

# Support to Higher Education in Albania - Project progress report

STEERING COMMITTEE, MARCH 2017

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## General Information

This report is presented to the Project Steering Committee and it provides a summary of the project's main achievement and progress so far, during the initiation (July – December 2016) and implementation period (August 2016 – December 2017). The report also describes activities developed and planned up to February 2017.

The project is supported by the Italian Agency for Development and Cooperation (AICS), managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). Following an initiation phase of 6 months, the project is foreseen to last 12 more months' and it intends to support the operation of the new law on Higher Education approved by the Albanian parliament in summer 2015. The overall object is to shape an advanced – qualitative and competitive higher education system in the country that equips students with the adequate knowledge and relevant skills. After the initiation phase signed on July the 1<sup>st</sup> 2016, the project agreement was finalized by UNDP and the MoES on October the 20<sup>th</sup> 2016, covering the period of September the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 – December the 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017. Due to emergencies that the Ministry of Education faced, the operationalization of the programme commenced in July 2016, whereas the actual implementation after the project signature and receipt of funds from AICS towards the end of 2016.

Following an initial investment of UNDP of 50,000 USD, the Government of Italy contributed with 200,000 Euros (equal to 212,314 USD at the time of receipt based on the UN operational rates of exchange). The total resources allocated are 262,314 USD.

## I. Introduction

### *DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES*

Albania's higher education system has been through dynamic changes especially after 2007, when the sector was liberalized. The main objective until 2013 was to increase access to higher education, as a result the enrolment rates rose from 33% of the university-aged population in 2009 to 63% in 2013;<sup>1</sup> however this was not accompanied by an increase in the teaching personnel. Moreover, curricula are very outdated and do not adequately respond to the labour market; students are not equipped with the proper practical skills, which leads to a skills gap for newly graduates; lastly curricula are not harmonized. The main challenges in higher education system include:

- Increasing quality of education through improvements in teaching standards and conditions
- Increasing the quantity and quality of personnel
- Improvements in infrastructure
- Updating of curricula and quality control as per European standards
- Coherence of strategies, curricula and education programmes with the private sector to better respond to the labour market needs
- Expansion of post-secondary education according to specific needs and regional developments
- Strengthening institutional capacities and increasing the autonomy and self-governance of higher education institutions

### *INTERVENTION STRATEGY*

Under the framework of the UNDAF/Country Programme Results and Resources Framework, this project intends to contribute to Outcome 3: Economic growth, priorities, policies and programmes of the Government of Albania are inclusive, sustainable and gender-responsive, with greater focus on competitiveness, decent jobs and rural development. The overall objective of the project is to establish an advanced – qualitative and competitive higher education system in the country that equips students with the adequate knowledge and relevant skills. The entire project is conceived as technical assistance support to the Ministry of Education and Sports; therefore, the general objective are achieved through a capacity development approach in the form of technical assistance (legal, academic and institutional) along with the following two main specific objectives:

1. Legal framework for the implementation of the higher education reform drafted and approved
2. Technical assistance at the university level ensures the reform roll out through feedback mechanisms and user perspectives

### *PARTNERSHIPS*

The Ministry of Education and Sports is the institution in charge of the project. National and international partners include public and private Universities and research and scientific institutions; the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research; CINECA, a non-profit consortium made up of 70 Italian University, 5 research institutions and the Italian Ministry of Education. The Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research and CINECA contributed to establishing the Academic Network of Albania (ANA), which offers ICT services for policy making and implementing agencies in the field of higher education and research.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR>

## SUSTAINABILITY

The project was articulated as a response to the urgent need to support the implementation of the higher education reform. Yet it takes place in the frame of the long-term cooperation between Italy and Albania, which has been especially active in the higher education field. In fact, the Academic network of Albania has been established with finding of the government of Italy. The national ownership of the project is ensured thanks to the direct implementation of the Ministry of Education and Sports.

However, the project aims to assist only the first steps of the reform implementation. In order to achieve sustainability on the Albanian commitment to quality HE standards, a longer-term involvement should be taken into consideration by all partners. The EU integration process should be the long-term horizon to look at, with a special focus on Chapter 26 of EU *acquis* on Education and Culture.

## II. Project implementation

### Initiation plan

The law no. 80/2015 has paved the way for the new reform on Higher Education, yet the institutional set up was missing secondary legislation in its support. UNDP provided assistance to the MoES in the formulation, revision and adoption of legal and policy documents. First of all, an initiation plan was launched in order to create the support facility for the legal acts. This also aimed to mobilize the necessary partnerships in financial and human resources terms for the following implementation phase. The whole project has been and it is currently developed through a capacity building approach, capitalizing expertise from the partners. Both national and international experts have been contributing by closely collaborating with the MoES.

#### Establishment of working groups

In February 2016 the MoES set up 3 working groups with Albanian legal experts and representatives from the MoES, in order to draft the new bylaws foreseen in the new law. The working groups are in charge of (i) definition of academic standards, (ii) establishment and organization of institutions/agencies, (iii) financial aspects of Higher Education. A 4<sup>th</sup> working group, focuses on the regulation process of authorities and governing bodies, had already completed its mandate at the time of the initiation plan agreement. The reform aims to be fully effective by the beginning of the next academic year (September 2017). Given the limited time available, the working groups evaluated that most of the bylaw required external expertise.

#### Launch of the initiation plan

On July, 1, 2016 the Ministry of Education and Sports signed the agreement with UNDP, launching the initiation plan for the “Support to Higher Education” project. The initiation plan lasted 6 months (until December, 31, 2016) and it led to the project agreement signed in October 2016. The plan consists in 2 activities.

Under the supervision and selection of MoES and UNDP, a team of 4 national legal experts was hired and worked closely with the MoES, in order to prepared a full list of needed bylaws. A call was

launched in June 2016 and the selection process terminated within July 2016. The experts' work produced a list of all bylaw needed, grouped by scope:

- tie financial sources to performance
- establishment of institutions and agencies
- academic organizations and standards

The legal experts' work resulted in

1. A list of 31 relevant legal acts, opinions and explanatory notes. Specifically, 10 Decisions of Ministers accompanied by 10 legal explanations, 8 Instructions and 3 orders of the Minister of Education and Sports have been prepared
2. A final explanatory report

As already mentioned, the reform was partly inspired by the British and Italian model. The Italian model is a continuous point of reference and as a result international technical expertise has come from Italy. Italy with its reform of 2010 has adopted the British model (Legge Gelmini, nr. 240/2010). Therefore, the Italian experience can orient and guide in order to prevent to the great possible extended problems related to the implementation through their own legal and sub-legal acts. In early 2016 the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research (MIUR) has been asked to support for what concerns the application of the part of the reform which most reflects the Italian higher education system. This consists specifically in codification, harmonization and rationalization of study programmes, establishment and functioning of research institutions. The assistance provided by the MIUR was based on the capitalization of Italian experience on implementing the higher education reform in the past decades.

A consultation with the Italian Rectors, leadership of Bologna university as well as with officials of the inter-university consortium ALMALAUREA conference identified some valuable experts on each field, which would have been able to actively contribute to the bylaw drafting process. During the period 28-29 June and 8-9 July 2016, Deputy Minister of Education and Sports as well as Deputy Minister of European Integration went for a visit to the University of Bologna to ask for assistance and cooperation in the field of higher education and scientific research. Another visit took place in September 2016 and as a result experts Roversi – Monaco; Morrone, Cimbalo, Botti, Insolera and others have come and are expected to be engaged further on.

## Implementation phase

The project in support to the implementation of the Higher Education reform in Albania was launched in October 2016. It is articulated into 2 outputs.

**Output 1:      Legal framework for the implementation of the higher education reform  
                         drafted and approved**

### Design of study programmes' general framework

Between October 24 and 26 the first expert mission was organized in Tirana. The meeting's outcomes articulated the framework for the study programmes layout. 2 international experts were selected as the most valuable from the official Italian University consultation bodies. Their expertise achieved to identify the overall codification system and study programmes' design. The 2 experts were:

Professor Marco Abate, from University of Pisa and the National University Council (Consiglio Nazionale Università' CUN). CUN it is a consultation body of the Italian government which provides opinions to the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research.

Professor Massimo Carfagna, member of the Foundation of the Conference of the Italian Universities Rectors (Fondazione CRUI). The Conference of Rectors provides advices and services at institutional level in order to transfer university innovation to the key-developing sectors.

They have collaborated with the working groups at the MoES. As a result of their contribution 2 package of bylaw were drafted:

1. The Bylaw on codification of study programs which indicates provision and procedures of the study programmes' organization. Given the similarities between the 2 HE systems, the working groups agreed on taking the Italian model as an example. The experts provided suggestion for the application of the law in the Albanian context. Based on their experience on implementing the HE reform in Italy, the experts have been able to highlight specific critical points.
2. The bylaw on the elements of the study programs. This has been an articulated task, since such a regulation took into account several elements, including: the content of the programs, learning outcomes, prerequisites for each course, composition of the courses in terms of ECTS, training, final examination, and so on. Moreover, with the aim to harmonize curricula, the new law establishes that 70% of the contents of the same study program has to be the same at national level (80% for teaching programmes). Given the complexity of this package of bylaws, further work and experts contribution had been necessary in order to complete this task.

#### Building the accreditation system

A study visit on Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions was organized in cooperation with the MIUR. The visit took place in Rome between 21 – 24 November 2016. The meetings were chaired by experts from the MIUR and the CRUI. Study visits at the CUN, CRUI and ANVUR (National Agency of Evaluation of University and Research Systems), the Italian Quality Assurance Agency for HE were also included.

As a result of it, assistance and exchange of best practices in accordance to European Standards on HE were reached. The visit achieved for the involved members of the working groups a clear understanding of the following:

- Italian framework on the academic titles
- Italian academics careers and legal status of students and researcher
- Quality assurance aspects of academic career in Italy
- Procedure for the licensing of HEIs and study programmes
- Code of quality for study programmes in public and non-public institutions

The study visit accomplished the identification of specific interventions to put in place in the Albanian legal framework, with regard to academic career matters. Moreover, it created a comparison scheme between Italian and Albanian bylaws related to academic titles; expertise on how to develop a database of the study program was gained; guidelines on how to increase quality on HE were endorsed.

UNDP arranged the mission of 3 experts from the MoES<sup>2</sup>, while additional financial support was provided from other sources such as TAIEX<sup>3</sup>, which co-founded the visit of other experts from the working groups.

### Regulation of non-secular universities

A special focus was given to the regulation for non-secular universities. In this respect, 2 international experts on this field were designed in order to provide all assistance needed. Both the selected experts are professors of ecclesiastic law at the University of Bologna, Italy.

Professor Giovanni Cimbalo is also expert on pluralism confessional in Albania

Professor Federica Botti is expert on freedom of confession in East Europe

Their contribution, still ongoing, is provided from remote. Specifically, the experts are currently collaborating with the working groups at the MoES in order to draft the bylaws needed to implement the reform in the non-secular universities.

### Support at university level

In order to design in details the bylaws needed for the definition of the curricula, a second round of missions has been organized in Tirana. The selected international experts were chosen from Universities, since the focus of the activity was on the organization of the didactic component of the study programmes.

Professor Fabio Alberto Roversi-Monaco, a renowned expert from the Bologna Process, collaborated with the working groups in Tirana between in February, 5-6, 2017. Prof. Roversi-Monaco had been the main promoter of the Bologna Process, which led in 1999 in a conference involving all European Ministers of Education in order to achieve comparability among European HE programmes and degrees. The result of the conference was the Bologna Declaration, which was a reference document also for the Albanian reform.

The mission resulted in a contribution at different levels:

1. expertise was provided to the working groups and experts in higher education at the MoES, in order to further define the bylaws package - output 1 of the project<sup>4</sup>;
2. a meeting with rectors from the main Universities in Tirana furnished technical assistance at the university level, in order to ensure the reform's roll out -output 2<sup>5</sup>;
3. under the framework of the Italian development cooperation in Albania, which is the main supporter of the project, a meeting with the Director of Italian Cultural Institute Adriana Frisena emphasised the collaboration between the 2 countries, with specific regards to Higher Education.

The mission of the second expert has been arranged for the period March, 6-9, 2017.

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<sup>2</sup> Mirela Bimo, Flamur Bidaj, Dhimiter Bako.

<sup>3</sup> TAIEX is the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument of the European Commission. It is a tool provided by the European Neighbourhood Policy And Enlargement Negotiations, in order to support public administrations with regard to the approximation, application and enforcement of EU legislation as well as facilitating the sharing of EU best practices.

<sup>4</sup> Participants in the meeting were Deputy Minister Redi Shtino; Prof. Anila Paparisto; Prof. Aleksander Xhuvani; Prof. Edmond Hajderi.

<sup>5</sup> Participants in the meeting: Deputy Minister Redi Shtino; Mynyr Koni – Rector of Tirana University; Arben Gjata – Rector of Medicine University of Tirana; Andrea Maliqari – Rector of Polytechnic University of Tirana; Bahri Musabelliu – Rector of Agricultural University of Tirana; Kastriot Çaushi – Rector of University of Arts



Professor Andrea Morrone, professor of Constitutional law at the University of Bologna, is also coordinator for the PhD programme in Legal Studies

#### Finalization of the bylaw and feedback mechanism

A team of national consultants', experts on legal acts drafting, as well as on civil society organization and policy implementation process, is currently in phase of selection. The scope of the assignment is both legislative and consultative. In fact, while the selected team will support the working groups at the MoES in order to identify the bylaws still needed, it will also conduct a consultation work with relevant stakeholders (implementing universities, experts in higher education, students).

Deliverables of the assignment include:

- an assessment of the current situation on the bylaw drafting process and identification of the still missing acts
- the bylaw drafting process itself
- consultation with implementing institutions and involved actors through focus groups, workshops or others
- finalization of the legal framework for the reform implementation, taking into account also the feedback from the world of University

#### **Output 2:      Technical assistance at the University level ensures the reform roll out through feedback mechanisms and user perspective**

#### Collaboration with European Universities

According to the goal of adjusting Albanian HE system to European standards, 2 applications for Erasmus+ project have been submitted under the key action 2 (KA2) of European Commission, Cooperation for Innovation and the exchange of good practices - Capacity Building for Higher Education Projects. If successful, these projects are expected to contribute actively towards the increasing of capacities for better drafting of policies and writing of sub-legal acts in the respective areas.

UNDP was invited to participate as part of the consortia with details as follows:

1. *GRaduates Advancement and Development of University capacities in Albania - GRADUA project. Coordinator partner: Agriculture University of Albania.*

#### **Objective**

The project envisages the creation of an innovative ICT platform, which will enable the Universities members of the consortium to monitor outputs of the HE system and provide relevant information for the labour market. The aim will be achieved through:

- i) collection and analysis of data on graduates performances and universities, issuing reliable, continuous and updated documentation for assessing the HE system at support of the ongoing reform process;
- ii) facilitation of the cooperation between higher education institutions and business world (IT based online services are developed and made available to both graduates, and university staff and firms);
- iii) facilitation of the placement of graduates in the labour market

The project is based on a capacity building approach which intends to capitalize the experience developed by AlmaLaurea in Italy in over 20 years.

## Partners

AlmaLaurea is an Inter-university non-profit Consortium set up in Italy in 1994. It currently groups 71 Italian Universities and 91% of graduates. Among the main missions of the consortium there is gathering and provision of detailed data about career development of graduates. Moreover, AlmaLaurea is involved in internalization process, based on the commitment to share with foreign local governments its data and knowledge in order to support governance of HE, strengthen linkages between HE and labour market, and improve quality of HE systems. This is fully in line with the Albanian reform and the project itself.

The full list of the partners of the project is: Agriculture University of Tirana (AUT-UBT), University of Tirana (UT), University of Arts, Tirana (UART), Polytechnic University of Tirana (PUT), University of Medicine, Tirana (UMT), European University of Tirana (UET), Polis University (U\_POLIS), Catholic University "Our Lady of Good Counsel" (UniKZKM), Albanian University (AU), Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna (UNIBO), Università degli Studi di Siena (UNISI), University of Barcelona (UB), University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE-IUL), Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Tirana (CCIT), Consorzio Interuniversitario AlmaLaurea (AL), Ministry of Education and Sports (MES). United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is an associate partner.

## Implementation

The project implementation is articulated in 9 working package:

WP1 – data. Preparatory activity on relevant information

WP2 – tool. Tailoring and realising the web platform

WP3 – competencies. Training on how to manage the platform

WP4 – recommendations. Direct involvement of career offices in order to match skills supply with the demand

WP5 – tool. Main exploitation activities: running of the survey on Albanians' graduate profile. The dataset will be analyzed and main findings will be highlighted in a report.

WP6 – competencies. Develop guidance on labour market for students through workshops with EU partners.

WP7 – dissemination

WP8 - sustainability

WP9 – management and quality control

UNDP will be mainly involved in WP7. Thanks to its long term support on skills development, it will also have the role to highlight capabilities and potential of Vocational Higher Education in Albania, not included in the consortium.

Should the application be successful, further developments will follow.

## *2. Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and human rights: a New Educational Challenge for Albania - NECA project. Coordinator partner: University of Tirana*

## Objective

In the framework of the highly diverse religious affiliation in the Balkans area, sharp conflicts in the past have founded there their roots. This has not been the case in Albania; however, an institutional policy framework supporting coexistence of religious pluralism is still missing, giving space for raising

of radicalism in the country. The goal of the project is contributing to such an institutional policy framework by using the education tool, as well as to promote research.

The specific objective is the creation of a high qualifying training programme on religious phenomenon in historical, sociological, theological, cultural, artistic and institutional terms. The programme will be a specialization master (ISCED level 6), and it aims to promote and booster quality scientific research in Albania. The historical pacific coexistence of religions in Albania offers the perfect conditions to make the country a hub of specialized study on this topic. This is in line with the reform and the project's goals.

### **Implementation**

The project is organized in 9 working packages:

WP1 – context analysis, through study reports and conferences

WP2 – training and transfer of knowledge

WP3 – design the master and development of new teaching

WP4 – internship plan and organization

WP5 – implementation

WP6 – creation of an alumni network

WP7 – dissemination

WP8 – quality assessment

WP9 – project management

UNDP will be involved in all work packages, and, in particular, it will be in charge of the quality and project monitoring system (WP8).

### **Partners**

Project partners are: Universiteti I Tiranes, Universiteti Alexander Moisiu Durres, Universiteti Shkodres Luigj Gurakuqi, European University of Tirana (UET), University College "Logos", Universiteti Katolik Zoja e Keshillit te Mire (Catholic University Our Lady of Good Counsel) – UniKZKM, University College Bedër; Bedër, Ministry of Education and Sports, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna UNIBO, Universidad de País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (UPV/EHU), Università degli Studi di Salerno, Universitatea Din Bucuresti, Fondazione Flaminia.

Should the application be successful, further developments will follow.

## **III. Management and Finance**

The overall management of the activities and background support was provided by UNDP all along the project's implementation. Specific assistance has led to the arrangements of missions and study visits; support on translating research documents, to be discussed during the meetings with international experts; complementary research on bylaws on HE approved in Italy -used by the working groups at the MoES as a base for the comparative analysis.

In January, an Italian government funded UNDESA fellow joined UNDP with the responsibility to coordinate and support the activities under this project. Stefania Sechi will continue to support this project until its anticipated completion by the end of 2017.

The initiation phase of the project was financed with UNDP contribution. A budget of 50,000 USD was made available for the recruitment of legal and academic expertise. The project “Support to Higher Education in Albania” is supported by the Italian Cooperation through a cost-sharing agreement. Specifically, Government of Italy allocated a contribution of 212,314 USD.

Additional logistics and driving costs have been undertaken by the UN and UNDP support arrangements.

FUNDING SOURCE	FUNDING RECIVED (USD)	DISBURSAMENT AS OF FEBRUARY 28, 2017	COMMITMENTS	TOTAL DISBURSED AND COMMITTED (USD)	TOTAL DISBURSED AND COMMITTED (%)
UNDP	50,000	32,143	50,000	32,143	64%
AICS	212,314	-	212,314	96,852	45%

	Budget		*Expenses + Commitments		%
	UNDP	Donor - ITA	UNDP	Donor - ITA	
2016	\$ 35,000	-	\$ 29,429	-	84%
2017	\$ 20,571	\$ 212,314	\$ 2,714	\$96,852	41%

*\*As of Feb 28<sup>th</sup>*