

## MANAGEMENT OF EUROPEAN PROJECTS IN SCIENCE AND EDUCATION: THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

*Carolina BUDURINA-GOREACII*<sup>6</sup>

**Abstract.** *In recent years, European projects have become an essential tool for the development and modernization of the education system and scientific research in the Republic of Moldova. Participation in these programs facilitates the gradual integration of the country into the European Higher Education and Research Area, contributing to the alignment of domestic standards and policies with European ones. At the same time, they provide access to resources, international partnerships and the exchange of good practices, essential for academic and scientific progress.*

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**Keywords:** *European projects, research, education, science*

### Introduction

Effective management of European projects is essential in today's science and education sectors, where collaboration, innovation, and international standards are key to progress. These projects offer significant funding opportunities, promote cross-border partnerships, and support the modernization of research and education systems (Chessa, 2013). For countries like the Republic of Moldova, learning how to correctly write, access, and manage European projects is not only a strategic priority but also a pathway toward integration with the European Research Area and the European Education Area. Mastering these skills allows Moldovan institutions to secure vital resources, build capacity, and align with European best practices, ultimately enhancing the quality and competitiveness of Moldovan science and education on a global scale.

### **European project management in science and communication: general overview**

European project management is a focal point of the progress in science and education in the majority of countries, especially those that wish to strengthen their cooperation with the European Union. These projects—supported by programs like Erasmus+,

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<sup>6</sup> PhD, University Lecturer, Department of International Relations, Faculty of International Relations, Political and Administrative Sciences, Moldova State University, Email- carolina.budurina.goreacii@usm.md

Horizon Europe, and others—are fantastic opportunities for universities, researchers, and educators to innovate, grow, and collaborate across borders.

Good management of the project plays a key role in ensuring that the goals are met, collaborations function well, and the resources are maximized. It entails organizing the team, determining clear goals, respecting timelines, monitoring progress, and delivering quality. Without good management, even the best-funded or most ambitious projects can fail to deliver.

In education, European programs typically promote innovation in pedagogy, curriculum, student mobility, and staff training. For example, the Erasmus+ program allows universities to exchange students and staff with other universities from other countries to bring new experiences and perspectives into the academic community. It also supports tertiary education change, including the establishment of new study programs and enhanced governance of universities (Neumann; Baumann, 2021).

In science and research, efforts like Horizon Europe fund international research projects that aim to solve global challenges, ranging from climate change to digitalization. Some of the projects are comprised of groups from different countries working together, sharing knowledge, and applying cutting-edge equipment and labs. To handle such projects, coordination, efficient communication, and the ability to meet EU standards and regulations are required.

Project management also helps in the building of necessary skills among participants, including researchers, teachers, and students. These skills include teamwork, leadership, planning, communication, and reporting—skills not only to be used in an academic setting but the whole job market (Leydesdorff; Ward, 2009).

In countries like Moldova, European project participation is of prime importance. It allows universities and research institutes to be included in international networks, access finance, improve their study programs, and raise the level of education and research. Success in such projects proves that the institution is reliable and capable, and this makes it more likely to be accepted into future international partnerships.

Overall, European project management reflects growth, innovation, and international cooperation on science and education. It brings human beings and institutions together, solves shared challenges, and creates new opportunities for knowledge and exploration. As more countries participate in European programs, the project management will continue to be a key tool for building stronger, more integrated, and more innovative education and research systems.

### **General framework of European projects in the Republic of Moldova**

The Republic of Moldova is a full participant in a number of European programs; the most relevant are the Horizon Europe 2020 (research and innovation framework program) and Erasmus+ (programme for education, vocational training, youth and sport). Other actions like TEMPUS, Marie Skłodowska-Curie and Twinning have also enhanced the capacities of institutions and cooperation at international level.

Key actors in the implementation of these projects: the Ministry of Education and Research, institutions of higher education, State university (USM), Technical university

(UTM) or Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova (ASEM); research institutions, NGOs for educational development.

Managing of European projects is an ordered and planned process across several important phases. It starts with selecting targeted calls for funding, matching these with the institution's strengths and aspirations. This is then coupled with the development of international consortia with a wide range of European national partners, leading to complementary expertise and to a stronger proposal. A sound Project Proposal elaboration is a fundamental step which needs clear objectives, a clear-work plan, a clear-results measuring already at the beginning and of course a well-prepared budget. Once project approval is obtained, implementation is the process of coordinating across partner institutions to ensure tasks are done on time and within scope. Monitoring is key to ensure that progress is made along the project and identify where it is occurring or not, and what further insights may be necessary. Transparent financial reporting to the funding body is credible and auditable. Last but not least, publication in journals, conference presentations, and public awareness enhance the dissemination of results from the project and foster knowledge transfer throughout Europe and beyond.

Efficient management of European projects requires the integration of modern tools and strategies to ensure smooth coordination and successful outcomes. The use of digital planning and project management platforms—such as Trello, Asana, or Microsoft Project—enables teams to organize tasks, set deadlines, track progress, and facilitate collaboration in real time. These tools help improve accountability and ensure that all project members are aligned with the objectives and timelines. In addition, involving multidisciplinary teams is crucial, as European projects often address complex challenges that require expertise from various fields, such as research, education, technology, administration, and finance.

Effective communication with international partners is another cornerstone of project success. Regular meetings, clear documentation, and collaborative decision-making help build trust, avoid misunderstandings, and maintain strong working relationships throughout the project. Financial transparency is just as important, which includes the need for prudent budgeting, reporting in a timely manner and abiding by the financial rules of the European Commission or any other funding agency.

Access to important European portals, particularly the Funding & Tenders Portal, is essential for keeping up to date with open calls, deadlines for submissions, eligibility criteria, etc. This portal is the primary tool for finding opportunities, submitting proposals, monitoring active projects, and being current with administrative requirements. Competency in the use of these tools is a key factor in enabling an institution to actively compete in European funding and thus secure international funding.

Although there is a growing interest in engaging in European projects, institutions in the Republic of Moldova continue to face numerous and complex *challenges* that hinder their full participation and success. One of the primary obstacles is the limited administrative capacity within many organizations, which affects their ability to manage the demanding procedural and logistical requirements of European-funded initiatives. This is often compounded by a lack of experience and expertise in writing competitive project proposals that align with European standards and expectations, making it difficult to secure funding.

Language barriers present another significant hurdle, as many calls for proposals, documentation, and communication with partners must be conducted in English or other widely spoken EU languages. This creates an additional layer of difficulty for institutions that may not have multilingual staff. Furthermore, excessive bureaucracy at both national and institutional levels slows down the project development and implementation process, discouraging potential applicants.

Co-financing requirements, which obligate institutions to contribute a portion of the project's budget, pose another major challenge. Many Moldovan institutions struggle to identify or allocate the necessary financial resources, especially in a context of limited public funding and economic constraints.

Additionally, the ongoing migration of specialists and researchers abroad in search of better opportunities weakens institutional capacity. This brain drain disrupts the continuity of project teams and diminishes the overall quality of research and project implementation. As a result, even when institutions manage to join European projects, sustaining momentum and ensuring successful long-term outcomes can be extremely difficult.

Despite these challenges, there remains a strong desire among Moldovan institutions to integrate more fully into the European research and innovation landscape. Addressing these structural and systemic barriers will be key to unlocking their full potential and enhancing their contribution to European cooperation frameworks.

### **Erasmus+ Program Opportunities for Educational Institutions in Moldova and Their Role in Strengthening European Project Management**

The Erasmus+ program represents a strategic opportunity for educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova to strengthen their academic offerings, enhance international cooperation, and build institutional capacity—particularly in the area of European project management. As a partner country, Moldova is eligible to participate in various Erasmus+ actions that not only support mobility and innovation but also serve as a platform for developing essential administrative and managerial competencies related to European-funded initiatives.

One of the most impactful components of the Erasmus+ program is *International Credit Mobility (ICM)*, which provides Moldovan universities with the opportunity to actively engage in student and staff exchanges with higher education institutions across Europe. This mobility fosters not only academic and professional development but also promotes intercultural understanding and integration into the broader European Higher Education Area.

For students, ICM offers a transformative experience, allowing them to study abroad for one or two semesters, gain exposure to different teaching and learning environments, improve language skills, and enhance their employability. These exchanges also contribute to the development of critical thinking, adaptability, and global awareness—skills increasingly valued in today's labor market.

For academic and administrative staff, ICM facilitates teaching assignments, training sessions, and job-shadowing opportunities at partner institutions. These experiences help improve pedagogical practices, support curriculum development, and encourage the exchange of institutional knowledge and administrative innovation. Faculty and staff

return with fresh perspectives and new methods, which can be adapted and applied within their home institutions to improve quality and efficiency. Moreover, ICM strengthens institutional partnerships by fostering long-term academic cooperation, joint programs, and shared research initiatives.

The successful implementation of ICM projects also contributes to the professionalization of project management within Moldovan universities, as institutions must develop internal systems for selecting participants, managing mobility logistics, and ensuring the recognition of academic credits. These exchanges not only promote academic and cultural exchange but also require institutions to implement standardized procedures for mobility management, reporting, and quality assurance—core elements of effective project administration.

*International Credit Mobility (ICM) Key Action under Erasmus+ (KA107)* offers student and staff mobility with European partner higher education institutions at the State University of Moldova. There are bilateral agreements of the International Relations Department of USM with a series of institutions—such as Université catholique de Louvain (Belgium), Saarland University (Germany), and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece)—that ensure both incoming and outgoing mobility.

For bachelor, master, and PhD students, ICM offers study stays (2–12 months) at European partner institutions with fee waiver, full credit recognition, and a monthly stipend of approximately €800–900 based on distance Erasmus+ Moldova. Similarly, academic and administrative staff can undertake teaching missions or training abroad for durations between five days and two months Erasmus+ Moldova.

For example, USM students have availed themselves of ICM mobility through studying at leading European universities, access to advanced curricula and proficiency in their language. Registration for these exchanges is done through checking the student eligibility, approval of learning agreement, as well as host and home university arrangement.

Equally important is participation in *Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) projects*, which play a critical role in the reform and modernization of Moldova's higher education system. These projects are designed to bolster institutional capabilities by introducing innovative practices in teaching, research, and administration (European Commission). Through CBHE initiatives, universities and colleges in Moldova receive technical support and training aimed at updating curricula, integrating modern pedagogical methods, and fostering digital transformation across academic departments. This process often involves collaboration with European partner institutions, enabling the transfer of best practices and the alignment of local academic standards with those prevailing in the EU (IPN News Agency, 2024). Moreover, CBHE projects contribute to the development of strategic management skills within institutions, ensuring that administrative structures are better equipped to manage complex, interdisciplinary projects. Ultimately, participation in CBHE projects not only enhances the quality and competitiveness of Moldovan higher education but also lays a solid foundation for sustainable international collaborations and innovation in teaching and research. These multi-partner projects demand strong coordination, proposal writing, budget management, and monitoring skills. As Moldovan institutions increasingly engage in CBHE consortia, they gain hands-on experience in managing complex European projects, often for the first time. This exposure

contributes directly to the professionalization of university administrative structures and fosters a project-based culture within institutions (Turcan).

Moldova State University (USM) has actively participated in several Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) projects, which have significantly contributed to the modernization and internationalization of higher education in Moldova.

One of the most impactful projects is *ELEVATE (Advancing the Internationalization of Higher Education in Moldova)*, implemented from 2016 to 2019. USM participated as a partner institution, contributing to the development of internationalization strategies and the establishment of international relations offices within universities. The project provided training to university staff on mobility programs, partnership development, and project coordination, which enhanced the global visibility and operational capacity of Moldovan higher education institutions.

USM is also a partner in the ongoing *MHELM project (Enhancing University Autonomy in Moldova)*, coordinated by the Technical University of Moldova. This project aims to strengthen university governance by promoting institutional autonomy, particularly in strategic planning, leadership, and financial management. USM has contributed by piloting internal reforms, participating in leadership training modules, and aligning its institutional management practices with European standards.

These projects have collectively improved USM's administrative and academic capacity, deepened its integration into the European Higher Education Area, and laid the foundation for greater involvement in EU-funded programs like Horizon Europe.

The **Jean Monnet Activities** also present valuable opportunities by supporting teaching and research on European Union integration, policy, and governance. These activities often involve interdisciplinary cooperation and dissemination strategies, requiring effective communication and coordination—key components of sound project management.

Through active involvement in Erasmus+, Moldovan educational institutions not only benefit from academic improvements but also enhance their internal capacity to plan, implement, and evaluate European projects. This contributes to building a sustainable infrastructure for international cooperation, increases competitiveness in future EU calls, and reduces dependency on external project management support.

In conclusion, the Erasmus+ program serves as both a gateway to European integration and a training ground for Moldovan institutions to develop robust project management skills. These competencies are essential for navigating the broader landscape of EU-funded programs and for ensuring successful participation in increasingly competitive and complex international projects.

### **Horizon Europe: A Chance for Moldovan Universities to Grow in Science**

Horizon Europe, the European Union's flagship research and innovation program, offers great possibilities for the research and educational institutions of the Republic of Moldova to engage in world-class international collaboration. Being an associated country in Horizon Europe, Moldova can access nearly the full range of program opportunities, which enables its institutions to take part in competitive research consortia, innovation actions, and high-impact initiatives in all fields of science.

By being included in Horizon Europe, Moldovan universities, research institutions, and innovation-driven organizations can contribute to and benefit from joint research efforts for addressing societal challenges such as climate change, digitalization, public health, and sustainable development. Through their inclusion in transnational consortia, Moldovan institutions can gain access to advanced research infrastructures, interdisciplinary networks, and strategic partnerships in the long run with leading institutions of the European Research Area.

Of comparable importance, engagement in Horizon Europe significantly raises institutional ability for European project management. Projects funded by Horizon are extensive, multi-year endeavors with high standards for proposal preparation, budget planning, work package structuring, and evaluation of performance. Engagement in such projects helps Moldovan institutions make their internal processes professional, improve their project offices, and form well-tied teams capable of managing administrative, legal, and financial functions of EU-funded research.

The complexity of Horizon Europe projects is also beneficial in terms of experiential learning in aspects such as risk management, maintaining ethical practices, open science protocols, and communicating outcomes. These are fundamental skills not only for managing Horizon projects but also for tendering for other EU funding programs as well as developing a sustainable policy of internationalization.

Secondly, successful participation boosts institutional reputation and standing in the European community. It also makes institutions credible and capable partners, paving the way for new collaborations and access to financing. Horizon Europe competences and organizational arrangements therefore have a multiplier effect, supporting overall readiness for broader access to European and global research activities.

Next, we want to present some successful projects implemented by Moldova State University and Technical university of Moldova and their role in developing and professionalizing European project management capacity.

A good example is the *QFORTE project*. Moldova State University (USM) coordinated the project under the Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) program, with a total budget of approximately €992,000 for the period 2020–2023, serving as a foundation for future engagement in Horizon Europe initiatives. The project focused on enhancing the quality assurance system of Moldova's higher education through institutionalizing best practices, building internal evaluation tools, and creating a culture for continuous improvement. QFORTE enhanced USM's capacity for governance and administration in coordinating complex international projects significantly.

Another such project is *RE-ENGAGE*, which is a Horizon Europe project that USM researchers are undertaking as national coordinators. The project analyzes democratic resilience and European integration prospects, especially for Eastern Partnership nations. Through this project, USM has organized top-level academic conferences, public debates, and dissemination of research to the advantage of both the EU integration agenda of Moldova and USM's contribution to European-level social science research.

The Horizon 2020 *NanoMedTwin project* at the Technical University of Moldova (UTM) aimed to increase research and innovation potential in biomedical nanotechnology. In partnership with leading European institutions from Germany, Sweden, UK,

Belgium, Israel, UTM established scientific infrastructure, provided training for scientists, and involved students in exchange programs. The project not only boosted nanoscience research but also helped UTM's ability to participate in international scientific consortia.

Another example of successful application is the *SPINTECH project*, which UTM coordinated with Swedish and Dutch partners. Committed to cutting-edge research in superconducting spintronics, the project enabled the establishment of sophisticated laboratory equipment, promoted top-level academic collaboration, and promoted physics and materials science excellence. SPINTECH demonstrated Moldova's ability to coordinate research-driven Horizon projects and significantly enhanced UTM's image in the European Research Area.

Participation in such Horizon-supported activities is essential for building and professionalizing European project management capability at Moldovan universities.

- *Building Consortia and Proposals*: Participation in Horizon Europe projects requires skills in developing competitive proposals, navigating advanced common governance frameworks, and building international consortia. These exposures allow institutions to build strategic planning and coordinating capacity from the early stages of projects.
- *Project Coordination and Administration*: Administration of EU-funded projects requires stringent application of budgeting, scheduling, and reporting guidelines. Proactive coordination activities at universities give them practical experience in coordinating project activities to EU standards and deadlines.
- *Quality Assurance and Regulatory Compliance*: Initiatives like QFORTE enhance institutional capabilities in quality assurance by establishing in-house audit systems, policy consistency, and deeper familiarity with compliance frameworks to be applied in future Horizon participation.
- *Networking and Results Dissemination*: Successful implementation increases the visibility of institutions in European research networks. This in turn leads to more opportunities for collaboration, enhanced dissemination of research results, and enhanced competitiveness in future EU calls (Ministry of Education and Research in Moldova).

In conclusion we can say that Horizon Europe offers Moldovan educational institutions far more than financial support—it provides a pathway for scientific excellence, international recognition, and capacity-building in European project management. By taking full advantage of these opportunities, Moldova can strengthen its role in the European Research Area and build a more competitive, innovation-driven academic and research environment.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The participation of the Republic of Moldova in European projects dedicated to education and science brings significant benefits for the sustainable development of the academic and scientific sector. However, in order to maximize the impact of these initiatives, it is essential to invest in strengthening administrative capacities, training project managers, reducing bureaucracy and providing financial support for co-financing.

By promoting sustainable international partnerships and capitalizing on the opportunities offered by the European Union, the Republic of Moldova can take concrete steps towards full integration into the European space of knowledge and innovation.

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