
Strategy for the Activities of the EU-funded Project “National Erasmus+ Office – UKRAINE” for 2025-2026

A. National Erasmus+ Office-Ukraine (NEO – Ukraine): mission and vision

Mission: To strengthen Ukrainian education and youth capacity working on the Programme Overarching priorities to meet global challenges by contributing to internationalisation development and maximizing the usage of the EU-funded Erasmus+ Programme open opportunities, projects results and other resources.

Vision: A center of excellence and a pool of expertise contributing to the reforms in education, as well as youth and sport areas, providing high quality guides on opportunities and building capacity for the stakeholders to become Erasmus+ champion widely disseminating the Programme impact. Ambassadors of the European values in Ukraine and promoters of the Ukrainian achievements in European Educational and Research Areas.

NEO – Ukraine team will provide guides on Erasmus+ Programme new stage promotion with much attention to the Programme impact dissemination to be further utilised by the relevant beneficiaries to implement reforms in education, training, youth and sport.

NEO – Ukraine team will support the implementation of the specific guide and opportunities for the solidarity with Ukraine actions under Erasmus+ provided by European Commission in response to Russian war against Ukraine.

NEO – Ukraine team will develop the knowledge repository of the video-manuals for potential participants and current beneficiaries as an open-source resources to be used for further sustainability after the project end.

B. Overall scope of the work, objectives, mandate, actions and priority areas

General

Erasmus+ is the European Union (EU)'s programme to support education, training, youth and sport. The 2021-2027 programme places a strong focus on social inclusion, green and digital transitions, and promoting young people's participation in democratic life. It continues strengthening the cooperation between the EU and the third countries all over the world.

Overall objective

To improve the awareness, visibility, relevance, effectiveness and impact of the international components of the Erasmus+ Programme and to support its promotion and dissemination in Ukraine for Higher Education and Vocational Training and Education (VET) reforming as well as youth and sport fields.

Specific objectives

- To assist the European Commission, the EACEA, the Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, the Authorities of Ukraine, relevant Stakeholders and Beneficiaries in the implementation of the International Dimension of the Erasmus+ Programme in the fields of Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training, as well as other opportunities in Education, Youth and Sport which are open to Ukraine as a Partner Country.

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- Information and awareness raising on the Erasmus+ Programme opportunities open for Ukraine.
- To disseminate best practices and project outcomes for wider target audience.
- To provide support to the current project teams and individuals to achieve high quality results.
- NEO – Ukraine will follow closely the policy developments in Ukraine in the field of Higher Education (HE) and Vocational Training and Education (VET), and when necessary, in other Education fields, Youth and Sport.
- To cooperate with the Policy makers, national and local authorities and other international development partners of Ukraine for synergy.
- Support to the education reforms at the national level via participation in the working / expert groups.
- Capacity building of the Ukrainian HEIs and public bodies for policy dialogue with the EU in the field of higher education in line with the tasks for the EU – Ukraine Integration and EEA, EHEA, ERA.
- Support to Erasmus+ projects by consulting and disseminating their best practices and innovative initiatives to contribute to the modernisation and development purposes in higher education.
- Capacity building of the HEREs by participation in the international and local events.

The mandate

NEO cover supporting, promotion and dissemination activities related to the Erasmus+ International Dimension actions open to cooperation with Ukraine.

The support to the individuals on the available opportunities with the focus on the audience with fewer opportunities will provide a wider access to make Erasmus+ open for all.

Themes and priorities:

Priority areas for the Commission's work on International Partnership with focus on International Dimension of the Programme:

- Inclusion and diversity;
- Digital transition;
- Environment and fight against climate change;
- Participation in democratic life, common [EU] values and civic engagement.

The covered actions are:

1. International Credit mobility, managed by National Agencies in the Programme countries;
2. Capacity building in Higher Education;
3. Capacity building in Vocational Education and Training
4. Capacity building in the field of Youth;
5. Capacity building in the field of Sport;
6. Virtual Exchanges;
7. Degree mobility through Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters;
8. Jean Monnet activities.

Geographical area

The NEO – Ukraine is operated as an EU-funded project that has been implemented by the NGO “Institute for Leadership, Innovations and Development” with activities to cover all Ukraine and in cooperation with other Countries participating in the Erasmus+ Programme.

Target groups

Activities of the NEO – Ukraine are targeted at the diverse groups of stakeholders.

All Erasmus+ beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries in Ukraine at the organisational level:

- Higher education institutions, VET institutions, schools, research institutions, civil society, non-governmental organisations, enterprises, academic / professional and employers’ associations, students and youth associations, professional organisations and any other stakeholder eligible for participation in the Erasmus+ Programme in Ukraine working in the fields of education, training, youth and sport.
- National authorities, in particular those in charge of education, youth and sport and their affiliate bodies.
- Potential applicants, grantholders, beneficiaries and other stakeholders in the fields of education, training, youth and sport in Erasmus+ Countries.

All Erasmus+ beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries in Ukraine as individuals:

- Students and staff of educational institutions, researchers, young people, youth leaders and other individuals eligible for Erasmus+ opportunities.

NEO – Ukraine maintains contacts with other NEOs, especially in the Neighbourhood East region and with National Agencies in the Erasmus+ Programme Countries (in particular for partners search, exchange of good practices or organisation of joint events). Joint TCAs opportunities will be provided to Ukrainian organisations.

NEO – Ukraine keeps in contact with other EU’s Programmes for synergy and interproject cooperation.

C. Results to be achieved by the NEO – Ukraine

The results to be achieved by the NEO – Ukraine include the following:

- Improved awareness of Erasmus+ Programme for potential applicants and education, youth and sport stakeholders in general.
- Assessment of the NEO – Ukraine assistance to applicants and beneficiaries by the education, youth and sport stakeholders as a high quality.
- Contribution to the increasing knowledge and understanding of the state of education reforming in Ukraine, other relevant issues for EEA, providing expertise and timely response to the Commission and EACEA requests, in particular for the consultation exercise in the context of the selection process.

- Recommendations based on the results of cluster events with the running projects and dissemination of projects outcomes used by the HEIs and VETIs for effective of realisation the Erasmus+ projects as well as projects outcomes implementation on the national and institutional levels.
- Higher education reforms implementation in line with EHEA principles with significant support of the team of Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) as well as NEO – Ukraine.
- Fostering the Erasmus+ community by collaborating closely with the European Commission, EU Delegation to Ukraine and the National Authorities.
- Increasing knowledge about other EU education initiatives in Ukraine using system approach to dissemination of information and visibility providing.
- Synergy with NSO – eTwinning, EUROPASS, EUROGUIDANCE, EQF and Eurydice Support Centers in Ukraine and others.

D. Team, office operation and location:

- ✓ Professional team, relevant premises, office network and technologies support to the team work to ensure the smooth and high-quality services in the offline/online/hybrid formats.
- ✓ Team details, responsibilities and contacts: <https://erasmusplus.org.ua/en/about-us/project-team/>
- ✓ NEO – Ukraine office is located at the Institute of Higher Education of NAESU at:

9 Bastionna str. 8th floor, in walking distance from the Metro Zvirinetska in Pechersk Area of Kyiv, Ukraine.



- ✓ Contacts and map at: <https://erasmusplus.org.ua/en/about-us/contacts/>
- ✓ Working hours: from Monday till Friday at 9.00-18.00.
- ✓ Details at: <https://erasmusplus.org.ua/en/about-us/working-hours/>

NEO Communication Channels:

- ✓ *Tel., emails, WhatsApp, Viber, Telegram, Facebook messengers, groups and chats.*
- ✓ *Newsletters for potential and current beneficiaries.*
- ✓ *Promo and communication campaigns with EU Delegation to Ukraine.*
- ✓ *NEO – Ukraine website, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn.*

NEO team provides the following consultations:

- ✓ *Regular individual and group consultations for potential and current beneficiaries offline/online.*
- ✓ *Monthly meetings with potential and current beneficiaries will be performed by Thematic topics.*

All events and Activities will be performed according to the Work Plan placed on the NEO website pages (constantly updating):

NEO – Callender: <https://erasmusplus.org.ua/en/calendar/>

NEO – Activity Plan: <https://erasmusplus.org.ua/plan-zahodiv/>

E. NEO – Ukraine Activities

The following types of activities are planned to perform in 2025-2026:

Opportunities' promotion (online/offline/hybrid/blended formats):

- ✓ Information Days, Information sessions, Europe Days for organisations and individuals to be performed at the national and regional levels in cooperation with national authorities (MESU and MYSU) and other stakeholders of education, training, youth and sport.
- ✓ International InfoDays and TCAs to be performed in cooperation with the EU Delegation to Ukraine, DG EAC, EACEA, ICPs/NEOs/ENFPs for wider international promo, partnership search, networking and exchanges of best practices.
- ✓ Promo and communication Campaigns with EU Delegation to Ukraine (e.g. EU Study days, Europe Days etc.)
- ✓ Workshops and video-manuals on the opportunities and on how to apply to different actions calls for proposals to reach education, youth and sport fields potential beneficiaries.
- ✓ Wide dissemination of the video-manuals to reach maximum newcomers in education, youth and sport.
- ✓ Relaunch and regular updates of the NEO – Ukraine website and other Internet resources for potential beneficiaries.
- ✓ Update of the Erasmus+ webpages at the MESU and MYSU websites for promotion of the opportunities to wider target audience.
- ✓ Cooperation with the International Relation Officers and Erasmus+ Coordinators of HEIs as multipliers of the Programme in their institutions and among communities.
- ✓ Cooperate with centers/offices/units, programmes and projects supported by the European Commission for synergy and joint events.

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- ✓ Promo and other visual resources for events participants will be developed based on the Erasmus+ Programme and national specifics.

Support to current beneficiaries and dissemination of the projects results (online/offline/hybrid/blended formats):

- ✓ International and national #ErasmusDays for promo of the Erasmus+ experience of stakeholders and beneficiaries: organisations and individuals.
- ✓ Workshops for winners, trainings, consultations on how to implement the projects under martial law and local specifics, state registration of the projects.
- ✓ Participation in the project's events to promote projects activities and their results.
- ✓ Video-manuals updates on how to implement the Erasmus+ projects under martial law successfully according to the local specifics and martial law consequences.
- ✓ Relaunch and regular updates of the NEO – Ukraine website and other Internet resources for current beneficiaries.
- ✓ Cluster/ thematic workshops with HEREs to assist project teams for activities and results promotion for their further exploitation and sustainability.
- ✓ HERE team workshops/conferences for project teams to build their capacity to implement reforms according to the recommendations of European Education Area.
- ✓ InfoBox with Erasmus+ projects compendia to be disseminated during the NEO&HERE events and in open access.
- ✓ Updates of the Overview of Ukraine's participation in Erasmus+ based on the calls results, projects database by Actions.
- ✓ Projects events for their results dissemination to wider target audience.
- ✓ Preparation of the project cards with the achieved results, articles on the projects results impact at the institutional level for wider target audience.
- ✓ Participation in the Erasmus+ projects managers meetings if relevant.
- ✓ Participation in NEO/ICPs/ENFPs meetings for the capacity building of the teams.
- ✓ Regional events with Neighbouring East and other regions.

HERE team activities:

- ✓ Support to reforms at the national level in the working groups. Capacity building of the Ukrainian HEIs and knowledge hub with the open resources for the HEIs to implement reforms at the institutional level (SPHERE events and publications, thematic and cluster seminars, trainings, workshops, projects matrix by priorities of reforms, translation of the relevant materials etc.) to cooperate smoothly within EHEA and ERA. Capacity building of the HERE by participation on the international / regional and TAM events. See details on HEREs part below – Annex 1.

Synergy with other stakeholders

- ✓ Synergy with other EU Delegation projects for the Erasmus+ promotion in cooperation with the European Info Centers networks.
- ✓ Joint events with the national and local authorities responsible for education, training, youth and sport.
- ✓ Synergy events with Horizon Europe, Creative Europe and other international programmes/projects and organisations working in education, youth and sport or at the cross sectoral level.

- ✓ Participation in the international partners for development (donors') coordination meeting organised by the MESU and MYSU for synergy and to fit the projects results into the reforms (Projects Matrix updates).
- ✓ Cooperation with eTwinning Support Center, Information Erasmus+ Info Center and European Solidarity Corp, Salto-Youth, Salto-E&T, ESN, EMA, Eurodesk, EQF, Europass, Euroguidance centers, Eurydice Unit, all-Ukrainian students' unions, employers organisations, professional networks and other relevant organisations for the new opportunities dissemination.
- ✓ Pre-departure orientation workshop for the Erasmus Mundus students in cooperation with the EMA, ESN and EU Delegation to Ukraine.
- ✓ Meetings and correspondence with Embassies of the Participating Countries to Ukraine for the partnership search, visa support and update them on the cooperation results.
- ✓ Cooperation with rectors', vice-rectors and international relation officers, national and regional networks for the successful implementation of the Programme and wider impact etc.

Annex 1. Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs – Ukraine)

a. Objectives and mission of the HERE-Ukraine

The purpose of the National Teams of Higher Education Reform Experts – Ukraine is to provide a pool of expertise in order to promote reforms and enhance progress in Higher Education in Ukraine and therefore participate in the development of policies and reforms in Higher Education in Ukraine.

The mission of the HEREs-Ukraine:

- Support policy development in Ukraine by supporting modernisation reform processes and strategies in Higher Education, in close contact with the local authorities concerned and in particular as regards for instance curriculum development, modernisation of governance, management and functioning of higher education systems and institutions, strengthening relations between the higher education sector and the wider societal and economic environment, etc.
- Support policy dialogue with the EU in the field of Higher Education possibly in synergy and coordination with the various policy platforms established under the Erasmus+ programme or other potential initiatives established by, and under the guidance of, the European Commission.
- Support Erasmus+ projects by disseminating their results and outcomes, notably best practices and innovative initiatives and exploiting them for modernisation and development purposes.

b. Geographical scope

HERE – Ukraine is operating as a part of the EU-funded project that has been implementing by the NGO “ILID”.

c. Profile of the HEREs

The HERE scheme is a “peer-to-peer” exercise. Although HEREs do not replace the work done by Ministries, Rectors Conferences, Quality Assurance Agencies, academic recognition centres, NEOs, etc., they are well embedded in the national higher education environment and cooperate closely with national authorities.

Members of the national team of HEREs have held one of the following positions (or a combination thereof): (Vice) Rectors, Deans and Heads of Department, Senior Academics, Responsible of administrative services (such as International Relations Offices, Quality Assurance departments, Career orientation services, etc.), Ministry officials dealing with higher education, Other Higher Education experts and researchers, Student.

Whatever their status or functions, HERE-Ukraine team is highly motivated and concerned by their overall mission, available to attend and actively participate in the proposed events, willing to report widely about the results and to initiate activities locally.

Further to their appointment, HERE-Ukraine have signed a **Code of Conduct** stating their responsibilities and duties in relation to their activities as HEREs. In particular, the absence of conflict of interests and the experts' availability to participate in the activities abroad and the coordination meetings in his/her home country will be essential.

d. Size and composition of the HERE team – Ukraine

HERE team – Ukraine consists of 13 members with the relevant expertise in higher education field and was officially appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine for the period of 2023-2027.

A Chair is identified by the national team of HEREs by voting with the responsibility of coordinating the activities of the group and being the privileged contact person for external stakeholders.

As a group, national team of HEREs has the necessary knowledge and expertise to provide counselling to institutions and peers on the different areas covered under their mandate. In this context, the composition of the team provides a suitable balance between the various profiles (academic/administrative/Student representatives) and fields of competences. The inclusion of at least one student within the team should be ensured.

In order to ensure that each members of the team have the knowledge and competences required to fulfil the tasks assigned, training will be provided through international training events such as conferences, seminars and study visits.

e. Activities

In order to fulfil their mission, with the support of NEO-Ukraine national team of HERE performs activities at national and international level, targeting primarily:

- All Erasmus+ beneficiaries as well as potential Erasmus+ beneficiaries in the country (i.e. higher education institutions and individuals; civil society; non-governmental organisations; enterprises, professional organisations, research institutions, schools, vocational training institutions; etc.) and any other stakeholder in the field of higher education.
- National authorities in charge of higher education and their affiliated bodies.

1. NEO support to HERE activities

NEO – Ukraine supports the HERE activities as follows:

- Together with the HEREs, follow the policy developments in the field of higher education in Ukraine and beyond.

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- Support and coordinate the local activities of the team of HERE-Ukraine. Ensure the efficient local follow-up and dissemination of information, especially of training and other activities HERE-Ukraine took part in abroad.
 - Participate in the process of selection, appointment and renewal of the HERE in Ukraine.
 - Establish the HERE's-Ukraine annual work programme and monitor their activities. In particular, the NEO-Ukraine manages part of the costs incurred by the HERE's participation in external events (travel costs, daily allowances) and the costs related to local initiatives involving the HERE team.
 - Identify gaps in the higher education sector of Ukraine and propose Technical Assistance Missions to ensure expertise from Programme countries is disseminated to local stakeholders.
 - Prepare reports about the activities implemented by the HERE team for the Agency and the Commission Services.
 - Disseminate information about local HERE activities to relevant stakeholders and the wider public (e.g. via the NEO website or social media).
 - Keep the national authorities informed on the HEREs' work programmes, as well as on planned and implemented activities.
 - Where applicable and upon request from the Agency, organise regional (/cross-regional) activities for their team of HEREs.

2. HERE activities at international level

Activities at international level are organised by an external service provider, under the supervision of the European Commission and the Executive Agency, and correspond to the following types:

- **Thematic seminars** designed to meet specific needs common in various Partner Countries. The aim of the thematic seminars is to provide new knowledge and practical experience. They may include field visits at higher education institutions or other relevant stakeholders. They will also provide a platform for questions, discussion and exchange of practices on specific topics and processes.
- **Study visits** that will take place in prominent EU or Partner Country universities, focusing on specific topics and fields of interest, common to various Partner Countries. Such visits will provide an opportunity to meet with academic and non-academic staff directly responsible for the introduction and the implementation of specific reforms or policies in the field of Higher Education. The visits will include meetings with several types of stakeholders as well as presentations, question & answer sessions and debates.
- **International large-scale conferences** including key note speeches by prominent experts and specific workshops dedicated to the attention of the HERE teams of all Partner Countries. Such conferences will deal with themes and topics connected to the core issues of the modernisation of the higher education sector in fields such as governance, management, funding, curriculum development and lifelong learning.
- **Technical assistance missions:** Specific technical expertise and advice by EU or Partner Country experts will be provided locally to HERE teams to carry out training and consultancy activities in the Partner Countries, targeted at a wide audience of university staff, officials and other higher education stakeholders. The service provider will identify

relevant experts, who can be entrusted with such short term missions. These technical assistance activities will be organised upon specific request from the HERE team, channelled by the NEO-Ukraine, at national or regional level.

- **Surveys / publications:** HERE-Ukraine may be involved in the preparation of surveys or publications commissioned by the European Commission or EACEA in relation to the Higher Education sector, its institutions, policies, reforms and modernisation process.
- **Virtual expert community and material:** HERE team is provided with a web platform to communicate, liaise and exchange. This includes the provision of information materials, brochures and case studies.

The support services required for the preparation, implementation and monitoring of the international HERE activities will be provided by the European Commission and EACEA with the support of an external provider.

3. HERE activities at national level

In addition to the international activities referred to above, HERE teams performs counselling and advisory activities at national level and more concretely:

- **At institutional level,** HERE's work consists in counselling, advising and providing assistance to higher education institutions with regards to the introduction and implementation of reforms.

Higher Education Reform Experts are actively involved in all kinds of promotional and awareness-raising activities about HE reforms in general and EU higher education programmes and initiatives in particular. Experts with specialist knowledge and experience may be recruited for the development and delivery of training activities for HEREs in those areas.

- **At national level,** HERE-Ukraine provides support to the national authorities in designing, implementing and monitoring policy reforms in the field of higher education. Overall, this includes the following types of activities:
 - Advice and expertise;
 - Involvement in policy making process, preparation of national reports, codes, draft laws & decrees;
 - Organising or participating in seminars, workshops, roundtables (teaching, training, informing, disseminating);
 - Lecturing, participation in panel discussions and debates;
 - Interviews (radio, TV, newspaper, specialized press), public appearances;
 - Drafting of reports, analysis, studies;
 - Publication of papers on the HE reform processes in Ukraine.

f. Appointment of the HEREs

For the period 2023-2027, HERE team was officially appointed by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and the student was added to the team.

In case of changes, reasoned by the low performance or other, new HERE teams will be proposed by the NEO-Ukraine and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. This proposal will be submitted to receive the endorsement of the EU Delegation to Ukraine and to be confirmed by the EACEA in line with the criteria defined by the European Commission.

g. Management of the HERE teams

The setting up of the HERE's initiative together with the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the HERE's activities in support to the higher education modernisation and reform processes in Ukraine is based on joint responsibilities shared between the European and Ukrainian responsible bodies.

The European Commission is responsible for the general steering of the HEREs' initiative according to its political priorities. In particular, the Commission provides the guidance related to the themes to be considered for training and events. This includes also steering of the content, priority setting, overall monitoring of the activities and budget of the action, definition of the selection criteria and profiles of the HEREs. It also includes regular review and approval of the HEREs overall objectives and results achieved based on ex-ante & ex-post information, reports and presentations submitted by the EACEA.

The EACEA is responsible for validating the selection of the individual HEREs in accordance with the criteria and profiles defined by the European Commission. The EACEA is also responsible for approving and monitoring the HEREs' activity plan and budget included in the NEO grant agreement, ensuring a coherent and coordinated approach for all involved countries. Finally, it is also responsible for managing the service contract with the external provider that will support the organisation of HEREs' activities at international level.

The EU Delegation to Ukraine is closely associated in all HERE activities. They endorse the appointment of the HERE in Ukraine.

The National Authority (the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine) propose the appointment of the national HERE team, in liaison with the NEO-Ukraine. They set strategic goals and targets for the work of the HEREs, in the light of the state of progress of higher education reforms at national and institutional level.

The National Erasmus+ Office – Ukraine (NEO – Ukraine) provides administrative, logistical and financial support to the HEREs, supporting and coordinating their activities, following the strategic goals and targets set by the national authorities. They act as intermediaries between the EU (EACEA) and the HERE teams, as well as between the Erasmus+ Capacity Building projects and the HERE team. In close cooperation with the National Authorities, NEOs participate in the process of appointment of the Higher Education Reform Experts.

From a management point of view, NEO-Ukraine will:

- Implement the budget allocated to the HEREs as part of grant agreement (see section "H. Funding" below);
- Monitor the activities of the HEREs – Ukraine;
- Provide feedback on HERE activities in the framework of the progress and final reports to be submitted to the EACEA.
- Keep the national authorities informed on the implementation of the HERE's activities.

NEO – Ukraine coordination procedures and tools envisaged to manage the HERE team are as follows:

- Senior Manager is appointed with a task to coordinate HEREs activities;
- HERE annual work programme will be developed based on consultations with HERE Chair, HEREs and the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine via meetings, e-mails and phone conversations;

- The gaps and critical topics in the higher education, the content of events is to be identified with the Chair and HEREs via meetings, e-mails and phone conversations, making proposals for Technical Assistance Missions;
- HERE team regular meetings are to be organized twice a year for planning and reporting (and working meetings – back-to-back to HERE events);
- Local events – Cluster events, TAM seminars and annual Bologna conference, follow-up events are to be organized for improving HEREs' competencies, for presenting outcomes of the EACEA seminars, conference, study visits by HEREs as well as to build capacities of HEIs to implement reforms and synergy project teams;
- Support to HEREs with logistic and financial provisions for participation in local and international events;
- Regular updating HERE team page at the NEO-Ukraine website as well as information about HERE activities in Facebook;
- HERE reporting – collecting individual prepared in frame of the template and developing reports about the activities implemented by the HERE team for the EACEA and the Commission services as well as for local authorities and HEIs;
- Assessment of HERE individual performance during the year according to the certain specific tasks carried out to be submitted to EACEA approval;
- Liaising between HEREs and HEIs for consulting and training per request as well as mass media for interviews etc.

h. Funding of the HERE activities

The travel and subsistence costs incurred by the HERE for their participation in international events, as well as the direct costs related to local initiatives involving the HERE, are covered by the NEO grant agreement. No remuneration is foreseen for the HEREs, but a limited part of the NEO budget can be used to compensate certain specific tasks carried out by the HEREs. The organisation of the international HERE activities where relevant is financed through a service contract with an external service provider.