

# Erasmus Policy Statement

Preschool Teacher Training College "Mihailo Palov" in Vršac, Serbia, actively participates in preparation and implementation of projects contributing to international cooperation, especially at European level. As a preparation for the implementation of the program Erasmus+, in the period between December 2013 and November 2016, the college was a coordinator of the Tempus Programme project titled Harmonization of Preschool Teacher Education Curricula in Serbia (Project reference number – 544141 – Tempus-1-2013-1-RS-TEMPUS-JPCR). Specific project objectives were to: a) harmonize curricula through identifying the harmonization framework and developing individual harmonization plans in Preschool Teacher Education Curricula in Serbia; b) certify harmonized curricula at all participating VET colleges through re-accreditation and enrolment of the 1<sup>st</sup> generation of students; c) improve transversal skills of teachers through training of trainers (ToT sessions) and spill-over training sessions; d) improve teaching methodology and entrepreneurial competences of teachers through identifying learning outcomes and methods of achieving them.

Striving for continuation of international networking in a unique European space of higher education, Preschool Teacher Training College "Mihailo Palov" in Vrsac, entered the program of academic mobilities through Key 1 Erasmus+ program, establishing interinstitutional cooperation with a number of partners in the EU countries (Romania, Slovenia, Croatia) and partner countries (Ukraine, Montenegro, Moldova, Alger), in accordance with institutional capacities and possibilities of member and partner countries to establish cooperation in the field of academic mobility of students, academic and non-academic staff. In other words, the target groups to be encompassed by mobilities are teaching staff, non-teaching staff and students of the first level of studies (bachelor degree) and second level of studies (master degree).

Following the institution's strategy for the organisation and implementation of international EU projects of Preschool Teacher Training College "Mihailo Palov" in Vrsac, it is envisaged to continue with the search for compatible partners in European higher education institutions and to permanently develop its own capacities to collaborate both in the field of mobility and in the field of structural and other projects with the EU countries and partner countries. Preschool Teacher Training College "Mihailo Palov" in Vrsac, has active institutional cooperation within the Erasmus+ program with the following EU HEIs: "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad (Romania), "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iasi (Romania), "Lucian Blaga University" of Sibiu (Romania), "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia (Romania), University of Maribor (Slovenia), University of Rijeka (Croatia), National University of Moldova, National University "Dragomanov" in Kiev (Ukraine), University of Montenegro, University Mouloud Mammeri in Tizi Ouzou (Alger).

Our institution strategy for the organisation and implementation of international cooperation projects in the future period anticipates several concrete steps, i.e. 1) empowerment of institutional capacities for the implementation of the program of Erasmus+ through training and professional development of staff; 2) stimulation of involvement of students, teaching and non-teaching staff in design and implementation of activities within the framework of the Erasmus+ Programme, 3) broadening of the network of active partners and monitoring of reaching of aims of the Erasmus+ Programme through a variety of activities carried out at the Preschool Teacher Training College "Mihailo Palov" in Vrsac.

In regard to our institution's geographical orientation of mobility of our students, teaching and non-teaching staff and other activities within the program, apart from the area encompassing Erasmus Programme Countries and Erasmus Partner Countries, our attention in the sense of cooperation and educational capacity building through Erasmus+ program activities is directed to the countries of the Region 5, Region 6 – Asia, Region 8 – Latin America, Region 12 – Industrialised: Gulf Cooperation countries and Region 13 – Other Industrialized countries. Our partners and target groups are to be chosen in accordance with our most important educational and cultural objectives, resulting in stronger internationalization and leading to higher quality of education at the College.

Participation of Preschool Teacher Training College "Mihailo Palov" in Vrsac in mobility programs helped us in many ways, mostly in modernizing our institution and our aspiration to join the unique European Education Area, in accordance to the priorities of the renewed EU Agenda. Involvement of our students and faculty in these programs led to higher competencies and easier access to the European Education Area, in hope of building inclusive and connected higher education systems. In the future, our institution will be dedicated to well-designed higher education programmes and curricula, centred on students' learning needs, crucial for effective skills development. Taking into account that our institution is educating future preschool teachers, in accordance to the priorities of the EU Agenda which accents developing didactic skills, through applying our own and the experiences of others involved in the Erasmus+ Programme, these efforts will lead to overall higher teachers' continuous professional development. In this regard, since December 2018, the College has participated in another Erasmus+ capacity building project under the

title Keep Education Yourself (acronym KEY, No 598977-EPP-1-2018-RS-1-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP) under the current ERASMUS+ programme. The main project aims are to establish life long learning hubs for preschool teachers within the higher education institutions in Serbia and Montenegro and to modernise the existing preschool teachers training offer. The KEY project began in December 2018 and will last until November 2021. The KEY project consortium consists of 17 partner institutions: Preschool Teacher Training College Novi Sad – a coordinator of the Project, Preschool Teacher Training College Vrsac, Preschool Teacher Training College Krusevac, Preschool Teacher Training College Pirot, Preschool Teacher Training and Business Informatics College Sremska Mitrovica, Institute for the Improvement of Education, Serbia, Eotvos Jozsef Foiskola Hungary, University of Maribor, Slovenia, Research and Educational Center Mansion Rakican Slovenia, West University of Timisoara Romania, Birmingham City University, Bureau for Education Services of Montenegro, University of Montenegro, Kindergarten Ljubica Popović Podgorica, Union of Associations of Preschool Teachers in Serbia, Association of Preschool Teachers in Vojvodina, Western Balkans Institute Belgrade and the associate partner Pedagogical Center of Montenegro. The establishment of learning hubs for preschool teachers in higher education institutions participating in the project is envisaged as one of its main outcomes. These hubs will be of great importance for the overall development of preschool teachers' profession through the improvement of competencies and skills all teachers need for high quality teaching and learning in the 21st century.

In wanting to build inclusive and connected higher education system, our institution accepts that European higher education is an important part in facing up to Europe's social and democratic challenges. In that sense, Preschool Teacher Training College "Mihailo Palov" in Vrsac will be open to talent from all backgrounds, giving students a chance to have a crucial role in defending empirical facts and evidence and also to communicate research results effectively and widely. Taking into account that many of our students come from socially marginalized groups, our institution will provide maximum support for the social groups of students least represented in higher education, specifically in areas of literacy, numeracy and digital competence. They will also experience learning independently and get a clear idea of what higher education entails, through individualising their training and them being included in activities of the Erasmus+ Programme. Preschool Teacher Training College "Mihailo Palov" in Vrsac has been, for more than 25 years, doing research in areas of working with talented children and students, and those experiences connect to the global academic field through organising international conferences focused on the gifted and talented, and this drives our students to understand new concepts, think critically and creatively and also act entrepreneurially in order to develop and apply new ideas. Stimulating individuals, their talents and capacities, leads to creating future action researchers, developers and "innovation managers". In another phase, by stimulating excellence, our institution tends to introduce new forms of teaching fellowship and frameworks for teaching and to strengthen the relationship between teaching and research by better integrating quality frameworks and funding systems.

It should be noted that our institution completely supports the points European Education Area entails, by implementing the Erasmus+ Programme, and respecting the principle of flexibility and recognising the results of students in implementing mobility. By including elective modules, that focus on language learning in our curriculum, we promote the idea that students should have a good knowledge of two languages in addition to their mother tongue(s) by 2025.

The Preschool Teacher Training College in Vrsac embraces all objectives of the EU Agenda and through international cooperation projects strives to improve governance and funding, the quality and relevance of HE, the attainment levels of its graduates, the knowledge triangle, and the overall quality through mobility and cross-border cooperation. Our College is dedicated to participating in all the three Key Actions and works towards intensifying activities and mobilizing a greater number of the staff and students to take part in related projects.