

Erasmus+ Staff Mobility Impact and Challenges at Georgian Higher Education Institutions

Research Project Report

Executive Summary

(full text available only in Georgian)

National Erasmus + Office Georgia

2019

Research Group:

Tamar Bregvadze
Ketevan Gurchiani
Tamar Lortkipanidze



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

This project has been co-funded with support from the European Commission. 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.

About the report

Georgia is among the leading partner countries by the scale of international mobility in Europe. However, the outcomes of such mobility as well as the opinions of stakeholders about its effects and challenges have not been properly studied and systematized yet.

The report examines the results of the last five years of implementation of staff mobility in Georgia pursuant to the ICM (International Credit Mobility) program. It represents the first attempt in the country to specify the challenges and priorities of such program within the wider goal of Higher Education internationalization and development.

Questions

The main task of the study was to compile stakeholders' opinion on the program impact in light of the following questions:

- What is the effect of the international staff mobility program on professional development of administrative and academic personnel at Georgian HEIs?
- What is the role of the international staff mobility program in organizational development of higher education institutions?

The report also incorporates suggestions of stakeholders for further improvement of the program based on the following questions:

- What are the current challenges in the process of administering the staff mobility program?
- How Georgian HEIs see the ways to increase the quality of ICM inputs, processes and results?

Participants

The findings, conclusions and recommendations presented in the report are based on the feedback of academic and administrative personnel of all the Georgian higher education institutions currently involved in ICM (32 HEIs).

The data was gathered through three stages:

1. Analysis of statistical data submitted by all HEIs participating in staff mobility program in Georgia during the period 2015-2019;
2. Online survey of international relations departments of all mentioned HEIs;
3. In-depth interviews and focus groups with academic and administrative personnel of selected HEIs (past and potential participants of ICM programs, units involved in ICM management, education experts).

Multiple criteria were applied for sampling HEIs for the third stage (in-depth discussion) to incorporate diverse viewpoints:

- International mobility scale and experience (Extreme cases - HEIs with the highest number of ICM partnerships & long history of ICM programme implementation and HEIs with no ICM partnerships, newcomers in this regard);
- Type and size: public and private as well as large and small HEIs have been selected;
- Location: HEIs from regions and capital have been involved;
- Profile: ideas and opinions from multi and mono profile HEI representatives have been examined.

Main findings and recommendations:

All HEI representatives consider that the program makes a significant contribution to the internationalization of higher education and represents a potentially effective instrument for organizational and institutional development of their institution.

In order to further increase the effectiveness and efficiency of ICM programs, they consider important to keep working with their international partners in several strategic directions:

- **Better balance the share of representatives from different fields of science and structural units in the overall flow of academic and administrative staff mobility;**
 - The largest share belongs to Humanities in academic mobility and international relations offices in administrative personnel mobility;
 - The same individuals tend to participate in mobility programs from year to year;
- **International mobility should be more clearly and explicitly linked to the organizational development goals of HEIs.**
 - The effect of academic personnel mobility is mostly visible on an individual level and less explicit on an organizational level. Specifically, mobility plays an important role in building individual competencies for teaching (among faculty and invited teachers), widening professional links and increasing intercultural awareness, but it is rarely used as a systemic organizational instrument for improving teaching and research;
 - Administrative staff mobility serves the wider goal of expanding the international network of the HEI and is less focused on the specific organizational development goals of any particular structural units. In most HEIs, administrative staff mobility is considered as a preparatory stage for long-term international projects (capacity building, student mobility) rather than a tool to accumulate knowledge in a particular structural unit.

- **A more systematic policy should be developed to facilitate the inclusion of new HEIs/departments/individuals in the mobility network;**
 - New/potential members of the network face difficulties in the process of finding partners;
 - Marketing strategies of the HEIs should be revisited in this regard to facilitate inclusion policy;

- **HEI internal organizational policies and mechanisms facilitating the participation of individuals in mobility programs should be improved;**
 - The main barrier for participation is low language proficiency. Intra-organizational mechanisms for increasing language competencies are not sufficiently effective;
 - Another challenge is the low awareness of personnel on mobility opportunities and, most importantly, on the results of the mobility programs. In most cases, participants report to small audiences (mainly academic or department board). Potential participants of mobility programs are rarely considered as a strategically important target group for such presentations.

- **Some procedural aspects should be improved:**
 - In some cases, the selection procedure is not clear enough; participants do not fully understand who makes a final decision (host or sending HEI) and based on which criteria;
 - The HEIs that are “more experienced” in mobility programs face a high competition among mobility candidates. Under these circumstances, the challenge for them is thus to elaborate and introduce a selection mechanism that could ensure a fair and transparent differentiation among candidates with similar competencies and backgrounds;
 - Some HEIs have introduced rules to limit repeated participation of academic personnel during a particular period of time. However, such mechanism could be detrimental to the organizational development if it is not coupled with additional criteria, notably the consistency of the mobility issue/theme/aim with the long-term vision and strategy of the HEI.

- **Instruments of mobility should be diversified and effectively combined:**
 - The main instrument currently used by HEIs is “teaching”. Other instruments such as “job shadowing”, training, workshops are rarely used in combination with teaching;
 - The ability to combine instruments depends greatly on personal initiative of particular participants and varies from case to case;

- HEI academic personnel needs to be better informed about opportunities for research capacity development as well as about the results of such programs (Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions).
- **Georgian higher education institutions should continue working with European partner HEIs on clarifying expectations related to the quality of mobility programs and evaluation criteria.**
 - In mobility program administration, the quality of the support processes varies among and within HEIs and the allocation of tasks and responsibilities is sometimes vague. Yet, it appears that the success of any given mobility program depend greatly on the motivation and managerial capacity of the coordinators;
 - Due to unclear agreement on deadlines and milestones, mobility programs are sometimes delayed and HEIs have to make adjustment under extreme time constraints ;
 - Even in case of negative experience, HEIs tend to avoid addressing problems openly with their partners, for fear of damaging long-term partnerships (student mobility is considered especially important). Therefore, they often refrain from expressing critical viewpoint.
 - Formal feedback is seldom provided to partner HEIs. The demand for such mechanisms comes neither from the host nor from the sending HEIs.
- **Mobility program monitoring and evaluation system should be improved:**
 - HEIs currently find it difficult to evaluate the cumulative effect of mobility programs on their organizational development;
 - Participating HEIs rarely analyze the reports. As a result, the review of the mobility program evaluation results is not integrated into their strategic planning processes.
- **Georgian HEIs should be proactively involved in formulating long-term cooperation goals with their partners.**
 - Agreements with partner HEIs rarely establish a clear linkage of mobility goals with their respective long-term organizational development strategies.
 - Georgian HEIs are passive in formulating and revising mobility program goals and in the absence of clearly defined priorities from their Georgian counterparts, European HEIs often mechanically extend the technical tasks of the previous mobility programs to the new period. Even in long term partnerships the long term goals are in most cases vaguely defined for both host and sending HEIs.
 - Proactive search for European partners (with regard to strategic organizational goals) is very rare.

Priorities for further work and strategic partnership

In response to the mentioned challenges the respondents involved in the study consider the improvement of intra-organizational processes and the development of inter-organizational networks as equally important tasks for the future.

In particular HEIs should:

- Better link ICM strategy development with general strategic planning processes at the HEIs;
- Jointly work to balance participation of different fields/departments in mobility programs;
- Improve organizational mechanisms and policy for ICM quality management at input, processes and output levels;
- Facilitate improvement of language proficiency among staff.
- Clarify performance indicators as well as information gathering and analysis mechanisms according to such indicators;
- Improve communication strategies on individual and organizational benefits of ICM with potential beneficiaries and partners;
- Better integrate different instruments of ICM (*i.e.* job shadowing for academic personnel, thematic weeks for academic and administrative personnel) for increasing the overall impact of the program;
- Intensify proactive search for partners and negotiation and revision of ICM goals in accordance with the strategic goals of HEIs;

In parallel to strengthening intra-organizational processes, Georgian HEIs should cooperate with each other on several strategic issues such as better adjusting ICM to specific capacity development goals in research and teaching and clustering for development of particular fields of science;

Specific instruments of ICM (such as thematic week or job shadowing) can be used nationally as a form of cooperation between Georgian HEIs for knowledge dissemination and overall development of the higher education system.