

PICASA (PROMOTING INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HEIS IN EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD COUNTRIES THROUGH CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL ADAPTATIONS) is a three-year multi-country project, under the Regional Priority for Governance Reform, EACEA N° 35/2012, 6th call, Structural Measures action.

The wider objective is to promote recognition of Eastern Neighboring Area HE systems- Armenian, Georgia, Belarus and Ukraine - through development and integration of internationalization dimensions into structural and cultural components of HEIs management.

The specific objectives target

- Integration of international dimension into the teaching, learning and research functions of HEIs through developing and implementing respective policies and procedures;
- Development of internationalization elements for operationalization of curricula, scholar and student exchange and technical cooperation of the HEIs;
- Identification and development of new skills, attitudes and knowledge in students, faculty and staff;
- Promotion of ethos and culture that values and supports intercultural and international perspectives, initiatives and their quality assurance (MINT approach).

The principle outcomes and outputs include:

- Trained staff and revised functions of IROs that become building blocks of the ethos and culture supporting international perspectives
- HEI-wide policies and procedures for internalization
- Software for the database necessary for internationalization
- Academic programmes with internationalization dimensions
- Approaches to research internationalization: scholarly collaboration, study abroad, student and staff mobility
- New approaches to curricula internationalization
- Quality assurance of internationalization (the MINT approach)

The choice of PCs will allow deeper understanding of the needs of developing systems and customization to specific country and HEIs priorities. The EU partners – CESIE, WUS, KHL, RU, USGIT – bring in their wealth of experience in internationalization.

The project rationale*

Please outline the motivation behind your project, clearly identifying the specific problem/s which it intends to solve. Explain how the project proposal fits within the development strategies of the Partner Countries involved and why this/these problem/s were selected instead of others. In particular, explain how the area of intervention has been explored to guarantee that the project is offering something new compared to the existing situation. Where applicable, any synergy with other EU initiatives should be highlighted. Define the wider and specific objectives that will be addressed as well as target group(s)/target sector(s) that will benefit from your project. (Max. 6000 characters).

Throughout the last 25 years the internationalization dimension of HE in Europe has become a central issue on the agenda of European and national governments and HEIs. However, although Bologna and Lisbon call for increased competitiveness and globalization in higher education so far no European-wide approach has been made to measure internationalization. The issue is more tangible in the former Soviet countries, where there is lack of common understanding on internationalization, which leads to misuse and mismanagement of that specific dimension of HEI management.

Since signing the Bologna Declaration in 2005, integration into EHEA has become a major topic on the agenda of Armenian, Ukrainian, Georgian and Belorussian Governments and has been included in the national development plans of the four countries (Belarus, 2011-2015; Armenia – 2011-2015; Ukraine -

2009-2013; Georgia – 2011-2015). However, as NTO reports for Armenia, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine (2012) demonstrate none of the countries has any explicit policy on internationalization in general and mobility of staff and students in particular, which endangers the system development and furthers the fragmentation the systems are suffering from.

To be more specific, as the needs analyses conducted for the purposes of this proposal demonstrates almost all the HEIs in former Soviet countries have “internationalization” as a concept/value identified in the strategies. However, in reality the concept is reduced to mere establishment of an international relations office (IRO) with just student exchange functions and joining to grant proposals, whereas “internationalization” is taken as a broader concept, which underpins changes at teaching and learning, research and service to society dimensions of HEI functioning. Thus, almost all the HEIs in the target countries have the term “internationalization” on their agenda, but, a deeper investigation into the HEI strategies, policies and procedures for teaching and learning, research and services to society revealed no sign of internationalization. Further, transparency and accountability in internationalization are not in place yet.

Another challenge comes with the operationalization of curricula, bringing in the internationalization dimensions to promote scholar and student exchange and technical cooperation of HEIs. The current curricula design, being rigid and fixed by its nature, hardly allows smooth exchange of scholars and students, let alone such elements of curricula internationalization as preparing students to be active in a much more globalized world, extra-curricula activities, liaison with local cultural/ethnic groups, involvement in research projects with international peers and the like.

Next, the issue of capacity to internationalize a HEI surfaces when we look at the HEI management in general and IRO functions and roles in particular. The needs analysis demonstrates dire need to identify and develop new skills, attitudes and knowledge in students, faculty and staff to promote internationalization. As the data explicates, except for some individual cases (QATMI and ICAEN -516663), none of the HEIs in the consortium has had a capacity building event to professionalize the staff in internationalization.

Last, but not least, to ensure the internationalization strategies yield positive outcome a necessity arises to establish a firm background for quality assurance (QA) of internationalization. Some of the HEIs in the consortium were privileged to participate in the Tempus QATMI project on QA of internationalization. However, since the objectives of the project were limited to setting a QA mechanism for internationalization (internationalization being limited to the functions of IRO) the system was built only for the self-assessment of the functions of IROs, whereas internationalization concept goes beyond the IRO functions. Thus, it is high time to move from peripheral to a system-wide approach to internationalization and its QA and the MINT approach developed by the Dutch QA specialists (NVAO) will serve as a good background from which a new system for QA of internationalization of the HEIs will evolve. To this end, a toolbox of indicators and related objectives and activities need to be developed, which will allow HEI's to individually define a level of internationality and internationalization profile corresponding with their institutional goals. The set of indicators will ensure both relevance and acceptance and will support HEIs to show how well performing they are.

Thus, PICASA will promote recognition of Eastern Neighboring Area HE systems- Armenian, Georgia, Belarus and Ukraine - through development and integration of internationalization dimensions into structural and cultural components of HEIs management. It will do so through

- Integration of international dimension into the teaching, learning and research functions of universities through developing and implementing respective policies and procedures;
- Development of internationalization elements for operationalization of curricula, scholar and student exchange and technical cooperation of the universities;
- Identification and development of new skills, attitudes and knowledge in students, faculty and staff to promote internationalization;
- Development of ethos and culture that values and supports intercultural and international perspectives, initiatives and their quality assurance (MINT approach).

The target groups for the project are HEIs from Armenia, Georgia, Belarus and Ukraine, which will be enabled to integrate internationalization dimension into the different functions of HEIs. Examples of good practice, clear approaches to management of internationalization, reformed curricula, internal and external quality assurance practice will be made available through involvement of competent and experienced EU partners with good practices and knowhow of internationalization.

E.2 Quality of the partnership*

Explain why the selected partners are best suited to participate in the project. Please describe the skills, relevant expertise and competences within the consortium directly relating them to the planned project activities and how they complement each other for the project's purpose. If applicable, make clear reference to any partner that has not benefited under Tempus IV or had a limited participation in the Tempus programme during previous calls for proposals. Explain how the tasks are distributed amongst the partners and how project "ownership" is ensured. Describe how the networking and communication amongst partners is envisaged during the project's lifetime. (Max. 6000 characters).

Meticulous planning is essential for a project success; however, the ultimate success mainly depends on the implementers. Thus, a careful design of the consortium has been undertaken to come up with a well-balanced one, in which the competencies of the partners dovetail and compliment each other rather than overlap. In general, it brings in the key players in the field of HE internationalization - directly linked to the project objectives. They are classified in 4 major groupings: (1) EU HEIs intended to bring in richness of their experience in internationalization; (2) PC HEIs from Eastern Neighboring Area, the needs analysis of which explicitly demonstrates that revision of their approaches to internationalization is a must to further their development and integration in EHEA; (3) independent agencies – ANQA, CESIE, WUS – specialized in internationalization in general and its quality assurance in particular; (4) last, but not least, the ministries of education and science of the 4 partner countries – the main executive and legislative bodies at national level, whose revision of policies will ensure multiplier effect all over the country.

The 1st grouping – the internationalization experience conveyers- includes KHL (BE), RU (UK) and USGIT (IT). All the three HEIs emphasize integration of research into education as well as internationalization as one of the main dimensions of university functioning. RU has a long history of excellence in Learning and Teaching and research into pedagogy. USGIT is one of the main universities of the industrialized Italia North-West. Internationalization has been embedded in the culture of USGIT since the 1990th.

The 2nd grouping – the main recipients of the experience – includes both HEIs in the capitals and in the regions, the ones with extensive experience in Tempus grants and the ones that have less.

Thus, from Armenia the HEIs include three from the capital (YSU, YSAFA, SEUA) with their branches in the regions and one from the region (GSU). All the HEIs have international relations offices and consider integration into EHEA a priority on their agenda. All the HEIs in the target have a strong quality assurance system and have undergone the first round of self-assessment. YSU and SEUA are under joint external evaluation conducted by NVAO, ASIIN and ANQA. The HEIs will revise their approaches to internationalization to embed it into teaching and learning, research and service functions of the institution. YSU takes upon the main responsibility as the grantholder and will revise its approaches to internationalization to embed it into its culture.

The Georgian partners include most experienced ones and the beginners in Tempus. ISU is one of the flagship public research HEIs. ISU strives to develop and maintain international partnerships with the HEIs and research centers worldwide. TSU is an active member of several prestigious international networks. Internationalization is a high priority for TSU, with particular emphasis on English instructed programs. ZSSU is a regional HEI just at the boarder of Abkhazia, about 50% of our students are refugees. RSU is regional HEI located in Batumi, Ajara, has academic tradition since 1935. All the HEIs in the target seek to integrate internationalization and its quality assurance into teaching and learning, research and services functions.

Ukraine is represented through CHNU, which is accredited with the highest IV level of accreditation. It is an individual full member of the European University Association, and a signer of the Magna Charta Universitatum. ONPU represents a huge training center of high-qualification personnel in the south Ukraine. NMAU has an international Cooperation Office. The internationalization processes on university level require sufficient practical skills in international cooperation from academic and admin staff of university that still a weak point hindering the development international cooperation of NMAU. TSNUK was founded in 1834 and is one of the oldest in Ukraine. TSNUK has an IRO, the competencies of which mainly refer to handling student exchange and grants. The target HEIs seek to integrate internationalization and its quality assurance into teaching and learning, research and services functions.

Belarus is represented through its HEIs in the capital and in the regions. Thus, BSU is the national centre of development of international cooperation in the sphere of education. It has extensive experience in managing international grants and managing student and staff exchange, however, the research and service functions of it are left unattended. YKSUG participates in activities within the international network BSRUN and the Baltic University Programme developing projects. BSUIR is a leading technical university in ICT and radio-electronics in Belarus. It pays particular attention to its integration into the EHEA and promotion into the world market. The HEIs in target seek to integrate internationalization and its quality assurance into teaching and learning, research and services functions.

The 3rd group – independent agencies – is represented by the Armenian national quality assurance agency (ANQA), WUS and CESIE. ANQA has been recognized at international level as a bearer of a good practice in internationalization. Its internationalization strategy has been acknowledged by APQN. WUS and CESIE are NGOs that are highly experienced in promotion of Bologna reforms, higher education policymaking, quality assurance.

The 4th grouping is represented by the MoESs of Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus – republican bodies of executive authority, which elaborate and implement the policies at national level. They have rich experience in international projects and acknowledge their impact to the extent that are actively involving in the project to smooth integration of the countries HE systems into EHEA.