

HERAS+

Higher Education, Research and Applied Science Plus (Kosovo)

Guidelines for Programmatic Partnerships

1. General Information on the Project and Overall Objective

The project Higher Education Research and Applied Science Plus (HERAS+) aims at a more competitive and diversified public higher education and research sector in Kosovo in line with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), European Research Area (ERA) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 and 9 related to quality assurance, economy and labour market relevance, international cooperation and the Social Dimension of higher education. It contributes to a higher education and research system in Kosovo that is better governed, more international, coherent, effective and efficient, fostering students' employability and the third mission of universities. HERAS + aims to reach the following outputs:

- At the Policy level, MES is enabled to effectively develop and implement policies along European standards in HE and research adapted to the national context. KAA has satisfactorily addressed and implemented key recommendations from the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (ENQA);
- At the University level, strategic plans of public universities are reviewed, developed, and decision-making processes are based on these strategies and better contribute to a competitive HE sector as well as to economic, social and cultural development of Kosovo (in line with the 3rd mission of universities);
- At the research level, Kosovo has further advanced the quality of its research capacities and the internationalization / Europeanisation of its higher education and research system.

The target groups of the project are the Ministry for Education and Science (MES) as the main responsible institution for Education and research in Kosovo, the Strategic Planning Office (SPO), the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA), public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Kosovo as well as research organizations, individual academic staff (PhD and PostDoc staff), students including from underrepresented groups (such as Roma and other minorities).

The three-year project “HERAS+ – Higher Education, Research and Applied Science Plus” is being implemented from June 2020 – May 2023. As part of its outputs it aims to develop and implement five programmatic partnerships (PPs) between Kosovan and Austrian public institutions in the field of Higher Education along four focus areas: fostering 1) labor market relevance, 2) the Social Dimension of HE and 3) the implementation of a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) in HE and 4) the implementation of the European Standard Guidelines for quality assurance (ESGs).

The project is funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA), and co-financed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Kosovo (MES). HERAS+ is implemented by a highly experienced Austrian consortium represented by World University Service Austria (WUS Austria, lead partner), the Center for Social Innovation (ZSI) and the Austrian Agency for International Mobility and Cooperation in Education, Science and Research (OeAD).

2. Programmatic Partnerships

The development and implementation of Programmatic Partnerships supports partnerships between public Higher Education Institutions in Kosovo and Austria as well as between Accreditation Agencies and National Qualification Framework Agencies from Kosovo and Austria. Proposals need to contribute to one of the five National Research Programme (NRP) priority fields:¹ Environment; Energy and Natural Resources; Agricultural Production and Food Safety; Medical Research, Social and Economic Sciences; Linguistics; Historic and Cultural Studies and can encompass a variety of jointly implemented activities. In addition, the applications should contribute to the implementation of other strategic documents related to Kosovo’s development documents/plans with focus on higher education such as the [Kosovo Education Strategic Plan \(KESP\)](#), the [National Development Strategy \(NDS\)](#), [Standards and guidelines for quality assurance \(ESGs\)](#) and the [Kosovo Economic Reform Plan \(ERP\)](#).

Within HERAS+, a total of five programmatic partnerships will be supported at public universities and/or the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) and the National Qualification Framework Agency in Kosovo. All partnerships have to include at least one Austrian partner institution.

Public universities from Kosovo, KAA and the National Qualification Framework Agency are invited to approach Austrian HEIs and/or the Accreditation Agency/National Qualification Framework Agency to jointly apply for a Programmatic Partnership. Detailed project applications are prepared by the project

¹ The National Research Program of the Republic of Kosovo (NRP, 2010). Available from: http://www.masht-gov.net/advCms/documents/NRP_FINAL_%20English.pdf.

partners (Austrian and Kosovan institutions in the field of higher education). WUS Austria will check the formal eligibility of the applications. All eligible applications will be reviewed by two independent experts. Based on the results of the scores, the Selection Board (SB)² will make a final decision regarding financing of Programmatic Partnership projects.

2.1 Priority fields, focus areas and cross-cutting topics

A) Priority fields

Please note that projects dealing with the following NRP (National Research Programme) priority areas can be supported: All proposed activities should be related to the NRP priority areas as listed below:

- (1) Environment, Energy and Natural Resources;
- (2) Agricultural Production and Food Safety;
- (3) Medical Research;
- (4) Social and Economic Sciences;
- (5) Linguistics, Historic and Cultural Studies.

In addition, the applications should contribute to the implementation of other strategic documents related to Kosovo's development documents/plans with focus on higher education such as the [Kosovo Education Strategic Plan \(KESP\)](#), the [National Development Strategy \(NDS\)](#), [Standards and guidelines for quality assurance \(ESGs\)](#) and the [Kosovo Economic Reform Plan \(ERP\)](#).

B) Focus areas of the HERAS+ project

IN ADDITION to the priority fields and as outlined under section 1 of these guidelines, proposals need to contribute to *at least* one of the following four focus areas: Fostering of 1) labor market relevance, 2) the Social Dimension of HE and 3) the implementation of a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) in HE and 4) the implementation of the European Standard Guidelines for quality assurance (ESGs).

² The SB is an Ad-hoc body established by the HERAS+ with an aim at making the final decision with regard to awarding grants. The SB takes into consideration the technical eligibility, independent reviews, the horizontal matters as well as geographical outreach of the received applications. For further information on members of the Selection Board and the selection procedure, see section 5.

Labour market relevance

In order to enhance labour market relevance and to increase the employability of university graduates, applied study program approaches (e.g. labour market relevance of curricula, practice orientation, cooperation with the industry and similar) can be supported within this funding scheme. Among others, such initiatives may aim at improving the link between the higher education sector and industry, quality assurance for enhanced employability and promoting more practice oriented higher education in Kosovo.

The Social Dimension of Higher Education

Proposals under this grant may also seek to contribute to the goals set by the Social Dimension of Higher Education of the Bologna Process. This may include different measures to improve access and completion of higher education for underrepresented and vulnerable groups in order for students to be able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. Among others, this may also include research projects targeting and promoting female researchers or the setup of different institutional mechanisms and strategies.

Human Rights-Based Approach

In line with the third focus area, this call is also open for proposals that aim at strengthening human rights in different dimensions of higher education – including teaching, research or by mainstreaming a HRBA in the institutional set-up and quality assurance mechanisms of HEIs. This may include the incorporation of human rights in curricula, human rights as a research topic or the reflection of human rights in different HEI strategies.

Please note that in line with the project requirements, at least 1 programmatic partnership is earmarked for a project that has human rights and/or gender equality as main objective.

Implementation of the European Standard Guidelines for quality assurance (ESGs)

In addition, the projects that are eligible should contribute to the implementation of the ESGs for quality assurance in higher education. In 2018 respectively in 2019, the Kosovo Accreditation Agency has been excluded from the European Quality Assurance Registry (EQAR) as well as from the European Association

for Quality Assurance (ENQA) in HE due to inconsistency of the implementation of the ESGs which are one of the preconditions of being member in those associations.

C) Cross-cutting topics

Gender equality and equal opportunities are cross-cutting topics under this call and need to be reflected as required in the application form. Each applicant will be requested to outline how the proposed programmatic partnership will contribute to promote gender equality and equal opportunities. In this regard, a gender and vulnerability perspective needs to be incorporated into each application, addressing the following key questions:

- **Composition of the project team:** Please describe the composition of the project team and outline to what extent men/women, young academics and other persons from vulnerable groups (e.g. from minorities, PWDs etc.) will be represented in the team.
- **Use of disaggregated data:** Please outline how the proposed programmatic partnership plans to incorporate data disaggregated according to sex and other vulnerable groups.
- **Specific needs of women and persons from vulnerable/underrepresented groups (e.g. PWDs, minority groups, young researchers etc.):** Please briefly outline specific needs of women and persons from vulnerable/underrepresented groups in the thematic area the proposed programmatic partnership seeks to address and ways in which the programmatic partnership will respond to these needs.

Possible areas of cooperation: The projects can encompass one or more of the activities listed below. Other activities in line with the basic principles of the project HERAS+ and the programmatic partnerships can be proposed by the partners.

- Curriculum development;
- Enhancing of research conditions and capacities on an institutional level including selected research activities (please note: for projects being solely research projects a separate Research Call will be available in a given timeframe during the project implementation period);
- Issues related to the Bologna Process (including also aspects related to the Social Dimension of Higher Education);
- Strengthening HRBA, the Social dimension of higher education and gender equality in curricula, teaching and research;

- Linking Higher Education and economy; issues related to the employability of graduates
- Quality assurance in higher education;
- Workshops on specific topics for students and staff;
- Handling of examinations and staff exchange;
- Other topics in line with basic principles of the partnership idea (see below).

Projects funded as Programmatic Partnerships under HigherKOS and HERAS can apply for an Advanced Programmatic Partnership under HERAS+. For applications for advanced Programmatic Partnerships, a well-grounded justification is required which outlines how the continuation builds upon the success of the previous partnerships. The amount granted is the same for all awarded PP projects.

2.2. Basic Principles

The strengthening of capacities in higher education, research and management supports poverty reduction and contributes to the achievement of development goals according to the national/regional strategies of Kosovo and the overall objectives of the ADC. Programmatic partnerships funds well-designed collaborative and innovative projects, and applied study program approaches responding to the identified needs and demands in Kosovo and its higher education institutions. Emphasis will be also put on specific needs of students from underrepresented and vulnerable groups (e.g. from minority groups, PWDs, women etc.) in line with the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the Bologna Process and on the implementation of a human rights-based approach in different aspects of higher education.

The participatory approach of programmatic partnerships means that project proposals should be planned and worked out jointly by the cooperating institutions, based on a multi-stakeholder approach. At least two institutions – one from Kosovo and one from Austria – must be involved in the partnership. The coordinating institution must be an Austrian partner institution. The coordinating institution will sign the contract and be responsible for reporting and accounting.

If the proposed activities require the involvement of more than two partners in order to be implemented and realized successfully, this is possible, too. This has to be well stipulated and described in the project proposal. Programmatic partnerships follow an open-minded concept of knowledge, science and empirical research. Programmatic partnerships are not interested in one-sided “knowledge transfer” but should be based on mutual learning of all partners from both countries. Programmatic partnerships

strictly follow a demand-driven approach through which the demand has to be defined by the partners from Kosovo, and a participatory approach in education and research. Respect of different methodological and empirical approaches, of different epistemological and cultural systems, of different modes of interaction and interpretation of results – regarding the impact on the addressed target groups/countries in particular – should be seen as preconditions for the aimed participatory and demand-driven partnerships to be realized on an equal basis.

In order to realize the overall objective, programmatic partnerships follow **five basic principles**:

- Participatory approach
- A concept of culturally open-minded knowledge
- Practically- and empirically-oriented approach
- Promotion of equal opportunities and the Social Dimension of higher education³
- “Bottom-up” and demand-driven approach

Furthermore, the following **requirements** regarding the content are seen as relevant for approving the programmatic partnerships:

- Demand-driven approach: The proposed activities are based on institutional and societal needs in Kosovo and also take into account specific needs of vulnerable and underrepresented groups.
- Relevance of the partnership for development in Kosovo, specifically in relation to the thematic focus of the partnership project.
- Gender equality and equal opportunities are systematically reflected and incorporated in the project plan.
- Professional expertise and stated interest in relation to the thematic focus and sufficient resources of the partners to implement the proposed partnership actions.
- Well-balanced ownership between the partners.
- Result orientation and sustainability.

³ The concept of the Social Dimension of higher education was first developed within the Bologna Process in the Prague Communiqué of 2001 and, broadly speaking, refers to the goal of removing inequalities in access to higher education in the EAHEA: The student body entering, participating in and completing higher education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations.

2.3. Expected results

The programmatic partnership shall strengthen the capacities of the partner institutions in higher education, research and management. In order to unite scientific questions with specific needs of Kosovo, the partners have to embed a developmental approach in the theoretical, methodological and empirical design of the proposed activities. Development issues and important development-oriented academic questions related to the thematic focus of the program will be brought together with educational and institutional demands to improve academic capacities as well as skills in management. Ownership must be well balanced between the concerned partners, and the above outlined cross-cutting topics must be systematically integrated in the project design

The expected results can be described on different levels:

Institutionally

- The partnership strengthens the management and the teaching/educational skills and capacities of the scientific institution in Kosovo.
- The partnership strengthens and/or establishes a sustainable cooperation between the Kosovan and Austrian academic institution(s) and leads to follow-up projects and educational activities.
- The partnership empowers female and young academics.
- The partnership has a positive impact on and addresses specific needs of (prospective) students from marginalized groups in order to enhance their access to and participation in higher education without obstacles related to their social, cultural and economic background.
- The capacity development measures enhance the quality at higher education institutions in Kosovo.

Educationally, scientifically

- Innovative curricula, teaching methods and other educational activities that are in line with the thematic focus of the program are introduced to improve the academic standard of the partner institutions.

- Short-term exchange of lecturers and students (Kosovo-Austria, Austria-Kosovo) is realized
- The partnership improves the linkage between the HEI and the labour market and increases the employability of graduates.
- The partnership contributes to an increased integration of partners in international scientific Networks.
- The dissemination and utilization of findings and results are shared within other institutions and lead to further activities: follow-ups, publications, conferences, teaching, curricula and are of policy use for national or regional development activities.
- The partnership has a positive influence and raised awareness regarding the Kosovo's obligations in the field of human rights including the right to education.
- The partnership contributes to the applicability of research results in practice.

2.4 Budget / Financed cost and project duration

The requested grant should not exceed the amount of 40,000 EUR, accounting for a project period of max. 2 years and depending on real cost calculation.

Use the attached file Timetable and Budget for a presentation of the detailed project budget.

Please refer to **Guidelines for the Budget and Financial Report** for further information on eligible costs and financial reporting.

3. Evaluation criteria and procedures

3.1 Thematic and Organisational Dimensions

Applications will be approved based on how well they integrate and demonstrate the ability to implement the following dimensions: (1) project design and substantive quality, (2) project management and the capacity of the consortium, (3) applicability of project results and sustainability, (4) cost efficiency. The evaluation criteria listed below should assist both, the public higher education institutions writing the project proposals and the external evaluators as an evaluation guideline.

Thematic and/or organizational dimensions	Specification / Description Evaluation grid
<p>1. Project design and substantive quality (problem oriented, relevant)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the proposed action in line with the national research priorities? - Are the proposed activities chosen and designed in a way that enables reaching the set objectives, impacts and indicators? - Does the project description clearly outline the benefit of the project: are project objectives and its envisioned impact in line with the needs of the partner(s) in Kosovo? Do they reflect national priorities and are they in line with the focus areas for this call? Is this well argued in the project description (challenges to be addressed, its context, and background, description of local, institutional and scientific needs in Kosovo)? Is the motivation to implement the project given by both Kosovan and Austrian partners? Is the project approach innovative in terms of theoretical, interdisciplinary, methodological/empirical and educational aspects? - Are the expected project results realistic and to be reached with proposed design of the project? Are the indicators of progress measurable and verifiable? Are the beneficiaries clearly defined? - Is the project methodology designed in line with the expected results? Are capacity development activities foreseen and well designed? - Are the cross-cutting topics integrated into the project design? To which extent are relevant aspects and dimensions of gender equality and equal opportunities addressed? - Academic quality of project objectives and of capacity development measures (i.e. education, research and/or management).
<p>2. Project management and capacity of the partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the selection of partners fit the set objectives? Has there been any previous cooperation to build upon in this partnership? Are the roles of partners clearly defined/set out? - Do the project partners have sufficient capacities for project implementation? Does the project team integrate young academic staff, and/or women = added value? (and attached CVs)?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the project management clearly defined, enabling participatory distribution of tasks and responsibilities and decision making? Does it lead to shared ownership? Is the project monitoring plan in place and appropriate? Does the project description contain a risk analysis and measures to mitigate the risks? - Is the time plan realistic and well elaborated? (Attachment Time table and budget)
<p>3. Applicability of project results and sustainability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are the expected results applicable in practice? How will it be ensured that the project results will reach the target group and be used by it? How is dissemination and utilization of expected findings and results planned? (spin-offs, follow-ups, publications, conferences, teaching, curricula, exchange of lecturers, etc.) - Does the project include measures that assure that the project results will continue existing after the end of the project? How do the partners plan to make their cooperation sustainable beyond the funding period? - How do partners plan to ensure project dissemination among the wider academic community?
<p>4. Cost efficiency (2.4. and the Timetable and Budget Sheet)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the budget cost efficient? Does it efficiently use the project means to reach the objectives of the project? - Is the budget well balanced and the allocation between the partners appropriate? - If applicable, is the usage of the equipment well justified? - How relevant are the contributions of the partners?

3.2 Cross-Cutting Topics

In accordance with the principles of the Austrian Development Cooperation the project incorporates a vulnerability perspective. It seeks to apply a human right based approach throughout the project and to address specific needs of students from marginalized groups in line with the Social Dimension of the Bologna Process which also **constitute important aspects of the partnership projects**. Funded partnership

projects are required to mainstream a gender and vulnerability perspective into the respective implementation plans, in line with the above outlined guiding questions (see section 2.1.) and the detailed application form. The following documents published by the ADC refer to the importance of these topics for development and reduction of poverty (to obtain detailed information please refer to the following documents of the ADC):

- **GENDER EQUALITY:**

ADC - Gender equality and empowerment of women - Policy document

(http://www.entwicklung.at/uploads/media/PD_Gender_Equality_19032010_Web.pdf)

- **THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS:**

(<http://www.ehea.info/srticle-details.aspx?Articleid=12>)

Partnership projects will also be evaluated by how well they integrate these cross-cutting topics.

3.3. Quality Criteria of the Programmatic Partnership

- All projects must be fully in line with the guidelines and criteria for programmatic partnerships elaborated in this document.
- The partnership projects need to outline how they contribute to the realization of cross cutting topics (equal opportunities, social dimension of higher education (i.e. support to students from marginalized groups). Please refer to Chapter 3.2. for further information on cross cutting topics.

4. Evaluation Criteria and Procedures

All documents required for submission have to be in **English** and have to be submitted via E-mail (electronic version) to the addresses listed below.

Required documents

Application form

Time table and budget sheet for partnerships

CVs of project coordinators and further team members

Letter of intent from the leading management of all partner institutions

Address for submission by **electronic mail**:

fitore.fazliu@wus-austria.org and heras@wus-austria.org

Deadline for submission:

25 March 2021

4.1 Timetable

Activity	Deadline
Call for proposals	24 November 2020
Deadline for submissions	25 Mach 2021
Technical evaluation of the project description and budget	April/May 2021
Expert reviews	April/May 2021
Selection Board	June 2021
Information and contracting	June 2021
Start of the programmatic partnerships	June 2021
Mid-term report (including financial report) by project partners	2 weeks after the first half of project implementation
Final project report (including financial report) by beneficiaries	2 weeks after the end of project implementation

4.2 Information

The main item of the information campaign will be an information session during the kick-off meeting of the HERAS+ project on 25 November 2020 in Prishtina. The programmatic partnership call will be announced on the project website, MES website, and the website of the WUS Austria. WUS Austria will offer personal information and counselling for all prospective applicants.

Contact person:

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5. Selection procedure

1) The WUS Austria checks the formal eligibility of the applications:

- complete and correct applications and documents
- eligibility criteria
- timeframe and budget

2) Experts reviews

All eligible applications will be reviewed by two experts. The expert team should be gender balanced.

3) Final decision by the Selection Board (based on the result of the score)

Members of the Selection Board (it will be tried to have a gender balanced board):

- ADA: Head of Selection Board
- MEST representative for HERAS+ project
- WUS Austria
- OeAD-GmbH / Österreichischer Austauschdienst

The Selection Board will aim at reaching a balanced portfolio of grants, taking into account the objectives of the call, the quality of the applications and the experts review.

Aspects that may be decisive when a choice between equally scored applications needs to be made:

- Advanced Programmatic Partnerships with a well grounded justification on the continuation.
- Applied study program approaches.
- Extent to which a gender and a vulnerability perspective is mainstreamed into programmatic partnerships (e.g. promotion of gender-relevant research topics).
- Extent to which aspects related to the Social Dimension of Higher Education of the Bologna Process are promoted and fostered within programmatic partnerships.

The Selection Board will formally approve the decisions and advice WUS Austria to start the contracting process.