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**Erasmus+ Staff and Student Exchange programmes,
experiences from the Kosovo Academy for Public
Safety (KAPS)**



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Abstract

Erasmus+ staff and student exchanges contribute significantly to the internationalization of education, enhancing collaboration, cultural understanding, and personal development among participants. The program plays an important role in building a more interconnected and cooperative European educational landscape. It contributes to the creation of a more interconnected and knowledgeable labor force by facilitating the exchange of expertise and ideas among professionals from different countries and educational institutions.

The program also enhances the quality and inclusiveness of European higher education while promoting collaboration and mutual understanding among students and institutions across Europe. Therefore, Kosovo Academy for Public Safety and Laurea University of Applied Sciences have decided to use this EU-funded Programme to further internationalize their offers and values with each other. Amongst wider picture of international cooperation, both institutions are developing successfully. KAPS and Laurea UAS plan to further expand cooperation between the institutions.

The article highlights the experiences of two students from Laurea University studying at KAPS, emphasizing the practical experience they gained, including meetings with Kosovo public safety institutions and international organizations like OSCE, KFOR, and EULEX.

The students describe their exchange studies in Kosovo, emphasizing the unique opportunities to interact with the local safety authorities and the local community. They encourage future exchange students to embrace the experience, highlighting the lasting impact it can have on personal and professional growth.

Keywords: Erasmus+, higher education, staff and student exchange

Erasmus+ Staff and Student Exchange programmes, experiences from the Kosovo Academy for Public Safety (KAPS)

Erasmus+ program offers exchange opportunities for staff members and students of higher education institutions. Enabled by Erasmus+ funding, two Laurea University of Applied Sciences students and one teaching staff member visited the Kosovo Academy for Public Safety in the spring 2023.

Erasmus+ is managed by the European Commission, the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), National Agencies in Programme countries, and National Offices. For the higher education institution staff members and students, there are many ways to take part in Erasmus+. The staff members' Erasmus+ training periods typically consists of job shadowing, observation periods, professional development courses, or specific competence-building events and teaching. For the students Erasmus+ supports exchange studies as well as placements in a Programme or Partner country. (European Commission 2024a.)

WHAT IS ERASMUS+ STAFF AND STUDENT EXCHANGE?

The Erasmus+ program aims to provide opportunities for individuals to study, train, gain work experience, and volunteer experience abroad. Erasmus+ Staff and Student Exchange are opportunities under the larger Erasmus+ initiative, which is an EU-funded program designed to support education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. There are three groups of eligible countries that can take part in certain actions of the programme. Groups are EU Member States, third countries associated to the Programme and third countries not associated to the Programme, for example, Kosovo (European Commission 2024b). Erasmus+ programme guide presents a general overview of the programme. It provides specific information about the actions of the programme and gives detailed information on procedures for grant application and selection of projects, as well as the financial and administrative provisions linked to the award of an Erasmus+ grant. The guide has also the exact list of eligible countries for each specific action.

Erasmus+ Staff Exchange specifically focuses on enabling staff members, including teachers, trainers, administrative staff, and other professionals, to participate in short-term mobility experiences within European educational institutions, organizations, or companies (European Commission 2024c). The staff exchange aims to enhance professional development, foster international collaboration, and promote the exchange of knowledge, skills, and best practices among participants. The staff exchange activities are relatively short-term, usually ranging from a few days to a few weeks. During this period, participants can engage in various activities, such as teaching, training, job shadowing, or attending workshops and seminars.

Erasmus+ has been a highly successful program, promoting internationalization and cooperation in higher education and contributing to the overall mobility, as well as independence and mental growth of students across Europe. One of the key components of Erasmus+ is the student exchange program, which provides opportunities

for students to study abroad and gain international experience. The primary goal of the Erasmus+ student exchange program is to promote mobility and cooperation among higher education institutions across participating countries. Participating in an Erasmus+ exchange can have a profound impact on personal and professional development. It provides students with the opportunity to broaden their horizons, gain intercultural skills, and enhance their employability in an increasingly globalized world. (European Commission 2024d.)

Laurea University of Applied Sciences strategy 2030 (Laurea 2019) states that the strategic intent of Laurea UAS is to be an international developer of working life competence and vitality in the Uusimaa region in 2030. Laurea identified four critical needs for change required to achieve that strategic intent. One of them is expanding and deepening the strategic regional, national, and international partner network. Internationalization at Laurea UAS is guided by the Laurea Strategy 2030 and the units' annual operating and financial plans. Laurea UAS International Services supports staff members and students to get information about mobility and other activities, such as RDI projects, shared international online studies, and Blended Intensive Programme implementations (Laurea 2024).

In Laurea UAS staff mobility-related activities are target-oriented and linked to Laurea's strategy 2030. The aims of a staff exchange are planned and agreed upon beforehand in the mobility agreement (Laurea 2024). In European mobility, the minimum duration of staff mobility in Programme Countries is two days, and the maximum duration is two months excluding travel time. In Partner Countries, the minimum duration is five days (Finnish National Agency for Education 2024).

Higher education degree students can travel abroad to complete a part of their studies or a placement related to their studies through Erasmus+ European mobility. They may get an Erasmus+ grant to cover part of the expenses of the exchange. The duration of long-term mobility is minimum two months or one term. The maximum duration is 12 months. The duration of short-term mobility is 5-30 days, and a compulsory virtual period must be also combined (Finnish National Agency for Education 2024). Before the exchange all students complete a Learning Agreement which is needed in the recognition process of studies completed abroad.

KOSOVO ACADEMY FOR PUBLIC SAFETY (KAPS)

In spring 2023 two Laurea UAS students from Safety, Security and Risk Management degree programme (Bachelor of Business Administration) got Erasmus+ grant for student exchange to study one semester in Kosovo. As a tutor teacher there was also a possibility to apply Erasmus+ grant for staff exchange. The five-day exchange took place in May 2023.

The Kosovo Academy for Public Safety (Akademia e Kosovës për Siguri Publike) is the only public safety educational institution in Kosovo. KAPS is responsible for providing training, higher education, and professional development for branches of public safety and law enforcement agencies in Kosovo. The Academy's primary mission is to provide high-quality training, education, and research in the field of public safety to help provide a safe environment for all citizens of the Republic of Kosovo. The goal is to ensure that law enforcement and public safety personnel are well-trained, knowledgeable, and equipped to handle various challenges and situations effectively. Within the year at KAPS are trained from 12,000 to 13,000 public safety officers in vocational, advanced, and specialized training. (KAPS 2024a.)

KAPS offers a range of training programs and courses for law enforcement officers, including police, border police, police inspectors, emergency response teams, correction and probation officers, customs, and other public safety professionals. These programs cover a wide array of topics, including crime prevention, community policing,



Picture 1. Kosovo Academy for Public Safety, the Main building of the campus. Photo by KAPS.

human rights, crisis management, and specialized tactical training. The Academy's curriculum is designed to provide both theoretical knowledge and practical skills required for effective law enforcement and public safety operations. It often includes elements of ethics, communication, legal studies, and leadership. KAPS may engage experienced instructors, professionals, and experts from various fields to deliver the training (KAPS 2024b).

KAPS is located in the town of Vushtrri/Vučitrn, which is one of the oldest towns in Kosovo. The town of Vushtrri/Vučitrn has about 27 000 inhabitants and the municipality of Vushtrri/Vučitrn has about 70 000 inhabitants. The town is situated in the northern part of the Plain of Kosovo, some 28 kilometers from the capital city Prishtina. Vushtrri/Vučitrn has been inhabited from ancient times through the Illyrian, Roman, Byzantine, Rascian, and Ottoman periods. Each era has left its traces in the town. There are many historical monuments still to be seen (Municipality of Vushtrri 2024).



Picture 2. The Turkish Bath (Hammam) in Vushtrri/Vučitrn. Photo by Timo Rynnänen.

When comparing Laurea UAS and KAPS as an educational institution there are more differences than similarities. First, the basic mission of the institutions is different. Laurea offers higher education to all students who meet the selection criteria, as well as through the open university of applied sciences. KAPS, on the other hand, provides different levels of education and training just for government officials working in the field of public safety. Both institutions provide bachelor's degree programmes and Laurea UAS also master's degree programmes. KAPS provides also vocational education and training and different kinds of courses for continuous learning. The number of students is also slightly higher in KAPS per year.

Laurea UAS and KAPS can achieve numerous benefits through Erasmus+. For example, the benefits may show up as increased potential to operate at an international environment, more efficient management methods, increased funding and project opportunities, better opportunities for project preparation, management and monitoring, and more interesting repertoire of opportunities for students and staff.

KAPS INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Kosovo Academy for Public Safety started to implement International Credit Mobility (ICM) activities through the Erasmus+ program in 2016. Before engaging in Erasmus+ actions, KAPS had already successfully participated in two EU funded development projects that had facilitated the initial steps of the Public Safety Bachelor -program started in 2014. In addition, KAPS has signed bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements with institutions from both Finland (Laurea, Training Institute of Prison and Probation Services, University Police College of Finland) and Estonia (Estonian Academy of Security Sciences). KAPS also works closely together with regional actors including the Security Academy of Albania, Montenegro Police Academy, Faculty of Security of the University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in North Macedonia, as well as the Training Center of the Ministry of Internal Affairs also from the North Macedonia (KAPS 2024e).

Under the Erasmus+ Programme, KAPS has signed Inter-Institutional Agreements (IIAs) with five European Higher Education institutions (Table 1). During the period from 2016 to 2023, a total of 122 individuals participated in staff and student exchange to or from KAPS.

As depicted in Table 1, the majority of both student and staff exchange actions enabled Kosovan students and staff members to enrich their professional skills and knowledge in other European institutions. The most visited partners are Brandenburg Police University in Germany and The Estonian Academy of Security Sciences.

Erasmus+ activities are coordinated by the KAPS international relations unit, called the External Relations Division (ERD) led by Avni Istrefi (Head of Division and Erasmus+ Coordinator for KAPS) and supported by Skender Agaj (External Relations Officer).

Table 1. KAPS engagement 2016-2023 in mobility of students, academic and administrative staff within the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU. Source: KAPS External Relations Division (ERD).

Institution	STUDENTS		RDI STAFF		ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF		KOSOVO POLICE OFFICERS		TOTAL
	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out	In	Out	
Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, EE	-	8	1	6	10	12	-	-	37
Brandenburg Police University, GE	-	17	1	4	-	2	-	26	50
Fire University, PL	-	-	-	3	-	6	-	-	9
Norwegian University Police College, NO	-	4	3	2	-	-	-	-	9
Laurea University of Applied Sciences, FI	2	-	8	2	-	5	-	-	17
Total	2	29	13	17	10	25	0	26	122
								Total in: 25	
								Total out: 97	

KAPS COOPERATION WITH THE LAUREA UAS

Preparations to welcome Jessika Kokko and Oskar Leskinen, were started well in advance. Both Jessika and Oskar are students of Safety, Security and Risk Management at the Laurea University of Applied Sciences of Finland and they were the first exchange students ever to spend a full term in KAPS. Their theoretical studies in KAPS were combined with experiences in the newly established institutions of public safety in Kosovo. Jessika and Oskar also met with senior representatives of the Kosovo public safety institutions, as well as international mechanisms present in Kosovo, including OSCE Mission in Kosovo and the EULEX, EU Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. (KAPS 2024.f.)

During the second week of May 2023 Jessika's and Oskar's professor Timo Ryynänen joined the students in Kosovo. Timo introduced Laurea to his Kosovo colleagues as well as participated in teaching. The visit was concluded with a visit to the Embassy of Finland in Prishtina, Kosovo, where Timo and the students were received by H.E. Matti Nissinen, Ambassador of Finland in Kosovo, and his team (Embassy of Finland in Prishtina 2024).



Picture 3. Meeting with the ambassador of Finland. From left Deputy Head of Mission Sargit Salakari, students Jessika Kokko and Oskar Leskinen, Ambassador Matti Nissinen, Senior Lecturer Timo Ryyänänen and External Relations Officer Skender Agaj. Photo by Oskar Leskinen.

In spring 2023 there was also other cooperation activities between the institutions. RDI-delegation from Laurea UAS visited KAPS in February to explore future cooperation opportunities and EU-funded projects. The delegation met also other authorities in Kosovo and representatives of international actors such as EULEX and OSCE. The Acting General Director of KAPS visited Laurea UAS with his delegation in May to discuss future cooperation ideas and projects (KAPS 2024g).

Encouraged by the good start, KAPS and Laurea intend to further enhance cooperation. Internationalization is important for Kosovo as it helps smoothen its way towards firmer integration to Europe and to eventually join EU.

EXCHANGE STUDIES IN KAPS

Ever since the beginning of studies in Laurea, it was clear for both students to go on an exchange somewhere in the world. By nature, Oskar and Jessika found themselves often spontaneously solo traveling around the world. This attitude helped with the 2-month notification warning for departing to Kosovo. "Our exchange was officially confirmed two weeks before the beginning of the studies in Kosovo" Oskar says and continues: "which meant we didn't have much time for preparing the exchange itself, as everything was unsure until receiving the official confirmation."

Both students were unfamiliar with KAPS, but it didn't bother the students at all. "There was a little amount of information available online, but the study selection list was enormous with multiple interesting choices, ranging from criminology to crisis management and getting to know the progress of development of public safety institutions in Kosovo," said Jessika. "We were the first exchange students in the Academy staying there for the whole semester, so there was this mysterious unknown cloud above the country – little did we expect it to be a first-class ticket to the international civil crisis management field," Oskar added.



Picture 4. A visit to the EULEX Headquarters. In picture Jessika Kokko and Oskar Leskinen. Photo by Oskar Leskinen.

Kosovo Life

The students had their lectures in KAPS with two experienced professors. The exchange students were the only students in class, so the conversation was flourishing between the students and the professors during lectures. Prison and Probation Management course included multiple visits to different prisons throughout Kosovo. During the visits, the students had unique opportunities to meet and chat with prisoners and prison staff, and drink macchiato with the top management.

“We didn’t let the personnel get easily away – our conversation topics were often related to risk management, preparedness, and other safety-related topics. It made me realize how sufficient the Laurea study offering is, as there were lots of elements that could be put into practice in the prison environment regarding to safety and security,” said Oskar.

The students were living in the campus area in Vushtrri for the first two weeks, until they decided to move into the capital city, Prishtina. Accommodation was adequate; it was clean, and everything worked. Living in campus was free, but Prishtina had good connections for travelling across the country and to nearby countries as well. The travel to campus took approximately 40 minutes from “home”, and the transportation cost 1€ to 1,3€. Majority of the leisure time was spent traveling and networking with people in the field of international security.

Our tips for students thinking about exchange studies

“We can only give one tip for future exchange students: if you’re thinking about it, do it. Once the idea is planted on your mind, it’s in there for the rest of your life” says Jessika, and Oskar continues: “We’re happy to share more insight about the exchange in Kosovo. Feel free to contact us through the teachers.”

FUTURE COOPERATION POSSIBILITIES BETWEEN THE INSTITUTIONS

The experiences of cooperation between the Laurea UAS and KAPS are positive. Increasing the Erasmus+ funded student and staff exchange offers good opportunities for individuals to improve their international skills, as well as gain experiences from another culture and different educational institutions. Hopefully, in the future, students from KAPS will also apply for a student exchange at Laurea UAS. There are suitable studies available, for example in degree programmes in Correctional Services and Safety, Security and Risk Management.

KAPS has a need and desire to arrange master’s level education in the future. This is one possible new area of cooperation where Laurea UAS, together with some other European higher education institutions, can support the planning of master’s level education.

In the field of RDI there are opportunities for cooperation in topics that are in the interests of both institutions. These topics can deal with, for example, border management, EU policies, criminology and trafficking. External project funding will continue to be more important part of the overall financing of higher education institutions.

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