

SMK University of Applied Social Sciences (further - SMK) strives to be well-known, globally-oriented higher education institution contributing to sustainable growth, social cohesion and society development. Internationalization is seen as horizontal priority at SMK, covering all aspects of SMK activities. SMK internationalization strategy is embedded in overall SMK strategy 2021-2030 where internationalization is inevitable element in all areas of activities.

Within the strategy period, SMK aims to focus on these directions:

1. **Promote international mobility of students and staff** (more and diverse opportunities to gain experience abroad, ongoing quality assurance and monitoring of mobility activities, development of reliable partners network in EU and non-EU countries);
2. **Improve student mobility, increase the number of external partnerships for students, and remove internal academic and administrative barriers to such mobility.** One of the ways in which this will be achieved is by reinforcing the students' relationships with external parties, more attention for mobilities for people with fewer opportunities;
3. **Develop support system for foreign students**, seeking their full integration in SMK and society (support system implementation, ensure that all documentation needed is available in English language, Buddy mentorship programme, integration programmes etc.);
4. **Ensure clear entry points to the SMK** for academic staff, students and partners from all over the world. We will make it easier for foreign students to join SMK, and we will strengthen international services with up-to-date course catalogues, study descriptions, accommodation services;
5. **Increase internationalization at home dimension** (increase of international faculty ratio, integrating intercultural competences development in study curricula, implement blended learning mobilities, joint study modules with international partners);
6. **Create international educational products** (summer courses for students and staff, intensive language courses for foreign students, summer camps for pupils from abroad);
7. **International recognition of SMK study programmes** (accreditation of international business programmes, constant updated of information for Multirank);
8. **Strengthen academic partnerships and collaboration** according identified strategic areas of SMK (joint researches, R&D projects with well-known academic partners, active engagement in international associations, development of joint international projects, etc.);
9. **Design a process for approval and strategic priorities for international cooperation projects** to make sure that the SMK is fully committed and offering the right support for cooperation activities e.g. allocation of administrative support for accreditation, budget and finances, and student affairs at all relevant levels
10. **Enhance the quality and visibility of international activities and ensure SMK visibility in international arena** (implement target marketing campaigns with integrated storytelling elements, participation in main academic events, exhibitions with speaking engagement, exchange of information with Erasmus+ partners, creation and support of international alumni community, active participation in academic networks).

While implementing these directions SMK reinforces international image of the institution and seeks the name of active and assuring study quality institution in European higher education space. Moreover, these activities will contribute to enhancement of overall attractiveness and competitiveness of Lithuanian higher education. Therefore, SMK chooses its partners strategically and emerges international branding and popularity in targeted markets.

Participating in the Erasmus+ Programme has been an integral part of SMK's institutional and international strategy. Thanks to this programme SMK is able to enhance the mobility of staff and students at SMK, as well as the participation in European and international cooperation projects. SMK cooperates with over 90 educational institutions across 28 countries in Europe in order to ensure student and staff mobility through Erasmus+ programme. Bilateral agreements are signed with non-EU partners and joint initiatives implemented through International Credit mobility scheme and CBHE. Our partners come from different Asian (South Korea, Taiwan, China, Lao, Cambodia), Central Asian (Uzbekistan), Eastern partnership countries (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, Azerbaijan), Russia, South Africa, Western Balkans (Kosovo). During upcoming period (2021-2027) SMK is planning to expand its cooperation with ACP countries for joint mobilities under KA107 and continue cooperation with already existing partners. For SMK also very important is membership in educational organizations. SMK is a member of BMDA, CEEMAN, EURASHE, EAIE, TCI Network, etc. More active participation in these networks is foreseen for the future.

Extensive European partners allow SMK provide students and staff possibilities to move around Europe freely, using the Schengen area possibilities, and develop their education at any European university/college they want. Other geographical areas of partnership interest are the USA, Africa, Asia, Eastern Partnerships, Western Balkans, seeking to create and contribute to multinational, intercultural and global academic community.

Target groups of mobility activities are staff and students of first cycle. At the moment our outgoing and incoming students make approximately 40 participants yearly. In the new period SMK seeks to increase incoming/outgoing students' mobility by 10%.

In order to increase our current teacher mobility, there is a necessity to create a clear system for mobility period abroad recognition, as well as to integrate means encouraging mobilities among those, who have never participated in mobility activities. This will be done by ensuring mentoring and support system as well as implementing mobilities where newcomer and experienced staff member are participating jointly.

Receiving visiting lecturers adds to the international character of our education. Opportunities provided to our own staff to visit universities around and outside Europe directly lead to enhanced cooperation in joint teaching programmes and multi-lateral research activities. SMK administrative staff also benefits from international cooperation activities.

SMK currently is the biggest private higher education institution in Lithuania, providing first cycle studies in different study fields – Arts, Social Sciences, Computer sciences, Health, etc. SMK has participated in more than 100 collaborative international projects funded by different programmes (Erasmus+, Structural Funds, cross-border cooperation programmes), which helped to strengthen partnerships, implement joint activities, carry out joint research, prepare methodological material and publications. Participation in cooperation project will be further supported, ensuring new and innovative educational products development in order to modernize institution, contribute to society well-being and European identity encouragement.

SMK has a dedicated International Relations Office (further - IRO), which is responsible for coordinating international cooperation and providing administrative support for different international activities (mobilities, projects, international events). IRO assists SMK staff and students to seek and secure partnerships and support for their academic mobility, cooperation and research. The SMK Institutional Assessment and Quality Assurance Policy helps achieve excellence in education and outreach activities.

Programme contribution towards SMK modernisation and in the context of the Modernisation Agenda

SMK is a community that reacts to fast change of the world and knowledge, trying to foresee the most wanted and demanded skills of the future that is how we create a modern institution of higher education. SMK provides not only theoretical knowledge, but concentrate on building foundation of

values for the whole life career and consistent personal development, and Erasmus+ highly contributes to this aspiration. SMK is and will continue to promote educational, professional and personal development of people in education, training, youth, in Europe and beyond, thereby contributing to sustainable growth, jobs and social cohesion and to strengthening European identity. As indicated in **renewed EU agenda for higher education and the Bologna process** Erasmus+ is a key instrument for building a European education area, supporting the implementation of the European strategic cooperation in the field of education and training through mobility and cooperation projects, flexible learning opportunities (blended, virtual mobilities). None the less digital tools will be used while managing programme (European Student Card, OLS, EWP, App, etc.).

SMK will further promote international experience, where spending time abroad while studying, doing internship, learning and exchanging ideas are the norm. This will be done in wide spread dissemination of Erasmus+ mobility and cooperation opportunities among students and staff. For students transparent and full recognition system of gained experience will be automatically recognized and transferred to Diploma Supplement. Experience of European identity in all its diversity will be considered through social and integrational programme, buddy system.

During this period SMK will dedicate its efforts to encourage international experience of those facing difficult situations (e.g. part-time working students, students raising children, students with fewer opportunities). Incentive schemes, different modalities of learning experiences will be applied, seeking to remove barriers of participation. On the other hand, SMK will also consider staff needs, especially those with lower language skills (while arranging mobilities with colleagues who can speak English), family commitments (while providing additional support for childcare during mobility period), those first times participating in mobility programme (ensuring that more experienced colleague will join the mobility).

Response to emergency situations

Reflecting on situation that happened in Spring 2020, SMK also carefully considers implementation of physical international activities and will further consider situation regarding possible outbreaks of COVID-19. With this regard, Erasmus+ programme also helps to:

Ensure academic continuity: Together with partners constant communication and exchange of best practises allows to ensure educational continuity as feasible in situations where students, faculty, and staff may not be able to be on campus. Exchange of teaching resources among partners will be supported and encouraged, integration of blended, virtual mobility models will be discussed and promoted seeking to ensure possibilities for international experiences using different modalities.

Provide up to date information and ensure smooth communication: Providing timely and accurate information is a critical component response to COVID-19 or similar outbreaks that might happen in the future. This was the case in Spring and Autumn terms of 2020 where partners constantly shared information with students and staff seeking to help them to find best solutions and be informed about safe choices.