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National Impact Report on Capacity Building in Higher Education Action Projects Funded in Azerbaijan by the EU Erasmus+ programme implemented in the period of 2015-2020

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ACRONYMS

AESOP	Advocacy Establishment for Students through Ombudsman Position
ANAS	Azerbaijan Academy of Science
CBHE	Capacity Building in Higher Education
EACEA	Education and Culture Executive Agency
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EQAC	Establishment and Development of Quality Assurance Centers in Azerbaijan Universities
EC	European Commission
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HERE	Higher Education Reform Expert
ICT	Information Communication Technologies
LFM	Logical Framework Matrix
LPEB	Licence professionnelle en formation ouverte et à distance pour la performance énergétique et environnementale des bâtiments en Fédération de Russie, en Chine et en Azerbaïdjan
MOE	Ministry of Education
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NIZAMI	Restructuring and development of doctoral studies in Azerbaijan in line with requirements of European Higher Education area
NMP	National Management Portal
PAWER	Paving the way to interregional mobility and ensuring relevance, quality and equity of access
PETRA	Promoting Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Azerbaijani Universities
PROMIG	Promoting Migration Studies in Higher Education
QA	Quality Assurance
QAC	Quality Assurance Center
SPHERE	Support and promotion for Higher Education Reform Expert
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
TL	Teaching and Learning
TLC	Teaching and Learning Center

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5. Azerbaijan Technical University
6. Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University
7. Azerbaijan Cooperation University
8. Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction
9. Azerbaijan University of Languages
10. Baku Business University
11. Baku Engineering University
12. Baku Slavic University
13. Baku State University
14. Ganja State University
15. Khazar University
16. Mingachevir State University
17. Nakhchivan State University
18. Nakhchivan University
19. Sumgayit State University
20. Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences
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KEY FINDINGS

- ✚ 88% of project participants think that projects helped them in their professional development.
- ✚ 46% of the respondents have experience with only one Tempus project, 62% have experience with only one Erasmus+ CBHE action project.
- ✚ 50% of staff members involved in projects are aged 25-44. There is a certain level of female dominance in the process – 59%.
- ✚ Over 70% of participants have less than 5 years of project experience.
- ✚ Only 19 HEIs out of existing 51 were involved in 7 Erasmus+ CBHE action projects during 2015-2017.
- ✚ Erasmus+ CBHE action projects facilitate valuable cultural and educational exchanges.
- ✚ Erasmus+ CBHE action projects satisfy the participants' needs in learning new experiences.
- ✚ Multi-faceted projects with built-in cultural and educational interchange enrich participants culturally, spiritually, financially, and professionally.
- ✚ Projects implemented have fewer impact on climate change and public health.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study has revealed that Erasmus+ CBHE action projects (further projects) significantly and positively impacted Higher Educational Institutions (further HEIs) in the Republic of Azerbaijan (further Azerbaijan). The projects effectively contributed to and supported the transformation of university management, curriculum development, human capital development, and the internationalisation of Higher Education in Azerbaijan. Although the total number of the projects to date is not high, there is a detectable range of significant achievements, which can be observed in each of the projects. In order to provide for visibility of effectiveness, the most significant accomplishments can be categorised in the following three segments:

Individual

Individual-level attainments are more substantial than the ones in the other two categories. This result may be explained by the nature of the projects that are bound by the possibilities of involving many faculty members and staff from each university. Throughout the years of participation, individuals gained professional, technical and soft skills, progressed in their career development, were admitted to different international programs, became successful as projects initiators and designers of the state-of-the-art methodology, gained international certifications/accreditations, and, by doing so, extended their international and national networks.

Institutional

As for the educational institutions, level-wise, they accomplished apparent success in internal structural transformation since the accomplishments within the projects are operationally aligned with the institutional development strategies of each university. As this study reveals, some institutions, upon the completion of their projects, have already gone through institutional governance transformation, structural adjustments and changes, and infrastructural development to allow for a better level of both local and international cooperation-driven compatibility in the immediate future. Nevertheless, it is also worth mentioning that the capacity of the existing human resources in Higher Education is still insufficient to hope for achieving anticipated results and fully utilise even existing capabilities. The study-bound respondents particularly underscored the latter fact in their interviews, where it was usually presented as a more significant challenge in the process of achieving ultimate success.

National

Although the projects led to some changes already being made in the corresponding sectors at the national level, more significant amendments are yet to be implemented. For example, the NIZAMI project introduced a range of policy-adjusting suggestions and even generated a debate on the issue, but the implementation process is now extended indefinitely. The following three factors can explain this observation: firstly, the pace of changes is relatively slow in Azerbaijan compared to the other Eastern Partnership countries; secondly, the project did not involve one of

the main stakeholders (Higher Attestation Commission) to assure the outcome, and thirdly, the scope of the project did not allow to make the ambitious changes over the given time.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Massification of Higher Education worldwide, driven and framed by the complexity of globalisation and knowledge economy-associated factors, has led to a range of remarkable changes made at both national and international levels (Andres *et al.*, 2015; Lisbon European Council, 2000). Evidently as well as objectively, subsequent policy-level changes at national levels caused substantial institutional adjustments, enabling countries to globally compete in the knowledge economy (Andres *et al.*, 2015). In its turn, the 2019 OECD report on the issue indicates the positive impact of the growing supply of highly educated workers on economic and societal developments. Following and monitoring these trends, it becomes crucial for the HEIs in Azerbaijan to build an international network for attracting (externally) and nurturing (internally) highly qualified people for such an increasingly competitive socio-professional segment of human interrelations.

In general, the Azerbaijani HEIs gained access to international networks through the EU-supported current programs such as Erasmus+, Horizon2020, and, in the past, Tempus and TACIS. These projects allowed Azerbaijani HEIs to familiarise themselves with and then learn from the best European practices, adapt and use similar approaches and systems in Azerbaijan. Although there are not many projects involving Azerbaijani HEIs within the whole framework, their direct involvement in the process has already generated some significant results that are outlined in this report at length. In this context, it is worth underscoring that, even though the EC-supported projects have been known and implemented in Azerbaijan since 1998, no impact-focused nor impact-measuring study had been conducted before our report.

Time-frame wise, this study sheds light on how well Erasmus+ CBHE action projects were implemented in Azerbaijan during 2015-2017. Firstly, it detects, observes and examines the impact of the projects made on the capacity development of individuals and at both institutional and national levels. Secondly, it analyses the impact of the projects on socio-economic, political, climate change-linked, and other existing and emerging issues. General information about the projects is provided in *ANNEX 1*.

According to the rules and procedures of Erasmus+ CBHE actions, NEO conducts regular monitoring of the projects. As seen from the monitoring process documents, timely intervention provides project coordinators with substantial feedback, and subsequent changes follow the feedback. This impact study focused on the shifts and alterations brought by each project rather than fulfilling in-depth monitoring of project documentation. Nonetheless, the team of investigators meticulously reviewed the documentation produced within the projects.

METHODOLOGY

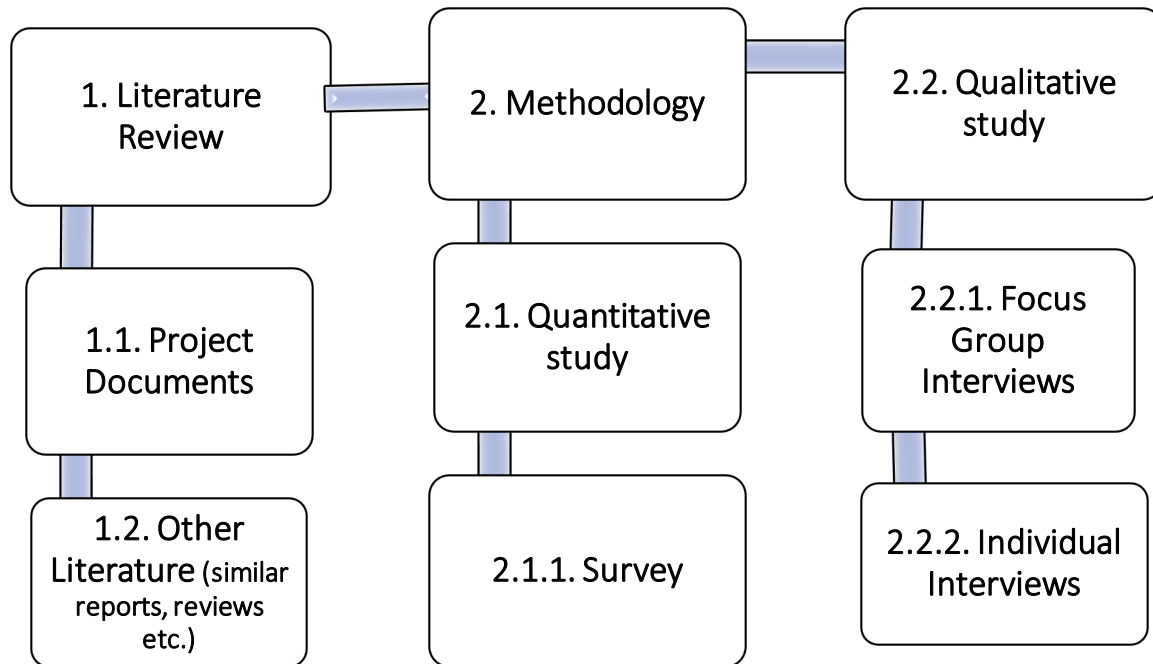
From the methodological perspective, the national Impact Study of Erasmus+ CBHE action projects implemented during 2015-2017 in Azerbaijan was based on a carefully designed mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods to be outlined below. Firstly, the involvement of multiple stakeholders involved in implementing CBHE projects makes it necessary, in analytical terms, to utilise such a complex research design. Project implementation involved stakeholders such as students, academic and non-academic staff, policymakers, and university leaders.

Secondly, the data bits collected through the prism of the aforementioned mixed methodological approach led to an objectively more comprehensive understanding of the issue (Creswell, 2014). Mixed methods allow for looking at specific achievements and their impact at the individual, institutional and policy levels. Such an approach provides a holistic take on the theme while helping in collecting empirically rich data. The impact study also reflects on the analysis of the extent to which each project managed to address the country's national priorities. Specifically, with the direct focus on the projects, the study attempted to find responses to the following research questions:

1. What has been achieved and why?
2. Why would it not have been possible without the EU-based partners?
3. Who benefited directly from the project-originated activities, and how? Who will derive direct benefit from the activities and how?
4. What are the long-term academic, economic, social and environmental impacts and who will be affected?
5. What are the main lessons learned?

The design of the methodology is visually presented in *Figure 1* and described below in details.

Figure 1 Methodology design



LITERATURE AND DOCUMENTS REVIEW

During the process of reviewing relevant literature and documents and contextualising them with this study, we attempted to gather and study all project-related documents, including initial proposals, both mid-term and final reports, other materials, project-associated web-pages of the HEIs' web-portals, and the theme-focused scholarly studies on impact evaluation of capacity building projects.

The review was based on the Logical Framework Approach (further Logframe), where we analysed the inputs and outputs, short- and long-term accomplishments, placing them against the funding program indicators. The choice of using the Logframe approach is academically justified because all CBHE action projects are applying this approach in the process of learning about the given data.

The evaluation of the impact of CBHE projects at the national level was studied for the first time, although some scheduled interim monitoring-framed evaluations have been conducted by national Erasmus+ offices regularly. Their timely interventions allowed each project to improve the situation in achieving the envisioned goals and objectives. As a usual practice, throughout the abovementioned interventions project documents and reports were thoroughly reviewed, which

excluded the necessity for this study to address the shortcomings of the reporting. Instead, this study rather thoroughly looked at the quality of outcomes and impact. Based on the Theory of Change, it focused on the following questions:

Relevance: How relevant was the project to meet the national and regional priorities?

Inputs and activities. What has been invested? What has been done?

Outputs and outcomes. What has been achieved and why? **Outputs:** short-term results?

Outcomes: medium-term results

Impact and Sustainability. What are the long-term results? (What did we aim to change?): Who benefited directly from the activities and how?

Finally, the review provided for the analysis of the existing reports, including final, interim, monitoring, internal project reports, institutional monitoring reports and other related documents produced within the project, made officially available. The use of Logical Framework Matrix (LFM) analysis is justified by the facts that 1) all projects are based on LFM, 2) it allows to look at the links between input, actions, outputs, outcomes and impact of each project, and 3) it allows to evaluate the success and failure of the interventions.

Case Studies

Applying this pluralistic qualitative method, three cases out of seven were studied for exploratory research, through which the team gained concrete, contextual and in-depth knowledge about a specific project (Dooley, 2002). In a significant addition, the Survey, Focus Group Interviews (FGI) and Individual Interviews validated the findings of the study. The project NIZAMI, PETRA and EQAC have been chosen based on the number of HEIs and people involved, the outcomes they have generated, and the observable impact they had on the individual and institutional levels, as well as for the Detailed information about these particular projects is presented in the Case Boxes, additionally, general information about the projects presented in *ANNEX 1*.

Survey

The survey for this study developed considering key issues such as the project's relevance to the needs of individuals, institutions, its efficiency and effectiveness. It also considered the impacts they had on micro, meso, macro levels; sustainability; and socio-economic levels, mainly inclusivity and accessibility. The survey was conducted among various stakeholders ≥ 700. Only responses

from 439 participants were regarded as relevant for the survey and were therefore included in the evaluation. The critical stages in the survey program were as follows: 1) Expert Review of the Survey; 2) Approbation of the Survey; 3) Amendments of the improvements; 4) Conducting survey; 5) Statistical analysis of the data collected.

The actual survey, key indicators and structure for this study were developed as being based on the guidelines provided by the Erasmus+ Programme. Additionally, websites of different international organisations and various reports on similar frameworks were reviewed by experts in order to generate the indicators.

Focus Group Interviews (FGI)

There were 4 FGIs, with 5-6 participants in each group, organised to learn about each stakeholder's perspectives on the project impact, look at their perceptions of project ideas and assumptions of the project sustainability, promotion, and further dissemination of project ideas. Participants of the focus groups were selected based on the following criteria: 1) experience with project management; 2) experience with the CBHE project management; 3) leading position at HEI; 4) policy-level decision-maker; 5) Experience in the teaching process. Focus Group Interviews conducted among stakeholders with different managerial and decision-making capacities allowed triangulation of the data to increase the reliability (Gillham, 2000). In this study, data triangulation was referred to as the involvement of different people as sources of data. In addition, FGIs were conducted employing a bottom-up approach, presented below. For example, project participants were interviewed before the project managers so that the findings in the former informs the latter—such a technique allowed for enriching and broadening the interview-bound interaction.

Project participants/academic/non-academic/students/ project managers – these groups of stakeholders presented perspectives from a different angle to the extent to which the projects were successful and impacted individually.

Direct implementor/project managers – these groups of stakeholders are directly linked to project success or failure and shared lessons learned.

University Leadership – their participation in the projects, perceptions and assumptions are essential for a project's sustainability and, sometimes, policy-level impact.

Polymakers shared their perspectives on how project outcomes can or already impact policy-level changes and how they see their roles in the process of project implementation, crafting sustainability-focused frameworks, and planning for delivering a more effective policy-level impact.

Interview questions are annexed to the study. See ANNEX 2.

Individual Interviews

Individual interviews with key informants (project managers) were based on the ratio of 7 projects – 7 interviews. In a tangible way, these enriched the data on existing and forecasted challenges, lessons learned, and actions to improve the *status quo*. In comparison to the FGI, this set of interviews was empirically more in-depth and thorough.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data was processed and coded on the quantitative side, whilst the qualitative data, mainly gathered through the interviews, were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Then all the collected data were combined for further analytical exercises. In the analysis, we focused on the impact of seven projects we have reviewed using this complex methodology. Specifically, we focused on the *achievements* of individuals and institutions within the projects, their effects, the *changes* projects brought, and the *impact* the projects made at the national level and the projects-associated *sustainability* mechanisms. We looked at how project participants understood and perceived the initiative's effects, whichever they might be. One of the most important questions we were interested in receiving the answer for was how different actions embedded in the projects would help achieve national-level impact.

In the analysis, the central notions are defined and understood to be as follows:

Achievements: a set of created, imposed or designed positive developments that could be forecasted to occur and usually have a lasting legacy. Each of the projects had a set of measurable achievements, identified initially in a project's proposal. In such a context, the focus was on identifying how participants perceived their personal and institutional achievements.

Changes: developments start occurring differently if compared to the previously defined or prescribed, aligning the process with European standards. Therefore, one of the goals was to look at if the changes happened and how they happened.

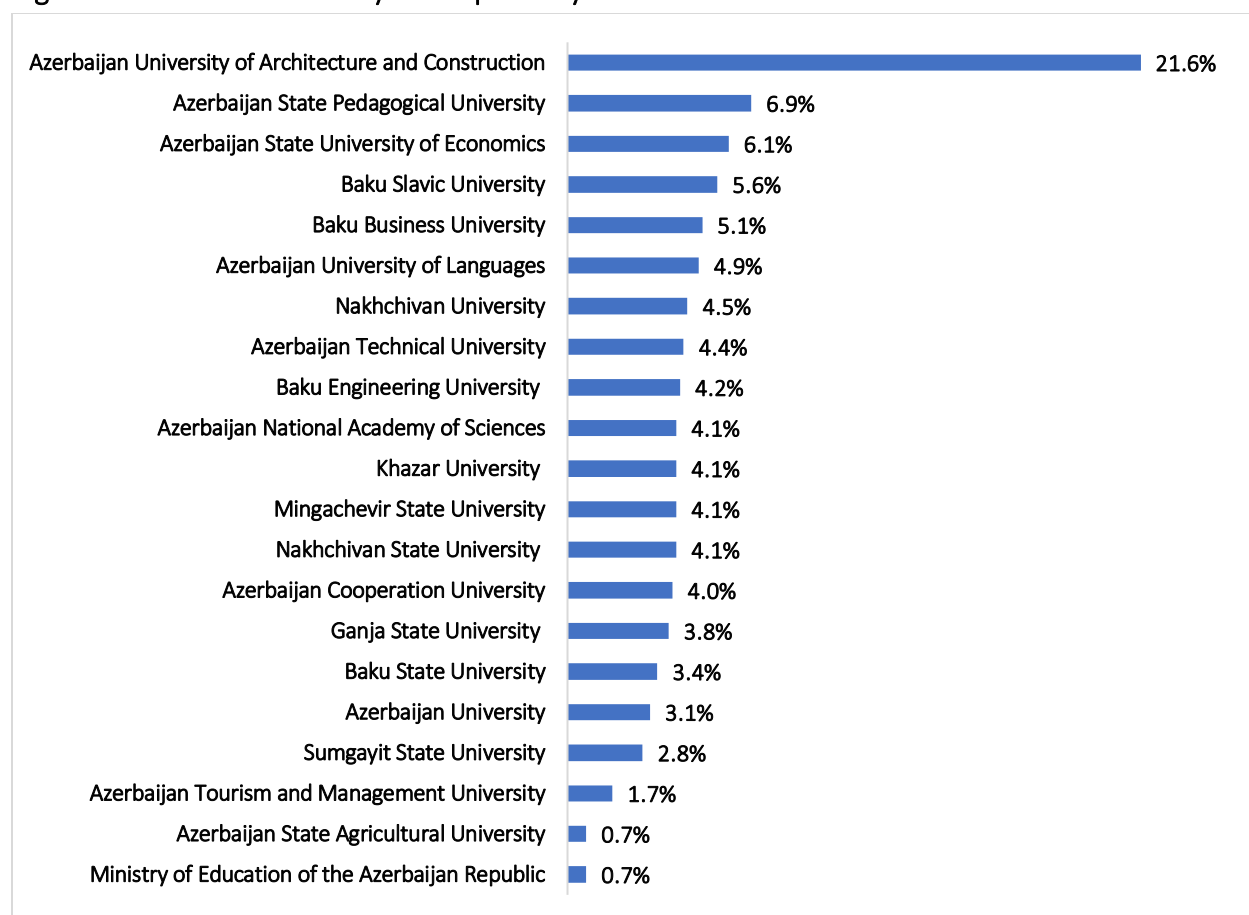
Impact: with a possibility to observe and measure a distinctly marked effect – objectively or subjectively treated as either positive or negative, intended or unintended, direct or indirect, primary or secondary – of a project on a given process, existing framework or interrelations. (extrapolated from an OECD Development Assistance Committee's definition). In many cases, the *Impact* is described as a result appearing a lot later than the project's immediate outcome.

Sustainability: utilising the already existing or newly developed capacity, it is a solid and provable provision to continue project-generated positive methods, practices, beneficial developments. It is featured by a distinct probability to keep achieving long-term benefits.

Types of participants

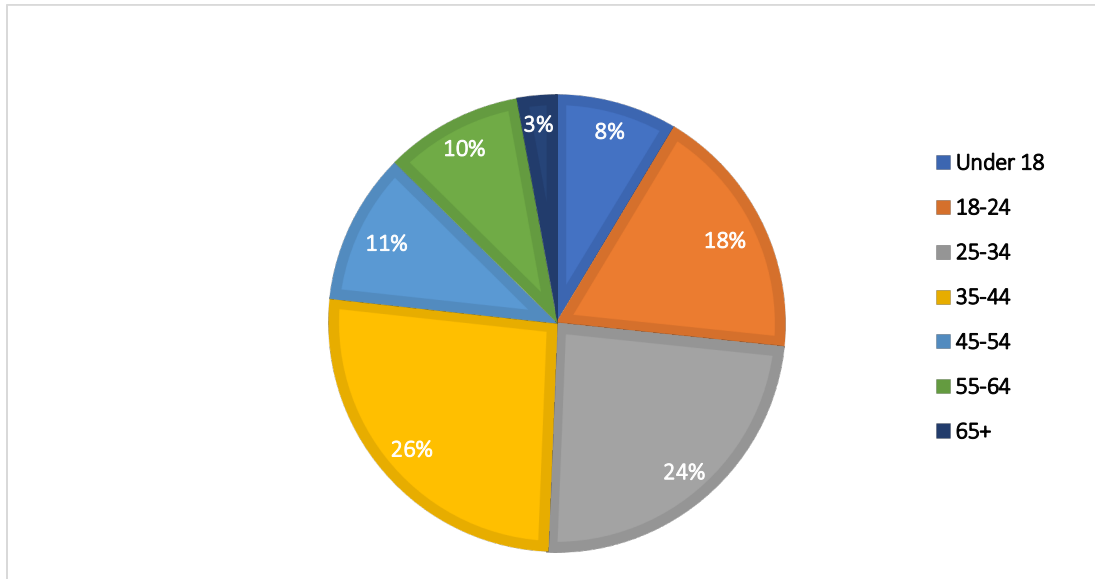
This study managed to collect the data from seven hundred and eight (708) respondents, as already mentioned on page 13, and their institutional distribution is shown in *Figure 2*, who represented 23 organisations (HEIs, ANAS, MoE) and participated in an online survey. Twenty-four university staff members of different professional levels participated in the focus group-generated discussions; seven project managers were interviewed individually through emails. Process wise, the majority of universities tried to involve people who have participated in projects. At only one university, the number of participants was high; about half of those participants were excluded from the analysis because they have never participated in a single project and thus did not respond to questions beyond the demographic ones. Thus, the total number of responses included in our analysis (beyond demographic) was four hundred and thirty-nine (439).

Figure 2 Survey Participants by HEIs



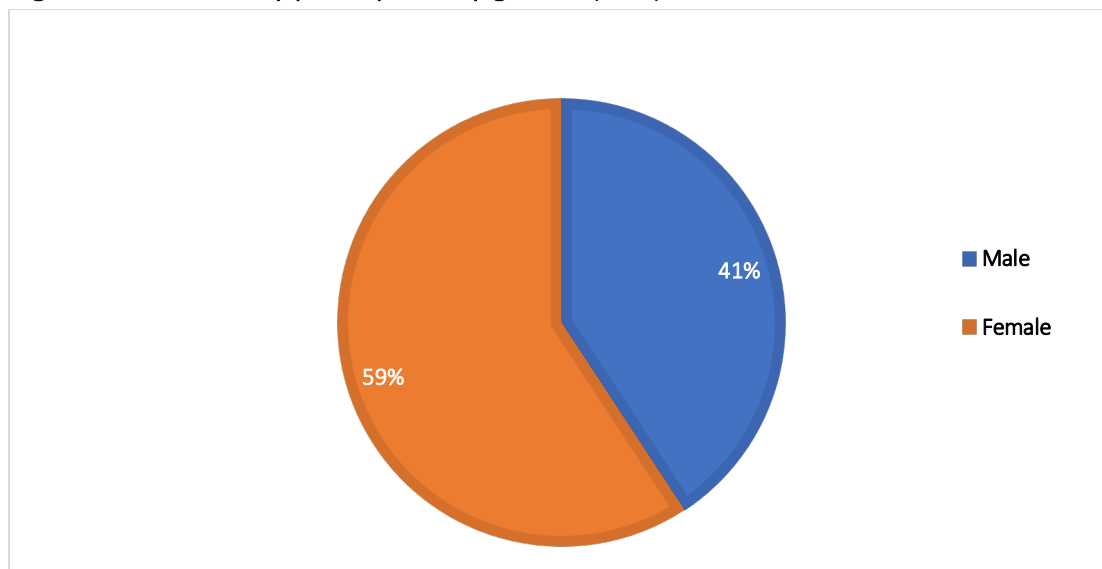
Characteristically for the data, 46% of the respondents had only a single experience of being involved in a Tempus project, while 62% of them experienced an ERASMUS+ CBHE project only once. In addition, 21% of them have participated in 2 CBHE projects, whereas only 5% of all project participants had the experience of participating in more than five projects.

Figure 3 Project participants by age group



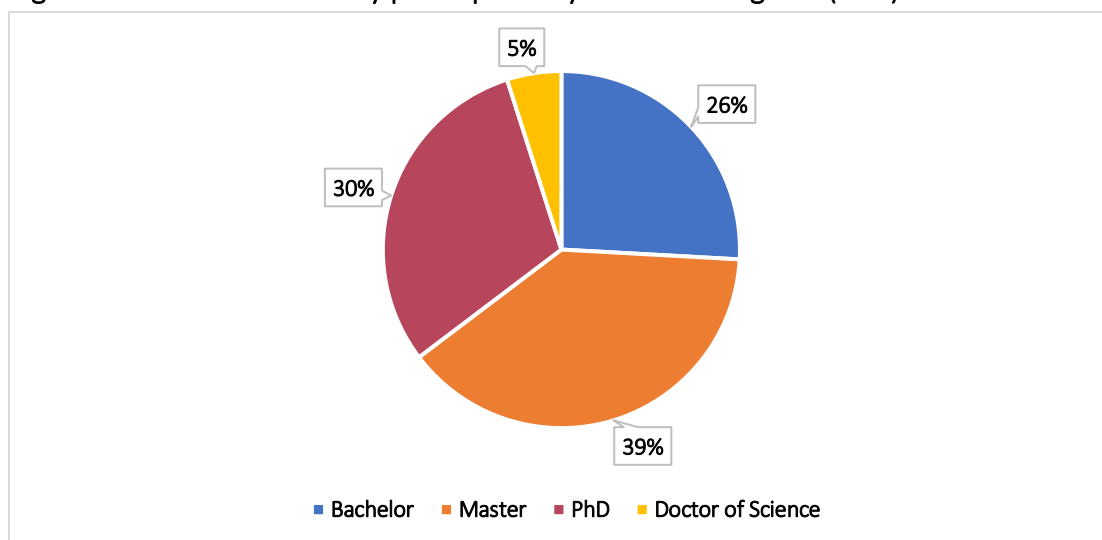
The dataset shows that the age group 35-44-years (26%) prevails over the others, with the 25-34-years old group coming next (24%). In general, this analysis indicates that the majority of this study's respondents are relatively young people. A possible explanation for this might be that young scholars are more inclined to travel, get involved in new experiences and bring different new practices back home, although they might be less experienced in project management at the same time. The 55-64- and 45-54-years age groups represent correspondingly 10% and 11% of the total.

Figure 4 Survey participants by gender (in %)



The female/male ratio shows the 59%/41% breakdown, with a majority firmly 'residing' on the females' side. According to the state statistics committee, the number of women in the education sector is prevailing, and the difference in most cases is over 10%. This can be one explanation, yet another one is that the number of women involved in CBHE project management is again prevailing in Azerbaijan.

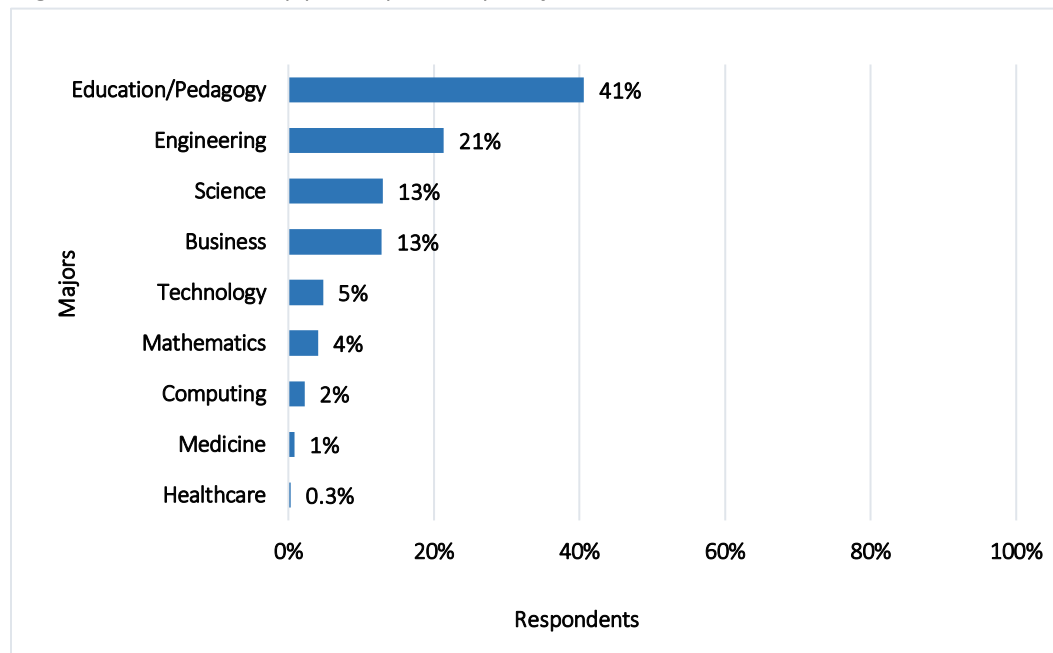
Figure 5 Survey participants by academic degrees (in %)



The majority of project participants (39%) have a Master Degree, and 30% have a doctorate. It was an interesting fact to find out that 26% of participants had only a Bachelor degree. This

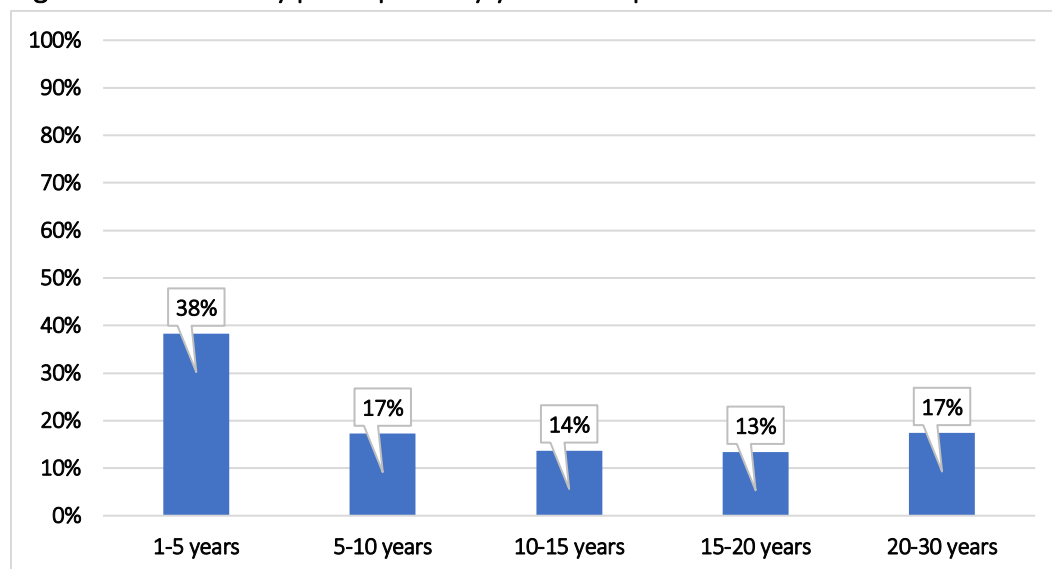
fragment of the data seems contradictory because HEIs in Azerbaijan hire employees with a Master degree as a minimum requirement. However, some may be involved in technical jobs and/or some universities involved students in the survey.

Figure 6 Survey participants by majors



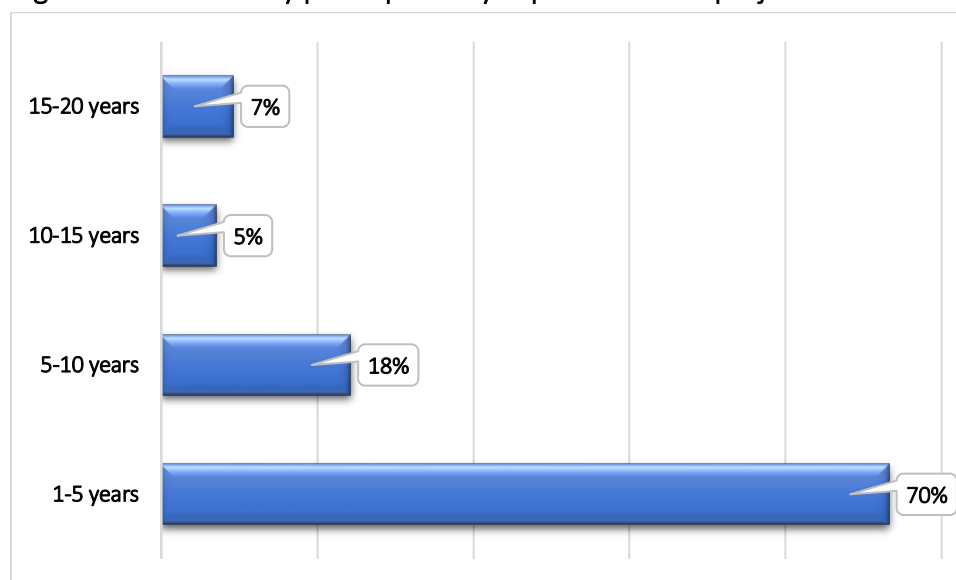
The highest number of the study’s participants came from education/pedagogy, making 41% of the total, with 21% coming from engineering, equally – from business and science (13%), while the rest comes from technology (5%), mathematics (4%), computing (2%), medicine (0.85%) accordingly. The uneven distribution of involvement from various disciplines might be related to the project subject or the type. Another possible explanation for this could be that most HEIs involved in the projects are comprehensive universities, with a few being specialised HEIs.

Figure 7 Survey participants by years of experience in HE



The dataset indicates that those who have less experience within the country’s HEIs represent a more significant segment of the survey participants (38%), while 17% have 5-10 years, 13% – 10-15 years, 13% – 15-20 years, and 17% – possess enormous 20-30 years of industry experience.

Figure 8 Survey participants by experience with projects

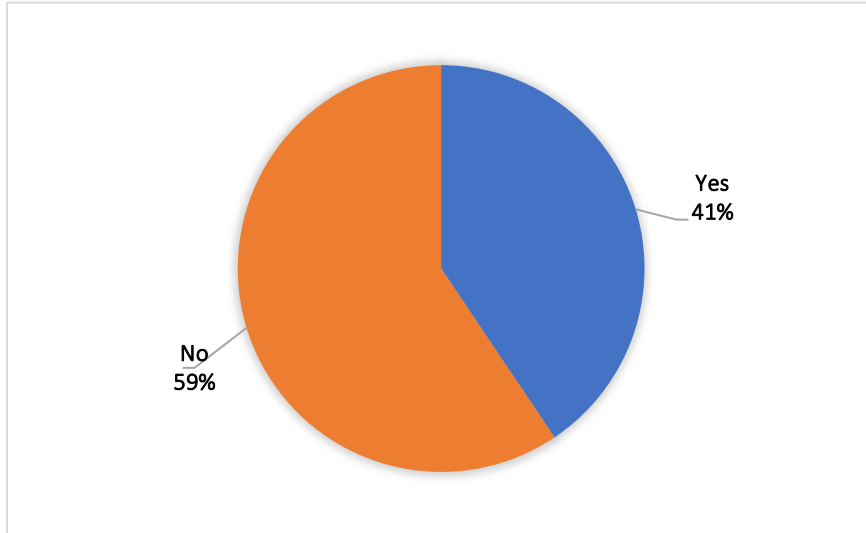


Over 70% of participants have less than five years of project experience, 18% have up to 10 years of experience, only 5% have 10-15 years of experience, only 7% have 15-20 years of experience.

As the analysis gives it, most staff members have limited experience with projects and have a shorter working period at HEIs. This distribution might indicate that having younger, less

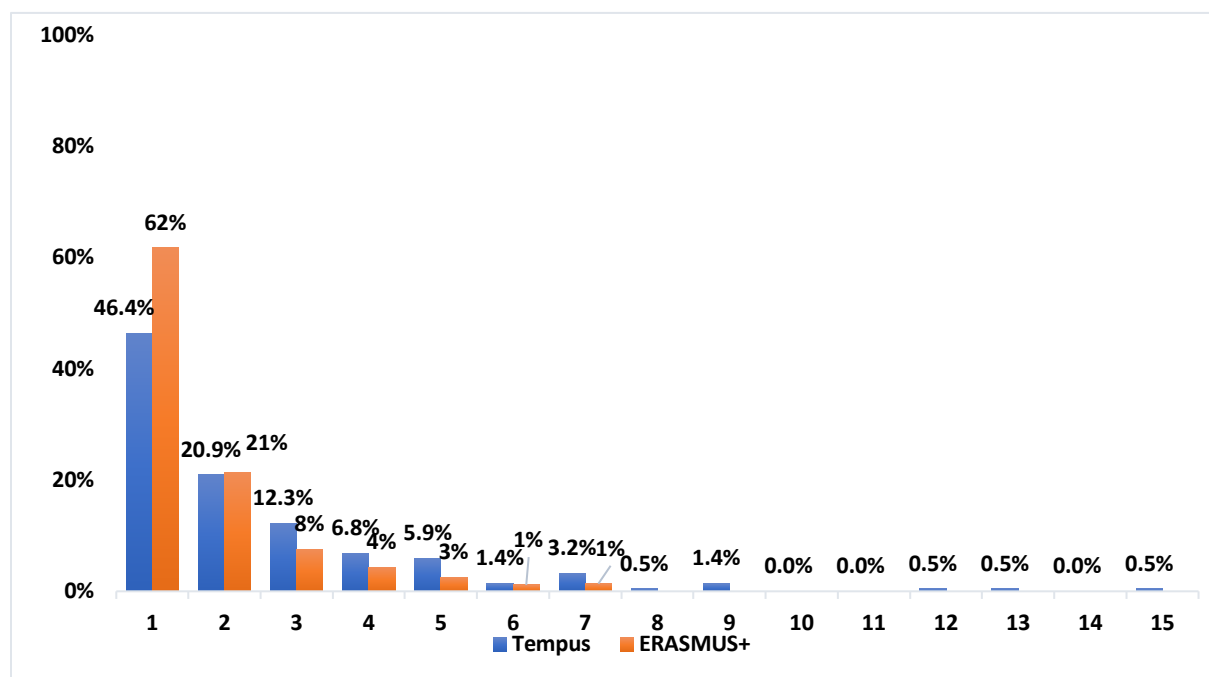
experienced employees involved in managing a project creates operational tensions in the visions and challenges the process. On the contrary, it might also provide a diverse perspective on both project management and implementation.

Figure 9 **Tempus experience**



For example, *Figure 9* shows that only 41% of the respondents had experience with a Tempus project, indicating a low level of project-bound involvement in general. Nevertheless, another data depicted in *Figure 10* shows that most participants have been associated with only one Tempus (more than 40% of participants), and 62% of the respondents – in only one CBHE action project.

Figure 10 Years of experience with EC projects



NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The educational system in Azerbaijan has gone through a range of reforms since the country joined the Bologna process in 2005. In 2009, the government adopted the Law on Education, which had its latest amendment in 2020. Education is set as a priority, and some relevant regulations were developed as a part of the process. At present, reforms in the educational system are taking place according to that particular legal document.

In addition, one of the most important documents that had effectively pushed the educational reform towards a new era was the corresponding presidential decree of 2008 on the Integration of Higher education institutions of the Azerbaijan Republic into the European Higher Education Area (Aliyev, 2011). Some important initiatives that brought substantial changes to the HEI-associated broad framework have followed the decree since then (Isakhanli and Pashayeva, 2018). However, another document worth mentioning for the context was the National Strategy for the Development of Education developed for 2015-2025, which underscored the government’s determination to focus on long-term and substantial investments in Education and Science (TT Report, 2019-2020). As a logical continuation, the presidential decree on expanding the international competitiveness of HE in Azerbaijan (November 2018) formed a drive for positive tendencies in expanding internationalisation within the industry. A detailed legislation mapping is annexed to this report (ANNEX 3). Subsequent changes have significantly impacted the education

system, yet, as Mammadova and Valiyev (2020) argued, the pace of the reform is still relatively slow.

In Azerbaijan, the number of HEIs varies from 53 to 52 since 2015. In spite of this relatively high number for a 10.1-million strong nation, their involvement in different international projects remains patchy and insufficient. For example, CBHE projects during 2015-2017 involved only 19 HEIs in the country. Many factors are affecting and explaining the low-level involvement in the projects. Firstly, existing human capital in higher Education is heavily and predominantly involved in the teaching process. Secondly, most of the teaching force represents an older generation of professionals who are very close to their retirement age (TWINNING 1). Thirdly, existing human resources are not trained well enough to be effectively involved in fundraising or grant writing. This *status quo* creates a significant gap in HEI's capacity of attracting extra funds for further development. However, fourthly, the HEI staff do not have a clear vision regarding what to expect from the system that usually does not 'produce' any encouragements for the people involved to grow professionally. Evidently, the latter can be explained by the lack of strategically envisioned changes. On the contrary, at the HEIs in Azerbaijan, those changes are often made due to *ad hoc* reflections or even by chance.

Table 1 Number of HE constituents in Azerbaijan, 2015-2020

Indicators	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Number of HEIs	53	54	51	51	51	51
Number of teaching staff (person)	15023	14550	14500	14569	14779	15064
Number of students (person)	158212	161234	163779	167677	176723	187654

Source: State Statistical Committee (SSC) 2021. The data is available through <https://www.stat.gov.az/source/education/?lang=en>

Objectively, CBHE projects are crucial for the country's continuous development, but the initiatives' 'critical mass' would have a more substantial impact. Despite the undisputed fact that Azerbaijan has remarkably progressed economically in the last two decades, has also made some noticeable as well as substantial changes in the segment of governance and increased the country's budgetary share on Education by 13% in 2019 (World Bank), there are still many

challenges that the Azerbaijani HEIs are facing. A historically low level of internal investment, compounded with negligible external funding, leaves universities to survive with limited funds received locally, dramatically restraining institutional development.

For Azerbaijani HEIs, among the positive outcomes of collaboration within Erasmus+, the establishment of **Higher Education Reform Experts** (HERE) can be singled out. This framework, being originated from within the Tempus programme, is financially supported by Erasmus+. With a focus on the theme, the country's authorities appoint a group of experts, and their goal is to promote and enhance the modernisation of HE at the national level. The National Erasmus+ Offices manage the local Network of 9 experts in cooperation with the MoE of Azerbaijan. The experts are trained within different international programs, which are coordinated by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), in cooperation with the DG Education and Culture of the European Commission. The services provided by the Network is supported by the Support and Promotion for Higher Education Reform Experts (SPHERE) team. More information about the action can be found through -<https://supporthere.org/page/about-action>

Affiliation with and collaboration within such a high-profile group of experts and the ministerial level coordination of the process became a positive indicator of growing effective interdependencies in the industry. The HEREs also contribute towards building a platform for communicating urgent messages to policymakers and policy-shapers. However, a higher number of planned activities and more regular meetings would assist the framework that is naturally striving to make a difference and positively increase its impact.

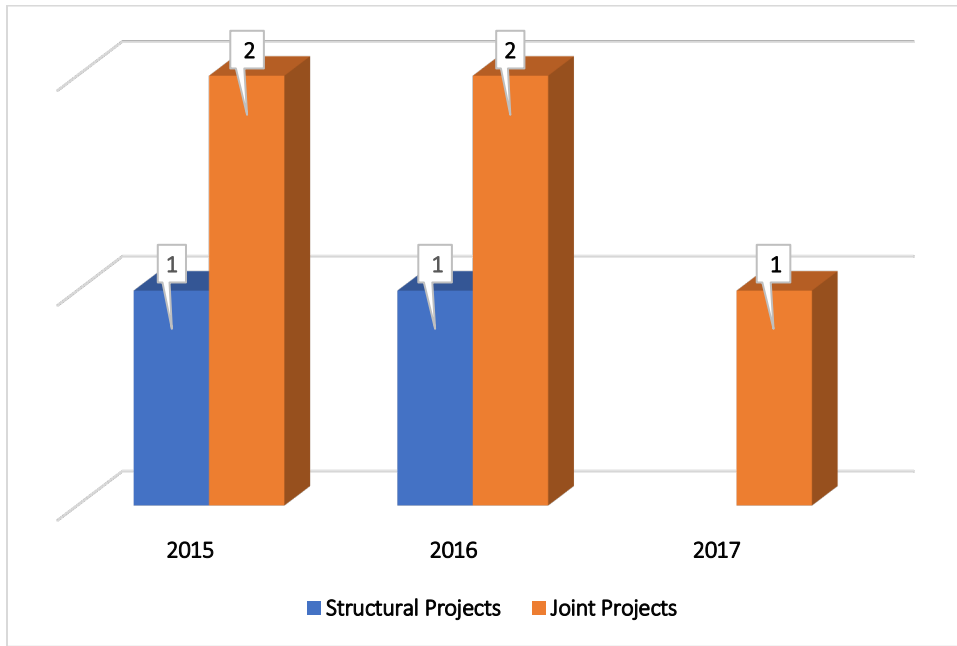
EC project experience

The Azerbaijani HEIs have been implementing projects supported by the EC since 1998. These initiatives covered plenty of key segments, namely capacity building in university governance, curriculum development, internationalisation, and other aspects of university development. Many changes at the institutional level were achieved through establishing international networks. Nevertheless, many issues (i.e., limitations in a university autonomy regarding designing a new curriculum and rigid and centralised student enrollment process) impede the development and improvements in the HEIs context. There is a particular urgency in offering improvements on teaching and learning approaches, research excellence, student engagement at the HEIs in Azerbaijan. Our study shows that the HE actors recognise these issues; nevertheless, only a few actions have been taken by some HEIs to rectify the *status quo*.

Along with this, as reported by the TWINNING project (AZ-ad-EHEA), there is a low level of Bologna process awareness among students, university staff and other stakeholders. The report also recognises the importance of the constant need for professional training to be provided with the support of the EU-originated projects since providing European examples are considered essential

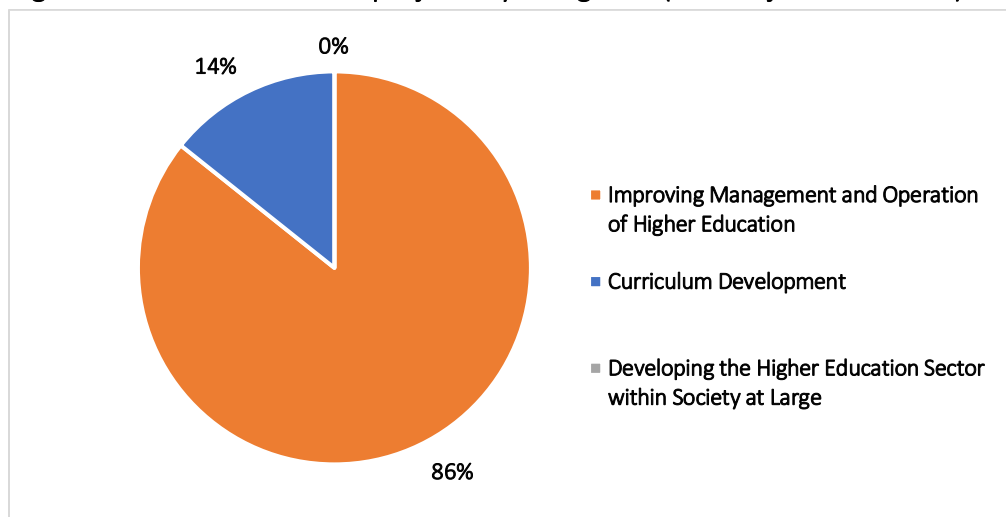
for and by the stakeholders. The majority of the approved projects with an Azerbaijani connection are Joint Projects, whereas the number of structural projects is limited to only two during 2015-2017. One of those structural initiatives was a multinational project involving different regions, and only three projects were coordinated by Azerbaijani HEIs.

Figure 11 CBHE action projects by types (Azerbaijan 2015-2017)



Specifically, those projects that were implemented during 2015-2017 in Azerbaijan were more related to improving the management and operationalisation of the country's HE. There was only one project on curriculum development and none on developing the HE sectors on the society-wide level.

Figure 12 CBHE action projects by categories (Azerbaijan 2015-2017)



Notably, the number of HEIs involved in international projects in the country is not high; specifically, within 2015-2017, there were only 19 universities involved out of the total of 53. Nevertheless, people wise, the number was quite significant, evidently making the projects-linked impact on the individual level considerable.

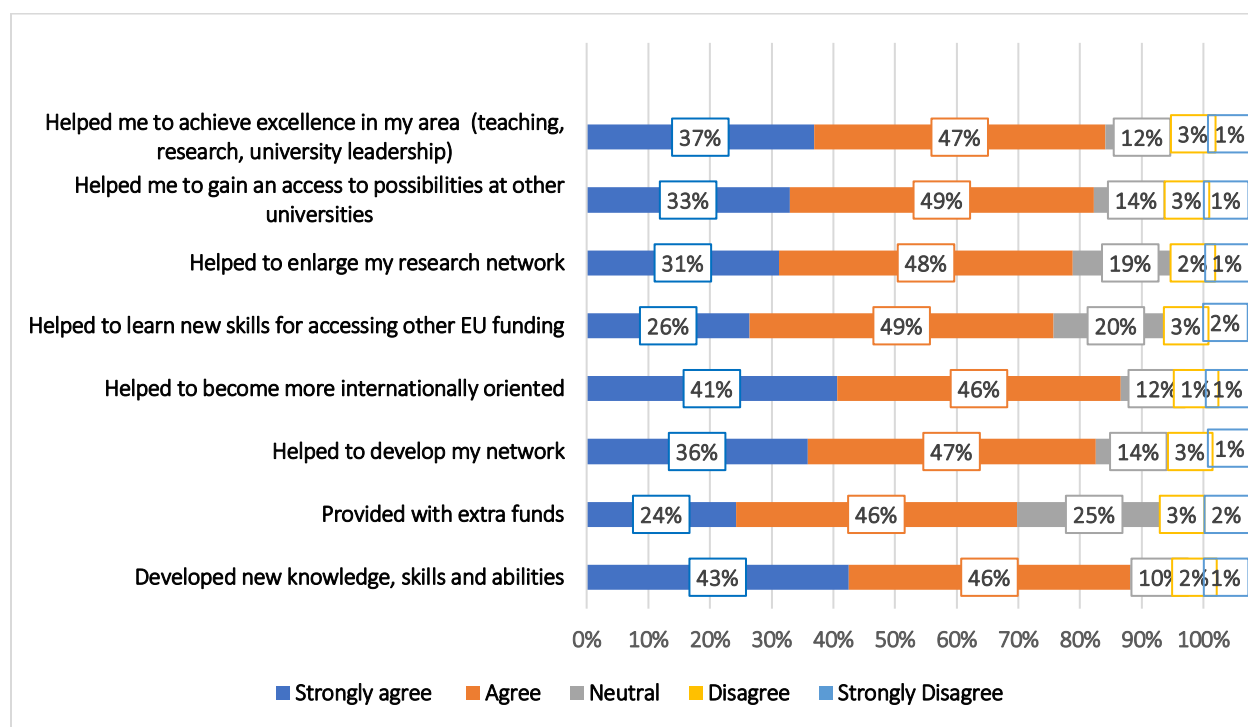
In general, and ideally, Erasmus+ capacity-building projects are designed and implemented to have an impact on individuals, institutions and bring policy level changes. This, with necessity, leads to a situation when, if the impact is made, it could be easily or hardly detectable, with a short- or long-term perspective, tangible or intangible. Considering that many factors influence the state of implementation, the projects may end up being featured by a belated impact. At the individual level, the impact can have a multiplicity of outcomes. It leads to career progress, socio-economic advancements, skills acquiring and development, making noticeable enhancements to existing *intra*-national and/or international networks. As many interviewees indicated, the Erasmus+ capacity-building projects can be and often are life-changing involvements for academic and non-academic staff members.

In general, multiple reports have been informing about the crucial role the HEIs play in individual and societal development, economic progress, which ultimately brings the necessity to focus on further development of the HE to the level of one of the priority areas for the state. Allocating substantial funds for the extension and further growth of HE might impact societal and socio-economic progress. With necessity, such an improvement at the institutional level will enhance the capacity to generate income and attract external funds from various sources. Since the Azerbaijani HEIs are primarily supported by EC projects, they will play a crucial role in institutional development.

INDIVIDUAL ACHIEVEMENTS WITHIN CBHE PROJECTS

The purpose of the capacity-building projects is to support the modernisation, accessibility and internationalisation of HE in the Partner Countries. The actions planned within the projects are directly implemented by the people and through the people involved at HEIs. Thus, the individual-level impact of the projects is one of the indicators of successful project implementation.

Figure 13 CBHE action projects meeting individual needs and expectations



The study has been able to demonstrate that capacity-building projects have a substantial impact on the individual level. More than a third of the sample (or 37%) strongly agree and 47% agree that the projects helped them in their professional development. They have also indicated that the projects assisted them in acquiring new knowledge, new skills and abilities. Closer to three-fourths of the respondents (70%) indicated that the projects provided them with extra funds and thus changed their socio-economic condition. Over 82% of the total sample indicated that the projects helped them in developing their professional network, over 78% took it that the projects served them in the process of enlarging their research network, whereas 86% pointed out that they became more internationally-oriented than they were before getting involved into a project. Learning new skills to access other EU funding was indicated by 80% of the surveyed, and the understanding of some 80% is that the projects helped them in gaining access to a range of opportunities at other HEIs (shared resources). Over 84% responded that the projects aided them to achieve excellence in teaching, research, and university leadership. The data collected for and presented in this study showed that individual-level achievements were significantly more

remarkable, impact wise, than those detected at institutional or national levels. Such indicators empirically highlighted and academically emphasised the impact of the capacity-building project on human capital development.

The study also made it clear that changes in the professional capacity of individuals involved in the project are substantial as shown in **Table 2**. The aforementioned developments are directly related to the participants' improvements of their language, communication, project management and many other skills. In a thorough manner, project participation impacted their value system and improved their transversal skills and academic ethics, i.e., tolerance, self-awareness, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. The skill inventory is developed on the basis of interview analysis and Special Eurobarometer 417 was used to define the notions deployed.

Table 2. Skill inventory of CBHE participants (Skills that helped to gain career progress)

Skill categories		Indicators		
Specialised skills	Research skills	IT skills	Teaching and training skills	Acquired Curriculum development skills
Soft Skills	Team working	Communication skills	Improved Presentation skills	Problem-solving
Foreign language skills	Improved English language skills	Improved writing skills in English	German language improvement	New language acquisition
Transversal skills	Tolerance	Self-awareness	Cultural awareness	Global citizenship
Other skills	Time-management	Project Management (certification)	Project writing	Multitasking

Note: Skill categories are defined based on the Special Eurobarometer 417 available at <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/69f56f69-f45f-4754-b295-5d009c585741/language-en/format-PDF/source-212452906>

As it was indicated during the interviews, many participants, after their projects'-bound involvements, managed to progress with their careers and get promoted to better-paid and higher-ranked positions. When it came to career progress, participants mentioned that due to their project participation, they gained some of the necessary skills and, interestingly enough, reputation to be promoted to new positions within their own HEIs or were even invited to take new roles at other HEIs.

[...] I was promoted to lead the project, and it helped me explore myself as a good leader and as a good person.

Arguably, the projects participation provided individuals with opportunities to gain extra funds, so some changes in their social-economic status were made. As one interviewee puts it:

Participation in these projects equipped us with a research skill enabling us to earn extra money by conducting research for external organisations.

Indeed, they have expanded their international and local networks, which ended up in a new project or a joint paper, influencing the international visibility of early-stage and/or young researchers. Almost all interviewees were happy to participate in this study and share their project experience as learning individuals are usually ready to bring and lead the change. They thought that the capacity-building projects represented excellent chances to develop professionally and personally, extend the network of collaboration, gain new professional and social statuses, and many more.

Objectively, in their nature of both initiation and implementation, the capacity-building projects are different from other projects in many ways. Firstly, the project design requires it to be built on an international collaboration with many universities. This brings internationalisation, new cooperation types, new projects. This way, it was possible for many individuals as well as institutions to expand or, if previously non-existent, develop their networks. The 'Network' was the most frequently used word during the interviews in terms of individual and institutional achievement.

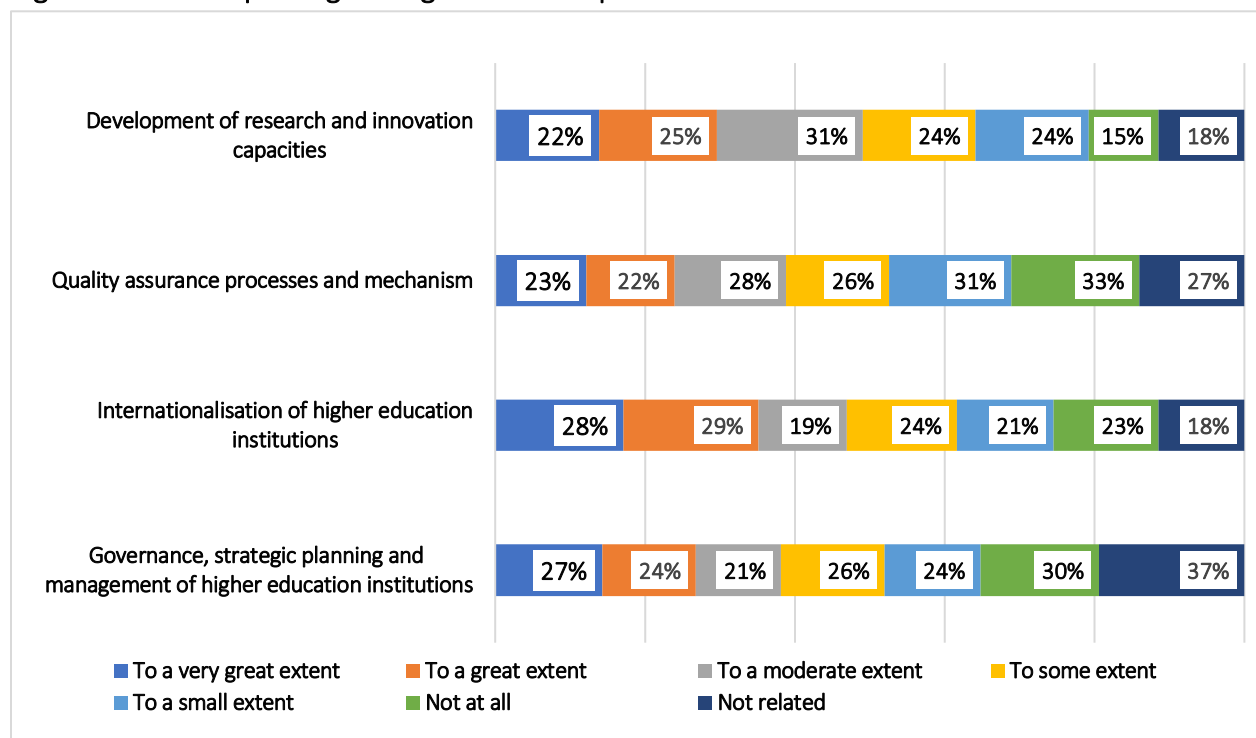
Secondly, the CBHE action projects are multi-faceted and 'crafted' to impact multiple aspects – institutional development, professional development of individuals, implications at the national level. This feature makes them to be always singled out from the other projects, which usually involve a limited number of partners and individuals and tackle only one issue, having very limited funds.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The next substantial impact that the projects made was noted on the institutional level. Intriguingly for the whole framework of cooperation and considering a certain level of archaism Azerbaijani HE is usually featured by, 63% of this study's respondents stated that the projects improved governance, strategic planning, and management of HEIs in the country. As many

interviewees admitted, due to their participation in the projects, strategic goals (especially, on Teaching and Learning) were set as a requirement of a project to be later approved by a corresponding university's council. As a strong indicator of the particular change within institutions, 70% of the respondents specified that the projects contributed to the internationalisation of the HEIs extensively. With the quality assurance processes and associated mechanisms getting improved, 58% of the respondents agreed on that. A similar number of the survey participants (59%) underlined that the projects contributed towards developing research and innovation capacity.

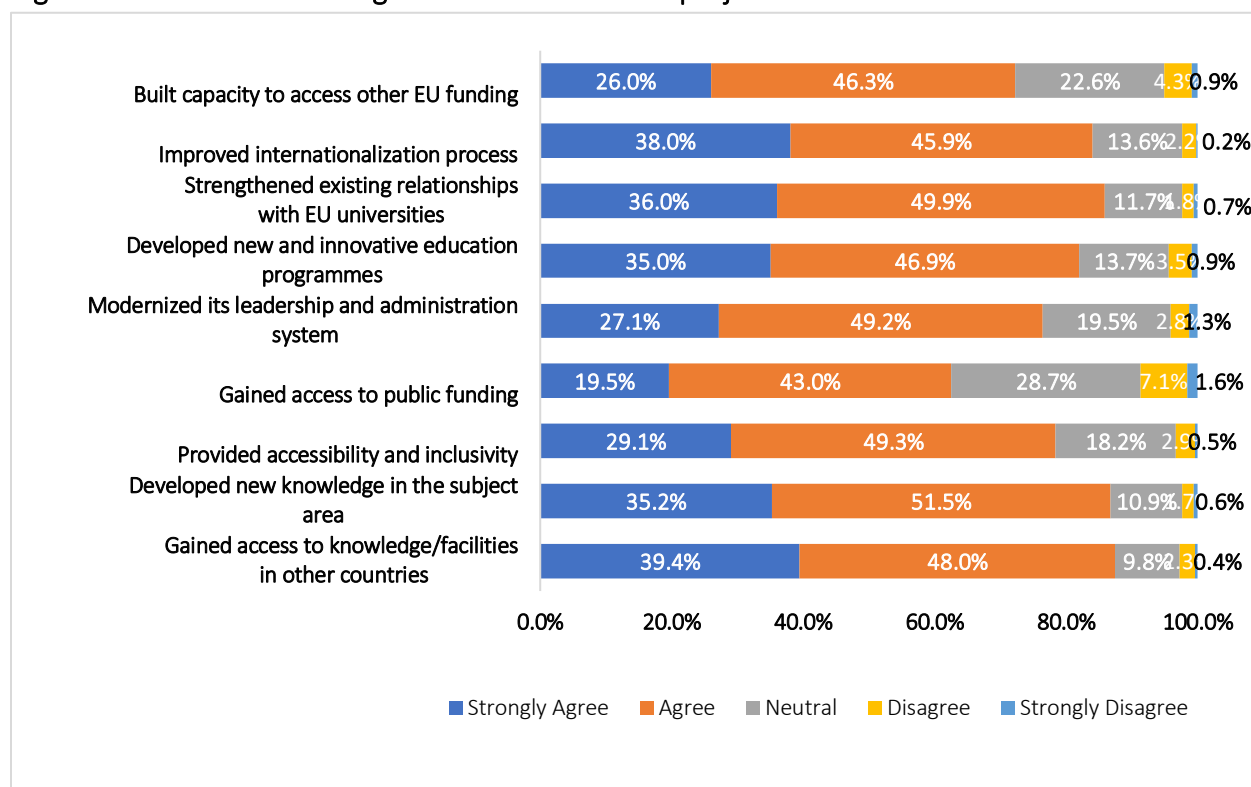
Figure 14 Improving management and operation of HEIs



This study's qualitative data analysis revealed that the HEIs-based research centers made it possible for local scholars to gain extra income by conducting research for European organisations and other international and national Institutions. As many interviewees stated, due to their skill improvement within the CBHE action projects, they got access to other/different financing sources, extended their international networks, and many of them have even established International Double Degree Programs. The Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan, for example, had a chance to participate in the ERASMUS+ CBHE project for the first time, having achieved a remarkable success with this single project: it signed an agreement on establishing a Double Degree Program with the University of Montpellier (France), implemented student exchange,

established a new platform of communication with the country's MoE. Some other HEIs built new centers, initiated new study programs, and new international relationships.

Figure 15 Institutional gains from CBHE action projects



The majority of respondents understood that there are tremendous institutional gains from CBHE action projects. For example, 39% of respondents strongly agreed, and 48% agreed that their institutions gained access to knowledge and facilities of other countries. Moreover, 35% strongly agreed, and 51% agreed that institutions developed new knowledge in the subject area; 29% of the respondents strongly agreed, and 49% agreed that their institutions provided accessibility and inclusivity due to the projects.

Although 19% strongly agreed, and 42% agreed that projects helped their institutions to gain access to public funding, 28% remained neutral. 27% of respondents strongly agreed, and 49% agreed that their institutions modernised their leadership and administration system and 81% of them (a very significant number) indicated that institutions developed new and innovative education programs. 36% strongly agreed, 50% agreed that their institutions had strengthened existing relationships with EU universities. 38% strongly agreed, and 46% agreed that CBHE projects improved the internationalisation process. The projects also helped in building capacity to access other EU-issued funding, according to 71% of the participants. Considering that the HEIs

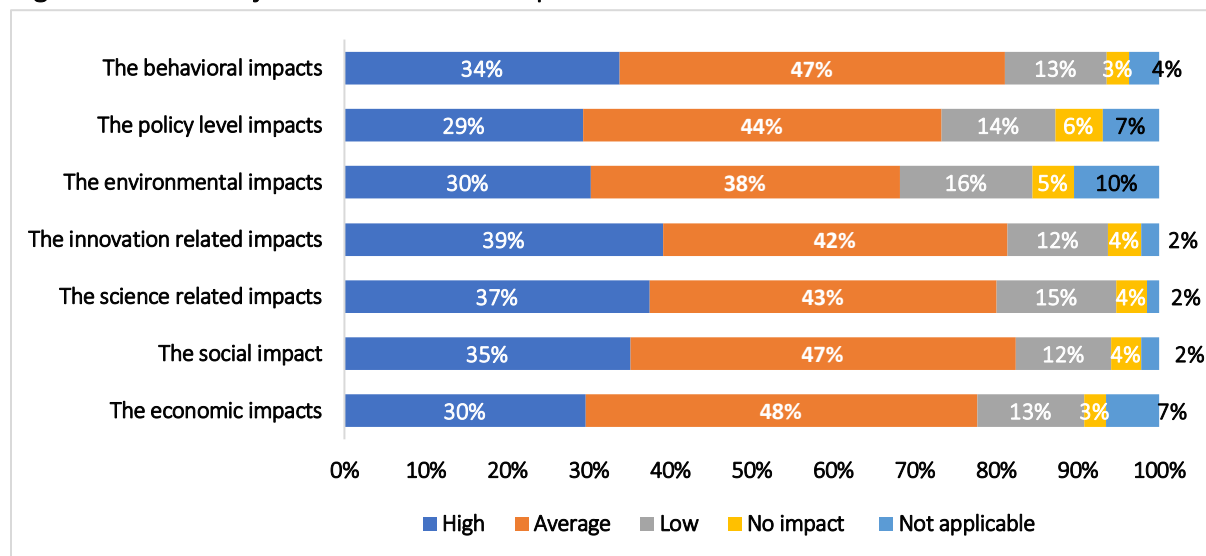
in Azerbaijan have a relatively low level of CBHE project engagement, the impact of the projects is still impressive.

Internationalisation of the HEIs

The European Higher Education Area brought more restructuring of cooperation-focused practices and encouraged a strong network to be built among European universities, which led to the Europeanization of HE (Carlson *et al.*, 2018; Maassen and Musselin, 2009). Although the links developed by the Azerbaijani HEIs are not extensive and are not comparable to those among the EU-based universities, CBHE actions and other EC projects had a significant impact on the internationalisation of local HE. As depicted in *Figure 15*, most of the respondents (over 80%) agreed that their participation in a CBHE action project had improved the internationalisation processes and frameworks.

As stated by the interviewees, the number of networks developed and MoUs signed within these projects is rather great, and this operational as well as normative ‘push’ already led to many new projects and cooperational linkages. Besides, more systematic and strategic planning to be focused on enhancing cooperation is emerging for the Azerbaijani HEIs. An improved methodology on internationalisation of HEIs in the country is, arguably, one of the most significant achievements stated by many informants during the interviews. Numerously, they have mentioned that a university’s international strategy was renewed or simply developed from scratch within an EC-supported project. Taken separately or together, a number of new projects being implemented, MoUs and cooperation agreements being signed, and Double Degree Programs being established evidently indicate the emergence of trust-based relationships in general, contributing to the broadening practice in terms of formulating strategic directions for a HEI.

Figure 16 Project achievements’ impact on the institutions



As it is indicated in *Figure 16*, the participants mentioned that there were multiple-level impacts that could be detected out of the projects' implementation. For example, 30% of the respondents agreed that there was a high economic impact made, whereas 43% and 13% thought, correspondingly, of an average and a low one. In contrast, the social impact is agreed to be higher than the economic impact by 5%. The science-related impact is indicated by 37% as high, whereas the innovation-related impact is higher and supported by 39% of the respondents. 30% mentioned an environmental impact to be high, and 38% agreed it to have an average impact, whereas this result contradicts the results of a question related to climate change (*Figure 23*), where most of the respondents mentioned that the projects did not touch upon the issues related to this global challenge.

The policy-level impact was indicated to be high by 29% of the survey participants, as for the average – it was noted by 44% of them. The majority of participants (47%) agreed that projects have an average impact, whereas 34% said they had a high behavioral impact. In comparison, innovation (39%) and science-related (47%) impacts are higher than the other indicators.

Participants of the study mentioned many positive outcomes of the projects and suggested explicitly on a range of various effects the projects must have on the individuals and institutions. Many mentioned that those people who were trained in the EU within the projects-originated frameworks managed to progress in their careers later on. Others mentioned that some people changed personally as a result of those trainings as well as gained more interpersonal and transversal skills.

IMPACT

I think the projects had a positive impact on Human Resources Development.

Apart from what we call 'cultural shock', each trip contributed to understanding of the concept of the ideal global citizen, integration of the best practices into our society, and realizing our deficiencies.

We are trying to cooperate with our partners not only within the framework of Erasmus+, but also in other fields as well.

This is very pleasing that our colleagues are not only limited to the Erasmus+ framework, but also try to effectively participate in other activities.

Table 3 Overview of CBHE action Projects under the study

PROJECTS/ INDICATORS	INPUTS*	PARTNERS**	ACTIVITIES	OUTCOMES	IMPACT
AESOP	€196.391	3 HEIs MoE	Needs analysis Best practices from EU Universities Capacity building events Study visits Recommendations	Training materials Student advocacy procedures and guidelines Ombuds office at each HEI	Students are more aware of Bologna Process's democratic principles for resolution of their academic and administrative issues Streamlined approach to conflict resolution increases the efficiency of institutional governance
EQAC	€661.811***	12 HEIs MoE	Needs analysis Best practices Study visits	Establishment of the platform for QA QACs established at each university Number of Quality Assurance related documents	Understanding and awareness of QA activities, requirements and standards. Streamlined QA activities at each university. Evident changes in attitude and behavior of involved staff members.
NIZAMI	€461.652	8 HEIs MoE ANAS	The state-of-art report Models of Doctoral Studies Professional development trainings	A thesis charter is developed and used by each HEI involved Established Doctoral Schools National Management Portal established PhD & Master students Association Double-degree program with ANAS established	Recommendations on doctoral studies submitted to the Public Authorities Needed changes at the Doctoral studies at national level are discussed in local Media and by the public authorities Multiple changes at institutional level

LPEB	€112.712	2 HEIs	Professional development trainings Review of the study programs	New program on Energy Efficiency and Construction Renewed current degree program	Impacted the perception of the program which has offered totally new subjects New entry into the market (new major)
PAWER	€47.619	2 HEIs MoE	Professional development trainings on credit recognition Regional and international events for public	Development of internationalisation (Credit recognition) policy	Students' knowledge of the fair and transparent credit recognition system within the HEIs Enhanced knowledge of staff about mobility and credit recognition process
PETRA	€536.696	8 HEIs MoE	Needs analysis Best practices from EU Trainings Study visits International conferences	TL strategies TL guidelines TLC at each HEI Online TL platform	Streamlined professional development for university staff contributing to student learning Educational platform supporting online learning and teaching Collaborative research projects
PROMIG	€124.839	2 HEIs	Trainings for staff Summer and winter schools for students International conferences Guest lectures	Diploma programme in Economics and Migration in Afghanistan Recommendations provided to the government of Afghanistan on Migration Management	New collaboration opportunities for HEIs from Afghanistan and South Caucasus MCC turns into a national hub for Migration Studies

*Only sums related to Azerbaijani HEIs are indicated in the table

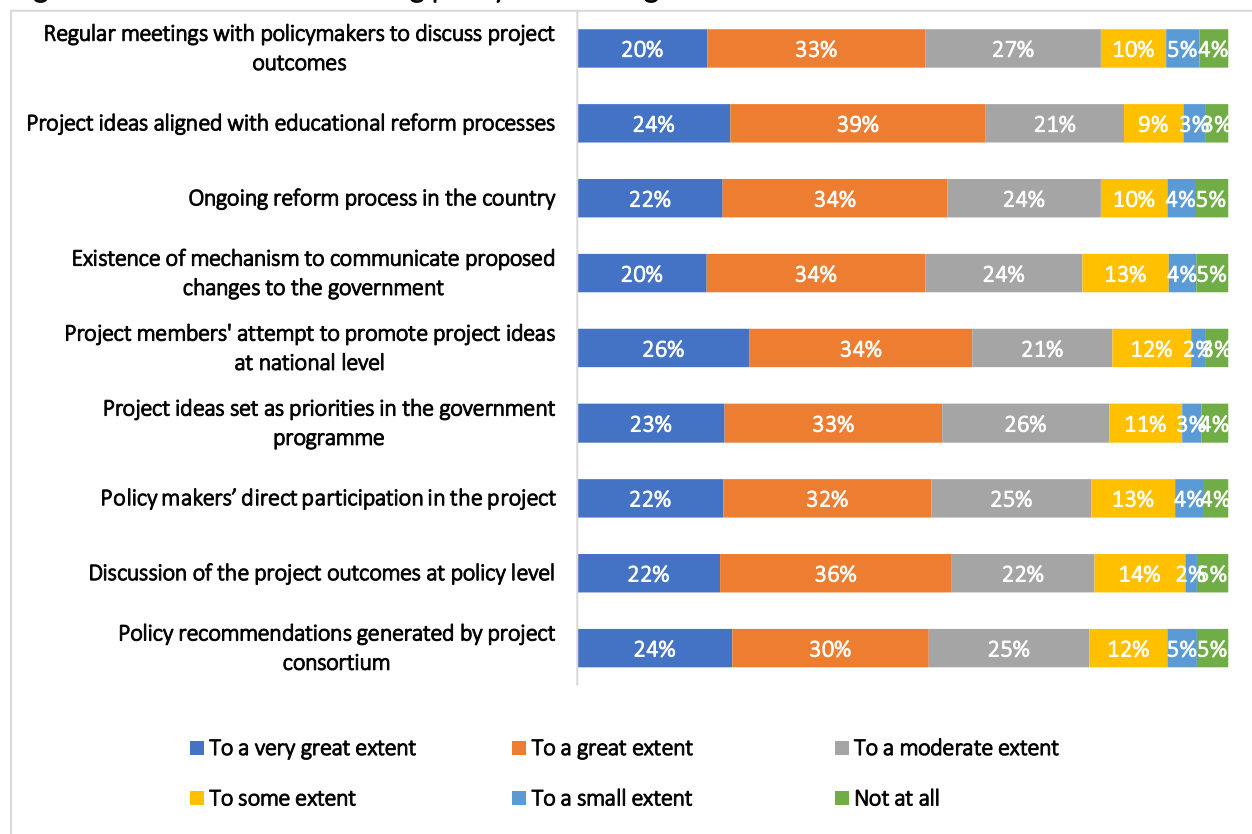
**Includes only partners from Azerbaijan

***The figure is approximate since the project is not completed

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Having longer-term policy level changes to modernise the HE systems in the Partner countries is one of the utmost goals of the CBHE projects. A part of this study was conducted with a focus on the implications noted at the national level because of the projects' implementations. *Figure 18* summarises the factors that might have influenced the policy-level changes.

Figure 17 Factors affecting policy level changes



Among the aforementioned factors affecting the policy-level changes, three can be singled out. Those local project members that attempt to promote their respective initiatives' ideas at the national level would help the cause to a very great extent as agreed by 26% and agreed to a great extent by 34%. In addition, 24% of the participants agreed that the projects-associated ideas that were aligned with educational reform processes would help in achieving a policy-level change to a very great extent, 39% think to a great extent, 21% think to a moderate extent. Another factor the participants believe to have a great impact on policy-level changes is the policy recommendations generated by a project consortium after its completion. 24% of the participants thought that this would assist to have an effective policy change to a very great extent, and 30% –

to a great extent. The existence of a mechanism to communicate proposed changes to the government agreed to have an impact by a very great extent by 20%, and to a great extent by 34%.

Regular meetings with policymakers to discuss project outcomes were considered beneficial for a prospective policy adjustment to a very great extent by 20%, whereas 33% agreed on that to a great extent, with 27% indicating a moderate extent, and only 10% noting some extent. Although 54% thought that policymakers' direct participation in a project would prospectively lead to a policy change, 36% noted that it would help moderately or even lower. If project-generated ideas were set as a priority in the state program, it was considered by 56% of the participants making a more significant project impact on a policy. The rest of the respondents stated that it would help to an extent.

One of the most striking findings of the qualitative segment of the study was that, for many of its participants, a project-related involvement was experienced for the first time. Before this particular initiative, they had never visited an EU-based university. For example, one of the participants of the AESOP project mentioned that

My first trip within AESOP project was to one of the European universities, there I first learned about students' rights, and was amazed how much they value students, and students know their own rights [...].

Yet another policymaker mentioned that

[...] NIZAMI project was the first and the only Erasmus+ capacity building project I have participated in.

Case Box 1 – Restructuration of the Doctoral Education in Azerbaijan NIZAMI

About the project

Although the government of Azerbaijan approved a series of documents to improve the Doctoral Level Education in the country during 2010-2012, there was a severe need to upgrade the doctoral Education at national and institutional levels. NIZAMI project aimed to restructure Doctoral Schools within Azerbaijani partner HEIs and build capacity to enable HEIs to deliver PhD studies in Azerbaijan aligned with European standards. Such changes, the modernisation of doctoral Education, would lead to joint doctoral degrees and recognition from European HEIs. These improvements proposed in the project might also assure the recognition of the quality of research provided by Azerbaijan's HEIs and research institutions.

Outcomes

National Management Platform (NMP), although with some shortages in the usage, Establishment of Doctoral Schools at Khazar University, Double-degree programme established between ANAS and University of

Montpellier, Thesis Charter, Multiple Reports, and many other documents produced within the project are significant outcomes of the project.

Impact

Graduate employability promoted and provided by the NMP, expansion of the internationalisation provided by the signed MoUs among partners, Double-degree programme established, and gradual changes to the doctoral Education at institutional and national levels will significantly impact the Doctoral Education in the country. Additionally, ongoing discussions in local media and by public authorities will lead to eventual yet slow changes at the doctoral education level.

What participants said

I believe the conducted reforms were an efficient experience, especially understanding of various experiences in European universities.

I joined NIZAMI project late, but this project had a tremendous impact on me. I hope there will be continuation of the project...

NIZAMI was the only CBHE action project I have participated in, and it gave me the chance to learn from the experiences of the best European universities and enabled me to compare and see the deficiencies of our own system.

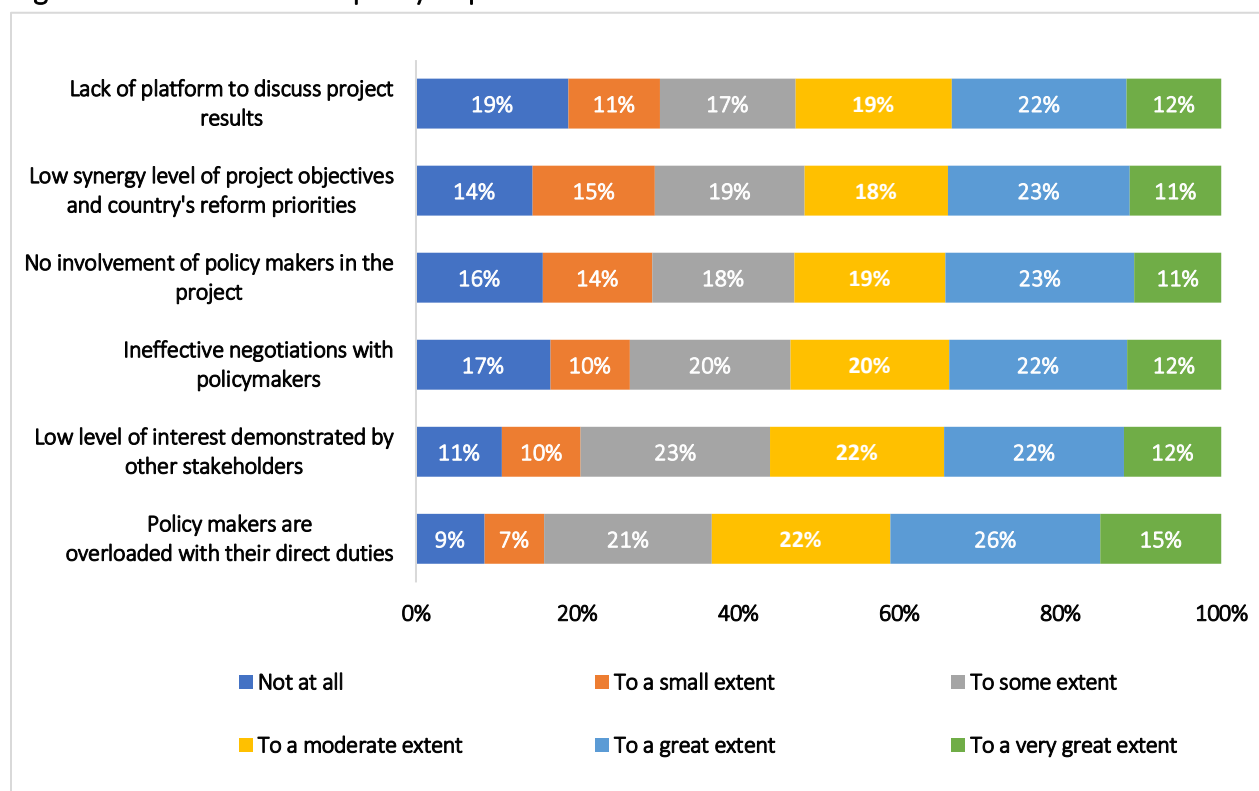
What I have noticed within visits of NIZAMI project was that doctoral students have a very active student life at European universities

BARRIERS TO POLICY LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION

As numerous reports and analytical papers indicate, changes in HE in Azerbaijan occur at a slow pace (Mammadova and Valiyev, 2020). By all means, this also is related to those changes that were enforced by the projects. Some factors are affecting this situation that is, however, beyond the focus of this study. Nevertheless, the survey contained a question related to the barriers at the policy-level, allowing to portray the picture of impediments. Respondents suggested that the country's policymakers, being overloaded with their direct duties, could become the barrier to a very great extent (15%) and a great extent (26%) for making an effective policy impact out of a project. 12% think that the low level of interests demonstrated by other stakeholders is a barrier to a very great extent, whereas 10% believed it is an issue to a small extent. Ineffective negotiations with policymakers could be treated as yet another hurdle for policy-level changes to

be made, as this option was supported by 12% (a very great extent), 22% (a great extent), and 20% (a moderate extent).

Figure 18 Barriers to policy impact



The 11% of the participants expressed a view that that no involvement of policymakers in a project impedes policy impact to a very great extent, and 23% – to a great extent. Low synergy level of project objectives and the country’s reform priorities is seen as a barrier to a very great extent by 11% of the participants and to a great extent – by 23%. A relative majority (19% – not at all, and 11% – to a small extent) does not see the lack of a platform to discuss project-generated results as a barrier to policy-level changes.

BOX 2 – Promoting Excellence in Teaching and Learning at HEIs of Azerbaijan (PETRA)

About project

Education in Azerbaijan was going through significant changes in 2016. Reforms introduced due to the Bologna Process related to the adoption of the credit system, curricula development, evaluation system changes, and framework educational environment creation. Nevertheless, changes such as faculty training, teaching resources development, learning improvement, development of assessment and evaluation systems, or technological innovations directly related to enhancing teaching and learning processes implemented at a slow pace at the institutional level.

As one of the leaders in introducing innovations in HE of Azerbaijan, Khazar University submitted a project on Promoting Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Azerbaijani HE to streamline teacher professional development

and support for student learning. The project was granted, 7 HEIs involved in the project, and 5 European partners started working on the idea. Due to the grant registration complexities, the grant management was transferred to one European partner – Valencia Polytechnic University, Spain. Even though the project faced a challenging situation, and had a late start, the project was successfully implemented.

At the initial stage of the project, a survey conducted among participants and universities revealed that most teaching staff are not qualified to apply modern teaching tools and technology (%). It also revealed that contemporary teaching tools and technology were not available at universities. Teachers admitted that they have limited opportunities to support teaching with research. The lack of organised faculty retraining to keep pace with ongoing innovations in the education system was another weakness.

PETRA was designed to address the streamlining of the professional development support for teaching and learning. The project aspired to build the capacity of the teaching staff to meet pedagogical and technological needs and support active learning.

Outcomes

The Teaching and Learning Centers at each of the 7 HEIs established within the project aimed to streamline the teacher professional development. Among other achievements of this project are the hundreds of staff members trained, new partnerships signed, joint publications, and new projects.

Impact

Currently, 7 TLCs are operating within HEIs involved in the project. After the lifetime of the project, all TLCs are working in cooperation. They organise joint events, workshops and seminars with the participation of European Partners. As a leading Azerbaijani partner, Khazar University organises continuous workshops and coordinates this process with all local and international partners.

What participants said

During the interviews with various stakeholders, they mentioned that the PETRA project helped Azerbaijani universities to transfer to an online mode quickly. The Moodle platform built within the project made it possible for students and teachers to successfully lead the process during the COVID-19 pandemic. This project prepared all universities for using and applying technology for teaching and learning.

I personally participated in 2-3 training within the Petra project. A training in Valencia made a good impression because it was related to distance education. I got acquainted with the process of preparing e-lectures on the spot. We applied this as experience gained in some processes during the training preparation.

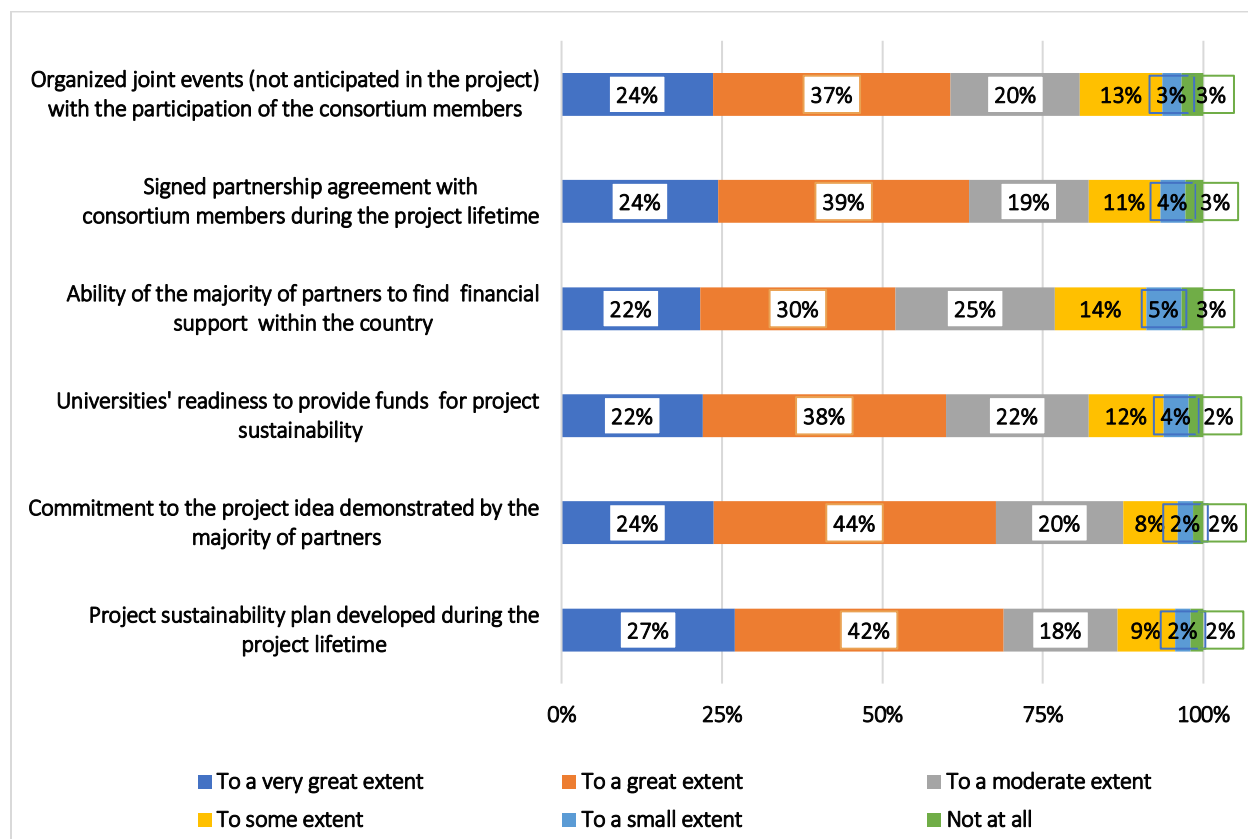
Thanks to the PETRA project, our university was ready for e-learning enforced by the lockdown. This project was proactive and prepared our staff members and the university for online teaching and learning.

I have noticed that Austrian colleagues are very punctual and hardworking during our site visit in Austria. Along with the deep knowledge and wide range of experiences we have gained during that 5-day training programme, positive change in myself was one of the influential aspects of our visit.

PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

A given project’s sustainability is provided by the commitment the implementers demonstrate and strive to deliver right from the very beginning of the initiative’s implementation. The probability of continued long-term benefits depends on how well the project was planned and supported during its lifetime. Another important aspect of providing for sustainability is foreseeing potential risks and building a plan to overcome those risks.

Figure 19 Indicators of the Sustainability



Concerning this cluster of the study, 27% of the respondents pointed out that a project sustainability plan that was developed during the project’s ‘life’ would help the HEIs in providing for the initiative’s sustainable future to a very great extent, and 42% chose the ‘a great extent’ option. Commitment to the project-pushed idea, which would be demonstrated by most of the consortium-bound partners, was another indicator of sustainability that was supported by 24% (a very great extent) and 44% (a great extent). In addition, 22% of the respondents (to a very great extent) and 38% of them (to a great extent) believed that if the HEIs were ready to provide funds

for the initiative, then a given project's sustainability would be ensured. The institution's ability to find financial support within the country agreed to be one of the indicators, as 22% of the participants supported this statement to a very great extent and 30% agreed with it to a great extent. On another note, 24% (to a very great extent) and 39% (to a great extent) proffered that a signed partnership agreement with the consortium member/s during the project's implementation would influence its sustainability. An organised joint event (not forecasted or anticipated in a project) with the participation of the project-bound consortium members could positively influence the initiative's sustainability: 24% agreed with that to a very great extent, and 37% – to a great extent.

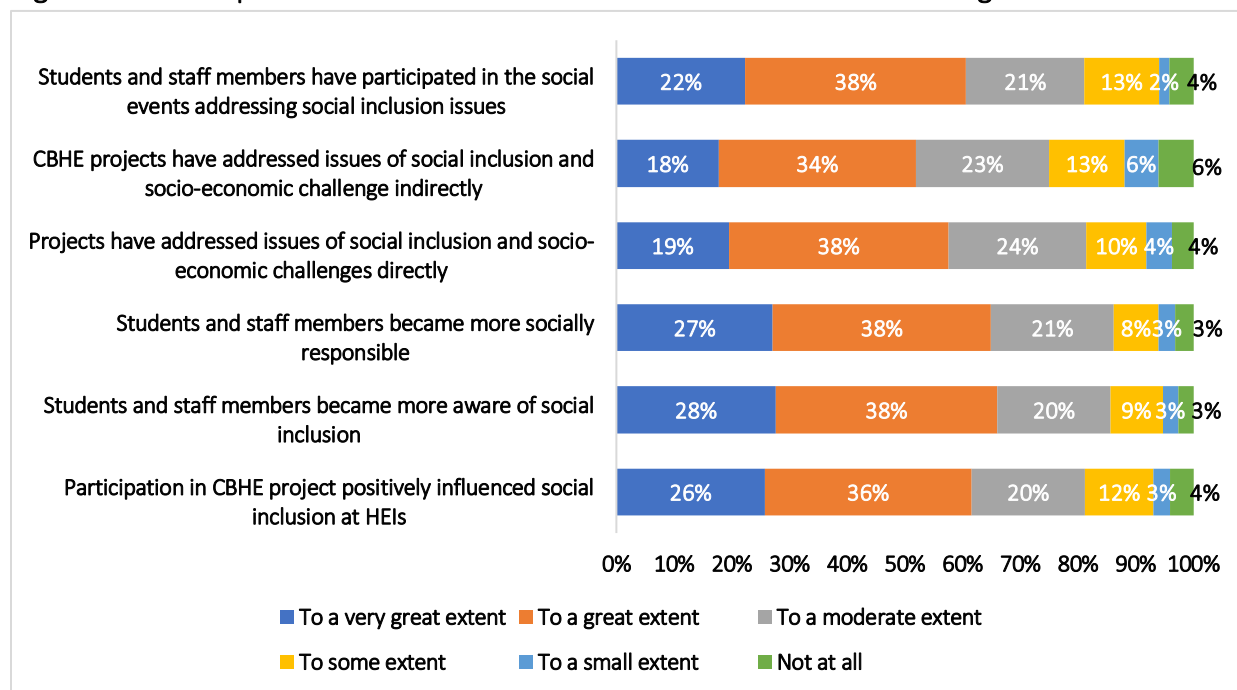
TRENDS

Across the board, the capacity-building projects have been paying particular attention to inclusiveness, socio-economic balance, climate change, public health and other trends. What is the situation with the projects in Azerbaijan, considering these themes?

Inclusiveness

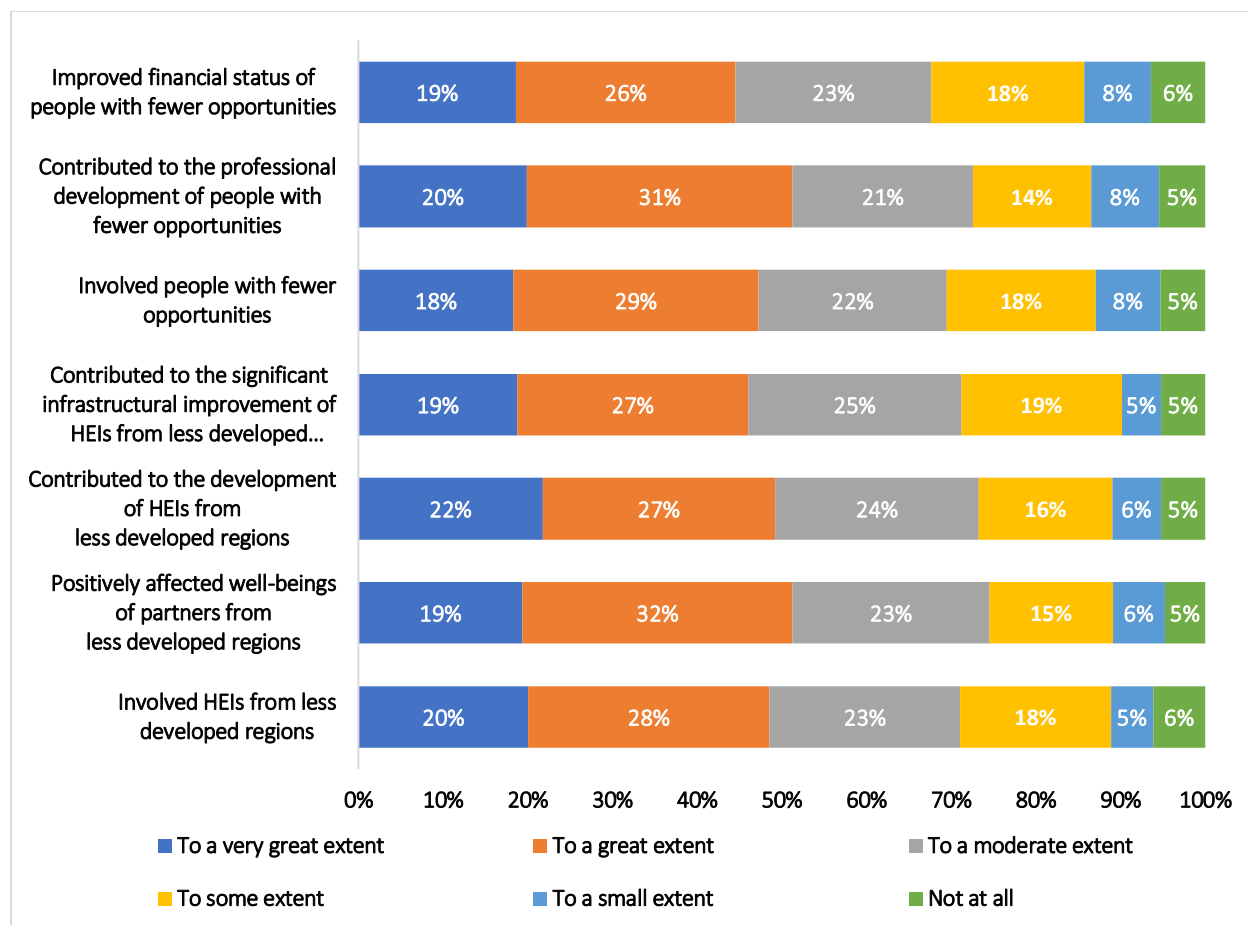
On the practical level, the survey participants expressed their deep concern about the inclusiveness in the country's HEIs, underlining the apparent absence of any practical hands-on approach regarding the utilisation of the concept in different cities of Azerbaijan let alone peripheral localities. More socially-oriented projects should raise awareness among the population in the regions, which will make it possible for people with disabilities to be welcomed and/or reintegrate into the country-wide society. As one participant mentioned, "*the more we participate in CBHE projects, the more we notice our shortages in this area.*"

Figure 20 Impact on Social inclusion and other socio-economic challenges



Overall, the respondents were notified that their participation in the projects positively influenced social inclusion at the HEIs, since 26% thought that it helped to a great extent, 36% reckoned that it was a great extent, and only 4% did not think so at all. Both students and staff members became more aware of social inclusion as 27% agreed to that statement indicating a great extent (with 38% – a great extent). The exact breakdown was on achieving social responsibility. Ticking the ‘very great extent’, 27% of the participants confirmed that the studentship and staff became more socially responsible, and 38% specified a great extent. More than 57% of the participants thought that the CBHE action projects managed to address issues of social inclusion and social-economic challenges directly, whereas 52% stated that it addressed the issues indirectly. More than 27% of participants think that students and staff members who participated in the social events, addressing social inclusion, became aware and socially responsible to a great extent.

Figure 21 Socio-economic impact



Evidently, the CBHE action projects had impacts at different levels due to their multi-faceted character, as detected via different indicators depicted in *Figure 22*. 20% of the participants reckoned that the projects involved the HEIs from less developed regions to a very great extent, 28% – agreed with the statement to a great extent, and 23% picked up the opinion to a moderate degree. The fact that the projects were involving people with fewer opportunities was supported by 18% of the respondents (to a very great extent) and by 29% (to a great extent).

In addition, 20% understood the situation that the projects contributed to the professional development of people with fewer opportunities to a very great extent, 31% – to a great extent. The Participants agree that the projects improved the financial status of people with fewer opportunities. The majority of the participants noted that the initiatives positively affected the well-beings of partners from less developed regions of the country, contributing to developing the HEIs from less developed regions – 22% -to a very great extent, 27% - to a great extent, 24% – to a moderate extent. A substantial number underscored that the projects contributed to the

significant infrastructural improvement of the HEIs from less developed regions – a 46% to a greater extent, 47% – to some.

ICT Developments

Over 57% of the respondents indicated that they became more advanced ICT users in education-associated practices, over 36% managed to do that to some extent, and only 5% did not agree with the statement. More than 57% of the respondents declared that they had developed their ICT skills due to CBHE projects. 36% of respondents said it had been somehow developed within the CBHE projects.

More than 61% of the projects participants declared that their institutions advanced their potential in using ICT in teaching and learning at the institutional level. 34% agreed that the projects contributed to this point in a moderate way.

About 60% of the respondents said that their institutions have updated ICT infrastructure, 33% of them mentioned that the involvement into a project somehow impacted the ICT infrastructure of a particular HEI.

60% of the respondents mentioned that the CBHE projects contributed to the training and development of teachers in ICT, while 34% mentioned that the contribution was on the level of 'somehow'.

55% of the survey participants agreed that the initiatives contributed to developing the digital content at their universities, with 38% picking the 'somehow' on this occasion.

ICT improvements within the projects helped the universities to easily cope with and adapt to the e-teaching and learning situation enforced by COVID-19 – this statement generated the agreement of 59%, with 35% choosing the 'somehow'. 59% agreed to a very great extent that their universities are continuously investing in ICT infrastructure.

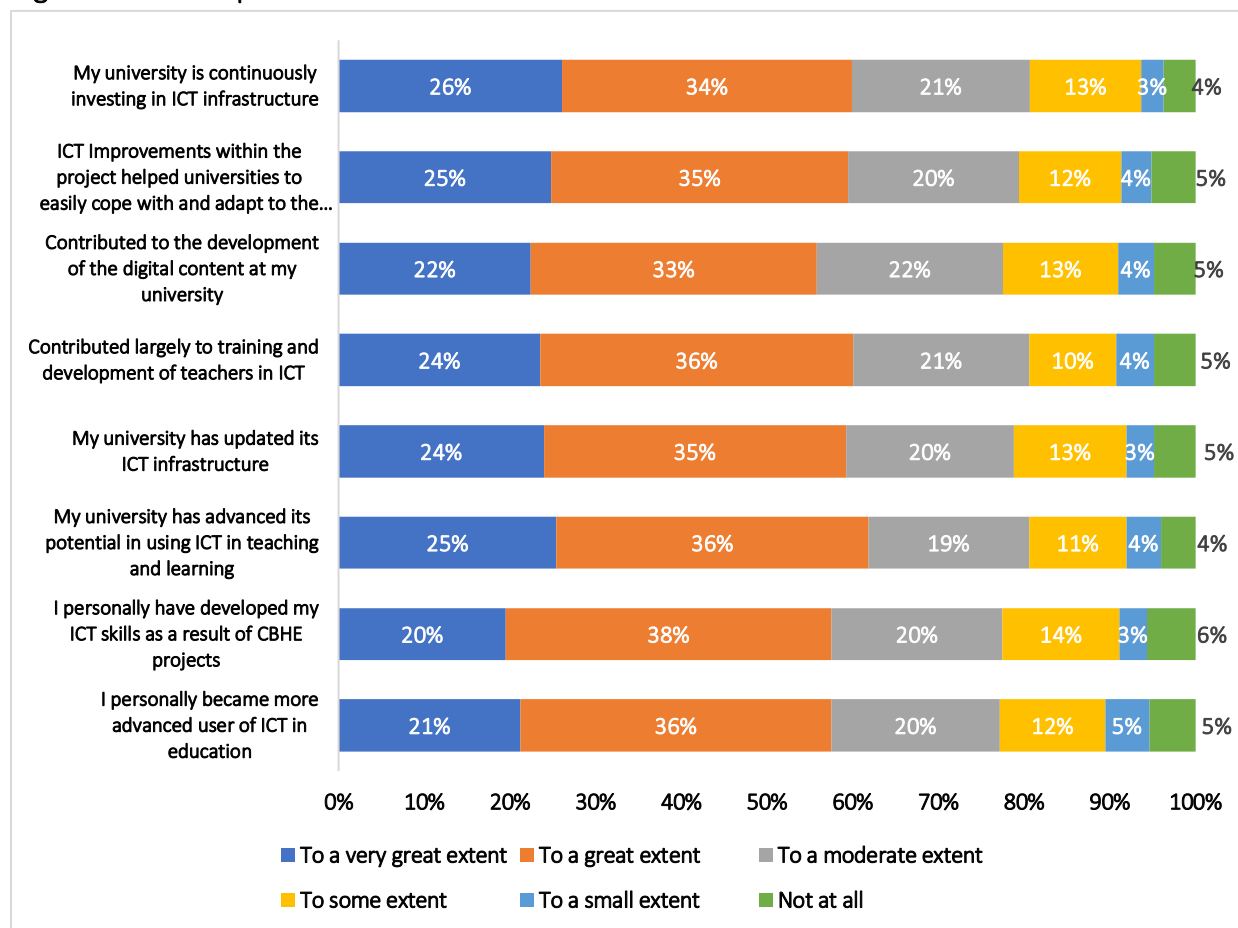
INVALUABLE EXPERIENCES

Our academic staff members visited well-known universities in Germany, France, Italy and gained invaluable experiences there.

All experiences we gained impacted the quality of our teaching.

I believe that due to the lack of financial support to our universities or individuals, funding such as trainings by the European budget is crucial for our personal development, career progress and comprehensive learning.

Figure 22 Impact on ICT

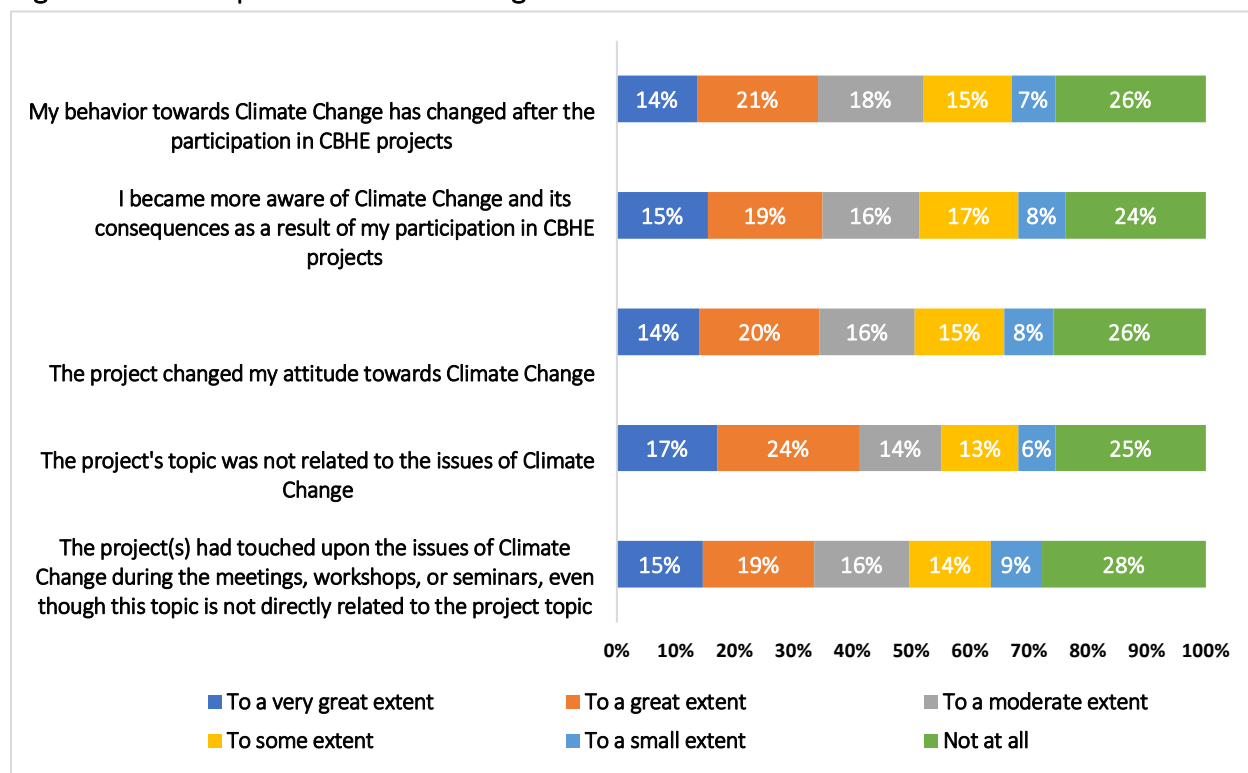


Climate Change

Although climate change was not a topic of any of the studied projects directly, the theme was slightly touched upon during some of the interactions. *Figure 24* displays that the general tendency in the responses was more inclining towards the negative results. The greater shares of the survey's sample neglected any concern demonstrated with the climate change during the projects' implementations. For example, 25% of the participants believed that climate change was not a topic of any discussions at all. In contrary, 15% agreed to a very great extent and 19% – to a great extent that the project touched upon some climate change-related issues during the meetings, workshops, or seminars, even though this topic was not directly associated with a corresponding project's main idea.

Over 35% of the participants admitted that they became more aware of climate change and its consequences due to their participation in the projects; over 40% agreed to some extent, and over 23% did not agree with the statement at all. Nevertheless, 34% of the respondents pointed out that the project changed their attitude and behavior towards climate change; on the same statement, about 40% agreed to some extent, and over 25% did not agree at all.

Figure 23 Impact on Climate Change



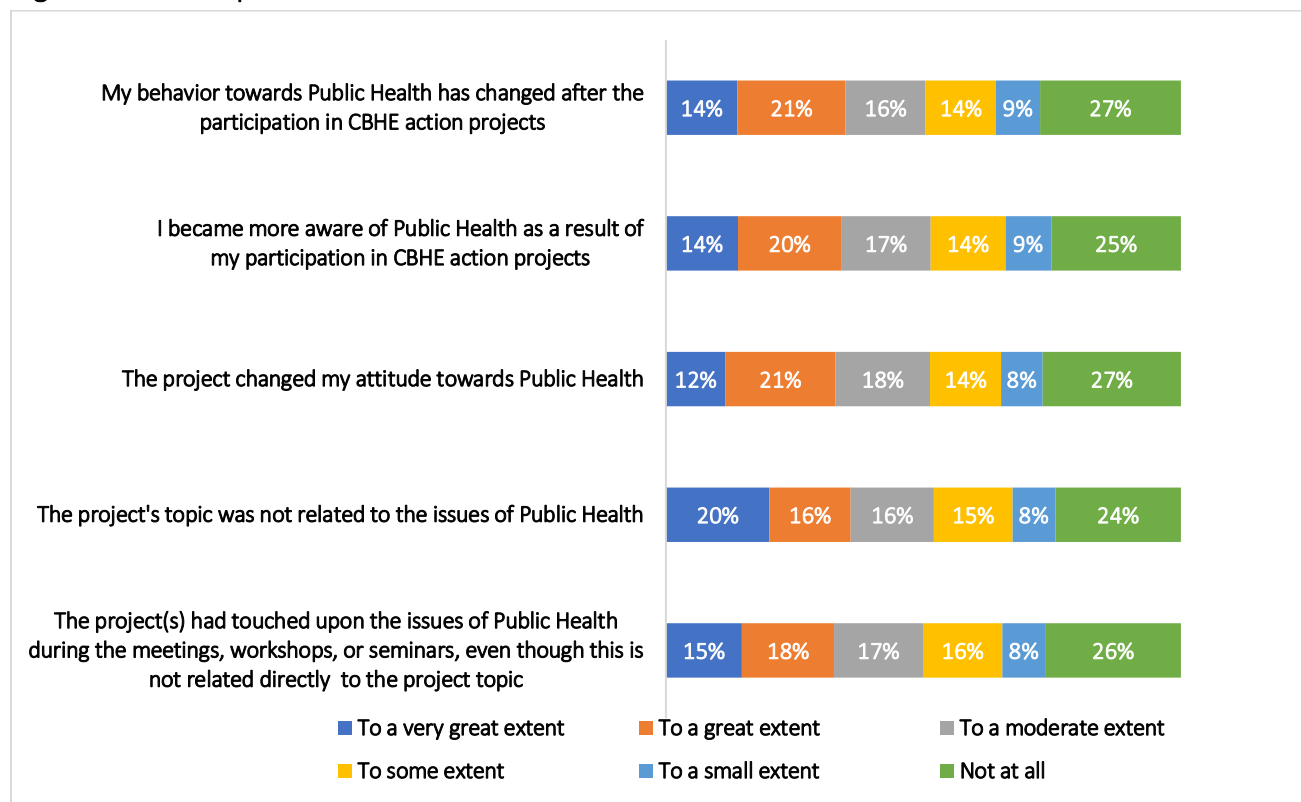
Public Health

About 15% of the survey respondents agreed to a very great extent that the projects touched upon public health issues during the meetings, workshops, or seminars, even though, in a similar way with the climate change, this topic is not directly related to a corresponding project's theme. Over 41% agreed to some extent, and 26% did not agree that public health was a topic of any discussion. Correspondingly 20% of the participants agreed that their respective projects were not linked with public health issues; at the same time, 24% disagreed with the statement.

Only 12% of the participants said that the projects changed their attitude towards public health, whereas 27% did not agree with that at all. 25% did not agree that they became more aware of

public health and its consequences due to their participation in CBHE projects, although 20% agreed with it to a great extent. Around 35% of the participants agreed that their attitude towards public health has changed after the CBHE projects, although over 27% did not agree at all.

Figure 24 Impact on Public Health



CHALLENGES

Although a successful project is a realisation of a well-crafted proposal, not all initiatives can report about their smooth implementation. There are many internal and external factors affecting the project's ultimate success. The following *Figure 25* summarises some issues predefined in the survey question.

Figure 25 Factors affecting the quality of project implementation



At the individual level, 12% agreed to a very great extent and 19% to a great extent that 'language' is a barrier to achieve a more successful implementation of a project. However, encouragingly for the future of the Azerbaijani HEIs, 25% of the respondents did not agree with that statement. Lack of time is pointed out to be a barrier to a very great extent (by 11%) and to a great extent (by 16%), whereas also 16% ticked the box with the 'small extent'.

CASE BOX 3 - QUALITY PROVISION AT HEIS OF AZERBAIJAN (EQAC)

About project

Many universities in Azerbaijan do not have Quality Assurance Centers. Traditional Quality Assurance systems inherited from Soviet System have two main directions: controlling student knowledge at the institutional level and control from the Ministry of Education. The project EQAC was designed to meet the institutional needs of streamlining the quality assurance process by introducing the quality culture. Due to numerous training and development programmes, it was possible to introduce modernised quality assurance practices, which will improve the way education is delivered across the country. The establishment of 11 Quality Assurance Centers at different HEIs across the country, the changes introduced in monitoring and evaluation practices, and improvements in educational delivery significantly impacts the reform process at the national level.

Impact

11 QACs established at 11 HEIs across the country. Formation of the quality policy, setting quality objectives, measurement (process, product, satisfaction) model, auditing model, rules and procedures, and 100s of staff members trained are among the project's outcomes.

What participants said

The multi-faceted character of Erasmus+ capacity building projects is not comparable with any other projects regarding their impact on individual, institutional and national levels. These projects, along with the infrastructural changes and structural improvements, bring tremendous changes at individual level, which is more prominent. For many participants, such an experience was for the first time and brought many substantial changes in their personal and professional lives.

I have noticed that our colleagues who have participated in the project are very distinct from others who have not participated in any project.

I got acquainted with the concept of European standards and guidelines within the EQAC project.

I have gained extensive experience in Quality Assurance. We now know the 10 standards applied in the European Higher Education Area by heart [...].

I gained deep knowledge about European standards and guidelines. I have learned about SDGs for the first time when we visited Stockholm. We try to apply the knowledge we gained here when we write other projects.

Technological illiteracy was indicated as a barrier by 12% (to a very great extent), 16% (to a great extent), and 16% (to a small extent). Intriguingly, 24% of the participants did not consider it a barrier at all. Biases towards partner country representatives are thought to be less significant barriers since more than 28% thought it was not a barrier at all. Only 10% of the participants understood it as a barrier to a very great extent.

At the institutional level, 12% of the respondents agreed to a very great extent, and 19% – to a great extent that *intra*-institutional bureaucracy represents a barrier to a project's success, whereas 26% noted that it was not a barrier at all. More than 31% of the respondents believed that a lack of support from the HEI's leadership was not a barrier at all, whereas 10% thought that it was to a very great extent, and 17% – to a great extent.

An interesting trend appeared for this study's observation, and it was related to political barriers, i.e., grant restrictions. On that one, 31% of the participants claimed that it was not a barrier at all, whilst 17% considered this political dimension a barrier to a very great extent, and 18% to a great extent.

LESSONS LEARNED

Projects brought many positive outcomes; nevertheless, there were challenges and lessons learned that project managers have adequate notice. The data for the lessons learned in this study was received basically from the interviews conducted with the project managers, but it is not limited to this source. Direct implementors, policy-makers have also contributed to the development of this passage. As a result of the analysis, the following conclusion within the identified categories is possible to make:

Project planning: The majority of project managers mentioned that they now know better how to plan the project because they have experienced project management, observed and learned from European partners, and now understand the mistakes they made during the planning and implementation. Now they know better to how to plan it more thoroughly, especially the management workpackage.

Human capital: Many of the project managers complained about the quality of people involved from other universities. Their lessons learned from this particular aspect would be to recruit staff members who know better English, who had experience in project management. As human resources are critical for the project's

LESSONS LEARNED

Unfortunately, we did not highlight the role of students when writing our project, however, during the implementation of the project, we worked very actively with the students.

I think we have participated in many events with the students during our projects so far. However, if we had to restart it all again, it would be very beneficial to provide the flexibility to the students, their application to international universities with the financial support by university budget; to organize various summer/winter schools together.

I would work on management workpackage in details.

Constant communication during the project lifetime among the partners might contribute to the sustainability of the project.

success, it is worth communicating the involvement of appropriate staff members during the project planning stage.

Student involvement: During the interviews project managers admitted that student involvement in the project was one of the weakest points since only few projects undertook involvement of graduate students (PETRA, NIZAMI, for example). Nevertheless, changes brought by the projects are impacting students in the longer-term as a multiplier effect of the system, infrastructural changes, and professional development of the academic and non-academic staff undertook within the project.

Communication: Communication within the consortium and different stakeholders is a vital aspect of project management. Since the project promotion was mentioned as one of the weakest points, which highly depends on the solid communication capability of the team, it needs to be addressed at the beginning of the project to establish a decent team.

Technical challenges: Almost all projects have faced technical problems, especially with the grant registration, which has delayed the implementation and have caused a lot of demotivation for staff members. To overcome this barrier, firstly, it needs to be estimated as a risk and mitigation plan should be ready; secondly, constant communication with authorities should be led.

Incompatibility of partners: Another aspect mentioned during the interviews was mentioned as the incompatibility of partners in terms of the capacity of people and institutions involved. It is worth identifying and selecting partners strategically during the idea formation.

Although partners have faced some challenges, all of them served individuals and institutions as a learning opportunity.

CONCLUSION

In general, this study's findings revealed a significant impact that the CBHE action projects had on HEIs in Azerbaijan. However, there is still room for further improvement for institutional development and a need to promote policy-level changes

Despite a range of challenging issues, i.e., grant registration, late start, coordination transfer, partner change, all projects were implemented successfully due to the individual and institutional support and appreciation of such a chance. Although many projects faced obstacles during implementation, participation in such complex projects like the CBHE action projects provides foundations for professional development and network expansion for individuals and institutional capacity building for Partner country institutions.

Although interregional projects are effective in expanding networks and establish new partnerships, national projects have more significant impact on supporting country-bound reform processes in Azerbaijan. Additionally, national projects allow for a higher number of the Azerbaijani HEIs to focus on the issues raised within a given project and gain in many respects individually, institutionally, and nationally.

Those HEIs involved in the projects praise the initiatives and their impacts on institutional development, internationalisation, and quality improvement. There is a good level of understanding that the HEIs could have achieved more results with more projects on board and better-trained staff members.

Individuals declared tremendous personal and professional achievements out of their participation in the projects. There is an evident impact of the CBHE action projects on the individuals' socio-economic segment of interactions and career progress. Nevertheless, the needs and expectations of academic and non-academic staff members need to be identified more precisely in a range of future studies to enhance the existing database.

Detected as taking place within some of the projects-originated frameworks, a number of indirect discussions on topics like public health and climate change made some behavioural changes. More intense and advisedly planned activities related to public health, climate change, and similar global issues would significantly impact the participants' worldview.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As this empirical study revealed, there are remarkable accomplishments projects assisted the HEIs to achieve, but there are also challenges to be found at all levels of the process. Keeping in mind the uniqueness of Azerbaijan's HE system, this report's recommendations are still in line with some of the documents produced by the EU on a similar situation. *An Agenda for the Modernisation of Europe's Higher Education System* (2011) that the EC issued has plenty on the need to modernise European Education. Following our analysis, recommendations in *institutional* and *national* categories are shaped. Although this research conducted through the prism of a bottom-up approach, our recommendations are presented in the top-down manner, considering the specificity of the issues.

National level

Building an attractive system for the younger generation and talents who wish to remain within the system is one of the fundamental changes HEIs should address in upcoming years. This approach will revitalise the system, which is heavily inherited from the Soviet heritage. Building the HE system competitive with the other industries in the country will contribute to its renovation and provide a new vision.

There has to be a particular encouragement projected from the national level to the HEIs to provide for and demonstrate excellence in teaching and research. Setting up a frame to identify the excellence in teaching and research and building a rewarding system related to it would bring modest results.

Creating conditions and support systems for the HEIs to attract more funds from alternative sources will enable HEIs to secure the sustainability of development. In this way, HEIs will be able to involve high-class researchers to allow for a higher level of international exposure to the country's research capacity.

Institutional level

HEIs need to review the institutional strategic directions and enjoy more autonomy in the process of developing such strategies. Prospective directions to move along may include plenty on (but are not limited to) the core of Education – teaching and learning, research, institutional governance, strategic human resources and internationalisation. It is essential to streamline the work with projects at an institutional level to build a transparent system where the load and

substantial payment, incentives for project management, and implementation will be clearly stipulated for all parties involved.

Adequate support systems within institutions enabling staff members to apply for grants and funding available via the EC and other providers will improve acquiring some extra funds for the industry. First, there should be more incentives provided to staff members involved in the projects or those who are able to attract funds for institutional development. Second, working on bringing in new international projects should be a strategic direction of institutional development especially considering that governmental funds available for HEIs are limited. This approach might decrease the burden on the state to keep on funding HEIs' total needs.

Third, both long-term and 'systematic' professional development opportunities for staff members would help HEIs attract more funds through international project participation (Bunescu and Gaebel, 2018, p.22). Foreign language proficiency is another challenge brought to project management. This can be improved again by employing professional development programs organised within the projects.

Incentives will motivate staff members to be involved in the project. Better conditions created at HEIs might also increase staff members' willingness to stay within HEIs for a more extended period.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1– General Information on CBHE action projects implemented in Azerbaijan 2015-2017

Reference	561640-EPP-1-2015-1-AZ-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
Title	Advocacy Establishment for Students through Ombudsman Position (AESOP)
Description	<p>Reason for project: Since implementation of Bologna system, students have responsibility to take initiative in managing their academic careers, but they lack the resources to deal with problems arising along the way Universities in Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Ukraine struggle to provide democratic systems for dealing with conflict and student appeals. Many student conflicts remain unresolved due to unclear or ambiguous administrative procedures</p> <p>Expected outputs: Written materials (training guides in each regional language) on best practices in student advocacy systems are created in collaboration with EU partners New student advocacy procedures and guidelines are produced and accepted by non-EU partner universities Ombud's Office established in each non-EU partner university. Ombudsperson from each university trained Students, staff, and faculty from each university trained on procedures and Ombud's office functions.</p> <p>Impact: Students and instructors have full access to the democratic spirit of the Bologna Process for resolution of their academic and administrative issues Students and faculty/staff become aware of their rights and responsibilities University administrations become more efficient and effective as conflicts lessen and resolution processes are streamlined</p>
Coordinator	Khazar University
Partners	Akaki Tsereteli State University Bundesministerium Für Wissenschaft, Forschung Und Ganja State University Georgian American University Jyvaskylan Yliopisto Ltd Caucasus University Middlesex University Higher Education Corporation Ministry of Education of The Azerbaijan Republic Nakhchivan State University Nakhichevan University

	<p>Poltava University of Economics And Trade</p> <p>Qafqaz University</p> <p>Universidade Do Minho</p> <p>Università Degli Studi Dell'aquila</p> <p>Uniwersytet Warszawski</p> <p>Vadym Hetman Kyiv National Economic University</p>
Budget	578.901
Contract Duration	36 months

Reference	561732-EPP-1-2015-1-FR-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
Title	LPEB
Description	<p>Joint project for the modernization of educational programs in climate engineering, regional priority for Russia and China, national priority for Azerbaijan.</p> <p>3 AIMS IN EACH COUNTRY:</p> <p>Reduce skills gaps on intermediate levels (construction site coordinator, design technician) by improving the employability of students and by perfecting corporate executives.</p> <p>Professionalize teaching programs in line with the Bologna Process and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and relocate them partly into companies.</p> <p>Create a professional Bachelor accessible in distance learning for the energy and environmental performance of buildings and a lifelong training program.</p> <p>ACADEMIC KEY PARTNERS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CNAM Paris - GIPFIPAG - CRVEP - UNINETTUNO - AGCNAM <p>Universidad de Sevilla</p> <p>University Harbin Institute of Technology</p> <p>North-Eastern Federal University</p> <p>POLITECNICO DI TORINO</p> <p>UNIVERSITA DEGLI STUDI DI PAVIA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Siberian Transport University - Tuvan State University - Irkutsk State Technical University - Far Eastern Federal University - The State Institution of Vocational Education Yakut Municipal Civil Engineering - Dalian University of Technology - BEIJING UNIVERSITY of TECHNOLOGY - Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction - Sumgayit State University - Ural State Mining University <p>EXPECTED RESULTS:</p>

	<p>3 regional strategic action plans.</p> <p>25 teachers professionalized in the EU.</p> <p>3 job descriptions, 3 professional Bachelors, programs, course content and digitalized teaching resources available for distance learning.</p> <p>3 poles of excellence, resource centers and three technology platforms for energy efficiency in buildings.</p> <p>3 didactic cyberspaces.</p> <p>480 students and 150 employees trained on site or by distance learning. 3 double diplomas or joint degrees.</p> <p>An action plan for sustainability.</p>
Coordinator	CONSERVATOIRE NATIONAL DES ARTS ET METIER S
Partners	<p>Association de Gestion ds Cons ergative National des Arts et Métiers de Azerbaijan Technical University</p> <p>Azerbaijan University Architecture and Construction</p> <p>BEIJING UNIVARSITY 01= TECHNOLOGY</p> <p>Dalian Universe of Technology</p> <p>FAR EASTERN FEDERAL UNIVERSITY</p> <p>GROUPEMENT D'INTERET PUBLIC FORMATION ET INSERTION PR (HARBIN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY)</p> <p>HOCHSCHULE FUR TECHNIK WIRTSCHAFT UND KULTUR LEIPZIG</p> <p>Irkutsk State Technical University</p> <p>Ministry of architecture and building complex of the Republic of Sakha</p> <p>Ministry of Housing and Public Utilities and Energy, Republic of Sakha g</p> <p>North-Eastern Federal University in Yakutsk (NEFU)</p> <p>POLITECNICO DI TORINO</p> <p>Siberian Transport University of Railway Engineering</p> <p>Sumgayit State University</p> <p>The state institution of vocational education Yakut Municipal Civil Engine</p>
Budget	999.200
Contract Duration	36 months

Reference	573630-EPP-1-2016-1-AZ-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
Title	Promoting Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Azerbaijani Universities

Description	<p>This project's wider objective is to promote teaching and learning excellence in Azerbaijan. Specific objectives are</p> <p>(1) Building Capacity for Developing Teaching and Learning Process to meet pedagogical and technological needs and (2) Improving and Providing Quality Teaching and Learning through innovative technology, promoting research, improving active learning, and establishing long-term partnerships with European universities. The project targets two private and four state universities in Azerbaijan with a key objective to improve their quality of teaching and learning. It aims to build human resource capacity in teaching, research, and developing/improving necessary infrastructure to provide an environment for effective learning. The most up-to-date planning, development and management resources will be utilized for these activities and adapted to the needs of the student body. A Teaching and Learning Centre aimed at guiding and enhancing the teaching and learning process will be established at each member university in Azerbaijan, because one of the main aims of this project is to assure the quality of education, teaching and learning processes. The project aims to enhance the quality of teaching by utilizing contemporary teaching tools and advanced technology, by developing human resource capacity and international partnerships, and developing students' learning skills. The project also undertakes development of 3-year strategy plan, structure, and activity plan because of learning experience in European countries. Then trained teachers will train other university teachers for the purpose of professional development. A broad assortment of trainings and workshops on enhancing research competence will be provided for teachers, recent graduates, and PhD students at target universities.</p>
Coordinator	<p>KHAZAR UNIVERSITY MEHSETI STREET 11 BAKU AZ1089, AZ Internet site address:</p>
Partners	<p>Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University Azerbaijan University Limited Liability Company Baku Slavic University Fachhochschule Des Bfi Wien Gesellschaft M.B.H. Ganja State University Gazi Universitesi Jyvaskylan Yliopisto Kozep-Europai Egyetem Ministry Of Education of The Azerbaijan Republic Nakhichevan State University Qafqaz Universiteti Sumgait State University Universitat Politecnica De Valencia</p>
Budget	908.623,00
Contract Duration	36 months

Reference	574099-EPP-1-2016-1-IT-EPPKA2-CBHE-SP
Title	Paving the way to interregional mobility and ensuring relevance, quality, and equity of access
Description	<p>In the last years, with the contribution of European Cooperation Programmes, the EHEA became a reference point for policy dialogue between the EU and several regions of the world on higher education and its key role for employability of graduates. The growing global dimension of education, needs further actions for the enhancement of exchanges between the EHEA and other parts of the world, sharing goals and principles, as the transparent recognition of studies and qualifications.</p> <p>Within the EHEA, the implementation of ECTS (as credit accumulation and transfer), the fundamental shift from a teacher-centered to a learner-centered approach (SCL) and the use of learning outcomes and workload in curriculum design and delivery, as result of a long process and experimentation, increased the transparency and readability of the educational process and facilitated the recognition of mobility from institution to institution and from country to country as well as successful learning mobility between institutions of EHEA for short-term study periods ("credit mobility").</p> <p>The recent acceleration of mobility between EHEA and other regions through the EM programme put a renewed and global perspective of "mobility" which showed the huge challenges that HE institutions and systems still need to face and manage. The students participating to EM projects are experimenting the same problems in recognition of studies abroad, that EU students and institutions had to afford at the first stage of Erasmus mobility. The project proposal intends to harmonies the credit allocation and grading system in 5 study areas jointly developed in previous projects in 23 institutions from 8 countries belonging to 4 different regions, besides EU, providing a reliable scheme for credit and grades transfer, and is based on previous experiences of the partnership in TEMPUS Programme in CA, Caucasus, Russia, and Asia and EMA2 projects in the same regions, and on the new ECTS Guide and pilot project EGRACONS</p>
Coordinator	<p>UNIVERSITA DEGLI STUDI DELL'AQUILA PIAZZA VINCENZO RIVERA 1 L AQUILA 67100,IT Internet site address:</p>
Partners	<p>Akaki Tsereteli State University Andijan Agricultural Institute University Of Telecommunications Ilia State University Innovative University of Eurasia Kazakh National Agrarian University Khazar University Khujand State University Kulob State University Named After Abuabdulloh Rudaki Kyrgyz National Agrarian University Named After K.I.Skryabin Kyrgyz National University Named After Jusup Balasagyn Middlesex University Higher Education Corporation Ministry for Higher and Secondary Specialized Education Of The Republic Of Uzbekistan Ministry of Education and Science Kz Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia Ministry of Education and Science of The Kyrgyz Republic</p>

	Ministry of Education and Science of The Republic Of Tajikistan Ministry of Education and Science of The Russian Federation Ministry of Education of The Azerbaijan Republic National University of Mongolia Osh State University Kg Qafqaz Universiteti Samarkand Agricultural Institute Seifullin Kazakh Agro Technical University Shokan Ualikhanov Kokshetau State University Shota Rustaveli State University Siberian State University of Telecommunications and Information Sciences (Sibsutis) Szegedi Tudományegyetem Tajik State University of Commerce Technological University of Tajikistan Termez State University The Ministry of Education and Science UNIVERSITY OF CHEMICAL TECHNOLOGY AND METALLURGY. UNIWERSYTET PRZYRODNICZY WE WROCLAWIU
Original Project Budget	999.663,00
Contract Duration	36 months

Reference	586351-EPP-1-2017-1-AZ-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
Title	Establishment and Development of Quality Assurance Centers in Azerbaijan Universities
Description	<p>Azerbaijan HEIs is highly heterogeneous in terms of the structure of being public and private. The need for strategy development regarding quality assurance is among all other common problems for both type of the universities. Traditional system of quality assurance in HEIs of Azerbaijan has 2 main directions: control of student's knowledge on institutional level and control from the Ministry of Education or other relevant authority based on academic aspects. Most of the universities do not have Internal Quality Assurance System in terms of administration and effective control of the processes. Some of the universities have the Quality Assurance Centers but they are not functional, or the functions are not appropriated with the common standards.</p> <p>First of all, there is a lack of training of the staff involved, the low profile of QA culture and the low level of communication between the QA structures and the academic staff involved. Even though Ministry of Education of Azerbaijan have several attempts to increase the Quality Assurance System of the universities to the international level, but the universities did not absorb the importance of these attempts. Taking into account the backwardness in this field, especially in the regions of Azerbaijan, this project is planned by BBU to contribute to the improvement of the situation.</p> <p>Considering all of these issues the overall aims of the project is to enhance the quality of higher education in Azerbaijan and to promote voluntary union with EU developments, to</p>

	develop a model of principles, priorities, guidelines and procedures to improve and assess the quality.
Coordinator	BAKU BUSINESS UNIVERSITY SHARIFZADA STREET 131, H. ZARDABI STREET 88A BAKU AZ1011, AZ Internet site address:
Partners	Azerbaijan Architecture and Construction University Azerbaijan Cooperation University Azerbaijan State Pedagogical University Azerbaijan Technological University Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University Ganja State University Kungliga Tekniska Hoegskolan Middlesex University Higher Education Corporation Mingachevir State University Ministry of Education of The Azerbaijan Republic Nakhichevan University Odlar Yurdu University Socialiniu Mokslu Kolegija Sumgait State University Uab Ekonomines Konsultacijos Ir Tyrimai Universidad De Alicante
Project Budget	893.137
Contract Duration	36 months

Reference	573554-EPP-1-2016-1-GE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
Title	Promoting Migration Studies in Higher Education (PROMIG)
Description	<p>Project is based on the national and regional priorities and development of cross regional cooperation practice amongst HEIs dealing with or interested in migration related research and curriculum.</p> <p>The project is based on the already well-established good practice of consortium member institutions working together in prior EC funded project under TEMPUS Programme (517002 - UNIMIG).</p> <p>As a result of successful accomplishment of previous Tempus project consortium member institutions decided to bring gained experience to build capacities in Afghanistan for Kabul and Tabesh Universities, by curriculum development, deepening international relations capacity, improving the quality of education and teaching by adding migration related challenges faced by Afghanistan into the teaching schemes of partner country institutions and vice versa. These goals and aims are in full compliance with the regional and national priorities being defined as such for partner country institutions.</p>

	<p>Using well established practice of establishment of MA programs in migration studies within South Caucasus region to enhance the development of the similar MA program in Afghanistan for ensuring that Afghanistani Universities are capable to offer curricula/education and research in the field of migration should be identified as wider objective of the project.</p> <p>Specific objective of the project is to bring MA program in Migration studies in two Universities in Afghanistan into operation for the very first time. For effective administration of MA program in migration studies the project will establish Migration Competence Centre at Kabul University able to become a hub of cooperation between academic, research and public institutions.</p> <p>For sustainability reasons project also aims at development LLL training modules for Students, Representatives of Government and CSOs.</p> <p>In order to attract Youth to migration studies establishment of annual Cross-Regional Summer School is another goal of the project.</p>
Coordinator	<p>IVANE JAVAKHISHVILI TBILISI STATE UNIVERSITY</p> <p>ILIA CHAVCHAVADZE AVE 1</p> <p>TBILISI 0179, GE</p> <p>Internet site address:</p>
Partners	<p>Carl Von Ossietzky Universitaet Oldenburg</p> <p>Georgian Institute of Public Affairs</p> <p>Kabul University</p> <p>Khazar University</p> <p>Qafqaz Universiteti</p> <p>(Slavonic) University</p> <p>Tabesh Institute of Higher Education</p> <p>Universidad De Alicante</p> <p>Universitaet Graz</p> <p>World University Service-Osterreichisches Komitee Verein</p> <p>Yerevan State University</p>
Budget	999.790,00
Contract Duration	36 months

Reference	573554-EPP-1-2016-1-GE-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
Title	NIZAMI
Description	<p>The Nizami project concerns the modernization of doctoral education, research, and internationalization of HEIs in Azerbaijan. This project intends to answer to the ident needs for Azerbaijan universities to revise the rules and content of organizing doctoral studies within Bologna process documents in terms of their consistency, especially, to fulfill the students' mobility and internationalization of research.</p> <p>The consortium will achieve the objectives by restructuring the doctoral education through a) the organization of doctoral schools within the HEIs and at the National level, b) insuring high standards in doctoral education, c) improving internationalization.</p> <p>A standardization and modernization of doctoral education will lead to a better recognition from Europe of the quality of research provided by the HEIs and research institutions of Azerbaijan. Therefore, an enhance in collaboration between Europe and Azerbaijan can be predicted. As well, a greater ease of international mobility for PhD students, young researchers and staff should be reached. On a national level, the PhD students should enhance their professional skills to meet the needs of the local, regional, and national markets.</p>
Coordinator	Universite de Montpellier
Partners	<p>Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences</p> <p>Azerbaijan State Agriculture University</p> <p>Azerbaijan State University of Economics</p> <p>Azerbaijan Technical University</p> <p>Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction</p> <p>Azerbaijan University of Languages</p> <p>Baku State University</p> <p>Fatih University</p> <p>Khazar University</p> <p>Masarykova University</p> <p>Ministry of Education of the Azerbaijan Republic</p> <p>Nakhchivan State University</p> <p>Qafqaz University</p> <p>Ruprecht-Karls-Universitaet Heidelberg</p> <p>Universitat de Barcelona</p> <p>Uppsala Universitet</p> <p>Universite Montpellier III Paul Valery</p> <p>Yildiz Technical University</p>
Budget	999.790,00
Contract Duration	36 months

ANNEX 2 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction and ground rules

Length: 45-60 minutes

The Focus Group Interview's primary goal is to understand how CBHE projects had a long-term structural impact on the systems, organisations/institutions, and individuals in Azerbaijan.

What were the projects' **innovative character**, the **impact and sustainability** of their results and how HEIs intend to **maintain or develop the outcomes** after the project?

The impact of projects should address the following:

- o **national and regional priorities;**
- o **needs of different stakeholders academic, social and economic**
- o target groups involved in the capacity-building projects

General rules for interviewers:

- *Consent about voluntary participation and recording should be agreed upon prior to the interviews.*
- *Consent to participate in the study should be announced and recorded.*
- *The recording should start as the consent is announced.*
- *Each participant's contribution should be kept anonymous and confidential and under no circumstances should be presented to third parties.*
- *Everyone should be treated equally during the interview, with due dignity and respect, and no intervention (conclusion, justification, and/or judgment) from our side should be made.*
- *Everyone should be given equal opportunity to express his/her ideas and thoughts).*

QUESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

1. Please tell us about your experience in the ERASMUS+ CBHE project?
 - Project name
 - Your specific experience
2. What were your specific achievements within that experience? (languages skills, research skills, professional development, others)
3. Do you think that you would have learned the same experience anyway?

4. What were some changes in the value system of people involved in the projects? Have they become more tolerant of diversity?
5. Do you continue your cooperation with those partners?
6. What were the main pitfalls on your way of achieving project goals?
7. How would you change the project to have a larger impact on the stakeholders?
8. What would you do differently if you were given a chance?
9. How students (student learning) are impacted as a result of this project?
10. Did you have other chances of professional development? Where and which?
11. If not in this project, how would you develop your skills, knowledge?
12. Do you think that your participation in these projects helped to improve your financial/economic status?

QUESTIONS FOR UNIVERSITY LEADERS

1. Please tell us about your experience in the ERASMUS+ CBHE project?
 - a. Project name
 - b. Your specific experience
2. What is the process of project implementation at your institution? When you receive the grant, how do you proceed?
3. What has changed at your university as a result of a project?
4. Do you think that the changes achieved are going to last, if yes, how and why?
5. What do you think an institution would need to do to achieve the same results achieved within a project? (Why would it not have been possible without EU Partners?)
6. What has been changed in terms of making others feel involved?
7. How diverse is your organisation? (number of women, disability, religion, ethnicity)
8. What were the main challenges during project implementation?
9. What were the societal changes achieved within a project? Social-economical, environmental etc?
10. Do you have an opportunity to apply for other grants? Can you please name? How did you learn about those opportunities?
11. What would you do differently?
12. What kind of support have you received at a policy level? Did you need it to implement the project?
13. What needs to be done to receive a policy level support?
14. What are some pitfalls at the policy level?
15. Please give us an example when a change within an institution has led to a change at the national level?
16. How can a project implemented within three years influence policy-level changes?
17. Did you have any chances to communicate changes to the government authorities? If yes, what were they?
18. Do you know any platform to communicate with the Ministry of Education about changes and other achievements within a project?
19. What else is needed to be changed at Higher Education and is it possible to achieve it within CBHE projects? If yes, how and why? If not, how and why?

QUESTIONS FOR POLICY-MAKERS

Experience with ERASMUS+ CBHE

1. Have you participated in CBHE projects? What were the projects?
2. Can you please tell us one story from your participation in the CBHE project that has impacted your perception about projects, learning, teaching?
3. How do you learn about projects implemented within HEIs? Is there any preferred way of receiving information from HEIs?
4. How do you prefer them to solve their problem?
5. How CBHE projects' goals and objectives are in line with the national priorities?

Policy level impact

6. What are the changes implemented as a result of the project?
7. What is the impact the projects have on a policy level?
8. If the policy level changes have not been achieved what were the main issues? Why?
9. What would be your recommendations to improve the situation with the policy level changes?
10. What else can be achieved within CBHE projects?
11. How can these projects help the country in the process of educational reforms?

ANNEX 3 – Related legislative changes during 2015-2021

Date	Document	Content and links	Impact
2021 22 February	Amendments to Decisions No. 129 of 1 July 2010 No. 40 Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan	Link To make amendments on the following decrees: No. 50 of March 18, 2010 On Establishment of Rules on Content and Organization of Residency Education No. 12 of May 12, 2010 On Establishment of Rules on Content, Formation and Awarding of Master’s Degree No. 117 of June 24, 2010 On Establishment of Rules for Content and Formation of Undergraduate (Basic Higher) Medical Education and Establishment of Rules for Admission to Doctoral education http://e-qanun.az/framework/46910	The state pays tuition fees for students who lost their parents and deprived of parental care. Legislative changes allow such children to retain this right even when they are adopted.
2020 December 14	Decision No. 493 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan	Rules for Accreditation of Educational Institutions http://e-qanun.az/framework/46460	New national accreditation rules have been developed and approved in full compliance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).
2020 May 13	The order of the Ministry of Education No. F-226,	The approval of the Framework of the bachelor’s degree (basic higher medical education) education program” was approved.	The Ministry of Education approved educational programs for 148 specialities.
2020 April 17	Decision No. 140 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan	Classification of specialities for secondary education http://e-qanun.az/framework/44910	A new Classification of specialities for secondary special education has been developed and approved per the labour market requirements.
2019 February 11	Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 45 of February 11, 2019	Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 45 of February 11, 2019 “Classification of specialities (programs) at the bachelor’s (basic (higher) medical) level of higher education” http://e-qanun.az/framework/41438	A new Classification of specialities (programs) at the bachelor's (basic higher) medical education level of higher education following the labour market has been developed and approved.

2018 November 16	Order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 711 dated November 16, 2018	State Program on Increasing the International Competitiveness of the Higher Education System in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019-2023 approved by order of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 711 dated November 16, 2018 http://e-qanun.az/framework/40711 http://e-qanun.az/framework/43619 http://e-qanun.az/framework/43618 http://e-qanun.az/framework/43667 http://e-qanun.az/framework/43666 http://e-qanun.az/framework/43665	In order to gain the internationalization and International Competitiveness of the higher education system in Azerbaijan mentioned legislations were approved.
2018 July 18	Resolution No. 311 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated July 18, 2018	National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved by Resolution No. 311 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated July 18, 2018 http://e-qanun.az/framework/39622	The National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning of the Republic of Azerbaijan, fully adapted to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), has been developed and approved.
2018-2020	Twinning: “Support to strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan”,	http://www.twinning4he.edu.az/en	The general project objective is to further develop Azerbaijan’s higher education system by aligning it with a competency-based education approach. The project purpose is to increase the institutional capacities of the Ministry of Education, higher education institutions and the Accreditation and Nostrification Office for the continued introduction of the principles, mechanisms, tools and policies of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to ensure their consistent implementation and application supporting the shift towards a student-

			centred system and learning outcomes approach.
2017 June 24,	Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 587 of December 21, 2017 "On Amendments to the" Rules on Content and Formation of Undergraduate Education "approved by the Resolution No. 117 of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan dated June 24, 2010	http://e-qanun.az/framework/37513	This resolution allowed MoE to identify rules of organization and realization of final exams at the universities.
2015-2017	Twinning 1: Support to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Further Adherence of the Higher Education System to the European Higher Education Area, 2015-2017	http://ehea.edu.az/en/main	Support to the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Further Adherence of the Higher Education System to the European Higher Education Area" is Twinning project implemented in Azerbaijan and funded by the EU. The overall objective is to enhance Azerbaijan's higher education by integrating with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The focus is on implementing the EHEA principles of quality enhancement, improved accreditation of higher education institutions, policy dialogue, and international cooperation and mobility. The more comprehensive framework is the EU-Azerbaijan European

			Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan. The Action Plan includes higher education sector reforms and European support for the reform within Azerbaijan's reform programme.
2016 June 14	Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 271-VQ of June 14, 2016 "On Science of the Republic of Azerbaijan"	http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/3348	
2015	The Action Plan to implement the State Strategy for the development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan	The Action Plan on the implementation of the State Strategy for the Development of Education in the Republic of Azerbaijan http://www.e-qanun.az/framework/29145	This Action Plan assured the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of Education in the country.
2013 December 24	Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan on December 24, 2013, No. 348	Rules for the establishment of higher education institutions at the bachelor's and master's degree levels, basic (basic higher) medical education and the credit system at the master's level of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences" approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan on December 24, 2013, No. 348 http://e-qanun.az/framework/27030	After signing the Bologna Declaration, this resolution was the first official document of the government to adopt reforms on higher education based on implementing the ECTS system.
	Following amendments have been made to the Law on Education related to higher education:	http://e-qanun.az/framework/31955 http://e-qanun.az/framework/36095 http://e-qanun.az/framework/36100 http://e-qanun.az/framework/39384 http://e-qanun.az/framework/43002 http://e-qanun.az/framework/45453 http://e-qanun.az/framework/46449 http://e-qanun.az/framework/46842	It was decided that the training of cadres in the field of culture and art will be practical rather than theoretical. Following the time requirements, it was decided to pay tuition fees only in a non-cash manner. Winners of international subject olympiads in any

		<p>specialities, winners of republican subject Olympiads, high-level international competitions and contests are admitted out of the competition to higher education institutions in relevant specialities as one of the tools to ensure access to education.</p> <p>The rates of state duty for the accreditation of educational institutions have been determined as one of the tools to ensure the external quality of education.</p> <p>Certain decisions have been made to legislate the concept of inclusive education.</p> <p>Decisions were made on the recognition of qualifications in accordance with the EQF and Lisbon Convention.</p> <p>It was decided to create a Centralized Education Information System according to today's requirements and the requirements of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
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