



Internationalization is a top priority for HEIs in Albania, an obligation which also derives from the law on higher education 80/2015. While the country is pushing towards EU integration, HEIs are also upgrading their standards to the required levels as in EU member countries. However, due to lack of previous experience and many internal factors, internationalization is perceived differently by different institutions. In several cases, internationalization of HEIs is at the stage of signing MoUs, participating in EU financed programs such as Erasmus+ etc, and there is no strategic approach and no follow-up. The process is very complex and goes deep at institutional level while HEIs are dedicating fewer resources and many MoUs exist only on paper and no real activity and follow up is taking place.

The number of English language (or any other foreign language) remains very low with little or no initiatives taking place to introduce programs in English to cater for international students. The number of foreign students and professors selecting to study and work in Albanian HEIs, is even lower. There is a massive misbalance between the number of outgoing and incoming Erasmus+ students. The overall number of Erasmus+ students will show that 95-98% of them are outgoing and the number of incoming students remains low.

This topic has been selected due to the importance internationalization plays for the development of HEIs. Currently, there is not a clear set of benchmark standards on what is internationalization. Different HEIs understand the internationalization process differently and their objectives are not complete or partial. There is an inherited perception that internationalization is about new bilateral agreements, Erasmus exchanges and mostly EU-financed projects. Therefore, it is necessary to underline and “clear the air” about what internationalization is, how it affects all units in a HEI, what are the required objectives, which are the instruments to measure internationalization etc.

1. Internationalization strategies redefinition and instruments to measure impact qualitatively and quantitatively

Higher education institutions have drafted internationalization strategies, approved by their internal governing structures. However, in many occasions, such strategies are not visible enough or consulted with the academic staff prior to their approval. Internationalization strategies need to include clear mission and vision, intent and goals. HEIs need to understand that internationalization, as according to best international practice is an ongoing and evolving process. Internationalization is not a target in itself.

On the other hand, such strategies following their approval by the internal regulatory bodies in HEIs, are not visible enough, in several cases not made public through the institutional website. HEIs in Albania need to develop:

1. Qualitative Assessment:

Conduct regular qualitative evaluations of internationalization initiatives to assess their impact on student learning outcomes, faculty engagement, and institutional partnerships.

Use qualitative methods such as surveys, focus groups, and interviews to gather feedback from stakeholders on the effectiveness of internationalization efforts.

2. Quantitative Assessment:

Utilize quantitative metrics such as student enrollment numbers, faculty mobility rates, research collaboration data, and international rankings to measure the quantitative impact of internationalization strategies.

Implement key performance indicators (KPIs) to track progress towards internationalization goals and benchmarks.

Internationalization of curricula

Internationalization of curricula is another aspect HEIs in Albania need to immediately take into consideration and start a process of internationalizing them. Currently, few public institutions had a low number of programs offered in English (or any other 5 most used languages in EU). Lack of programs in English seriously hamper any effort regarding internationalization. Currently, the focus of HEIs in Albania is on participating in EU financed programs. That is one aspect, but without programs in English HEIs in Albania will have no international students, they will attract no high quality researchers from the region or EU member countries. The latter will find it difficult to develop their research work in any HEI in Albania if there are no programs in English.

Internationalization of curricula will also require from HEIs to develop an “international campus culture” affecting all aspects of life in the university. Translating the existing curricula into English is wrong, that doesn't make or qualify a curriculum an international one. HEIs need to conduct a comprehensive review of existing curricula to identify opportunities for internationalization, such as incorporating global perspectives, cross-cultural content, and interdisciplinary approaches.

International student recruitment strategies

HEIs in Albania have made scarce efforts to recruit international students. That is reflected in the very low numbers of international students enrolled in public and non-public universities. It is sad that no public university is yet to develop a clear strategy and pathway to recruit international students. During the seminar, a lot of staff from international relations offices were not aware of what kind of procedures a foreign students needs to follow to study in their university. This is also reflected on the fact that international students, for instance: students from Africa, South East Asia or Latin America find no information on the website of Albanian universities how to enroll, what are the programs, (including detailed information about modules, program content, credits, professors, etc). There is no information on how international students can find accommodation, what are the

living costs in Albania, information about the cultural life in Albania, food, etc, things which are determinant in foreign students choosing the university they want to study.

Build a national strategy on internationalization

Most of the countries in European Union, but not only, have adopted their national strategies on internationalization of higher education. There are many drivers pushing the higher education authorities in the governments of these countries to adopt such a strategy at national level. Albania will need to adopt a national strategy where first of all it provides a clear definition and rationale on internationalization, the process, evaluation and measurement instruments, qualitative and quantitative indicators for HEIs to evaluate the scale of internationalization. It is recommended that key stakeholders, including government agencies, higher education institutions, industry partners, and student organizations, are engaged in the development of a national strategy on internationalization. Solicit feedback and input from a diverse range of stakeholders to ensure that the national strategy reflects the needs and priorities of the higher education sector. Policy Formulation: Develop a comprehensive policy framework that outlines clear objectives, action plans, and performance indicators for advancing internationalization in higher education. Address key areas such as student mobility, research collaboration, curriculum development, and quality assurance in the national strategy.