



# ACADEMIC SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

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## List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NatRisk	Development of master curricula for natural disasters risk management in Western Balkan countries
NDRM	Natural Disasters Risk Management
PMC	Project Management Committee
SMS	Special Mobility Strand
WB	Western Balkan

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Sustainability of the project

A project is sustainable when it continues to deliver benefits to the project beneficiaries for an extended period i.e. its results will be used and exploited in the longer-term after the European Commission's financial assistance has been terminated. NatRisk mechanisms of sustainability will ensure a return of EU investment by multiplying the benefits provided from acquiring EU best practices.

All envisaged measures of the Sustainability Plan are in function of achieving sustainability of the following main NatRisk project results:

- at least seven new master programmes in natural disasters risk management (NDRM) at the Western Balkan (WB) partner HEIs that will be developed, accredited and implemented with incorporated student and staff mobilities through the Special Mobility Strand (SMS),
- three new training programmes in NDRM (one per each WB partner country) with training materials for public sector and citizens developed and conducted,
- retrained teaching staff with up-to-date knowledge in NDRM to teach on the new master programmes,
- introduced new laboratory equipment, library units and software necessary for the continuation of the new master programmes.

NatRisk project aims to benefit number of WB students, teaching staff, NDRM professionals and public sector in the field of NDRM.

Adequate planned and consistently implemented dissemination and exploitation activities, with regular quality control for ensuring the set quality standards of NatRisk project results, will maximize the NatRisk project effects throughout its lifetime and imply with strong sustainability capacity of the NatRisk project.

Dissemination activities support sustainability by ensuring:

- visibility of the NatRisk project inside (at partner institutions) and outside (at stakeholders institutions) of consortium,
- interest for new master study programme from students and professionals in the field of NDRM,
- support from the NatRisk HEIs authorities, policy makers, labour market and other relevant stakeholders, and
- awareness among wider community.

Sustainability will be ensured by following actions:

- sustainability of financial and administrative project aspects,
- continuation of developed NatRisk master curricula,
- continued cooperation with project partners through student and staff mobility, research cooperation and possible joint degrees and new projects,
- continued cooperation with stakeholders in the field of NDRM at national and regional levels.

## 1.2 Exploitation strategy

Significance of exploitation activities for a project is outlined in Erasmus+ projects guidelines:

*Having a strong plan for dissemination and exploitation from the beginning of a project is a key priority and should form an integral part of the CBHE throughout its lifetime. The objective of dissemination and exploitation is to maximise the impact of project results by optimising their value, strengthening their impact, transferring them to different contexts, integrating them in a sustainable way and using them actively in systems and practices at local and international levels.*

Erasmus+ Programme Capacity-Building projects in the field of Higher Education  
(E+CBHE) Guidelines for the Use of the Grant, 2016

The NatRisk process of exploitation is planned as an efficient transfer of project's results to the scope of NatRisk target groups, ensuring that they will be actually used both within the lifetime of the project and after. Maximizing the potential of all NatRisk project activities resulting in high quality of project results, will enable the aim of exploitation - to convince target groups to use main project deliverables at different levels during and beyond project lifetime.

Exploitation is complementary with dissemination activities. They are distinct but closely related to one another in achieving that goal. Exploitation is necessarily related to the actions that will bring project visibility, transferring on that way projects' deliverables to end-users - they can access it, use it and ask for support through open channels for communication after the project end.

Exploitation is substantially associated with the sustainability of the project after its conclusion since exploitation measures will ensure using and possibly transferring to other contexts (i.e. other sector, regions, educational areas, national policy) of project results.

Exploitation mechanisms will include:

- positive reputational effects for the participating organization through the increased institutional rate related to development of new and up-to-date master curricula and teaching environment,
- increased awareness of NDRM among responsible professionals in public bodies, and
- increased influencing on policy and practice through addressing responsible Ministries.

## 1.3 Expected impact of the project

Effects of conducted NatRisk activities with produced results on involved participating organizations, students, teaching staff, appropriate NDRM practices and systems, will determine impacts of the NatRisk project in whole. Feedback about effects obtained from end-users, stakeholders, students measured by surveys will determine impact level of the NatRisk project which will be in a direct proportion with project sustainability.

Impact of NatRisk project will be achieved at several different levels.

At local level, all target groups will be reached by dissemination tools such as delivering promotional materials to students and citizens, website, social and digital media. This kind of informing will arise the awareness about the importance of improving knowledge and skills in NDRM. Teaching staff will be in direct contact with the representatives of local public sector in NDRM to analyse their needs for improvement of current system of NDRM, transfer acquired latest knowledge and sign protocols for students' internships. Students will be reached through the call for enrolment at newly developed master curricula. Substantial project effect will be achieved by students' involvement in gaining theoretical and practical knowledge in NDRM that can be applied immediately after the graduation.

At institutional level each of the WB partner HEIs will enrich their educational potential by implementation of new master study programmes, improved teaching staff skills through acquiring up-to-date knowledge and adopted new pedagogical methods in teaching and learning, upgraded laboratories with appropriate hardware and software infrastructure for analysis and simulation natural disasters and the new library units.

At national level at WB partner countries, the cooperation will be settled between HEIs and representatives of national bodies and agencies for environmental protection to impact on national efforts for developing the system of national protection by establishing institutional, organizational and personal conditions for the implementation of the protection in the emergency situations.

The global policy in the field disaster risk reduction requests national efforts, but efforts are particularly necessary and productive at the regional level for efficient prevention and reducing consequences of natural disasters. Therefore, realized networking between WB partner HEIs within project framework will have strong impact on strengthening common responses to the challenges in the field of NDRM.

At European level, WB partner HEIs will benefit the rich experience of EU HEIs in NDRM forming new master curricula. Students from WB HEIs will be included in realization of mobilities between WB and EU partner HEIs. The teaching staff will be involved into the teaching trainings into EU partner countries through the study visits. The EU teaching staff and students will be also in position to apply their knowledge to the specific cases in WB region, enriching in that way their experience. The WB partner countries with such trained staff in line with EU standards and directives in NDRM will contribute to recommendation of European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction ("create a safer Europe by reducing the impact of natural hazards to reduce vulnerability, and increasing the ability to minimize consequences of disasters").

## 1.4 Overview of short and long term impact indicators

Impact assessment evaluates project deliverables i.e. measure progress and quality level of final achievements. Questionnaires, observations, assessments and analysis will be used to measure project impact.

In the following tables the short and long term impact indicators of the NatRisk project are presented:

Short term impact	Target groups/potential beneficiaries	Quantitative indicators	Qualitative indicators
Professional development	Teaching staff	93 trained staff	Improved teaching performance
Innovative knowledge gaining	Students	At least 120 of enrolled and graduated students	Improved knowledge of the graduates
Capacity building	Institution	7 laboratories with new equipment; upgraded 7 libraries with new library units	Better working conditions
Awareness about new educational trainings and their significance	Citizens/public sector	At least 420 registered participants	Enhanced interest in trainings participation
Improved competences through educational trainings	Citizens/public sector	At least 420 trained participants; 14 one-day trainings	Improved performance of the trained public organization representatives
Innovative skills and knowledge gaining through SMS	Students/Staff	At least 119/43 of realized mobilities	Skill and knowledge improvement

Long term impact	Target groups/potential beneficiaries	Quantitative indicators	Qualitative indicators
Up-to-date knowledge of teaching staff	Scientific community	Number of scientific papers in international journals and conferences in the field of management of natural disasters	Improved quality of published papers
Permanent modernisation and update of master curricula	Experts in management of natural disasters in WB region	Number of newly topics and courses	Continuous harmonization with EU trends



<b>Graduated students with the knowledge that can be immediately implemented in practice</b>	Labour market in WB region	Number of new employees	Increased employability of the graduates in the field of NDRM
<b>Continued cooperation and transfer of information and knowledge</b>	Scientific community	Number of projects related to management of natural disasters by project partners and achieved research cooperation	Improved project applications achieved through the practice
<b>Permanent improvement of national systems in NDRM</b>	Wider community	Number of articles in current legislations and action plans	Improved national strategies in risk management in the Partner Countries and enhanced effectiveness of the national systems for NDRM
<b>Permanent cooperation between HEIs and national bodies and agencies in NDRM</b>	Wider community	Number of achieved agreements between HEIs and representatives of national bodies and agencies for environmental protection	Enhanced cooperation between HEIs and national bodies and agencies in NDRM

## 2. Academic sustainability approach

The central objective of the sustainability plan is to maintain the main project tangible outputs (master programme and educational trainings) and intangible outputs (gained knowledge, experience and skills by students, teaching staff and participants, improved awareness about NDRM) after the end of the NatRisk project funding. Develop high quality project results is major factor that can ensure sustainability. The following are crucial points in achieving that objective:

- ❖ Master programme
  - The attractiveness and up-to-date of the master programme based on EU best practices to the main target groups, i.e. students and professionals of the natural disasters risk management;
  - The accreditation of the master programmes in Western Balkan countries which will confirm quality standards of national study programmes;
  - The funding of the master programme will be achieved by incorporating into the national system of financing; self-financing students will secure revenues that will be reinvested in favour of the students or to reinforce the attractiveness of the NDRM master;
  - The permanent management of the master programme and the maintaining connections with the WB partner HEIs.
  
- ❖ Educational trainings for public sector and citizens
  - The quality of educational trainings is based on created Survey of citizens and public sector awareness and Study visits and analysis of courses best practices in EU countries;
  - The long-term training sustainability by possible accreditation as life long learning courses in NDRM;
  - The permanent improvement of training materials.

Trainings for citizens and public sector will be free of charge during the project lifetime and after the project they will be organized and realized in line with the needs of bodies in systems for NDRM and financed from funds of these systems.

Sustainability of the master programme will be based on two main sustainability principles:

- NatRisk project attractiveness through communication, study programme quality, curricula evaluation and update, students' employability, employers' awareness,
- NatRisk project operational capacity through the cohesion and involvement of the partner HEIs and a stable project environment i.e. WB partner HEIs will maintain the formed laboratories and the new teaching environment and provide dedicated staff and a regular financial resources.

The priority work domains and main challenges related to academic sustainability are summarized in the table below:

Sustainability principles	Priority work domains	Related challenges
NatRisk project attractiveness	Students' recruitment and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Attract students from the WB HEIs,</li> <li>➤ Increase the number of candidates and the number of students enrolled up to the number agreed (10-15 students per WB HEIs).</li> </ul>
	Study programme quality, evaluation and adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Have the course results evaluated by the main stakeholders (students, academic staff, employers),</li> <li>➤ Develop NatRisk community around students, alumni, partner HEIs and professional organizations,</li> <li>➤ Promote students' employability and stay in line with the job market expectations,</li> <li>➤ Guarantee quality assurance of NatRisk study programmes.</li> </ul>
NatRisk project operational capacity	Consortium cohesion and organizational capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Secure the continuous accreditation of the programme in each WB country,</li> <li>➤ Maintain a strong cohesion and long-term stable relationship between partners,</li> <li>➤ Guarantee master programmes operational and organizational efficiency supported by HEIs management.</li> </ul>
	Funding stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ensure the study programme's financial stability by incorporating into the national system of financing after its accreditation,</li> <li>➤ Secure revenues by self-financing students,</li> <li>➤ Secure additional programme-based revenues, e.g. participation in new European or bilateral funding programmes.</li> </ul>

## 2.1 Students' recruitment and communication

The success and sustainability of the study programme is mostly based on the number and quality of students enrolled.

The challenges are the following:

- Increase the number of candidates and ensure the diversity of candidates' origin,
- Increase the number of enrolled students based on settled requirements.

The objectives are:

- Increasing the number of students enrolled will ensure the financial stability of the study programme.
- Increasing the number of candidates will enable the WB HEIs to reach a higher selection rate (number of students admitted/number of candidates) to ensure the students' quality.

- Increasing the diversity of students' origin will help maintaining the international and cultural dimension of the study programme.
- Attract students from the consortium partner HEIs and from the consortium countries. This will enable the mobility of the students among the HEIs, and guarantee the involvement of each partner HEIs.

The following table presents main action steps in detail:

Action steps	Responsibility	Timeframe	Resources needed	Progress monitoring – Key indicators
Yearly evaluation of the dissemination and communication actions made by the partner HEIs. Based on this evaluation, discussion and agreement on the future communication actions	Project Management Committee	Between April and November each year	* Analysis of the source of candidates' awareness of the new study programme * Feedback on the fairs where NatRisk study programmes will be promoted by each partner HEI	* Number of candidates * Number of admitted students * Origin of candidates * Origin of admitted students * Number of visitors at the fairs attended * Number of students' visit to the website and bounce rate * Number of students from each NatRisk partner country
Keep NatRisk website regularly updated as it is the first source where students has found information on the new study programmes	Project Management Committee	Regularly during and after the project lifetime	* Information from partners on their communication actions	
Organize special promotion activity at each WB partner HEI	Each WB partner HEI	Between April and November each year	* Updated promotional materials regarding study programmes	
Build on the students' feedback on the study programme and jobs occupied, to improve the programme's attractiveness (students written testimonies, videos, participation of students and alumni to promotional activities, etc.)	Each WB partner HEI	From 2019 after the first graduation of students	* Students' interview * Students' video * Students' alumni	

## 2.2 Study programme quality, evaluation and adaptation

The objective is to make sure that the study programme meets the requirements of the main target audience, i.e. students and employers. The consortium will work in a view to continuously improve the NatRisk study programme. This will increase the attractiveness of the study programme and support realization of the students' recruitment.

The challenges are:

- To have the study programme content and structure evaluated by the main stakeholders (students, academic staff, employers) and adapted in order to meet the requirements of these stakeholders.
- To develop NatRisk community around students and alumni.
- To promote students' employability and stay in line with the job market expectations.
- The NatRisk HEIs have to evaluate the matching between the study programme's outcomes and the evolution of the employers' needs.
- To guarantee quality assurance of NatRisk study programmes.

The following table presents main action steps in detail:

Action steps	Responsibility	Timeframe	Resources needed	Progress monitoring – Key indicators
Evaluation of the NatRisk study programme by the students	Quality Assurance Committee	At the end of each semester	Self-evaluation forms for students and summarise responses in Self-evaluation report of master curriculum	* Number of respondents * Further adaptation of the study programme * Number of visits to the Facebook page * Number of new alumni * Number of respondents to the employability survey * Number of relevant connections made with professional organizations
Evaluation of students' capacities by the professors	Academic coordinators at each WB partner HEI	At the PMC meetings	Feedback from the academic coordinator at each WB partner HEI	
Evaluation of students' capacities by the professional organizations hosting the master's theses	Primary thesis supervisor	At the PMC meetings	Feedback from the primary thesis supervisor	
Develop and adopt any necessary amendment or improvement to the study programme based on these evaluations	Project Management Committee	At the PMC meetings	Prior work on amendment and improvement	
Create a students' community around	Project Coordinator,	From autumn 2018	Facebook page	

NatRisk study programme	Academic coordinator at WB partner HEIs			
Create an alumni community and use it as a channel for further students' employability	Project Coordinator	From 2019	Online directory or LinkedIn group (to be defined), Employability survey	
Create a community of professionals around the study programme	Project Management Committee	From autumn 2018	Provide online newsletters on the key news of the NDRM sector	
Develop links with the commissions for accreditation and quality assurance in each of WB partner country	Each WB partner HEI	From autumn 2018	Standards and guidelines for quality assurance	

### 2.3. Consortium cohesion and organizational capacity

The capacity to operate the NatRisk study programme strongly depends on the Consortium cohesion and the organizational capacity.

It includes three main challenges:

- Securing the accreditation of the study programme and prospect for student employability.
- Maintaining a strong cohesion and long-term stable relationship between partners.
- Guaranteeing master programme operational and organizational efficiency during and beyond of the funding.

The following table presents main action steps in detail:

Action steps	Responsibility	Timeframe	Resources needed	Progress monitoring - Key indicators
Check and share any modification of accreditation scheme and criteria in the WB partners' country	Administrative coordinators at each WB partner HEI	Regularly from autumn 2018 on; Annual review at each SC meeting	Information from websites of commissions for accreditation and quality assurance on any modification to be given to the Project Coordinator in order to take any necessary actions	* Accreditation maintained in each WB partner country * Report of the SC * Questions raised, problems identified and solved



			within the Consortium or at national level	
Evaluate the efficiency of NatRisk project organization in line with the Project management guidelines	Steering Committee	Biannual at the SC meeting	Analysis of the operation and activities of each committees, identification of any overlap or problems	
Identify any question or problem within the Consortium	Project coordinator; All partners	Regularly from autumn 2018 on; Annual review at each SC meeting	Regular bilateral SC conferences. Feedback from all partners on any problem arising from the project realization. Regular information from the NatRisk appointed persons at each partner HEI.	

## 2.4. Financial sustainability of the NatRisk study programme

Two challenges are part of this priority domain:

- Ensure the study programme's resources based on the national system of financing after its accreditation and the registration fees paid by the self-financing students.
- Secure additional financial resources for the study programmes and for the WB partner HEIs. It is necessary to propose suitable scholarships from public or private sectors in environmental protection for students with different financial capacity. The consortium agrees that all revenues from the study programme will be reinvested to increase study programme's attractiveness or to provide students' financial support.

The following table presents main action steps in detail:

Action steps	Responsibility	Timeframe	Resources needed	Progress monitoring - Key indicators
Find suitable public scholarships for international students	Academic coordinators at each WB partner HEI	Autumn 2018	Information on the existing scholarships from EU programmes	* Number of calls and sources for student scholarships * Availability of information about scholarships on the
Search for private	Relevant services/departments	From 2018	Support from the academic	

scholarship from companies or foundations interested in the study programme	at WB partner HEIs offering these services		coordinators at WB partner HEIs offering these services or other relevant services/ departments	websites * Number of students that have benefit from EU programme scholarships * Number of
Use part of the current study programme content to develop vocational training for enterprises or professional organizations	Relevant services/ departments at WB partner HEIs offering these services	From 2018	Labour market and information from environmental protection organizations	companies or foundations reached, sources of private financial support for students * Number of students that have benefit from companies' scholarships * Number of developed vocational trainings



### 3. New study programmes follow-up

The study programmes resulted from achieving NatRisk project wider and specific objectives that are in line with socio-economic needs and the labour market have prospect to be sustainable. This fact have to be accessible to all interested future students through the NatRisk promotional follow-up activities – to be aware of various jobs available to them in their future career. It is teachers' responsibility to maintain master study programmes up-to-date. Continuously transfer of knowledge, practices and technology in NDRM will provide entirely appropriate curricula regarding needs of the society. Requirements of potential employers in NDRM related to knowledge, skills and attitudes set on labour market will need to be monitored regularly in the future by the study programme teams to support changes in curricula content.

The WB partner HEIs will need to ensure that relevance, contemporaneity and quality of the new NatRisk study programmes by implementing regular Quality Control and Assurance measures resulting with an annual review of course content, learning resources and teaching methods. The conclusions of the annual reviews should, as a matter of good practice, be posted on the NatRisk web site for the benefit of current students and as reassurance for prospective students and the wider professional community.

Sustainability will be achieved through intensifying and enlargement of cooperation with other HEIs, the maintenance of existing international networks and continued engagement with local employers. Special importance is given to regular contact with local employers to share insights into their many common challenges. Students could usefully be encouraged to address small current problems in professional practice during their studying and preparing master thesis.

During the first few years after the conclusion of the project, the course teams should seek to involve their national ERASMUS+ Coordinators in monitoring issues relating to the sustainability of the study programme.