



# D3.3. CONTINUOUS SUPPORT AND IMPROVEMENT OF SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND AND TEACHING CAPACITY OF SCIENTIFIC STAFF

WP3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENTIFIC STAFF



## **Deliverable 3.3. Continuous support and improvement of scientific background and teaching capacity of scientific staff**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The STEPS project was an opportunity for partner countries HEI-s to cooperate in many aspects. The transfer and exchange of knowledge between scientific staff from EU HEIs and partner countries HEIs has continued throughout the entire project life. Apart from the open lectures organized during the six events on specific dates in partner countries, and the online training sessions, additional activities contributed to the strengthening of the capacities of the staff involved in the Master Program on Sustainable Food Production Systems. During the lifetime, the scientific staff from different HEIs worked together with their colleagues to prepare joint research and participate in relevant conferences. The STEPS project served also as an opportunity for the mobility of the staff and students and the organization of lectures as visiting staff.

The participation of the teaching staff of the STEPS partner institutions in scientific events was organized regularly and included: a workshop connected with the International Conference "Agriculture for Life, Life for Agriculture (2019)"; workshops and round tables organized by Universum College of Pristina, Kosovo ; guest lectures for the MSc students; mobilities of students and professors; the publication of a scientific article in an international journal; and the cooperation between HEIs involved in the STEPS project in terms of scientific research. All the above are described in detail in the contents of the present report.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The transfer and exchange of knowledge between scientific staff from EU HEIs and partner countries HEIs has continued throughout the entire project life. Apart from the open lectures organized during six events on specific dates in partner countries, and the online training sessions, for specific subjects aiming to improve the professional and scientific skills of staff in the specific fields related to sustainable management of food production systems, there were other activities in order to strengthen capacities of the staff involved in the Master Program on Sustainable Food Production Systems.

The STEPS project was an opportunity for partner countries HEI-s to cooperate in many aspects. During the entire STEPS project lifetime, the scientific staff from different HEIs worked together with their colleagues to prepare joint research and participate and present in the conferences. The STEPS project served also as an opportunity for the mobility of the staff and students and the organization of lectures as visiting staff. The collaboration between the scientific staff of the HEIs involved in the STEPS project will be extended also after the project's lifetime. The modern infrastructures and equipment, including ICT-based educational tools as well as experimental and scientific software tools provided by the STEPS project, helped the scientific staff from the partner countries in improving their teaching capacity and in applying new innovative concepts in teaching.

Deliverable 3.3 aims to present results of continuous support and improvement of scientific background and teaching capacity of scientific staff achievements in terms of joint research, guest lectures, and mobility of teaching staff and students.

## **2 CONTINUOUS SUPPORT OF SCIENTIFIC STAFF**

A permanent concern of the HEIs partner of the STEPS project was the development of the partnership with other profile institutions at the national level, but also at the EU level, by intensifying the participation in the European integration process in the field of knowledge.

Specific objectives included:

- Active participation in the realization of joint education programs by organizing master's programs at the country level, in Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Kosovo, by participating in joint open lecturing and dissemination actions.
- The integration of HEIs in the European Higher Education Area through the accrediting and implementation documents at the National level that correspond to the Bologna requirements in the field of higher education.
- Strengthening professional-scientific connections with national and international personalities and institutions.

This means that the development of international cooperation and collaboration programs between HEIs and EU partners, in which the strategic orientation of these collaborations was pursued through the creation and support of Master Courses educational materials.

Improving the organizational framework regarding the orientation of national collaboration programs, at the level of Joint institutions, by supporting the implementation of the planned actions, ensuring logistical support by developing the infrastructure and the material base and that regarding the skills of the people involved.

### **Participation in scientific events**

The participation of the teaching staff of the STEPS partner institutions in scientific events such as symposia, conferences and congresses was organized regularly.

It has started in 2019 at the University of Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest, by a study visit and the Workshop "Modernisation of Food Engineering and Food Management Practices - a Priority for a Sustainable Development" in connection with the International Conference "Agriculture for Life, Life for Agriculture "

This workshop and participation in the conference aimed:

- To transfer the knowledge on scientific, technical and organizational aspects, which will boost the level of education and the capacity of partner countries;
- To inspire with new ideas, but also, to offer the opportunity to discuss and make an exchange of academic cultures and perspectives;
- To analyze how best practices can be adapted to the MSc program that will be developed during the STEPS project;
- To provide participants the opportunity to get to know and compare with their own experience, the strategies and practices for the organization of teacher's training initiatives in Romania;
- To disseminate project activities to all interested actors that can find information about the project and its achievements, even after the completion of the project and to bring them forward for public discussion in the relevant communities of interested actors.

### **Participation in workshops and round tables**

The project activities continued even during the pandemic through the online presentation of the learning material and the open courses within the project meetings. Also, collaborative relationships consisted of the organization of various dissemination actions, such as conferences and workshops.

A good example is the workshop organized by Universum College of Pristina, Kosovo, with the theme of "Circular economy policies in the Western Balkans", in connection with the Congress on the same topic and attended by external collaborators, such as Astrit Istrefi, Executive Director of the Balkan Forum, Ivana Lozanovska, University of Sarajevo and Sanda Midzic-Kurtagic, The Ecological Society, North Macedonia, and experts of the STEPS project (Uran Raci, Giannis Tsoulfas).

The discussions were focused on the concept of circular economy, the importance and role of government and society in the circular economy. At the same time, during the meeting organized in Pristina, there was also a Panel: Bridging the gap between theory & practices; development & implementation.

The panel was composed of one representative from STEPS Project (Maria Toader) and three other panelists. The discussion was mainly focused on finding mechanisms to fill the gap between HEIs and industries in implementing the concept of circular economy and then producing in a sustainable way. The session concluded with a discussion between all the participants mainly focused on the impact of the circular economy in Western Balkans.

Such events continued throughout the other meetings of the project, as well as a series of professional visits, as examples of good practices for sustainable food systems for the master students of HEIs, in Sarajevo, Peja, Bihac and Tirana.

### **Guest lectures for UNBI MSc STEPS students**

Guest lectures for MSc STEPS students of the University of Bihać are organized primarily on the basis of the established joint study program with the University of Sarajevo (UNSA).

Following this conception of the MSc STEPS study program and the signed INTER-INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT ON COOPERATION FOR THE EXCHANGE OF STAFF AND STUDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF ERASMUS+ STEPS SECOND CYCLE STUDY PROGRAMME „SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRODUCTION SYSTEMS“, the teaching staff of UNBI and UNSA held a joint online meeting immediately after the start of the teaching, where they discussed the implementation of this agreement in the part related to the organization of planned guest lectures. Accordingly, during the first and second semesters of classes for the first generation of MSc STEPS UNBI students, a total of 18 guest lectures were organized in which 7 teachers from the Faculty of Agriculture and Food, University of Sarajevo participated. On the other hand, a total of 4 teachers from the University of Bihać held a total of 10 guest lectures for the UNSA MSc STEPS students. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, these activities were mostly organized online, using various distance learning platforms. Detailed information in the form of names of nominated visiting professors and the number of hours/lectures held at UNBI MSc STEPS is available in the document Workload of teachers on MSc STEPS. It should be noted that in the current academic year 2022/2023, in which the MSc STEPS study program at UNBI was launched for the second time, a combined organization of online and live guest lectures for MSc STEPS students is also planned. It is important to note



that these activities will continue in the future, after the completion of the Erasmus+ MSc STEPS project, which is supported by the fact that the aforementioned inter-institutional agreement between the UNBI and the UNSA was concluded for an indefinite period.

During the 2022/2023 academic year, professors from Universum College/Pristina and the Agricultural University of Tirana are giving lectures at the University of Peja 'Haxhi Zeka'.

### **Mobility of UNBI/UNSA STEPS staff and students**

For staff and students of the MSc STEPS study program at the University of Bihać (UNBI), there are special mobility and exchange opportunities based on the signed INTER-INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT ON COOPERATION FOR THE EXCHANGE OF STAFF AND STUDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF ERASMUS+ STEPS SECOND CYCLE STUDY PROGRAMME „SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRODUCTION SYSTEMS“.

According to this Agreement, the teaching staff and students of the MSc STEPS study program from the UNBI have, among other things, the open possibility of mobility, i.e. staying at the UNSA partner institution. This mobility implies a shorter stay of staff and students at a partner institution, guest lectures, joint mentoring of master's theses, access to laboratory-research facilities for research purposes for the preparation of masters theses and applications to joint projects, etc.

Considering all the above, it is important to emphasize that the mentioned mobilities could not be realized in the past period mainly due to the suspension of all types of exchange and travel of staff and students due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

After the normalization of the situation with the pandemic, the mobility and exchange of UNBI teaching staff and students came back into the focus of the University priorities. Thus, in the academic year 2022/2023, immediately after the start of MSc STEPS classes, the mobility and stay of students and professors from UNSA was organized at the University of Bihać. During the month of December 2022, 2 students and 2 professors from the UNSA were on mobility at the Biotechnical Faculty of the University of Bihać. On this occasion, the UNSA professors held several guest lectures, while UNSA students had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the work and possibilities of the Biotechnical Faculty's laboratory through practical exercises and simulations on, among others, our STEPS equipment.

Such activities will continue in the further course of this academic, as well as the following academic years for MSc STEPS students based on the mentioned inter-institutional agreement between partners the UNBI and the UNSA. It should be emphasized that the University of Bihać, in order to raise the level of internationalization and international mobility of MSc STEPS teaching staff and students, will in the future, together with other partners in the Erasmus+ MSc STEPS project consortium, plan applications for regular calls of the Erasmus+ ICM (International Credit Mobility) program.

### **Jointly published research articles**

In order to increase international visibility, some joint scientific works were developed with the aim of disseminating the results of the project as an example the paper with the title "Developing a Joint Master of Sciences in Sustainable Food Production Systems in Western Balkan Countries: Evidence on the Design Process, the Structure of the Curriculum, and the Importance of a New Postgraduate Program", on European Modern Studies Journal, ISSN 2522-9400, Vol 6, No 2; Published on 27 May 2022.

During the last two-three years, academic staff from University of Pejë-Kosovo collaborated with colleagues from the University of Sarajevo in terms of research. From this collaboration, they managed to publish two scientific papers <https://doi.org/10.3390/app12020629> and <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/jhvmse>

### **3 CONCLUSIONS**

Apart from the open lectures organized during the six events on specific dates in partner countries, and the online training sessions, there were other activities in order to strengthen the capacities of the staff involved in the Master Program on Sustainable Food Production Systems. During the entire STEPS project lifetime, the scientific staff from different HEIs worked together with their colleagues to prepare joint research and participate and present in the conferences. The STEPS project served also as an opportunity for the mobility of the staff and students and the organization of lectures as visiting staff.

The participants of STEPS project from partner HEIs have attended a Workshop "Modernization of Food Engineering and Food Management Practices - a Priority for a Sustainable Development, which was connected with the International Conference "Agriculture for Life, organized by Agriculture Agronomic Sciences and Veterinary Medicine of Bucharest.

The participants of the STEPS project had an opportunity to participate also to the workshop organized by Universum College of Pristina, Kosovo, with the theme of "Circular economy policies in the Western Balkans". This workshop was in connection with the Congress on the same topic attended by external collaborators, such as Balkan Forum, The Ecological Society etc.

In terms of guest lectures for the MSc students, a total of 18 guest lectures in UNBI, where 7 teachers from the Faculty of Agriculture and Food, University of Sarajevo participated. On the other hand, a total of 4 teachers from the University of Bihac held a total of 10 guest lectures for the UNSA MSc STEPS students. The cooperation was shown also between STEPS partner HEIs in Kosovo. During the 2022/2023 academic year, professors from Universum College/Pristina and the Agricultural University of Tirana are giving lectures at the University of Peja 'Haxhi Zeka'.

There were also activities in terms of the mobility of academic staff and students. During the month of December 2022, 2 students and 2 professors from the UNSA were on mobility at the Biotechnical Faculty of the University of Bihac.

STEPS partner HEIs collaborated also in joint scientific research with the aim of disseminating the results of the project. There are few examples in this regard such as publication of a paper "Developing a Joint Master of Sciences in Sustainable Food Production Systems in Western Balkan Countries: Evidence on the Design Process, the Structure of the Curriculum, and the Importance of a New Postgraduate Program", on European Modern Studies Journal, ISSN 2522-9400, Vol 6, No 2; Published on 27 May 2022. A next example of cooperation between HEIs involved in the STEPS project is the collaboration of the academic staff from the University of Pejë-Kosovo with colleagues from the University of Sarajevo in terms of scientific research. From this collaboration in the research, the scientific staff from the two mentioned HEIs managed to publish two scientific papers.