



# **National impact study: Capacity Building in Higher Education projects**

**REPUBLIC OF  
MOLDOVA**

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**2021**



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

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This publication was elaborated by the National Erasmus+ Office in Moldova at the request of European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA)

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*This study has been funded with support from the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CBHE</b>	Capacity Building in Higher Education
<b>DG EAC</b>	Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture
<b>EACEA</b>	European Education and Culture Executive Agency
<b>EaP</b>	Eastern Partnership
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>ICM</b>	International Credit Mobility
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology
<b>IRO</b>	International Relations Office
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>HERE</b>	Higher Education Reform Experts
<b>LLL</b>	Life-long learning
<b>NA</b>	National Agency
<b>NEO</b>	National Erasmus+ Office
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>PBL</b>	Problem based learning
<b>SMS</b>	Special Mobility Strand

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This impact study of Capacity Building projects in Higher Education (CBHE) is carried out by the National Erasmus+ Office in Moldova on behalf of European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). The study is focused on the first three generations of CBHE projects, launched in the period between 2015 and 2017 and implemented in the Republic of Moldova.

### Summary of findings

1. Following the analysis, it can be firmly concluded that each CBHE project, whether joint or structural<sup>1</sup>, has had a **positive effect and a strong impact on the higher education system in the Republic of Moldova** at multiple levels. CBHE projects have played a **decisive role in the modernisation, internationalisation and digitisation of Moldovan higher education institutions (HEIs)**. This progress would not have been possible without the support of projects funded by the European Union.
2. As the **majority of the 11 CBHE projects** implemented in Moldova **were joint projects**, the strongest impact was produced **especially at institutional and individual level**.

#### Institutional level

3. The generation of projects from 2015-2017 has contributed to the direct **modernisation of 155 university courses, the creation of 98 totally new courses** for existing programmes, the **development of 23 new study programmes**.
4. From the **total number of modernised or new courses, 93 courses** can be **taught in foreign languages**.
5. These CBHE curricula projects have **involved more than 750 academic staff, and more than 30,000 students** were beneficiaries of the courses modernised by international project teams.
6. Almost all the **courses' developers have been trained** by their peers, professionals from Programme<sup>2</sup> and Partner Countries<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Joint projects* - aim to support organisations from partner countries (i.e. through curriculum development, modernisation of management, etc.), and *structural projects* aim to strengthen higher education systems and promote reforms at national and/or regional level.

<sup>2</sup> *Programme countries* - are EU and non EU countries that have established a National Agency, which participate fully in the Erasmus+ Programme.

<sup>3</sup> *Partner countries* - are states which do not participate fully in the Erasmus+ Programme, but which may take part (as partners or applicants) in certain Actions of the Programme.



7. The **involvement of non-university actors** (enterprises, NGOs, public authorities) in the **modernisation of curricula** proved to be a very efficient and an **innovative approach** for Moldovan HEIs.
8. The **student-centred approach**, as well as the **innovative teaching methods** have been widely applied in Moldovan universities involved in these projects.
9. All **centres created and equipped within universities** with the support of CBHE projects **are functional** and part of the HEIs' organisation charts. These include: problem-based learning spaces, laboratories for production of digital teaching resources, multimedia rooms, foreign language learning laboratories, conference congress hall, Students Ombudsmen Offices, educational office for drones, laboratory within the Centre of Cybernetic Security, as well as laboratories for food safety testing, SMART Caffes.
10. The **equipment** purchased within the projects is being **used by university staff and students** and helped create online courses and lectures which proved to be **very efficient during the COVID-19 pandemic**.
11. The experience in CBHE projects helped university leaders to **transpose European best practices in university governance** to Moldovan higher education institutions.
12. The **internationalisation of Moldovan HEIs has improved** significantly during 2015-2017 selections due to the implementation of a national structural project in Moldova intended to boost the universities' internationalisation.
13. The HEIs' **International Relations Offices have been strengthened** and services for international students started to be improved; staff from university **auxiliary services were thoroughly trained** and are able to provide now more efficient support for the management of international projects.
14. The **newcomer HEIs**, after being involved in CBHE projects, have changed their attitude and have become more open to **reforms in their institutions**.
15. CBHE projects contributed to the increase of national and international visibility of Moldovan higher education, to more reputation gain and recognition at regional and national level.
16. The number of project proposals applied by Moldovan HEIs is quite small for now, but an **increasing trend of the number of applications** can be observed after the successful experience in coordinating the first projects by a Moldovan HEI (Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova - AESM). The previous experience of participation in CBHE projects and the example of AESM in coordinating a CBHE project **encouraged other Moldovan universities to apply and coordinate CBHE projects** – till now 7 CBHE projects from all 2015-2020 selections are coordinated by Moldovan HEIs.

### Individual level

17. The study visits performed within CBHE projects have contributed to a **better understanding of the educational process in the European Union**, both for academic staff, as well as for students.
18. The student-centred approaches and innovative teaching methods promoted by the CBHE projects have **increased the students' engagement**, made Moldovan universities more attractive and **motivated the students to perform their studies in the country**.
19. The **students have increased their employment chances after graduation** due to the involvement of enterprises and public entities in CBHE projects and have obtained new vocational education opportunities.
20. The Special Mobility Strand (SMS) granted in one of the CBHE projects (PBLMD) **revealed the inclusion problems of students from regional HEIs**, which could not be solved by these universities, nor via the CBHE projects rules related to SMS.
21. The **level of English proficiency among academic staff**, participant in CBHE projects, **has increased**, and more and **more curricula in English** are offered by Moldovan HEIs.
22. The **academic staff**, participating in CBHE projects, **was trained** during study visits and projects activities and events.
23. The **training of academic staff for the purpose of digitalisation** of education was particularly useful during the COVID19 lockdown and helped them to switch to online mode.

### National / systemic level

24. Only **one structural CBHE project** was selected between 2015 and 2017. Its aim was to enhance the **internationalisation of higher education** in Moldova. Therefore, namely in this field, **the greatest impact** at national level was obtained.
25. Moreover, most of the **joint projects** have also obtained a significant national impact in various fields (**increased academic autonomy of HEIs, elaborated job profiles in IT**, developed the national regulation in other specific fields) and have **contributed to the modernisation of the regulatory framework** of higher education in Moldova.
26. The cooperation in the frame of **large international universities consortia** of colleagues from Programme and Partner Countries **boosted the modernisation** of Moldovan higher education and contributed to the **internationalisation** of HEIs.
27. The CBHE projects, implemented in Moldova, allowed to **build national and international networks of professionals** in different fields of higher education, established long-term

cooperation between Moldovan HEIs and their colleagues from the Programme and Partner Countries.

28. The **Moldovan higher education system was prepared to easily switch the educational process to online mode** during the COVID19 pandemic lockdown, due to the implementation of Erasmus+ CBHE projects and previous Tempus projects.
29. The support that Moldovan regional universities received through their participation in CBHE, but also in International Credit Mobility (ICM) projects, is one of the most important factors that **allowed to maintain and develop regional universities in Moldova**.
30. However, the **impact is especially tangible at those Moldovan HEIs, which were directly involved in CBHE projects**, their spin-off effect on other HEIs from Moldova being medium or low.
31. CBHE projects, which involve only **unexperienced universities, produce rather lower, local institutional effects** and have neither the strength, nor the ambition to achieve impact at national level.
32. CBHE projects do not always immediately produce the expected impact at systemic level. As the previous TEMPUS projects have shown, the **long-lasting impact appears much later after the finalisation of the project**. The implemented CBHE projects have largely contributed to the **development of national understanding and reflection on the needed reforms** and of the modalities of their realisation.



# INTRODUCTION

The Capacity Building in Higher Education projects have been launched in the frame of the Erasmus+ Programme 2014-2020 and represent transnational cooperation projects, based on multilateral partnerships between higher education institutions (HEIs) from Programme and eligible Partner Countries, and can also involve non-academic partners.

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, two categories of CBHE projects have been financed: Joint Projects (aimed at producing impact especially at institutional level) and Structural Projects: (aimed at producing an impact on higher education systems and promoting reforms at national and/or regional level).

Altogether 21 CBHE projects with the involvement of Moldovan HEIs were financed during 2015-2020 in Moldova. Of these, only **11 CBHE projects** are subject of this study: 2015 selection – 3 projects, 2016 selection – 4 projects and 2017 selection – 4 projects. Nine projects are already finalised and two others are coming to an end. The vast majority of these CBHE projects were **joint projects – 10**, and only **one project was a structural CBHE project**. It is worth mentioning that **one** of the joint national projects, received additional funding through the **Special Mobility Strand (SMS)** for staff and student mobility.



Therefore, this study aims to give a preliminary assessment of the impact, generated by the CBHE projects, based on the review of about half of CBHE projects, implemented in the Republic of Moldova so far.

The objectives of the study consist in:

- evaluating the role that CBHE projects have had in promoting modernisation and internationalisation of the higher education in Moldova,
- observation how these projects addressed the challenges facing the national higher education system,
- appreciating the extent to which the projects have promoted international cooperation and intercultural awareness.

This study is based on four categories of source materials:

### **A. Monitoring reports**

- 31 reports on preventive, advisory and impact monitoring visits of the 11 CBHE projects covered in this study,
- 5 cluster meetings reports, submitted to the EACEA by the National Erasmus+ Office in Moldova,
- 25 monitoring reports of International Credit Mobility (ICM) projects, submitted to DG EAC,
- 2 reports on institutional monitoring visits carried out at 2 Moldovan HEIs (Moldova State University and “Alecu Russo” State University of Balti).

### **B. Moldovan Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) team publications**

- About 40 articles, part of the annual HEREs publications “Current trends in higher education in the Republic of Moldova” and 11 studies, elaborated by the HEREs team in Moldova.

### **C. Surveys**

- 3 online surveys, developed by NEO Moldova, which targeted CBHE projects partners from Moldovan HEIs: a) project coordinators, b) project participants and beneficiaries, c) public authorities involved in the project. These online surveys involved 32 national and institutional CBHE project coordinators, as well as 343 participants and beneficiaries of the 11 CBHE projects, selected during 2015-2017: rectors, vice-rectors, heads of HEIs departments, teachers and students, 6 representatives of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research and of other national authorities, who participated in the implementation of these CBHE projects.

### **D. Discussions, interviews, focus group**

- Discussions and interviews with the CBHE projects coordinators, representatives of the Ministry of Education and of the International Relations Officers (IROs) of Moldovan HEIs involved in these CBHE projects,
- Focus group with HEREs team to validate the outcomes of the study.

# 1. POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

## 1.1. National reforms and modernisation of Higher Education

The **policy and legislative reform** of the higher education system is expected (and produced) especially during the implementation of structural CBHE projects. But often, some joint projects, implemented in Moldova, managed to boost the modernisation of higher education as well. According to the impact surveys, all respondents have evaluated the **general impact**, produced by the CBHE projects **on the higher education system** as **very high (86%) or high (14%)**. In addition, the long-lasting effect of the previously implemented TEMPUS projects has had a positive impact on the higher education system, even several years after the completion of these projects.

During the first three CBHE selections (2015-2017), only one of the 11 selected for Moldova projects was **structural** – the **national ELEVATE project**. The overall objective of the project was to strengthen the internationalisation of higher education in Moldova, therefore namely in this field the greatest impact at national level was obtained.

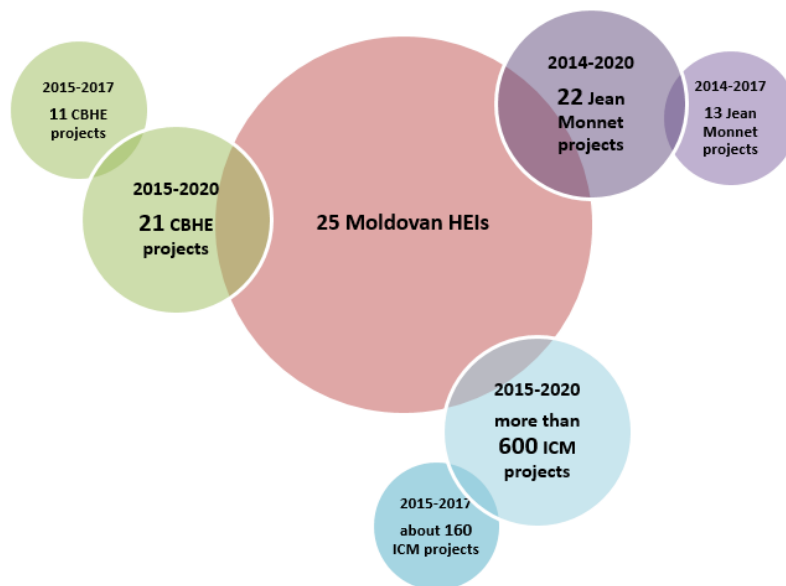


### Internationalisation of the HEIs and increased international cooperation

It would be worth mentioning that all CBHE projects, as well as the International Credit Mobility projects (ICM), implemented in Moldova, have strongly contributed to the internationalisation of higher education system in the country.

During 2014-2020 period (chart 1), 21 CBHE projects were selected with the involvement of Moldovan HEIs, as well as 22 Jean Monnet projects and more than 600 ICM projects (KA107<sup>4</sup>). As a result, universities' internationalisation expanded: 25 universities from Moldova partnered with more than 200 European universities in ICM (KA107) projects and with about 160 Programme and Partner countries' HEIs in CBHE projects (more than 100 European HEIs and almost 60 HEIs from Partner countries).

<sup>4</sup> Erasmus+ KA107 - higher education student and staff mobility between Programme and Partner Countries.



**Chart 1.** Number of Erasmus+ projects implemented in Moldovan HEIs (by years)

Internationalisation was particularly successful because of improvements in the legal framework in this field within the structural CBHE project ELEVATE. The **national strategy on internationalisation of higher education and research** was approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, as well as the **regulatory framework** on international mobility, recognition and equivalence of studies abroad, and the organisation of joint and double higher education study programmes was initiated.

**ELEVATE** - Elevating the internationalisation of higher education in Moldova - 573921-EPP-1-2016-1- MD-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP

Within the ELEVATE project, the National Roadmap on Internationalisation of Higher Education and Research in Moldova for the period 2020-2025 was elaborated and approved by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research; 4 specific strategic priorities and objectives of Higher Education internationalisation and the list of performance indicators for achieving these goals were established.

Two other regulations were developed by the project consortium and approved at national level:

- National regulation on academic mobility and recognition of mobility periods;
- National recommendations for initiation and organisation of joint and double higher education study programmes.

## 1. POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The national impact of this structural project was amplified by the involvement of a wide number (one third) of Moldovan universities: both the biggest, located in the capital of the country, and the regional universities from the south and the north of the country. The project contributed to a better understanding of the concepts, opportunities, challenges, financial and human resources required at national level for the implementation of internationalisation in higher education.

### National network of HEIs

One of the most important CBHE impacts at national level is the creation of the national task-force networks of specialists from different Moldovan HEIs, i.e. teams brought together through cooperation in CBHE projects. These national networks have strongly contributed to the initiation of debates, to solving problems and spreading widely the best practices and experiences within the Moldovan higher education system.

### Management and operation capacity in coordinating international projects

The CBHE projects have significantly **improved the management and operation capacity of Moldovan HEIs to coordinate international CBHE projects consortia**. The universities have progressed a lot in applying and coordinating CBHE projects. During the first three calls for applications (2015-2017), the HEIs from Moldova were not at all confident to apply and coordinate CBHE projects. It was perceived by them as a complicated and risky exercise, the financial management of international projects being especially intimidating in the conditions of Moldova's very restrictive legislation.

The number of CBHE projects, applied by Moldovan HEIs, has increased from 3 applications in 2015 to 10 in 2020. Finally, 7 CBHE projects from all 2015-2020 selections are coordinated by Moldovan HEIs.

**ELEVATE** - *Elevating the internationalisation of higher education in Moldova* - 573921-EPP-1-2016-1- MD-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP

The ELEVATE project is the first project coordinated by a Moldovan HEI – the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova. The successful experience of this university to coordinate a CBHE project Consortia, as well as the previous numerous participations of Moldovan HEIs in TEMPUS, Erasmus Mundus, ICM and CBHE projects, encouraged and boosted Moldovan universities to apply and to coordinate CBHE projects.

## 1. POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

At the moment, Moldovan HEIs coordinate 6 CBHE projects selected during 2018-2020. 5 of these CBHE projects are structural (and national) and cover a quite diverse thematic area: life-long learning (LLL), open science, leadership and management in higher education, quality assurance in higher education and dual higher education.

### Increased academic autonomy of HEIs

Some of the **joint CBHE** projects, especially those which involved national authorities in the project consortia, have also been successful in achieving systemic level impact and improved the legislative framework in higher education.

Thus, the PBLMD project contributed to **soften the national regulation regarding the elaboration of university curricula and study programmes**, and finally, contributed to **increasing the academic autonomy of Moldovan HEIs**.

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

The project succeeded to amend the ministerial regulation, which largely hindered the implementation of student-centred approach in the university curricula, and led the Ministry of Education to agree on the necessity to change the national legislative framework into a less restrictive one, in order to allow the modernisation of the university curricula by developing new learning methodologies: Problem Based Learning (PBL), Enquiry Based Learning (EBL) and Simulations etc. The PBLMD project has had an important impact on the modernisation of the national legislation and contributed to widening the university autonomy, especially in the academic field.

### Better cooperation between HEIs and national authorities

Three **joint CBHE** projects have involved the Ministry of Education as full or associated project partner. Other national authorities have participated in the implementation of CBHE projects in Moldova as well: the National Quality Assurance Agency (ANACEC), the Civil Aviation Authority, the Centre of Combating Cybercrimes etc. Therefore, the projects obtained a general systemic impact or a targeted one, within a specific thematic area (e.g. job profiles were elaborated for Bachelor and Master Programmes in the field of IT security - LMPI project; national regulation was developed in drone piloting - eDRONE project, etc.)



### *eDRONE – Educational for Drone - 574090-EPP-1-2016-1-ITEPPKA2-CBHE-JP*

The project consortium has developed a study on the state of the art of drone laws and applications in more than 10 European countries and around the world. Based on this research, the involved HEIs have developed, in close collaboration with the national Civil Aviation Authority, the regulatory needs for Moldova.

### **New teaching and learning technologies in higher education at systemic level**

The majority of joint (curricular) CBHE projects have had a new e-learning component. The COVID19 pandemic lockdown has shown that the Moldovan **higher education system was partially prepared to switch the educational process to online mode.**

It is worth mentioning that Moldovan universities were already implementing the e-learning methodologies before the COVID19 crisis. Their participation in CBHE projects, and even before – in TEMPUS projects, has strongly and positively impacted the Moldovan higher education system, especially the development of new technologies in higher education.

### *TEACHME - Creating Moldovan E-network for promoting innovative e-teaching in the continuing professional education - 561820-EPP-1-2016-1- DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP*

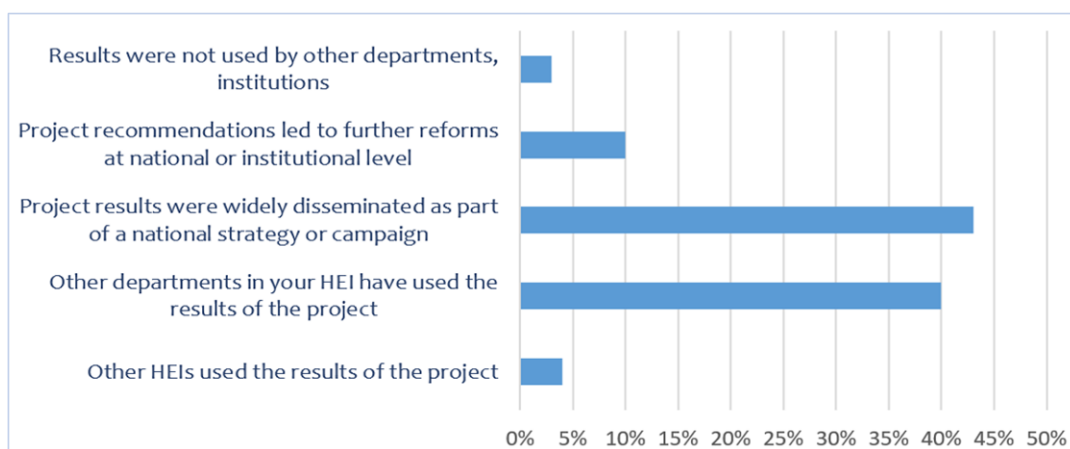
7 Moldovan HEIs developed distance teaching and learning technologies meant to increase the access to online education for a wide range of students (bachelor, master, doctoral, lifelong learning).

The majority of Moldovan HEIs, acting on the principles of university autonomy, have developed and implemented new teaching approaches long before the validation of national regulations.

The emergency situation and the lockdown has forced the development and approval, **in March 2020**, of the **national regulatory framework on the organisation of online teaching activities in higher education institutions.** The big majority of respondents (84%) mentioned that CBHE projects strongly contributed to the support of digital learning and teaching in Moldova.

### **Exploitation of CBHE project results beyond the projects**

According to the estimations of the interviewed national and institutional project coordinators, beyond the impact within the project, the CBHE projects implemented in Moldova **have mainly had an institutional impact.** This effect is explained, of course, by the **predominance of joint projects** in the 2015-2017 selections.



**Chart 2.** Area of exploitation of project results

40% of respondents mentioned that other departments in their HEIs have used the results of the project. Even if 43% of respondents stated that the project results were widely disseminated as part of a national strategy or campaign, only 10% of respondents replied that project recommendations led to further reforms at national or institutional level.

### Impact at society level

In some particular cases, the effects of the CBHE projects can be discerned at society level, going beyond their initial objectives and ensuring that the projects would be viable in long term perspective.

**LNSS - Library Network Support Services:** modernising libraries in Armenia, Moldova and Belarus through library staff development and reforming libraries - 561633-EPP-1-2015-1-AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

The qualifications and skills obtained by the staff during the project implementation helped them to be involved in the elaboration and public discussions of a series of national regulations related to libraries functioning on wide society level:

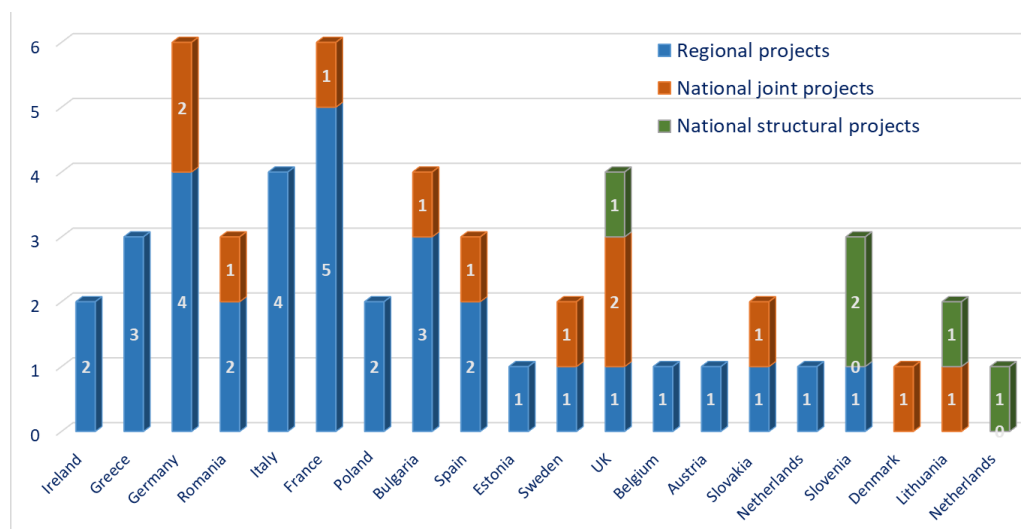
- Framework regulation on public libraries organisation and functioning
- Regulation on recording the state library registry
- Regulation on services provided by public libraries
- Regulation on minimum selection criteria for library staff and process of organisation of public libraries staff recruitment
- Regulation on libraries evaluation
- Deontological code of libraries
- Regulation regarding the library staff attestation.

## Long-term impact of previous TEMPUS projects

It is important to mention that the national impact of CBHE projects implemented in Moldova is not only obtained during the project implementation and immediately after their finalisation. The long-lasting impact of the previously implemented projects appears even several years after the projects' end. The example of two TEMPUS projects is representative in this sense - ATHENA (Fostering Sustainable and Autonomous Higher Education Systems in the Eastern Neighbouring Area) and EUniAM (Enhancing University Autonomy in Moldova), **largely contributed to the development of the universities' institutional autonomy legislation in Moldova, to debates on governance, autonomy and funding reforms in higher education.** This shows that the national impact is achieved over a period of time, once the understanding and the need to promote reforms are achieved at all levels of government.

## 1. 2. Cooperation with Programme and Partner Countries HEIs

CBHE projects have strongly boosted the cooperation of Moldovan HEIs with universities abroad. The **15 Moldovan HEIs** involved in the 11 CBHE projects, selected during 2015-2017, have developed partnerships with **51 HEIs from 20 Programme Countries**:



**Chart 3.** Partner HEIs from Programme Countries in CBHE projects (by project type)

Two Programme Countries, Germany and France, stand out with the biggest number of universities involved in CBHE projects with Moldova - 6 HEIs each. But the majority of Programme Countries are represented by 1 or 2 HEIs. This situation is explained by the relatively small number of CBHE projects awarded for Moldova annually – 3-4 projects during 2015-2017.

## 1. POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The surveys have shown that one of the biggest challenges for Moldovan HEIs in applying for CBHE funding is to find a viable EU HEI as partner. This obstacle discourages them to apply for new CBHE projects.

However, CBHE projects offer a great opportunity to Moldovan HEIs to launch new cooperation with EU partners. For instance, Moldovan HEIs have **signed double diploma agreements with EU universities** within the LMPI cross-regional project.

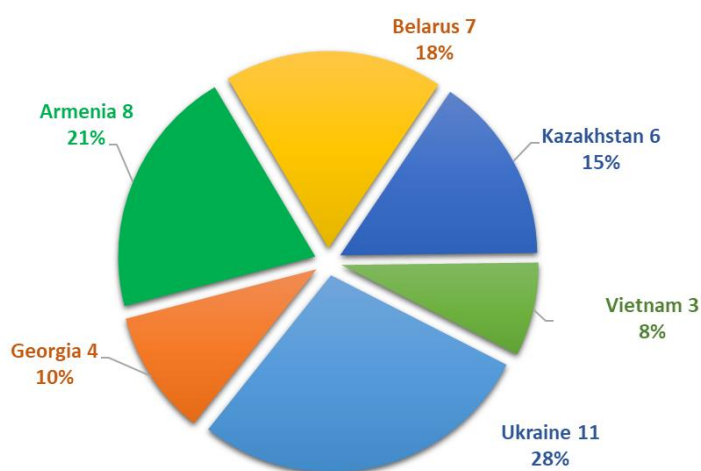
*LMPI - Licence, Master professionnels pour le développement, l'administration, la gestion, la protection des systèmes et réseaux informatiques dans les entreprises - 573901-EPP-1-2016-1-ITEPPKA2-CBHE-JP*

Four Moldovan HEIs have signed double diploma agreements with the University of West Attica (Greece) within this cross-regional project. As a result, 9 students from Moldova and Greece started their studies in 2020 in the framework of these bilateral agreements.

Regional and cross-regional CBHE projects strongly contributed to the improvement of cooperation of Moldovan HEIs with the universities from **6 Partner Countries**.

During the period 2015-2017, **more than 60%** of the selected CBHE projects (7 from 11) were **multi-countries projects**: 1 of these 7 projects was a **cross-regional project** and the other 6 were **regional projects**.

These 7 multi-countries CBHE projects engaged cooperation between 8 HEIs from Moldova and **39 HEIs from 6 Partner Countries**. The big majority of partners (36 HEIs) were represented by the institutions from the former Soviet Union, **especially** those from the **Eastern Partnership region (30 HEIs)**.



**Chart 4.** Partner HEIs from Partner Countries in CBHE projects selected during 2015-2017

## 1. POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

This cooperation has helped to better assess and compare the mutual progress in higher education reform, adopt best practices, avoid mistakes and learn lessons from peers in countries with a similar historical background.

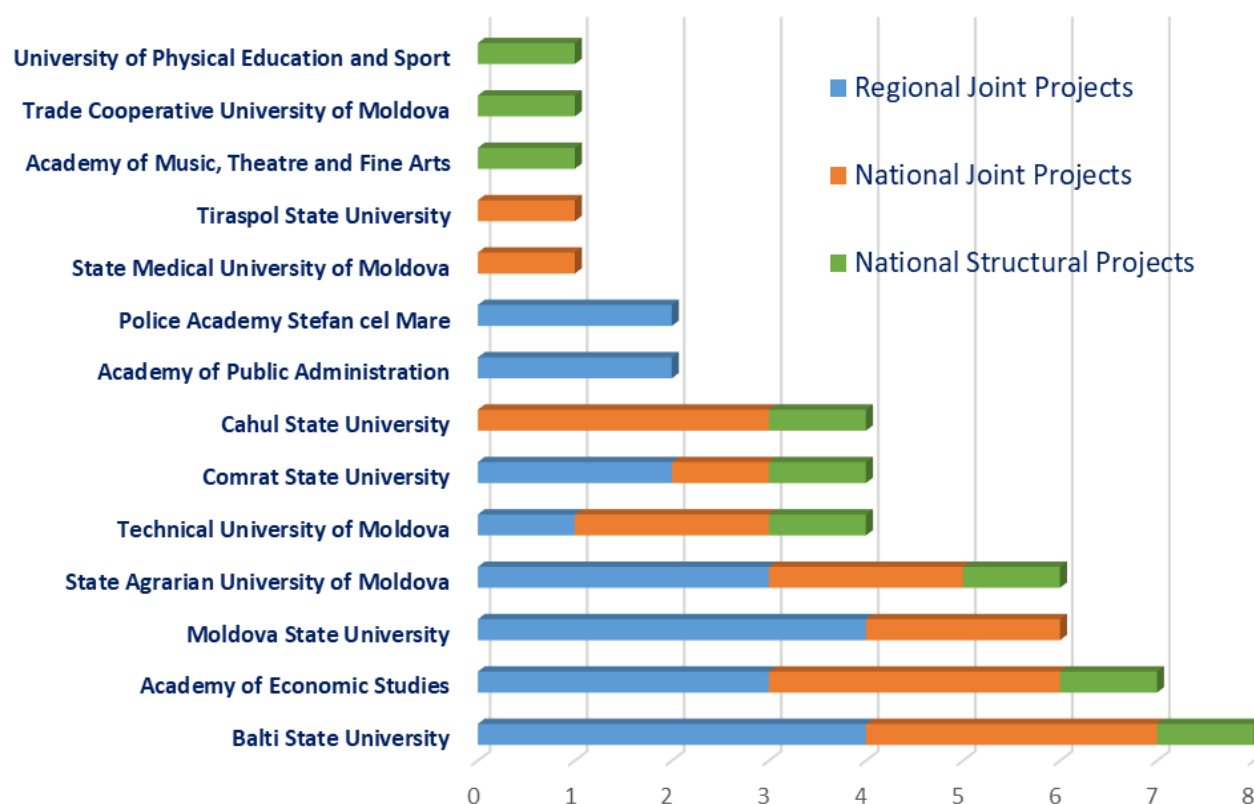
Moreover, the cross-regional project made it possible to go beyond the borders of this traditional EaP<sup>5</sup> cooperation: the LMPI project initiated academic and research cooperation with 3 Vietnamese HEIs.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Eastern Partnership (EaP)* - is a joint policy initiative which aims to deepen and strengthen relations between the European Union (EU), its Member States and its six Eastern neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

## 2. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

CBHE projects implemented during 2015-2017 have involved 14 Moldovan higher education institutions. In this sense, the institutional impact achieved within all CBHE projects by these HEIs is different and, in general, proportional to the number of implemented projects. The more the institution is involved in international projects, the bigger impact these projects have on their institutional development with all its aspects.



*Chart 5. Participation of Moldovan HEIs in CBHE projects (by projects' type)*

According to the respondents, the current level of development in the universities involved would not be possible without the implemented Erasmus+ projects. The respondents stressed that major institutional impact was perceived for the following development areas:

- Institutional strategies adoption and changes of internal regulations and protocols,
- Strengthening of teacher-student relations,
- Curriculum development,
- Creation of new university structures,
- Equipment endowment,
- Improving reputation, visibility and recognition of the university at national, regional and international levels,



## 2. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

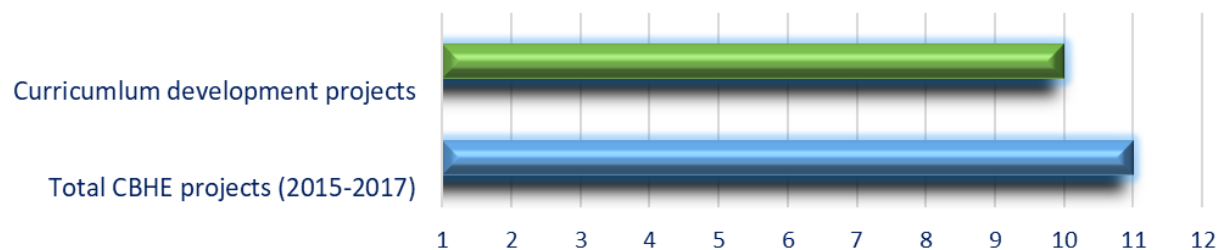
- Consolidation of human resources capacities within universities,
- Involvement in networks or associations of HEIs at national and international levels.

It has to be mentioned that the four bigger Moldovan HEIs, located in the capital of the country, are in the top five due to their involvement in CBHE projects. At the same time, there is quite a big number of small universities (public and private), also situated in the capital, which are involved in 1 or 2 CBHE projects only. Regional HEIs are quite actively involved in CBHE projects (State University of Balti – 8 projects, Cahul State University – 4, Comrat State University – 4).

*“Alecu Russo” State University of Balti* is the single regional university from the north of Moldova, and the most involved university from the country in CBHE projects during 2015-2017. Moreover, the institution is an example of how international projects are to be implemented in a HEI, including student and staff mobility projects.

### 2.1. Curricula reform

Curriculum development represents one of the main areas where the CBHE projects implemented in Moldova have had an important impact. The majority of the 2015-2017 CBHE projects granted for Moldova (10 out of 11) represent joint projects with a curriculum development component.



**Chart 6.** *The share of projects with a curriculum development component*

The elaboration of new or the modernisation of existing study modules for university study cycles has contributed, at large, to the modernisation of all Moldovan institutions participating in Erasmus+ projects by bringing new teaching/learning approaches (problem-based learning, case-oriented studies, etc.), new teaching methods and tools, EU experience and other innovative methods, suitable for a smooth development of national HEIs.

The majority of curriculum development projects have had a direct impact on the participating institutions. Moreover, one of the national joint projects succeeded to positively influence the updating of the national regulation related to the elaboration of university curricula and study

## 2. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

programmes, and finally, to increase the academic autonomy of Moldovan higher education institutions:

**PBLMD – Introducing Problem Based Learning in Moldova: Toward Enhancing Students Competitiveness and Employability - 561884-EPP-1-2015-1- DK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP**

The PBLMD project brought the innovative element of the Problem Based Learning-approach in teaching and learning within the piloted interdisciplinary study programmes. This student-centred learning methodology is used to enhance the quality of teaching and increase the students' engagement in studying. The project introduced new principles of curricular design in the Moldovan higher education system, with semestrial (half-year) projects playing a central role and providing a much more intense collaboration framework with the social and economic environment.

***The generation of 2015-2017 projects has participated in the direct modernisation of 155 university courses, creation of 98 totally new courses for the existing programmes, creation of 23 new study programmes. From the total number of modernised or new courses, 93 courses can be taught in foreign language. This effort has involved more than 759 didactic staff and more than 30,000 beneficiary students.***

New programmes	New courses in new programmes	New courses in existing programmes	Modernised courses	Involved teaching staff	Students / beneficiaries	Courses taught in foreign languages
23	127	98	155	759	30,013	93

It has to be mentioned that almost all course developers have been trained during international or national project trainings by EU and Partner countries' professionals and competent trainers identified in the projects. Indirectly, the experience of the course/module updating has been spread among colleagues from departments, faculties and even other universities.

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**Chart 7.** The distribution of the modernised and new courses developed within CBHE projects during 2015-2017

As estimated by project participants, the number of modernised courses more than tripled as a spill-over effect of CBHE projects implementation (around 1,000 courses). The courses are taught at bachelor, master, doctoral level or in life-long learning programmes. The most popular domains for modernisation in Moldovan universities are ICT, business and administration, law, education sciences, as shown by the chart above.

Besides the modernisation of the existing courses for the bachelor, master and doctoral programmes, the CBHE projects contributed to the creation of new study programmes:

- **11 new life-long learning programmes** aimed at expanding and deepening the professional competences of teaching staff in educational institutions for all levels of study were developed by 6 Moldovan participating universities - project *Creating Moldovan e-network for promoting innovative e-teaching in the continuing professional education – TEACHME (561820)*.
- The Continuous Vocational Training Programme “**Robotics and mechatronics. Education for drone**” (13 courses) created and accredited within the project *Educational for Drone – eDRONE (574090)* at Moldova State University.
- A new Master Programme „**Animal husbandry and beekeeping**” (23 courses) created and accredited within the project *Improving skills in laboratory practice for agro-food specialists in Eastern Europe - AGLAB (586383)* at State Agrarian University of Moldova.

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- A new Master Programme „**Information Security**” (14 courses) created and accredited within the LMPI project - *Licence, Master professionnels pour le développement, l'administration, la gestion, la protection des systèmes et réseaux informatiques dans les entreprises (573901)*.
- A new Master Programme “**Human rights**” created and accredited within HRLAW project - *European Human Rights Law for Universities of Ukraine and Moldova (573861)*.

Another aspect of the CBHE projects' implementation is the involvement of **non-university partners** (NGOs, public authorities, local businesses, research entities, etc.) in consortia. According to project participants' questioning, the collaboration of universities at department, faculty and/or administrative levels with this category of participants contributed gradually to the strengthening of their relations, with mutual benefits.

For example, the universities received a field and experienced view on a particular aspect, expertise and contribution to the **modernisation of university curricula**, professionals were invited to deliver particular lectures, etc. The project participants stressed that these collaborations had, as result, contributed to rising the number of student placements for traineeships and increased the employability of students after graduation.

According to the respondents' reaction, there is still room for improvement related to curricula reform in Moldovan HEIs. For example, there were no curricula developed or created in green or environmental technologies, sustainable development, etc.; the number of new or modernised curricula taught in foreign languages is limited, thus impeding international students to access the educational offer of Moldovan HEIs.

All new and modernised curricula have been approved according to the national requirements. The newly elaborated programmes within CBHE projects have been accredited.

In Moldovan universities, the e-learning platforms developed in the framework of TEMPUS and CBHE projects must be used by both students and teachers. The promotion of teaching staff within universities is based, among others, on criteria related to the number of developed courses posted on these platforms. Consequently, all courses developed within CBHE projects are placed on the universities' e-learning platforms and are being used by students from bachelor, master and doctoral programmes. Moreover, these courses are being used in life-long learning programmes and by students from other universities, on the basis of mutual agreements.

Usually, the project consortium places its materials, including the elaborated courses or programmes, on the CBHE projects' websites, and in several cases, the presentation of the developed materials and the main project results are placed on the universities sites.

During the COVID19 pandemic, this approach has helped a lot the higher education actors in implementing the on-line teaching-learning processes, by actively using the didactic materials elaborated within CBHE projects.

### 2.2. Technological upgrade

#### Equipment for project needs

Equipment endowment of Moldovan universities from the government (owner) side is pretty modest. One of the reasons, among others, why Moldovan HEIs get involved in CBHE projects is to purchase new, modern and very much needed equipment for different teaching /learning and training purposes.

Almost 1/3 of the budget allocated for the projects is spent on different kinds of equipment, e.g. books, cameras, laptops, computers, servers, projectors, smart-tables, screens, special software and specific equipment like drones, simultaneous translation equipment, equipment for veterinary laboratories, etc. According to Moldovan project participants, the purchased equipment is of great value, especially when it comes to specialised apparatus for specific disciplines other than generic office equipment.

As foreseen by the Erasmus+ programme, the use of equipment comes hand in hand with the elaborated courses, helping university staff and students to better understand and implement the proposed project tasks – in teaching, training, study programmes and training programmes content development, blended learning and supervision, laboratory work, conferences, etc.

The destination of the equipment is quite different:

- Office equipment used by students for learning purposes.
- Office equipment used by university staff to elaborate new or updated curricula.
- Specific equipment used in specialized laboratories: drones, veterinary equipment, medical equipment.
- Video creation equipment for teachers and students.
- Simultaneous translation equipment - Conference Congress System.

The vast majority of respondents mentioned that the equipment purchased from the project was very useful during the project implementation and continues to be used after the project's end.

During the 2020 COVID19 pandemic, the equipment purchased within CBHE projects proved to be very helpful both for students and university staff. It was used to organise communication channels within the projects (kick-off meetings, staff trainings, seminars, conferences, monitoring, interactive

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sessions, etc.) and for teaching-learning processes (development of courses, placement of course content on existing university learning platforms, organisation of online teaching etc.).

### Creation of project centres within universities

All CBHE projects have been influential for the universities where they have been implemented in, also by setting up education centres, which continue their activity after the end of the projects. Usually, these spaces are allocated and refurbished by the universities and endowed in the frame of projects with the necessary equipment. These centres are included in the university organisation chart; in some cases, responsible staff is appointed, and remunerated by the university (e.g. eDRONE, ELEVATE projects).

PBLMD	Each participating HEI has refurbished and allocated <b>Problem Based Learning (PBL) spaces</b> intended for students work in groups, according to PBL approaches.
TEACHME	<b>2 laboratories designed for production of digital resources</b> (elaboration of multimedia and digital learning materials) are functional at 2 HEIs. During the project lifetime, the idea of distance or blended learning became a necessity taking into consideration the profile of the stakeholders (teachers from different regions of the country).
LNSS	<b>Multimedia rooms</b> are created at partner universities which offer physical or on-line access to the information needed for study or research.
EDRONE	<b>The Office of Education for Drones (OED)</b> was created and fully equipped – an infrastructure designed to transfer experience, knowledge and technology to all individuals and organisations interested in civil application for drones.
ELEVATE	<b>A Conference Congress System Hall</b> was up in one HEI offering the option to organise different format events with simultaneous translation. The other partner HEIs have created <b>small modern Language Learning Laboratories</b> for HEIs students and staff.
HRLAW	<b>Students Ombudsmen Offices</b> have been set up and are functional at three Moldovan participating universities in the project.
LMPI	The project team has established the <b>LMPI Laboratory within the Centre of Cybernetic Security</b> in order to train students, teachers in IT Security and professionals in the field of protection of computer systems and networks. The on-line space for distance learning was created.



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<b>AGLAB</b>	The <i>existing laboratories meant for food safety testing</i> have been upgraded with new equipment and are being used by students.
<b>RESTART</b>	The equipment purchased within the project is being used by project's participants for teaching -learning purposes.
<b>REFINE</b>	Partner universities have allocated separate spaces where the specialized books purchased within the project are available both for students and teachers
<b>SMART</b>	Each participating institution has launched physical spaces for the <b>SMART Caffes</b> and their virtual/on-line extension for supporting, developing and marketing innovative student ideas through relevant trainings and mentoring.

According to projects' participants, once a CBHE project is finished, the created centres continue their activity. Moreover, university staff strive to ensure the synergy with other Erasmus+ or other programmes' projects (e.g. PBLMD, TEACHME projects).

### 2.3. Governance and management reform

There was no specific CBHE project implemented during 2015-2017 in the field of university governance and management in Moldova. However, a considerable improvement of university management in all Moldovan HEIs as a result of their participation in Erasmus+ projects was attested. Visible positive dynamics are clearly identified in the following fields:

- Increased university autonomy
- Improvement of university guidelines and regulations
- Improvement of university curricula taking into consideration the international case-studies and good practices
- Management of international projects by university departments (universities are gradually beginning to organise project fairs, international university open days, etc.)
- Improvement of transparency related to the involvement of university staff in CBHE and other international projects and available scholarship offers (e.g. CBHE projects and ICM scholarships presented on university websites).

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The most visible progress in university governance is observed in those HEIs which have implemented a bigger number of CBHE projects due to the flexibility and positive attitude towards changes of the university's management.

However, in some cases, small universities, with fewer participations in CBHE projects (1-2 projects), are more responsive to change (due to their small size).

*HRLAW - European Human Rights Law for Universities of Ukraine and Moldova - 573861-EPP-1-2016-1-EE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP*

HRLAW illustrates the shift in perception of university management towards CBHE projects. E.g. the Police Academy "Stefan cel Mare", a small university, being at its first CBHE project, was about to leave the project because of their lack of experience in international projects. The project implementation team was, initially, disappointed by the resistance to change of the university management and the numerous hierarchical obstacles. The insistence and continuous support of both the National Erasmus+ Office in Moldova and the other Moldovan partners finally persuaded the university rectorate. As a result, the university has successfully implemented the project, as well as another CBHE and ICM projects.

The improvement of the university management and governance in Moldovan HEIs is made possible, among others, through the involvement of university leadership in CBHE international trainings and study visits. As national CBHE coordinators stressed, these experiences helped them to understand the need for changes in governance and university management, and to apply the European experience in this domain at their own universities.

Also, the students' involvement in university governance activities is taken more seriously. They are included in various committees, university Senates, students' governance bodies, etc. and their opinion is taken more and more seriously. Thus, one can state that the university leadership becomes more receptive to students' needs and recommendations.

*HRLAW - European Human Rights Law for Universities of Ukraine and Moldova - 573861-EPP-1-2016-1-EE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP*

The HRLAW project, implemented in 3 Moldovan HEIs succeeded to elaborate, approve and apply *The University Code of ethics and academic integrity* and *The regulation on the organisation and functioning of the Office of Students' Ombudsman*. The *Office of Students' Ombudsman* is functional within all 3 participating universities.

## 2. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The implementation of CBHE projects in Moldovan HEIs required, besides the didactic staff and governance bodies involvement, the active although indirect implication of **university support structures** such as international relations offices, accounting, public relations, planning, human resources services, etc.

Improvements in the management of International Relations Offices were made in the framework of the national structural project ELEVATE. The project coordinators understood the role of university support services for the successful implementation of their CBHE projects and started to involve more frequently their representatives in various projects training activities – financial/staff management, etc. (ELEVATE, LNSS, TEACHME). In this sense, the university services became more prepared to international projects' implementation (capacity building, research projects, etc.).

Since 2015, there is an **improvement in university accounting services** as regards the correct and transparent management of CBHE projects' finances. The requirement of having separate bank account for each CBHE project is respected in most universities at the moment.

Another perceptible aspect of university governance reform is the significant improvement of visibility and dissemination activities. The publicity and visibility rules imposed by the Erasmus+ programme are now fully respected. This approach was transposed to many other university visibility activities. Considerable improvements, as spin off effects, were attested by the presentation of ICM projects on university websites. Universities have adapted their communication channels to students and the larger public, using various communication means, becoming more visible at national and international levels.

Although university staff is more and more involved in international projects, their knowledge of foreign languages is still a problem (reported by about 50% of respondents).

The involvement of non-university bodies in CBHE projects' consortia (business, local administration, NGOs, etc.) determined the university leadership to work closely with these partners beyond the projects' objectives – curricula development, student placements, invited lecturers coming from the business world, etc. These partnerships continue even after the end of CBHE projects.

### 2.4. HEI internationalisation strategies

Erasmus+ projects, as capacity building projects, came as a helping hand in the area of HEIs' internationalisation too. Previously, the internationalisation of an institution was seen mostly as the capacity to have students and staff participating in international exchanges. The more CBHE projects

## 2. INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

were implemented, the more this vision changed. The management and staff of Moldovan universities started to understand that a proper university internationalisation also implies modernisation of university curricula, participation in international research programmes, projects and events, elaboration and participation in multi-degree educational programmes, cultural exchanges, international labour market orientation, etc.

Gradually, each CBHE project influenced this vision but, for the implementation of major actions, government support was needed.

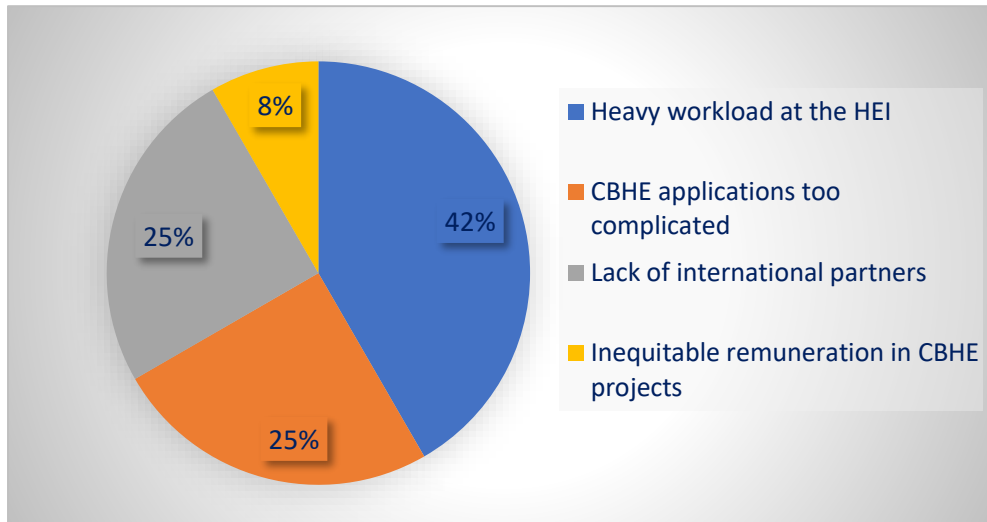
The ELEVATE national structural project, which started in 2016 and was meant to boost the internationalisation of Moldovan HEIs, has radically changed the situation. Considerable progress has been made for the internationalisation of institutions, namely:

- 11 HEIs have revised their internationalisation strategies
- Institutional documents related to HEI internationalisation have been approved at University Senates' level:
  - University Guidelines for increasing the quality and scope of academic mobility and recognition of mobility
  - University Guidelines for the recruitment of foreign PhD students, teachers and researchers
  - Action plan for integration in the European Research Area.

Compared to the situation in 2014, the largest universities have improved the capacities of their International Relations Offices to manage international projects and collaborations.

There are improvements in developing services for international students too, but, compared to EU universities, these advances are still not very significant. Universities have reported that there is a limited number of staff allocated to these offices (from 0.5 to 2 units per university) and it is fairly difficult to employ motivated staff with fluent English with the low salaries offered by universities. Also, staff rotation within the international relations services is quite high which impedes the continuity of activities.

The share of Moldovan HEIs involvement in 2015-2017 projects is quite low – about 30%. Most HEIs still do not have the initiative to apply for CBHE or Jean Monnet projects. They are rather waiting to be invited in project consortia. Potential applicants give the following reasons for not applying for CBHE projects: the university staff is very busy with their workload, they consider CBHE projects complicated to apply for, the remuneration in CBHE projects is very small compared to other project partners, the lack of international partners, etc. (see Chart 8). But certainly, one of the most serious obstacles remains the insufficient level of foreign language knowledge of potential project participants.



**Chart 8.** *The main obstacles in applying for CBHE projects*

The internationalisation of a university comes along with the modernisation and internationalisation of university curricula. There is still a very small number of programmes and courses taught in international (English) languages. This fact keeps international partners away, especially in mobility projects. Lots of university staff is invited to international mobilities for teaching and, year by year this number increases. However, some university staff are reluctant when it comes to teaching mobilities abroad because of their poor foreign language proficiency.

Finally, a significant improvement of the presentation of the 'international relations' chapter can be noted on the universities' websites (international projects, students and staff scholarships, international strategies, EU rules to apply for public funding, etc.).

### 3. PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS

#### 3.1. Academic staff

The impact of capacity building in higher education on the academic staff from Moldovan universities has been significant due to the diversity of core objectives these projects have intended to reach. The first one to mention in this regard is the **international cooperation** between universities, which has contributed to broaden the horizons of Moldovan teachers. It has to be stated that the “old school” legacy in the local universities is still perceptible, but the situation has improved substantially, since the implementation of the first Tempus projects, and then of CBHE and ICM projects in Moldova.

The **level of English** of the academic staff teaching within the HEIs from the Republic of Moldova has **increased**. Consequently, **more and more curricula in English** are being developed and implemented; and more and more academic staff have the courage to **teach in English** during their ICM teaching mobilities, as well as to apply for CBHE and Jean Monnet projects year by year. It has to be noted that 745 academic staff have been trained and 965 staff mobilities have taken place within CBHE projects. Also, most Moldovan universities are offering at the moment free of charge courses of English language, both for academic staff and for students, which has been crucial in the process of their internationalisation.

In this regard, the ELEVATE project has been very important in the process of internationalisation of Moldovan universities.

***ELEVATE** - Elevating the internationalisation of higher education in Moldova  
- 573921-EPP-1-2016-1- MD-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP*

The academic and administrative staff participating in the ELEVATE project have gained teaching, research, language, IT, management and intercultural skills, i.e. active involvement in university internationalisation activities. Moreover, the project has opened perspectives to new international cooperation, joint participation in international events, such as forums, conferences, fairs, etc.

Another aspect which has been of great importance for the Moldovan academic staff participating in CBHE projects was the **trainings within study visits and during diverse dissemination events**, organised at beneficiary universities. For many professors, this has been their first opportunity to confront the Western system of education, and therefore to try to implement its best practices at their home universities.



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

PBLMD is the CBHE project which has had the biggest impact in terms of numbers of trained individuals from Moldova. There were 188 academics in mobilities within the project. During the PBLMD project implementation, the administrative and academic staff from Moldovan HEIs took part in problem-based learning trainings in Moldova and in staff mobilities. Moreover, there was a significant number of staff trained indirectly within internal dissemination workshops.

The **training of academic staff for the purpose of digitalisation of education** process in Moldova has started to be implemented since Tempus projects, and has continued with the TEACHME CBHE project, which was launched in 2015. Both of these projects were particularly useful during the year of 2020, when the whole education process in Moldova was forced to switch to online mode due to COVID19 restrictions.

***TEACHME** - Creating Moldovan E-network for promoting innovative e-teaching in the continuing professional education - 561820-EPP-1-2015-1-DE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP*

The specific objectives of TEACHME were to elaborate and implement new continuing education courses for teachers, enabling them to design and deliver ICT-based learning provisions; to adapt the continuing education services to innovative teaching and learning strategies and finally to create a Moldovan network of innovative teachers. Overall, 37 teachers were trained within the continuous education courses elaborated within TEACHME and had the possibility to practice their ICT skills within the two TEACHME laboratories based at the Technical University of Moldova and the Tiraspol State University.

### 3.2. Students

CBHE projects have been of great importance for the students from the Republic of Moldova. First of all, they have been a helping hand in an environment where there is an ever-growing number of youth immigration from Moldova, and therefore an ever-diminishing number of students in the local universities. CBHE projects have helped Moldovan universities gain more prestige, i.e. new modern curricula have been elaborated, the universities' government and management has been modernised and/or relations between HEIs and the wider economic and social sector have been strengthened. Thus, these projects have managed to make Moldovan universities more attractive for students and helped **retaining the young bright minds in the country**.

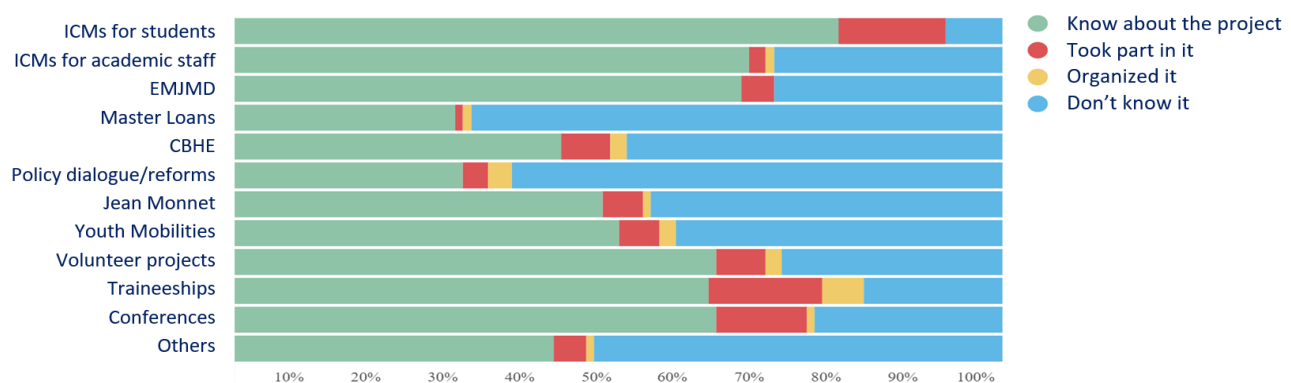
### 3. PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS

Moreover, many students have benefited from mobilities within CBHE projects, which is also a very attractive factor for them and has proven to **double their chances of employment**.

The new English curricula, especially in the big Moldovan universities have significantly contributed to a **better knowledge of foreign languages among students**, and therefore have diminished their reluctance in participating in international projects, including Erasmus+ projects.

Regarding **student-centred approach**, the survey realised within this study has shown that more than 60% of responding students have **participated in new interactive courses** within CBHE projects, 35% of them have improved their foreign language skills and more than 15% have been in mobilities abroad.

Besides that, within the Higher Education Reform Experts [study](#)<sup>6</sup>, among a representative number of 105 active youth studying in Moldova, almost half of them have recognised that they are familiar with CBHE projects, and 10% have participated in them.



*Chart 9. Students' awareness about Erasmus+ projects in Moldova*

#### Greater chances of employment

The increased demand for specialists in Computer Systems and Networks Security domains on the market has generated the LMPI project idea. As a result, after its successful implementation, the graduates of the new study programmes have gained **priority in career development** and most of them have found jobs in their fields of study.

<sup>6</sup> Cristina Voroneanu, "Impactul proiectelor ERASMUS+ în învățământul superior: perspectiva tinerilor" [http://erasmusplus.md/sites/default/files/media\\_file/2021-03/studiu-2020-cvoroneanu.pdf](http://erasmusplus.md/sites/default/files/media_file/2021-03/studiu-2020-cvoroneanu.pdf), page 9

### 3. PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS

*LMPI - Licence, Master professionnels pour le développement, l'administration, la gestion, la protection des systèmes et réseaux informatiques dans les entreprises*  
- 573901-EPP-1-2016-1-ITEPPKA2-CBHE-JP

Due to LMPI, the collaboration with the enterprises from the IT sector has strengthened, the growth of employability chances for students was ensured, and their entrepreneurial spirit has been increased. The majority of Master students participating in LMPI have found jobs due to the big demand of such specialists in the Republic of Moldova and in the region.

Overall, judging from the NEO's survey, more than half of Moldovan students perceive that the participation in CBHE projects **increases their chances of employment**.

#### Increased role of students within HEIs

The HRLAW CBHE project was generated by the need to regulate the human rights policies within Moldovan and Ukrainian HEIs according to EU standards, as well as to establish focal points which would defend student rights within universities.

*HRLAW - European Human Rights Law for Universities of Ukraine and Moldova*  
- 573861-EPP-1-2016-1-EE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

Within the HRLAW project, *The Code of Ethics and Academic Integrity and Regulation on the Organisation and Functioning of the Students' Ombudsman Offices* was elaborated, approved and published on the websites of partner HEIs. Moreover, Students' Ombudsmen Offices in three Moldovan universities have started their activities with the involvement of students' representatives.

#### Training within vocational education programmes

The eDRONE project in Moldova has created a fully-equipped Office of Education for Drones (OED) based at Moldova State University (MSU), for the transfer of practical and theoretical knowledge to Moldovan professionals and students interested by drone technologies in professional activities.

#### *eDRONE – Educational for Drone - 574090-EPP-1-2016-1-ITEPPKA2-CBHE-JP*

So far, 75 students were trained within the first 5 editions of the course. Almost all participants who took part in the eDRONE courses were employees from organisations and professionals from different areas such as agriculture, mass media, archaeology, public security, customs security, public services, academics, cadaster, drone technology, etc.

#### **Increased student engagement**

The PBLMD project has increased the engagement of Moldovan students and brought positive changes to their attitude towards the study process.

#### *PBLMD - Introducing Problem Based Learning in Moldova: Toward Enhancing Students' Competitiveness and Employability - 561884-EPP-1-2015-1- DK-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP*

Since the start of the PBLMD project, there is an increased interest of students to study at specialties which apply the problem-based learning approach. They show an increased creativity and motivation to solve specific situations and cases linked to the real activity of partner enterprises during their internships. Besides that, there is positive feedback received from the partner enterprises, which have stressed the improved quality of PBLMD alumni.

Furthermore, 34 students from Moldovan HEIs participating in PBLMD have travelled to Aalborg University (Denmark) and University of Gloucestershire (UK) in order to increase their effective problem-solving and decision-making abilities based on the use of appropriate qualitative and quantitative skills, as well as their cognitive ability for critical thinking, analysis and synthesis.

### **3.3. Administrative staff**

The IRO staff, as well as the persons responsible for the financial management of CBHE projects have directly benefited from the CBHE projects in Moldova. On one hand, they have received all the necessary training for the proper **management and supervising of international projects** implementation in the country. Besides, they have **improved their foreign languages skills**, due to the active communication with international partners within these projects. And finally, the equipment acquired within the CBHE projects has also served to the use of International Relations Offices and other administrative staff involved.

### 3. PERSONAL & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS

For example, the ELEVATE structural project has **boosted the capacity of IROs** and administrative staff via national and international project events and trainings.

Furthermore, LNSS was a project aimed at **modernising the university support services**, in which the administrative staff of universities was the primary beneficiary.

***LNSS – Library Network Support Services:** modernising libraries in Armenia, Moldova and Belarus through library staff development and reforming libraries - 561633-EPP-1-2015-1- AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP*

The project partners have developed 8 modules intended to modernise the libraries through library staff development. The acquired equipment and didactic materials from the project are used to conduct training courses for librarians from Moldovan universities, public or pre-university librarians and academic staff in the country.

During the project's implementation, the librarian staff has participated in various local and international study visits, trainings, summer schools, conferences. The benefits achieved by the library staff include basic management, marketing, communication, foreign language, IT skills, etc. Additionally, an important number of regional pre-university librarians and public libraries have been involved in life-long learning programmes for librarians.

#### 3.4. Entrepreneurs / Businesses

Participating in CBHE projects is beneficiary for partner Moldovan enterprises because it allows access to the newest up-to-date equipment as well as to young enthusiastic brains and working force. Therefore, this synergy has always been a win-win situation both for HEIs and for business partners. Erasmus+ CBHE projects were one of the first to **incentivise enterprise - HEI partnerships** in the local market.

***RESTART - Reinforce entrepreneurial and digital skills of students and teachers to enhance the modernisation of higher education in Moldova - 585353-EPP-1-2017-1-RO-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP***

The RESTART project has modernised the entrepreneurial curricula for the Master programmes in Business & Administration at each of the 5 Moldovan partner universities.

The new curriculum has been elaborated in a close collaboration with 112 entrepreneurs, representatives of enterprises and professional associations, which continue to ensure a better employability of project's graduates.

*LMPI - Licence, Master professionnels pour le développement, l'administration, la gestion, la protection des systèmes et réseaux informatiques dans les entreprises  
- 573901-EPP-1-2016-1-ITEPPKA2-CBHE-JP*

A result of the LMPI project was the increased employability of LMPI students, after the close collaboration of HEIs with enterprises in the IT sector. Moreover, many foreign IT companies are continuously coming to Moldova for advantageous tax conditions and human resources. Therefore, the existence of well-prepared specialists in this field has a great impact on further development of this trend.

#### 3.5. NGO representatives

The **synergy between NGOs and HEIs** has been of great significance in terms of experience exchange on both sides. Therefore, specialists in the non-governmental area have offered their expertise to the beneficiaries of CBHE projects in Moldova, and at the same time the academic community both from local universities and from partner countries HEIs have offered their knowledge and resources to the NGO community.

*HRLAW - European Human Rights Law for Universities of Ukraine and Moldova  
- 573861-EPP-1-2016-1-EE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP*

NGO GUTTA Club, an associated partner within the HRLAW project, aimed at educating children and youth in human rights, defending human rights, in particular people's civil and political rights, while also supporting and empowering human rights defenders at risk.

The NGO representatives have held a series of trainings within the HRLAW project on topics related to human rights, such as combating the growth of extremism and discrimination among young people, ecology protection and arranging PR campaigns aimed at various ecology challenges, intercultural dialogue, active citizenship, etc.



## 4. INCLUSIVENESS

### 4.1. People with fewer opportunities

There are several CBHE projects implemented in Moldova between 2015-2017 which have promoted inclusiveness and human rights issues. LMPI, HRLAW and LNSS could be brought up in this regard, as follows:

**LMPI** - *Licence, Master professionnels pour le développement, l'administration, la gestion, la protection des systèmes et réseaux informatiques dans les entreprises*  
- 573901-EPP-1-2016-1-ITEPPKA2-CBHE-JP

As an example of students' inclusion within this project, Moldova State University established a centre for students with visual disabilities to give them a chance to study Information Security.

**HRLAW** - *European Human Rights Law for Universities of Ukraine and Moldova*  
- 573861-EPP-1-2016-1-EE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

Within this project, the Police Academy has modernised the university curricula and introduced case-oriented modules on Human Rights, at Master study level, 20 ECTS:

- Legal protection of human rights in police activity - 5 ECTS;
- Special protection of children at risk - 5 ECTS;
- Justice for Children - 5 ECTS;
- Resocialisation of persons after imprisonment - 5 ECTS.

**LNSS - Library Network Support Services:** *modernising libraries in Armenia, Moldova and Belarus through library staff development and reforming libraries*  
- 561633-EPP-1-2015-1-AM-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP

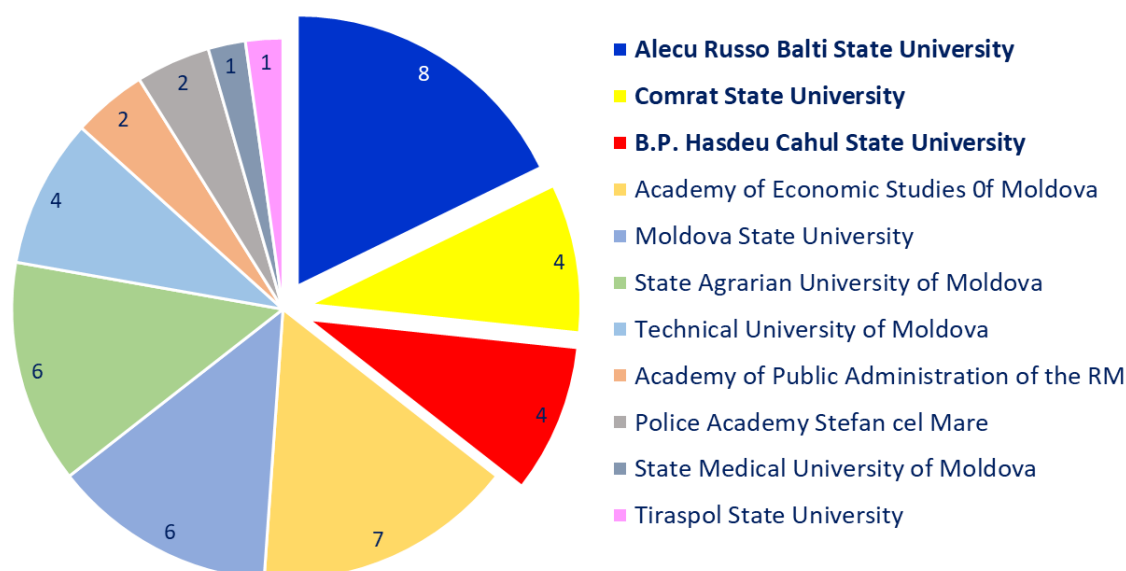
The HEIs involved in the LNSS project have organised a national campaign named "Give a book to change a destiny", meant to collect and donate books to the newly created library of "The Chernobyl echo" Foundation as an act of charity and support for people of all ages suffering from serious illnesses caused by the Chernobyl catastrophe. The purpose of the campaign was to raise awareness about the necessity of rehabilitation, integration of people with special needs.

## 4.2. Institutions located in less developed regions

The majority of Moldovan HEIs are concentrated in the capital of the country. Only 4 from the 30 HEIs existing in Moldova in 2015-2017, were located outside Chisinau. For these small regional universities, it is very difficult to survive in competition with HEIs located in the capital and, above all, to resist the massive emigration trend of young people to study abroad.

The support that Moldovan regional universities received from the Erasmus+ Programme through CBHE, but also through ICM projects, is one of the most important factors that allowed to maintain and develop regional universities in Moldova. **10 out of 11 CBHE projects selected in 2015-2017 involved at least 1 regional HEI from Moldova.** Moreover, the regional universities have been selected as partners in CBHE projects' consortia more often than other HEIs, located in the country's capital.

As shown in Chart 10, three regional Moldovan HEIs are involved in several CBHE projects: "Alecu Russo" State University of Balti (the only HEI located in the north of the country), "B.P.Hasdeu" State University of Cahul and Comrat State University (both located in the Southern part of the country).



**Chart 10.** The involvement of regional universities in CBHE projects (number of CBHE projects)

These regional universities were involved in the structural national CBHE ELEVATE project focused on HE internationalisation. Moreover, "Alecu Russo" State University of Balti (**USARB**) is the most active Moldovan university in CBHE projects with 8 projects implemented. Its participation in CBHE

projects, as well as in ICMs and in the previous TEMPUS and Erasmus Mundus projects, allowed USARB to become a **strong regional higher education centre**. The significant participation in international projects highly contributed to the modernisation of the academic programmes and emphasised the crucial role of the university among the HEIs of the Republic of Moldova and its increased visibility in the European context.

### “Alecu Russo” State University of Balti (USARB)

The CBHE projects allowed USARB to have a more qualified staff, updated governance policies, upgraded infrastructure, good relations with the industry and labour market:

- Increased attractiveness and visibility of USARB has facilitated better cooperation with decision makers: USARB developed a very strong collaboration with the Balti City Hall, the administration of the North Regional Free Economic Zone, the administration of the North Regional Development Agency.
- Equipment purchased in support of CBHE projects is of particular importance to this regional university, which has little financial support.
- In regional universities, students and employees have lower financial opportunities, are poorer, many of them are from vulnerable backgrounds, and CBHE projects, as well as ICM projects, facilitate their inclusion and access to the common European space for education and research.

# 5. CONCLUSIONS - CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 5.1. Challenges

The **exodus of young people from Moldova** for educational and employment purposes remains one of the main societal challenges, as well as a huge problem for Moldovan universities. The COVID19 lockdown has slowed the pace of emigration and the **decline in the number of students in HEIs**, but the problem remains substantial. Moldovan HEIs are facing a vital need to modernise and increase the quality of the educational offer in order to withstand international competition. The constant decrease of student numbers represents a real risk for courses created in the frame of CBHE projects, if they are followed by a low number of students/trainees.

In this sense, a **series of higher education reforms has started**, but a **number of regulatory adjustments is still waiting to be developed** and implemented (**improving the accreditation process, strengthening the research capacities of HEIs, perfecting the national qualifications framework**, etc.): *Moldovan higher education is structured according to Bologna principles since 2005 (Bachelor: 180-240 ECTS, Master: 90-120 ECTS, Doctorate: 180 ECTS) and the ECTS is implemented in all HEIs and all university programmes. Moldovan HEIs have obtained University autonomy with the adoption, in 2014, of the Code of Education.*

An important progress has been made in the field of internationalisation of HEIs as a result of the implementation of a structural CBHE project. Gradually the number of international students admitted to studies in Moldovan universities is growing. However, there are still challenges which have to be overcome in this regard:

- The **poor knowledge of English and other foreign languages** by academic staff and students, explains the **small number of courses taught in foreign languages**.
- **Poor funding of the international dimension activities** of Moldovan HEIs slows down the participation of academic staff and students in international scientific and networking events.
- Most **universities do not have the necessary capacity and services** to receive international students and staff (dormitories, adequate libraries etc.).
- **Building viable international partnerships** remains an important issue for Moldovan universities. Identifying partners for international cooperation remains one of the biggest obstacles for Moldovan HEIs, as EU HEIs have little interest to cooperate with them.
- A **small number of applications for new CBHE projects from Moldovan HEIs**. As the results of the NEO Moldova impact survey have shown, the respondents mentioned several reasons for this phenomenon: **the high workload of university staff, the non-competitive remuneration**, as well as **the complexity of CBHE application rules**. These are the most important factors which prevent HEIs to come with new applications. Nevertheless, it is worth

noting that Moldovan HEIs were reluctant to apply for new CBHE projects in the first three Erasmus+ CBHE calls. However, this situation is slowly but surely changing – the number of CBHE applications has increased from 3 to 10 during the last CBHE calls for project proposals, even though this number is still too small.

- The **poor funding of Moldovan universities** prevents the promotion of internationalisation of Moldovan universities, i.e. universities practically do not finance participation in international scientific events, networking events etc.
- CBHE **joint projects** contributed largely to the modernisation and internationalisation of the 15 universities involved in these projects and have had **a strong institutional impact**. However, the **small number of structural projects have had medium, or even reduced, impact at the system level**.
- The **involvement of students** in curricula modernisation and in HEIs governance **is still very modest**.
- The **involvement of the ministry and national authorities** supporting the implementation of CBHE projects is still **weak** and their impact at the national level has to be amplified. The change of governments was mentioned by respondents as one of the factors which affected the Ministry's involvement and impact at national level.
- **More than half of Moldovan universities did not participate in CBHE projects**, or only participated in 1-2 projects. This low involvement of Moldovan HEIs in CBHE projects **does not allow the creation and accumulation of the critical mass necessary for changes**, for the modernisation of the entire system.
- The small number of CBHE projects implemented in Moldova (on average 4 new projects yearly) leads to the **lack of projects focused primarily on inclusion**, thus resulting in **insufficient attention paid to the topic of inclusiveness in the Moldovan higher education system**.
- **No CBHE projects (2015-2017) directly addressed the current global priorities: greener world or environmental and sustainable development aspects**.
- Regarding the **visibility of projects and the wide dissemination of results**, not every CBHE project's website presents clearly the results obtained within the project.
- The **excessive bureaucracy in reporting, but also the insufficiency of financial resources within the project** also add to the challenges linked to project implementation.
- The monitoring of the projects as well as the responses received in the framework of the online surveys showed that the **level of remuneration of Moldovan participants** in CBHE projects is **perceived as unfair, inequitable**. The university staff, participating in regional CBHE projects, stressed that, comparing to their colleagues from other Eastern Partnership countries, their remuneration for the same tasks was substantially lower.

### 5.2. Recommendations

#### Messages to the European Commission

- **The number of selected CBHE projects with Moldova should increase significantly in the new Erasmus+ Programme.** Indeed, the **small number of selected CBHE projects involving Moldova** (2-4 per year) **does not allow the modernisation of higher education in many areas** and reduces the potential impact of the projects. The low winning rate (10-12%) within the EaP region discourages potential applicants.
- Measures to **encourage project coordination by Partner Countries HEIs** should be maintained. This will stimulate HEIs to analyse the local needs and to submit project proposals relevant to their university requirements.
- However, even if the coordination of CBHE projects by Moldovan universities is extremely important to improve their management capacity, it is also important to **maintain some projects coordinated by EU HEIs**, which will bring the necessary innovative reform ideas, coming from abroad, and will allow the exchange of multinational experiences in project management.
- The new Erasmus+ Programme could **further encourage the implementation of CBHE projects aiming to support and develop inclusiveness, ecology and sustainable development, digitalisation**, etc.
- The new Erasmus+ Programme could have powerful tools to support networking events for small Partner Countries like Moldova, in order to increase their international visibility and support new partnerships with Programme Countries HEIs. At this stage, it is important for Moldovan HEIs to obtain **funding to support their internationalisation efforts, to promote their universities internationally, to participate in networking events, to facilitate the search for new project partners**, etc.
- The **involvement of Ministries of education in CBHE projects and the number of structural projects** should be increased.
- **It is crucial that the unit cost amounts for staff costs are to be re-evaluated**, in order to reduce inequalities between Partner Countries, **at least in the Eastern Partnership**, where working conditions and salary levels are almost the same and unequal unit costs only generate frustrations.
- **The development of a common cost grid for all projects in the new Erasmus+ programme** would be recommended. Indeed, the experience of 2014-2020 Erasmus+ projects showed that there were differences between KA1, KA2, Jean Monnet and other Erasmus+ projects and their management within one university was quite complicated.



## 5. CONCLUSIONS - CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The **simplification of procedures within Erasmus+ projects**, both at application stage and during project implementation would encourage more young professionals to get involved in these projects.

### Messages to the Moldovan HEIs and national authorities

- Moldovan HEIs and national authorities should develop and apply mechanisms which would **attract young professionals for teaching and administrative positions in higher education**.
- **Academic staff, and especially young teachers**, should be **encouraged, trained, motivated and supported** to **apply to new innovative international projects** (including CBHE projects) with topics relevant to the reform of higher education in the Republic of Moldova.
- **Funding should be increased to support internationalisation** of Moldovan universities.
- **The impact** of implemented CBHE projects at institutional and national level should be **further assessed**, the **synergy of CBHE projects** should be **ensured** and the **exploitation of their results** at systemic level should be **extended**.
- **The Moldovan legislative and regulatory framework should continue to improve for a better implementation of Erasmus+ and other international projects in the field of higher education**.
- The **visibility of Erasmus+ projects** should be improved at institutional and national levels, as well as the **dissemination of CBHE projects results and best practices** in higher education at systemic level.
- The poor knowledge of English and other foreign languages by academic staff and students remains an impediment for the further internationalisation of Moldovan HEIs. **Strong incentives should be developed to increase the level of proficiency in English and other foreign languages**, especially among academic staff.
- Universities and academic staff should be encouraged to **develop courses taught in English and other foreign languages**.
- **The universities' capacity to receive international students and staff** should be developed (as regards teaching-learning conditions, dormitories, capacity of university structures to manage this category of students and staff, development of university services, etc.)



# ERASMUS+

## National impact study: Capacity Building in Higher Education projects

### Resume

This report is based on the National Erasmus+ Office in Moldova evaluation of the first generation of CBHE projects selected for funding between 2015-2017. Altogether 11 projects were funded during this period in the Republic of Moldova.

