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FINNISH NATIONAL
AGENCY FOR EDUCATION

Higher Education Partnership

Capacity development and learning

between Finnish and partnering higher education institutions

2023-26

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Programme Document

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The **Programme Document** is the basis for the programme layout and financing decisions. This final version is included in the call for proposals.

The **guidelines for applicants** are presented on the EDUFI website and are available in February 2023.

The guidelines for project implementation are presented in the “**Administrative Handbook**”, available on the EDUFI website prior to financing decisions in late 2023.

The **website** for the programme is available [here](#).

Summary

The new Higher Education Partnership (HEP) programme supports cooperation between Finnish higher education institutions (HEIs) and higher education institutions in partner countries to jointly strengthen and develop higher education through joint projects in the latter.

The cooperation projects develop and strengthen the methodological, pedagogical, and administrative capacities of higher education institutions in developing countries.

The themes of the partnership programme are the following:

- High-quality education of primary, secondary and vocational teachers (TVET)
- Climate change, energy transition and circular economy
- Food security as enabler of sustainable development

The partnership programme has the following impact objective:

HEIs in the partner countries contribute to sustainable development by providing high-quality, inclusive and working-life relevant higher education.

The outcome objectives are:

- 1. Strengthened educational and institutional capacities of partner HEIs in providing relevant working-life higher education***
- 2. Improved quality of the partner HEIs' education, including digitalized and blended education***

The programme objectives are described in more detail in Section 2 and Attachment 1.

The programme contributes to the goals of Finland's development policy, within the Agenda 2030 framework, and applies its principles. Finland's Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) provides funding for the programme from its development cooperation funds. Supporting higher education in DAC-listed developing countries will help promote skills development, establish a well-functioning, efficient and equal society, encourage entrepreneurship, and ultimately drive sustainable development and reduce poverty. *The HEIs will provide graduates with labour-market relevant skills, thus contributing to improved productivity and economic growth.*

The Finnish National Agency for Education (EDUFI) provides administrative support to the programme.

This document describes the purpose and expected results of the Higher Education Partnership Programme overall. Each project within the partnership programme is designed to reflect each individual country's specific development goals and is based on the needs identified by the partner higher education institutions. The individual project objectives are aligned with those of the overall partnership programme and contribute to its outcome.

The programme has many similarities with the earlier Finnish programme called HEI-ICI. However, the new HEP includes new thematic and country coverage, new approaches and new financing regulations.

1. Policy framework

1.1. Finland's development policy

[Finland's development policy](#) contributes to the implementation of the universal Agenda 2030, aiming at sustainable poverty reduction and the realisation of fundamental human rights, a rules-based multilateral system, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the UN. Finland's international cooperation and actions are also grounded in the [Paris Agreement on Climate Change](#) and [the Convention on Biodiversity](#). Our national guiding documents are the Government Programme and the Report on Development Policy to the Parliament.

The concrete objective of Finland's development cooperation is to strengthen developing countries' own capacities. Finland makes long-term development cooperation [in five priority areas, building on its values and strengths](#):

1. [Strengthening the status and rights of women and girls](#), with an emphasis on sexual and reproductive health and rights.
2. [Education](#), especially the quality of education, participation of persons with disabilities, and gender equality.
3. [Sustainable economies and decent work](#), especially innovations, the role of women in the economy and female entrepreneurship.
4. [Peaceful, democratic societies](#), especially the development of tax systems in developing countries, and support for democracy and the rule of law.
5. [Climate change and natural resources](#), with an emphasis on strengthening adaptation alongside mitigation of climate change; food security and water; meteorology and disaster risk prevention; forests and safeguarding biodiversity.

[Finland's Africa Strategy towards a Stronger Political and Economic Partnership](#) (MFA 2021) aims to diversify and deepen Finland's relations with African countries. The Strategy has specific objectives for promoting cooperation to peace and security and trade and investments and job-creating green growth. Finland also supports development efforts in countries within other regions, but these are not covered by specific regional policies.

1.2. Development effectiveness

All Finnish development cooperation aims to ensure the effectiveness of development cooperation. This includes:

1. **Human rights:** Finland applies the human rights-based approach in its development policy.
2. **Transparency:** Effective and responsible development cooperation requires that both donors and recipients share information openly.
3. **Coherence:** Different policy sectors should engage in policy coherence for development to ensure the creation of preconditions for sustainable development in developing countries.
4. **Quality and sustainability:** Finland is committed to improving the quality of development cooperation. Finland focuses on achieving sustainable results that have positive long-term results on society. Finland lays emphasis on more goal-oriented planning and results-based management,

monitoring and evaluation of results, as well as learning from results and communicating about them.

5. **Partner countries' ownership:** Finland's development cooperation is based on the development needs defined by the partner countries and their own development plans. The responsibility for change rests with the partner countries—Finland supports their development. For some partner countries Finland applies a country strategy for development cooperation, grounded upon the partner country's needs and priorities.

1.3. Higher education within Finnish policy for development and internationalisation

“Education at all levels is a Finnish strength”. “Global responsibility is a key value in Finnish society”. These two elements are combined in the way Finland is exercising its strength and experience in its development policy in the field of education. The [Government Report on Development Policy](#) to the Parliament 2021 makes it clear that Finland should do even more with education in developing countries. Education was defined as a new independent priority area of Development Policy. In the Theory of Change for Education, high-quality higher and vocational education was set as a sub-objective.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) coordinates national development of the international activities of Finnish HEI. The aim of the international strategy for higher education and research is to make higher education and research more international, as well as to achieve a globally acknowledged frontrunner position by 2025. Finland has signed the Bonn Declaration and supports the Marseille declaration on values and principles in international higher education and research. An overview of the Finnish policies for the internationalisation of the higher education is presented in this [Vision statement](#).

[The Africa Action Plan](#) for the administrative branch of the Ministry of Education and Culture seeks to contribute to achieving the goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development together with African countries, by promoting education, research and skills, culture, cultural understanding and the creative industries, as well as social cohesion and civil society. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Culture has established a global network to support the national internationalisation agenda for higher education.

1.4. Previous experiences and lessons learned

While no formal evaluation has been recently conducted on the previous capacity building programme HEI-ICI, the MFA and EDUFI have jointly collected lessons learned from the previous experiences. In addition, the experiences and feedback from partnership programmes financed by selected European countries have been taken into account.

In general, the overall layout of the previous HEI-ICI has proved to be functional. However, in order to further emphasise mutual ownership, some focal design issues of the programme have been modified. **Key elements** of the Higher Education Partnership Programme are as follows:

- Enhanced emphasis for equal, mutually beneficial partnerships
- Renewed financing model to enable more equal partnerships
- Reciprocal mobility of students and teachers
- Partnerships of experienced and more recently established HEIs in the South

- Training/education of vocational teachers (TVET) within HEIs.

The overall lessons learned regarding capacity building in development cooperation emphasise ***adaptive management*** and flexibility. This element is also well recognised by the MFA of Finland

2. Description of the new Higher Education Partnership Programme (HEP)

2.1. Programme approach

The Higher Education Partnership Programme (HEP) supports cooperation projects between Finnish higher education institutions and higher education institutions in the global South to strengthen and develop higher education by enhancing their methodological, educational and administrative capacities.

The HEP programme for 2023-2026 specifically aims to improve the overall employability of graduates, boost digitalisation and develop both social and technological innovations in higher education.

The partnership programme supports the partnering higher education institutions to improve their pedagogical practises and institutional capacity to better respond to the rapidly changing needs of the labour market and to improve the resilience of the education system.

The partnership programme is also linked to digital development, blended learning and enhanced attention to promoting equal access to higher education for a diverse cadre of students, including vulnerable groups such as girls and persons with disabilities.

The partnership programme will support the professional development of academic staff and leaders to promote teaching, in HEIs and for higher-level TVET. It will strengthen the institutional capacity to provide quality education through various means, including digitized teaching and learning and the administration of higher education.

The Programme will also support student and staff exchange to pursue mutual exchanges and learning.

2.2. Programme objectives

The programme has two expected outcomes. The first focuses on institutional-level development while the second relates to staff capacities. Naturally, these two outcomes are closely related.

Since the programme financing for a single project is very small compared to the operations of the partner HEIs, and since the period for implementation is limited, it is important to recognise that the contribution of the single project can be only a small ingredient for the developmental activities of the partner HEI.

The results framework is available in Attachment 1. It is directly related to the programme-level risk analysis, available in Attachment 2.

IMPACT

HEIs in the partner countries contribute to sustainable development by providing high-quality, inclusive and working-life relevant higher education.

OUTCOME 1

Strengthened educational and institutional capacities of partner HEIs in providing working-life relevant higher education

Output 1: Strengthened educational capacity, including/in particular renewed degree programmes and individual courses

Output 2: Strengthened capacity of teachers and experts involved in projects in teaching and administration (professional development)

OUTCOME 2

Improved quality of the partner HEIs' education, including digitalized and blended education

Output 3: Improved pedagogical methods and new innovative solutions created for teaching and learning.

Output 4: Improved access to higher education for students with vulnerable backgrounds

Results-Based Management (RBM) is utilized both at the programme and project level. One of the evaluation criteria for project financing is the following: the level of correspondence between the goals of the project and the aim and objectives of the HEP programme. This includes correspondence with one or several programme-level outcomes, and the selected programme-level thematic correspondence.

2.3. Three programme-level themes

The themes of the partnership programme are the following, and the projects would need to focus on at least one of them:

- High-quality education of primary, secondary and vocational teachers (TVET)
- Climate change, including energy transition and the circular economy
- Food security as an enabler of sustainable development

The assessment of the applications analysis the fit of the proposed project to the relevant theme as applied in the actual context.

2.4. Eligible developing countries for partnering

Eligible partners are higher education institutions from the [ODA eligible countries](#), paying due attention to Finnish partner countries and countries where Finland has other activities in the same sector. The list of the ODA eligible countries is continuously updated.

2.5. Eligible partner institutions

The eligible partners are universities, universities of applied sciences or their equivalents that have the right to award higher education degrees. The minimum requirement is one Finnish and one southern HEI but there can be several partners from both Finland and the developing country.

A Finnish HEI acts as the applicant and coordinator of a HEP project. The coordinating Finnish HEIs must fulfil the following requirements to be eligible to apply:

1. The Finnish HEI operates under the Universities Act (558/2009, amended 2011) or Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014).
2. The Finnish HEI has the right to provide a public civilizing service in the field of higher education and has the right to award a higher education degree.

Finnish research institutes or trusts are not eligible partners unless they are directly under the administration of an official HEI and have the right to award higher education degrees.

Projects are encouraged to establish multi-stakeholder partnerships of universities and universities of applied sciences, younger HEIs, TVET institutions, CSOs, companies, and cooperation between southern countries HEIs (south-south cooperation).

It is recommended that the projects cooperate with non-academic stakeholders as associate partners, if relevant. The non-academic partners are not eligible to receive direct funding from the project but the tentative allocation to their activities can be indicated in the project budget, subject to procurement rules.

For instance, expertise from industry, employers and business, other tertiary and vocational education institutions and registered NGOs could be beneficial for the HEI capacity development.

Activities involving non-academic partners can consist of internships for local students with local industry or NGOs in developing countries, dissemination activities by NGOs, project-based learning with real-life cases, input in external quality assurance activities and subcontracting for external expertise (translation activities, external evaluations or facilitated self-evaluations). Sub-contracting is only to be used when the competence required is not found within the formal partnership.

3. Project-level objectives and approaches

Many evaluation criteria for financing decisions concern the layout of the project. The layout is demonstrated first and foremost in the description of the Result-Based Management at the project level. RBM is directly linked to a human rights based approach, cross cutting objectives and risk assessment. In addition, the partnership arrangements and budget are directly linked with reaching the expected objectives—the partnership needs to be strong and the timetable and financing arrangements need to be realistic. Together these six items should create a coherent approach—reflecting underlined values and priorities—to reach the expected outcomes.

The project-level planning (application and its Attachments) needs to have an adequate level of specificity in defining the approach—and the commitment to jointly implement it—in order to make the comparative evaluation of the applications possible. However, MFA acknowledges the need for adaptive management. This means that some activities can be defined only during the first months of the project (called ‘inception period’). Additionally, some activities can be changed and certain budget changes can be made during the implementation if necessary. Thus, the project implementation should be a joint effort of mutual learning and adjustment.

3.1. Results-Based Management

In the drafting of the HEP project proposals, the following guidelines will be followed:

Each project is designed and implemented within a project-specific results framework, which is linked to the programme-level results matrix (above). However, the results framework of the project should focus on the selected themes and approaches (within the limits defined at programme level).

All projects are required to set relevant result indicators for each outcome to be produced during the project implementation phase. In addition, the projects are expected to monitor the four programme-level indicators.

The main tool for results-based management is the results framework. Materials related to the RBM approach in the Higher Education Partnership (HEP) programme are available on the EDUFI website. More information on the RBM approach can be found in the administrative handbook. RBM practices in Finnish development cooperation are available in the publication: [Results Based Management](#).

Best practices for designing the results framework

In the project preparation, the participating HEIs are advised to consult the programme’s overall results framework, which contains the impact and the outcome statement for the programme, towards which each HEP project is expected to contribute.

Results Framework

- For an individual HEP project, the results chain should show the internal logic of the intervention from inputs to outputs and outcomes and finally, to the long-term impact.
- The results framework presents the above results and forms the basis for the monitoring and reporting of the intervention.

In the results development work the following principles apply:

- Base project result objectives on the partner countries' national priorities and development needs
- Define results and results targets jointly with your partner.
- Specific results targets and related indicators should be defined at the impact, outcome, and output level.
- Ensure that the indicators are aligned with the overall programme indicators and that they are Specific, Measurable, Attributable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART). Consider in advance, how the data can be collected and who are responsible for this work.
- Set clear results targets at the outcome level and analyse how the project specific outcome contributes to the overall outcome expected impact of the programme.
- Define assumptions i.e., external factors which influence the performance of the project but which the project cannot influence at different levels: from outputs to outcomes and from outcomes to impacts.
- The project design also includes a risk matrix which analyses the likelihood and impact of potential contextual, programmatic and institutional risks. If the risks seem to be very likely and their impact could be significant, it may be useful to revisit the project layout. See Attachment 2.

3.2. Human Rights Based Approach

The realization of human rights is a key goal in Finnish Development Policy. Applying a Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) to development cooperation means that 1) development results should strengthen the realisation of human rights 2) human rights principles (non-discrimination and equality; inclusion and participation; transparency and accountability) should be considered and applied in the programming, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policy projects and programmes, and 3) development cooperation should contribute to the development of the duty-bearers to meet their obligations and of the rights-holder to claim their rights.

With MFA Finland, the minimum level of the HRBA application in any intervention is human rights sensitive, which means that 1) a basic assessment of the human rights situation and the human rights implications of the intervention's activities in the context is conducted, and that 2) human rights principles (non-discrimination and equality; participation and inclusion; transparency; and accountability) guide the whole intervention.

At a more ambitious, i.e., Human Rights Progressive level, interventions have to meet two additional requirements. The first is that the intervention should aim to increase the capacity of duty-bearers and rights-holders – especially those in most vulnerable situations—at the level of project's outcomes, and the second is that disaggregated data is analysed and systematically used. In addition, at the progressive level, the intervention should include outcomes that further the realization of human rights even if the project is not necessarily framed with a human rights language. The interventions which are categorized as the highest—Human Rights Transformative—level should actively seek to eliminate discrimination and address the root causes behind the non-realization of rights.

As the main objective of the HEP instrument is to build the capacity of higher education providers to fulfil the right to higher education in the partner countries, it is likely that most interventions can reach a progressive level. This is assuming that the intervention is linked with the partner country's commitments and international standards in this regard and that it fulfils the requirements of the human rights-sensitive level. To ensure the minimum requirement of human rights sensitivity, the partnership projects need to conduct a basic human rights assessment to ensure that the planned projects do not contribute to any direct or indirect

harm to the realization of human rights or further discrimination. In addition, to ensure adherence to the principles of human rights, attention should be paid to ensuring that the rights-holders and other beneficiaries have the possibility to participate in an equal manner in the different phases of the project cycle; that no stereotypical or discriminatory practices are being condoned or promoted; and that the project does not create or maintain structures or processes that hamper the participation and inclusion of those in the most marginalized or disadvantaged position. In addition, to ensure accountability and transparency, it is important to ensure that any information about the intervention and its results are shared in a transparent manner, and that the systems or processes created by the project link to and promote accountability.

For the HEP project to reach the transformative HRBA level, the project would need to link itself with the partner country’s commitments for the realization of the right to higher education in the country, for instance by engaging in advocacy or policy work for making national legislation and policies more in line with the international human rights standards in this regard, or trying to support the development or strengthening of national systems or institutions which have the obligation to make the right to higher education more broadly available and accessible in the country. Transformative action could also include project objectives for changing negative and harmful attitudes that hinder certain groups from enjoying their right to higher education.

Please consult the [MFA Guideline on the Human Rights Based Approach to Development](#) for additional information on the application of HRBA

3.3. Crosscutting objectives

‘Crosscutting objectives’ means themes and values which the MFA considers to be vital elements which need to be considered in order to have a successful project. These relate to gender equality, non-discrimination, and climate and biodiversity issues. In the scoring the project for financing, the project document is assessed also how it manages to address crosscutting objectives.

Sometimes only some of the crosscutting objectives are relevant for a specific project.

Best practises for ensuring cross-cutting objectives in HEP projects

| <i>Gender Equality</i> | <i>Non-discrimination, with a focus on disability inclusion</i> | <i>Climate resilience and low emission development</i> | <i>Protection of the environment, with an emphasis on safeguarding biodiversity</i> |
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| Gender equality, including the rights and status of women and girls, have been integrated into the study programme and course material and analyses related to them. | Project analyses include non-discrimination of persons in vulnerable situations, including persons with disabilities. Targeting partner HEIs in rural, remote areas to | Study programmes, course materials and training integrate climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss. As a result, the participants of the projects are equipped with knowledge and skills to enhance low emission, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable development in their fields of expertise and in their countries. | |

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| <p>Ensuring gender balance in the selection of teachers and students and the equal participation of women.</p> | <p>improve quality higher education also outside the capital regions.</p> | <p>HEP projects carry out screenings/assessments of environment and climate related risks as well as screenings/assessments of their impacts on climate and environment, as per the minimum criteria of the MFA's Guideline for Cross-Cutting Objectives in Finland's Development Policy and Cooperation.</p> |
| <p>Developing a gender policy that promotes equitable and inclusive practices, with the objective of reaching gender equality and gradually reaching full gender balance in staff at all levels.</p> | <p>Participation of organisations of persons with disabilities in project planning, activities, monitoring and evaluation.</p> | <p>The research topics, case studies and capacity-building activities are aligned with the objectives of national environmental and climate policies and plans, such as Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), National Adaptation Plan (NAP) or National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP).</p> |
| <p>The project enables stakeholders to recognize the importance of, and promote women in all their diversity in roles other than those traditionally assigned to them.</p> | <p>Course materials and teacher training to cover issues of non-discrimination, rights of persons with disabilities and accessibility issues.</p> | <p>Sharing information and raising awareness of climate change, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss in social media, networks and communications. While acknowledging the challenges, the communication should focus on solutions and stimulate positive action.</p> |
| <p>If needed to achieve gender balance, giving priority to female participants, especially when the number of women is almost non-existent at the local, regional, or national level.</p> | <p>Raising awareness on non-discrimination and the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities, including promoting education and training opportunities for persons with disabilities.</p> | <p>Developing e-learning and distance learning methods and materials as part of curricula renewal activities and using online tools and avoiding travelling, especially air travels, when possible, thus avoiding or reducing greenhouse gas emissions.</p> |
| <p>Actively promoting women's career opportunities in technology professions at various events, and demonstrating positive women role models.</p> | <p>Bottom-up planning and inclusion of all interested stakeholders including rights holders and duty bearers.</p> | <p>Some projects have suggested that the HEI ICI programme should compensate projects' CO2 emissions in the future. This is an important discussion, but subject to an eventual decision by the Prime Minister's Office that would cover all ministries.</p> |
| | <p>Non-discrimination and gender equality is integrated into policies and actions on work conditions and environments.</p> | <p>Using environmentally sustainable solutions when organizing training, meetings or other activities (zero waste, reusable or recyclable materials, renting equipment, using digital solutions, no</p> |
| | <p>Recruitment of persons identifying as minorities</p> | |

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| <p>Supporting women's access to leadership positions and supporting women's career aspirations and providing representations of women in the high ranks of academia.</p> | <p>(ethnic, language, religion), persons with disabilities, and all genders and sexual orientation in the programme.</p> | <p>material gifts or other unnecessary items, choosing venues that have sustainability certificates and are accessible by public transport, well-thought catering with local, vegetarian menus and moderately sized portions to avoid food waste, etc.). Participating HEIs are encouraged to elaborate on environmental management systems or plans.</p> |
| <p>Advertising campaigns aiming to attract female candidates, breaking with traditions where information technology is considered more of a male dominated study field and showcasing both male and female role models in student communications.</p> | <p>Promoting open and distance learning to provide better access to education for all people, including accessibility for persons with disabilities.</p> | |
| <p>Using virtual or otherwise accessible learning environments in teaching to enable women to participate from their homes when household duties might prevent regular physical participation.</p> | <p>Accessibility for persons with disabilities is included in the design and implementation of digital solutions and innovations.</p> | |
| <p>Promoting a gender transformative approach with a view to changing social norms that set defined roles for women in society (e.g. regarding household work).</p> | <p>Project data is disaggregated by sex, age and disability, whenever appropriate.</p> | |
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3.4. Risk analysis and risk mitigation

The HEP programme design is based on the previous phases which have shown remarkable results. During the previous phases, the capacity of the HEIs to implement the projects has increased over time and projects have been learning environments for gradual improvement. HEP continues the emphasis on broad projects where personal-level relations are combined with sustainable institution-to-institution-level cooperation. The programme faces risks related to the political stability in Europe and developing countries. The political context requires continuous follow-up. Financial risks at the programme level relate to the available financing and the commitment of the agencies, as well as inflation.

The programme-level risks and mitigation measures are described in Attachment 2. The risks at the project level can be completely different.

In the project application process, the quality of the risk assessment is a major evaluation criterion. Thus, the risk analysis capacity of the implementing HEIs is taken as a key element for successful projects.

The project application must include a risk matrix at the project level. The project-level operational risks include elements such as personnel, change in administrative rules, lack of political support, changes in policy environment, personal-level disagreements, financial management risks etc. A common feature is that operational risks that materialise tend to cause delays in the project implementation, leading to non-attainment of results at the outcome level. These are addressed already during the project design but also through the EDUFI training during the implementation phase. See Attachment 2 for further guidelines.

MFA has a specific procedure for two distinctive risks: corruption and sexual harassment. All cases are subjected to the procedure. Detailed information will be available for the successful project applicants.

3.5. Institutional partnerships, project board and project coordinators

Partnership

Mutual respect and functional personal-level relations are the foundation for any project aiming towards capacity development. The importance of the sense of joint ownership cannot be overestimated. The importance of the joint ownership is reflected in the evaluation criteria.

The guidance towards mutually beneficial partnership has been described above. In addition, the emphasis towards wider partnerships includes various other stakeholders in implementation has already been described. These design issues are vital for effectiveness and sustainability of the project.

The Project Board

For each approved partnership project, a Project Board will be set up. The key function of the Project Board is to monitor project progress and to support the cooperating HEIs in carrying out the activities. The Project Board is obliged to take action if there is a risk that the stated objectives of the project are not followed. The Board can also decide on the termination of the project with the consent of EDUFI and the MFA. The Project Board approves the Project Document and the annual reports before they are submitted to EDUFI. The project application should include a budgetary provision for the Project Board meetings.

The Project Board consists of representatives of the cooperating HEIs, and of other stakeholders if deemed beneficial for the project. The Project Board is the decision-making authority in the project.

The Project Board is chaired by a developing country HEI. The members, responsibilities and meeting arrangements of the Project Board are defined in the Project Document.

Project coordinators

Regarding practical administration, a person from each participating HEI is nominated as a coordinator. These people ensure that the activities are implemented as planned. The coordinator of the Finnish coordinating HEI (i.e., applicant) is the contact point for the MFA and EDUFI.

The project coordinators are jointly responsible for ensuring the smooth operation of the project. They coordinate the monitoring of the project (both collecting data for indicators but also sensing the feelings of the project related persons). They also need to prepare the Annual Reports to be submitted to the Project Board. Based on evidence regarding progress, they coordinate the preparation Annual Work Plans.

3.6. Possible project-level activities and implementation methods

The programme gives credit to project-level objectives and implementation plans which are very focused and clearly presented. This does not exclude utilising novel and innovative approaches, even when the implementation includes definite risks.

The three themes, as well as the programme outcomes and outputs, can be implemented at the project level through various kinds of activities, e.g. the development of:

- teaching methods,
- curricula, courses, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in partner countries,
- teaching materials, including on-line materials,
- digitalisation, online educational tools, blended educational tools etc.
- access to existing teaching materials,
- accreditation and approval mechanisms,
- equipment upgrading,
- training of trainers,
- thematic workshops and seminars,
- staff capacity building through exchange visits,
- peer learning and growing expertise,
- administrative and leadership structures,
- quality monitoring mechanisms, risk management instruments
- thematic networking and internationalisation,
- strengthening the societal roles of HEIs,
- support services, data collection and management tasks related to any of these methods.

While planning activities it is useful to consider the limited scope of the project in terms of time and money.

The programme does not finance academic research or applied research as such. However, the programme may aim at improving research and teaching capacity directly related to support achievement of the programme objectives.

3.7. Project budgeting

The coordinating Finnish HEI is responsible for the financial management of the project and may transfer funds to the partner HEIs for the implementation of project activities.

Other public (EU or Finnish) project funding cannot be used to cover any part of projects self-financing. The projects cannot produce a profit or have a subsidising effect on HEIs with funding from the Higher Education Partnership Programme.

Costs due to the planning or writing of a project application or document may not be included in the budget. Acceptable costs for a project can occur only after the decision on state aid has been signed.

All projects must have a minimum of 10% of self-finance and state aid can amount to a maximum of 90% of the total budget of the project.

State aid (max. 90%) + self-financing from HEIs (min. 10%) = total budget (100%)

The budget of the project should be drawn up for the entire duration of the project and follow the HEP model (Attachment 9. Project-Level Budget).

Please note the new method for counting overall costs of the HEI, presented in Attachment 3. The new method aims to enhance equality as well as transparency between the implementing HEIs.

Financing rules for the HEIs in nutshell:

- Self-financing minimum 10% in cash (i.e. eligible expenditure)
- *Overhead for total salary costs fixed as flat rate of 30% (both Finnish and non-Finnish HEIs)*
- Contingencies max 10% of the budget
- Recommendation for roughly same number of working months (i.e. paid salary months) for Finnish and total non-Finnish HEIs.

Adaptive management and adaptive budgeting during the implementation phase: it is common that the circumstances change over time and the project layout may need to be updated. The use of adaptive management is necessary in such situations. Key principles for this include:

- Possible adjustments need to be discussed between the partners transparently.
- The adjustments need to be made within the limits of the legal provisions: Act on Discretionary Government Transfers (Valtionavustuslaki 688/2001) and Act on Public Contracts (2016/1397).
- If there is any doubt on the legality of a change, the matter should be checked from EDUFI in writing.
- For details, see also Section 6.4 below.

4. Programme-level management

4.1. Stakeholders and beneficiaries of the Higher Education Partnership Programme

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland has the main policy-level and programme financing responsibility. The MFA is the funding decision-making authority and the contractual partner of the applying HEIs.

Any corruption will be investigated and judged using the strict procedures of the MFA.

EDUFI

Finnish National Agency for Education EDUFI is responsible for the administration of the programme and reports to the MFA.

Implementing partners

The partnership projects are implemented jointly between Finnish HEIs and the partner HEIs in the selected countries. The joint application is submitted to the MFA by the Finnish HEI, which bears final responsibility for project implementation and financial management. The Finnish HEI serves as project coordinator. It is responsible for guiding the project implementation in accordance with the guidelines set by the programme and by Finland's development policy framework.

The coordinator at the Finnish coordinating HEI is the contact point for the MFA (on contractual issues) and EDUFI. Additionally, a person from each partner HEI is nominated as a contact person. These people ensure internal communication and monitor activity implementation.

The partner country HEIs plan and implement activities in collaboration with the Finnish HEI, monitor progress, and report through the Finnish HEI to the EDUFI.

HEIs are committed to following the guidelines in the HEI ICI Programme Document and the instructions given by the MFA and EDUFI for project implementation.

Beneficiaries

The main beneficiaries of the programme are the partner HEIs in the developing countries, including their students, teachers and administrative staff. Special attention should be paid to enhancing the access to higher education for women, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups.

4.2. Programme administration

Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) is set at the beginning of the programme. Its main channel is monitoring the progress of the programme from the perspective of mutually beneficial partnership. It provides information between key stakeholders on (substantive, administrative, financial) matters affecting the effectiveness of the programme. The PAC assesses risks and challenges as a totality. Thus, PAC forms a venue for mutual learning.

The PAC is composed of the following technical experts from institutions: an international affairs expert of one Finnish university, an international affairs expert of one Finnish university of applied sciences, an international affairs expert of one partnering university from the south (or a representative of regional/global

body), an expert from a like-minded country managing similar projects. In addition, the PAC has expert representatives from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education and Culture and EDUFI and relevant student organisations. The PAC meets annually when project-level reports are available. The key elements of the minutes of the PAC meetings are published on the EDUFI website.

4.3 Programme funding

Funding in the Higher Education Partnership Programme is based on the Act on Discretionary Government Transfers (Valtionavustuslaki 688/2001).

The state aid for projects under application in the Higher Education Partnership Programme is a maximum of 700,000 euros. If the Finnish higher education institution is partnering with another Finnish higher education institution or more than one higher education institution in a developing country, the state aid can be a maximum of 1,100,000 euros.

The total budget of the Higher Education Partnership Programme 2023–2026 is about 7,525,000€, including the administrative and capacity building costs of the EDUFI,

The partnership programme supports projects which will be implemented in 2024–2026. However, contracts can be signed already in 2023.

The number of projects to be financed is a maximum of 10 projects.

The Finnish coordinating HEI is responsible for an equitable distribution of the funding. It is recommended that both Finnish and non-Finnish HEIs (in total) have a roughly similar number of paid working months, and that a fair share of the project budget be allocated to non-Finnish partner HEIs. Partner institutions should implement specific activities which are defined in the project results framework and budget.

The financing model has been amended to better comply with the principle of equal partnership. ***Instead of the full cost model, all HEIs in Finland and in partner countries have a fixed 30% flat rate for indirect costs, which is included in the total budget.***

The programme budget is available in Attachment 3.

4.4. Programme-level monitoring and reporting

EDUFI compiles the data from project-level reports and monitoring visits. It presents an annual report which also covers financial data as well as reporting on the programme administration. EDUFI shares data on results to the MFA whenever needed. EDUFI also compiles the data for the synthesis reports towards the end of the programme period. The detailed procedures are defined on the intra-governmental task allocation from MFA to EDUFI.

EDUFI needs to properly archive all its tasks and communication so that the relevant information can be obtained for independent evaluation. The evaluations are commissioned and defined by the MFA according to its overall evaluation schedule.

The Programme Advisory Committee familiarises itself with the advancement of the programme. After its annual meeting the Board publishes an overview which analyses the programme progress and shares the relevant information from the stakeholders. This overview will be published on the EDUFI website.

4.5 Programme brand, visibility and related policy-influencing work

EDUFI and MFA ensure the visibility of the programme as a whole. Individual projects have key responsibility to ensure their visibility at the partner countries.

The projects are guided to work closely with Finnish Embassies in order to enhance their policy influence at a country level.

Branding: HEP has been given a new name in order to emphasise some novel elements. However, when communicating with partner country representatives who are familiar with the previous HEI-ICI programme, the new name may be confusing. Therefore, at the country level, it is possible for project leaders to brand the HEP programme using a name like “HEI-ICI – Higher Education Partnership with Finland” or something similar, consistently.

5. Application and selection processes

5.1. Application process and application documents

The Act on Discretionary Government Transfers (Valtionavustuslaki 688/2001) is applicable.

The schedule:

| | |
|---------------|--|
| January 2023 | Advertisement about the coming Call for Applications |
| February 2023 | The Call for Applications opens, guidance for applicants |
| May 2023 | The deadline for applications/The Call for Final Applications closes |
| August 2023 | The scoring process by external evaluators, guiding EDUFI and MFA |
| October 2023 | The financing decision (discretionary subsidies) by the MFA |
| November 2023 | Contractual arrangements, first payment request |
| January 2024 | The project starts |

EDUFI and the MFA publish the Call for Applications. The Call for Applications, including detailed information and instructions, as well as access to the application system can be found on the relevant websites in February. Applications are submitted through the electronic government grant application system (valtionavustusjärjestelmä in Finnish) to EDUFI and will be forwarded to the MFA.

Separate guidance sessions will be arranged by EDUFI when launching the Call for Applications.

5.2. Selection process

Eligible project applications will be evaluated in three phases. First, external evaluators will perform a qualitative evaluation, based on set HEP project evaluation criteria. As a result of a consolidation meeting of external experts, an application shortlist will be produced. The number of the shortlisted applications is such that they amount together to twice the available funding.

Secondly, the MFA (regional departments, Embassies and sectoral policy advisors) will assess the development policy relevance and complementarity of the shortlisted applications.

Finally, the short list is discussed in an assessment meeting between the MFA, EDUFI and the representative of the group of external evaluators. The meeting should not change the score of any shortlisted project more than +/-5% of the total initial score.

The MFA makes the final decision within the framework of the appropriations approved by the Finnish Parliament. Decisions are based on the Act on Discretionary Government Transfers (Valtionavustuslaki 688/2001).

The MFA sends the positive or negative decision to each applicant. EDUFI also informs all the applicants of the selection results. After both parties have signed a statement to implement the project according to the decision regarding government grant, the preparations for the project implementation can begin. Project implementation period is 2024-26. This means eligible costs accrue from January 1, 2024, onwards until August 31, 2026. EDUFI is in charge of administrative support and guidance while the MFA is responsible for the financing decisions and official financial monitoring.

5.3. Application documents

The application includes the following parts:

- An online application form
- Attachments
 - The Project Document (template in ATTACHMENT 6)
 - The Results Framework (template in ATTACHMENT 7)
 - The Risk Management Analysis (template in ATTACHMENT 8)
 - Budget (excel template in ATTACHMENT 9)
 - Initial Work Plan (excel template in ATTACHMENT 10)
 - The Key Expert forms (template in ATTACHMENT 11)

The online application form includes the basic information of the project. Access to the online application form can be found at the EDUFI website dedicated to HEP Programme 2023-2026. Additionally, templates for the attachments can be found on the same website.

The MFA regional department officers responsible for the country as well as Finnish embassy may be approached for receiving relevant background information on the country-specific context.

The Project Document should be prepared jointly by the partners. A template with instructions is presented in ATTACHMENT 6. The Project Document and the Results Framework should support each other.

The Results Framework ATTACHMENT 7. The Results Framework is a matrix summarizing the three result levels (outputs, outcome and impact), indicators, baselines and target values as well as related assumptions. The framework should match the narrative section "Project design" of the Project Document.

The Risk Matrix Analysis presents the foreseen contextual, programmatic and institutional risks. Applicants are asked to reflect on the likelihood of each risk, their potential impact and mitigation measures. The Matrix is found in ATTACHMENT 8.

The Work Plan and Budget format is available in ATTACHMENTS 9 and 10. The overall work of the project is broken down into activities in the Work Plan. The main outputs should be clearly described in the Work Plan. For example, the output "development of a new learning module" can be broken down into activities like needs and learning outcome assessment, curriculum preparation, enhancing institution administration, the training of trainers, material preparation, introduction of new methodology, piloting, and accreditation. Operational responsibilities are further elaborated. The preparation of the annual work plan should take place as a consultation between the participating HEIs. The Work Plan in the application is made on a general level. The Final Work Plan including the scheduling of activities is prepared during the inception phase.

The presentation of Key Experts. A Key Expert is an individual from the participating HEIs who will provide an input of more than 20 days during project implementation. Using the Key Expert template each Key Expert confirms (ATTACHMENT 11, maximum one A4 per expert) that she or he has the required expertise and

experience and that she or he is available and committed to the tasks as specified in the paper. No CVs of the experts are attached to the application.

5.4. Selection criteria

Eligibility criteria

Minimum partnership composition requirements

- At least one Finnish HEI as a coordinator and one southern HEI as a partner
- The coordinating HEI is a Finnish HEI entitled to participate
- The southern partners are eligible HEIs

The application is submitted on time

- The online application form is submitted electronically by the set deadline

The application is prepared according to the instructions for applicants

- The Project Proposal is signed by legal representatives of the partner HEIs (scanned signatures are accepted)
- The project duration meets the set criteria

The required mandatory attachments are provided (in the given format and templates)

- The Project Document
- The Results Framework
- The Risk Analysis Matrix
- The Budget
- The Work Plan
- The Key Expert forms

The project budget adheres to the following

- The costs occur during the contract period
- There is an annual budget, with calendar year budgeting presented
- The self-financing amounts to a minimum of 10%
- The total sum of applied state grant meets the set funding criteria

Qualitative evaluation criteria

1. Relevance (20 points)

The project's relevance to the overall aim and objectives of the HEP programme including:

- The level of correspondence between the objectives of the project and the aim and objectives of the HEP programme.
- The extent to which the project exhibits novelty in the use of the methods of learning and the use of virtual/blended learning platforms.

2. Impact and effectiveness (20 points)

The impact and sustainability of project results including:

- The extent to which the project demonstrates its potential impacts including the identification of target groups in consideration of gender equality and inclusive and non-discriminating practices.
- The extent to which relevant expected outcomes and outputs for the project have been identified and will be met by the project during its period of implementation.
- The quality of the risk analysis including mitigation measures and the extent to which these are incorporated in the project management activities.

3. Quality of partnership (20 points)

The quality of partnership including:

- The extent to which the project is jointly developed by the partner institutions.
- The level of formalized commitment between partners in a mutually beneficial manner.
- The extent to which the project addresses the particular needs of the target country(ies) and partnering HEIs (including synergy with other initiatives of the partners institutions and avoidance of duplication).
- The inclusion of the less experienced and/or more fragile HEIs as partners in a meaningful manner.

4. Implementation (20 points)

The quality of implementation plan including:

- The extent to which project management structures and division of responsibilities are adequate and support mutual commitment.
- The extent of complementarity, experience, and expertise of the project team.
- The extent to which adequate measures to monitor and evaluate project results have been identified.
- The extent to which the project implementation addresses gender equality and inclusive practices (and climate/biodiversity whenever relevant).
- The extent to which the project demonstrates cost-effectiveness.

5. Clarity and complementarity (20 points)

- The fit of the inter-related aspects of project design (results orientation, HRBA, crosscutting objectives, partnership arrangements, administrative practices, scheduling and budgeting) to create a coherent and realistic project. Assessment of the project as a whole.
- The correspondence of the project with the overall goals of the MFA and the complementary of the project with other Finnish activities in the selected country and within the selected theme.

6. Project Implementation

This section on project implementation is useful to read already when preparing the project application, because there are tasks in the implementation arrangements that need to be properly planned and budgeted in advance.

6.1. Inception phase

Inception phase is up to 4 months. It is recommended for the approved projects to start the collaboration with an intensive inception phase to review the results objectives and agree on the work plan. One person should be assigned to coordinate the monitoring activities in each participating HEI. The detailed roles and responsibilities related to the decision-making, financial management and implementation are clarified. Supportive internal documents and rules are agreed.

During the inception phase, the monitoring arrangements and data collection procedures are defined and the indicators in the results framework will be updated accordingly.

The purpose of the inception phase is to increase trust between the partners and nurture and develop local ownership within the southern partners.

6.2. Annual work planning

Annual work planning should be used as a method of advancing commitment and results orientation. Annual work plans are always work-in-progress versions and changes can be agreed by correspondence between the project coordinators. However, rules for changes described in 6.4. below apply.

It is useful to discuss the programme advancement (the soft spots in implementation) as well as the quality of the partnership annually when the preparation of the annual work plan is in progress.

6.3. Experts and mutual learning

The partnerships should combine Finnish higher education expertise with the needs of this sector and partner institutions in the developing countries. Thus, the Project Document must demonstrate that the Finnish HEI has the required expertise and know-how, also making it clear how these will be applied.

Key Experts from all organisations and their tasks and duties should be described in the Project Document. A Key Expert is an expert from the participating HEIs in Finland and in the partner country who will provide an input of more than 20 days during project implementation. Experts engaged for less than 20 days do not need to be presented with a biography, but they should be introduced in the Project Document. Each Key Expert should verify that she or he has the required expertise and experience and that she or he is available and committed to the tasks as specified in the paper.

It is advisable to focus on the long-term commitment of the Key Experts during the planning phase because changes in personnel have proved to be a major risk in the previous HEP projects.

6.4. Financial management of a HEP project

Payments, bookkeeping and auditing

The coordinating Finnish HEI is responsible for the financial management of the project and makes funds available to the partner HEIs for the implementation of the project. The partner agreement concluded by the project partners after the State aid decision defines money transfer procedures.

Project bookkeeping must be organised so that the project is an individual cost object in the HEIs' accounting and that project expenditure and costs are transparent and easily verified from the records. All costs have to be actual, verifiable and acceptable and caused by the carrying out of the project activities.

An audit is required at least for the final completion report. The audit must be carried out as defined in a) the General terms and conditions of state aid granted by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs for development cooperation work, and b) the Audit Instructions for a Development Co-operation Project with financial support through the HEP programme. Projects may be asked to perform an extra audit by EDUFI or the MFA during the project implementation.

Any corruption will be investigated and judged using the strict procedures of the MFA.

Changes in project implementation and reallocations within the budget

The project expected outcome and expected impact cannot be changed during the project implementation. Significant changes can be made only through a special procedure. The Project Boards should recommend changes and provide the reasons for them. The coordinating HEI informs EDUFI of the proposal. EDUFI decides within two weeks whether the change is acceptable. Approved changes are reported in the annual/completion report with a reference to the EDUFI decision.

Significant changes include the following:

- Any change in the results framework,
- Reallocation of cost items within a year which together count for more or 15 percent of the amount of certain main budget item.

Note: changes in project impact or outcome statement are not allowed and will not be approved.

Minor changes can be made by the project partners flexibly but only jointly (email between all project coordinators). Any changes should be brought to the recognition of the next Project Board meeting.

When changes are made the requirement set in the general terms and conditions of state aid granted by the MFA for development cooperation work by HEIs cannot be overruled.

6.5. Monitoring and reporting

The project is expected to organise its data collection for monitoring purposes during the inception phase.

Monitoring needs to be organised so that it feeds relevant and timely information to the decision-makers. Direct feedback from stakeholders in seminars and training sessions should be collected and key observations discussed jointly. The use of qualitative and process indicators is recommended especially for identifying changes in working methods, attitudes, and commitment. Self-evaluation workshops using participatory methods should be organised within the second year of the project implementation.

Project progress is monitored by an annual report presented to EDUFI, who compiles the information into a comprehensive annual programme report. The coordinating HEI will in collaboration with partner HEI(s) prepare and submit the required annual and final completion reports. The reports are discussed and approved by the Project Board before the submission. Reports are signed by the cooperating HEIs.

It is important to note that the HEIs must not only report on the completion of activities and the achievements but also analyse the process towards achieving the results and project/programme indicators in the annual reports. The realization of risks is reported as well as possible deviations from the work plan and corrective measures.

The qualitative final completion report summarizes the achievements of the project. The report describes the progress made in the project towards the project objectives and both the expected results and the actual results of the project.

The annual reports and the final completion report include financial reports and, when requested, audits. The financial report will compile the costs incurred during the reporting period. Items of expenditure are reported in the financial reports under the same cost items as previously approved in the budget.

The MFA and EDUFI follow up the project implementation through project reporting, coordinator meetings, consultations, and field visits. EDUFI will, if needed, request further information or clarification from the coordinating HEI whose responsibility it is to submit the reports. A delay in reporting or neglecting to report may lead to the MFA refusing to pay the granted aid and/or recovering aid already paid. The MFA and EDUFI also reserve right to make project- or programme-level evaluations.

Payments: Reports will be preliminarily checked by EDUFI. EDUFI may ask for clarifications and adjustments. The payment request will be sent directly to the MFA, which analyses the reports in detail and pays the bill.

6.6. Information dissemination

The project is expected to disseminate information actively on its objectives, advancement, and results. Different methods of information dissemination should be utilized to reach various stakeholders. Two-way communications channels should be utilized when feasible.

Information dissemination should be used also as a strategic tool to expand and deepen the result achievement of the project.

EDUFI and MFA reserve right to request information from the project on its results for specific communication purposes.

6.7. The closing of a project

It is important to allow sufficient time for phasing out and to include related activities in the operational planning to ensure that there is enough time to process decisions regarding the transfer of responsibilities. The partner organisation's fiscal years should also be taken into account when planning the timing of phasing out and the transfer of managerial and administrative duties. The Project Board approves the final report. A closing seminar can be arranged to discuss lessons learned and document good practice.

Attachments

ATTACHMENTS 1-5: Programme design – additional details

ATTACHMENT 1: Programme-level results framework

ATTACHMENT 2: Programme-level risk matrix

ATTACHMENT 3: Programme-level budget

ATTACHMENT 4: Project-level eligible costs

ATTACHMENT 5: Selection criteria in detail

ATTACHMENTS 6-11: Formats for project applications

ATTACHMENT 6: Project Document

ATTACHMENT 7: Project-level results framework

ATTACHMENT 8: Project-level risk matrix

ATTACHMENT 9: Project-level budget

ATTACHMENT 10: Initial workplan

ATTACHMENT 11: Key Expert template