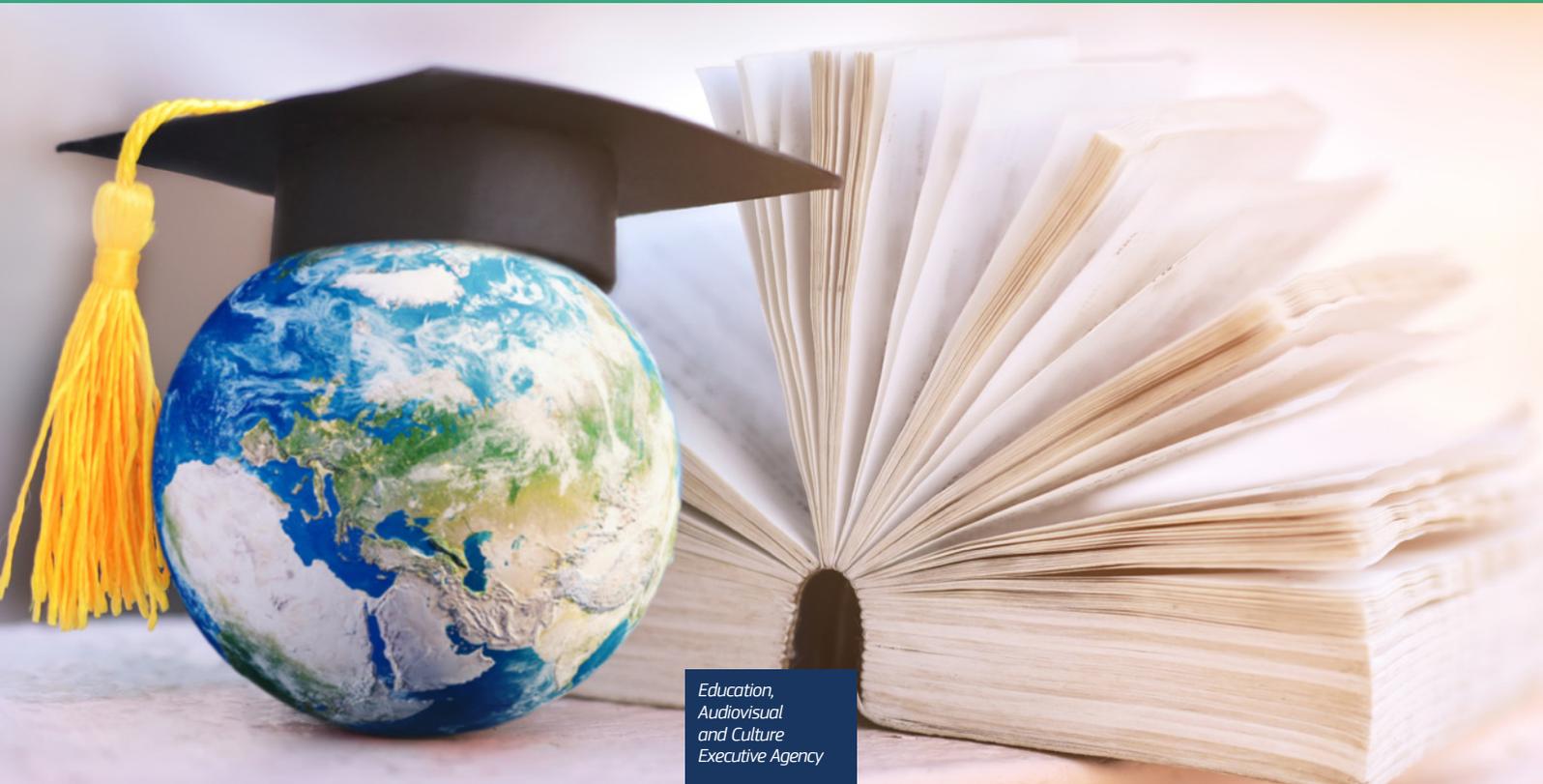




Erasmus+

Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) action

Regional Report Eastern Partnership Countries



More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://europa.eu>).

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Erasmus+
**Capacity Building in
Higher Education (CBHE) action**

**Regional Report
Eastern Partnership
Countries¹**

¹ Defined as 'Region 2' in the Erasmus+ Programme Guide and covering Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.



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1. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORT

This report is based on the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency's evaluation of the first final project reports of the first generation of CBHE projects selected for funding in 2015 and a few two-year projects from the second generation (2016). Altogether 138 projects were funded in 2015² and 88 finalised projects have submitted their final reports in 2019, among which 23 were implemented in the Eastern Partnership Region.

The report's results are therefore based on a relatively small sample of finalised CBHE projects³ and are to be considered as preliminary and to be reviewed at a later stage. The analysis also takes into account the institutional monitoring visits and cluster meetings that were organised by the Agency as part of its monitoring strategy.

The report analyses the role of the CBHE action as regards the **impact and sustainability of the funded projects** together with their **inclusiveness** (participants with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities compared to their peers). More specifically, the report will look into the institutional development of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the modernisation of their study programmes and teaching and learning methodologies, structural reforms and the strengthening of HEIs' technical capacities. It will examine **opportunities created for individuals** (students, academic and administrative staff) and third parties like quality assurance agencies, student associations, NGOs, enterprises, chambers of commerce, etc.

The report will also examine how the EU projects have influenced **national policy developments in the education sector**, mainly but not exclusively through 'Structural Projects'. Special attention is given to the strengthening of regional cooperation through CBHE projects that include two or more countries from the same Region.

Finally, the analysis will be used to identify **challenges** and provide a **set of recommendations** for future reference.

2 CBHE projects are funded between EUR 500,000 and 1 million and normally last 3 years; with a small number of projects having a duration of 2 years. A high percentage of projects asked for a contract extension to catch up with implementation delays and will ultimately last between 3-4 years.
3 There are about 700 active projects supported via five annual calls, starting from 2014.

2. INTRODUCTION

The CBHE action of the Erasmus+ Programme supports the modernisation and development of HEIs and educational systems in the Partner Countries. Capacity Building projects are expected to have a long-term structural impact and their direct influence is on institutions and educational systems rather than on individuals.

European HEIs have a key role to play in supporting the modernisation efforts of emerging and developing parts of the world. Via the development of the educational systems of Partner Countries, they contribute to the sustainable development of the economies and societies as a whole, and allow challenges to be addressed at national, regional or even global level (e.g. climate change). In this context, the involvement of national authorities (Ministries of Education) plays a critical role.

International consortia of HEIs (including private businesses) strengthen the quality of Higher Education in the Partner Countries by providing students with new and upgraded skills that they need for the labour market, introducing innovative approaches in teaching and learning and encouraging entrepreneurial skills.

The CBHE action is implemented through two types of projects, which aim to have an impact on HEIs or on the educational system as a whole. **‘Joint projects’** are aimed at the development of HEIs (e.g. curriculum development, governance of institutions, etc.), while **‘Structural projects’** address important challenges for the educational systems of the Partner Countries (accreditation, quality assurance in education, PhD education, etc.).

Both project types address one of the following **three pillars**

1. Curricula Reform
2. Modernising university governance and management
3. Strengthening of relations between HEIs and the wider economic and social environment

based on *pre-established national⁴ and/or regional priorities*.

The **six Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries**– Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – have been involved in the CBHE action from the very beginning of the Erasmus+ programme in 2014.



⁴ For the ex-Tempus countries defined by the Ministries of Educations of the Partner Countries.

3. CBHE IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Overall, interventions themed around Capacity Building financed either under TEMPUS or Erasmus+, have proved to be instrumental in aligning the ex-Soviet tertiary educational structures of the EaP countries with Western European norms. The Bologna Declaration of 1999 provided a further impetus to increase the mobility of their students and the transferability of their degrees.

Since independence, there have been multiple changes in the EaP countries with the intention of changing the system from one designed under a command economy to one designed to serve a market economy. The further reaching changes made by these recently independent republics have varied in both form and substance and a number of challenges remain. The complexities and idiosyncrasies of each country's higher education system imply that the transition is not done in the same timeline and that the Bologna protocols are not accepted to the same degree. In this context, the impact cannot be measured for the EaP region as a whole, but must be seen in the specific context of each country, the state of the education reforms, the type of institutions involved and the types of projects.

The CBHE action targets the aforementioned challenges through the implementation of international cooperation projects. The results accomplished have affected the **modernisation and reform** of higher education in the Eastern Partnership Region. HEIs and individuals (staff and students) have benefitted from institutional and study programme reforms by using and mainstreaming results of CBHE projects, primarily related to creating new curricula, modernisation of university structures and updating educational processes. In some cases, the CBHE project outputs have also triggered changes at the national level through directly or indirectly influencing higher education structures and legislative frameworks.

The CBHE action applies both a bottom-up and a top-down strategy to align national decision making with priorities of **university development and internationalisation** (fostering the Bologna process and tools). However, effective impact on the normative and hence structural level often remains disconnected from legislative and administrative reforms. Attainments directly traceable to CBHE projects are visible mainly in **curriculum development**: creating new student-centred study programmes at bachelor and master level as well as national accreditation.



The achievements obtained through CBHE projects, in particular the introduction of quality assurance procedures and new and updated degree programmes, have provided students in the region with possibilities that could not have been realised without the input of the European partner institutions. Tangible results become highly visible through the establishment or improvement of laboratories, library systems and other student-oriented structures and services at university level. This has had an effect on the educational excellence and distinction of the participating

HEI in the Partner Countries and hence the quality of training offered to their students.

The support of HEI management and of national authorities is pivotal in this context and vital for the sustainability of the achieved project results. The CBHE action has considerably enhanced the capacities of universities in the region to manage international cooperation projects.

- ▶ The EaP countries have only recently gained enough confidence and understanding to start applying as project coordinators. As a result, since the start of the programme, 22 projects are or have been coordinated by EaP HEIs, representing 21% of the total number of EaP projects.

As a result of CBHE projects with European partners, bridges have been built for intra-national, regional or cross-regional cooperation that otherwise are unlikely to have occurred due to a high competition between HEIs, cultural differences and even diplomatic and armed conflicts. EU cooperation policy in the EaP Region covers issues such as education exchanges, mobility and cooperation projects. Amongst these key policy areas, CBHE projects help individuals and institutions to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in a changing world, to increase career opportunities and boost competitiveness. The programme is highly visible and popular amongst students, young people and the academic community throughout the region.

3.1. Institutional Development

3.1.1. Curricula Reform

One of the main objectives of the CBHE action is curricula reform. Partner Country HEIs work together in high quality international consortia to revise study programmes or to develop new ones, to engage in new learning and teaching methods and to prepare students with new and better skills for a changing job market and a developing economy.

- ▶ Almost 50% of all CBHE projects in the Region selected for funding focus on curriculum reform. Across the 2015 projects, based on the information available in the final reports, 361 courses were newly developed/updated. In the EaP Region, out of 13 curriculum development projects of the 2015 generation, 8 have developed courses taught in English.

The modernisation and launching of new study programmes and the introduction of **innovative learning and teaching methods** (not previously available in the EaP countries) have significantly changed the landscape of the university sector. Curricula reform projects have been highly sustainable, since all newly created study programmes at graduate and postgraduate level have become an integral part of regular degree programmes taught at the HEIs:

**Master Degree in Innovative Technologies in Energy Efficient Buildings for Russian & Armenian Universities and Stakeholders (MARUEEB)
(561890-EPP-1-2015-I-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The new master on environmental protection and energy efficient buildings (EEB) – providing graduates with environmental and green buildings technological skills – has been fully integrated in the academic portfolio of the three Russian and two Armenian beneficiary universities.

For many Partner Country HEIs the collaboration with European universities on curricula development implied an exposure to the **Bologna Process methodology**. Hence, when developing new curricula and considering student mobility opportunities, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was introduced, and student-centred learning approaches and outcomes were implemented along with a three-cycle system of bachelor, master and doctorate:

Introducing Problem-based Learning in Moldova: Toward Enhancing Students' Competitiveness and Employability (PBLMD) (561884-EPP-1-2015-1-DK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The six Moldovan universities involved in the PBLMD project have approved new modernized study programmes for six specialities in line with a problem-based learning pedagogy. They have adopted new approaches related to curricula elaboration processes and have influenced national regulations by acquiring more academic autonomy for the Moldovan HEIs in the elaboration of university curricula and study programmes.

Improvement of Master-level Education in the Field of Physical Sciences in Belorussian Universities (PHYSICS) (561525-EPP-1-2015-1-LV-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

This project introduced and upgraded master-level courses in the field of physics in four Belarusian universities, and helped the transition of the Belarusian higher education system from a 5+1 system to a degree system in line with the Bologna Process principles.

Many HEIs have embraced the Bologna Process as a means of supporting **mobility with European HEIs**. In some countries, for example in Ukraine, appropriate regulations have been adopted – such as the maintaining of job or study locations and scholarship/salaries during the academic mobility period – in order to develop academic mobility. In other countries, nationwide working groups on the Bologna Process were created to promote the use of the methodology:

Students Mobility Capacity Building in Higher Education in Ukraine and Serbia (MILETUS) (574050 EPP-1-2015-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)

MILETUS created governance mechanisms and increased the mobility capacity in Serbian and Ukrainian partner universities in the field of virtual, real and blended mobility runs (MR). Academic staff prepared themselves methodologically for the supervision of blended mobility and the guide to virtual mobility offers a framework for virtual, real and blended MR implementation at the national level. In Ukraine, the project contributed to the regulation on academic mobility, improving the international and national academic mobility for Ukrainian HEIs.

Additionally, CBHE projects have supported the institutions to adopt a more **multidisciplinary approach** to curricula development in line with the Bologna principles.

Higher education interdisciplinary reform In Tourism Management and Applied Geoinformation Curricula (HERITAG) (561555-EPP-1-2015-1-ES-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

This project created interdisciplinary programmes at master and continuing education level integrating geo-information technologies (GIT) applied to cultural heritage preservation and documentation, tourist management and entrepreneurship with the aim of fostering the sustainable development of cultural tourism in Armenia and Georgia. In addition, in Armenia, this new interdisciplinary concept is feeding the preparation of the new law on higher education.

- For the 2015 generation of projects implemented in the EaP, out of 13 Curriculum Development CBHE projects, 4 cover interdisciplinary study programmes.

Higher education institutions in the EaP have not always had the necessary resources to adapt curricula at the same pace as the evolutions in the labour market needs. Via the CBHE projects, EaP HEIs have also managed to undertake activities in relation with the **third mission** of higher education, i.e. the social, entrepreneurial and innovative activities performed by universities in addition to teaching and research tasks. The cooperation with European HEIs has allowed European study programmes to be adapted to labour market needs in the Region (by translating the courses' content into local languages or developing country-specific case studies, for example). Universities have established **cooperation with the non-academic sector** in particular through curriculum reform projects, which increases the impact of the interventions:

Investing in Entrepreneurial Universities in Caucasus and Central Asia (EUCA-INVEST) (561724-EPP-1-2015-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The establishment of CreaLABs, which are centres for innovation and transfer of theoretical and practical business and entrepreneurship knowledge, has expanded the possibilities for students for creative work and communication with potential employers. New institutional strategies reflecting entrepreneurial and innovative approaches have been developed and a better understanding of the importance of income-generating activities has been fostered.

It is important to note that the labour market includes not only the private sector, but also NGOs and the public sector:

Promoting Migration Studies in Higher Education (PROMIG) (573554-EPP-1-2016-1-GE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The PROMIG project is an example of strong cooperation between participating partner universities in Armenia. As a result of the project joint research and education, activities among universities have been implemented and strong links with the local non-academic sector in the field of migration have been established (including the State Migration Service, the IOM mission in Armenia, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), the World Bank, NGOs (Armenian Caritas, Birth Right Armenia, Repat Armenia, People in Need), as well as with non-partner universities.

Development and Implementation of Social Dimension Strategies in Armenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina through Cross-regional Peer Learning (INCLUSION) (574139-EPP-1-2016-1-AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The NGO UNISON for the support of people with special needs, the Armenian National Students' Association and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Republic of Armenia are three examples of non-university partners that contributed to the success of the INCLUSION project.

Cooperation with the labour market is also to be seen in the different initiatives concerning the development of **Dual Education**, which is being introduced in the Region following best European practices. Not only is the number of applications on this topic increasing each year; we also see some legislative changes beginning to come about in the Partner Countries. For instance, in Ukraine, dual higher education has recently been introduced as full-time education, which provides on-the-job training at enterprises, institutions and organizations for the acquisition of certain qualification (to the amount of 25-60 % of the study programme). In other EaP countries, such as Moldova or Azerbaijan, the concept of Dual Education still refers only to Vocational Education and Training (VET) and not yet to higher educations.

Specific remarks

Though most countries in the region have introduced higher education laws and strategies for the adoption of the Bologna principles, the concern remains that this was not applied strictly to allow **profound reforms of teaching practices and curricula**. Challenges exist in particular in the areas of transparency, transferability, recognition and quality of teaching.

It should be noted in particular that Belarus is still not a full member of the Bologna Process and that it is lagging behind in the implementation of a roadmap for higher education reform in the country in accordance with the values, principles and goals of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Not all study programmes started during the CBHE project's implementation period or immediately after the project completion. This is because of the long time required for study programme accreditation and the reform of the education system. Therefore, some study programmes could only be launched after the end (i.e. following the eligibility period) of the project. Furthermore, curricula development projects often **lack guidelines for students as well as a proper information policy about the new possibilities**, which is a weakness for this type of project. In general, the **involvement of students** as end beneficiaries is not sufficiently considered. In most of the cases, student involvement in curriculum development takes place only at end for the purposes of individual testing. While there are many active student associations (e.g. the Azerbaijan Student Youth Organizations Union), these are not always involved in project consortia, which is certainly detrimental to the purpose of the CBHE projects. There are however good practices such as the Ukrainian Student Association – the All Ukrainian Students Association – which are active in CBHE projects and contribute through its participation in the creation and development of the student quality assurance pool of experts (Members of the National Agency for quality assurance (QA)). Another good example is the Armenian Student National Association.

European Human Rights Law for Universities of Ukraine and Moldova (HRLaw) (573861-EPP-1-2016-1-EE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The All-Ukrainian Youth NGO Students Association and the Moldovan Gutta-Club association are partners in the HRLaw project aiming to develop a case-oriented master and doctoral programme in human rights studies in Moldova and Ukraine.

3.1.2. Technological Upgrade

The provision of funds to improve the technical structure of Partner Country HEIs is an important element of CBHE and the provision of **equipment** plays an important role (often almost one third of the total project grant). This is an attractive offer for universities, which often lack modern and labour market oriented training facilities.

- ▶ Approximately EUR 5.4 million were invested in equipment for the 23 CBHE projects implemented in the Eastern Partnership Region..

Adequate provision of equipment in laboratories and centres is vital for supporting practical coursework, especially in the natural and hard sciences. Provision of equipment allows the establishment of facilities like career advice centres, innovation and start-up centres. New facilities are frequently used to train private or public employees, who otherwise would not have access to such important support structures. Sometimes this even happens on a fee-paying basis, thus contributing to the project's impact and financial sustainability:

Development of Two-cycle Innovative Curriculum in Microelectronic Engineering (DOC MEN) (561627-EPP-2015-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The DOC MEN project established MicLabs for didactical purposes within the new engineering programme and Offices for Support and Distribution of Microelectronic Services (MicSOs), with the role of creating links to the industrial sector through sharing information, gathering feedback to feed courses, providing job placements, conducting seminar and retraining engineers.

The strengthening of HEI technical capacities by opening new laboratories for teaching is an obvious goal for CBHE projects. Additionally, these labs are often used to conduct research and hence to create a vital bridge between teaching and research. This is of utmost importance for the EaP universities where the gap between research and teaching inherited from the Soviet system is still tangible with academies of science in charge of research and universities in charge of teaching.

CBHE projects have also strengthened the digitalisation of education by using various IT tools in the teaching process and by creating online learning platforms:

**Creating Moldovan E-network for Promoting Innovative E-teaching in the Continuing Professional Education (TEACH-ME)
(561820-EPP-1-2015-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

This project established continuous education centres and laboratories in Moldovan universities designed for the production of digital resources, such as the elaboration of multimedia and digital learning materials. The E-Teaching Handbook: case studies has been published and distributed among a wide variety of beneficiaries. E-learning has directly contributed to the development of academic staff collaborative skills in working with other teachers, in increasing the research in ICT Education, and in enhancing capacities in the use of multimedia resources.

**Development of Innovative Learning Approaches in Medical Education in the Context of the Current Medical Reforms in Ukraine (TAME)
(561583-EPP-1-2015-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

The TAME students of the Ukrainian partners Zaporizhzhia State Medical and Bukovinian State Medical Universities had the opportunity to study 12 TAME created virtual patients in the OpenLabyrinth platform using D-PBL (problem-oriented critical thinking) training.

In the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic, distance learning has exploded and the demand for remote technologies has increased drastically. This makes the CBHE projects addressing e-learning and e-teaching even more relevant.

**Creating Moldovan E-network for Promoting Innovative E-teaching in the Continuing Professional Education (TEACH-ME)
(561820-EPP-1-2015-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

Introducing Problem-based Learning in Moldova: Toward Enhancing Students Competitiveness and Employability (PBLMD)

Both national projects are set-up in Moldova and have prepared Moldovan universities to switch rapidly to online education. Moreover, Moldovan universities have supported the transition to remote teaching and learning for schools, pre-university level. TEACH-ME has also set up a network of innovative Moldovan teachers, who are currently thinking of ways to further improve distance education.

Specific remarks

Though the possibility of buying project specific equipment is important, there are a number of projects in which equipment was used for general purposes like the provision of laptops to students and teachers. While these purchases were not indispensable for the implementation of the CBHE project, the equipment is registered in the inventory of the HEIs and contribute to the overall modernisation of teaching in these HEIs. For example, HEI departments, such as finance, have sometimes been equipped thanks to CBHE projects. This not only allows them to function more efficiently, but it also gives them more stability and increased recognition throughout the rest of the university.

In certain cases, the required maintenance of equipment and a follow-up financing is not ensured. Sometimes the reason for this is the lack of funding or the poor funding from the state budget, which can be observed in particular in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Moldova.

Moreover, many HEIs have reported challenges in the handling of the tendering procedures when equipment was not available in their country but had to be imported. Since different tendering rules have had to be followed, the universities faced a multilayer bureaucracy. Furthermore, the lengthy official registration procedure in Azerbaijan, Belarus and Ukraine has prevented HEIs from launching the tendering process before the project grant is fully registered.

3.1.3. Governance and Management Reform

Eastern Partnership university governance bodies still require institutional strengthening to be able to compete with European and worldwide universities. HEIs in the Partner Countries need to improve the efficiency of their governance processes and their structures to make them grow internationally and offer study programmes of high quality, which attract the interest of academics, students and society at large. This implies, among other things, sustainable strategies and regulations, efficient international relations offices, quality assurance units endorsing international and European standards, financial autonomy, structures for collaborating with the labour market and strong alumni associations.

CBHE projects have clearly contributed to the creation or **reinforcement of university bodies** and changes at institutional level. Examples include the reinforcement of quality assurance units, the strengthening of international relation offices or creating student or alumni associations:

Advocacy Establishment for Students through Ombudsman Position (AESOP) (561640-EPP-1-2015-1-AZ-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The AESOP project has established student ombudsmen offices as new structural units in beneficiary Universities in Georgia, Ukraine and Azerbaijan, developed democratic institutional procedures for student advocacy and created the fundamental legal and structural platform to raise student voice (including academic and disciplinary appeals, complaints, emergency financial aid requests, or health-related concerns).

However, much remains to be done in the area of governance and management reform for the Eastern Partnership HEIs. New CBHE projects should support the development of internal and external mechanisms for quality assurance and the efficiency of the structures in place (e.g. approaches to involve stakeholders in governance, especially employers and alumni), digitised procedures, optimised processes, and mechanisms to trace the employability of the graduates, etc.

Indeed, a number of CBHE projects in the EaP Region have focused specifically on the topic of quality assurance (QA), particularly of systems and processes. Experience shows that promoting a QA culture within HEIs is an extensive process and that it is not achieved with a single intervention. More coherence and cooperation between the different QA initiatives would enhance the impact.

3.1.4. HEI International strategies

The internationalisation of higher education in the Eastern Partnership countries is high on the political agenda of governments and HEIs. However, while in Europe internationalisation is considered as a vehicle for enhancing the competitiveness of HEIs and economies, in the EaP it is seen primarily as a means of supporting national reforms and institutional capacity building. The higher education systems in the Region cannot compete with the more established and highly internationalised educational systems in Europe and elsewhere. However, internationalisation offers a chance to improve and develop through cooperation with highly qualified European partner institutions.

Individual academics remain the most important driver of international cooperation in the region. It is through bottom-up initiatives by academics that short-term mobility, research cooperation, development of joint-study programmes, and other activities are being developed. While there is a high level of commitment to internationalisation almost everywhere, these academics often do not receive sufficient support to enact their cooperative ventures. University practices and support services are not sufficiently adapted to serve this goal. Internationalisation efforts are hampered by certain shortcomings throughout the Region, such as weak international relations offices (IROs), an insufficient number of courses offered in foreign languages, relatively poor foreign language skills among students and academics in most EaP countries, and weak support for finding and managing research funding. However, the extent of these shortcomings varies significantly across the countries.

Numerous strategic and procedural documents have been created and adopted which aim to support the internationalisation and modernisation at the institutional level. These include guidelines for learning outcomes at HEIs, strategies for university internationalisation, systems for monitoring the quality of the education process, and newly adopted protocols and procedures, which help improve the service provided by the international relations offices.

Development of Approaches to Harmonization of a Comprehensive Internationalization Strategies in Higher Education, Research and Innovation at EU and Partner Countries (HARMONY) (561561-EPP-1-2015-1-ES-EPPKA2 -CBHE-SP)

The partner universities from Armenia, Russia and Belarus developed an institutional internationalization strategy and an action plan for its implementation. In Armenia, the toolkit and framework developed during the project have been used to facilitate the (re) design of a national internationalization Strategy.

Moreover, CBHE projects have **increased the visibility** of the HEIs involved, through their strong outward orientation and focus on international cooperation. One of the most visible aspects of the projects' impact is the establishment of an informal Erasmus+ academic and administrative coordinators network, which often closely cooperates with the central university management and across the whole EaP Region. This change significantly improves the support provided to students and staff interested in mobility at faculty and university levels.

The performance of HEIs at international level is often measured on the basis of their **research output and quality**. Opening HEIs up to global standards and benchmarks has motivated them to work on the continuous improvement of their systems and processes. Some recent legislative changes, for instance in Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, now consider research as an integral part of higher education, thus closing the gap that existed between the two during the Soviet era. Some concrete measures have led to the involvement of international peers in the accreditation process of regulated and PhD programmes. There has also been a decrease in the maximum teaching workload per year, providing further possibilities for academics to conduct research. Moreover, the ECTS system is beginning to be applied at the level of doctoral studies in the EaP.

**Promoting Internationalization of Research through Establishment of Cycle 3 QA System in Line with the European Agenda (C3QA)
(574273-EPP-1-2016-1-AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)**

The project has led to the development of national policy frameworks for doctoral education in the beneficiary Partner Countries in line with the European agenda. The project has also established internal and external quality assurance systems to improve the standard of the Cycle 3 programmes. The accredited programmes contribute to research internationalization.

For some EaP HEIs, the process of internationalisation has shown a significant impact on their **ranking indicators** such as international cooperation, international joint publications, international academic mobility, research partnerships, etc.). For other HEIs, the impact is visible in **world rankings**. For example, there were no Ukrainian HEIs in these rankings until 2016, but over the past 5 years, the most active and successful HEIs within Tempus and Erasmus+ projects were included in international rankings such as Times⁵ and QS⁶ (Karazin Kharkiv National University (481st place), Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University (531-540), National Technical University "Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute" (701-750), Lviv Polytechnic National University (751-800)). Ukrainian Sumy State University and Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics were among the top of U-Multirank⁷ 2019, together with both leading Georgian Universities, Tbilisi State and Ilia State, with high scores in international collaboration. As stated by university administrations, this was mostly due to Erasmus+ projects and their follow-ups.

The impact of the process of internationalisation at the institutional level (measured via participant surveys) has been overwhelmingly considered by the project participants as **positive**.

With the established legal framework and an increasingly market-oriented environment, universities in the EaP Region have become more adaptive to changing global trends and are securing their place on the international education market (e.g. becoming more research focused, increased quality and technologically novel, labour market oriented, etc.).

⁵ Times Higher Education World University Rankings is an annual publication of university rankings by Times Higher Education magazine

⁶ QS World University Rankings is an annual publication of university rankings by Quacquarelli Symonds.

⁷ Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, U-Multirank compares higher education institutions' performance in areas that matter most to students, i.e. quality of teaching, university facilities, etc.

3.2. Broadening Horizons for Individuals

3.2.1. Academic staff

The CBHE action has given professors from Partner Countries opportunities to meet their peers in different countries. By working together in international consortia, professors have become aware of different perspectives, gained new insights into their academic field and were exposed to international quality standards in education. The CBHE projects have allowed them to collaborate with experts in their area leading to a direct peer-to-peer knowledge transfer from Europe to the Partner Countries. They have also gained valuable work experience through the teaching of students in a different country and from different countries (sometimes in a foreign language), especially through the 'Special Mobility Scheme' (SMS) of the CBHE action:

Harmonizing Water Related Graduate Education (WATERH) (561755-EPP-1-2015-1-NO-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

This project used the 'Special Mobility Scheme' (SMS) to provide specific training for Ukrainian academic staff on teaching tools, methodologies and pedagogical approaches using best practices in water-related graduate education. This opportunity has supported their professional development and ensured the transfer of important capacities.

Improving Teacher Education for Applied Learning in the Field of Vocational Education (ITE-VET) (574124-EPP-1-2016-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

This project involved staff mobility which has provided the opportunity for Ukrainian professors to take part and give lectures at vocational school classes in Germany, which is very relevant for their professional development and improvement.

Introducing Problem-based Learning in Moldova (PBLMD) (561884-EPP-1-2015-1-DK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

This project involved staff mobility which was organised through the SMS and has had a major impact on academics who have gained expert knowledge on various approaches to problem-based learning (PBL) practiced by EU partner universities. The project allowed for the development of an appropriate PBL model to be implemented in new study programmes in Moldova.

Two different categories of academics can be distinguished, namely

- a) experienced academics and
- b) young academics at the start of their career:
 - a) These academics were advanced in their career, but limited as regards further vertical growth at their home universities. By bringing an international dimension to their work, CBHE projects have offered these staff members a new lease of life, allowing them to broaden their perspectives. However, for the same reason, this also means that often, it is a field's leading academics that are participating in the CBHE projects. Thus, a monopolisation within the HEIs may occur. Access to EU projects is regarded as 'territorial gain' and not necessarily as something to be shared.

This also holds true for Programme Country staff members for the same reasons and is leading to these 'peer group' networks risking 'mediocre' project outcomes. It should also be outlined that the motivation to be part of a CBHE project is not always only connected to the project's content or cooperation aspects but also to the **generous funding** that the CBHE project offers for personnel costs of professors. The additional remuneration is covering tasks that should be part of the normal tasks of the academics, namely the updating of their degree programmes in the case of curriculum development projects.

This attractive funding can sometimes lead to abuses regarding academics and 'professional project writers' selling or recycling project ideas that do not always correspond to the real needs of the HEIs in the Eastern Partnership (and other regions), and the CBHE action suffers from a high number of 'recurrent beneficiaries'.

This goes hand in hand with the **one-size-fits-all programme structure** of the CBHE action that makes it possible for academics and universities to include a huge variety of project ideas in their applications.

- b) Young academics are given the possibility to actively participate in project packages and are exposed to an international working level. They get access to EU funding which prevents a further brain drain in some EaP countries. For instance, in countries like Moldova, HEIs are faced with very serious challenges: (i) the ever-diminishing number of Moldovan students due to demographic, economic and political reasons. CBHE projects can enhance the institutions' appeal and help them retain students; (ii) the low salaries of teachers: it is harder and harder to get good teachers, as the salaries are ridiculously low. This does not encourage young people to pursue third level studies nor to stay in Moldova.

The contacts built in the framework of CBHE projects have proven extremely useful for pursuing further research and enhancing the publication list of young academics. Indeed, contacts with European academics in CBHE projects have sometimes led to further research activities after the end of the project.

In general, trainings and workshops organised within the CBHE projects have allowed academics to acquire new skills and knowledge in various disciplines:

**Bridging Innovations, Health and Societies: Educational Capacity Building in the Eastern European Neighbouring Area (BIHSENA)
(561726-EPP-2015-NL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

This project organized trainings and content-focused workshops on competence-based education and blended learning for Russian and Ukrainian academic staff. Furthermore, staff development visits to EU universities proved instrumental in ensuring the quality of the course design and enhancement of skills of the academic staff. In addition, academic staff from Russia and Ukraine participated in English courses throughout the project.

- ▶ Across the 23 Eastern Partnership projects **2558 instances of training of academic staff** were reported, which mostly took place at Programme Country institutions. The new skills and knowledge also strengthen the home HEIs and improve education standards.

The CBHE action has allowed academics to overcome national boundaries and also to link with other disciplines within their HEI. EU countries have been experimenting with **multi-disciplinary courses** for some time and most academics recognise the benefits. Therefore, this concept was also introduced in certain Partner Countries and helped to promote innovation and cooperation between departments, and broaden the academics and institutions way of thinking.

Since going international and increasing the skills of their teachers will make the HEIs more competitive on the higher education market, some HEIs are incentivising academic staff to participate in CBHE projects. This is the case of the Moldovan State University which has introduced a point-based system for promotions.

Working with the **private sector** within a CBHE project has been a new experience for many professors. They have gained greater insights into business realities and could make the study programmes more relevant to business needs:

**Licence, master professionnels pour le développement, l'administration, la gestion, la protection des systèmes et réseaux informatiques dans les entreprises en Moldavie, au Kazakhstan, au Vietnam (LMPI)
(573901-EPP-1-2016-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

A strong collaboration was created between HEIs and Moldovan and foreign IT companies established in Moldova to ensure that the new modular training courses responded to the IT labour market expectations and the requirements of these companies in terms of cybersecurity.

Furthermore, CBHE projects have opened the door for academics to **university management**. This was observed especially during the Agency's monitoring visits, which took place in the presence of the university management.

It turned also out that professors working on CBHE projects in different departments were often not aware that other colleagues in their HEI were also working on CBHE projects. Hence, it was through the Agency's monitoring visit that a connection between different CBHE projects was established. In this sense, the cluster meetings on specific topics have proven very useful for the recognition of the work of academic staff by their peers and their management.

By the same token it also became clear that some HEI managers were unaware of the activities taking place on the ground, which shows that there is a **lack of proper monitoring** and thinking of 'internationalisation' in a strategic manner is often not yet in place.

The CBHE action has given staff from the Region the opportunity to **develop their intercultural skills**, by working together with colleagues in a multi-country consortium. Academic and administrative staff have gained an intercultural experience of working with EU countries and with their neighbouring countries, which is not always obvious in the EaP. Often only within an EU-funded international consortium does it become possible to receive endorsement from both the HEI and the national authorities to collaborate with HEIs from neighbouring countries.

Promoting Migration Studies in Higher Education (PROMIG) (573554-EPP-1-2016-1-GE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

PROMIG is an example of successful cooperation between Armenian and Azerbaijani Universities under the coordination of Georgia in the field of migration studies. Due to the conflict between these two countries, this cooperation is only possible in the framework of international cooperation projects.

3.2.2. Students

One of the main drivers of internationalisation has been the need for universities to attract the best students and professors to raise the level of education offered and to become more competitive both in their national and the global education market. The CBHE action has helped HEIs to set up high-level study programmes, which has increased the visibility and appeal of the HEI in the national context and contributed to stopping brain drain. This is especially true for Azerbaijan and Moldova where a considerable number of graduates tend to leave the country. Cooperation with EU partners also provides students with an environment in which their **merits will be fairly treated** in societies that are often marked by **nepotism and corruption**.

- ▶ Within the 23 Eastern Partnership CBHE projects starting in 2015, 2733 students were enrolled in new or upgraded courses and 5075 students received training or took part in a mobility.

The impact of the CBHE projects on students has been manifold. They have been beneficiaries of **modernised or new study programmes** and have been exposed to innovative teaching and learning methods and motivational approaches. The work with new or improved equipment and infrastructure, exchanges with foreign academics, new methodologies, courses followed in English, and short and long-term mobility (available to all three cycles), has enhanced both the academic and practical competences of students.

Student mobility

CBHE projects give the opportunity to students to experience mobility outside their home country, sometimes for the first time. This mobility has a major impact on students. It is very often an eye-opening experience in terms of new cultures and languages, new mind-sets, etc. Furthermore, mobility is also a way for HEIs to attract students.

Students Mobility Capacity Building in Higher Education in Ukraine and Serbia (MILETUS) (574050 EPP-1-2015-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)

The Lesya Ukrainka Eastern European National University (EENU) implements several Erasmus+ KA 107 (International Credit Mobility - ICM) projects and is simultaneously a partner in the CBHE project MILETUS, which aims to improve the capacity for student mobility via blended (real and virtual) mobility. This strengthens the impact of both Erasmus+ actions on the university and the higher education sphere. MILETUS has produced a methodological framework for student mobility programs with the contribution of the EENU participants involved in both Erasmus+ actions.

Introducing Problem-Based Learning in Moldova (PBLMD) (561884-EPP-1-2015-1-DK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The opportunity to facilitate a higher number of exchanges as a result of the Special Mobility Strand (SMS), has attracted a large number of students to participating Moldovan HEIs. These students have a high level of English and would otherwise have left the country to study abroad.

Research

In addition,, the impact can also be seen in research. There are numerous examples **of joint research projects and joint publications** initiated after successful cooperation within CBHE projects. In fact, this research work tends to takes place in parallel to CBHE projects. The mobility of staff and students has allowed the **supervision of doctoral candidates by staff from international partners**, improving the quality of research and enhancing the reputation of the associated HEI.

Restructuring and Developing of Doctoral Studies in Azerbaijan in Line with Requirements of European Higher Education (NIZAMI) (561784-EPP-1-2015-1-FR-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)

With the established necessary legal framework for 3rd cycle education, universities become more research-focused and the international mobility of young researchers is facilitated.

Creation of the Graduate Curricula in Peace Studies in Georgia (PESTUGE) (561589-EPP-1-2015-1-IE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

This ambitious project aimed at laying the foundations of new peace-oriented mind-sets; Georgian PhD candidates were supervised by Dublin City University professors.

Many stakeholders complain about the lack of job-readiness of higher education graduates in the region, while others report graduates' lack of interactive skills, IT skills, organisational skills, and ability to work in teams. HEIs are seen as focusing on theoretical knowledge to the detriment of providing graduates with practical knowledge and experience, which is a key concern of employers. In addition, the curricula of many study programmes fail to reflect the combination of skills that employers seek.

Student employability

Graduate **entry to the labour market** in the EaP is often precarious and they often experience periods of unemployment before they find stable employment. This transition from the academic world to the labour market is hampered by a relatively low level of cooperation between HEIs and employers in relation to curriculum design and recruitment. Few employers are naturally involved in the discussions of new curricula

This is why the CBHE action **strongly encourages cooperation of HEIs with the labour market**. In a number of projects, private sector representatives are involved in designing new curricula that are more appealing and relevant for the business world. Professors who internalise this entrepreneurial and long-term perspective have been the main exponents of this cooperation, which has translated into internships for students and, in some cases, job offers after graduation. Evidence

shows that curriculum development projects working closely with private sector partners and including internships within university education have a higher graduate employability rate and are therefore much more appealing to national and international students.

**Licence, Master professionnels pour le développement, l'administration, la gestion, la protection des systèmes et réseaux informatiques dans les entreprises en Moldavie, au Kazakhstan, au Vietnam (LMPI)
(573901-EPP-1-2016-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

This project has contributed to fulfilling IT labour market expectations and overcoming cybersecurity challenges. The high employability level of the first class of master students in Moldova shows that increased collaboration with enterprises in the IT sector has contributed to the improved employability of students and the development of their entrepreneurial spirit.

Some CBHE projects have included concrete support structures, such as career centres, incubators or students support services, which have developed strategic and sustainable links with the labour market and **provide training in soft and transversal skills**:

**Adaptive Learning Environment for Competence in Economic and Societal Impacts of Local Weather, Air Quality and Climate (ECOIMPACT)
(561975-EPP-1-2015-1-FI-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

This project has impacted the governance structures at Russian and Ukrainian beneficiaries through the establishment of new units and/or the upgrading of existing structures. One beneficiary established a lab of Internet of Things, equipped in line with the ECOIMPACT approach. Another beneficiary established a career guidance center aimed at popularizing meteorology and related sciences.

- ▶ Overall **53%** of the 2015 generation of CBHE projects include placements and internships for students. Thanks to CBHE projects, many students established their first contacts with the private sector and this interaction has increased their employability.

A number of the HEIs are involved in projects to set up **language-learning centres** or to improve the **language skills** of students, who have enjoyed this linguistic training by attending newly developed English courses, joining mobility opportunities and accessing research material in foreign languages.

Vocational Education and Training

The development of **Vocational Education and Training (VET)** is high on the agenda in the EaP. VET partners with industry and government provide students with both the soft skills and technical knowledge to help them secure jobs upon graduation. By creating a more relevantly skilled labour force, CBHE gives local companies a competitive advantage. There are several examples showing the relevant contribution of CBHE to the development of VET education and the increased employability level for the students:

Improving Teacher Education for Applied Learning in the Field of Vocational Education (ITE-VET) (574124-EPP-1-2016-1-DE-2016-1-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The ITE-VET project improved the structure and quality of the vocational education training system in Ukraine and made the VET teacher profession more appealing and more socio-economically relevant in the country, by strengthening the link between the teacher education institutions and the employment sector.

Licence professionnel en formation ouverte et à distance pour la performance énergétique et environnementale (LPEB) (561732-EPP-1-2015-1-FR-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

This project provided students with better learning opportunities, skills and experience through jointly signed dual diploma programmes.

Wider choice of study subjects

Via CBHE projects, new fields of study have been introduced or developed in the region, such as environmental studies, public health and peace studies. Cooperation has also enabled the development of new professions and created new opportunities in the labour market for students:

Creation of the Graduate Curricula in Peace Studies in Georgia (PESTUGE) (561589-EPP-1-2015-1-IE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

This project boosted research in peace studies, facilitated the cooperation of Georgian academics with colleagues from Georgia's break-away region Abkhazia, and established a new line of work as a result of the development of a study programme on this new topic.

Educational for Drone (eDrone) (574090-EPP-1-2016-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

This project has offered new educational opportunities in order to meet the economic and technological challenges of the 21st century and provide new skills in drone education applicable in different professions: agriculture, journalism, public order, media, gas emissions detection, fire detection, environmental monitoring, archaeology, monitoring of photovoltaic systems, monitoring of structures and buildings, and inspection of high voltage lines.

To conclude, the students are the main end beneficiaries of the CBHE projects and they have been more and more involved in project activities, although not always. The development and modernisation of curricula, and therefore the identification of student needs for their future, is still seen as the domain of the HEI and their academic staff. In EaP countries, CBHE projects have not yet reached the point where students systematically participate in building their own future, and work still needs to be done to improve the situation.

3.2.3. Administrative staff

CBHE projects also have an impact on administrative staff. This relates particularly to staff from the **offices for international affairs and staff responsible for project financial management**, who have to be well acquainted with the regulations and procedures relating to project implementation.

Although administrative and financial staff are key people in international cooperation, their role is not always very visible in the project activities. Moreover, given the nature of their work, they are rarely the first to participate in mobility opportunities. However, regular interaction via email and skype with their counterparts in other countries has brought learning opportunities and given them insights into best practice in financial and grant management. Sometimes, they have been able to **introduce new practices within their own HEI** systems. Dealing with international projects, they have to work in English and in this way, their **language and intercultural skills** tend to considerably improve. The equipment budget has allowed administrative staff to purchase new technology and to use their newly acquired skills for the benefit of their home HEI.

Working as partners in CBHE projects has helped build the management and in particular the financial capacity of Partner Country institutions in the Region, so that some now feel confident to act as CBHE project coordinators. This is evidenced by the rising interest by local EaP institutions in covering this role in the most recent calls. Projects coordinated by Partner Country institutions have helped to professionalise staff, show increasing ownership and more sustainable results.

Some CBHE projects specifically target administrative staff:

Library Network Support Services: Modernising Libraries in Armenia, Moldova and Belarus through Library Staff Development and Reforming Libraries (LNSS) (561633-EPP-1-2015-1-AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

Librarians from Armenia, Moldova and Belarus were the main target group of the LNSS project. They participated in various local and international study visits, trainings, summer schools, conferences, exhibitions, awareness days and other events which have contributed to their professional growth.

- ▶ In total, 386 administrative staff members of EaP universities were trained within the 23 CBHE projects.

3.2.4. Entrepreneurs/Employers

Most of the EaP companies that participate as partners in CBHE projects are **small and medium enterprises (SMEs)**. CBHE projects have given these access to experts in specific fields, as well as to research laboratories and specialised equipment. Businesses have benefitted from this partnership to develop new products and to find students to work on new processes and equipment.

HEIs are a rich recruitment ground for businesses, which use internships to test potential future staff. In a number of CBHE projects, businesses are part of review panels and participate directly in the curriculum design process:

**University-Enterprises Cooperation in Game Industry in Ukraine (GameHub)
(561728- EPP-1-2016-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

GameHub developed an intense cooperation with the Gaming industry in Ukraine to develop students' entrepreneurial competences. GameLabs was established at partner universities and provided a supportive creative environment in which students developed their knowledge in complex elements and communication processes embodied in the professional life of the programmer.

In addition, **training courses for practitioners** were introduced, sometimes on a fee-paying basis, which has contributed to the financial sustainability of the activities:

Educational for Drone (eDrone) (574090-EPP-1-2016-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

Within the eDrone project, professionals and the general public in Moldova benefit from the lifelong learning educational courses on offer, thus allowing them to use drones in various professional fields such as agriculture, archaeological research, public security, media, environmental monitoring, etc.

**Adaptive Learning Environment for Competence in Economic and Societal Impacts of Local Weather, Air Quality and Climate (ECOIMPACT)
(561975-EPP-1-2015-1-FI-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

In addition to the implementation of University programmes, this project developed and commercialized short-term sectorial courses for hydrometeorology professionals, managers at weather-sensitive companies and public bodies.

- ▶ Overall, 1932 individuals active in the private sector, including NGO and civil servants, were trained inside the 23 CBHE projects.



4. REGIONAL COOPERATION AND NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

4.1. Regional Cooperation

There is significant potential for internationalisation through intra-regional cooperation. Several important initiatives already exist to foster such cooperation in both teaching and research. Academics in the EaP Region are eager to seek cooperation with institutions from the same Region. Indeed, when there is a preference for international cooperation, the geographic or cultural closeness (expressed in factors such as language, common history and a tradition of cooperation) tends to prevail.

In certain countries, relations between HEIs – before they started their collaboration in the frame of the CBHE projects – were quite competitive. However, after having worked together, HEIs often discovered **hidden benefits** of this collaboration. For example, some HEI realised that **sharing resources**, such as research databases, open learning platforms and scientific laboratories, quite feasible for geographically small countries like Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, and even saves costs.

The sharing of resources within the CBHE projects has led to greater interaction between professors and more active sharing of ideas. Hence, with successful cooperation within a CBHE project, the universities involved decided to establish double or even **joint degrees**:

**Licence, Master professionnels pour le développement, l'administration, la gestion, la protection des systèmes et réseaux informatiques dans les entreprises en Moldavie, au Kazakhstan, au Vietnam (LMPI)
(573901-EPP-1-2016-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

As a result of LMPI, the participating institutions now share a common vision about the aims of cybersecurity and have developed a commitment to publicly support and promote their combined course portfolio, and to support the entry of their graduates in the job market. At international level, new alliances have been formed between partner universities and the referent European universities: nine cooperation agreements for double degree university diplomas and ten inter-institutional mobility agreements have been signed.

The CBHE action has contributed significantly to the strengthening of cooperation in the region. It provides a means by which HEIs can work together on themes of mutual interest across national and cultural boundaries and it promotes people-to-people contact, which helps change mentalities and reduce prejudices.

A number of academic subject areas lend themselves to a regional dimension such as agriculture, engineering and environmental studies. These therefore tend to promote regional cooperation. In working together, exchanging processes, results and best practices, each country has learned from its neighbours. The creation of regional budget envelopes has further fostered regional cooperation and exchange. In terms of geographical scope, **18%** of the CBHE projects are regional projects involving 11-15 institutions from different countries.

It is also interesting to note that as a result of the cross-regional projects, cooperation has increased among several countries in various other world regions:

Establishing Modern Master-level Studies in Information Systems (Montenegro and Ukraine) (561592-EPP-1-2015-1-FR-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

Investing in Entrepreneurial universities in Caucasus and Central Asia (Georgia and Kyrgyzstan) (561724-EPP-1-2015-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

Promoting Internationalization of Research through Establishment of Cycle 3 QA System in Line with the European Agenda (Armenia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Mongolia) (574273-EPP-1-2016-1-AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)

Promoting Migration Studies in Higher Education (Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) (573554-EPP-1-2016-1-GE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

4.2. National Education Reforms

Structural projects are of particular importance for triggering and supporting developments and reforms of the national education systems in the Partner Countries. The majority of the Structural Projects (**86%**) are therefore single country (**national**) projects.

Analysis has shown that successful CBHE projects have sparked national debates and highlighted policy gaps, which led to **policy and legislative reforms**. The obligatory involvement of the Ministry of Education as a partner (notably, but not only) in Structural Projects has laid the basis for cooperation between HEIs and national authorities and has significantly contributed to addressing policy issues such as quality assurance and has facilitated the incorporation of the Bologna Process's principles into the EaP education systems:

Quality Assurance System in Ukraine: Development on the Base of ENQA Standards and Guidelines (QUAERE) (562013-EPP-1-2015-1-PL-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)

This project's consortium has developed internal and external QA models and a national full accreditation procedure on the basis of the ENQA standards and guidelines. The internal model was implemented at 8 Ukrainian beneficiaries. The results linked to external QA, such as Guidelines for Pilot Programme Accreditation, Peer Review Report, Guide for Students and Programme Accreditation Guidelines, were used by the National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance for the preparation of the Draft National Guidelines on Programme Accreditation and other QA documents and procedures.

Restructuring and Developing of Doctoral Studies in Azerbaijan in Line with Requirements of European Higher Education (NIZAMI)
(561784-EPP-1-2015-1-FR-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)

NIZAMI has restructured doctoral education in Azerbaijan through the organization of doctoral schools at national level, increasing the quality standards of doctoral education and improving research internationalization. With the established necessary legal framework, universities have become more research-focussed and the international mobility of young researchers is facilitated.

Development of Approaches to Harmonization of a Comprehensive Internationalization Strategies in Higher Education, Research and Innovation at EU and Partner Countries (HARMONY)
(561561-EPP-1-2015-1-ES-EPPKA2 -CBHE-SP)

The Ministries of Education of the three Partner Countries of this project were highly involved and have incorporated the project results in their national policies, notably in the framework for a comprehensive internationalisation strategy.

There are also some examples of Joint Projects that have achieved a systematic impact, due to the excellent cooperation, the interest of the results for the national policy issues or the close cooperation and involvement of the national authorities:

Higher Education Interdisciplinary Reform In Tourism Management and Applied Geo-information Curricula (HERITAG)
(561555-EPP-1-2015-1-ES-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The Armenian beneficiaries of the project HERITAG have implemented a Joint Master Programme with the involvement of one European University of the consortium, in addition to the planned project results. Issuing a double degree was unprecedented in the Armenian higher education system and it has been taken by the Ministry of Education as a model for a new regulation on Joint Programmes in the country.

Despite success stories **in reforming the national legislation**, the process is not always smooth. Many Ministry officials were not used to this bottom-up approach and limited English language skills acted as a barrier, increasing their resistance. In the EaP, considerably work has been carried out to keep ministry representatives informed on the ongoing CBHE projects and to ensure a proper follow-up from the national authorities. In some countries, such as Ukraine and Georgia, the Ministries' role has been particularly important for the implementation of the project's outcomes at national level. Ministry officials were for instance involved in communication activities within projects and ensuring the updating of national and sectoral standards for curricula. They also acted as experts in the formulation of recommendations on national policy development and they actively contributed to the improvement of the regulatory and legal framework. However, in some EaP countries, such as Moldova or Armenia, political instability is such that the active support of the Ministry for a Structural Project is unreliable and can never be guaranteed, whereas in more

Substantial **policy gaps** exist in the higher education systems in the Eastern partnership, and consequently **substantial reforms and follow-up** are needed to improve their quality and enhance their contribution to economic competitiveness. Educational quality improvement has been a key theme in the **reform of higher education systems in the Eastern partnership** for several years, especially since the introduction of the Bologna reform process.

authoritarian regimes, such as Belarus and Azerbaijan, the government is often reluctant to change or adopt any type of reform.

Overall the vast majority of Structural Projects contributed **significantly** to the policy objectives of the Partner Countries.

Additional support for EaP higher education policy reforms has been provided by the network of more than 50 Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) from the countries in the Region. These comprise local professors, Ministry officials and students who are interested in higher education policy reform. With the support of Erasmus+ funding, they have had the opportunity to take part in a number of seminars on higher education reform in the EU. Upon return, they have shared their knowledge and expertise with universities, by holding seminars and workshops to disseminate information about the latest developments in EU higher education policy and the Bologna process.



5. INCLUSIVENESS

5.1. People with Fewer Opportunities

- ▶ Around 26% of the CBHE projects in the EaP include a priority for the involvement of people with fewer opportunities. Projects concentrate mainly on students with disabilities (visual disability, hearing disability, physical disability).

Given the socio-economic difficulties in the EaP, activities aimed at people with disabilities are especially dependent on funding mechanisms like the CBHE action:

Developing Programs for Access of Disadvantaged Groups of People and Regions to Higher Education (DARE) (561547-EPP-1-2015-1-IL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

This project has developed special support mechanisms (including academic support with special equipment and revised recruitment and retention regulations) for students with learning and physical disabilities, among other vulnerable groups, improving their access to higher education.

Development and Implementation of Social Dimension Strategies in Armenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina through Cross-regional Peer Learning (INCLUSION) (574139-EPP-1-2016-1-AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

The strategies on inclusive education developed by this project have been adopted by the Armenian and Bosnia-Herzegovina partner universities' senates and scientific Councils and have been implemented at these beneficiary institutions. The national guidelines on inclusive education have been endorsed by the respective Ministries in Armenia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina and have started to be disseminated and shared among the main beneficiaries. The guidelines equip the system with clear mechanisms and tools on integration of the social dimension and inclusive education national strategies into daily life, and propose mechanisms for evaluating the implementation success rate and impact.

5.2. Institutions Located in less developed regions

In the EaP countries, the CBHE action reached HEIs outside the capital cities, with participation from HEIs located throughout the territory in most CBHE projects, in particular the national projects targeting one Partner Country only.

Cooperation among HEIs from the same territory is especially important for the EaP, where traces of a common Soviet past are still present. Institutions located in the main cities participate more often in consortia but there is no 'geographic monopoly'.

**Restructuring and Developing of Doctoral Studies in Azerbaijan in Line with Requirements of European Higher Education (NIZAMI)
(561784-EPP-1-2015-1-FR-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP)**

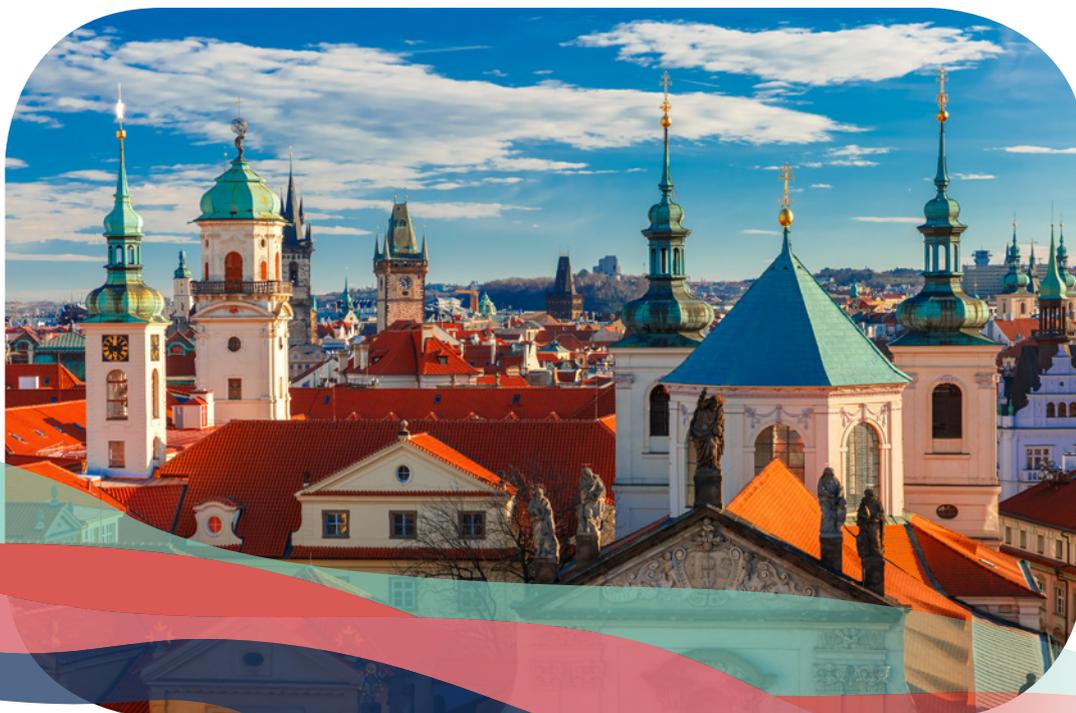
NIZAMI's partnership illustrates very well the participation of universities in remote areas, with partners from Ganja and from Nakchivan. This is significant, as the region of Nakchivan is a landlocked exclave with no direct borders with Azerbaijan. It is surrounded by other countries and continues to suffer from the effects of the Armenian-Azerbaijan war.

**University-Enterprises Cooperation in Game Industry in Ukraine (GameHub)
(561728- EPP-1-2016-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

This project's consortium includes Donetsk National Technical University, which has been temporarily relocated by the Joint Forces Operation to the remote city of Pokrovsk, in the Donetsk region.

**Creation of the Graduate Curricula in Peace Studies in Georgia (PESTUGE)
(561589-EPP-1-2015-1-IE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)**

One unexpected outcome of this project has been the professional cooperation established between the Georgian professors and the professors from the secessionist region of Abkhazia, despite the tense geopolitical environment. Academic cooperation has been fostered across this political divide and the consortium is planning to continue working together on future projects.



6. CONCLUSIONS

The participation of the EaP countries in the CBHE action contributes to the key priority area of the revised European Neighbourhood Policy of building a **stronger society through mobility and people-to-people contact**. It supports the interaction between EU and Partner Country citizens, focusing mainly on students, academic staff, researchers, young people and cultural actors. Increased cooperation in Higher Education is recognised as a promoter and monitor of change. It enhances the internationalization of higher education institutions, delivers tangible results for stakeholders across the Eastern Partnership region, but also increases the convergence of higher education systems, fosters school cooperation and improves collaborative learning.

In a wider context, the CBHE action promotes stability, better governance and economic development at EU's Eastern borders and strengthens political, economic and cultural links both between the European Union and the Partner Countries and among the Partner Countries themselves.

A first analysis of a smaller sample of 2015 and 2016 project final reports has shown that CBHE projects have played an important role in the support and the development of Partner Country education systems. The higher education sector is a driving force for the economy and society as a whole and the role of the CBHE action is important as it has a long-term structural effect on the countries. A number of best-practice examples show in an impressive way the benefits that CBHE projects can have on educational systems, HEIs and individuals (academics, administrative university staff, and students).

However, the impact of the CBHE action can be further improved by looking at the challenges that were identified via the sample of final project reports and the monitoring activities (desk monitoring, monitoring missions, cluster meetings) conducted by the Agency. Some of the challenges refer to the CBHE action as a whole, others specifically to the EaP countries

6.1. Challenges

- Higher education in the EaP Region has moved decisively from a centrally-controlled, supply-driven, public-funded, state system to a more complex, increasingly market-oriented system when it began adhering to the **Bologna Process**. However, it is important to underline that some of the Bologna principles still have to be fully implemented and additional accompanying measures such as methodical support and specific legislative amendments are still needed. A specific case is Belarus which signed the Bologna Process in May 2015 with conditions imposed by the EU in the form of a roadmap. The implementation of this roadmap is still ongoing with little progress to be seen.
- **Accreditation** is sometimes problematic because it takes a long time and does not allow the running of degree programmes within the eligibility period of the CBHE projects. The national agencies for quality assurance in higher education in the EaP countries are relatively new institutions (Ukraine since 2016, Azerbaijan 2015, etc.) and they are regularly subjected to risks linked to policy instability or intervention (such as legislative changes affecting their composition, or changing their independence level).

- Joint **double degree programmes** open opportunities for HEIs in the EaP to become more active partners in Erasmus+ JMD Action and the possibility for developing this kind of enhanced cooperation with foreign universities is mentioned in the education legislative documents some of the EaP countries. However, not all mechanisms for their implementation are regulated at legislation level.
- In EaP countries, **research** is often still not considered as one of the HEIs' core responsibilities, probably based in the historical relation between the research institutes of the Academies of Sciences and the universities. Regulations to introduce PhD level content according to Bologna have been adopted in different countries, but their implementation is not yet complete. This is especially true for Belarusian doctoral students who work independently and are not considered as part of the higher education system.
- Poor **science-industry linkages** and ineffective collaboration constitute one of the weakest structural components of the EaP innovation systems. The participation of **non-academic partners** in CBHE projects is limited and the involvement of private business remains a challenge. Sizeable parts of the economies of EaP countries are still insufficiently competitive, the private sector is underdeveloped and there is often too much political interference. None of the EaP countries are considered to be well-functioning market economies and in spite of the progress made and reforms undertaken, many structural problems remain which affect the national labour markets and employment opportunities for younger people – graduates.
- There is a need for more adequate monitoring and supervision mechanisms to ensure **transparency and accountability** in university performance, or the effectiveness of their programmes and the development of internal and external mechanisms for quality assurance, as well as fighting corruption and promoting academic integrity in higher education communities.
- Although **university autonomy** is guaranteed by law in the majority of EaP countries, in practice financial autonomy remains limited and HEIs still face difficulties managing their own revenues (non-governmental funding), including international grants.
- For a number of CBHE projects appropriate **institutional endorsement** by the HEI administration is not always systematic, especially in smaller regional HEIs. Often, we have observed a lack of cooperation between different CBHE projects (and with other funded Erasmus+ initiatives).
- **Internationalisation strategies** in HEIs are often insufficiently developed. The creation of project consortia often lacks a long-term strategic vision for HEI development, and proposals are developed because of existing or recurrent collaborations. Due to the increasing number of mobilities (notably via International Credit Mobility (ICM)), some universities have introduced mechanisms for the recognition and transfer of ECTS credits earned abroad. However, there are still challenges with the recognition of staff mobility achievement within universities. The number of courses taught in English remains small, which hinders the involvement of international students in Erasmus+ credit mobility.
- CBHE projects face various **administrative and management challenges** due to different rules and regulations applicable in different countries. This is particularly true for tendering procedures. On average, one third of the CBHE grant is foreseen for the purchase of equipment and complications and delays in the tendering procedures generate significant implementation problems for projects. Sometimes, equipment will only be available at the very end of the

project duration. In particular, the **mandatory registration of the project grants** poses real challenges in Azerbaijan, Belarus and Ukraine and hinders the proper implementation of EU funded projects. As a matter of fact, partners cannot access the grant money or launch the equipment purchase before the heavy and lengthy registration procedure is completed. This causes substantial delays for institutions willing to participate in Erasmus+ programme,

- The ability to **reach out beyond the initial partnership** needs to be further developed and should become a key priority for the projects. Intensive dissemination of project outcomes and results during and after the project funding period plays an important role. Excellent results should be more highly valued and shared with other HEIs working in the same field and facing the same challenges.
- The CBHE action has a large number of **recurrent beneficiaries**, both institutions and individuals. In the long term, this leads to a **lack of innovative and creative project ideas** (and few new collaborations) and reduces the impact of the CBHE action in the Region.
- Proper **involvement of decision makers and national authorities** (especially for Structural Projects) is lacking for many projects, but the reasons behind this vary from country to country. While the Ukrainian ministry's involvement has improved drastically over the last few years, the political instability in Moldova means that governmental support is sporadic and can shift during the project's lifetime. On the contrary, Belarus has a very stable government, but is showing reluctance both to implement the Bologna principles and to increase their openness towards foreign countries. In these countries, this is often concomitant with a lack of commitment on the part of the national authorities to follow-up and incorporate the CBHE projects and results into their national educational strategies.
- The large **maximum grant amount** of EUR 1 million sometimes leads to 'inflated' project budgets and lowers cost efficiency of project activities. In terms of staff costs, it was observed that individual professors and consultants worked on several CBHE projects in parallel, thus incurring high staff costs. This kind of project 'monopolisation' by individuals is not desirable and leads to projects that are repetitive, and to suboptimal project results.
- The **sustainability of project results** is often not sufficiently addressed by the consortia. Newly developed programmes can be easily made sustainable once they are accredited and included in the portfolio of the HEIs, but it is much less straightforward for newly established structures or centres. Such structures need to be properly staffed, managed, and equipped, and require efficient and realistic business plans to ensure their financial viability in the long term.

6.2. Recommendations

The analysis of the 2015 and few 2016 CBHE projects together with the challenges identified suggest the following recommendations for changes and improvements:

- The action should focus more on **targeted structural change in the Partner Countries**. Efforts should be made to encourage the submission of more **Structural Projects**, to better integrate them and to bring them in line with the national priorities of Partner Countries for the development of their educational systems. The Ministries of Education play a critical role for the exploitation, upscaling and mainstreaming of CBHE project results. It is hence essential to show how these projects can support reforms in national higher education systems and policies in

order to win the Ministry's support. The **Erasmus+ Higher Education Reform Experts** (HEREs) have a lot of expertise and are actively involved into HE reforms since 2009. They can provide an invaluable source of guidance to the Ministry as well as to other public bodies.

- There is a need for more adequate monitoring and supervision mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability in **university performance**, the effectiveness of their programmes and the development of internal and external mechanism for quality assurance. In this regard, the effective functioning of the existing independent quality assurance agency of each EaP country should be ensured.
- Quality education should respond to labour market needs with the goal of encouraging a sense of **entrepreneurship** and improving the **employability of graduates**. The gap between higher education and the labour market needs particular institutional and national attention across the EaP. The EaP countries' education agendas should address the need for entrepreneurial skills and competences in programmes at all educational levels. Furthermore, the establishment of mechanisms to increase the integration of non-academic partners into the academic endeavour is critical to guaranteeing the relevance of new and updated study programmes for the labour market.
- Closer links between research and industry and between research and teaching should be encouraged in order to strengthen the **knowledge triangle**. In order to improve the national innovation systems, the quality of scientific research must improve and the university-industry collaboration in research and development (R&D) must be boosted. Cooperation projects in the area of tertiary education should be encouraged.
- **Internationalisation** of Higher Education Institutions should be prioritized and dialogue in this area should be promoted. Marketing and promotion of Higher Education Institutions globally needs further development and improvement. **Intra-regional mobility** of academics and students could be encouraged as a way to (i) foster academic exchanges in the Region, (ii) give international exposure to students having less opportunities to travel internationally, (iii) train university administrations on the management of incoming and outgoing mobilities, (iv) encourage the offer of courses in English, etc.
- More HEIs must **adopt a strategic approach** and focus their participation in the CBHE action on projects that are in line with their medium- and long-term priorities and development goals. This 'strategic interest' orientation will then lead to better support of the CBHE projects (e.g. by the international office and finance department), the exploitation of cooperative practices between projects implemented at the same HEI and above all to the sustainability of the projects after the end of their funding period.
- The **institutional capacity of Partner Country HEIs** to manage international projects needs to be further developed. Although there has been a positive evolution in terms of institutions taking over the coordination of CBHE projects, the Partner Country HEIs need more training and support to develop innovative project ideas, to submit competitive proposals and to ensure high quality in the implementation and management of international projects.
- The **participation of higher education institutions** which are **less involved** in the programme should be encouraged. The **diversity of HEIs** and individuals in the CBHE action needs to increase. The CBHE action focuses on high value projects and this favours experienced (often

recurrent) and large HEIs. The ‘entry barriers’ for smaller institutions and newcomers are high. One way to counterbalance this challenge would be to dedicate a share of the budget to smaller projects covering certain types of activities only (i.e. staff training activities, university professor exchanges, module updates, summer schools, etc.). However, such an approach is more labour-intensive to manage from EACEA, and would require the introduction of simplified funding modalities (e.g. lump sums) and simplified or external monitoring of project activities. Another way would be to oblige consortia to include less experienced HEIs in the project and to train them in international project management.

- The **involvement of some professors in several parallel projects** (as coordinators and/or partners) – which sees them benefiting from generous salary multiplications – needs to be reviewed as it undermines the quality of project outputs. The inclusion of more young academics in CBHE projects would provide them with opportunities for continuous professional development and career options, and contribute to the fight against brain drain. This is especially true in post-Soviet countries where the older generation of academics is particularly set in its old ways and reluctant to change.
- The **involvement of private businesses and relevant stakeholders** (e.g. Chambers of Commerce, professional associations, etc.) in CBHE projects needs to be increased when the connection to the world of work is important and students need relevant labour market skills. New approaches should be developed to ensure significant participation, both quantitatively and qualitatively, of companies active in the region. Mandatory involvement of non-academic partners could be envisaged, where appropriate. However, the involvement of consultancies, often acting as hidden coordinators behind one or several HEIs, should be strictly monitored and restricted in order to enable the effective development of the capacities of Partner Countries HEIs.
- **Administrative barriers should be removed** in order to ensure the smooth implementation of CBHE projects and boost EU cooperation in the Region. Due to their common Soviet past, EaP countries are all faced with heavy bureaucratic structures and procedures. EaP governments should take a series of measures to that end, e.g. lighter grant registration procedures (Azerbaijan, Belarus and Ukraine), tax-free equipment purchase, visa facilitation to ease student mobility, etc.).
- **Students, and student associations** should take part in CBHE projects (were relevant) from the very beginning. This would enrich project development and implementation and allow a better match between project outcomes and the student expectations and interests. This would also contribute to guaranteeing project sustainability, particularly for curriculum development projects.





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Erasmus+

Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) action

Regional Report Eastern Partnership Countries

Resume

This report is based on the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency's evaluation of the first final project reports of the first generation of CBHE projects selected for funding in 2015 and a few two-year projects from the second generation (2016). Altogether 138 projects were funded in 2015 and 88 finalised projects have submitted their final reports in 2019, among which 23 were implemented in the Eastern Partnership Region.