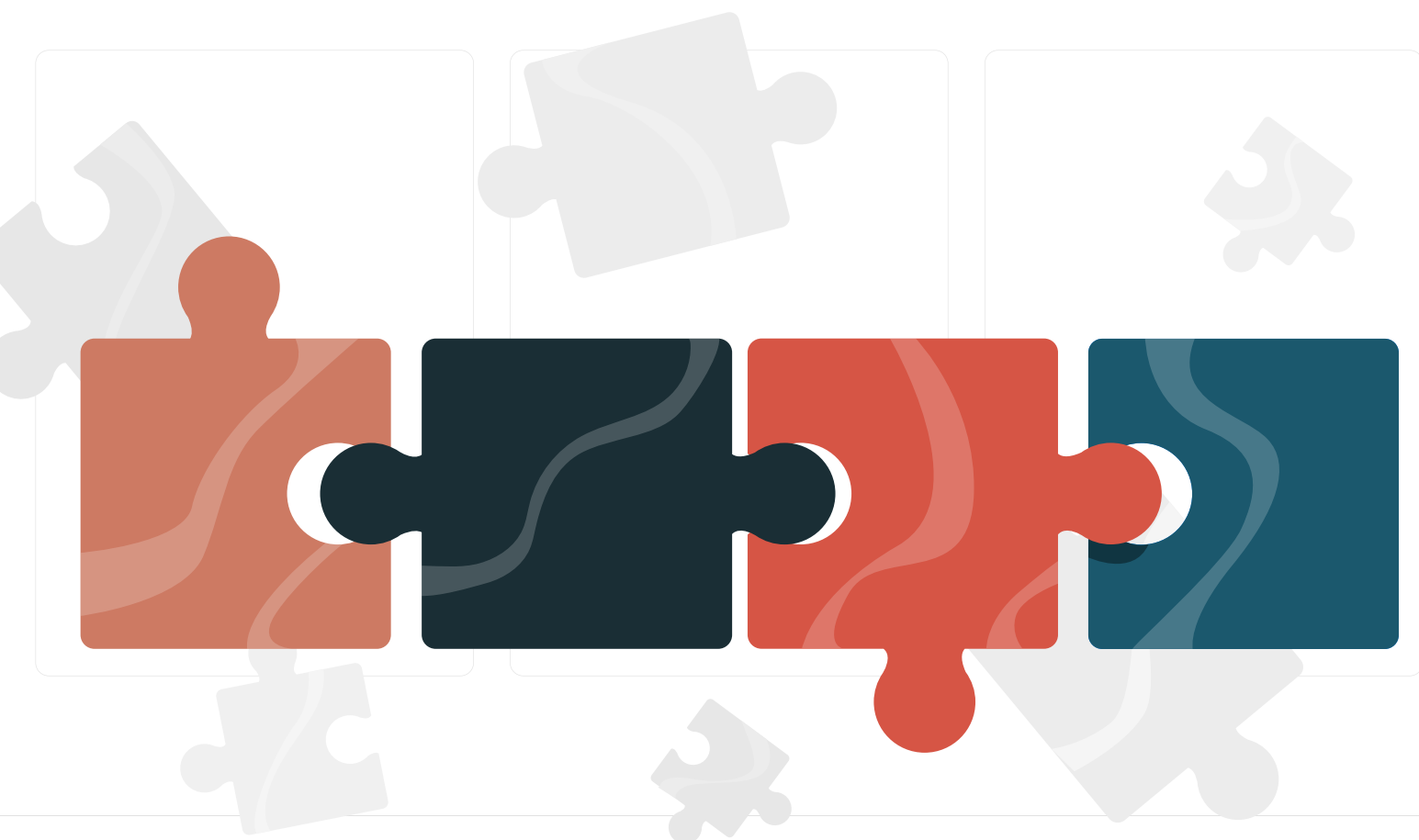


Promoting Equality, Fairness and Inclusion in Higher Education. The Social Dimension Small Grant Scheme.



Dear Reader,

It is our true pleasure to share with you this brochure, introducing once more 10 small projects with remarkable contributions from students, NGOs and university actors – aimed at strengthening the Social Dimension of Higher Education of the Bologna Process in Kosovo. The projects were designed by groups of students, NGOs and university actors and implemented between April 2022 and February 2023 within the HERAS Plus project (“Higher Education, Research and Applied Science Plus” <https://www.heraskosovo.org/>).

After the extremely successful implementation and positive feedback received on the Social Dimension Small Grant Scheme under the HERAS project (2016-2019), we were very glad to have the opportunity to upscale and launch this grant scheme again under the HERAS Plus project.

As reiterated in the Paris Communiqué (2018), the student body entering, participating and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of the populations. This comes with a need for appropriate conditions for students so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. This is also in line with international human rights commitments on the right to education: According to the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the right to education includes an obligation to develop equitable access to higher education for all.

In the last decade the number of tertiary students in Kosovo has tripled from 28,832 in 2004/2005 to over 95.335 in 2020/2021. During the same period there has been a considerable increase in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). In 2022, the KAA accredited 9 public HEIs and 12 private HEIs. An increase of HEIs, however, does not automatically translate into effective and equal access to education for all, including for persons from vulnerable and marginalized groups. As a matter of fact, structural barriers such as poverty, entrenched stereotypes or indirect discrimination can potentially hamper effective access to education for all. Against this background and recognizing the importance of the Social Dimension of Higher Education in Kosovo, HERAS has designed the Social Dimension small grant scheme, inviting students, NGOs and universities to come up with suggestions, offering different solutions to existing challenges. Given its success, this scheme was upscaled during the HERAS Plus project. We cordially invite you to learn more about the initiatives implemented and described in this brochure and would also like to use this opportunity to thank all grantees for their tremendous motivation, tireless efforts and the excellent cooperation! We hope that this brochure can serve as an inspiration on how to further strengthen access, participation and successful completion of higher education for all – including groups that are underrepresented in society.

Many steps need to be taken to reach a goal – but as can be seen also from the second round of the Social Dimension Small Grant Scheme - small steps can indeed make a difference to people!

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Louise Sperl
HERAS Plus Expert

Jeta Rexha
Project Assistant
HERAS Plus Project Team

Prishtina/Graz, June 2023

¹ HERAS Plus supports seven public universities in Prishtina, Peja, Prizren, Gjilan, Ferizaj, Gjakova and Mitrovica (South),

² Kosovo Agency of Statistics. (2022). Public Universities Data Set - Series 2018-2021. Prishtina. Retrieved from https://askdata.rks-gov.net/pxweb/sq/ASKdata/ASKdata_Education/.

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INTRODUCTION - The HERAS Plus Project

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 labor 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.

The three-year project “HERAS+ – Higher Education Research and Applied Science Plus” is being implemented from 2020 to 2023. The project 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.

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

THE PROJECT ADDRESSES THE FOLLOWING THREE LEVELS:

- | **Policy level** – MESTI 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). The systematic focus of this level will shape and further develop a regulatory framework with corresponding mechanisms/instruments that directly contribute to a higher education and research system in Kosovo that is more coherent, effective and efficient, fostering students' employability and the third mission of universities.
- | **Research Level** – Kosovo has further advanced the quality of its research capacities and the internationalization / Europeanisation of its higher education and research system. The systematic focus of this level will be contributing to a research system in Kosovo that is more coherent, effective and efficient and internationalized. This will also contribute to enhanced research capacities at the individual level and thus strengthen the profile and employability of researchers/academics.
- | **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 sectors well as to economic, social and cultural development of Kosovo (in line with the 3rd mission of universities).The systematic focus of this level will be shaping and further enhancing the institutional framework and effective functioning and relevance of HEIs through the implementation of improved strategies, complemented by programmatic partnerships and targeted measures to promote higher education reforms, strong leadership of the public universities, applied study approaches as well as the Social Dimension of Higher Education. These measures will contribute to a higher education and research system in Kosovo that is more coherent, effective and efficient, fostering students' employability and the third mission of universities.

Background: The Social Dimension (SD) Or Higher Education

As stressed by the EHEA, Higher education is considered as an essential element for the empowerment of individuals and societies. The Social Dimension, as part of such a process, has the potential to promote equality, fairness and inclusion in higher education, considering such action is focused on the equity and wellbeing concepts.

The concept of the Social Dimension (SD) of Higher Education was first developed within the Bologna Process in the Prague Communiqué of 2001. It refers to the goal of removing inequalities when it comes to access, participation and completion of higher education in the European Area of Higher Education (EHEA).

The London Communiqué of 2007 describes the goal of the Social Dimension as follows:

"We share the societal aspiration that the student body entering, participating in and completing higher Education at all levels should reflect the diversity of our populations. We reaffirm the importance of students being able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. We therefore continue our efforts to provide adequate student services, create more flexible learning pathways into and within higher education, and to widen participation at all levels on the basis of equal opportunity."

This was also reiterated in the Paris Communiqué (2018). In the Yerevan Communiqué 2015 Ministers further agreed to undertake to widen participation in higher education and support institutions that provide relevant learning activities in appropriate contexts for different types of learners, including lifelong learning.

As for the Social Dimension of Higher Education (HE) in Kosovo, focus group interviews (FGIs) on the Social Dimension (SD) of the Bologna Process were conducted in Pristina between March 11-13, 2015. The participants in the FGIs included higher education teaching staff, university management, education authorities, CSOs and students from Bosniak, Roma and Turkish communities. Participants concluded that the following groups are considered marginalized or underrepresented when it comes to higher education in Kosovo:

- Persons with lower socio-economic background including from rural areas;
- Minorities including from the Bosniak, Roma, Egyptian, Ashkali and Turkish communities;
- Returning migrants;
- Students with a disability;
- Non-traditional students (mature students, part-time students).

Both HERAS and HERAS Plus have provided targeted support to facilitate the implementation of the Social Dimension in Kosovo in line with the findings from the above-mentioned report – most importantly through the *Social Dimension Small Grant Scheme*. We are glad to introduce the projects implemented under HERAS Plus in this brochure.

³ For more information see <https://www.ehea.info/page-social-dimension>.

⁴ The full report can be found under

https://wusaustria.org/files/docs/Publica_ons/Report%20Social%20Dimension%20Kosovo%20final%2014072015.pdf

Research on the Enrollment of students from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Higher Education

Implemented by Muhamed Elshani and Shkendije Shabanaj students, University "Ukshin Hoti" Prizren

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are considered to be among the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups in Kosovo. These communities face significant social, economic, and educational challenges that prevent them from accessing higher education. The goal of the project was to address these challenges and to increase the enrollment of students from these communities at the University of Prizren, one of the main public universities in Kosovo.

The project aimed to increase access to higher education for these communities by identifying and addressing the barriers they face in pursuing higher education. Some of these barriers include financial constraints, lack of information about available resources and support as well as discrimination.

To this end, the project team carried out a number of different activities: A database of high school graduates from these communities was created and informative sessions for potential students on the university's offerings and the application process based on affirmative measures/quotas were organized. This was preceded by consultations with the university Rector. Furthermore, the project successfully monitored the student registration process, and conducted research on the challenges and problems faced by these communities in the course of this process.

The team also collected legal information on the quota system and produced a brochure for distribution to potential partner schools, organizations, and students to promote access to higher education for marginalized communities and to shed light on existing challenges they face.

"Several activities have been developed within the project, but it is worth highlighting the informative meetings with the students about the information about the use of the quotas reserved on the basis of affirmative measures based on the Administrative Instruction 09/2016 and the advocacy for registration, which as a result of this activity was the enrollment of some students from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities at the University of Prizren."

Project team member



Promotion of Gender Equality and War against Bullying in Roma, Ashkali and Roma Communities

Implemented by Dafina Maxhuni and Basri Oruqaj, students at the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina"

The objective of the project was to promote equal opportunities and to combat incidents of discrimination and bullying against Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the municipalities of Fushë Kosovë, South Mitrovica, and Prizren. The project team aimed to increase the awareness on the importance of education and included lectures on gender equality and bullying for primary and high school students, accompanied by an informative video and the distribution of brochures. The project team also focused on collecting information and raising awareness on the legal rights of community members, including on gender equality and the right to be free from gender discrimination.

The above-mentioned lectures were conducted for primary and high school students in the municipalities of Fushë Kosovë, South Mitrovica, and Prizren and aimed to encourage students to challenge gender stereotypes and promote equality in their daily lives. They provided students with tools to combat discrimination and bullying and addressed topics such as the importance of equal opportunities, the role of gender stereotypes, and ways in which gender inequality can lead to discrimination and bullying. The lectures on bullying aimed to help students in identifying different forms of bullying, such as physical, verbal, and cyberbullying, and to understand the negative impact it can have on individuals and communities. Students were also provided with strategies on how to prevent and respond to bullying in their schools and communities.



The lectures were accompanied by an informative video that further explained the topics and provided real-life examples of gender inequalities and bullying. Additionally, the project team distributed brochures to the students that contained information on their legal rights and resources for reporting on cases of discrimination and bullying. Overall, lectures, video, and brochures contributed to a comprehensive understanding of gender equality and bullying and empowered students to become active in combating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities.



Additionally, the project team presented their work at a workshop organized by HERAS Plus on Gender Equality in Higher Education in Kosovo on 11 October 2022. During the workshop, the student project members had the opportunity to engage with academics and civil society members specialized in the field of gender equality in higher education.

Student Support and Development Service

Implemented by the Faculty of Education, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina"

The Student Support and Development Service (SSDS) is a collaborative effort of professors, teaching assistants, and students from the Faculty of Education. The center has been founded based on principles of inclusivity and diversity, and aims to create an environment where students from marginalized communities can receive support and guidance to overcome personal and academic challenges. The professors and teaching assistants involved in the SSDS are committed to providing students with the necessary tools and skills to succeed in their studies. The center is also staffed by senior students from the MA programs who serve as peer counselors, mentored and supervised by academic staff.

The SSDS can be found by students who wish to consult it on the ground floor of the Faculty of Education. It aims to equip students, especially those from marginalized communities, with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools to overcome personal and academic challenges, complete higher education studies, and become contributing members of society. The center serves as a hub for strengthening the participation of underrepresented students and offers services to support new students in the faculty. The SSDS offers a wide range of services, including individual and group counseling, monthly developmental workshops, administrative and academic support, and initiatives designed to improve students' overall well-being, career prospects, academic performance, and personal satisfaction. In addition, the center provides support to students in conducting research on different school and community-related phenomena for their final thesis preparation.

The services provided by the SSDS are offered on-site, via phone, and through social media. The center also organizes informative webinars for students on available support services, as well as professional webinars for study-related issues. The SSDS has already organized 8 developmental workshops aimed at supporting students to reach their educational goals, where peer-to-peer groups led by students of the Faculty of Education have provided volunteer services to the new generation of students. The services are provided by peer counselors, who are senior students of MA programs mentored and supervised by academic staff.

"Student life and academic learning can be very difficult for marginalized groups in Kosovo. Peer support and counseling are therefore very important to support students to adapt to the academic reality and make a significant mark in their quest to complete higher education. Every one of us has the right to develop to our full potential and pursue our dreams, and the center is here to make it happen."

Project team member



Students, University and Dealing with Past Processes in Kosovo

Implemented by the Human Rights Center of University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina"

This project - implemented by the Human Rights Center, a unit at the Faculty of Law - aimed at promoting the importance of transitional justice and peace building education among university students in Kosovo. In the course of the project, a number of lectures and workshops were delivered on transitional justice, with participation of professors from the Faculty of Law and members of civil society organizations active in this field.

The project team developed a brochure on the importance of studying transitional justice, which was shared with other universities in Kosovo in both online and hard copy formats. The project resulted in an increased number of students interested in transitional justice processes, established new cooperations between participants from different backgrounds, and offered students the chance to discuss topics of interest with experts in the field and to share their ideas with their peers. Additionally, some participants showed interest in being engaged as interns at the Human Rights Center.



One of the goals of the project was also to inform students about a new master program in transitional justice being established by the Faculty of Law at University of Prishtina. As a result of the project, many students have shown interest in joining the program after finishing their bachelor studies. The workshops organized under this project were attended by students from the Faculty of Law and the Faculty of Philosophy.

"Through such a project, students from different fields and levels of study had the opportunity to be introduced to the multi-disciplinary approach that transitional justice promotes in dealing with the past".



"Such a project raised the interest of many student participants to further deepen their knowledge in the field of transitional justice - either through curricular courses or through extra-curricular ones when the latter are not available".

Project team members

Raising Awareness on the Inclusion of Marginalized Groups at University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”

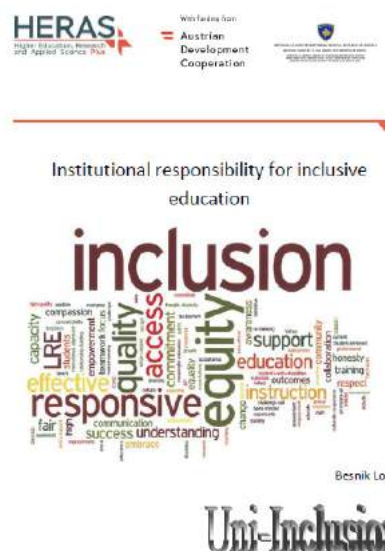
Implemented by the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina", Academic Development Office

Through this project, the Academic Development Office of University of Prishtina aimed to promote inclusion and to support academic success of all students at the University of Prishtina. The project also aimed to inform the development of policies and strategies by considering challenges faced by students from marginalized communities.

To raise awareness of issues related to the inclusion of marginalized groups, the project team organized a workshop with Handikos, a civil society organization focused on the rights of persons with disabilities. The workshop served as a platform to discuss challenges and ideas for improving access to education, services, literature, and career opportunities. One of the main obstacles seen for pursuing studies by persons with disabilities is the lack of infrastructure for accessing university premises. To gather a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that students face, the project team also conducted focus group discussions with students from marginalized communities, including students from lower socio-economic backgrounds as well as with female students. The project team also interviewed faculty administrators and staff to gain insights on the support services currently offered to students.

To raise awareness of the issues identified in the report, the project team organized several activities, such as workshops and panel discussions, with participation of students and faculty members. The project team also created informational materials, such as brochures and posters for distribution to students and faculty members.

The data collected from the focus groups and interviews were analyzed and presented in a research report. The report highlights the challenges that the target group faces, such as financial difficulties, lack of access to educational resources, and discrimination. The report also provides concrete suggestions on how the University of Prishtina can improve its services to promote inclusion and support the success of students from marginalized communities. The research report generated from the project will serve as a baseline document for developing other activities related to the inclusion of marginalized groups at UP. The report's recommendations and suggestions will be presented to the management of UP and integrated into the work plan and strategy of the Office for Academic Development in the coming years.



"The social dimension and the aspect of inclusion on the principle of equality are, and should be, part of every educational institution in Kosovo. This not only shows part of human sensitivity but is also an indicator of the quality of an Institution, and an indicator of democracy in the country."

Project team member

Equality through Education - Raising Awareness of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Implemented by University "Isa Boletini" Mitrovica (UIBM)

The project aimed to enhance the capacity of students and junior academic staff at UIBM, who are not studying law or practicing law, to understand the rights and legal obligations of persons with disabilities. To achieve this, the project team has developed a questionnaire to assess the current level of knowledge among academic staff and students about the rights of persons with disabilities. The project also promoted a more inclusive and participatory attitude towards community service related to disability issues.

The project was structured into three phases, namely the development of a questionnaire, workshops with students and junior academic staff, and the analysis of data followed by a roundtable discussion on the final findings. The University has benefited from this project through an increased capacity of academic staff and students to engage with the community and create a more inclusive environment for persons with disabilities.

Through the workshop and questionnaire, the project team has analyzed the data and organized a roundtable discussion to present their findings, which have led to the suggestion of establishing a database with relevant information for persons with disabilities. Additionally, the team has developed promotional materials, including a video, to raise awareness among the target group about their rights, the importance of higher education, and the value of equal treatment. The video aims to raise awareness about the importance of inclusion of marginalized groups, particularly persons with disabilities, in higher education. The video highlights key issues related to the rights of persons with disabilities and the challenges they face in accessing and participating in higher education. The video also showcases the activities and workshops conducted by the project team to increase the capacity of academic staff and students to understand the legal obligations and rights of persons with disabilities. By producing this video, the project team was able to promote their findings and recommendations to a wider audience and to encourage further collaboration with partners in addressing issues related to the inclusion of marginalized groups in higher education.

Ultimately, the project encouraged UIBM junior academic staff and students to update curricula, and to promote participation and inclusion on the long term, thus increasing innovation and inclusivity in universities, and to strengthen the link between universities and the communities they serve.



Increase Higher Education Opportunities through Equal Access to E-learning and Technology

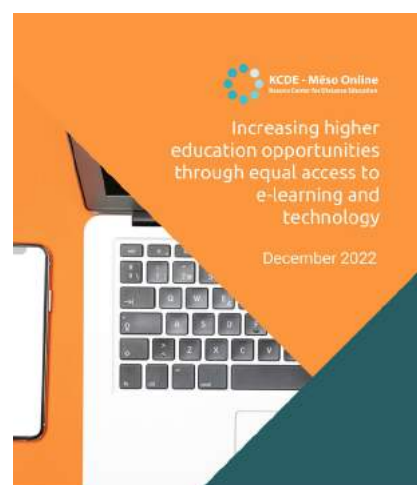
Implemented by the Kosova Center for Distance Education (KCDE)

The KCDE team has conducted extensive desk and field research to assess the current state of digital skills and competencies in higher education, as well as to identify the challenges faced in terms of accessibility, connectivity, and e-learning. The lack of technology inclusion in higher education in Kosovo has put students at a disadvantage when compared to their peers around the world, and the pandemic has served as a wake-up call to educators and policymakers alike. The KCDE project seeks to leverage this opportunity to ensure that e-learning provides possibilities for all youth, regardless of their background.

To achieve its overall goal of increasing higher education opportunities through equal access to e-learning and technology, the project has set specific objectives, including raising awareness and building community support for equal access in e-learning and technology and amplifying the voices of young people to act as allies for equal access to digital education.

The findings from the project are summarized in a report that assesses the existing needs of marginalized groups in accessing, participating, and completing higher education, with a special focus on gender perspectives. Through the research, the KCDE team has identified factors that have prevented some students from following online classes and has also implemented a process for tracking students who were not active during the COVID 19 outbreak. The team has noted the lack of online platforms in each municipality to showcase the number of students who were missing during the COVID 19 pandemic. The research conducted by KCDE has revealed various factors that hinder students from following online classes. These include the lack of access to reliable internet connection, inadequate technological infrastructure, and insufficient digital skills and competencies. The report highlights how these challenges disproportionately affect marginalized groups and limit their opportunities to access higher education.

To further engage students and promote awareness, the project team organized activities such as movie nights, where students from the Faculty of Education met with Avni Mustafa, a human rights activist and expert on Roma Inclusion. The goal of these activities was to build a community of support and allies for equal access to digital education, and to increase the opportunities for marginalized groups to access and benefit from higher education.



Peer to Peer (P2P) Mentoring Program

Implemented by the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina", Academic Development Office

The "Peer to Peer Mentoring Program" aims to address the issue of underrepresentation of marginalized communities in higher education, such as Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. The project aims to increase the enrollment of these communities in Kosovo's public universities by providing supportive orientation programs and promoting the benefits of higher education.

To achieve these goals, the project team organized three presentations/info sessions in high schools located in the municipalities of Ferizaj, Fushe Kosova, and Gjakova. The sessions aimed to equip students with information about the benefits of following higher education, the various possibilities of accessing university, and information about the P2P Mentoring Program.

To reach out to marginalized communities, the project team contacted focal points to identify potential students from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Overall, a total of 22 students participated in the info sessions, out of which 10 were from these communities.

The project team also implemented the P2P Mentoring Program, which aimed to provide support and guidance to high school graduates from marginalized communities who are interested in pursuing higher education through dedicated mentors. Eight mentors and 13 mentees were awarded for successfully completing the program, which aimed to provide a platform for mentees to gain insights and support in their transition to university life. Overall, the Peer to Peer project has successfully raised awareness among high school students from marginalized communities about the benefits of higher education, and provided supportive programs and resources to help them achieve their educational goals.



Building Psychological Capacities for Returning Migrants (BPCRN)

Implemented by the Psycho-Social and Medical Research Center

The primary objective of the project was to provide support to high school students who are returning migrants by helping them navigate the academic and social challenges they may face. The goal was to encourage these young students to continue their studies and to motivate them to pursue higher education. The project team conducted a thorough feasibility study to understand the difficulties that returning migrants may encounter when reintegrating into society.

To ensure maximum outreach, the project team disseminated information about project activities and the call for participation in counseling sessions through various social media platforms, including Facebook. The team also shared the information with Youth Assemblies and other organizations which work on similar projects with a large outreach.

As part of the project, the team produced a research report that highlights the challenges faced by returning migrants when reintegrating into society. The report was published on the organization's Facebook page, which helped to disseminate the findings to a wider audience. In the final stage of the project, educational psychologists conducted individual counseling sessions to support students with their academic qualification and reintegration status, based on their identified needs.

Overall, the project has been successful in providing support to returning migrant students, helping them to overcome academic and social challenges, and encouraging them to pursue higher education. The team's efforts to disseminate information about the project through social media platforms and collaboration with other organizations have also helped to increase awareness and to reach a wider audience.

“By investing in the education of returning migrants, Kosovo can not only strengthen its human capital and knowledge base, but also tap into the vast potential and expertise of those who have gained valuable experience abroad, ultimately paving the way towards a brighter and more prosperous future.”

Project team member



Promoting Austrian involvement in state-building in Kosovo

Implemented by the Organization for Kosovan Alumni Association (OKAA)

The project aimed to promote OKAA to potential members – persons who studied in Austria - through various activities and inputs, including with relation to the Social Dimension of Higher Education. By doing so, the project aimed to increase OKAA's visibility and establish it as a platform for future Kosovo-Austrian alumni. Through connecting state and non-state actors from both countries, the project also had the objective to explore new areas of cooperation that can benefit both countries.

Main activities included raising awareness about the organization's goals, preparing visual promotion materials featuring notable alumni, and planning an international conference. The conference was particularly important as it provided a platform for alumni to connect and build social cohesion amongst Kosovo-Austrian alumni. The conference also provided an opportunity for participants to share experiences, knowledge, and ideas on how to promote the interests of the Kosovo-Austrian community and specifically addressed the Social Dimension of Higher Education.

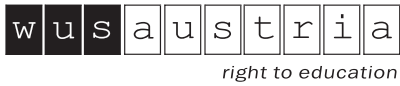
Furthermore, the project has also established partnerships with various institutions to facilitate the promotion of OKAA's goals. These institutions include universities, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Through these partnerships, OKAA hopes to increase the visibility of its activities and to attract more potential members to the organization in future.



Overall, the project can be seen as an important step towards promoting the interests of Kosovo-Austrian alumni and strengthening cooperation between the two countries. Through its various activities, OKAA hopes to build a strong and vibrant community of Kosovo-Austrian alumni who can contribute to the development of both countries.



IMPLEMENTING CONSORTIUM



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FACTS AND FIGURES

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