

Access to higher education in Kosovo

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Abstract

During the last decade alone, Kosovo saw higher education institutions going from a phase of low access (less than 12 % in the age group) and relatively poor quality of education and research in one public institution to massive access, very poor quality of education and total lack of research in seven public and over twenty private higher education institutions.

Higher education in Kosovo is going through a phase of significant albeit uncontrolled and unplanned, increase of access to higher education. Information available shows that for political reasons the government is establishing new universities in all the bigger cities in Kosovo. These policies have resulted in four new universities being established in the last two years alone. Besides being labeled as 'universities' against respective legal provisions, they are not preceded by a needs assessment or business plan, they remain underfunded and budgets are allocated only after months in operation, they operate with sparse administration and the new management is manned largely from among the members of the ruling coalition parties. This situation renders Kosovo higher education poles apart from that in any other country in the region.

Key words

Access, Universities, Regional, Second Chance, Quality, Private Sector, Equality.

Introduction

With a surface area of 10.908 sq.km Kosovo is the smallest country in the Balkans, landlocked between Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Macedonia. Fifteen years after the NATO-led intervention which marked the end of wars in former Yugoslavia, Kosovo is still the poorest country in the region, with a GDP per capita of \$ 3.568 and unemployment at 30,9%. According to the Labor Market Survey 2012 (KSA 2012) Kosovo has the lowest labor force participation rate – 36,9% - as compared to 71,8% in European Union countries, whereas it ranges between 60 and 68% in the Western Balkan countries with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina which also has a fairly low participation rate – 42,3%. Still, 176.100 out of 750.500 inactive populations are classified as "discouraged" job seekers who believe there are no jobs available, and in Kosovo they accounted for 14,8% of the working age population. (KSA 2012)

Further, according to (KSA 2012) "a significant share of the youth population, aged 15-24 is unemployed (55,3%) and the share of female population in that category is higher (63,8%) than that of male population (52,0%)". In 2012, 126.200 young people in Kosovo, aged from 15 to 24, were not in education, employment or training and they represented more than 35,1% of the young population. On the other hand, unemployment is highest for people who have no education (62,5% of this group are unemployed) and lowest for people who had completed tertiary education (15,6%). (KSA 2012).

Kosovo's population of 1.8 mil. is one of the youngest in Europe, with 45% of them under 25 years of age, and more than a quarter not yet 15. According to 2011 Census Data, 6,72% of Kosovo's population holds a tertiary qualification, which is comparably lower than in other Western Balkan countries where this share ranges from 8 to 14%.

In the last decade, the Government of Kosovo paid a great deal of attention to improving participation in higher education. In 2004, it was estimated that 12% of Kosovo's population aged 18-25 were attending higher education institutions, and the target was set to double this proportion by 2015 in the Strategy for the Development of Higher Education 2005-2015 sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology - MEST (MEST 2004). This target was reconsidered in the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011-2016 anticipating participation in higher education of 35% of the age group 18-25 (MEST 2011). As we will see later in this document, enrolments in Kosovo Higher Education institutions have by far exceeded the targets set in these two documents.

Legal and policy framework

The Kosovo Higher Education System is regulated by the 2011 Higher Education Law and a set of bylaws derived from it. The body responsible for HE policy implementation and for licensing all HE institutions is the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST). The other main regulatory bodies are the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) and the National Qualifications Authority (NQA). The KAA is the independent, public agency responsible for accreditation of all public universities and private HE institutions (HEIs) offering academic degrees, whereas the NQA is a cross-ministry body, charged with developing the National Qualifications Framework, at all levels, to comply with the needs of society and the economy.

By Law, the Municipality of Mitrovica North has authority to exercise responsibility for the University of Mitrovica North offering study programs in the Serbian language. This

situation, whereby local authorities are responsible for organizing higher education, is unique in the Kosovo legislative framework and apply only to this municipality. It came about as a result of the process of negotiations for the settlement of Kosovo's political status. The former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, who facilitated the entire process on behalf of the United Nations and the European Union, drafted a Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement (UNOSEK 2007). Article 4 of the Proposal, Extended Own Municipal Competencies, provides that “The municipality of Mitrovice/Mitrovica North shall have competence for higher education, including registration and licensing of educational institutions, recruitment, payment of salaries and training of education instructors and administrators.” As a result, this University together with the corresponding municipal authorities have been operating under the authority of the Government of Serbia. However, following the EU sponsored Brussels Agreement of February 2013, between Kosovo and Serbian authorities, this situation may change in favor of the integration of this institution into the Kosovo system of higher education. Municipal authorities in Mitrovica North have only recently been elected in the implementation of this Agreement, which make it realistic to expect a more cooperative approach by the municipality and the academic community in the region.

The main document guiding medium-term development of education in the country is the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011-16 (KESP). This document applies a comprehensive sector-wide planning approach in the education sector. As such, it works as a framework plan that incorporates and supersedes all sub-sector strategic plans, including the previous Kosovo Higher Education Strategy 2005-2015. KESP 2011 – 2016 set targets and measures for the integration of Kosovo into the European Higher

Education Area (EHEA), whereas key priorities are: increasing participation and ensuring equal access to higher education, improving the quality of higher education and establishing better links between higher education and the labor market. The same priorities are confirmed in the Government of Kosovo Program 2011-2014 (Government of the Republic of Kosovo 2011). Another important document affecting developments in higher education is the National Research Program, approved by the Kosovo Parliament in 2010 (National Research Council 2010), which defines measures for the promotion of research and national research priorities for the period 2010-2015.

Current trends in higher education in Kosovo

Kosovo is characterized by a weak economy and a large number of young people who are unemployed. The major challenge higher education faces is to make sure that graduates' qualifications meet the expectations of the labor market. The links between Kosovo's economy and the higher education system are weak. The private sector still has difficulty defining its needs, and the higher education institutions are not yet in a position to provide the labor market with potential employees whose skills make them immediately attractive to future employers.

This relates directly to the second challenge - the quality of higher education provision. Increased demand for higher education has created a significant discrepancy between the number of students and academic staff, and resulted in the overloading of the latter with teaching assignments. Despite efforts, research is still a marginal activity in many fields in the Kosovo HE community.

The third challenge is integration within the region and the EHEA. Kosovo institutions participate in a number of international academic programs, and have managed to develop a number of institutional partnerships with similar institutions in Europe. However, these partnerships did not result in sustained exchange of staff and students, or joint degrees. Financial constraints, visa-related issues and language problems have been identified as the main obstacles to stable partnerships and cooperation with international institutions of higher education. .

The first higher education institution in Kosovo, a teacher training college, was established in 1959. Today, there are already seven public universities and 25 private higher education institutions offering 418 different programs in three cycles. With slightly over 100,000 students currently enrolled, Kosovo reached a solid participation rate in higher education - 62.7%¹ of all persons aged 20-24, which is the exact EU average (EUROSTAT 2013). Provision is delivered by 3,695 academic staff members in five languages: Albanian, Serbian, Bosnian, Turkish and English. Table 1 provides data on students and staff, as well as study programs by HEIs.

¹ According to the Kosovo Accreditation Agency, there are 101,179 students in Kosovo HEIs in the academic year 2013/14, whereas data for the University of Mitrovica are not available. Also, according to the 2011 Population Census, there are 161,467 persons aged 20-24. The population census was not carried out in the Northern part of Kosovo largely inhabited by the Serbian community.

Table 1. Number of students, academic staff and academic programs for the academic year 2013/14²

PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONSⁱⁱ						
No.	Institution	Students	Academic programs	Academic Staff		
				Full Time	Part Time	Total
1	University of Prishtina	54.066	196	998	900	1.898
2	University of Prizren	5.875	12	30	150	180
3	University of Peja	4.682	14	64	95	159
4	Faculty of Islamic Studies	2.66	1	10	13	23
5	University of Ljubljana/Faculty of Economy – Prishtina Branch	59	2	-	-	-
TOTAL		64.948	225	1.102	1.158	2.260

² Source: Kosovo Accreditation Agency, 31/12/2013.

PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONSⁱⁱⁱ						
No.	Institution	Students	Academic programs	Academic Staff		
				Full Time	Part Time	Total
1	Private Higher Education Institutions	36.231	193	771	664	1.435
TOTAL		36.231	193	771	664	1.435
TOTAL Public+Private		101.179	418			

The sharp increase in access to higher education can be best presented and analyzed using the case of the University of Prishtina, established in 1970³. Until 2011, when the University of Prizren was established, the higher education system was identified with the then only university in Kosovo, the University of Prishtina. Thus, the new policies of increased access to higher education and its implications for the quality of provision can be best seen through data on student numbers, staffing and financing in this university.

Table 2 summarizes data from official sources on student enrolments, staff numbers and budget by years for the University of Prishtina, the largest higher education institution in Kosovo.

³ The University of Prishtina was the only institution of higher education in Kosovo until 2000, when the teaching staff and students with instruction in Serbian split from the University of Prishtina to establish a separate university in North Mitrovica.

Table 2. Trends in student and staff numbers and financing at the University of Prishtina

Academic year	Full time staff	Students	Budget / mil €	Teacher-Student Ratio
2012/13	1.023	54.066	17,5	52,8
2011/12	1.023	47.070	17,5	46,0
2010/11	1.023	44.130	15,6	43,1
2009/10	1.015	41.833	15,1	41,2
2008/09	1.065	29.051	11,6	27,2
2007/08	1.051	25.840	12,2	24,5
2005/06	980	28.708	13,2	29,2
2004/05	1.007	28.832	9,5	28,6

As can be seen from the table there is a sharp increase of around 40% in total student numbers between the academic years starting in 2008 (with around 29.000) and 2009 (with 41.000). This increase in student numbers was accompanied by a comparable increase of around 30% in state financing. In the later years however, the level of financing increased slowly by 15% over three years, whereas the student numbers rose by over 30%. At the same time the number of full time staff did not increase at all. As a result, there is a sharp increase in the student – teacher ratio from 27,2 to 41,2 over the period of three years in the University of Prishtina. This implies that the same number of teaching staff took on additional teaching hours for the increased number and size of classes. In the end, all these new developments resulting from increased enrolment negatively affected the quality of provision.

The trend of increasing access to higher education was further strengthened between 2010 and 2013, when the Government established five new universities: the University of Prizren (2010), the University of Peja (2012), the University of Gjakova (2013), the University of Gjilan (2013) and the University of Mitrovica (2013). Most of these were established in the former branches of the Faculty of Education of the University of Prishtina (Prizren, Gjakova, Gjilan) or in former faculties of applied sciences (former Business School in Peja and the Faculty of Metallurgy in Mitrovica).

The Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011 - 2016 dedicates one strategic objective to higher education and research providing that *"By 2016 participation in Higher Education of the 18-25 age group has reached 35% and gender parity observed."* Relevant to this study, a milestone was set that during 2013 - 2014 at least 25 % of the age group 18-25 would be participating in higher education in Kosovo.

Although this indicator is not comparable to the one applied by Eurostat (number of all tertiary students regardless of age expressed as percentage of the age group 20-24), relevant data show that enrolment is equivalent to 44,6 % of the population aged 18-25 (in total: 226.847 inhabitants), which exceeds the 2016 target by almost 10 percentage points.

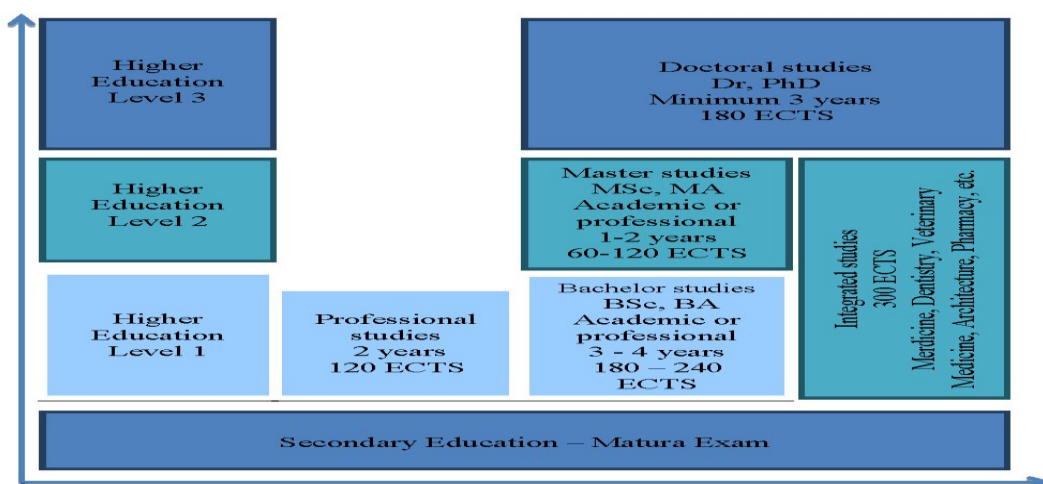
There is a relatively balanced participation of female students in Kosovo higher education. At the University of Prishtina, for instance, in the academic period 2009 till 2012, females represented around 50% of the total student population at bachelor level and around 45% at master level (MEST 2013-2).

Degree structure/NQF/Employability

The basic structure of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) consists of eight levels at which qualifications, and modules or other components of qualifications can be placed (NQA 2011). They progress from the simplest levels of achievement to the most difficult and complex. Each of the levels of the NQF is defined by a statement of typical outcomes of learning based on the approach adopted by the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), providing a cross reference to the levels of the EQF. Kosovo NQF level descriptors are based on the EQF level descriptors, elaborated to show how they will apply in the Kosovo context. With few exceptions, study programs are implemented on the 3/2/3 Bologna cycle scheme:

- Bachelor programs: 3-4 years (180 - 240 ECTS credits)
- Master programs: 1-2 years (60-120 ECTS credits)
- PhD programs last at least 3 years/180 ECTS.

Figure 1. Scheme of the Kosovo Higher Education System⁴



⁴ Source: Kosovo Accreditation Agency.

Quality control and quality assurance

Licensing and accreditation are compulsory for all HEIs operating in Kosovo. Whereas a license is issued by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) and represents the work permit, accreditation represents a formal acknowledgement that an Institution of higher education and its programs fulfills internationally recognized standards, and is issued or recognized by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA).

The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) has been operational since 2008 and is responsible for institutional and program accreditation in higher education. The KAA supports the implementation of quality assurance measures at two levels: internal and external. For internal quality assurance the KAA works closely with HEIs and supports them as they develop and maintain structures and processes such as quality assurance offices and instruments of internal evaluation. QA guidelines have been developed for all HEIs. HEIs are required to produce self-evaluation reports and submit them along with applications for program or institutional accreditation, which is said to be in compliance with the ESGs. (MEST 2013-1)

Since 2009, the KAA has made a priority of the specification of all degrees, at all levels, being given in terms of learning outcomes. With support from a number of international projects focused on learning outcomes, this has now been achieved and has enabled a competence-led approach to teaching and learning to be developed, and standards achieved to be more readily identified.

The KAA has decided to carry out external evaluation only by international experts who are hired by the KAA but paid for by the evaluated institutions. The reason for relying exclusively on international expertise for external evaluation was that at the time when

the accreditation process was started (2008) there was only the one public University of Prishtina. For instance, Kosovo could not get university professors in the field of economy internally to evaluate the Faculty of Economy of the University of Prishtina. The situation was the same with private higher education institutions since all teaching staff initially came from this university. However, now that there are more institutions of higher education in Kosovo, both in the private and public sector, it may be the right moment to start thinking about building capacity and engaging local expertise for external evaluation. If nothing else, this would lower the currently very high costs for evaluation (on average € 3.000 for the accreditation of one study program). The nine-member National Quality Council, which is effectively the KAA Board and has three international members, reaches a final decision on accreditation based on the recommendations of the external evaluators. To strengthen international recognition of the standards and quality in the system, the KAA has become a member of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA), and is currently in the final phases of accreditation for ENQA membership.

The Kosovo Agency of Accreditation requires that higher education institutions explicitly state the source curricula that served as a model for their curricula. Most of the institutions even have separate agreements to implement those 'borrowed' curricula. Thus, if adequately implemented by Kosovo HE institutions, Kosovo curricula seem fit to prepare them for the European market and for the Kosovo market. However, they stop at the level of copy-pasting and translating ready-made curricula of other international institutions for accreditation purposes; as a result of inertia and long

established teaching routines, these new curricula are disfigured during their implementation making the phenomenon of the '*secret curriculum*⁵' very much present in Kosovo higher education. What reaches the classroom and students often bears a lot resemblance to the old content based curricula and old methods of delivery and student assessment. The entire process, including that of re-accreditation, is to a large extent an improvisation that does not benefit the students or society.

Kosovo and the Bologna Process

In a study on higher education in the Western Balkans Pavel Zgaga argues that "..., the *internationalization of higher education* is often understood in the region as *policy transfer*. The term "*internationalization*» has been often used parallel to the "*harmonization* " and also "*modernization*" of higher education." (Zgaga et al 2013).

The policy transfer referred to in this book is in fact the transfer of the Bologna Process objectives.

Kosovo has not formally signed the Bologna Declaration, and thus, is not officially part of the European Higher Education Area. The problem is of purely political character - Kosovo has not ratified the European Cultural Convention which is a necessary precondition to adhere to the

Bologna Process. However, in 2001 Kosovo was among the first countries in Europe to adopt the three-cycle system and introduce ECTS, and, even though not formally part of the European Higher Education Area, continued to observe and implement all

⁵ A phenomenon whereby teachers implement a different curriculum than that approved by the state once doors to the classrooms are closed.

recommendations of the Bologna Process. "Bologna Process" and "European Higher Education Area" are key words in Kosovo higher education legislation since 2003 when the new Law on Higher Education was passed.

The Bologna process is clearly accepted as a guiding philosophy of higher education authorities and institutions. Apart from minor objections by few (more senior) faculty, one can see clearly that the Bologna Process and its objectives are omnipresent in Kosovo higher education institutions. It is difficult to say however if its implementation has resulted in improved quality, student performance and effectiveness of the system. Yet, on the side of access, implementation of three tier studies has resulted in increased access both at bachelor and master level studies. This primarily refers to master studies. The old studies for "*magistratura*" (a two year degree heavily focused on theory and research ending in a long thesis work) was a lot more demanding and was attended by the few who intended to continue an academic career. The new second cycle studies for the master degree are now seen as complementing the three year bachelor studies and increasing competitiveness in the labor market. . Structural PhD studies are still at early stages of implementation, with only a few programs accredited to the University of Prishtina. They are also designed based on the Bologna guidelines and bear strong resemblances to PhD programs of international institutions.

Challenges to increased access

In the last decade the number of tertiary students in Kosovo has more than tripled from 28.832 in the 2004/2005 academic year to over 107.000 in 2014. During the same period there has been a proliferation of higher education institutions - from only one

public university, the University of Prishtina in 2001, there are currently six public universities and twenty-five non-public higher education institutions with instruction in Albanian and one public university in North Mitrovica with instruction in the Serbian language. This proliferation of student intake and institutions has brought about increased access, but it has also posed numerous challenges for the student population, academic staff and new institutions in both the public and private sectors. These challenges pertain to quality assurance, infrastructure, research, employability, staff and student mobility, and so on.

Quality and relevance of academic provision

Employment and unemployment figures in Kosovo by education level show a high level of employability of higher education graduates. A report for human development for Kosovo in 2012 by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP 2012) shows that with employment rates at 76 percent "... those who have attained tertiary education enjoy an employment rate that is approximately 42 percentage points higher than those who have completed no more than upper secondary education, and 66 percentage points higher than those who have not completed that level of education". The situation is similar for female graduates from tertiary education who participates with 72% of employment compared to the 79% male employment rates of graduates. Thus, despite numerous weaknesses in the higher education sector identified by our study, one cannot deny the irreplaceable importance of higher education for the employability of the population.

As a result of the rapid increase in student numbers both at the University of Prishtina and in the newly established universities, the system of higher education is struggling to ensure quality academic provision. A recent study (Thaçi 2009) showed that there is significant student dissatisfaction at the University of Prishtina with the quality of provision by the teaching staff. At the same time, during the last round of institutional and program accreditations by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) the University of Prishtina saw a large number of its programs rejected due to the shortcomings and insufficient guarantees that they would provide quality studies (KAA 2014). The number of programs that were not granted accreditation was proportionately larger than those rejected at private higher education institutions in Kosovo. It is worth noting that over half of the proposed doctoral programs submitted for accreditation by the University of Prishtina were refused accreditation by the Agency. This is explained by the fact that the KAA insist that only PhD programs will be accredited that meet the European standards for this level of studies. Along the same line, any programs that are not designed and planned to be implemented jointly with some EU universities will most likely be rejected by the KAA Board. It is worthwhile remembering that the KAA engages international (mainly European) experts to carry out institutional and program evaluations in Kosovo, which has proved quite successful so far.

Challenges to staff and student mobility

Kosovo participates in European mobility schemes like the Central European Exchange Program for University Students CEEPUS and Erasmus Mundus, and also benefits from various forms of bilateral and multi-lateral support, but opportunities for mobility of staff and students remain limited. Major obstacles for outgoing mobility are restricted

number of scholarships available, visa requirements and insufficient knowledge of English among academic staff and students, whereas for incoming mobility - the local language issue. For example, Kosovo students benefited from 331 out of 4.163 mobilities funded by the Erasmus Mundus Program in seven Western Balkans Countries; on the other hand Kosovo hosted none of 398 mobilities of EU nationals to Western Balkans Countries (EC 2013). A better ratio of outgoing and incoming mobilities is achieved in the framework of CEEPUS, where in five years, 58 Kosovo staff and students have benefited from mobility to participating countries, whereas Kosovo had 46 incoming mobilities (MEST 2014-1).

Research

Increased access has made the University of Prishtina and the other new institutions predominantly teaching institutions. A study into the research capacity in Kosovo (Schuch 2008) found that there was very little capacity for research and consequently very little or no research was going on in Kosovo in 2008 and that it would probably take about a decade before Kosovo "will establish a fully-fledged system for research". Six years later, in 2014, Kosovo is even farther from any meaningful scientific initiatives, mechanisms, expertise or structures than it was in 2008. Public expenditure for research is at the level of 0,1% of GDP, whereas Kosovo-based research institutions were partners in only 3 projects funded by 7th Framework Program in the period 2007-2013 or 0,5% of the total number of projects in the Western Balkans.

With theatres and hallways overloaded with students, the University of Prishtina and other higher education institutions have turned into purely teaching institutions. This

can only mean further delays for any research to take place in these institutions. Even master and doctoral programs deliver very little or no basic research and retain a predominantly academic teaching character. Reasons for this situation should not be looked for only in the study programs or in the lack of expertise; in Kosovo there is a fledgling sector of economy with few initiatives for cooperation with and between social partners.

Academic staff

Data from Table 2 show that the increased enrolment at the University of Prishtina was not accompanied by similar trends in improving staff numbers. Thus, despite the threefold increase in student enrolment the full time teaching staff numbers remained 'stable' at around 1.000 changing thus the teacher student ratio from approximately 28 students to one teacher in 2004 to 45 plus in 2012 and 2013.

This applies in particular to the study fields of Social Sciences, Business, and Law attracting on average 40% of the total student numbers in the University of Prishtina - 36.8% in 2010 (KSA 2010), 42.0% in 2011 (KSA 2011), and 39,7% in 2012 (KSA 2012). For illustration, in the Faculty of Economy of the University of Prishtina in 2011 there were 9.429 students being taught by 47 full time teachers (KSA 2011), an extremely high teacher-student ratio that does not guarantee any quality of development of student competencies. The situation has not improved in the meantime due to the massive new enrolments⁶. These data are typical for countries in transition. In Kosovo,

⁶ The figures presented above refer only to full time staff at the University of Prishtina and are given as presented by the Kosovo Statistics Office. The part time staff is difficult to follow since the same professor frequently teaches in more than two departments of the UP. On top of this a large number teach in private institutions and in the four newly established public universities.

as in other formerly communist countries with a planned economy, there was a change of political, social and economic systems that was also reflected in the state administration and legislation. At the same time, with the advent of private enterprise, new skills and competencies were demanded in the labor market. The range of new skills required was mainly in the so called soft sectors of economy, law and social sciences. Even people in their mid-careers had to retrain or qualify in order to adapt to the new set of knowledge, skills and competencies. In this context, it is relevant to mention that private higher education institutions, with their more flexible approaches, provided a second chance for these mid-career persons.

Infrastructure, facilities and equipment

Over 9.500 students in the Faculty of Economy at the University of Prishtina attend contact hours in not more than eight lecture theatres with over 500 students usually crowded into them during lectures. There are frequent stories of students who are interested to hear what teachers are saying queuing in front of the theatres two-three hours before the lecture time. The situation is not any better in the faculties of Law or Social Sciences. These and other faculties are faced with basic shortages in classroom space, ICT equipment, and inventory. With few exceptions (such as technical faculties and agriculture) there is commonly a serious lack of research equipment and consequently no research and very little or no practical work at all.

Student performance

Studies last longer in Kosovo - it is expected that after the unplanned and uncontrolled increase in intake students will stay even longer in the system thus reducing efficiency and increasing cost of studies both for the state and family budget.

Table 3. Student enrolments by years of study at the University of Prishtina

Academic year	Total no. Students	First time Year 1	First time Year 2	First time Year 3	Graduated
2011/12	47.070	15.612	10.249	7.322	4.496
Female	25.308	7.920	5.800	4.580	2.476
2010/11	44.130	17.190	9.178	6.016	
Female	22.447	8.600	4.977	3.411	
2009/10	37.839	13.888	7.122	5.429	-
Female	19.443	7.003	4.003	2.971	
2008/09	29.051	10.007	5.192	4.413	5.161
Female	14.261	4.627	2.756	2.312	2.359

As can be seen in the table above, the academic year 2010/2011 marked a significant increase in intake at the University of Prishtina – 17.190 in the first year alone, at 40%

of the total number of students. It would be interesting to see if this increased enrolment affected the number of graduates at the end of the academic year 2013-2014. However, these data are missing; the last year for which the University of Prishtina, the Ministry of Education and the National Agency of Statistics made data available for graduates was the academic year 2011/12. Therefore, this analysis is faced with problems related to availability of data. Nevertheless, an important indicator can be inferred by comparing the number of graduates in 2009 with that of 2012. From the table we see that 5.161 students graduated in 2009 against 4.496 in 2012 with a difference of around 15% in absolute terms. In relative terms, however, the difference is even more significant since 4.496 graduated from among 10.007 students who enrolled in 2008 (around a 40% rate). The same table shows an increase in the representation of female students in the three year period between 2008 and 2011, both in total student numbers (from 49,08% to 53.76%) and in the number of graduates (from 45,7% to 55,07%). This shows that increased access has lowered overall student performance, but has had a positive impact on female participation and (even) graduation rates. The retention rate for the academic year 2011/12 is very low at 59,6% year on year for the cohort since out of the 17.190 students that enrolled in studies in the 2010/11 academic year, only 10.249 registered in the second year of studies in the next 2011/12 academic year. The others, roughly 20% of the cohort, are found either among the 3,246 repeaters (enrolling in the first year for the second time), or they simply dropped out for various reasons. The table shows another interesting result in that the retention rate is 51,8% for males and 67,4% for females. In a country where women are underrepresented in every sector of life, graduating from higher education significantly increases prospects for life. The higher retention rates for females show an increased awareness among the

female population about these improved prospects as a result of university studies. The Kosovo figures are indicative of a very high attrition rate of around 25% for the cohort from one to the next academic year alone. With few exceptions (in particular the transition between the second and third years of bachelor studies that will be discussed in more detail), this percentage of attrition can be followed with all cohorts from one year to another.

The University of Prishtina, is faced with the problem of the large number of students repeating the year in general, and even larger numbers repeating the year in the final third year of bachelor studies. There are no data available yet about the newly established universities to compare trends in the public sector. Statistics for the University of Prishtina show that the percentage of students repeating the third year is 2,5 (KSA 2010) to 4,5 times (KSA 2009) higher than the repeating values for the nearest second year. This could be explained with the more demanding courses put in the final years of bachelor studies, the need for students to select and write a degree thesis, and the fact that the insignificant study fees do not serve to motivate students to work harder and thus save on the costs for additional study fees when repeating the year. The degree thesis taking longer is understandable since in most cases students are required to engage in autonomous research work with little or no training or skills in writing and research. Another reason is probably the low number of qualified teaching staff to supervise the degree thesis. Since every June students have to focus on taking exams for the last and any remaining exams from the previous semesters, a large number of them will not have the time needed to engage in any meaningful research work. This results in a large number of students losing one or two exam sessions (June and September in every academic year). Thus they fail to graduate within a period of 12

months after having attended the lectures (University of Prishtina 2012), eventually inflating figures of the third year or repeating students.

Analysis of the repeater figures shows a high proportion of repeaters and a low level of graduation at bachelor level, which together indicate to a low quality of education in the University of Prishtina. One of the reasons for this can be found in the uncontrolled increase in student enrolment.

Similar to the analysis of the retention rates, when analyzing the figures of the repeaters one finds that there is a proportionately higher percentage of male repeaters (56 % of the total number of repeaters) compared to the female students, who outnumber the male students in the total UP student population by a narrow margin of 2 percent (51 to 49 % for women), but are fewer by as much as 12 % among the students repeating the year. This relates also to the higher retention rate for female than for male students at the University of Prishtina shown in Table 3.

The University of Prishtina shows interesting figures also when looking at the persistence rates. As with all other data, it is difficult to calculate a genuine persistence rate since the graduation and repeater data made available by the University of Prishtina are not cohort specific data but *all categories are blended in one annual value*. As shown in Table 3, 10.007 students (of which 4.627 female) enrolled for the first time in the academic year 2008/09. In 2010/11 (when this cohort attended the third year and started to graduate), the number of graduates with bachelor degrees for this academic year (found in the statistical data for 2011/12) is relatively high with 4.496 students (of which 2.476 female). Unfortunately, here again, a thorough analysis of the situation is impossible since statistics made available by the UP, the Ministry of Education, Science

and Technology and by the Agency of Statistics, give only a consolidated figure of graduates without discriminating between cohorts of students. At the same time, there were 4.466 repeaters (again non-specific data) enrolling in the third year for the second time. Our analysis has shown that these rates are relatively high as a result of the protracted studies in the third year (diploma exam and more senior stricter professors), high level of repeaters, and the fact that university studies are close to the best alternative for a young person in Kosovo, in particular in a situation with declining odds for employment the 'profession' of a student becomes a more attractive option.

Financial costs for expanding access

The costs for the expanded access to higher education are being shared between the state budget providing for the younger people enrolling in public institutions and the family budget covering mainly the expenses of the adult learners. It is important to emphasize that this division applies only when speaking in very broad terms since all age groups are present in both sectors of higher education with varying age distribution, as will be explained below in the student profiling section.

An example of state contribution to higher education is the University of Prishtina budget which is presented in table 2. The budget does not include revenue generated by the University from student fees, which typically ranges between 8 and 10 million € per annum. A simple calculation for the year 2012/13 shows that per-capita public spending on University of Prishtina students amounted to 323,70 €, which constitutes around 12% of GDP per-capita, and is far below the EU average of 26,2% (EC 2010). In addition to this, the Ministry prescribes maximum tuition fees for public universities. For the

academic year 2013/14 the annual fees are: 100 EUR for Bachelor, 600 EUR for Master and 2.000 EUR for PhD level studies (MEST 2012). However, in the national elections year, the Government reduced the fees by 50% starting with the academic year 2014/15 (MEST 2014-2).

According to the (MEST 2014-2), Article 1 states that funds collected from student participation fees will be used for scholarships and other benefits for students; improvement of working conditions at the University and payments for the academic staff and student activities.

Thus the recent government decision for reduction of participation fees is going to half the income of public universities from student fees and inevitably affects key functions related to quality of provision in the university. This is yet another move of mainstream character that will have a further negative influence on the quality of higher education services in Kosovo.

The private institutions account for around 35 percent of the total student body. This figure has increased in the last two years since the percentage of students studying in private institutions in 2009/10 was 9,1%, in 2010/11 was at 19,1%, and in 2011/12 dropped back to 14,7% of the total student population in Kosovo. Tuition fees in private institutions range from between 600 and 1.500⁷ euro per academic year⁸. Thus, even a conservative estimate gives a figure of around 25 million Euros invested by the families and private sources for around 35.000 students in private higher education institutions.

⁷ Data on tuition fees collected from private higher education institutions' advertisements for enrolment of new students in the printed and electronic media.

⁸ The American University in Kosovo makes an exception in this regard with prices of around 7700 Euros per year. The relatively low number of students studying here does not affect the average payment significantly.

This amount already exceeds the € 23 million spent from the public budget for over 60,000 students in the public Universities of Prishtina, Prizren and Peja in 2013. Moving a step further, students of the public University of Prishtina pay a participation fee that amounts to € 10 million annually. The Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) for 2015 – 2018 of the Government of Kosovo does not show that the missing funds have been compensated to the University of Prishtina yet (Government of the Republic of Kosovo 2014). Assuming that (as promised by the Government during the campaign) these funds will be found and provided by the state budget at the beginning of the academic year 2014, the total sum of investment in higher education from both public and private sources adds up to around € 58 million with close to two-thirds coming from private sources.

Conclusion

Until recently the higher education system in Kosovo was identified with the only public University of Prishtina. It was only after the five new public universities were established in the last three years that the Ministry officials started thinking of *system-wide instead of institutional* performance, financing and development.

At the same time, the increased number of higher education institutions (including the non-public ones) did not also result in diversification of academic provision and research as most of them mainly provide study programs in social sciences and humanities.

Thirdly, it remains to be seen if (i) the employment rates for higher education graduates will still remain relatively high (at around 70 %) after the graduates of the new wave of

massive enrolment in higher education start entering the labor market and (ii) what the market response will be. Based on the current market absorption capacity it is very likely that even the mere increased numbers will negatively affect the employability of new graduates. On the other hand, it will be interesting to see what, if any, impact the new reduced quality of provision will have on the Kosovo market and societal development.

Kosovo has established five new universities in less than four years. It seems that the sole result of all this is that all higher education institutions in Kosovo have turned into community colleges offering only outdated and mostly irrelevant theoretical studies to their students. This so, because the new institutions came about without adequate planning, preparations and support - serving a populist political agenda. A slightly increased number of teaching staff is teaching greater numbers at an inflated University of Prishtina, five new universities and twenty-five private higher education institutions. On the one hand, this does not allow for quality academic provision and, on the other hand, it reduces likelihood for any research activities and creation of new knowledge.

So, it looks like the primary casualties of increased enrolment into the higher education system in Kosovo are quality of provision, research, and impact of higher education institutions on social and economic development. This situation calls for a meaningful review of the higher education sector in Kosovo with a view to consolidating the achieved access and to improve quality of teaching and research work.

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ⁱⁱ University of Prishtina data also includes data on three new universities that started operation on 1 October 2013: The University of Gjilan, The University of Mitrovica with instruction in Albanian, and The University of Gjakova. These new public universities started operating in the facilities of the former branches of the University of Prishtina in these towns. They also took over actual students and teaching staff in those branches at the time they were established.

ⁱⁱⁱ Currently there are two universities operating in the Mitrovica region in the northern part of Kosovo: one with instruction in Serbian mentioned above, in North Mitrovica, and one with instruction in the Albanian language, established on 1 October 2013 by the Kosovo Government, in South Mitrovica.