SMALL STEPS DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

THE HERAS SOCIAL DIMENSION SMALL GRANT SCHEME
Dear Reader,

It is our true pleasure to share with you this brochure, introducing 10 small projects with remarkable contributions from students, NGOs and university actors – aimed at strengthening the Social Dimension of Higher Education of the Bologna Process in Kosovo. The projects were designed by groups of students, NGOs and university actors and implemented between May and December 2018 within the HERAS project (“Higher Education, Research and Applied Science” https://www.heraskosovo.org/).

As outlined in the London Communiqué of 2007, the student body entering, participating and completing higher education should reflect the diversity of the populations. This comes with a need for appropriate conditions for students so that they can complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background. This is also in line with international human rights commitments on the right to education: According to the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the right to education includes an obligation to develop equitable access to higher education for all.

In the last decade the number of tertiary students in Kosovo has tripled from 28,832 in 2004/2005 to over 110,137 in 2017/2018. During the same period there has been a considerable increase in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) – while there was only one public University in Pristina in 2001, there are currently seven public universities and twenty-one non-public HEIs. An increase of HEIs, however, does not automatically translate into effective and equal access to education for all, including for persons from vulnerable and marginalised groups. As a matter of fact, structural barriers such as poverty, entrenched stereotypes or indirect discrimination can potentially hamper effective access to education for all.

Against this background and recognizing the importance of the Social Dimension of Higher Education in Kosovo, HERAS has designed the above mentioned small grant scheme, inviting students, NGOs and universities to come up with suggestions, offering different solutions to existing challenges. As a direct result of these projects – just to name one of many successes – nine students from non-majority communities and two blind students were able to enrol at universities and colleges respectively. But much more has been achieved, as can be seen in the individual project sections of this brochure. In this context, we would also like to use this opportunity to thank all grantees for their tremendous, motivation, tireless efforts and the excellent cooperation!

We hope that this brochure can serve as an inspiration, providing students, NGOs and universities with ideas on how to further strengthen access, participation and successful completion of higher education for all – including groups that are underrepresented in society.

Many steps need to be taken to reach a goal – but as can be seen also from these projects, small steps do indeed make a true difference to people!

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Louise Sperl
HERAS Expert

and

Donjeta Ibra
HERAS Project Team
Coordinator of the SD Small Grants Scheme
Introduction - the HERAS Project

The project “Higher Education, Research and Applied Sciences – HERAS” aims to contribute to the well-functioning of Higher Education and Research in Kosovo along the principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA) with the long term objective to support the socio-economic development of the country.

The HERAS Project is funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) with funds of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) and co-financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). The HERAS Project is implemented by an Austrian consortium represented by World University Service Austria (WUS Austria, lead partner), the Center for Social Innovation (ZSI) and the Austrian Agency for International Mobility and Cooperation in Education, Science and Research (OeAD).

The objective of this project is to effectively and sustainably improve the higher education and research system in Kosovo, to enhance the quality of higher education and the employability of graduates, and to improve human capacities and increase internationalisation of research.

One of the target values of the project is also to put measures in place to support students from marginalized groups in order to access/ participate in and successfully complete their studies without obstacles related to their social, cultural and economic background.
Background: The Social Dimension (SD) or Higher Education

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

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

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

As for the Social Dimension of Higher Education (HE) in Kosovo, focus group interviews (FGIs) on the Social Dimension (SD) of the Bologna Process were conducted in Pristina between March 11-13, 2015. The participants in the FGIs included higher education teaching staff, university management, education authorities, CSOs and students from Bosniak, Roma and Turkish communities.¹

Participants concluded that the following groups are considered marginalized or underrepresented when it comes to higher education in Kosovo:

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

Throughout the lifetime of the project, HERAS also provided targeted support to facilitate the implementation of the Social Dimension in Kosovo in line with the findings from the above-mentioned report.

To this end, capacities of the target groups were developed and translated into practice through seed funding for follow up activities such as consultative services, mentoring, awareness raising, capacity building, empowerment of persons from marginalised groups and others.

¹ The full report can be found under https://wusaustria.org/files/docs/Publications/Report%20Social%20Dimension%20Kosovo%20final%2014072015.pdf
The Social Dimension Small Grant Scheme

HERAS supports the implementation of the Social Dimension in Kosovo both at the system level as well as through direct support to enhance access, participation and completion of higher education for persons from marginalised groups. For this purpose, a small grant scheme was set up to fund a variety of measures in line with the criteria established in the guidelines. The small SD projects aimed to further promote the SD of higher education of the Bologna Process in Kosovo and to contribute to the implementation of recommendations identified during earlier focus group discussions.

Further details about the small grant scheme can be found in the SD application package which is available on the HERAS webpage. The application was open to HEIs, CSOs, schools and groups of students from vulnerable groups. The call was open for two months and ten applications were finally selected for funding. Out of these ten projects, five were implemented by small groups of students (2-5), four by NGOs and one by a HEI. Grantees were invited to an initial workshop in June 2018 with the aim to introduce them to HERAS/reporting requirements as well as to support networking among grantees for fostering synergies across projects. During the lifetime of the projects, monitoring visits were conducted to all project partners. All selected projects started their activities during May 2018 and were finished by December 2018.

Areas covered by the projects include the promotion of minority quotas for HE and dissemination of information on study opportunities among minority communities, mentoring and on the job training for students from underrepresented groups, research on the right of stateless persons and others. Results from the SD Small Grant Scheme will be also disseminated in a public event on 26 February 2019 in Prishtina and are summarised in this brochure.

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2 The call package can be found under: https://www.heraskosovo.org/social-dimension-grants/
Within this project, a highly compact vehicle was designed and developed which allows persons with disabilities (PWD) to enter buildings and structures including university buildings which - in most cases - are physically not accessible for PWDs. This vehicle can be also used for patients and aged people in care facilities or at home. The vehicle is being made of light weight which also allows to increase its range.

The work started with the drawing, designing and simulation of the vehicle in computer programs. After designing the “Autotronic DP”, the required equipment was purchased, while some equipment was also designed and manufactured by the team itself. In a next stage, the equipment was tested and installed. During the entire project, the team was also provided guidance and supervision by relevant professors.

The electric wheelchair “Autotronic DP” is now ready for exposure and driving. This wheelchair offers a similar driving experience to those offered by large manufacturers and companies, but in this developed system there are significant advances in facilitating the driving of a person with disabilities and increasing the safety level. The charging of batteries of the “Autotronic DP” is not dependent on electricity that is offered with lignite burning. Batteries are and will be filled with hybrid wind/solar hybrid power that is available at the Faculty of Engineering, at UP.

The project was also presented in the 3rd International Scientific Symposium held in Prishtina. Furthermore, two diploma theses of students of this group were written based on this project.

The project was implemented by a group of five students from the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”: Agon Haziri, Arta Berisha, Lorik Gara, Adem Bacaj and Muhamet Lezi.
Integration of Females from Minorities in Higher Education

This project was implemented by a group of three students from the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtinë”: Marte Raja, Amir Zogu and Besë Zogu. The project aimed at strengthening access to and participation in higher education for women from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families by empowering young women from these communities.

To reach these objectives, the following activities were implemented:

- Advocacy and awareness raising on the importance of education for women and its impact on women and society at large.
- Provision of information about university requirements for accessing higher education.

In order to reach these objectives, door to door visits to families in six municipalities in Kosovo (Prishtina, Fushë Kosova, Vushtrria, Prizren, Gjakova and Klina) were conducted, aimed to raise their awareness on the importance and benefits of education as well as on existing educational opportunities. During these visits, issues related to these topics were discussed and information materials provided (including from public universities).

Distributed materials included information on (perceived) gender roles in society, the importance of education for women and information regarding public universities in Kosovo (minority opportunities offered, enrolment and exam dates, accommodation information, etc.).

During the implementation of the project, the team has discovered that economic reasons are very prevalent and seem to be a major cause for the low interest of minority women in obtaining a higher education degree. Furthermore, lack of information represents a serious obstacle.

During visits in secondary schools, information on educational opportunities could be successfully spread and shared. Future students were provided with brochures and informational materials to prepare them for the university entrance exams.

A closing event was organized, were potential candidates for enrolment at university were invited. The participants had the opportunity to meet and exchange information amongst each other. During the event the project team also provided support in the preparation of entry exams and enrolment.

“This project has been a great opportunity for us and a great lesson, too. We are very thankful for the opportunity to share with others on how important and irreplaceable is higher education is nowadays.”

- Project Team
Within this project academic units of the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” (UP) were identified that provide study opportunities for people with disabilities. During the first phase of the project, the project team conducted a research including all academic units of UP (as well as the national library) to identify and analyse existing opportunities for accessing buildings and structures. The collected data have shown that only two Faculties offer minimal certain conditions to provide access for people with disabilities and other support measures: Faculty of Education and Faculty of Philosophy. However, even though the buildings of these faculties are newly built, there are no further commodities, such as bathrooms for people with disabilities. The team produced promotional materials (flyers and posters) with further information on potential support for people with disabilities and distributed them at all UP Faculties.

During the second phase of the project, these results were presented to schools with students with disabilities/special needs. The team decided also to visit all centres of the “Association of Paraplegics and Paralysed Children of Kosovo - HANKOS” which is the largest organization with access to all persons with disabilities registered in Kosovo. During these visits, the team presented the project, delivered flyers and posters with information regarding the research which was conducted. They also held meetings with potential students and offered support in the enrolment process at university.

Also, a two-day workshop was held at the resource centre “Përparimi” which is a special school for children with severe and multiple disabilities. During this workshop, the team presented the project to potential students as well as the possibilities which the University of Prishtina offers for people with disabilities.

This project was implemented by a group of four students from the University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina”: Besart Shatri, Leutrim Dreshaj, Patriot Kelmendi and Jetmir Avdijaj.
Promoting Roma Culture

The aim of the project was to address and reduce barriers which cause discrimination and prejudice against the Roma community in Kosovo. For this purpose, a number of awareness raising and promotional activities were conducted:

A conference with the topic of “Roma Culture, today and tomorrow” was organized in cooperation with the Students Parliament of the University of Prizren “Ukshin Hoti”. The objective of the conference was to introduce and promote cultural values of the Roma community to other students. One of the key speakers was also the Rector of the university. During the discussions, it was concluded that the knowledge and awareness about the culture of the Roma community was low and that events like this conference can play an important role in promoting a better understanding.

Furthermore, a documentary movie entitled “Importance of Support” was shown to students in order to empower students/young people to support and motivate each other in order to succeed in life. The movie portrayed a Roma student and his struggles in everyday life in overcoming barriers and also showed the support he received throughout his struggles. After the movie the discussion and debate continued on sub-topics such as education, health, employment and social well-being, community protection mechanisms in Kosovo; legislation and policies in place, etc.

In addition, a debate with students on the topic “Prejudices and Stereotypes” was conducted. Presentations gave insight into the topic and illustrated how students dealt with real life situations. The lively discussions also addressed how prejudices touch not only on the lives of the Roma community, but also on other minority communities such as Ashkali, Turks, Bosniaks and others. It was concluded that actions need to be taken in order to raise the level of knowledge and awareness on minorities and their rights in Kosovo.

The project was implemented by two students from the University of Prizren “Ukshin Hoti”: Jemina Osmani and Elmedin Qylangji.
The project was implemented by a group of two students from University of Prizren "Ukshin Hoti": Muhamet Elshani and Fatmir Menekshe. This project aimed at promoting the existing quota system for non-majority students among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Since most of these communities come from and live in rural areas, they lack necessary information regarding non-majority quota which are provided for by law.

As a first step, meetings with high school directors of the Prizren region were held to identify potential students from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Rector of the University of Prizren where the Rector expressed his willingness to provide support to students from marginalized groups in the enrolment process at University.

The project team drafted and designed a brochure with information on affirmative measures for the enrolment at University (i.e. on reserved seats for non-majority communities) based on the administrative instruction. This brochure was published and distributed in the region of Prizren. Furthermore, an information session was held, in order to explain enrolment procedures, exam dates and other related issues. The session also helped to identify students interested in registering at the University of Prizren. Meetings with local NGOs were conducted in order to exchange information and to coordinate ongoing activities.

As a result of all this work, nine students from non-majority communities were able to enroll at the University of Prizren, six of them could eventually use the existing affirmative measures (quota system in place).

“The project was very important for students of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Prizren municipality and villages around it. Since the majority of us didn’t have the opportunity to pass the threshold of required points to be enrolled at “Ukshin Hoti” University, our colleagues from the project have intervened and through MoU signed with the Rector have managed to enrol the students which were not successful in the first enrolment period. I am also amongst these students and I am very thankful to the project for supporting us with the enrolment.” – Amar Berisha student

3 The brochure is also available under https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwWr6lokNGFWaUN4YTk3SWxxYzRsZWl2MW56STc5WTNQZ22Fn/view?fbclid=IwAR2MDepOYmsLiE5Z5Ca8AQR-G4kd1_WjBhy5KgKc5iBwqhesKvaaAkf44.
Within this project research was conducted on the rights of stateless persons in Kosovo (i.e. in the municipality of Gjilan), analyzing challenges faced in registering at universities and pursuing (higher) education.

According to the research paper, there are about 3,000 citizens of this category in the municipality of Gjilan who are not equipped with basic documents. In the past years, the offices for Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac have addressed 756 requests of citizens, which have been forwarded to the respective departments at the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). Out of 756 requests, 250 have received the citizenship of Kosovo, while others are pending.

In the process of developing the research, the project team held meetings with the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor of Gjilan, representatives of the MIA, Presidents of the Assemblies of Bujanovac and Presevo, representatives of the University of “Kadri Zeka” and representatives of different CSOs in order to advocate and find sustainable solutions for these persons - and especially for candidates, who are interested in applying for university admission. After these meetings, the project team was informed that a regulation is being drafted that foresees a long-term solution to this problem for stateless persons in Gjilan and other categories of citizens. Also, University of “Kadri Zeka” has reached an agreement of understanding with the Albanian National Council for cooperation in addressing this problem: Candidate students who have no citizenship and valid identification documents will receive a specific document from this council to support the applicant's identity, based on school and other documents.

Furthermore, a survey was conducted, to which 300 citizens from Presevo, Medvedja and Bujanovac have responded. Over 50% of them state that the problem of their nationality not being recognized is related to the lack of relevant legislation, while 42% of them think that the state of Kosovo is dragging the procedures which prevents them from receiving their citizenship. Only 8% of the respondents are optimistic that during the procedures they will follow, they will be ultimately provided with citizenship from Kosovo.

When asked, whether the lack of citizenship prevents them from finding jobs or attending school, over 70% of respondents claimed that this is the fact. Meanwhile, 19% of the respondents point out that this is only partly a barrier for finding employment and continuing education. 11% of respondents have no opinion on this question. The results were presented at a round table at the University "Kadri Zeka" in Gjilan.

The project was implemented by academic staff and students of University “Kadri Zeka” in Gjilan.
The project aimed to combat stereotypes that hamper access in higher education to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, including here: increasing number of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian students in Kosovo and more specifically in Prizren municipality; having better career prospects; reducing poverty; increasing number of students in higher education process, improving living conditions; enhancing their participation in decision making processes through better education; strengthening of cooperation and collaboration among minority and majority students; raised awareness among students for the importance of higher education as well as raised awareness of their parents for the importance of higher education with special focus on minority girls. A number of activities were identified and implemented in this project:

An interactive debate was organized with a mixed group of students from Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian, Bosnian, Turkish, and Albanian communities, aimed at raising the awareness on educational opportunities at university level. Specific emphasis was put on girls empowerment and access to higher education by sharing positive examples and good practices. Recommendations that were identified during the debate included: organization of other multi-ethnic activities (debates in the field of education aimed at improving the cooperation with majority youth); improvement of the image of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community/youth through organization of joint activities; allocation of additional public funds for joint educational activities with majority youth and others.

Also, a digital story was produced where young people from both majority and non-majority communities jointly promoted higher education with a special focus on facilitating access for Roma girls, preventing and reducing the number of early marriages, combatting existing stereotypes and providing informing about educational opportunities. The promotion of the digital story took place in Prizren, were participants made up a mixed youth group. The group emphasized that this is the first time that a digital story was prepared, in order to mobilize Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students to enhance enrolment in higher education, with a specific focus on girls.

The digital story was shared through social media, as well as on local television in the region of Prizren.

The project was implemented by the non-governmental organization “Sakuntala” from Prizren.

“The digital story will help to inform the majority about the situation the minority communities face, especially girls, and also help to remove stereotypes and prejudices. Initiatives like this need to be implemented continuously in order to show results” – Project Team

4 It is also available under the official Sakuntala Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/SakuntalaKosovo
This project aimed to raise awareness among students from marginalized groups on the importance of education (both minority groups and those coming from lower socio-economic groups). In addition, it has equipped them with basic skills needed for successful completion of university such as note-taking, presentation skills, processing information and writing emails.

The students who participated in the project activities have developed their skills through active engagement group work, participating in workshops and hands-on experiences. They were trained, mentored and supervised by the project team. This helped to additionally foster better communication among youngsters and to provide them with role models which encourage them to pursue higher education.

The workshops with students were organized in Gjakova, Prizren and Peja. During the first workshop students were informed about opportunities public universities offer, including study programmes, requirements, criteria, enrolment process and others. A number of practical exercises were implemented including role plays, puzzles and others. In addition, participants had the chance to discuss their interests, goals and skills.

In the second workshop students learnt how to use the MS office package, how to write formal emails, how to give a successful presentation, how to write an academic essay and much more. During these workshops, there were also motivational speakers from marginalized communities, serving as role models by providing their perspectives and personal experiences. These speakers shared their journeys to success with the students, highlighting their difficulties and strategies to overcome existing barriers.

Throughout the project, students from majority and minority groups became aware of their potential and possibilities while simultaneously building up their skills to meet their own potential.

This project was implemented by the non-governmental organization Development Research Innovation Training – DRIT.’

“There are many new things I’ve learned and enjoyed through the workshops. I’ve learned about the distinction between the university and faculty, their importance and the opportunities offered there. I also liked the discussion we had about our dreams for the future and that we became more skilful in using technology. Most importantly we did all the things an active way, expressing ourselves freely, learning from each other and we also made new friends.” – participating high school student
Career Orientation and Skills Needed for Professional Work

The project aimed at increasing the administrative capacity and providing career guidance and counselling to students aged 18-25 from minority communities by providing a series of trainings where participants were able to acquire skills needed for professional development.

The successful completion of activities included a 10-day training for young people. As a result, 26 young people have been provided with career guidance and have acquired personal attributes for professional development. Students came from different backgrounds including low socio-economic background; Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and young women.

The training resulted in participants adopting effective methods for working in groups, promoting collegiality and team spirit and preparing them with other necessary soft skills required in professional life. The training included theoretical inputs, practical exercises as well as discussions. During the training period, twenty-four topics were covered, including: training on SMART methodology, project proposal writing, communication in a working environment, job applications, development of professional image, importance of volunteering and others.

At the end of the training, participants provided their feedback through an evaluation. The below paragraph shows some of the thoughts and reflections:

"I am willing to share with others what I have learned during the training, because it has had a positive impact on my personality and profession”.

"I believe that young people need such trainings and I would recommend them to high school students as well as to students at universities”.

This project was implemented by the non governmental organization Oportuna Studentore - OST from Prishtina.
This project, implemented by the NGO Peja International Lions Club aimed at increasing the number of blind students at public and private higher education institutions in Kosovo.

Activities included hands-on support to blind students in registering at universities, mentoring of blind students and further capacity building measures for Universities and Colleges in order for them to provide conditions for studying responding to the needs of blind people.

The project team contacted six public universities in Kosovo and communicated with over twenty private colleges. The team provided information about blind people in Kosovo, existing opportunities in higher education and possibilities for support by the “Resource Center of Peja and the Association of the Blind”. They informed universities and colleges about students’ willingness to continue their studies and identified possible candidates for higher education.

During the project, two round tables with representatives of higher education institutions in Kosovo were held. The first roundtable was conducted at MEST in June 2018 in cooperation with QBMK “Xheladin Deda” with participants from different public and private HE institutions. Recommendations were identified to further develop opportunities for blind people and to enhance coordination between institutions for better services. The report with recommendations was shared with MEST and all higher education institutions. The second-round table targeted universities were blind studentshave already registered (MEST, November 2018). A second report with recommendations was shared with MEST and all higher education institutions.

As a direct result of these meetings, two students who finished their high school, started their studies at University of Prishtina “Hasan Prishtina” and Iliirja College. They were both supported and received counselling services by the project team in this process.

Also, another student who had just finished secondary school in 2018, was a participant in the first-round table held in June 2018 at MEST with representatives of higher education in Kosovo. After the presentation of his personal experience, several colleges have offered him free high school education and he has meanwhile started his studies at AAB College.

“On the meetings we have held with universities I was informed about their programs and I received offers from them to enrol. I have finally enrolled to AAB College, as I have seen most promising opportunities in this college. In these meetings I also met Diellona, who had completed her studies in this college and she also recommended it to me. Now I feel good about the decision I’ve made” - Herolind Gashi, student at AAB College
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