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Project number: 101128376
**MOBILITY RECOGNITION
FOR INTEGRATION**



MORI N



Kolegji AAB
CILËSI. LEADERSHIP. SUKSESI



**KOLEGJI - COLLEGE
BIZNESI**
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WP1. Management, coordination and evaluation of MORIN

D 1.8 – Needs analysis report

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Abbreviations

AAB College	AAB
Biznesi College	BC
ESN Nis	ESN Nis
Common Regional Market	CRM
European Commission	EC
European Union	EU
European University of Tirana	UET
Learning agreement	LA
Learning outcomes	LO
Palacký University in Olomouc	UP
Professional College, Tirana	KPT
Qendra ESN AL	ESN AL
University of Nis	UNI
University St Kliment Ohridski Bitola	UKLO
University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali"	UV
Western Balkans	WB
Work package	WP



1. Introduction

MORIN, “Mobility Recognition for Integration,” is a strand 1 CBHE multi-country project (ERASMUS-EDU-2023-CBHE; 101128376) funded by the EU that addresses the regional overarching priority of "Integration of migrants." MORIN aims to provide an innovative pedagogical approach that ensures curriculum transparency, comparability, and flexibility to improve recognition and study transfer procedures, specifically among WB6 HEIs. It seeks to revise course contents, methodologies, and assessments to provide for student-centred and skills-oriented learning. The focus of MORIN is on the academic recognition of student mobility based on learning outcomes.

In this way, the project aims to improve collaboration among WB6 HEIs for student exchange, intra-regional employability, and connection by giving the curriculum an international, global perspective. MORIN seeks to establish institutional procedures for the recognition of credit mobility through the adoption of a learning outcomes model, internationalise the curriculum through global learning outcomes and embedded mobility, and develop a shared regional approach to academic recognition through interconnected paths of action. These efforts will enhance transparency, quality teaching and learning, and future-proof skills, as well as facilitate mobility and credential completion through credit transfer.

MORIN will carry out a regional mapping survey to collect data and understand what else is required to accomplish these goals. The project will also include standards for academic recognition through learning outcomes, rules for institution-wide recognition processes, and a self-assessment mobility recognition tool. The project will also simulate and compare five recognition practices within the consortium, as well as rewrite the learning outcomes for at least five courses from two study programmes at each WB HEI.

Additionally, MORIN wants to increase academic staff members' abilities to enhance recognition procedures by offering webinars and training sessions. The project aims to provide immediate benefits to WB HEIs, their employees, and students; other WB universities, ministry officials, policymakers, and HE specialists are also expected to benefit from the project deliverables. By allowing these stakeholders to exploit the project's results and adopt them into their own higher education environments, the initiative hopes to improve student mobility recognition and integration in the WB region as a whole.

The project involves eight universities, five beneficiaries from the WB region, three from Albania and two from Kosovo*, three universities associated to the Erasmus+ programme, one EU HEI, and two third country associated to the programme HEIs, as well as two associated partners:

1. University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali" (COO, UV), Albania, PIC number: 934361522; project coordinator
2. European University of Tirana (BEN, UET), Albania, PIC number: 935875110
3. Professional College, Tirana (BEN, KPT), Albania, PIC number: 920114744





- 4.AAB College (BEN, AAB), Kosovo*, PIC number: 948683863
- 5.Biznesi College (BEN, BC), Kosovo*, PIC number: 884617982
- 6.University of Nis (BEN, UNI), Serbia, PIC number: 998833786
- 7.Palacky University in Olomouc (BEN, UP), the Czech Republic, PIC number: 999649506
8. University St Kliment Ohridski Bitola (BEN, UKLO), Republic of Macedonia, PIC number: 998930833
- 9.Qendra ESN AL (AP, ESN AL), Albania, PIC number: 887409157; associated partner
10. ESN Nis (AP, ESN Nis), Serbia, PIC number: 917020444; associated partner

MORIN will run for 24 months, starting on December 1, 2023. MORIN seeks to improve the integration of migrants in the WB region and effect positive change in the academic recognition of student mobility through its all-encompassing strategy and cooperation among many stakeholders.

The report herein presented, “Needs analysis report,” is a deliverable (D 1.8) within work package 1, “Management, coordination, and evaluation of MORIN.” The document is a small-scale study of the needs of the WB partners involved in the consortium that is based on two different sets of data and findings, those collected during the writing of the project and those collected during January 2024, one year later.

The methodology for this Needs Analysis Report was based on:

- Grey literature review on student exchange and mobility recognition practices (facts, practices, and statistics available);
- Designing and improving the questionnaire for the WB HEIs;
- Administering the questionnaire to the project WB partners;
- Collecting and analysing the data;
- Interpreting the results.

The Needs Analysis Report is structured as follows. MORIN and the background for the rationale of the project is introduced in chapter 1. Chapter 2 is a review on the grey literature on mobility practices in the WB region. Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the needs analysis, data collection methods and analysis to continue with an interpretation of results and the needs analysis. In the end, some conclusions follow. This analysis is aimed to pave the way for the mapping report in WP2.

2. Literature review on mobility in the WB region

Academic recognition is important for mobile students not only for their re-entry into their home educational setting, but most importantly, for the validation of the skills acquired beyond the academic domain, worthy of their employability prospects at home and abroad, either in the region or wider. In this regard, HEIs have a great role in realising the importance of recognition as a “factor of economic growth, social stability and educational equity” (Bruque 2021). Recognition of studies

in Western Balkan Higher Education Institutions (WB HEIs) remains problematic and somewhat overlooked, not only intra-regionally but also institutionally, which does not concern recognition of study periods abroad (credit mobility) only but recognition of prior learning, credit transfer, micro-credentials, and other forms of academic recognition as well. It can be a challenging process even in re-entry into a programme or study transfer procedures between HEIs of the same country or within the same HEI. Although formal steps have been taken towards recognition (“Declaration on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Western Balkans”; Decision of the Council of Ministers of Albania no. 18, dated 18.1.2023 on the recognition of HE qualifications obtained in the WB), concrete institutional action needs to be taken towards recognition.

In a globally mobile context, largely marked, among other things, by internationalisation, a strategic priority, institutional and national, generally conceived in terms of exchange, the higher education landscape in Albania and Kosovo* has grown more international. While establishing partnerships for mobility projects with EU HEIs mainly through the Erasmus programme has so far been quite effective, despite inadequacies in implementation, the same cannot be said about the level of cooperation for exchange among the WB6 countries. It is indeed true that regional cooperation within the Erasmus programme for KA1 is a recent reality (North Macedonia was already part of the programme when exchanges within the Erasmus programme were extended to partner countries, now 3rd countries not associated to the programme, whereas Serbia joined the programme in 2019), and that collaborations that were established were largely affected by the pandemic, but it is equally true that existing inter-institutional agreements among WB6 HEIs have been mainly effective for staff exchanges. Despite the strong focus on regional integration (EC 2021; Beharić 2022, 1; Balkans Policy Research Group 2021, 14-16), to enable the “four freedoms” (cf. Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan) by making mutual recognition arrangements and emphasising, among these, mobility for students, researchers, and professors (EC 2021; CRM Action Plan), mobilities for study have not attracted potential incoming/outgoing students.

The importance of mobility for study has already been emphasized in various studies/reports not simply as a life/intercultural experience, but most importantly, as related to career prospects/job opportunities (ter Horst, van der Moolen, Brandsma-Dieters 2017, 262-264; Panajoti 2019, 199; Beharić et al. 2021, 5; ESN 2022, 34), as equipping students with employability skills (EC 2019, 15-19), the so-called ‘soft’, ‘transferable’ or 21st-century skills (ter Horst, van der Moolen, Brandsma-Dieters 2017, 262, 264), more recently referred to as ‘future-proof’ skills, with a whole European agenda for linking skills with the labour market, job and learning opportunities, mobility, recognized qualifications throughout 2023, the European Year of Skills (EC 2022). While employers do not have any particular regard for mobility, they do look for those skills students build when on mobility (ter Horst, van der Moolen, Brandsma-Dieters 2017, 265). Considering these reported benefits of mobility for students and taking into account that WB young people/students see more opportunities outside the region after a study period abroad (Beharić 2022, 3), ideas for mobility regional programmes modelled after the Erasmus programme have already been articulated (ibid.; EU 2018, 24). Making reference to a student’s remark in Beharić 2022 (12), who “pointed to the benefits of student exchange programmes in terms of their successful promotion of intra-regional



understanding: ‘Erasmus+ has created a notion of togetherness within the EU, which is something we are lacking in the region.’”, the prospect of promoting mobility for study within the Erasmus programme and/or similar programmes, under well-structured recognition practices intra-regionally, will facilitate connectivity and movement of people in the region. Given the role regional integration has in sustaining economic, social, and political development in the region (OECD 2021; Ungerer, Hernandez, Vincelette 2018), opening up to people from other economies of the region would benefit the European integration of the WB6 (Mišćević 2021; Grieveson 2021). Action needs to be taken to motivate migration in the region. The movement of people in the region is relatively low (cf. *Barometer 2022*, 88). The tendency is movement for study and/or work in the EU countries, most notably in Albania and North Macedonia¹. Despite some variations in destinations among the WB6, the EU15 countries have traditionally hosted the largest stock of migrants from the region (e.g., Germany, Austria, France, Sweden, Italy, the UK, Switzerland, and Greece), while intraregional mobility has remained low (Mara and Landesmann 2022, 6). When there is movement in the region, it happens mainly for tourism or visits to family/friends (53% and 51% of the respondents, respectively, *ibid.*) It is time to move from an agenda of regional cooperation (Balkans Policy Research Group 2021, 33; EC 2021) to a regional integration approach to bring the region closer to the EU. The same pattern of flows is observable in intra-regional student exchange (Beharić 2022, 7), even within the mobility schemes enabled by the Erasmus programme.

Most exchange opportunities for HEIs in the WB6 come from the implementation of ICM projects in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme funded by the EU. Although the universities involved in the MORIN project have already established collaboration in this regard (e.g., the University of Niš, Serbia, with the University of Vlora “Ismael Qemali”, Albania, or the University St Kliment Ohridski, Bitola, North Macedonia, with the University of Vlora “Ismael Qemali”, Albania, and the University of Belgrade, Serbia, with the University of Vlora “Ismael Qemali”, Albania, within the Erasmus + programme), these mobility projects have so far been smoothly carried out for staff mobilities, teaching, and training, but have been ineffective with student mobilities. A similar concern is voiced by Beharić (2022, 3)—the region’s university students find greater opportunities outside the WBs, the incentives for returning to the region after studying abroad are limited; although international student mobility is impacting the WB region, mainly via the Erasmus+ programme, there is no regional funding scheme to enable study periods in other HEIs in the region, except for mobility flows between HEIs in North Macedonia and Serbia, both 3rd countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme, and the rest of the region. Overall, the movement of people within the region remains relatively low. In the 2022 *Balkan Barometer* (2022, 88), 65% of respondents said that they had not travelled at all for the last 12 months, whereas in the 2023 *Balkan Barometer* (2023, 68) this figure was lower but still quite significant (57%). When it happens, it is mainly for tourism (53% of respondents, cf. *Balkan Barometer 2022*, 88; 69% of the respondents, cf. *Balkan Barometer 2023*, 69) or visits to friends/family (51%, cf. *Balkan Barometer*

¹ As affirmed by 44% of the respondents in Albania and 33% in North Macedonia in the 2023 *Balkan Barometer* (ACIT Centre 2023, 38-39).



2022, 88; 36%, cf. *Balkan Barometer* 2023, 69).

The question naturally arises: Why is the region ‘attractive’ mainly for tourism or among academic/non-academic staff and not so equally and/or at all attractive to young people/students from collaborating universities? Couldn’t the same motivation, if any, be raised among students? Upon closer observation, academics, who are people already in the labour market, move in/to the region mainly for job-related, academic/professional reasons—participation in projects, workshops, conferences, trainings, seminars or other scientific events, lecturing/teaching in other WB HEIs, all of which are important for the advancement of their academic career. On the one hand, it is cost-effective to move in the region for these ends; on the other hand, it brings about academic/job-related benefits, such as publications, participation in scientific events, collaboration in (research) projects, expanded networks, and part-time/visiting lecturing positions, which receive recognition, most importantly, for the academic promotion of the staff involved. Despite the level of recognition, what is observable in this pattern is the fact that career expectations, employability, herein referred to as “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (Kempster, <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/career-success/0/steps/21285>), money-wise expenditure, financial interest, motivate academic staff to move in the region. The answer seems to lie in recognition. If there is recognition, there is motivation to obtain it. How can students, who are not yet in the labour market, be motivated to move to the region? How can they obtain the same level of recognition?

3. Needs analysis

3.1. Aim

To address this disbalance in student and staff exchanges, incoming and outgoing, in mobility projects between WB partners, we conducted a needs analysis in order to identify the causes, direct and indirect, and set the specific objectives for our action in order to develop activities for obtaining the desired result, that is, academic recognition of skills-oriented learning through learning outcomes to facilitate and enhance mobility experience in the region and thus reach a wider impact—integration of mobile young people in the region.

3.2. Methodology

The methodology of the needs analysis was discussed and defined during the first consortium meeting that took place in Vlora on 18-19 January 2024. It was decided that for the needs analysis, we would rely on two kinds of findings: 1. **institutional data** that would be collected with the help of a questionnaire in order to map mobility institutional approaches, policies, and practices



currently in place in these HEIs and see how they are oriented towards the regional integration approach; 2. **published surveys/reports**, and grey literature on the impact of student mobility in the WB region and wider that are pertinent to the importance of mobility recognition.

As regards the institutional data, it was decided that two sets of data be collected and compared: data collected during the writing stage of the project (January 2023) and data collected during January 2024. The primary goal was to investigate and measure WB partners' actual needs in order to have a better understanding of what activities to envision and what methodology to develop for their implementation, which would be beneficial not only to our target groups but also to other stakeholders. Qualitative data obtained from the two administrations of the questionnaire as well as from what the partners reported themselves as well as the findings from surveys and reports will be introduced and discussed in the "interpretation of results and needs analysis" section of this report in order to sustain and/or expand on the findings from the two administrations of the questionnaire (2023 and 2024).

3.2.1. Data collection

For institutional data collection, a questionnaire was designed during the writing stage of the project proposal to gather information about the institutional approaches, policies, and practices on mobility among HEIs in the WB region. The idea was to see how the WB partners involved in the project envisioned regional integration, what importance they placed on it, and what kinds of collaboration and mobility practices were in place, especially what inadequacies existed. The questionnaire was designed by the UV team and validated by a group of experts (educators, recognition committee members, and academics involved with internationalisation) identified by the UV team among the other partners. The questionnaire was administered in English and uploaded to Google Forms (<https://forms.gle/7VmD5a2apEdmiJdh8>).

The questionnaire contained three sections: 1. the institutional approach to mobility; 2. information about inter-institutional agreements; and 3. recognition of study/internship periods abroad. The items included in each section were related to:

- a. The overall institutional approach to mobility as related to its social and institutional impact;
- b. The institutional approach to student and staff mobility as related to its impact on the individual and the institution;
- c. Whether regional integration was included in the internationalization strategy of the institution;
- d. The kinds of programmes offered in collaboration with international partners, in particular in collaboration with any other WB HEI;
- e. The internationalization of the curriculum/internationalization at home;
- f. The existence of a set of international learning outcomes leading to global competencies that all graduates must achieve;
- g. The inter-institutional agreements WB partners had in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme or any other exchange programme, in particular with WB HEIs and how effective



- they are for student and staff mobility;
- h. The preparation of the learning agreement for student mobility;
 - i. The existence of a clearly defined institutional recognition practice and of a regulation or guide for recognition practice;
 - j. The composition of the recognition committee and the modalities of recognition decisions;
 - k. Institutional self-assessment of recognition procedures.

The survey was launched by the University of Vlora “Ismail Qemali” (UV) in January 2023, in collaboration with the other Albanian and Kosovo partners—European University of Tirana (UET), Professional College (KPT), Biznesi College (BC), and AAB College (AAB)—to map mobility institutional approaches, policies, and practices currently in place in these HEIs and see how they were oriented towards the regional integration approach.

In January 2024, during the first consortium meeting (18-19 2024), partners decided that, for the purposes of the needs analysis, the questionnaire be administered again, in order to check whether the situation had changed or whether it was more or less the same. It was also decided to review the questionnaire and make some of its items more specific so as to obtain more concrete and precise responses. The structure of the questionnaire remained the same (three sections) and the items covered the same concerns as specified above. The questionnaire was validated by experts (educators, recognition committee members, academics involved with internationalization) among the consortium team members. The questionnaire was administered in English and uploaded to Google Forms (<https://forms.gle/xmGCq7rBG9m1p2qY9>).

3.2.2. Data analysis

Regarding the overall institutional approach to mobility as related to its social and institutional impact, the results from the 2023 administration of the questionnaire show that all 5 WB partners (UV, UET, KPT, BC, AAB) link it with academic freedom and institutional autonomy, equity and access to internationalisation opportunities, shared benefits, mutual respect, and fairness as the basis for international partnerships, but only 4 partners, with the exception of UV, see it as pertinent to partnerships for inter-regional and intra-regional connectivity and have included regional integration in their internationalisation strategies (Fig. 1).

5 responses

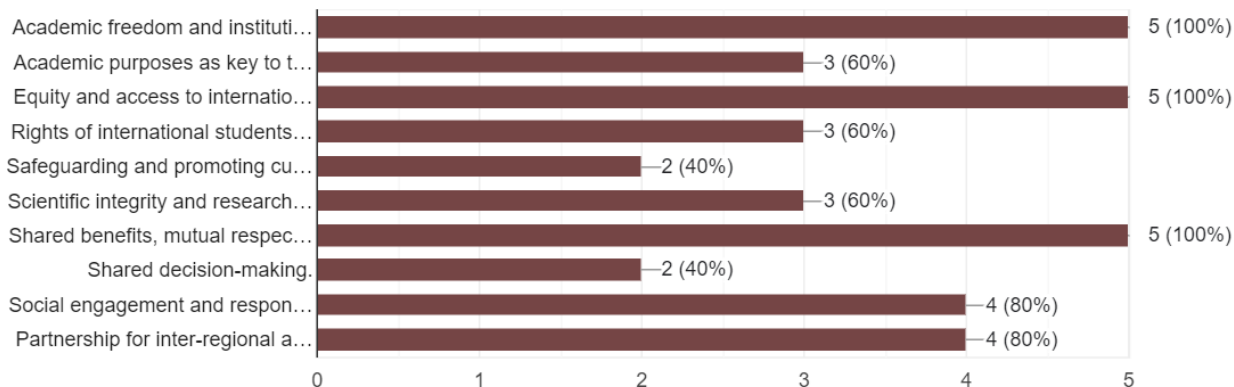


Figure 1. Overall institutional approach to mobility as related to its social and institutional impact. (Jan 2023)

Whereas the results from the 2024 administration of the questionnaire show that all 5 WB partners (UV, UET, KPT, BC, AAB) link it with academic purposes as key to internationalisation efforts, equity and access to internationalisation opportunities, shared benefits, mutual respect, and fairness as the basis for international partnerships, and see it as pertinent to partnerships for inter-regional and intra-regional connectivity and have included regional integration in their internationalisation strategies (Fig. 2).

5 responses

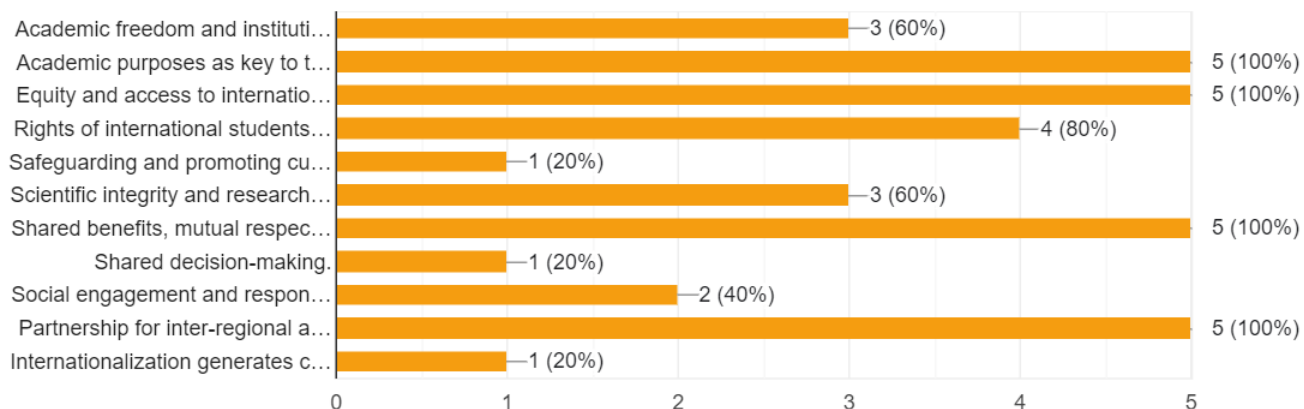


Figure 2. Overall institutional approach to mobility as related to its social and institutional impact. (Jan 2024)

With regard to the institutional approach to staff mobility as related to its impact on the

individual and the institution itself (Fig. 3), in 2023, all 5 WB partners saw it as affecting the acquisition of knowledge and specific know-how from good practices abroad and reinforcing cooperation with the partner institution. Four partners, with the exception of UV, thought that it had an impact on the development of field-related competences and the increase of teaching relevance, building practical job-related skills for professional development, and sharing knowledge and skills with students. Four partners, with the exception of KPT, thought that it helped to expand the professional network, increase the quality and quantity of student and staff mobility, and improve staff's language and intercultural skills. Four partners, except for UET, asserted that it created spin-off effects like curriculum development, the development of joint courses or modules, academic networks, research collaboration, etc. Three partners, except for UV and KPT, confirmed that it increased knowledge of social, linguistic, and/or cultural matters and job satisfaction, as well as gave them the opportunity to meet new people. Three partners, except for UV and UET, said that it helped to build up cooperation with the labour market. Three, except for UET and KPT, asserted that it had an impact on experimenting and developing new learning practices and teaching methods. Only AAB and BC affirmed that it helped to increase future employment and career opportunities.

5 responses

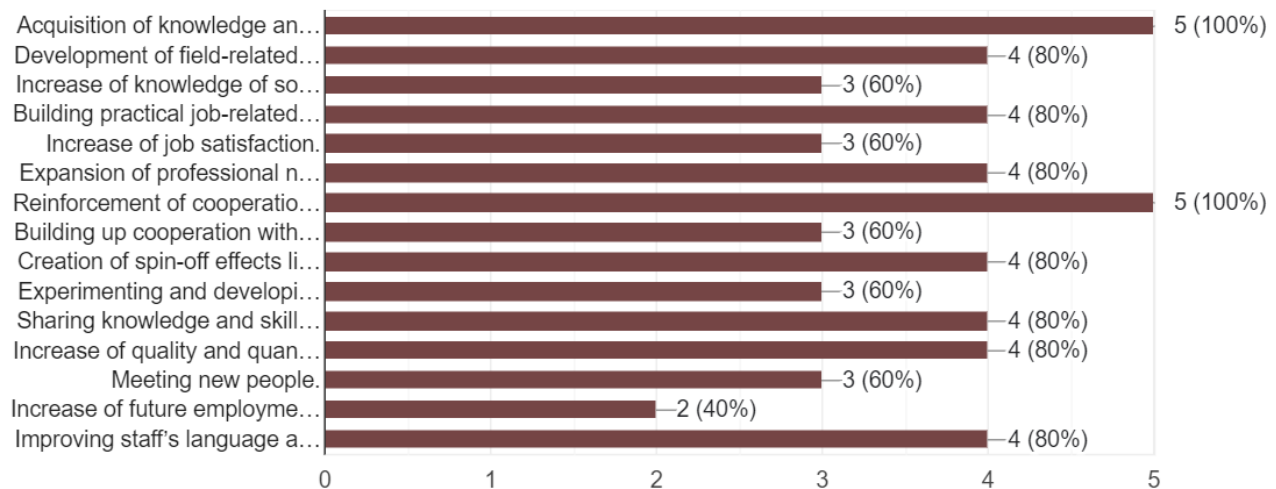


Figure 3. Institutional approach to staff mobility as related to its impact on the individual and the institution itself (Jan 2023).

In 2024 (Fig. 4), all 5 WB partners saw staff mobility as having a wider impact, more specifically on the acquisition of knowledge and specific know-how from good practices abroad, the development of field-related competences and the increase of teaching relevance, the increase of knowledge of social, linguistic, and/or cultural matters, the expansion of the professional network, the increase of quality and quantity of student and staff mobility, capacity building, and upskilling

for staff². Four partners, with the exception of UET, affirmed that it had an impact on building practical job-related skills for professional development, increasing job satisfaction, creating spin-off effects like curriculum development, the development of joint courses or modules, academic networks, research collaboration, etc., and improving staff's language and intercultural skills. Four partners, with the exception of KPT, thought that it helped to reinforce cooperation with the partner institution and share knowledge and skills with students. Four partners, except for BC, asserted that it helped with experimenting and developing new learning practices and teaching methods. AAB and UV stated that it provided the opportunity to meet new people. BC and UV said it enhanced future employment and career opportunities, whereas BC affirmed it helped to build up cooperation with the labour market.

5 responses

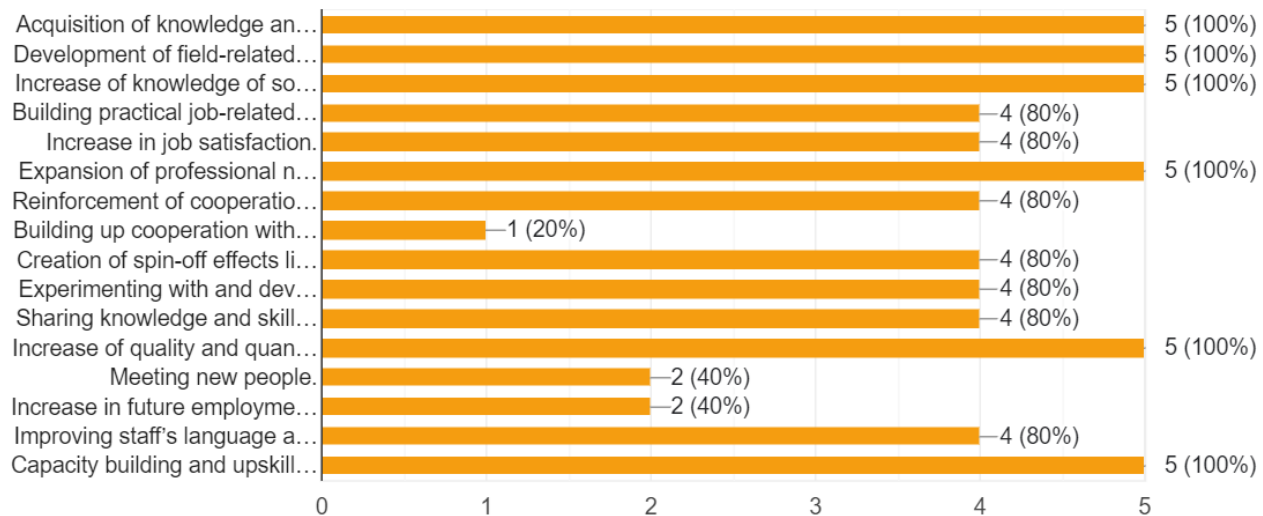


Figure 4. Institutional approach to staff mobility as related to its impact on the individual and the institution itself (Jan 2024).

As concerns the impact of student mobility on the individual (Fig. 5), the institutional approach of all 5 WB partner HEIs in 2023 was reported to link it with experiencing different educational environments and benefiting from different learning and teaching practices and learning contents/curricula. 4 partners, with the exception of UV, associate it with developing soft skills, such as intercultural competence and adaptability, and enhancing future employability opportunities at home or abroad. BC and AAB recognised its impact on building and enhancing language skills. Three partners, except for UV and KPT, affirmed that it helped build cultural knowledge, respect for cultural diversity, and personal and professional networks. One partner, UV, added that it made the home environment attractive to international students.

² This option was added later to this item in the questionnaire (in 2024).

5 responses

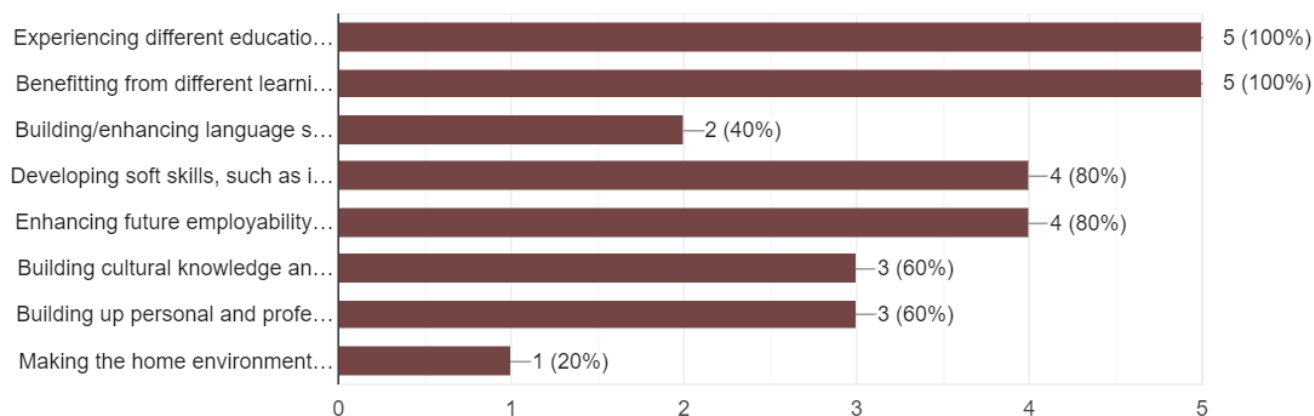


Figure 5. Institutional approach to student mobility as related to its impact on the individual and the institution itself (Jan 2023).

In 2024, all partners reported that student mobility (Fig. 6) was linked with students' experiencing different educational environments, their benefiting from different learning and teaching practices and learning contents/curricula, developing soft skills, such as intercultural competence, and building cultural knowledge and respect for cultural diversity. Four partners, with the exception of UET, saw it as impacting language skills and enhancing future employability opportunities at home or abroad. Four partners, except for KPT, affirmed that it helped build up a personal and professional network.

5 responses

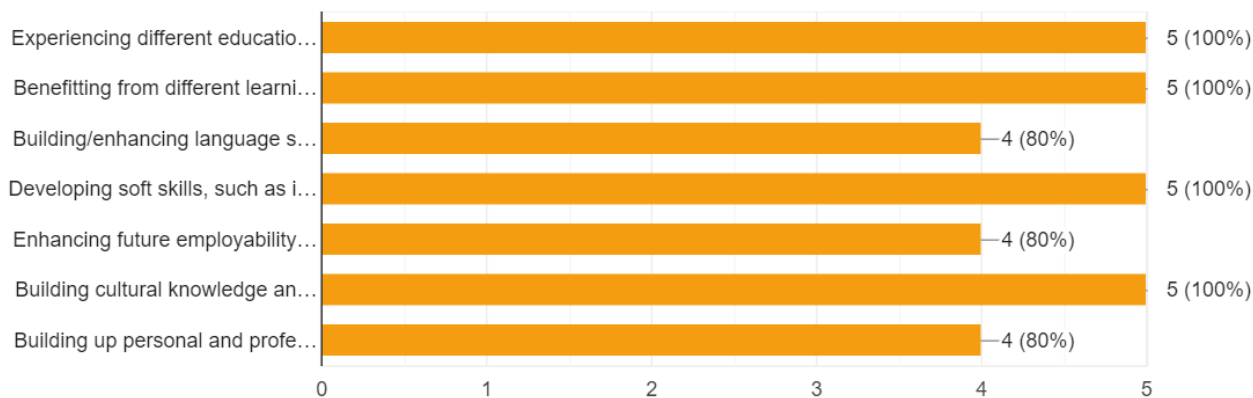


Figure 6. Institutional approach to student mobility as related to its impact on the individual and the institution itself (Jan 2024).



Regarding joint degree programmes, dual, double, multiple degree, or both programmes with international partners, in 2023, only three partners reported that they did (UV, UET, BC), whereas in 2024, four partners reported that they offered such programmes (UV, UET, BC, AAB). In most cases, these programmes are offered at the MA level only (BC and AAB; UV for 2023 only), and in some others, BA and MA (UET for 2023; UV and UET for 2024). KPT admits that it is currently working on offering one.

In 2023, among the reasons for not offering any, partners identified reasons related to the accreditation process and procedures in the country (AAB) and the specific profile of the institution and its period of existence in the higher education market (KPT). Similar explanations were given by KPT in 2024 for why it hasn't yet offered any: as a HEI, it was founded in 2015 as the only institution of its kind (providing solely VET higher education programmes), which is why it had some trouble locating comparable HEIs in the area and the EU³. However, in order to control the operations of professional institutions, the government and the ministry in charge of education had to pass sublegal acts, which also took time. Only by 2020 and beyond, despite their greatest efforts and the same small-scale initiatives, was KPT able to join prosperous consortia in several EU projects that furthered its network and internationalisation. Similar reasons seem to apply when it comes to not offering any in collaboration with other WB HEIs.

As regards internationalisation of the curriculum/internationalisation at home, in 2023, four partners except for KPT ('relatively important') said that it was very important for their HEI (UV, UET, AAB, BC), whereas in 2024, three partners with the exception of KPT and UET ('relatively important') affirmed that it was very important for their university (UV, AAB, BC). Concerning a set of international learning outcomes leading to global competencies that all graduates must achieve, in 2023, two partners affirmed that they have defined them (UET and AAB), whereas in 2024, only BC affirmed that they have. The other partners are either working on them (UET), have partially defined them (UV), or have not defined them at all (KPT, AAB).

All partners are involved in mobility projects, mainly within the Erasmus+ programme. The number of inter-institutional agreements has increased for most partners from 2023 to 2024 (see Table 1). However, collaboration for mobility projects with WB HEIs associated to the Erasmus programme or in the framework of other mobility programmes is almost absent, except in the case of UV.

<i>Item</i> <i>HEI</i>	UV		UET		KPT		AAB		BC	
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
No of countries the HEI has IIAs with	21	23	12	16	2	1	11	12	4	9
No of IIAs with WB countries associated	5	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

³ The time it took KPT to establish a brand name and to network. The type of education it provides is very specific and not many widespread in the current educational national context and others.

<i>to the Erasmus + programme (i.e. North Macedonia, Serbia)</i>										
WB countries associated to the Erasmus + programme (i.e. North Macedonia, Serbia) the HEI is you collaborating with for mobilities	Nort h Mace donia , Serbi a	Nort h Mace donia , Serbi a	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1. Collaboration in mobility projects.

Mobility exchanges are missing between WB HEIs in the framework of the Erasmus+ programme or any other similar exchange programme, except for UV (see Table 2). These exchanges have mainly been for staff mobility. In 2024, however, there is a change: three incoming students from the University of Belgrade are reported to be coming to UV to study for the spring semester.

In 2023, among the reasons for not having had any student exchange with WB 3rd country associated to the programme HEIs, most partners identified the following: insufficiency of study programmes in English or any other language used for instruction between collaborating HEIs (BC, AAB, UV), programmes not comparable enough to allow for student exchange (KPT, UV), and students' diverse preferences for receiving HEIs when they applied for mobility (BC, UV). In 2024, most partners (UET, KPT, AAB, BC) identified the insufficiency of study programmes in English or any other language used for instruction between collaborating HEIs as the main reason, whereas UV identified students' diverse preferences for receiving HEIs when they applied for mobility as the only reason for that.

<i>Item</i> <i>HEI</i>	UV		UET		KPT		AAB		BC	
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
Mobility exchanges between the HEI and WB countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme (North Macedonia and Serbia)	Yes	Yes	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kinds of mobility exchanges between the HEI and WB	STA/ STT	STA/ STT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

<i>countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme (North Macedonia and Serbia) or any other similar programme supporting exchange</i>										
<i>Student exchanges (incoming/outgoing)</i>	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 2. Mobility exchanges between WB HEIs.

As concerns the preparation of the learning agreement for mobility for study, partners have reported different steps. In the 2023 reporting (Fig. 7), most partners took these steps: 1. The student presents the selected courses to the host and home academic coordinators (UET, AAB, UV); 2. The home academic advisor looks at the level, objectives, contents, and forms of assessment of the courses before making the final decision (UET, AAB, UV); 3. When identical courses are missing from the list of courses to be selected, other related courses are selected instead but that contribute to the student's skills and knowledge (AAB, BC, UV). The 2024 reporting (Fig. 8) is slightly different. Most partners highlight these steps: 1. The home academic advisor looks at the level, objectives, contents and the forms of assessment of the courses before making the final decision (AAB, UV, BC); 2. Only courses that are similar to those corresponding to the study programme the student is currently enrolled in at the home institution are selected for inclusion in the learning agreement (AAB, UET, BC); 3. When identical courses are missing from the list of courses to be selected, other related courses are selected instead but that contribute to the student's skills and knowledge (AAB, UV, BC); 4. The equivalence of courses (that is, between those at the host institution and those at the home institution) is very important in the selection of courses (AAB, UET, UV).

Only AAB admitted that "Course learning outcomes are not always systematically taken into consideration when selecting courses", whereas KPT explained that they have had no exchange students (both incoming/outgoing) so far. KPT is involved in two pilot projects for VET mobility, allowing groups of fifteen students to study and intern in businesses in Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Greece, and Poland. The process includes an Erasmus+ Learning Agreement, participant monitoring, and a certificate of Europass Mobility.



5 responses

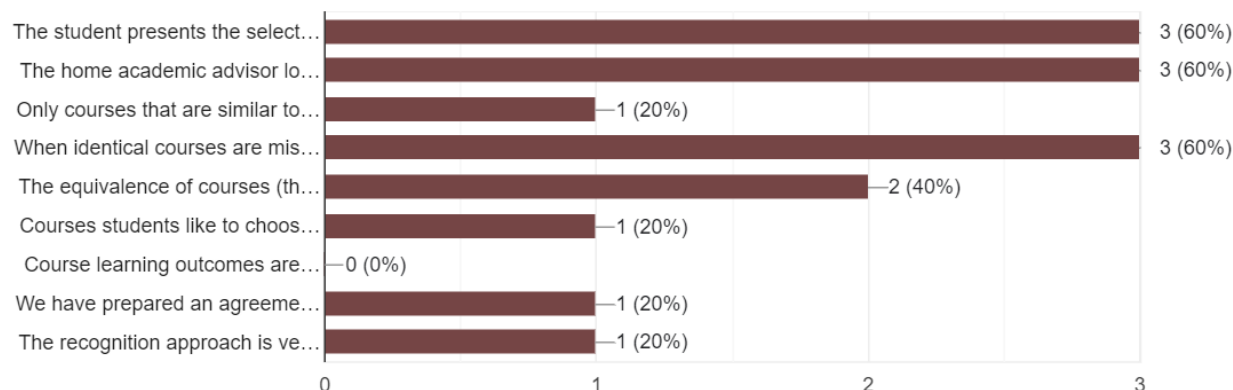


Figure 7. Preparation of the learning agreement (Jan 2023).

5 responses

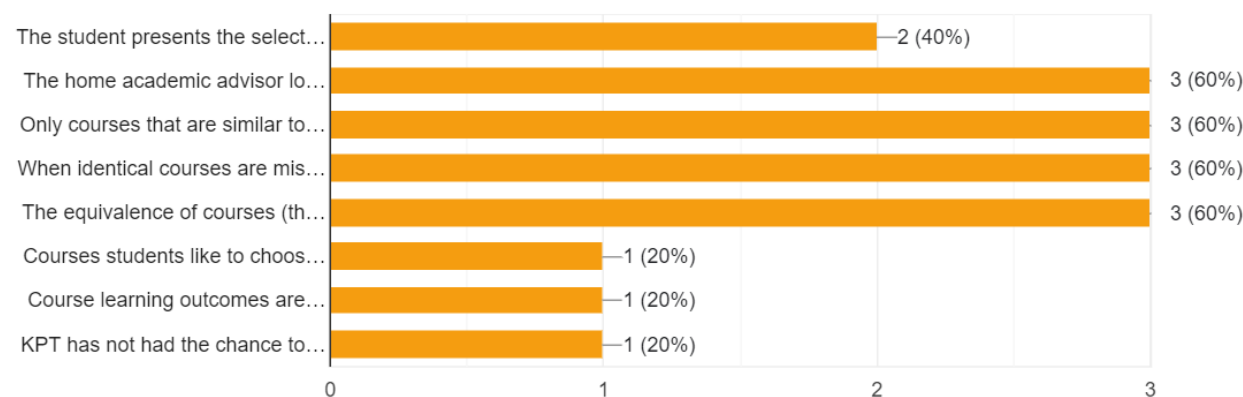


Figure 8. Preparation of the learning agreement (Jan 2024).

In 2023, although all partners, except for KPT, admitted to having a regulation/guide for recognition practice or had embedded it in the mobility regulation, it was made available online by 3 partners (BC, AAB, and UV). The recognition practices and composition of the recognition committees followed various patterns. The shared tendency was to include in the committee either the head of department (UV, UET), vice dean/dean (UET, AAB, BC), or, in some cases, even the vice-rector (UET, AAB). In other cases (UV), the composition of the committee varied from department to department, occasionally including the academic coordinator and another staff member who gained expertise in recognition from previous involvement in recognition procedures for mobility recognition and study transfers at home. Measures to ensure that the staff selected (and how they were selected) had the relevant knowledge and skills to perform recognition procedures were not reported. Moreover, Albanian and Kosovo partners used a full range of recognition decisions,



including 'partial,' 'alternative,' and 'conditional' recognition, with the exception of KPT, which, given its specificities, reported "substantial difference -> partial recognition (e.g., some credits are recognised)," whereas AAB reported "no substantial difference -> full recognition".

In 2024, all partners stated that they had adopted a regulation for the recognition of credits and credits transferred and had a clearly defined institutional recognition practice, except for AAB. Among the aspects foreseen in these regulations or guides, partners pointed out: the 'Role and responsibilities of the parties involved (student, coordinator(s), other authorities involved)' (KPT, UET, UV, BC); the 'Recognition procedure' (KPT, UET, UV); the 'Preparation of the learning agreement' (UET, UV, BC); the 'Selection of courses' (UV, BC) or the 'Number of ECTS' (UET, BC); only KPT pointed out the 'Approach: recognition vs. equivalence'. KPT highlighted the need to regulate the recognition of internships abroad (in EU HEIs) in order to make it clearer and more precise. As regards the composition of the recognition committees, no special provisions are laid down, but it is customary that deans (AAB) or heads of departments (KPT) and, in some cases, IROs (UET) take charge of the process. All five partners affirmed that they used the full range of recognition decisions, including 'partial,' 'alternative,' and 'conditional' recognition. Concerning self-assessment of recognition procedures, in 2023, two partners, AAB and BC, affirmed that they had done so, whereas in 2024, two other partners stated that they had, UET and KPT.

3.2.3. Interpretation of results and needs analysis

As it can be noted from the data analysis in Section 3.2.2. in this report, the overall institutional approach to mobility as related to its social and institutional impact has sustained some slight changes from 2023 to 2024. While in 2023 (see Table 3), all partners saw mobility in relation to academic freedom and institutional autonomy, equity and access to internationalisation opportunities, as well as shared benefits, mutual respect, and fairness as the basis for international partnerships, in 2024, all partners continued to see it as related to equity and access to internationalisation opportunities, as well as shared benefits, mutual respect, and fairness as the basis for international partnerships, but also saw it as more related to academic purposes as key to the internationalisation efforts and partnership for inter-regional and intra-regional connectivity. While some attitudes towards it remain more or less the same, it is surprising that it is seen as less related to social engagement and responsibility and enhanced visibility both locally and globally (only two partners out of four in 2023), but similarly interesting that they now all relate it to connection in the region. This could be explained by the fact that awareness of the need for regional cooperation has increased due to involvement in the project, its goals, and its objectives.

<i>Overall institutional approach to mobility as related to its social and institutional impact</i>	2023	2024
Academic freedom and institutional autonomy.	5	3
Academic purposes as key to the internationalization efforts.	3	5



Equity and access to internationalization opportunities.	5	5
Rights of international students and staff.	3	4
Safeguarding and promoting cultural and linguistic diversity.	2	1
Scientific integrity and research ethics.	3	3
Shared benefits, mutual respect, and fairness as the basis for international partnerships.	5	5
Shared decision-making.	2	1
Social engagement and responsibility and enhanced visibility both locally and globally.	4	2
Partnership for inter-regional and intra-regional connectivity.	4	5

Table 3. Partners' overall institutional approach to mobility in 2023 and 2024.

When it comes to partners' approaches to the impact of staff mobility on the individual and their institution, some approaches have not changed. In two approaches, they all agree with the fact that staff mobility impacts the acquisition of knowledge and specific know-how from good practices abroad and capacity building and upskilling for staff. The tendency is that WB partners tend to rate some approaches higher in 2024. So, they all see staff mobility as positively impacting field-related competences and teaching relevance, knowledge of social, linguistic, and/or cultural matters, professional network, and quality and quantity of student and staff mobility. This could be explained by the fact that the number of staff members and of the agreements currently active in each of the partners involved is, as reported, higher, which means that more staff members have been able to benefit from mobility exchanges and, in this way, to impact their own academic careers and home institutions. It is, however, surprising that in 2024, not all partners see staff mobility as reinforcing cooperation with the partner institution. However, this figure (4) does not particularly affect the overall approach to staff mobility in this regard. Only two partners see it as related to future employment and career opportunities. This can be explained by the fact that employability and career prospects are aspects that require complete information and data for their impact to be reported.

With reference to student mobility, partners' overall approach to its impact on the student and the institution is generally the same as compared to 2023. What has changed is an increased awareness of the impact student mobility can have on the student's language skills, the development of soft skills such as intercultural competence and adaptability, cultural knowledge, and respect for cultural diversity, which could be explained by the fact that more attention seems to be drawn to these benefits mobility can have on a personal level.

<i>Institutional approach to staff mobility as related to its impact on the individual and your institution</i>	2023	2024
Acquisition of knowledge and specific know-how from good practice abroad.	5	5
Development of field-related competences and increase of teaching relevance.	4	5
Increase of knowledge of social, linguistic and/or cultural matters.	3	5
Building practical job-related skills for professional development.	4	4



Increase of job satisfaction.	3	4
Expansion of professional network.	4	5
Reinforcement of cooperation with the partner institution.	5	4
Building up cooperation with the labour market.	3	1
Creation of spin-off effects like curriculum development, development of joint courses or modules, academic networks, research collaboration etc.	4	4
Experimenting and developing new learning practices and teaching methods.	3	4
Sharing knowledge and skills with students.	4	4
Increase of quality and quantity of student and staff mobility.	4	5
Meeting new people.	3	2
Increase of future employment and career opportunities.	2	2
Improving staff's language and intercultural skills.	4	4
Capacity building and upskilling for staff. ⁴	0	5

Table 4. Partners' institutional approach to staff mobility in 2023 and 2024.

<i>Institutional approach to student mobility as related to its impact on the individual and your institution</i>	2023	2024
Experiencing different educational environments.	5	5
Benefitting from different learning and teaching practices and learning contents/curricula.	5	5
Building/enhancing language skills.	2	4
Developing soft skills, such as intercultural competence and adaptability.	4	5
Enhancing future employability opportunities at home or abroad.	4	4
Building cultural knowledge and respect for cultural diversity.	3	5
Building up personal and professional network.	3	4
Other: Making the home environment attractive to international students.	1	0

Table 5. Partners' institutional approach to student mobility in 2023 and 2024.

Although the findings reported here show that there is greater interest and effort on the part of WB partners to offer degree programmes in collaboration with other HEIs overseas and to establish more collaboration for mobility projects (see Table 1), despite the increase in a year's time not being that significant, they do, however, testify to the fact that it shows a greater focus on quantity rather than on the quality of these cooperation agreements.

The absence of student mobility flows within the region seems to be primarily linked to appropriate provisions related to the study programmes. It appears that recognition of studies remains an overlooked part of academic processes, not only for mobility study periods abroad but also for prior learning, credit transfer, micro-credentials, and other forms of academic recognition. This is not an issue at the institutional, national, or regional levels in the WB6 alone, but even wider for many countries in the world. Melin et al. (2019, 6) report that 80% of students

⁴ This item was added to the questionnaire in 2024.

received full recognition and another 15% received partial academic recognition. The latest ESN survey (2022, 61), on the topic of recognition, reports that only 71.37% of participants had all of their courses taken abroad recognised by their home institution, whereas about 29% were partially recognised, quite in contradiction to the European Charter for Higher Education (ECHE) they have signed as a must for participation in the programme. In this regard, ESN (2022, 91) recommends flexibility and prioritisation of learning outcomes and learning experiences over specific courses. To tackle the problem more comprehensively, we also looked at it at the country level.

Two related problems with the successful realisation of mobilities for study currently facing Albanian universities (UV, KPT, UET) concern the availability of a wide array of compatible courses/study programmes with those of partner HEIs and the recognition of courses after mobility abroad, not only for establishing partnerships with WB third country associated to the programme HEIs but also with other HEIs, the EU, and third country associated to the programme. Study programmes are related to knowledge, learning, and skills for a future career, which is why, in various studies or surveys, when asked about choosing to study abroad, young people point to career prospects (at home or abroad). For example, in their survey study on student migration, King and Gëdeshi (2020, 30) found that, among the reasons, the majority of Albanian young respondents pointed to an international career (77.2% considered it very important). In another earlier study on the internationalisation of Albanian HEIs, involving students from six Albanian HEIs, among these UV and UET, Panajoti (2019, 197) found that, of the reasons motivating students to go on mobility, “creating new opportunities” was mainly ticked (31.9% of respondents from UET, 31.2% from UV). In this study, Panajoti (ibid.) also looked into the students’ opinions about the study programmes offered by their home universities. 59.5% of UET respondents and 46% of UV students found them aligned with international programmes. Similarly, teachers were asked to give their opinion on their course content. 45.9% of UET staff respondents and 34.8% of UV respondents thought they satisfactorily integrated an international component. This points to **the need to align study programmes** with those of collaborating universities to make them attractive to students for their future career prospects and employability, which automatically takes us to the second issue: recognition.

Although formal steps have been taken towards recognition, from endorsing the Declaration on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Western Balkans (Poznan Summit, July 2019) to the signing of the Regional Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Western Balkans 6 (Berlin, November 2022), approved by the Albanian Council of Ministers (Decision no. 18, dated 18.1.2023 “On the recognition of HE qualifications obtained in the WB”), this final document makes more detailed provisions for the recognition of qualifications rather than study periods abroad, micro-credentials, or other forms of learning. Moreover, the agreement applies to public HEIs only. Article 3 of the agreement foresees the recognition of other forms of study or qualifications as long as they are weighed and assessed against ECTS gained and learning outcomes obtained in compliance with the respective qualification framework and regulation(s), which assumes that **HEIs should regulate this in their own internal institutional practices**.

At UV, two common problems are encountered: a. recognition is entrusted to people of some



authority (as was reported above), as guarantees of the process but, often, of unfit competence and flexibility to recognise the courses; b. insistence on identicalness rather than on comparability, or, to put it otherwise, adoption of the equivalence approach over the recognition approach (i.e., insistence that the courses completed abroad must be identical to those which would have been taken at home). The second problem results from a failure to compare learning outcomes (an approach also sustained by Article 3 in the Council of Ministers' decision quoted above). They are either overlooked or little taken into consideration during the recognition process. Although there is a mobility regulation in place, its focus is rather on the formal aspects of the organisation of mobility-related procedures. When it comes to recognition, there is no institution-wide unified terminology or standardised procedure. Each department adopts its own recognition practice. This creates problems not only for intra-regional recognition but also for national (study transfer from one HEI to another) and even institutional recognition practices (study transfer from one programme to another within UV). Thus, ***concrete institutional action needs to be taken towards recognition of study periods abroad or other forms of learning based on curriculum comparability and transparency (ECTS, learning outcomes) to overcome barriers to recognition that discourage students from going on mobility.*** These measures will help departments whose students have not so far benefited from mobility projects. But experience is not lacking in this regard. The Department of Foreign Languages has been implementing ICM projects since 2016. In their routine, the staff members from this department who sit on the committee have quite successfully carried out many recognition practices for diverse scenarios. As a more experienced department with mobility projects, and at the same time, as the initiator of this project, the Department of Foreign Languages will share their experience to aid the Department of Albanian Language and Literature and the Department of Education, who are not experienced with project implementation and with ICM projects in particular and who ***need to align their study programmes*** with those offered by respective departments at other universities in the region and make them comparable to allow for student mobilities by increasing their attractiveness.

At UV, two common problems are encountered: a. recognition is entrusted to people of some authority (as was reported above), as guarantees of the process, but, often, of unfitting competence and flexibility to recognize the courses; b. insistence on identicalness rather than on comparability, or, to put it otherwise, adoption of the equivalence approach over the recognition approach (i.e., insistence that the courses completed abroad must be identical to those which would have been taken at home). The second problem results from failure to compare learning outcomes (an approach also sustained by article 3 in the Council of Ministers' decision quoted above). They are either overlooked or little taken into consideration during the recognition process. Although there is a mobility regulation in place, its focus is rather on formal aspects of the organization of mobility-related procedures. When it comes to recognition there is no institution-wide unified terminology or standardised procedure. Each department adopts its own recognition practice. This creates problems not only for intra-regional recognition but also for national (study transfer from one HEI to another) and even institutional recognition practices (study transfer from one programme to another within UV). Thus, ***concrete institutional action needs to be taken towards recognition of***



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At UET, recognition of ECTS for study periods abroad remains one of the main challenges with ICM projects. The recognition process is done by the Head of the Department and happens after the student's mobility, with little consideration given before mobility. Students are advised to wisely select the courses they will attend during the exchange period and to follow the recommendations of the department at the host institution. However, in most cases, they make changes in the learning agreement (LA) for different reasons when the mobility starts; hence, they return home with some new courses that have not been previously agreed to be recognised. UET has created an Erasmus+ institutional regulation, but the specific unified procedure at the institutional level is lacking. Each department has its own recognition process, either done by one person (usually the head of department) or by a committee of two or more people. Several discussions have been going on in the Academic Senate, but no concrete action has been taken so far regarding the recognition of courses after mobility. Many students hesitate to undertake mobility because of the recognition problems, and their main concern is having additional courses (overload) to take when returning from mobility. Another main challenge that exists at UET is that even when some recognition is done, the course syllabi are not taken into consideration. This means that the learning outcomes of the recognised courses may not match at all. UET ***needs to build the capacities of the academic staff involved with the recognition process*** from the Department of Communication, Faculty of Humanities, Education, and Liberal Arts, who have less experience with the recognition of ECTS.

KPT, an Albanian HEI offering only a two-year 120-ECTS professional study programme corresponding to Level 5 in the Albanian Qualifications Framework, focuses solely on vocational higher education study programmes. Article 72/2 in the Albanian law on HE stipulates that the credits gained during higher professional studies may be transferred to the first-cycle study programme, level 6 in the Albanian Qualifications Framework, in compliance with the criteria defined by HEIs. KPT students who have later taken a BA degree have had some of their credits recognised. All courses have a strong practical component (labs or workshops, which combine a content ratio of 50/50 theory and practice) taking place at the KPT premises or as study visits to a given industry. "Professional Practice," a compulsory course in each study programme, in the last

semester of the 2nd year, lasting 6 weeks (10 ECTS), gives students “hands-on job” training at a business or industry related to the corresponding study programme and also serves to find potential employers in the hosting entity, which is why practice takes place at the latest stage of studies when the student has created a clear profile and has skills and competences that allow him/her to be actively involved in the work process, thus acting as potential employees. Collaboration with related industries, businesses, and companies is enabled by KPT based on respective partnerships. As a new actor in the Albanian educational market, small-sized and vocationally oriented, KPT has found it somehow difficult to find counterpart HEIs in the region or in the EU for bilateral agreements, despite efforts with HEIs in Germany and Greece. Being in its initial stage, attention was mostly paid to growth, quality, curriculum development and improvement, infrastructure, staff and lab creation, and accreditation processes with tight and strict timelines to follow. With regard to mobility, so far it has not taken place through ICM projects but through the participation in successful consortia in different EU projects that have contributed as well to its networking and internationalisation (e.g., in two specific VET mobility projects that have provided a great opportunity for student internships in EU companies (2 weeks’ study visits, 1 month, 3 months, and 6 months). So far, 1 month and 3 months’ internships in Hungary and Greece have taken place. Once back, these students were employed in Albania and chose to stay home and not go abroad.

KPT has in place a regulation on students’ study transfers, but it has no specific provision on the recognition of ECTS earned during mobility for study abroad. Credit recognition takes place only for study transfers to and from local/national HEIs or for enrollment in a second-degree programme. Recognition of credits stands for equivalence of the same or similar disciplines or formative activities of a study programme with those of another study programme within the same study cycle. The procedure is carried out by the department, which establishes an ad hoc committee headed by the head of the department. The main challenge for KPT is to find counterpart HEIs or similar study programmes that allow for mobility for study or traineeship in the region and beyond. This is indeed challenging considering the various approaches to VET programmes in the region or the EU. KPT has little to no experience with the recognition of ECTS as concerns courses taken and internships carried out in the region and abroad; it ***needs to build the capacities of its academic staff involved with the recognition process***, which will prove beneficial to students afterwards. KPT ***needs to update its regulation accordingly to make provisions to include mobility scenarios both for courses and internships; course syllabi in their entirety and credit recognition have to be considered as crucial elements in the process***. A clear, transparent, and well-established regulation, implemented by skilled staff, will better help, guide, and encourage students on mobility. KPT students who have benefited from internship mobility have had good employment opportunities. ***A clear and well-organised recognition process may help reassure them to go abroad and work locally as well.***

The collaborations between HEIs from Kosovo* and regional partners, beyond research and teaching, are taking higher importance, which requires additional engagement in projects that ease the way to exchange technical expertise, transfer cultural knowledge and recognise ECTS especially. Student mobility has increased rapidly over the past six years, especially with the Erasmus+ ICM



projects. Overall, during the period 2015-2019, 4177 student and academic mobilities took place under the IC component of the Erasmus+ programme, with a 95% increase in incoming and outgoing ICM from 2016 to 2019 and a 100% increase in the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree (EMJ). (EACEA 2020). Kosovo* has had other mobilities/scholarships given by different countries, and donors, with whom the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI) has memoranda of understanding, for example, for 2019, cooperation with—the Embassy of Hungary (in total 50 scholarships: 25 for BA, 20 for Masters and 5 for PhD studies), the Embassy of Italy (15 scholarships for BA and MA studies), the Embassy of France (2 scholarships for PhD studies), the Government of Japan (2 scholarships for BA, MA, or PhD studies) (EACEA ,2020).

When comparing student mobilities with institutions in the region, a gap is observed, whose main reasons are probably related to the recognition of ECTS credits for courses in the BA and MA programmes. Many problems have been reported by students about the recognition of ECTS credits after mobility, which tells that there is **a need to be involved in such projects supported by the EU** for higher education institutions in Kosovo*.

Article 14 of the student academic mobility rule of AAB College outlines staff responsibilities and credit recognition procedures, among other things. The guidelines provide that the dean of the faculty must decide before mobility to ensure that the chosen courses will be accepted when the student returns to AAB College. Because they are better informed on the makeup of courses in a particular discipline, deans are involved in this process. However, what actually occurs is that the content of the courses and their suitability may be assessed at the outset of certifying the LA based just on the course name, without further examination of the curriculum and the learning outcomes, which might often differ. This might frequently be the result of insufficient knowledge about the content and learning outcomes of particular courses.

Likewise, the changes made to the LA present another issue. AAB mobility students frequently report that because the courses and/or subjects they originally applied for are no longer offered at their host universities, they must modify the terms of their Learning Agreement (which should be finalised before their study abroad experience begins). This is a problem in and of itself since students frequently fail to notify their home university of the frequent changes made to the LA. As a result, when they return, they can discover that their earned credits are no longer entirely transferable. The regulation states that courses taken by the student that do not align with the AAB study programme or that exceed the number of credits specified in the signed LA will only be included in the diploma supplement. However, this can be a challenge for students who need to retake some classes at their home university. Moreover, there are two crucial activities that need to be finished following mobility: getting the academic results and transferring them. Moreover, there are two crucial tasks that need to be finished following mobility: getting the academic results and transferring them. It is frequently necessary to convert the academic achievements from the host universities into the home university's academic database, which is quite difficult. It also presents a challenge because staff members might not have the necessary flexibility or abilities to 'translate' the grading systems. In order to accomplish this, AAB **needs to enhance procedures to give exchange students access to up-to-date course catalogues that detail the availability,**



content, learning outcomes, and academic timetable and grading tables of each subject. With the help of this data, the LA may be better planned and controlled, and the frequency of changes that are required may be reduced.

In order to facilitate the organisation of studies and the realisation of mobilities or exchanges between partner institutions, Biznesi College selects content and subjects based on the number of credits of the student's commitment (ECTS) for each subject of the chosen study programme. As long as they follow the advice of the faculty members who have been chosen by the institution, students at BC are permitted to select their courses based on their goals. The chairman of the ECTS credit recognition committee or the director of the study programme will provide practical guidance and instructions. Many problems come up while choosing the courses a student will study at the host university. In practice, programmes offered by two or more partner universities may appear to be identical on the outside, but they may differ inside in terms of study plans and syllabi. Based on both quantitative and qualitative internal institutional data, including comments from staff and students, BC can list a few of these differences: the disciplines are presented in the host institutions during different semesters or even years (according to 70% of staff responses), different institutions award different amounts of ECTS credits per subject (60% of staff feedback), changes in the priorities given to elective courses (75% of staff feedback), differences in the number of classes and, consequently, the number of ECTS credits assigned for elective courses (70% of staff feedback); extra teaching subjects that are added by the host institution that are outside the provisions of the inter-institutional agreement (65% of student and staff feedback); additional differences in how partners evaluate a student's practical work (internship)—in some cases, there is no evaluation at all (70% of staff and student input). Therefore, by **building HEIs' capacity for academic recognition via learning outcomes**, a complete and inclusive strategy to mobility can rectify or greatly improve the challenges produced by the various variations across HEIs in the region.

4. Conclusions

The analysis herein presented shows that WB 3rd country not associated to the programme HEIs need to build their capacities for academic recognition via learning outcomes (LOs) as an innovative pedagogical approach, which is both necessary and pertinent, for linking work with education, by ensuring curriculum transparency, comparability, flexibility for improving recognition and study transfer procedures, revising course contents, methodologies and assessment to provide for student-centred and skills-oriented learning that adds an international, global dimension to the curriculum, thus, enhancing collaboration among WB6 HEIs for student exchange and intra-regional employability and connectivity.

As such, WB HEIs and their academic staff need to focus on learning outcomes to reflect a skills-oriented learning approach to mobility and internationalisation goals as benefiting not only academic recognition but also regional integration, which also works towards strengthening intra-regional collaboration and furthering the internationalisation of higher education. Thus, to enable

free movement within the Western Balkans Six, here concerned with mobility for students, researchers, and professors, a content-wise methodology that looks at the content of the academic offer, more precisely the LOs, should be adopted by academics/relevant authorities, or bodies to ensure academic recognition of mobility for studies in the region for the integration of mobile individuals. Adopting an integrated approach to intra-regional connectivity will make student mobility more effective and efficient, study programmes more attractive, and HE in the WB produce more quality.

The consortium partners, of diverse and complementary profiles, academically and geographically, will focus on LOs to develop practices for facilitating the recognition process and paving the way for regional integration. The following activities are needed to obtain deliverables that would work towards this goal: developing documents and tools to establish a common regional approach to academic recognition; internationalising the curriculum via global learning outcomes and embedded mobility; establishing institutional procedures for the recognition of credit mobility by adopting a learning outcomes model for enhancing transparency; quality teaching and learning for future-proof skills; and mobility and credential completion through credit transfer. These can be achieved by capitalising on the human resources available, academic and non-academic, through training academic staff for academic recognition via learning outcomes, developing tools and guidelines for international learning outcomes, and recognising credentials and mobility of study abroad in compliance with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the European Charter for Higher Education (ECHE), and the European Recognition Manual for Higher Education Institutions. These provisions, we believe, will work towards providing an international dimension of long-term impact on education in WB HEIs and creating an inclusive intra-regional/international environment that will make both incoming and outgoing students feel accommodated. WB HEIs' capacities will be built through training workshops and webinars and for recognizing study periods abroad via LOs, developing tools and producing documents for intra-regional recognition practices, guidelines on internationalizing the curriculum via LOs that will serve all partners involved to create synergies among each other and beyond for cooperation and use the capacities as a springboard to develop new initiatives for regional collaboration and networking, to revisit their own organizational international operations and to improve the quality of education in WB HEIs, which is intended to transform the mobility experience, and internationalizing LOs relying on EU and 3rd country associated to the programme partners' good practice and experience in order to reduce the internationalization gap among HEIs from Albania and Kosovo*.

Relevance of academic recognition and quality of higher education in the WB partners in order to respond to the needs of students and young people for employment opportunities and career prospects, even more so in a post-COVID context marked by digitalization that has largely affected social, economic, environmental, and educational patterns, has made the need for future-proof skills a challenge for higher education in the WB, but not only. Hence, MORIN seeks to foster access to cooperation for strengthening learning opportunities and mobility and facilitating academic recognition.

It is hoped that regional integration and intra-regional connectivity will be achieved through a

learner-centred approach that looks into learning outcomes for curriculum comparability and internationalisation of the curriculum via international learning outcomes and embedded mobility to promote mobility as the provider of a global dimension to the education of young people from WB HEIs, equipping them with the skills needed by the EU and offering learning opportunities to mobile people, equally recognised across the region, thus allowing for integration and serving as a way to build stronger connections among WB6 for encouraging intra-regional student and staff mobility.

In today's world, where quality of education is assessed in terms of accessibility, equity, inclusion, and lifelong learning opportunities (UN, SDG4), internationalisation, regional integration, and mobility are key to creating a multicultural and global educational environment conducive to acquiring experiences and skills transferable and applicable across geographies, markets, and societies.

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Links to the Google Survey Forms

Mobility for regional integration - Institutional approaches, policies and practices (Jan 2023 survey).
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