Student Mobility

The Erasmus sectoral programme is the main source of funding for student mobility in the country. 47 HEIs are working within the programme. Mobility is also carried out through short-term or long-term programmes for bilateral and multilateral cooperation at either national or institutional level.

There are two types of international mobility:

- **training** - it focuses on academic training for a period of 1 to 2 semesters in a higher education institution in a EU-member country;
- **internships** - it focuses on practical training at a European company for a period of 3 to 12 months.

Responsibility for the proper execution of a mobility program is shared between the sending organization (higher education institutions) and the hosting organization (higher education institution or a company).

Programmes for learning mobility are recognized in accordance with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Internship mobility is a relatively new activity and the process of recognition depends on the hosting organization and whether it is allowed to issue certificates that are recognized on the labor market.

There are programmes which are not specifically directed towards students, but also offer mobility opportunities for them. Some of them are:

- “Youth in Action” programme - it stimulates mobility inside and outside the EU, non-formal education and intercultural dialogue and encourages inclusion of young people, regardless of their educational, social or cultural background;
- Cooperation with industrialized countries - joint mobility projects with countries from North America and the Asian-Pacific region. They are managed at a centralized level;
- “Culture” programme - mobility for people working in the area of culture;
- “Media” programme - mobility for people working in the audiovisual industry;

The main institutions responsible for the organization and coordination of mobility programme are the Human Resources Development Center (HRDC), National Center “European Youth Programmes and Initiatives”, higher education schools (including scientific organizations) and the Ministry of Education and Science. In accordance with the rules set out in Article 8, Paragraph 1, Point 7 of the Higher Education Act [1], it is the state that defines the conditions for official recognition of diplomas issued
by Bulgarian and foreign higher education institutions. After the amendments to the law of August 2011 (Article 21, Paragraph 1, Point 13) the academic sovereignty of HEIs also includes the right to recognize foreign diplomas or periods of times spent studying abroad for the purposes of continuing education in a particular HEI.

According to Article 6 of ORDINANCE on the State Requirements for Recognition of University Education Acquired in Foreign Institutions of Higher Learning, and of Periods of Studies Completed at Such Establishments[2], “the recognition of a university education acquired in foreign institutions of higher learning shall have the following objectives”:

- To facilitate the access to further education in the university education system, to higher vocational training, and to the acquisition of a PhD;
- To enable the use of a scientific title;
- To facilitate the access to the labour market.

In the first two cases, the procedure for recognition of a foreign degree is organized by the HEI. In the third case it is organized by the Minister of Education and Science through the National Center for Information and Documentation. The procedure is carried out under conditions and order, defined by the Center and the respective HEI.

**Academic Staff Mobility**

All universities in Bulgaria are able to organize training through mobility program Erasmus + for students and academic staff. They offer information about participation in the mobility by their websites aimed at all learners.

Centre for Development of Human Resources is a National Agency of Bulgaria in the administration of the program "Erasmus +" for 2014-2020. By order № RD 09-71/17.01.2014 the Minister of Education and Science has established the CHRD National Agency to the program "Erasmus +". HRDC receive accreditation by the European Commission as the sole national agency under the "Erasmus +" program. The Centre manages the whole program "Erasmus +" of 22.07.2014 year. HRDC have a central website which provide information about all mobility schemes for national and international students, academic and administrative staff, for teachers and pupils, for adult education and youth. The website is linked to Bologna website and provides information on the EHEA, with links to other national systems and international programmes.

The information campaign, training seminars for beneficiaries who got financing are planned as required by the EC. They are planned against call for application in various key activities and sectors. Informational materials are easily accessible and interactive, which facilitates obtaining information about the "Erasmus +" Program by Bulgarian citizens. Dissemination results are well set out, as provided for during the whole year and that allows attracting new potential beneficiaries from all sectors.

In implementation of the annual work program for 2015, the team of the National Agency has conducted numerous trainings with current and potential beneficiaries of the program:

- Conduct periodically information campaigns and training seminars for beneficiaries;
- Conduct Call for application in various key activities and sectors of the "Erasmus +";
• Provide regularly information materials by email to applicants and beneficiaries;
• Organizes thematic seminars and conferences with the aim of achieving the objectives of the program;
• Placed regularly posts information on its website;
• Actively provides media messages.

By Decision № 18 of 16.01.2014 of Council of Ministers the Ministry of Education and Science has designated for National Authority under Article 27 and from Council Regulation № 12 88 2013 EU establishing the "Erasmus +" (2014-2020). By Ordinance RD 09 № 351/ 24.03.2015 г. to the Minister of Education and Science has created “Council to monitor on a program "Erasmus +". Each year, the Council on 31 October must communicate to the European Commission information on the activities of the program monitoring and tracking of realizing, quality and impact of the implementation of educational projects. The procedure is an integral part of the cycle of administration of the program "Erasmus +". Also with a Minister monitoring activities at National level, can be carried out by Inspectorate and Internal Audit Unit of the Ministry of Education and Science and if necessary from other appointed persons by the Ministry.

The Council for monitoring carried out monitoring activities and supervise the management of the program "Erasmus +" at national level, as follows:

• Monitor the implementation of the work program of the National Agency;
• Propose further actions;
• Propose measures for the implementation of the program, with the participation of stakeholders;
• Monitor providing overall coherence and complementarily of the program"Erasmus +" with national policies and programs;
• Work in cooperation with the NA for the adaption of the strategic framework for implementation of the program covering the whole programming period 2014-2020;
• Confirm the extent possible, that the information, provided by NA is reliable and sufficient;
• Carry out a review of the Annual Activity Report of the NA.

The measures which are taken in order to raise the number of students and staff going for education or teaching abroad can be summarized, as follows:

• Dissemination of information about the opportunities which Erasmus offer - In order the information about the Erasmus programme activities to reach a wider number of potential participants, who can be attracted as real beneficiaries, HRDC organizes informational campaign by implementing the following measures and activities in close cooperation with the Erasmus Higher education institutions;
• Preparation, elaboration and distribution of information materials;
• Organization of information events;
• Elaboration and maintenance of up-to-date information about the programme on the website of HRDC, as well as on the Erasmus HEIs websites;
• Encouragement of HEIs, participating in the Erasmus programme, as well as other organizations working in the field of higher education in Bulgaria (students organizations, employers, municipalities, NGOs, etc.) to organize local and institutional information campaigns;
• Participation and active contribution by all national and international partners in the organization of information and dissemination events, devoted to academic mobility and multilateral cooperation in the framework of the Erasmus programme;
• Implementation of a system for distribution of grants to the Erasmus universities based on the previous performance: number of students and staff funded to take part in mobility, number of incoming students and teachers, geographical and subjects areas coverage, etc.. This system
allows the HEIs, which perform better in the field of mobility, to be rewarded for their achievements. The HEIs are also encouraged to seek for and to use supplementary funding for increasing the number of students or the level of funding;

- Organization of training for the persons responsible for Erasmus programme in the respective universities. These trainings aim at improving the programme’s management and, respectively - covering better the programme’s objectives;
- Continuous support for all the HEIs participating in the Erasmus programme in order to achieve better use of funds and thus to increase the level of the monthly grants. In this way the NA seeks to minimize the financial obstacles for mobility, as well as to make the programme more attractive;
- Assistance for the students interested in participation in the Erasmus programme;
- Organization of dissemination and valorization activities – The Erasmus students are usually invited to share their experience and benefits gained from the Erasmus period in the host countries;
- Monitoring and control on how the Erasmus universities respect their obligation assumed in the Erasmus University Charter to facilitate and support students and teachers mobility.

The universities are obliged through the Erasmus University Charter and through the contracts they sign in order to receive Erasmus funding to give full recognition for the study period spent abroad by the students. In spite of that there are still some problems concerning academic recognition. The recognition is up to the particular HEIs and it depends on various factors: student’s performance, documents issued by the host university, etc.

Unfortunately, the big differences in the curricula and the fixed studying programs in some cases has made the full academic recognition a really hard task, but good progress is being made. Higher Education Institutions support their students and staff to find out appropriate accommodation in host country. On the other hand, the HEIs provide accommodation for incoming students and staff. Our observations show that the incoming students and staff are satisfied with the support provided by the Bulgarian host universities.

In the implementing the Strategy for development of higher education are conducted the following activities related to increasing mobility of students, teachers and researchers:

- To promote academic mobility are organized periodic meetings for coordinators of universities;
- Been developed a special program for promoting academic mobility;
- To stimulate the mobility of teachers within the European Union are being developed common training programs and conducting of joint research activity;
- To provide a favorable conditions for expansion of the mobility of Bulgarian teachers in third countries;
- Promote the mobility of students from third countries;
- Carrying out of activities to attract Higher Educational Institutions in the activities of strategic partnerships under program "Erasmus +";
- Encouragement of academic exchanges within international agreements - a Memorandum of understanding about performance of Financial mechanism of European economic space 2009 - 2014 between republic Bulgaria and Iceland principality Liechtenstein and kingdom Norway;
- Implementation of the BG09 Program "Fund for scholarships EEA "in which perform the following 3 measures: Preparatory visits "; "Projects mobility in higher education and science ", with components "Mobility of Students " and "Mobility of teachers, researchers and administrative staff;
- Strengthening cooperation between universities from Bulgaria and from donor countries to develop joint curricula and teaching modules;
- Increase the level competencies of Bulgarian teachers;
- Increasing quality and applicability of offered by Bulgarian universities programs targeted to foreign students in Bulgaria for incoming mobility;
- Increasing quality and the applicability of offered by Bulgarian higher schools educational programmes.

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