_2020.pdf)

## **6) Workplan**

The **time frame** of the whole procedure is from **July 2022** (commencement of the tendering procedure) until **February 28, 2023** (submission of the final evaluation report).

For the evaluation itself app. **50 working days** are estimated.

The tendering procedure commences in **July 2022** and was supposed to end with the **tendering deadline on August 16, 2022 at 12:00 a.m. CET**. Due to a lack of bids submitted within the provided deadline and after consultation and approval by the donor, the call for offers is readvertised with the **tendering deadline on September 16, at 12:00 a.m. CET**.

The evaluation is planned to start **October 15, 2022**. The evaluation results should be available in the form of a detailed report by **February 28, 2023**. For more details, please consult the Timetable below.

<b>Action</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Submission of bids (electronically)</b>	<b>16/08/2022</b> <b>12:00 a.m. CET</b>
<b>Readvertisement of the invitation for offers</b>	<b>26/08/2022</b>
<b>Submission of bids (electronically), 2<sup>nd</sup> round</b>	<b>16/09/2022</b> <b>12:00 a.m. CET</b>
Contract signed and documents provided	until 15/10/2022
Start of evaluation and desk study	15/10/2022
Kick-Off meeting (meeting between contractor/consortium and evaluation team) (via skype in case a physical meeting is not possible)	tbc Until 25/10/20122
Submission of draft inception report	15/11/2022

Provision of comments (contractor/consortium)	18/11/2022
Inclusion of comments in inception report and submission of the final inception report	22/11/2022
Field Visit, interviews etc. and feedback workshop (followed by data analysis and report writing)	in the period 20/11-22/12/2022
Submission of draft report	31/01/2023
Provision of feedback (contractor/consortium)	15/02/2023
Inclusion of feedback in draft report and submission of <b>final evaluation report</b> (hard copy and electronic copy) to the contractor/consortium	<b>until 28/02/2023</b>

## 7) Evaluation Management Arrangements

The project coordinator Ms. Veronika Nitsche is the contact person for this evaluation and in charge of the overall coordination of the assignment in close cooperation with the team at the project office in Prishtina. The evaluation management is committed to respect ethical standards and guiding principles for evaluation including impartiality and independence.

### Contact details of contact person:

e-mail: [veronika.nitsche@wus-austria.org](mailto:veronika.nitsche@wus-austria.org)

phone: +43.699 18182014

## 8) Requirements for the Evaluator(s)

A tendering procedure will be applied in order to find a suitable evaluation team. The evaluation team will be chosen by the consortium partners on a 'best quality for price'-principle basis. Therefore, tenders need to prove below key qualifications by means of CVs and a list of already undertaken evaluation activities (references). Tenderers have to describe and explain in their written offers also their understanding of the assignment, their suggested evaluation approach and methodology, as well as their suggested work plan and division of tasks/work within the evaluation team. A clear plan for the division of labour between the evaluation team leader and the other team members need to be provided.

### **Eligible applicants have to prove the following:**

- Proven experience and expertise in the area of higher education and research systems and of current developments in higher education and research in the European Union and South Eastern Europe;
- Preferably specific experience and expertise in the following areas: curriculum development, university-economy cooperation and employability, quality assurance, inter-university cooperation, accreditation, capacity building and development assistance in higher education; European Research Area development; systems of research and innovation development

- (especially in transition countries);
- Proven experience in leading and/or conducting evaluations: at least three evaluations in the field of higher education and research in the last five years;
- Proven experience in applying qualitative and quantitative methods in project/program evaluations, including developing questionnaires, interviewing.
- Proven experience and expertise in evaluating cross-cutting issues (notably gender and minority equality as well as social standards) and on the human rights based approach.
- Proven experience in project cycle management and the logical framework/Theory of Change approach;
- Excellent oral and written English skills
- Experience and expertise in Kosovo or Western Balkans and its specifics (language, history, socio-economic background and so forth) is an asset;

The evaluation team should generally consist of at least two and not exceed four persons. Furthermore, a gender-balanced and diverse team is desired. The complementarity of qualifications within the team and suitability of the team will be part of the assessment. Besides international evaluators also national experts or experts from the respective region should be integrated into the evaluation team. The composition of the evaluation team will be proposed by the tenderers but is subject to approval by the consortium.

The independence of the evaluation team is of fundamental significance. The evaluators must not have been involved in the design, implementation or monitoring of this project.

### **9) Specifications for the Submission of Offers**

The **tendering deadline is on September 16, 2022 at 12:00 a.m. CET**. The tenders must be deposited at WUS AT via email: [veronika.nitsche@wus-austria.org](mailto:veronika.nitsche@wus-austria.org).

The submitted offer has to contain a technical part (detailing the organisation and methodology of the evaluation to meet the stipulated purpose and objective as well as the CVs) and a financial part. The weight given to the technical and financial part (in percentage) will be 70:30. The selection and contracting will be based on the 'best quality for price' - principle. The maximum available budget is Euro 60.000 (all in, fees including travel/subsistence).

In detail, the **offer** for the evaluation shall include the following:

- A significant description of the methods to be employed in the evaluation and of the organisation of the evaluation;
- The CVs of the evaluators highlighting also their relevant experiences incl. a description of the division of labour and their specific assignments during the evaluation;
- Reference projects;
- A detailed cost plan differentiating between work fees, travel costs and daily allowances and other costs, such as interpretation, visa etc. The offer has to include VAT, if applicable

### **10.) ANNEXES:**

- HERAS Plus Logframe Matrix
- Results Assessment Form<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> See also Annex 7 of the ADA Guidelines for Project and Programme Evaluations

- Evaluation Matrix<sup>136</sup>
- Social Standard Assessment

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<sup>136</sup> See also Annex 9 of the ADA Guidelines for Project and Programme Evaluations.