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Impact of COVID 19

on the implementation of ICM projects in Albanian

Survey Report

Impact of COVID 19 Pandemic on the implementation of ICM projects in Albanian HEIs.

Introduction

On the last week of June 2020, the National Erasmus+ Office in Albania launched a short survey aimed at collecting information on the difficulties experienced during the Covid-19 outbreak and measures adopted for addressing the situation, by International Relation Offices at Albanian HEIs. Information below summarizes the effects stipulated by the Covid-19 outbreak on processes and their activities managed by the International Relation Offices.

In Albania **41** High Education Institution are licensed by MESY, while only **38** of them are accredited by Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (ASCAL). For the academic year 2020-2021, **16** Albanian HEIs have ICM agreements under active implementation. Albanian HEIs, run a centralized management framework on ICM projects at the University level. Despite some agreements are concluded on the Faculty level, still their implementation remain centralized through the offices located at the rectorate, called International Relation Office or Projects Office.

The survey was distributed to IROs of 16 HEIs, **10** of them embraced the survey and responded promptly, 3 of them never responded and 3 remaining ones, didn't fill the form for various reasons. Nevertheless, the 5 HEIs (except the Agriculture University of Tirana)

that didn't participate in the survey have a very low number of ICM mobilities¹ or are lightly engaged to the programme.

Consequently, below data are significant and should be representative to the impact level of the COVID19 lockdown on the management of ICM projects.

Participate Institutions on this survey are:

Institution Name
POLIS University
"Katolik Zoja e Këshillit të Mirë" University
European University of Tirana
University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali"
Universiteti of Elbasan
EPOKA University
University of Tirana
University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi"
University "Eqrem Çabej" of Gjirokastra
University "Aleksander Moisiu" of Durrës

➤ Main Findings

As the COVID-19 outbreak impacted all the HE Institutions throughout Europe, it impacted the functioning of Albanian HE Institutions as well. As physical distancing measures were introduced, all the academic and social activities were banned from all HEIs, at least until mid-June 2020, after which only activities such as final exams and theses defenses were allowed at HEIs premises, provided they were conducted under strict COVID19's preventive measures.

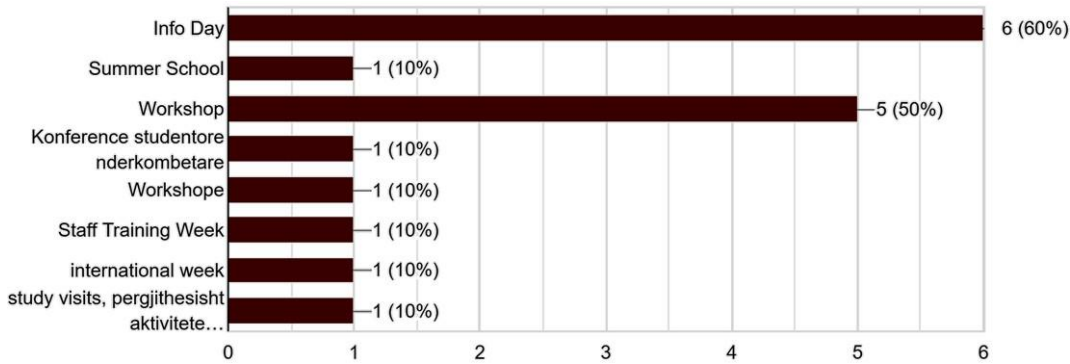
- 10 surveyed HEIs confirmed that ICM projects related activities were affected in some shape or form by the pandemic. They provided the following detailed feedback: the types of activities that have been canceled due to the lockdown are: Info days, International Conference, workshops, training week, study visits (Q1)

-60 % of surveyed HEIs answered that each of them had to cancel one Info Day on Erasmus+ Programme, with focus on mobilities.

-50% of surveyed HEIs canceled the workshop/s between students or staff.

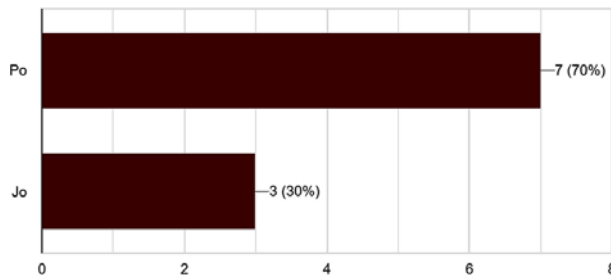
¹ According to the factsheet 2019 and ICM FMV conducted January 2020, AUT has 5.4 % of total ICM agreements under active implementation or 6.2% of total mobilities for incoming and outgoing students and staff, completed within last two years.

Q1: What kind of Erasmus+ activities had to be canceled due to Pandemic?



- 70% of surveyed HEIs confirmed that their student faced problems during the lockdown (Q4)

Q4: From your institution did any student have any problems during the student exchange?



Some Figures

243 Albanian Students were on mobility during lockdown 2020.

21 of them interrupted the mobility and returned to Albania

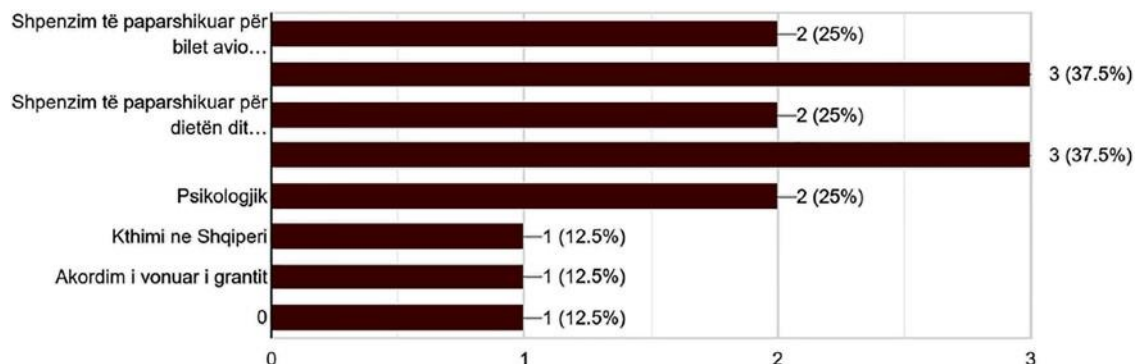
27 of Albanian students faced problems due to the lockdown

The main problems faced by Albanian students attending mobilities were:

1. Lack of availability of equipment's during the mobility which became necessary to support online learning.
2. Some students got stuck at the host institution country after the end of the mobility period, so they had to cover the accommodation and daily fees by themselves. The air ticket already purchased had to be rescheduled, but very few students have been refunded for the ticket price by air tickets office. But in the end, for surveyed HEIs, their students had fully or partially received the EU grant to which they were entitled. Only two students experienced delays in receiving their respective grant.

3. Students that had to cover the extra costs incurred due to the pandemic, expressed a high level of stress: to their respective IRO, pointing out to two main reasons:
 - The insecurity if they will or won't receive the additional support.
 - In the case of mobilities designed as work on site or Lab courses, due to the pandemic this kind of mobilities has not been successful implemented and students were worried if they already lost the possibility of earning the credits. (according to pic 3)

Q4b: If yes, what kind of problems?

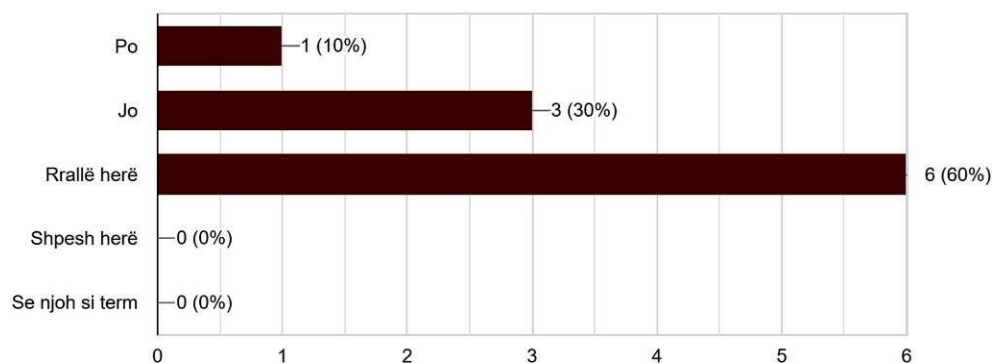


➤ **General Data**

Based on the feedback received by the 10HEI surveyed, the data on mobilities that were affected by the Covid-19 situation comprise:

- 320** ICM agreements, which were active during this academic year
- 239** Albanian staff (academic and administrative), which had to cancel their mobilities
- 78** Open Call for the new mobilities, which were not launched
- 37** Incoming students didn't have the opportunity to visit and study at Albanian institutions
- 16** Incoming students were studying in Albanian Institutions during the pandemic.

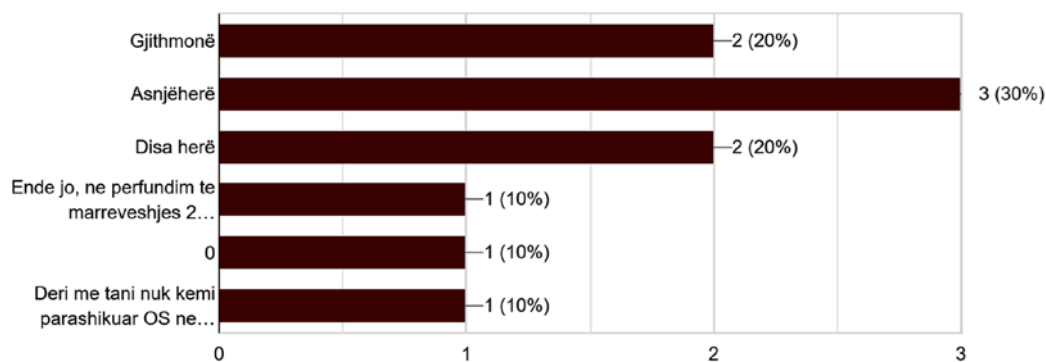
Q9: Did you foresee in the inter- institutional agreement “Organization Support”?



Regarding the provision of the Organizational financial support to Albanian HEI ²Albanian HEI, as part of the ICM programme framework, data informed that only one Albanian HEI has insisted for the inclusion of OS during the signing of all their Interinstitutional agreement, 3 of them hadn't discussed at all provision of OS, and 6 HEIs informed that they rarely had written any OS in their Interinstitutional agreement.

In the cases where OS was already agreed between institutions, data showed that 40% didn't receive at all the respective OS from the PC HEIs while 40% of them had received their OS.

Q10: If the OS is provided in the bilateral agreement, has it been sent to you?

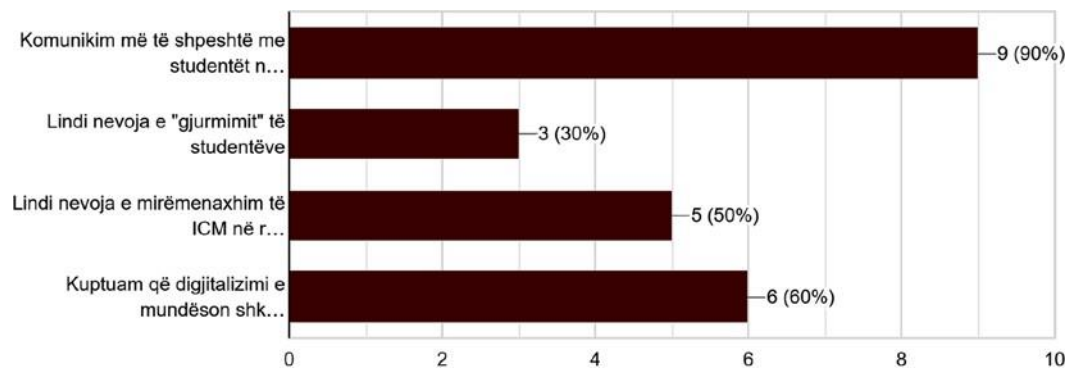


Surveyed participants were asked to give some opinions and provide ideas on ways how the ICM programme could be improve. They listed:

- OS should be mandatory and not an optional support,
- staff mobility to be used for writing project proposals or training staff to write projects, such as CBHE project, ICM projects.

² The question is not intended to know the number but to know if discussions on the OS are foreseen between HEIs

Q13: During the pandemic, what are some of the new experiences your institution experienced?

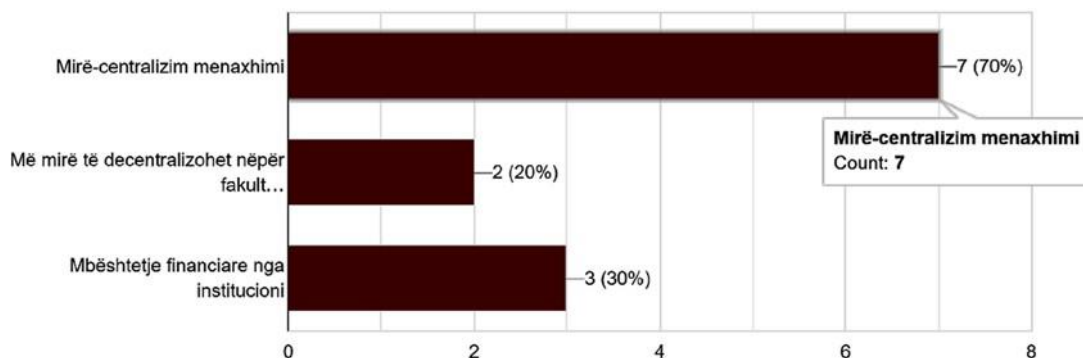


According to Q13, Covid19 has improved some skills and manners regarding support services for mobilities. 90% of the IRO staff answered that their communications with the students abroad have been more active than before Pandemic. 60% of them answered that digitalization is an opportunity that could substitute activities during implementation of ICM such as: training, staff meetings, students recruiting. During the outbreak (March-June 2020), it was approved that learning could be shift to e-learning, education system in Albania, from elementary school to High Education, embraced digital learning, consequently HEIs could provide online courses for mobility students.

- 50% of respondents admitted that the Pandemic proved the necessity for a **better management** of ICMs and,

-30% of them required the designing of a **tracing tool**, in the real time, for student and staff on mobility.

Q14: What do you think would improve the management of ICM management?



- 70% of respondents confirmed that the **centralized management** of ICM projects will improve their management and implementation of ICM projects

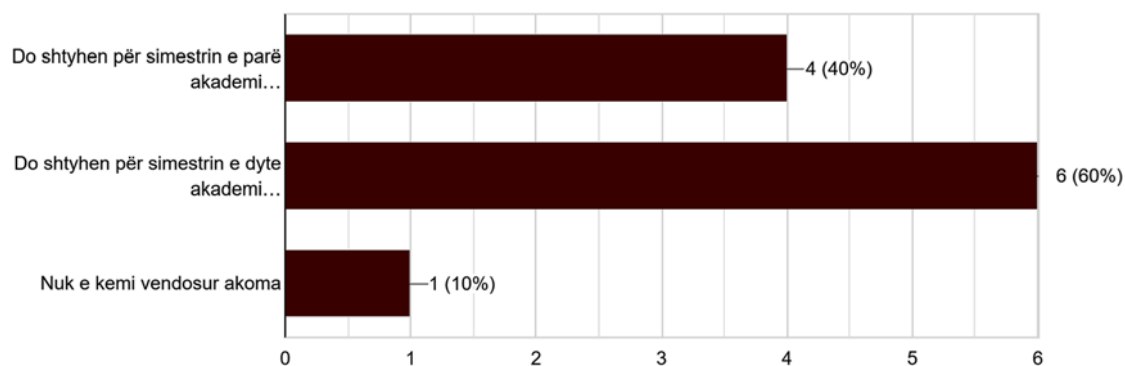
-30% of them for better implementation of the ICM projects, asked for **financial support** from their Institution,

-20% of them suggested that this process could be better managed at the **faculty level**.

All IRO's informed that until October 2020 all the activities related to the ICM programme were canceled. They decided to carry out the mobilities and IROs activities in the coming months, listed below (Q15):

- 60% of them have already notified to postpone the activities and mobilities for the second semester 2020-2021
- 40% of them answered that apart of activities will start during the first semester of the academic year 2020-2021.
- 10% of them haven't decided yet.

Q15: What have you foreseen or decided for the unfulfilled agreements??



We sincerely thank all Albanian IRO's Staff that contributed to the realization of this Survey!

National-Erasmus+ Office of Albania

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