SHER

Sustainable Higher Education and Research in Kosovo

SHER Joint and Double Degree (JDD) Program

The SHER Joint and Double Degree Programme is a cornerstone of Kosovo's ambition to reform and internationalize its higher education system. It provides a structured, phased pathway to building globally recognized academic programs through collaborative development, accreditation, and sustainable launch of Joint or Double Degree (JDD) offerings between Kosovo's public universities and European higher education institutions, especially in Austria.

Purpose and Vision

The overarching goal of the SHER JDD Programme is to create a resilient, quality-driven, and internationally integrated higher education sector in Kosovo. Through alignment with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA), the programme lays the groundwork for Kosovo's long-term academic transformation. It supports not only academic excellence but also inclusivity, gender equality, and sustainability as central pillars.

Programme Objectives

The JDD Programme targets the following strategic objectives:

- Foster integration into the EHEA and ERA, enhancing Kosovo's academic standing.
- Develop labour-market-relevant curricula in high-impact fields: STEM, healthcare, environmental and social sciences, and cultural studies.
- Deepen institutional collaboration and academic mobility between Kosovo and European institutions.
- Strengthen institutional governance and internal capacities for programme delivery.
- Promote equitable access, especially for underrepresented and vulnerable groups.

Programme Phases

The JDD Programme unfolds in two interconnected phases:

Phase 1: Curriculum Development and Partnership Formation Up to four public HEIs in Kosovo receive grants of €10,000 to design JDD programmes and establish partnerships with EU universities. This phase emphasizes curriculum innovation and strategic alliance building.

Phase 2: Accreditation and Programme Launch Institutions that successfully complete Phase 1 are invited to apply for the grant envelope of €80.000 with an indicative amount per project of €26,667 whereas up to three (3) projects will be selected and the selection committee reserves the right to determine final allocations based on proposal quality. These funds support the finalization of accreditation processes, promotional efforts, recruitment, and initial programme implementation.

Strategic Relevance

The JDD Programme supports the Kosovo National Development Strategy, the National Science Programme (2023–2028), and the Kosovo Education Strategy. It is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (notably SDG 4 and SDG 9) and fully adheres to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for quality assurance.

Expected Impact

The long-term aspiration is for Kosovo's JDD graduates to be competitive in both local and global markets. With increased institutional credibility and strengthened research capacity, Kosovo's HEIs are expected to become active contributors to the European academic community and catalysts for the country's economic and technological progress.

Core Programme Priorities

1. **Field Prioritization**: Emphasis on STEM, healthcare, environmental sciences, social sciences, and cultural studies reflects Kosovo's national development needs.
2. **Internationalization**: Strategic partnerships facilitate student/faculty exchanges, joint research, and curricular alignment with EU standards.
3. **Workforce Alignment**: Curricula must embed practical training and industry engagement.
4. **Equity and Access**: Proactive inclusion of women and minorities, with scholarships, mentorship, and tailored support services.
5. **Green Transition**: Programmes are expected to address environmental challenges and contribute to Kosovo's shift towards a sustainable economy.
6. **Institutional Strengthening**: Governance frameworks, quality assurance systems, and academic leadership capacity are core funding priorities.

Cross-Cutting Themes

- Gender Equality: Balanced participation, targeted support in STEM fields, and gender-inclusive content.
- Inclusivity: Provisions for ethnic minorities, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged populations.
- Human Rights: Ethical standards, transparency, and fairness in all programme operations.
- Environmental Sustainability: Curriculum components focused on climate resilience and sustainable innovation.
- Digital Transformation: Integration of digital tools and skills into learning and research.
- Social Dimension: Broadening participation and community engagement aligned with Bologna Process values.

SHER Joint and Double Degree (JDD) Program Guidelines for Phase 2

1. Introduction

- Purpose of Phase 2
- Objectives and added value
- Overview of Phase 1 learnings
- Importance of accreditation and sustainability

2. Eligibility Criteria

- Who can apply
- Preconditions (e.g., completion of Phase 1)
- Partnership requirements
- Institutional readiness

3. Funding and Financial Framework

- Up to three (3) projects may be selected under this call
- Indicative amount per project: €26,667
- Total grant envelope available €80.000
- The selection committee reserves the right to determine final allocations based on proposal quality.
- Eligible and ineligible costs
- Payment modalities (e.g., 70% upfront, 30% after reporting)
- Financial reporting requirements

4. Accreditation and Quality Assurance

- Required standards (EHEA/ESG, national)
- Expected documentation (QA plans, external reviews)
- Role of national accreditation agencies

5. Program Launch and Promotion

- Key milestones for launching the joint/double degree
- Strategies for recruitment and outreach
- Use of funds for marketing and onboarding

6. Institutional Capacity and Governance

- Faculty involvement and training
- Administrative structures to support the program
- Governance mechanisms

7. Sustainability and Long-Term Planning

- Plans for maintaining the program beyond SHER funding
- Institutional embedding and budget allocation
- Continued collaboration with EU partners

8. Application and Evaluation Process

- Required documents
- Evaluation criteria and scoring
- Timeline (Call launch, deadline, decision date)
- Contact for inquiries

1. Introduction

Purpose of Phase 2

The second phase of the SHER Joint and Double Degree initiative is designed to support public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Kosovo that have successfully completed the program's initial phase. This stage facilitates the progression from conceptual development to full implementation, accreditation, and sustainability of joint or double degree programs in partnership with European institutions. It provides both financial backing and technical assistance to ensure these programs attain formal recognition and become operationally viable.

Objectives and Strategic Significance

Phase 2 seeks to:

- Align newly developed academic offerings with both Kosovo's national accreditation frameworks and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).
- Equip institutions with the resources necessary to promote, recruit for, and sustain these programs long-term.
- Reinforce institutional governance, enhance faculty readiness, and embed program sustainability mechanisms.
- Deepen Kosovo's integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).
- Advance socio-economic development goals through internationally oriented educational collaboration.

Reflections on Phase 1 Outcomes

Initial results from Phase 1 indicated a promising appetite and capacity among Kosovo's HEIs to engage in cross-border academic cooperation. Institutions demonstrated strong curricular innovation and productive alliances with European counterparts, laying the groundwork for long-term academic partnerships.

On Accreditation and Sustainability

Achieving recognized accreditation is not merely procedural; it guarantees academic rigor, institutional accountability, and global comparability. Equally vital is the establishment of internal mechanisms and funding strategies to ensure that these programs endure beyond the life span of SHER's financial support.

2. Eligibility Criteria

Who May Apply

Only public HEIs in Kosovo that have successfully completed all Phase 1 deliverables are eligible for Phase 2. Eligibility is limited to HEIs continuing the development of programmes initiated under Phase 1 that are currently preparing for accreditation. Programmes already accredited or not developed during Phase 1 are not eligible.

Preconditions for Application

- Submission of final Phase 1 outputs, including, final report submitted to SHER[1], draft curricula and signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with European partner institutions.
- Clear demonstration of institutional preparedness to seek program accreditation and initiate implementation.

Partnership Continuity

The consortium must maintain active collaboration with the original EU partners. Both parties should contribute substantively to program design, accreditation readiness, and joint delivery mechanisms.

Institutional Preparedness
Applicants must demonstrate:

- A designated implementation team.
- A comprehensive external quality assurance plan.
- Basic administrative infrastructure to support program operations.

3. Funding and Financial Management

Grant Structure.

- Up to three (3) projects may be selected under this call
- Indicative amount per project: €26,667
- Total grant envelope available €80.000
- The selection committee reserves the right to determine final allocations based on proposal quality.

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[1] *SHER reserves the right to exclude any institution from Phase 2 funding if the Phase 1 final report is not submitted and formally approved*

Eligible Expenditures

Funds may be allocated to:

- Accreditation procedures and associated quality assurance costs
- Promotional campaigns.
- Capacity-building initiatives such as workshops and faculty training, mock-simulations and similar.
- Collaborative engagements with EU partners
- Indirect costs (capped at 5% of total direct costs).

Note: For specific categories of the eligible expenditures, please refer to the financial guidelines point 3.

Non-Eligible Costs

Funding cannot be used for:

- Expenditures not directly tied to program accreditation or launch.
- Overhead costs exceeding the 5% limit.
- Expenses incurred beyond the eligibility window or lacking documentation.
- VAT that is recoverable by national regulation.

Note: For specific categories of the eligible expenditures, please refer to the financial guidelines point 4.

Disbursement Schedule

- 70% of the awarded sum will be transferred upon signing of the grant agreement.
- The remaining 30% will be disbursed following approval of the final financial and narrative report.

Reporting Obligations

Financial reports must be itemized and supported with verifiable documentation, in strict adherence to SHER and ADA financial guidelines.

4. Accreditation and Quality Assurance

Compliance Requirements

Programs must be:

- Consistent with ESG criteria and national quality standards.
- Designed to fulfill National Qualification Framework (NQF) levels 7 or 8 (Master's or Doctoral levels, respectively).
- Consistent with Kosovo Education Strategy and National Science Program

Documentation Requirements
Submissions should include[2]:

- A comprehensive external Quality Assurance Plan.
- Any available external review documentation.
- Updated MoUs clearly defining partner roles and obligations.

Accrediting Bodies' Involvement
The Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) will oversee national validation. Dual accreditation with EU agencies is encouraged where feasible.

5. Program Implementation and Outreach

Key Milestones

- Submission and approval of accreditation documentation.
- Launch of the academic program.
- Recruitment and onboarding of faculty and students.
- Initiation of the first academic term.

Outreach Strategy
Institutions should develop and disseminate tailored promotional content, host student information sessions, and coordinate with EU partners on joint visibility efforts.

Use of Promotional Funds
Marketing, recruitment activities, and preparatory training for staff may be financed through the grant, with outcomes (e.g., outreach metrics) to be documented.

6. Institutional Capacity and Governance

Faculty Engagement
Academic personnel engaged in Phase 1 are expected to remain involved. Targeted professional development sessions should be arranged to ensure instructional readiness.

Administrative Infrastructure
Applicants must establish:

- A formal coordination unit.
- Tools for managing joint programs, including mobility logistics, grading systems, and credential recognition.

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[2] *SHER reserves the right, at its discretion, to confirm the status of the pre-accreditation process with the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) throughout the implementation period to ensure continued eligibility and compliance*

Governance mechanisms
Clear internal and cross-institutional governance frameworks must be in place to guarantee accountability and operational efficiency.

7. Long-Term Sustainability

Beyond SHER Funding
Institutions should plan for long-term integration of programs into regular budgets and consider cost-sharing models to support continuity.

Institutional Embedding
Programs must be formally incorporated into institutional strategic frameworks, with established policies ensuring their ongoing relevance.

EU Collaboration Continuity
Sustained partnerships should include curriculum renewal cycles, collaborative research, and joint funding applications (e.g., Erasmus+, Horizon Europe).

8. Application and Evaluation

Submission Requirements
Applications must include:

- Completed application form.
- Accreditation roadmap
- Curriculum
- Updated MoU(s) with EU partners
- Launch and promotional strategies
- Budget and timeline
- CVs of key personnel
- Institutional endorsement letter/Support letter
- A comprehensive external Quality Assurance Plan

Evaluation Framework
Proposals will be assessed on:

- Accreditation feasibility.
- Clarity and feasibility of programme launch plans, including realistic timelines, outreach strategies, and coordination with institutional and accreditation bodies. launch plans.
- Governance strength and sustainability planning.
- Inclusivity and labor market responsiveness.

Review Mechanism
Each submission will undergo independent dual expert **Assessment**. The final decision will be rendered by a selection committee prioritizing institutional readiness, quality assurance alignment, and strategic vision.

Expert Assessment Process

- o **Dual Expert Assessment**: Each eligible application undergoes independent review by two experts to evaluate readiness for accreditation and programme launch.
- o **Selection Criteria**:
  - ▪ **Accreditation Readiness**: Assessment of the accreditation plan, including compliance with Kosovo and European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).
  - ▪ **Programme Launch Strategy**: Evaluation of student recruitment and engagement strategies, promotional activities, and support services.
  - ▪ **Partnership Sustainability**: Plans for sustaining partnerships with European HEIs and ensuring long-term collaboration in research and curriculum updates.
  - ▪ **Inclusivity and Social Dimension**: Inclusivity measures, support for vulnerable groups, and alignment with the Bologna Process social dimension.
  - ▪ **Labor Market and Employability Focus**: Strategies to enhance graduate employability and partnerships with local industries.

Final Decision by the Selection Committee
- o **Selection Board Composition** remains the same as in Phase 1.
- o **Decision-Making Factors**: The Selection Committee prioritizes applications with robust accreditation plans, effective launch strategies, and a commitment to inclusivity and labor market alignment.

Formal Approval and Contracting for Phase 2
- o Selected HEIs for Phase 2 will proceed to final contracting and receive funding to initiate programme accreditation and launch activities, guided by WUS Austria.

Timeline

- **Call for Applications:** December 19, 2025
- **Submission Deadline:** January 30, 2026
- **Evaluation:** February 2026
- **Notifications & Contracting:** March 2026
- **Implementation Start:** April 1, 2026
- **Implementation End:** February 26, 2027
- **Final Reporting:** March 31, 2027

Contact for inquiries

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SHER — Sustainable Higher Education and Research in Kosovo

Austrian Development Cooperation

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MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

SHER Joint and Double Degree (JDD) Program

Program Objectives
- Align with European Education Standards: EHEA, ERA
- Develop Competitive, Labour-Market-Relevant Curricula
- Enhance International Mobility and Collaboration
- Increase Institutional Capacity
- Promote Gender Equality and Inclusivity

Program Structure
- Phase I: Curriculum Development and Partnership Formation
  - Grants: €10,000 per institution
  - Support partner-aligned curriculum creation
- Phase II: Accreditation and Program Launch
  - Grants: €40,000 per institution
  - Finalize accreditation and launch programs
  - Promote and recruit students
  - Embed long-term sustainability

Key Fields of Study
- STEM
- Environmental Sciences
- Healthcare and Medical Research
- Social and Economic Sciences
- Linguistics, History, and Cultural Studies

Program Priorities
- Labour Market Relevance and Applied Learning
- Academic Mobility
- Social Inclusion and Gender Equality
- Environmental Sustainability
- Digital Innovation and Governance

Expected Outputs
- Interdisciplinary, applied curricula
- Enhanced research capacities
- Strengthened governance
- Institutional visibility and gender equality
- EU collaboration models

Phase II Focus Areas
- Eligibility Criteria
  - Must complete Phase I
  - Ongoing EU partnerships
- Funding & Financials
  - €40,000 grants
  - 85% upfront, 15% post-report
  - QA, promotion, onboarding, administration
- Accreditation & QA
  - ESG and national standards
  - QA plan, MoUs, accreditation documents
- Program Launch
  - Marketing and outreach
  - Faculty and student onboarding
- Capacity and Governance
  - Faculty training
  - Governance frameworks
  - Admin infrastructure
- Sustainability
  - Institutional budget embedding
  - Long-term EU collaboration
- Evaluation Process
  - Dual expert review
  - Inclusivity, labor market focus
  - Launch strategy readiness

Cross-Cutting Themes
- Gender Equality
- Inclusivity and Support for Vulnerable Groups
- Environmental Sustainability
- Social Dimension of Higher Education
- Digital Transformation and Green Economy

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