



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*

Support to Higher Education in Albania - Project final report

STEERING COMMITTEE, DECEMBER 2017

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I. General Information

This report is presented to the project Steering Committee and it provides a summary of all activities carried out under the project during the period March – December 2017, results achieved and long-term results expected.

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, Sports and Youth (MoESY)¹. Following an initiation phase of six months, the project lasted 12 more months with the aim 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 1st 2016, the project agreement was finalized by UNDP and the MoESY on October the 20th 2016, covering the period of September the 1st, 2016 – December the 31st, 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. 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), UNDP co-shared the cost with a total contribution of 34,774 USD. The total resources allocated are 247,088 USD.

¹ Upon settlement of the new Government in September 2017, the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES) was reorganised in Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth (MoESY). The document refers to the Minister as the MoES.

II. Introduction

CONTEXT

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 arose from 33% of the university-aged population in 2009 to 63% in 2013. The problem at the time was that this was not accompanied by an increase in the teaching personnel. Moreover, curricula were outdated and did not adequately respond to the labour market; students were not equipped with the proper practical skills, which led to a skills gap for newly graduates; lastly curricula were not harmonized.

The main challenges in higher education system included:

- Increasing quality of education through improvements in teaching standards and conditions
- Increasing the quantity and quality of personnel
- Improvements in infrastructure (including telematic infrastructures)
- 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

As recognised by the EC progress report on Albania in 2013, some of the essential changes in the area of higher education were the implementation of the Bologna process, the attempts to become part of the EU research network and the liberalization of higher education system. The will to adopt EU standards in higher education, however, required additional efforts. Therefore, for the Government of Albania (GoA) the higher education reform was a top priority. The commitment of Albania on this field included studies on the capacities and professions requested by national and regional labour markets and comparing their findings with the study programmes offered by higher education institutions (HEIs) in Albania. Such objective is fully in line with the involvement of UNDP in aligning skills of youth towards the labour market needs and to the axes of the country's long-term strategy of development. The long-lasting experience of UNDP in this mission (currently through the project Skills Development for Employment, SD4E) confirms its specific expertise on this matter, capability to pursue catalytical actions, and continuous communication with relevant stakeholder, qualifying UNDP as appropriate partner for this project.

In 2015 the Government of Albania embarked on a reform of the Higher Education system, with the aim to strengthen the quality of the education, to offer the youngsters improved learning opportunities, and bring the university system in line with the European standards.

This entire project was initially conceived to support the GoA in the drafting of the bylaw necessary for the implementation of the reform, as well as to support complementary elements of higher education, such as practical operation of the reform at university level, research and the informatic infrastructure.

In line with the project document, the implementation of the reform was supported with assistance rolling out to universities in terms of assessment study as well as consultations, regulation, performance measurement. In terms of expertise, the project benefitted from the contribution of national and international experts, including some renowned Italian academics who developed first-hand experience of the European convergence process on higher education. While looking at the Anglo-Saxons educational model as a reference, the project capitalized the experience of higher education reform implementation in Italy and it pursued a capacity building approach at different levels: mission of international experts obtained to closely work with the Albanian Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, national external expertise was contracted to civil society organizations and legal and political sciences experts, an international expert provided technical assistance to the Albanian University network.

INTERVENTION STRATEGY

Under the framework of the UNDAF/Country Programme Results and Resources Framework, this project intended to contribute to Outcome III: *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, Sports and Youth; therefore, the general objectives are achieved through a capacity development approach in the form of technical assistance (legal, academic and institutional) along with the following two main outputs:

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

The project implementation adopted a flexible approach, regularly calibrating specific interventions according to the emerged needs, rather than strictly complying with the agenda foreseen in the preparation phase. This allowed on one hand to put in place mitigation mechanisms whenever resistances raised, on the other hand, to concentrate efforts where the potential was the most, and make smart use of available resources.

Indeed, the project went beyond the initially planned activities. The wise management of the resources allowed to include additional activities in support of the drafting of the New Law on Scientific Research. Since September 2017 the MoESY is engaged on the drafting of this missing legislative piece, so to complete the reform process started with the Law No.80/2015.

PARTNERSHIPS

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth was the institution in charge of the project operation. 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, five research institutions and the Italian Ministry of Education. The Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research and CINECA contributed on establishing the Academic Network of Albania (ANA, now RASh), which offers ICT services for policy making and implementing agencies in the field of higher education and research.

Following the activities roll-out, UNDP continuously dialogued with all other actors operating in the HE sector in Albania. Exchange of information and strategic goals was ensured with PERFORM², collaboration with Universities was carried forward through conjunct projects (Erasmus+), constant update on other initiatives in the field was guaranteed through the participation in thematic workshops and conferences presenting research studies on the HE in the Western Balkans (conducted by the EC).

SUSTAINABILITY

According to the Chapter 26 of the acquis, Member States need to have the legal, administrative and financial framework and necessary implementing capacity in place to ensure sound financial management of the education, training and youth Community programmes.

Hence, this project was articulated as a response to the urgent need to support the implementation of the higher education reform and strengthen the framework in line with European standards. 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. The Academic network of Albania itself has been established with finding of the government of Italy, and it represents a strategic element for the set-up of a modern information structure of the HE system, adequate to the European network. The national ownership of the project is ensured thanks to the direct implementation of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth.

III. Project Implementation

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

1.2 Sharing of best practices and capacity building process

Two international experts participated in mission in Tirana supporting the working groups at the MoESY on writing the bylaws needed.

Professor Andrea Morrone, Alma Mater Studiorum, University of Bologna, mission I, March 6-8, 2017

The international expert consulted with members of the working groups at the MoESY and other professionals from Higher Education (HE)³. Topic of analysis was the third cycle of HE, the reform of Italian higher education system, promotion of academic titles, Executive Master.

According to the previous Albanian legislation, Master graduates did not have access to further education but PhD. Consequently, there is a need in Albania of specialized profiles, especially in the medical field. Pro and cons of executive master models were analyzed and participants shared past experiences. The meeting achieved on analyzing research performance evaluation within Universities. It was discussed the suggestion to establish a research evaluation system, able to raise

² PERFORM is a project of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), implemented by HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation and University of Fribourg. The overall goal of the project is to focus on strengthening the relevance of social sciences for social and political reforms. One of PERFORM goals is to boost research, since the link between social science research and policy making, including a meaningful public debate, is weak in Western Balkan countries. The potentials of social science and research remain under-used in their contributions to quality, evidence-informed policy making and public debate.

³ prof. Hajderi, prof. Xhuvani, prof. Bidaj, Mrs. Kamberi, Ms. Bana, Mr. Bako.

research accountability -which is an incentive for the system- still shaped in a way that preserves inclusiveness and allows “all voices to be heard”. The challenge for a small country like Albania, where expertise in different fields is limited, is to create an *independent* system. Main concern is the trade-off between strengthening the hubs of excellence and empowering the less productive centers. In order to balance the two, it is necessary to act at University level. The discussion focused on the Mexican model: there, each professor allocates himself into a category among research, study, teaching. Each of these categories are associated with a different weight in the performance evaluation; such mechanism achieves to distribute resources through a rotating system. It was discussed the creation of a scheme able to balance incentives and deterrents in a way that increases new research, rather than punishing it. The assembly decided to adopt a sustainable system, characterized by clear criteria and ensuring new resources to all areas. Moreover, the meeting discussed about PhD national structure of the didactic component and autonomy of Universities.

Further discussions focused on PhD, how the cycle is regulated in Italy, how it will be regulated in Albania. The debate highlighted different viewpoints of the new bylaw and defined the status of a candidate, also in combination with a full-time working position. It was considered the introduction of a formal limit to the number of PhD candidates a professor can coordinate, and the accreditation modalities of PhD programmes. The working group decided to codify in the bylaw specific criteria - per field of research- for advancing in the doctoral studies, and that the PhD supervisor should be a member of the teaching committee.

Professor Andrea Morrone, from the Alma Mater Studiorum, University of Bologna, mission II, May 23-25, 2017

The second mission of Professor Morrone included a meeting with the National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation (NASRI) focused on the agreement of cooperation between the MoESY, University of Bologna and Region of Emilia Romagna, which provides the opportunity for Albanian students and public administrators employees to pursue a PhD at the University of Bologna. Funding of these PhDs is foreseen under the agreement and it would be implemented through the financial support of the Region of Emilia Romagna. In the framework of the agreement it was approved the draft of an Executive Protocol describing the selection procedures for candidate funding during the three years of the doctoral study and their obligation upon completion of the cycle.

A meeting with the Directory of Higher Education and Scientific research and another with the working groups and the faculty of Law, Tirana University, allowed to shape the long specialization in law (third cycle of HE). The discussion analysed general provisions of the law in Italy compared with the provisions in Albania. At the end of the meeting, the group had a draft and main points to continue working.

Lastly, participants explored the potential for collaboration between PERFORM and the Ministry within the scopes of two frame agreements (Uni Tirana with Uni Bologna, and Ministry of Education and Science with Regione Emilia Romagna). Specifically, the possibility for supporting or co-financing some PhD projects was discussed. The Ministry and PERFORM engage in further discussion about this option, assessing feasibility and, eventually, modalities.

Professor Fabio Roversi-Monaco, from the Alma Mater Studiorum, University of Bologna, mission II, September 8-12, 2017

Professor Roversi-Monaco has been the promotor of Bologna process in European Union. During his second mission in Albania under the project Support to Higher Education Reform he joined the

retreat organized by the MoESY with support of PERFORM, focused on the evaluation of the new draft law on Scientific Research. The Law on Scientific Research currently in force in Albania dates 1994. Considering the substantial changes which through the education system has gone during the last 20 years, as well as the recent implementation of the Bologna process, the attempts to become part of the EU research network, and the liberalization of higher education system, there was an urgent need to endow the country with an updated legislative framework.

The retreat was held in Saranda and lasted three days during which eight representatives from the MoESY, academic institutions and Prof Roversi-Monaco, coordinated by the Deputy Minister, discussed over European compared legislation on Scientific Research. Specifically, common elements from the cases of Croatia (2003), Estonia (1997), Lithuania (2009), Macedonia (2013), Kosovo (2012) were analysed. The retreat achieved to comment and produce a first draft of the new law, then finalised by the working groups at the MoESY.

All missions of international experts were organised by UNDP with backstopping support from internal resources.

1.1 Technical assistance for the drafting of Decisions of the Council of Ministers

The contribution from specialised academics guaranteed the working groups of the MoESY to be equipped with a wide spectre of sectorial competencies; on the other hand, for some scientists without legal background was challenging to participate in the legislative process. As a mitigation strategy UNDP, upon consultation with the MoESY, decided to hire external expertise to finalise the law and at the same time facilitate the contribution of all academics into the policy process. A specific scope of the assignment was to ensure high quality standards in the overall drafting process. With this purpose, the hired team was composed of

- Three legal experts⁴
- One political sciences experts⁵

The hired consultants, who combined advanced legal/political background with academic experience, are currently finalising the new Law as proposed and approved within the working groups, accompanied by the respective explanatory notes. The assignment was carried out during the month of December 2017.

The experts coordinated contributions from all members of the working groups -often coming from academia and not necessarily having expertise on national regulation and policies implementation, to translate into the legislative piece issues raised from the academic experts, proposed solutions and best practices, to carefully adapt to the Albanian context positive examples coming from comparative studies. The resulted final drafted law reflects a scientific research long term model, aimed to strengthen the Albanian research capacities, yet feasible for the Country.

⁴ Dr Erjad Dobjani, Dr Alketa Elezi, Dr Eralda Cani

⁵ Dr Enri Hide

2.4 Consultations, workshops and conferences with academics and students on the issues related to the implementation of reform

Provision of services for the Legal Advisory

An organization specialised in drafting by-laws, legal framework and policy documents was hired to conduct the **legislative** and **consultative** work. UNDP procurement office launched a Request for Proposal awarded by *Albanian Legal and Territorial Research Institute (ALTRI)*, an organization providing legal analysis and administrative support since 2011. The assignment focused on the way the law is embedded into work practices, on a comparative analysis of experiences of other European Countries that inspired Albania's higher education law (*ie*: UK and Italy), on the creation of a communication platform for any concern and implementation issue.

Results of the activities impacted both outcome 1 and outcome 2 of the project. Indeed, the legislative process was parallel and integrated with the consultative one, following a cyclic path. The initial assessment was based both on technical legal analysis and beneficiaries' experiences (academics and students); every piece produced was carefully evaluated by the working groups at the Ministry as well as through focus groups at the Universities, and eventually revised to embed all collected suggestions. Such approach ensured quality in the legislative production as well as a strong commitment to improve the daily functioning higher education institutions.

The hired organization achieved to assess issues encountered in the law implementation and gathering suggestions through

- Six regional focus groups involving pedagogues sent by Universities
- An assessment from students through an on-line survey
- A study on the work already done which led to the creation of a guidebook.

At the end of the assignment, in June 2017, the organisation finalised the following legislative acts:

Drafting of the draft-acts and explanatory notes:

1. Project-guideline "For the determination of the procedure, criteria and documentation for the opening of new programs of the third cycle study, *Doctorate*";
2. Project-guideline "On the definition of the procedure, criteria and documentation for the opening of new programs of the third cycle study, *Executive Master*";
3. Project-guideline "On the definition of the procedure, criteria and documentation for the opening of new third cycle study programs, *Long-term specializations in the field of medicine*";
4. DoCM "On the adoption of the quality code in higher education";
5. DoCM "On the higher secular education and the specific functioning of its institutions";
6. Project guideline "On determining the procedure, criteria and documentation for the opening of new programs of the third cycle study, *Long-term specializations in the field of justice*".

The above project guidelines have been consulted with the WGs for further improvement and have been finalized by ALTRI. Meanwhile the project DoCM have undergone the consultation process.

Review/ improvement of the draft-acts and explanatory notes initiated by the working groups at MoESY and finalized by ALTRI

1. DoCM "On determining the criteria for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor", defining the state standards for obtaining the academic titles "Associate professor" and "Professor", as well as maintaining their administrative value in high level education institutions in the field of arts";
2. DoCM "On determining the criteria for obtaining the scientific degree " Doctor", defining the state standards for obtaining the academic titles" associate professor "and "professor", as well as maintaining their administrative value in high level education institutions in the field of security and defence";
3. DoCM "On determining the criteria for obtaining the scientific degree" Doctor ", defining the state standards for obtaining the academic titles" associate professor "and" professor ", as well as maintaining their administrative value in education institutions High level of physical education and sports ";
4. DoCM "On determining the procedure and documentation for the establishment of independent higher education institutions";
5. DoCM "On determining the types of public/private health institutions/centres, as well as the criteria that they must meet in order to conclude agreements with institutions of higher education in the field of health";
6. DoCM "On determining the criteria for obtaining the scientific degree" Doctor ", determining the state standards for obtaining the academic titles" Associate Professor "and" Professor ", as well as for the preservation of their administrative value;
7. DoCM "On the codification of higher education study programs in the Republic of Albania";
8. DoCM "On the elements of study programs offered by higher education institutions in the first and second cycle of studies";
9. DoCM "On the Standards, Criteria and Procedures for Opening, Reorganizing, Allocating, Merging or Closing of a Higher Education Institution and their Branches";
10. DoCM "On the organization and functioning of the National Agency for Higher Education Financing" (AKFAL) ";
11. DoCM "On the Status and Special Treatment of Academic Personnel";
12. Project guideline "On the activity and teaching load of academic staff"
13. DoCM "On the allocation of approved funds in the form of grants for development policies for the public institutions of higher education, as well as the grant of scientific research and creative activities in the institutions of higher public education";
14. DoCM " On determining of service tariffs to third parties for services provided by Educational Services Center";
15. DoCM "On the methodology of the evaluation process of scientific-research activity of basic units of higher education institutions";
16. Project guideline "On Generating and Issuing Matriculation Numbers";
17. Project guideline "On the Codification of Higher Education Studies Programs in the Republic of Albania";
18. Project guideline "On the attendance of the teaching process by type of teaching activities in the auditorium and the study cycle";
19. Project guideline "On annual reporting of higher education institutions";
20. Project guideline "For the component elements of the diploma form and the certificate issued by the higher education institutions and the diploma supplement "

21. Order "On determining the content of 70 percent of the integrated program of the second cycle "Master of Science" in "Law";
22. DoCM "On the allocation of funds" Grant for Teaching "in public higher education institutions"
23. Project guideline " On the definition of the procedure for opening, reorganization and closing of higher education institutions and access to the start of academic activity"
24. Project guideline "The Criteria Needed for Opening New Study Programs"
25. Project guideline "On the documentation for opening, division and joining a higher education institution and obtaining a permit to start the academic activity"

Drafting final version of draft-acts and explanatory notes and reflection of comments received from interest groups

1. DCMD "On the Standards, Criteria and Procedures for Opening, Reorganizing, Allocating, Merging or Closing of a Higher Education Institution and their Branches";
2. DCMD "On the Status and Special Treatment of Academic Personnel";
3. Project guideline "On the activity and teaching load of academic staff";
4. Project-guideline "On the attendance of the teaching process by type of teaching activities in the auditorium and the study cycle";
5. DCMD "On the allocation of approved funds in the form of grants for development policies for public institutions of higher education, as well as the grant of scientific research and creative activities in the institutions of higher public education";
6. DoCM "On determining the criteria for obtaining the scientific degree "Doctor", defining the state standards for obtaining the academic titles "Associate professor" and "Professor", as well as maintaining their administrative value in high level education institutions in the field of arts";
7. DoCM "On determining the criteria for obtaining the scientific degree" Doctor ", defining the state standards for obtaining the academic titles" associate professor "and" professor ", as well as maintaining their administrative value in education institutions High level of physical education and sports ";
8. DoCM "On determining the criteria for obtaining the scientific degree" Doctor ", determining the state standards for obtaining the academic titles" Associate Professor "and" Professor ", as well as for the preservation of their administrative value;
9. DoCM "On the methodology of the evaluation process of scientific-research activity of basic units of higher education institutions";
10. DoCM "On the adoption of the quality code in higher education";
11. DoCM "On the higher secular education and the specific functioning of its institutions";
12. DoCM "On determining of service tariffs to third parties for services provided by Educational Services Center";

Some of the above DoCM after having undergone the public consultation process and after ALTRI has performed the process of reflecting the comments in the version that was to be sent for approval (by explaining and pointing out with comments in the project-act the reflected suggestions) are already approved. Meanwhile, a good part of the draft-acts, although they are not yet approved, have been subjected to the public consultation process and ALTRI has sent to the MoESY the finalized project-acts with the suggestions of the interest groups reflected and highlighted with comments. In this context, the work of ALTRI experts has been focused in two directions:

1. Initial review: improvement of the content, compatibility with the legal framework in force, and legislative technique of the project-acts and improvement of the content of the explanatory notes;
2. Final review: reflection of the comments of the interest groups and reflection of the comments of the MoESY and WGs.

MoESY in cooperation with ALTRI conducted the consultation process for the project-acts above for which this process was not realized yet. In this context, the first or improved draft of the project-acts prepared by ALTRI was part of the consultation process and workshops were conducted in different regions of the country.

The activity successful produced all missing bylaws, as identified in the project document. The entry into force of the produced legislation, if not accomplished yet, is remitted to the Ministry.

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

As mentioned, the implementation of the project pursued integrated catalytic actions with impact across multiple targets at once. This means that the results of each initiative of the project are not exclusively connected with one activity. The relative short length of the project, the cross-cutting expertise required, the centralised leadership of the Ministry facilitated a combined roll-out of activities. Whenever possible, each contracted resource was tasked a specific assignment, but with the aim to reach results at multiple levels across the project. Part of the achievements under this outcome were already described in the previous paragraph.

2.1 Capacity support for the implementation of higher education reform – technical assistance at the public and private university level

Involvement in Erasmus+, EU's programme to support education, training, youth and sport in Europe

Achievements within this activity go beyond what already mentioned in the participative, user-centred drafting process of bylaws.

Indeed, in the framework of the Higher Education Reform, the MoESY -with the support of the UNDP- applied to the Erasmus+ initiative with two project proposals in February 2017, out of which one was positively evaluated and successfully funded by the European Union. The GRADUA project -GRaduates Advancement and Development of University capacities in Albania, coordinated by the Agriculture University of Albania- envisages the creation of an innovative ICT platform, which will enable universities to monitor output of the HE system and facilitate the encounter of supply and demand in the labour market. This tackles the issue of lacking information, specifically in the graduates' segment of labour market. The project is built on the model of ALMALAUREA, which is also partner in the consortium. The ultimate ambition is to capitalize the Italian experience and build capacity in Albania, on continuing the strong collaboration and commitment that Italy has shown so far in this field.

The initiation phase of the project started in the current academic year (September 2017), further collaboration from UNDP side is foreseen even after completion of the SHER project.

2.2. Capacity support to RASH for defining a medium-term financial and technical sustainability report

As outlined by the higher education law, the reform was implemented through a series of institutions, which regulate all different aspects of the higher education system and ensure its efficient roll out. Tracking students' careers is one element of the HE reform, which leaves more autonomy to the Universities and at the same time strengthens the coordination role of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth.

The former Albanian Academic Network, now according to the Law NO 80/2015 *Interinstitutional Centre of Albanian Academic Network* (RASH) is the National Research and Education Network, established in 2007 in collaboration with the Italian Cooperation Agency and Albanian MoESY. RASH aims to improve higher education quality and upgrade the organization of academic research. Its mission is to offer modern services over the network for public universities and research institutions.

RASH provides and manages the university telematic network and in addition to that, as a supporter of education and research, development and improvement of the pre-academic and academic institutions functioning, it:

- a) cooperates, upon request of the MoESY, to define development plans for both public and private Higher Education Institutions;
- b) carries out consultancies for the MoESY on the general criteria for the planning and evaluation of the didactic activities of the Higher Education Institutions, individual teachers and researchers;
- c) plans, develops and manages integrated IT solutions for the administration of pre-academic and academic institutions;
- d) promotes the internationalization of the Albanian academic system and research.

The RASH constitutes a strategic element for the Higher Education in Albania and so for the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth and the implementation of the reform. The establishment of a Centre for Educational Services providing a centralised database of all students and their careers - which RASH manages since the academic year 2016/2017- responds to a specific need raised back in 2013, and finally puts Albania in line with the rest of European higher education systems. The capacity of developing Information Technology applications and services serves as a link between the academic world, the sphere of research and the world of Public Administration.

International consultant in IT services for Higher Education, Mr Paolo Cianca, former CINECA expert

An international consultant was tasked to support RASH capacity for defining a medium-term financial and technical sustainability report. RASH management highlighted specific needs to be addressed and the kind of expertise required for the assignment. Based on that, UNDP launched an open call for an international expert, who achieved to prepare:

- A programmatic document on medium-term horizon, a "Charter of objectives" for RASH;
- A roadmap document, including the organizational model planned for RASH, an assessment of current financial, technical and organizational state of the network, description, step by step, of organizational developments foreseen;
- A document designing the architecture of the Registry of the Student IT system. This was based on successful examples from other European countries.

The consultancy highlighted that, at the end of its long collaboration with CINECA, RASh overall reached its primary objectives. Its development processes involved the building of a big informatic system in a relatively small country, which initially required considerable instalments. However, positive outcomes are already evident, and these will multiply in the long run, as the functioning of the informatic system will be embedded in the universities. These include:

- A centralised system for all universities, which allows the MoESY to have direct access to reliable information frequently updated.
- The integration into the European academic informatic network (GEANT) – further involvement is foreseen.
- Data collection. Data are a valuable source for future research and essential starting point for strategic planning. Albania is starting to commit to an accurate timely data ecosystem, and this is expected to cover also the academic sector. Scientific research needs to be measured in order to keep improving its standards, reliable information is the key to anticipate and to mitigate risks, and data allow rigorous evidence-based approach to governance.
- The informatic students' enrolment system piloted in the academic year 2016/2017 is already producing valuable results. It is foreseen that in the short term (up to three years) the system will be fairly populated allowing data extraction and analysis.
- The creation of a specialised hub on informatics and research constitutes an incredible resource for the development of Albania, in terms of human capital, innovative potential, catalytical change. Specialised technical competencies can be adapted to many different sectors, and booster research capacity is at the core of successful development.

The sustainability assessment drafted a clear development plan for RASh, identifying the following critical points:

1. The establishment of such an informatic centre requires a complex structure, which translates into considerable efforts for a small size country like Albania is. Following the creation and adaptation phase, several processes will be automatized, generating growing tangible benefits for the HE system in the long-term. This is an example of a far-seeing policy.
2. RASh is still financially depending from the MoESY, while it aims at auto sustainability in the medium term. The strategic plan detailly describes how the cost of the informatic services will be progressively moved to universities and proportionally divided in small contributions from students' side⁶.
3. Evaluate the HEIs performance requires additional efforts and collection of data of students' success in academia and labour market. In the longer term, RASh aims to monitor the whole students' lifelong learning performance, and perhaps to link high school achievements and access to university via the introduction of a coefficient.

The consultation successfully provided all support necessary to re-organise technical and financial capacity. As a result, RASh developed a new statute as well as a juridical status. With the signature of such document on November the 8th 2017 by the MoESY and all public universities, the transformation of RASh into an inter-university centre was officially approved. A centralised management of HE information system is ensured by the constitutions of a board in which all universities as well as the MoESY participate. The MoESY will financially contribute to RASh

⁶ The estimation amounts to up to 25 euros per year.

operation, by receiving in return technical services for the functioning of the newly constituted agencies for Higher Education and Research.

With the finalisation of the three sustainability elements, namely financial, technical and institutional, the progress of RASh can be evaluated in line with the development plan and the set goals achieved. The new statute is currently in the agenda of the Council of Ministers for necessary approvals, and within six months all required bylaws will be completed.

The Italian Cooperation Agency supported all initiatives related to RASh evolution.

2.3 Identification of diaspora to assess the possibility of participating in scientific research and national development

A research institute has been tasked with an exploration study on diaspora in academia. The scope of the assignment is to profit of the scientific diaspora network created by Albanian academics abroad to boost research in Albania and to involve them in the implementation of National strategies and policies. Higher education and human capital accumulation is highly effected by brain drain in Albania, and UNDP has worked since 2006 on policies switching from brain drain to brain gain. The study offered to the Government inputs on appropriate steps and actions to take.

The UNDP Brain Gain programme launched in 2006 and ended in 2013 offered a package of incentives to researchers and high qualified Albanian migrants to return in Albania. A relative small number of migrants took benefited of it, since several factors influence the willingness of migrants to return, including economic, political stability and corruption, the status of research institutions, and investments in education. Nevertheless, the network of Albanian researcher working abroad could be a valuable resource to booster the development of the Country. Evidence proven, indeed, that countries can benefit from mobilizing communities and networks of researchers abroad.

Continuing the experience built with the previous initiative, one activity under the SHER project achieved to assess the possibility to engage Albanian researcher abroad on scientific research and national development. A civil society organization was tasked with conducting a study on relevant interventions that Albanian government can undertake to institutionalize brain gain policies. The study

- created a map of Albanian academics living in developed countries;
- identified their main area of research;
- elaborated a comparative analysis involvement of scientific diaspora in national programming;
- drafted a list of recommendations.

The procurement was awarded by the Centre for Economic and Social Sciences Studies (CESS), which possess over 20 years of experience on conducting socio-economic studies, with a specific focus on migration.

The study analysed main features of the diaspora phenomenon in Albania, allowing to identify biggest challenges, like

1. Different flows of migration. Interesting enough, besides the qualified professionals that migrated after completion of their studies, in Albania university and scientific institutions

staff had migrated massively⁷, not only causing loss of human capital, but also the weakening the capacity for training new generations.

2. Albanian academic diaspora is relative poor in social structures. Only 18% of respondents claimed to participate in one or more organization, making even more difficult their involvement from abroad.
3. Many of respondents stated they have been experiencing challenges in cooperating with Albanian HEIs, due to their diffidence, resistance to commit in non-remunerated activities, and fear to confront complex managerial standards.

For the purpose of the analysis, diaspora in academia includes Albanian PhDs and PhDs candidates from universities in EU and OECD countries currently living and working abroad. The study collected information through online survey with scientific diaspora and Albanian students abroad, interviews with Albanian universities and semi-structured interviews and discussion groups with scientific diaspora. The survey focused on socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and migrating countries, personal motivation for migration, field of study, employment in the host country, social capital and ties with Albania, prospective for return.

The study achieved to show that Albania academic diaspora is willing to collaborate with HEIs, so to booster the national research capacities. The top four envisaged forms of cooperation are, in order, joint ventures in research projects (81% of respondents), cycle lectures (75%), consultancy, especially for the government and private sector (68%) and participations in conferences (67%). However, to be able to achieve such exchange, the Albanian HE system should comply to the following recommendations:

- Create a Data Bank of Albanian academics, detailed and regularly updated. This will serve as a pool of experts for temporarily needs of specialists.
- Based on the experience of other countries, the GoA needs to support the creation and consolidation of the Albanian Scientific Diaspora network. This will be a valuable resource to improve the quality of national higher education, offering support at the level of policies framework, sharing of scientific knowledge, and promoting international joint projects.
- Make substantial efforts to break the national reticence towards cooperation, and invest in collaboration also through diplomatic initiatives. Albanian universities should be firstly involved in such joint experiments, so to develop a smarter long-lasting vision and to benefit first hand of the potential of diaspora in terms of curricula formulation, educational quality, opportunities for the students.

IV. Management, Finance and Work Plan

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; procurement process on hiring national, international experts and civil society organizations; support on translating research documents -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 continued to support this project until its completion at the end of 2017.

⁷ The estimation is about 40.6% of the total staff during the period 1990-2008.

The project “Support to Higher Education in Albania” is funded by the Italian Cooperation through a cost-sharing agreement with UNDP. Specifically, Government of Italy allocated a contribution of 212,314 USD. The MoESY initially committed 50,000 USD of its own resources. However, the contribution from the MoESY was not made available, and it was covered instead by UNDP. The initiation phase of the project was financed with UNDP contribution of 29,429 USD for the recruitment of legal and academic expertise. In 2017 additional 5,345 USD were disbursed for this project.

As per December 2017 the implementation of activities achieved to exhaust the contribution provided by the donor.

	Budget		*Expenses + Commitments		
	UNDP	Donor - ITA	UNDP	Donor - ITA	
2016	\$ 34,774	-	\$ 29,429	-	-
2017	-	\$ 212,314	\$ 5,345	\$ 212,314	100 %

**as of December 2017*

Work Plan and target indicators

Output 1	Map of deliverables/targets
Legal framework for the implementation of the higher education reform drafted and approved	
Activities	
1.1 Technical assistance for the drafting of Decisions of the Council of Ministers and instructions of the Minister of Education and Sport (contracting legal expertise / civil society organizations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 acts, explanatory notes and guidelines drafted (by ALTRI) • 25 draft-acts and explanatory notes initiated by the working groups at MoESY comprehensive reviewed/improved (finalized by ALTRI) • 12 drafted-acts and explanatory notes drafted and finalized, reflecting comments received from interest groups (by ALTRI)
1.2 Sharing of best practices and capacity building process (meeting with academics from Italy and European Union, study visits and collaboration from remote)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 missions of Italian experts from academia organized in Tirana (by UNDP) • 1 mission of Albanian experts in Rome (by UNDP) • 2 collaborations from remotes with Italian experts on non-secular universities (facilitated by UNDP)
Output 2	
Higher education reform is implemented through technical assistance at the university level through feedback mechanisms and user perspective	
Activities	
2.1 Capacity support fort the implementation of higher education reform – technical assistance at the public and private university level (contracting individual expertise and / or civil society organizations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 task force composed of three national legal experts and one national political sciences expert facilitated the participation of academics into the reform implementation (with specific regard to the scientific research) • 1 Erasmus+ project successfully funded
2.2. Capacity support to RASH for defining a medium-term financial and technical sustainability report (contracting individual expertise)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 financial assessment study conducted (international expert) • 1 technical programmatic documents and business plan drafted (international expert) • Signature of the new statute of RASH and evolution of its functioning (MoESY)
2.3 Identification of diaspora to assess the possibility of participating in scientific research and national development (contracting civil society organizations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 725 online questionnaires from representatives of the Albanian scientific (by CESS) • 303 online questionnaires from Albanian students abroad (by CESS) • 34 interviews and 3 discussion groups with scientific diaspora via skype (by CESS) • 1 assessment of main challenges produced (by CESS)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 list of recommendation for further improvement compiled (by CESS)
2.4 Consultations, workshops and conferences with academics and students on the issues related to the implementation of reform and readiness for the 2017 academic year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 focus groups with pedagogues from Universities for needs assessment purposes (held by ALTRI) • 1.549 online consultations with students (ALTRI) • 5 consultation workshops with pedagogues and students (ALTRI)

V. Project sustainability

Ownership

The government ownership of the project was the main driving force of this initiative. The hired National Project Director Mr Redi Shtino was highly engaged in the operation and responsive to the needs raised all along the project implementation.

Efficiency

Besides funds made available by the Italian Cooperation, partners devoted internal resources. The MoESY provide an office space to the project staff engaged under the project. UNDP ensured and coordinated the implementation of project activities by contributing with its own both humans and financials resources. Indeed, all project manager's tasks were carried in house by the UNDP Programme Specialist Mr Eno Ngjela. Furthermore, financial assistance was provided by UNDP staff, hosted under the growth and skills development portfolio, and not budgeted in the cost of this project. These include administrative support, financial management of the project, drivers' availability and logistic backstopping.

Effectiveness

The political instability experienced in Albania during the first half of 2017 as well as the election of a new government in June 2017 constituted a risk for a smooth implementation, which indeed experienced a slow-down of decision making and legislative production during the summer. In addition, the handover of mandates and roles within the government made slightly difficult to guarantee effective communication among all partners. Nevertheless, a mitigation strategy was put in place, allocating less sensitive activities in the critical period, such as the capacity support to RASH and the diaspora study. This allowed a continuous roll-out. Additionally, the structured planning and the committed activities guaranteed effective execution of the initiative. Continuity and consistency on the project implementation was ensured even after the occurred changes within the cabinet, as the MoESY maintained the same Project Director.

Relevance

The produced bylaws and the feedback mechanisms at university level put in place within different activities, shows that the project delivered in line with the planned objectives. The focus on scientific research was clearly complied in the implementation of the last components. Further approval of all produced acts is remitted to the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth.

Impact

Tangible effects of the project include the approval of several missing bylaws, the drafting of the New Law on Scientific Research and the signature of the new statute of RASH and its support to the higher education agencies. Bigger longer-term effects in the improvement of higher education and research system will be visible with the time and upon compiling of recommendations emerged from the study on scientific diaspora.

Sustainability

The two outputs set in the project documents were accomplished. Nevertheless, extension of benefits from this initiative requires strong commitment to improve quality at university level, continuous monitoring from the MoESY, and further engagement of all partners and potential resources, such as scientific diaspora and international institutes.