



# **Improving *Governance* Practices at Palestinian Higher Education Institutions**

## **Second Annual Evaluation Report Internal Quality Assurance Measures**

Due date of deliverable: **11, 2018**

Actual achievement date: **08, 2019**

**Project Coordinator:**

**An-Najah National University**



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

*The UniGov project has been funded with support from the European Union. This document reflects the view only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.*

## Project Details:

Based on the communications: "Increasing the impact of EU development strategy: an agenda for change" and "European higher education in the work", this project seeks to support the modernisation, accessibility, and internationalization of HEIs in Palestine, through addressing five cross-cutting aspects of governance. More specifically, this project seeks to:

1. Create an enabling environment to adopt decent governance, management and accountability practices
2. Establish a clear governance framework, including well-defined and clear mission and goals.
3. Establish effective governance and management structures
4. Stimulate autonomy and accountability,
5. Strengthen links with different stakeholders (i.e. improve participation) in strategic planning and development activities (this will reduce the gap between recent graduates and the industry).

UniGov project will initially seek to address weaknesses in the existing governance systems across HEIs in Palestine. Through establishing a comparative study with European benchmark universities, we seek to establish a governance framework and adopt innovative practices to improve existing structures. The partnership between European universities and Palestinian universities is expected to continue effectively over 36 months. EU partners will assess and analyze the existing situation, recommend necessary changes, and transfer necessary experience to implement effective governance structure (through training, workshops and site visits). The European partners will be responsible for establishing action plans to address the challenges in the existing governance structures in Palestinian Universities.

## Project Members:

Partner No	Partner Name	Abbreviation	Country
P1	An-Najah National University	ANNU	Palestine
P2	Birzeit University	BZU	Palestine
P3	The Islamic University of Gaza	IUG	Palestine
P4	Arab American University Jenin	AAUJ	Palestine
P5	Palestine Polytechnic University	PPU	Palestine
P6	Universita' Di Siena	UNISI	Italy
P7	University of Ljubljana	UL	Slovenia
P8	University College Cork	UCC	Ireland
P9	Mediterranean Universities Union	UNIMED	Italy
P10	University of Évora	UE	Portugal

## Document Information:

<b>Project Name</b>	UniGOV, Improving Governance Practices and Palestinian Higher Education Institutions
<b>Project no.</b>	573684-EPP-1-2016-1-PS-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP
<b>Deliverable</b>	D4.3 – Second Annual Evaluation Report (Internal Quality Assurance Measures)
<b>Work Package</b>	WP4 – Project Quality and Evaluation
<b>Version</b>	1.0
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<b>Summary</b>	This report summarizes the internal quality assurance measures conducted as part of the overall project evaluation process. It represents the main activities and the overall results of the conducted assessments for the capacity building activities along with recommendations to improve the project overall performance.
<b>Last Updated</b>	August 05, 2019

## Dissemination Level:

<b>PU</b>	Public	
<b>PP</b>	Restricted to other program participants (including the Commission Services)	
<b>RE</b>	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	
<b>CO</b>	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	✓



## 1. Introduction

This document aims to highlight the internal quality assurance measures conducted during the period (06/2018 – 06/2019). It features both an evaluation of the capacity building activities (the main theme of the evaluation period) and an assessment of the project overall performance. These measures were documented within the Project Quality Assurance and Monitoring Plan as part of the project Performance Measurement System. These measures were executed to support the consortium effort for a successful implementation of the UniGOV project (project management) and to ensure the project achieves its short and long term goals (project impact). The findings of the implemented assessments will be discussed in the nearest project management meeting to decide on the corrective actions and to serve as a roadmap for the needed improvements.

During this period, several measures were implemented to evaluate the capacity building activities as well as to capture the consortium feedback on the overall project performance. While the first group of measures consisted of different customized evaluative questionnaire for each activity (online training, face-to-face training, and study visits), the second part was a general evaluation online questionnaire that asks the consortium about their opinion and feedback on the following:

- Management and Coordination;
- Project monitoring and quality assurance;
- Overall impression of the project ongoing progress, workload and resources;
- Partnership and collaboration.

The analysis and findings of these activities show that the overall project performance is very good. Most of the training activities were evaluated with an excellent outcome and participants expressed an overall agreement on the importance of the topics presented during the training activities. On the otherhand, most of the partners (5 participants) in the online questionnaire agreed that the overall management, quality assurance and monitoring, workload and resources, and the partnership and collaboration activities were clear, sufficient, effective and efficient. However, the findings show that there are some weaknesses within these domains and some recommendations were submitted as suggestion for improvements. For example, some of participants raise an issue of the need for a training of trainers to be able to transfer knowledge.

The next section of the document will highlight the implemented internal QA measures. The third and fourth sections will describe and highlight the major findings and analysis of the conducted assessments. The final section will present the major recommendations for improving the project overall performance.

## 2. Quality Assurance measures

The internal quality assurance measures are organized to show the management structure of the project, its governing bodies, committees and people, their inter-relations and obligations, the decision processes, and meetings' courses of action. To this endeavor, the QA team during this evaluative period undertook the following measures:

1. Provide feedback on the submitted deliverables.
2. Conduct a review of the expected outputs to identify any missing deliverables, and communicated the findings with the consortium.
3. Participate in the evaluation process of the deliverables to make sure they were in line with the project quality standards and satisfies the requirements of the Palestinian partners.
4. Develop and conduct an evaluation questionnaire to collect partners feedback about the project overall performance.
5. Design and execute different questionnaires to evaluate the individual capacity building activities.
6. Develop individual reports on the capacity building assessments.
7. Develop this report (The second annual internal evaluation report)
8. Collect and classify the set of recommendations to improve the project management, coordination, quality assurance, dissemination, and development.

The main theme (WP2 lead by the UCC) of this evaluation period was a capacity building for the Palestinian partners. This WP consisted of different activities, first a training needs assessment was executed to determine the topics and governance domains that could be developed. Then a customized online-training course was developed by UCC consisting of four modules (the university and its contexts, governance in the public sector, academic governance and quality, and management techniques). A specific questionnaire (a copy is available in annex 1) was developed to evaluate the outcomes of this activity. The survey featured four sections, the general info section, course content, Course Impact and Participation, and overall feedback). This activity was directly followed by a face-to-face training held in Ramallah and offered by different EU partners on topics such as strategic planning, quality assurance and evaluation systems, human resources management, institutional and academic governance. Another survey was designed to capture trainees' feedback on the presented topics, the training settings, and the trainers' skills and expertise. A copy of this activity questionnaire form is available in Annex 2. Finally, three out four study visits were conducted in which each of them addresses a specific theme. For example, the study visit to Ljubljana University featured the strategic planning, the Siena study visit was about human resources management, and the UCC study visit featured both institutional and academic governance. The employed evaluation tools for this activity was a questionnaire (Annex 3) targeting at capturing participants experience and how they could apply what has been learned within their local institutions and a thematic analysis of their individual study visit reports.

The second component of this evaluation report was a general online questionnaire (Annex 4 Part 2) aims at getting partners' opinions on the overall project performance. This questionnaire is one of two parts used to evaluate project deliverables annually. Since this period (WP2) activities and outcomes were not a report or a document, the second part (Annex 4 Part 1) of the evaluation process wasn't executed.

### 3. Capacity Building

This section represents the analysis and findings of the capacity building activities. The following subsections elaborate more on each activity.

#### 3.1 Online Training

This subsection serves as an evaluation to the online training program developed by our colleagues at the University College Cork (UCC) launched in December 2018. The program consists of two units: A set of specialist modules designed specifically for the UniGov project based on the project training needs analysis conducted and prioritized with the Palestinian partners, and the second unit is a general training for academic and professional services staff suggested by UCC HR in collaboration with Epigeum. While the former comprises four modules (The University and its Contexts, Governance in the Public Sector, Academic Governance and Quality, and Management Techniques), the latter is a series of lessons on university leadership and management.

The training program employed a continuous improvement philosophy where the implementation of a strategic plan in any organization involves changes and improvements to the processes, policies and systems. This means that a culture change is needed to create and derive a continuous improvement while maximising resources in the delivery of high-quality services. Altogether, the program aims to strengthen participating partners' administrative and academic staff knowledge and skills in the different governance and managerial areas.

Total respondents in the evaluation process were 12 participants, representing the various partners and different participants backgrounds as summarized in the figures 1 and 2.

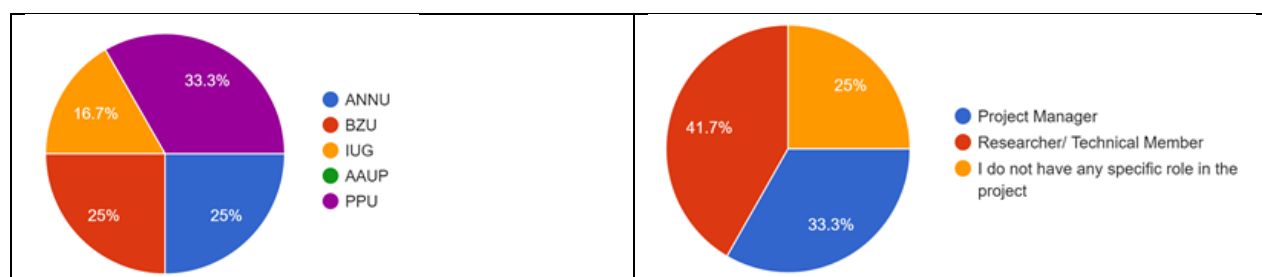
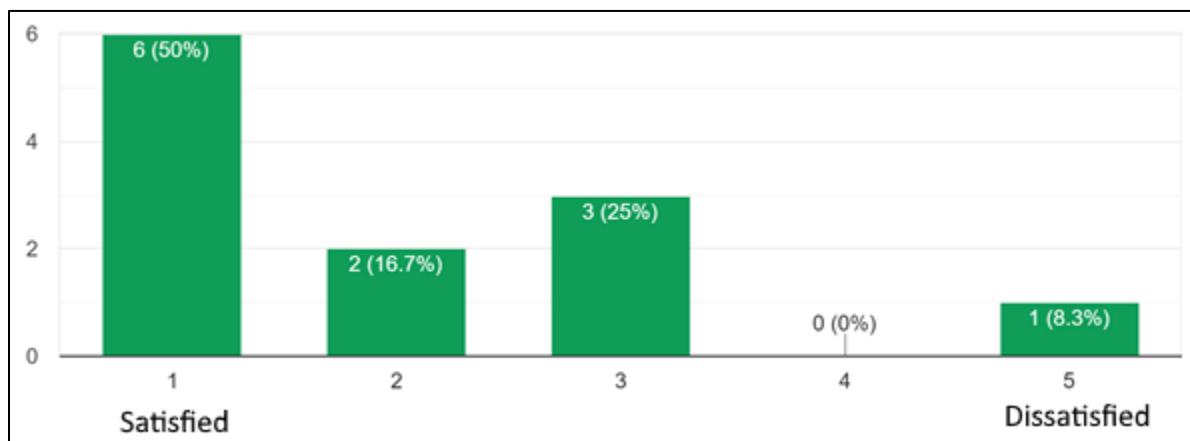


Figure 1: Respondents by their Institution

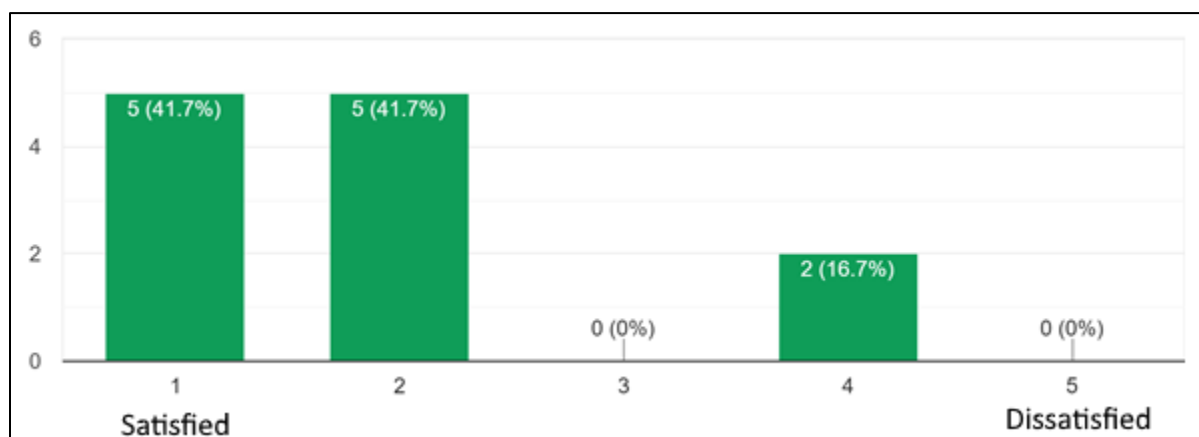
Figure 2: Respondents by their Role

Overall, the project consortium were able to deliver a successful capacity-building activity of online training following a participatory approach. As shown in figure 3 and 4, the trainees show that they were satisfied with the training platform and the course content and its coherence. The analysis reveals that there is an overall agreement among trainees in which they will apply the knowledge and skills gained within their institutions and they expressed an interest in disseminating such knowledge to their peers, as well as they recommend the course to other

members of their institutions. In general, the overall feedback on the online training program was positive as the majority of participants indicated that the material was enlightening, informative, and comprehensive. However, some of them pointed out that the program modules needs a lot of time to go through all the material.



*Figure 3: Overall participants' satisfaction with training platform*



*Figure 4: Overall participants' satisfaction with training material*

Participants indicated that they have covered almost all the course material and modules. Figure 5 presents the level of accomplishment for each module of the course. It is clear that all governance specialized modules had been accomplished with more than 50% among all participants.

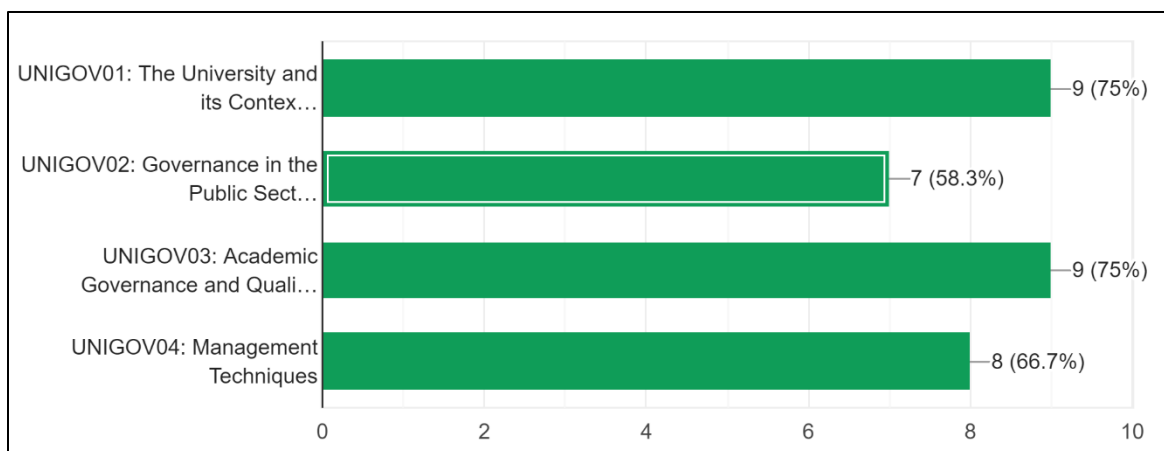


Figure 5: course module coverage

As shown in figure 6, there was also a mutual agreement among participants regarding the value of the course. For instance, more than 80% of participants confirmed that the course provided them with new knowledge and improved their skills, and the time invested in the course was inevitable. On the other hand, 50% of them indicated that the course material was easy to digest and applicable to their institutions. Regarding the second unit of the training program (leadership and management), the questionnaire doesn't cover this course material as the evaluation process was aiming at assessing the courses developed specifically for the project.

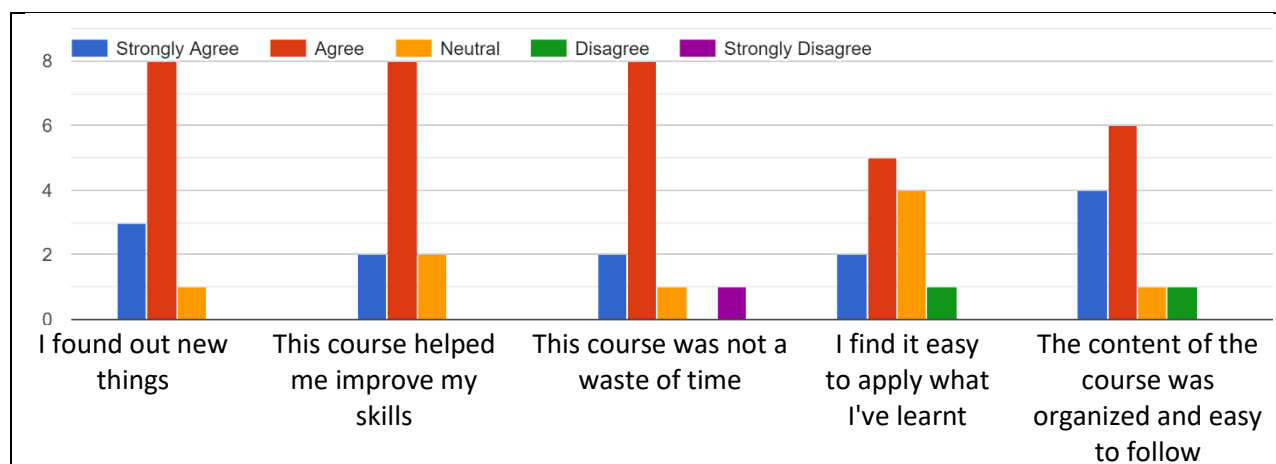
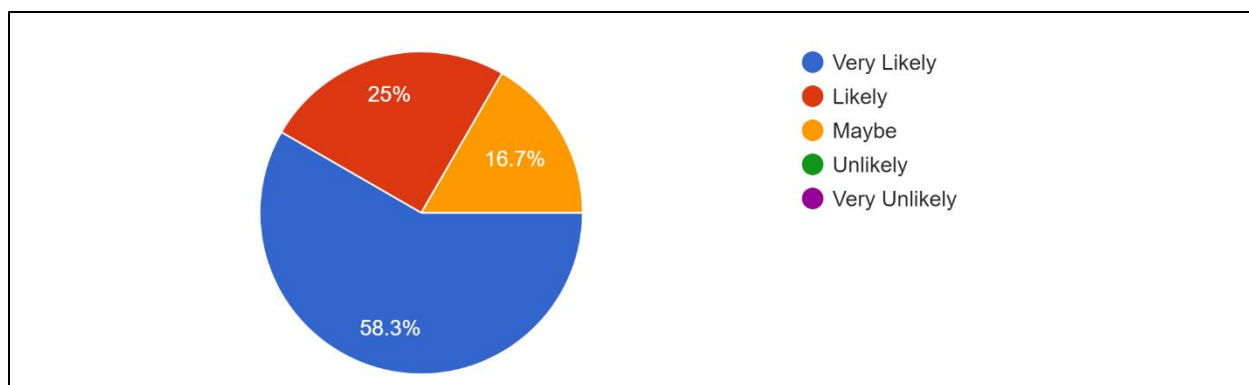


Figure 6: Value Derived from the Course Modules

Figure 7 below represents the level of participants agreement on recommending the training program for other colleagues and practitioners.



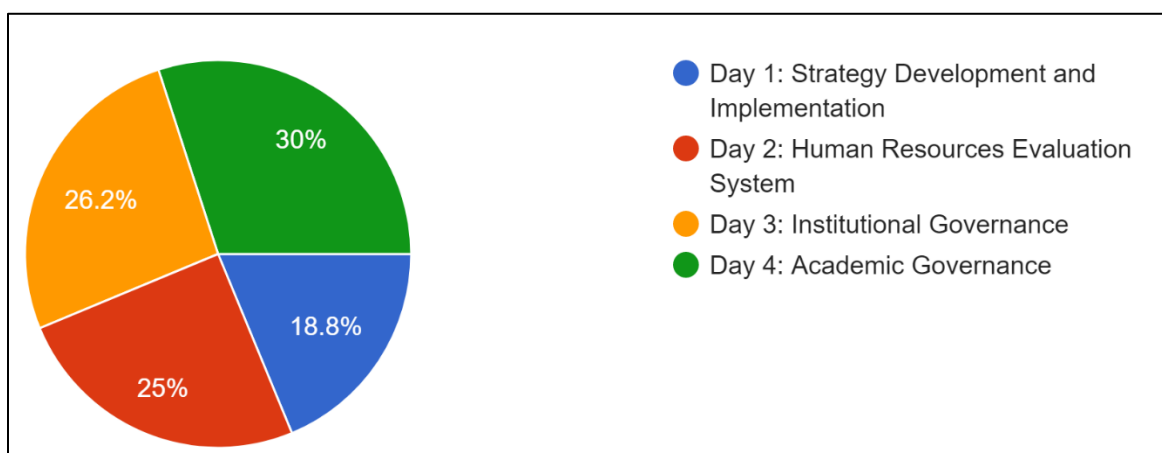


*Figure 7: Percentage of participants who will recommend the course for others*

### 3.2 Face-to-Face Training

This subsection highlights the evaluation measures conducted for the face-to-face training activity during the period (27/01/2019 – 31/01/2019) in Ramallah, Palestine. The training sessions delivered by the EU partners in the topics of (Strategy Formulation and Implementation, HR Evaluation, Institutional Governance, and Academic Governance) to their Palestinian counterparts. These training sessions were selected and developed based on the analysis and requirements of the participating Palestinian universities.

Total respondents in the evaluation process during the 4-days training sessions were 80. There is almost an equal distribution of respondents in every training session. The following chart provides a clear view of the daily participants. However, in the first day not all attendees participated in the evaluation process.

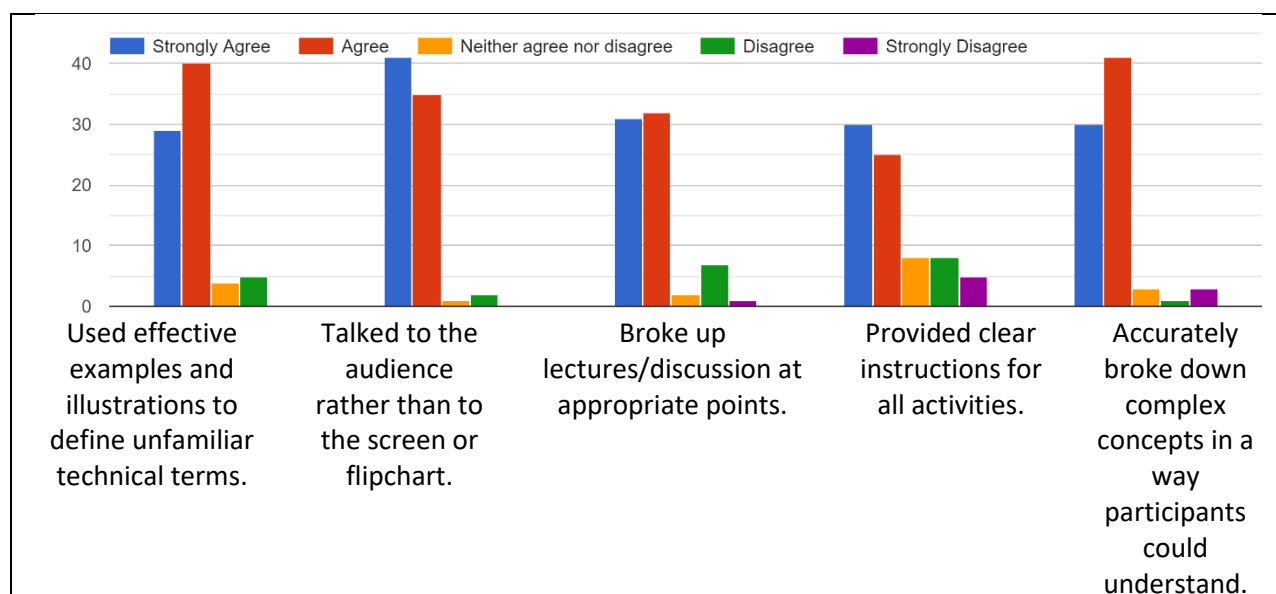


Overall, the project consortium were able to deliver a successful capacity-building activity of face-to-face training on governance issues. The trainees show that they were satisfied with the training methodology, the course content and its coherence, as well as the training venue. The analysis also show that there is an overall agreement among trainees in which they will apply the

knowledge and skills gained within their institutions and they expressed an interest in disseminating such knowledge to their peers.

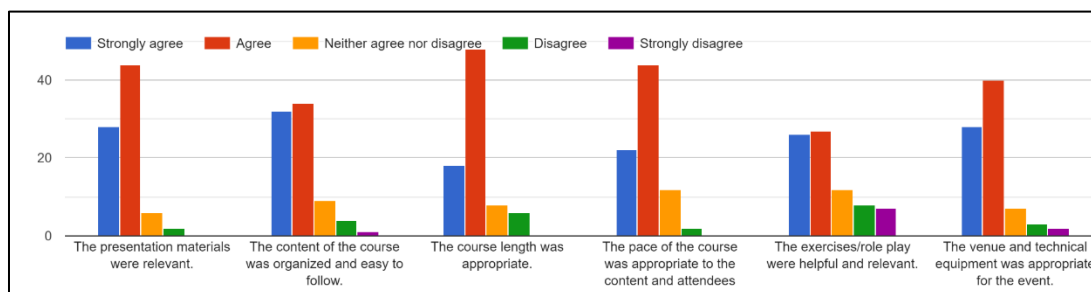
On the individual training days, there were some discrepancies among respondents on their agreement on the activities and instructions. For example in the first and fourth sessions “Strategy Development and Implementation, Academic Governances”, respondents expressed that they were satisfied with engagement in the conducted practices and activities, which makes the presented concepts easily to grasp. While this also applies to the second and third sessions (HR Evaluation and Institutional Governance) to some extent, respondents show some level of dissatisfaction in terms of the activities and pointed that these session were almost a seminar rather than a practical training.

### Part 1: Trainer’s Competencies (trainer’s knowledge/skills)



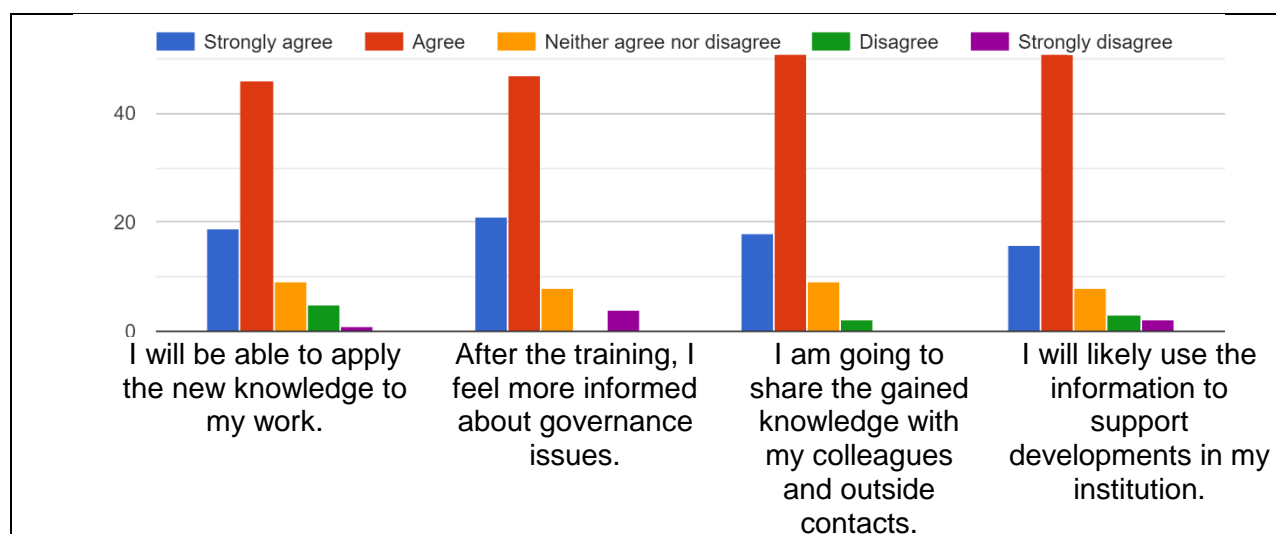
As shown in the chart, there are an overall agreement between participants that trainers have the proper skills and competences to deliver training sessions. It seems that some participants were not satisfied with the provided instructions, which could be considered a result of cultural and language differences.

## Part 2: Course content and the training venue



There were an overall satisfaction among trainees in terms of the presented material and coherence of courses. However, third of trainees expressed that there were some lack of practices within individual sessions (mainly within the second and third sessions). In terms of the venue and technical equipment around 85% of trainees agreed on the appropriateness of the training room.

## Part 3: Course Outcomes



As the chart shows, the level of agreement among participants exceeds 80% in terms of applying the new knowledge and skills. Most of trainees expressed their willingness to apply the learned concepts in the institution they belong to, as well as they will work on transferring such knowledge to their peers. For example, trainees in the first session “Strategy Development” expressed that they have learned new concepts and techniques for formulating and implementing strategy. In the second session “HR Evaluation”, trainees pointed to concept of returning to reasons for implementing evaluation that will lead to the how and the techniques. In addition, they expressed on the new learned way of quantifying the various steps and stages of the evaluation-complicated process. In the institutional governance session, learners grasped the concept and importance of participation dimension in the decision-making process; and how to

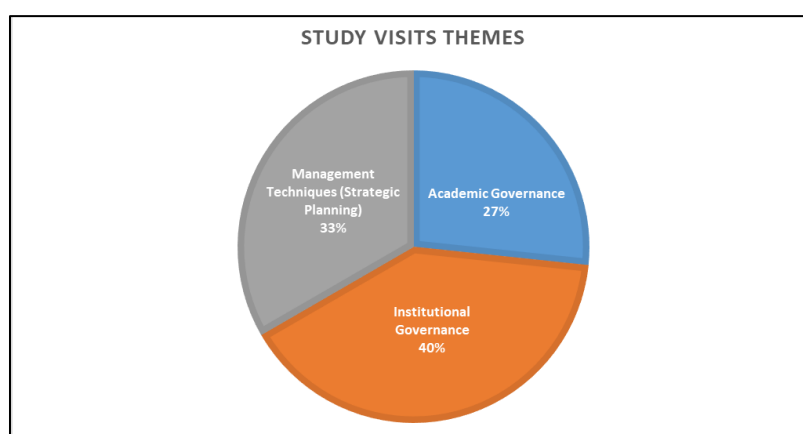
setup organization structures that promote performance and accountability. The academic governance session learned how to distinguish between institutional and academic governance, and how to use the service design concept and practices in reformulating the university's individual functions.

### 3.3 Study Visits

Following is a highlight of the evaluation measures conducted for the study-visits activities organized by the University Ljubljana (UL), the University of Siena (UNISI), and the University College Cork (UCC). Each study visit targeted one or more of the university governance themes intending to strengthen Palestinian participants knowledge and skills through having a hands-on experience of how the governance systems within these Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are implemented. Two participants from each Palestinian partner institution joined these one-week study visits, in which, more than 30 administrative and academic staff benefited from these activities.

The study visits hosted at the EU partners institutions covered different governance topics (Strategy Formulation and Implementation, Institutional Governance, and Academic Governance). These training sessions were accomplished after conducting face-to-face training and online training, and have been selected and designed based on the analysis and requirements of the participating Palestinian universities.

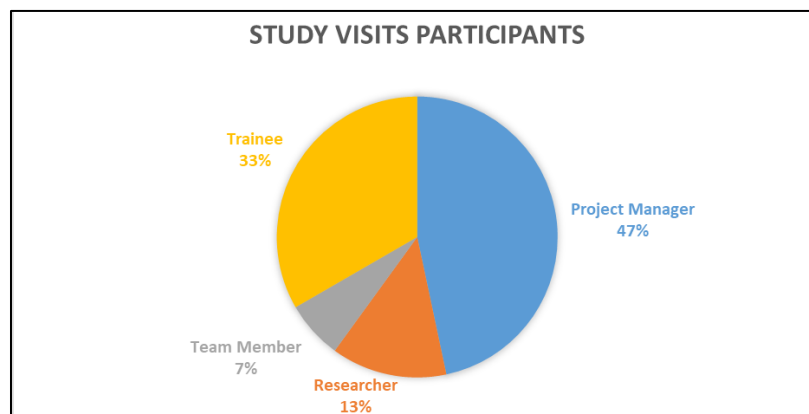
Total respondents in the evaluation process during these study visits were 15. As shown in figure 1, there is almost an equal distribution among respondents regarding the knowledge and hands-on experience they gained through their participation in the various study visits.



*Figure 1: Study visits themes*

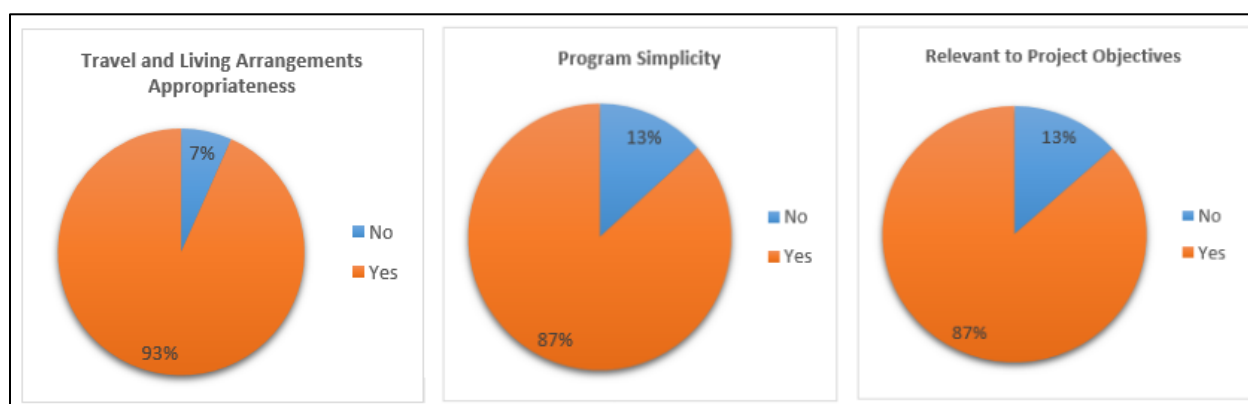
As indicated in figure 2, only 20% of who responded to the questionnaire were among the trainees and team members, while the majority of the participants (80%) were part of the project

team (leaders and researchers). This limitation of external project members participation could be a result of the complexity of the topics being discussed, the limited number of trainees allowed to participate, and the limitation of specialization and expertise available within the Palestinian universities.



*Figure 2: Study Visits Participants Role*

However, the project consortium was able to deliver a successful capacity-building activity of study-visits on governance topics. This is indicated by the overall agreement of participants on the high-level organization of the study visits programs. For instance, figure 3 shows that more than 85% of trainees confirms the relevancy and simplicity of workshops and seminars' topics, and more than 95% of them indicated that travel and living arrangements were made in an appropriate time before the study visit. Furthermore, all participants expressed their satisfaction regarding the experience and the quality of the presentations and discussions at the host university.



*Figure 3: Travel arrangements and overall training simplicity and relevancy*

In addition, participants were also satisfied with the universities' facilities visits and cultural activities included in the study visit program. For example, during the Siena study visit participants were interested in the scope and of the research, libraries, international affairs and

third mission areas at university in which they do believe will encourage students' creativity. Others assert that networking and discussions with the UCC colleagues opened new horizons for future cooperation in mobility and capacity building projects. While in UL, the participants valued the experience they had through looking at how research in engineering labs could be integrated with the industry.

The analysis also show that there is an overall agreement among trainees in which they will apply the knowledge and skills gained within their institutions and they expressed an interest in disseminating such knowledge to their peers. The details of these visits outcomes and impact are summarized below.

### 1. University of Ljubljana Study Visit

The visit took its place between February 13-15, 2019. The main theme of the visit was strategic planing techniques and quality assurance measures and how these important processes play an important role within the various governance domains (autonomy, accountability, management techniques, and participation). Although the training program activities were combined with the management meeting agenda held at the same period, the team get hands-on experience on the strategic planning process within the UL. They also introduced to the mechanisms of maintaining a fruitful relationship between academic staff and the industry. An additional seminar session was regarding the techniques and used in evaluating staff. As indicated in figure 4, the team will disseminate the knowledge and skills get during this visit by employing various means. The main methodology that will be used as writing and circulating individual reports that summarize their reflection on the study visit and how it could be applied within their institutions.

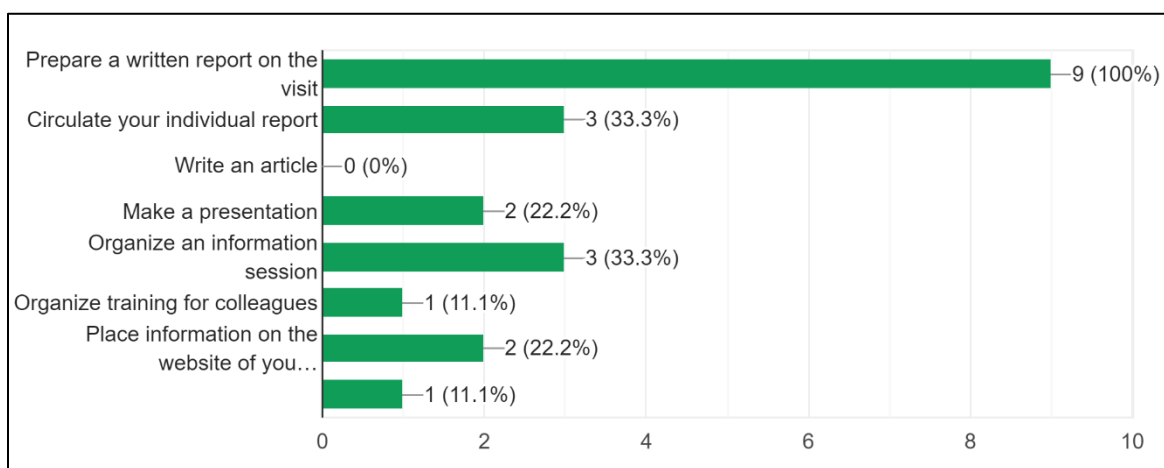


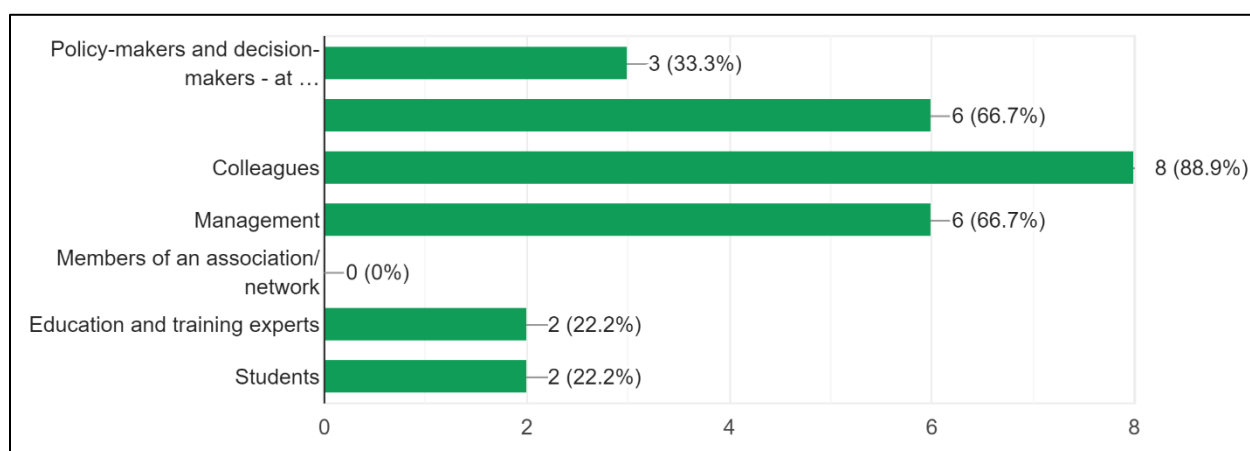
Figure 4: Methods of Experience Dissemination Based on Ljubljana Study Visit

However, the overall feedback of participants shows that some of them were not satisfied with combining the management meeting and the training program agendas as this decrease the level of training program clearance. These notes were gathered and the project steering committee considers them within the remaining study visits.

## 2. University of Siena Study Visit

The visit was conducted between April 16 – 17, 2019. The main theme of the visit was on the human resources management function and the regarding system being employed and how these measures are aligned within the overall governance system of the university. The Siena HR team presented the administrative system of the university and the relationships between the system and its stakeholders. Participants were attracted by the ability of the system to analyze the data sources leading to proper planning of staffing and allocation of budgets. During the various sessions, participants got insights on the role of the HR teams their responsibilities and their relationship to the university management.

As shown in figure 5, the team will disseminate their experience to wide range of audiences. Mainly to there colleagues wihtin their institutions, through presentations and workshops.



*Figure 5: Experience Dissemination Audiences After Siena Study Visit*

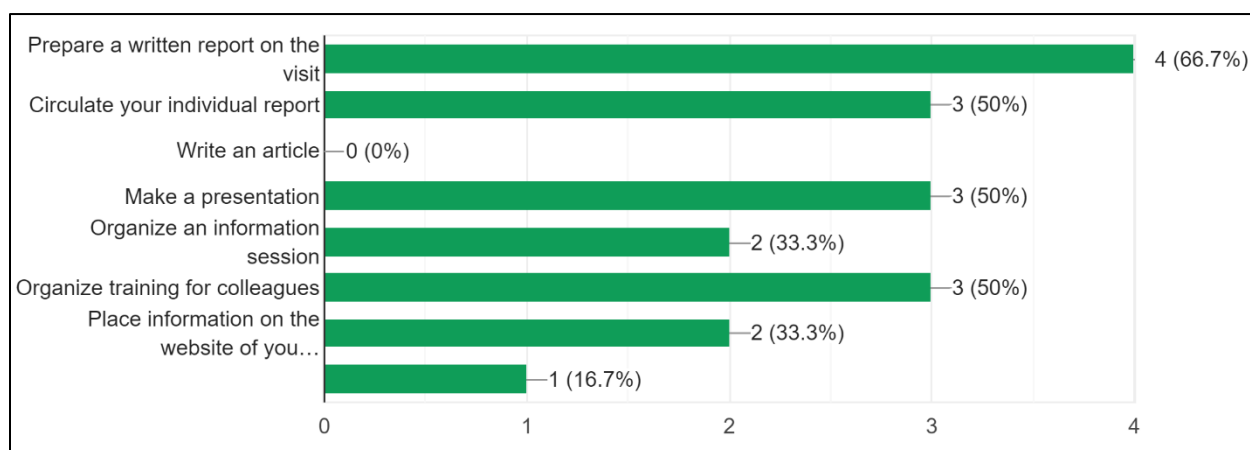
The overall feedback indicate that there was a wide range of acceptance to the program structure and the presented topics. Participants also indicated that this visit added a value to them and their future development.

## 3. University of Cork Study Visit

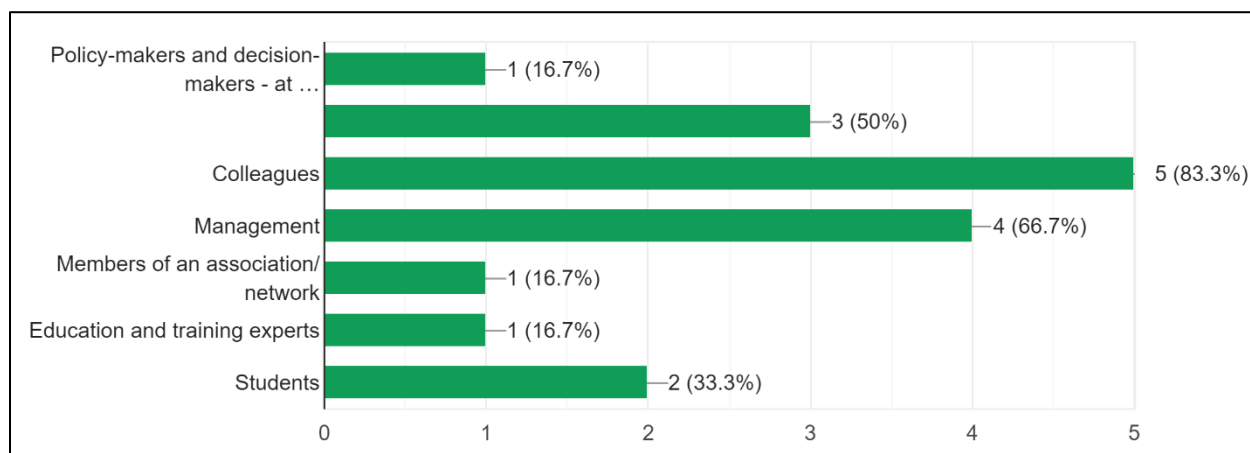
The study was acomplished between 11-14 Jun, 2019. The main theme was academic governance (teaching and research). From the first day it was a clear that there is well organized training program with a wide range of activities. The program agenda included diffrenet activities ranging from specilized seminar sessions to meeting with university officials and key persons. The governance and organization of the human resource function, the staff professional development program and how the university employed the digital badges system to build a culture of life-long learning and continuous development, and the governance of graduate education were part of the topics participants learned about.

Another important feature of the program was the Information Technology (IT) governance, and how this important function is being integrated within the various processes of the university business. The team was attracted by the concept and mechanisms the university employ to respond to the various stakeholders' needs of IT, and how these requirements are addressed through implementing individual projects on the base of transparency and participatory approaches.

Participants indicate an overall satisfaction of the training program in terms of its organization and rigorous. They attracted by the maturity of the UCC governance, and asserts on the need to build on such experience to improve the overall governance at all Palestinian Universities. as shown in the next two figures (6,7), they indicated that they will employ different mechanisms to make sure to share such an experience with a wide range of stakeholders.



*Figure 6: Methods of Experience Dissemination Based on Cork Study Visit*



*Figure 7: Experience Dissemination Audiences After Cork Study Visit*



## 4. Overall Project Performance

The major points presented in this section are derived from the results of the project evaluation questionnaire. This activity was conducted during the period (04 – 05/2019). The summary of the full responses from both measures are presented in the annexes (1 – 4). As mentioned earlier in this report, the overall performance was very good.

The overall results of evaluating the WPs outputs are in terms of:

- Compliance with the objectives of UniGOV
- Compliance with the specific objectives of the workpackage
- Correspondence with the description of work of the relevant activity
- Compliance with the deliverables format
- Adequacy of written language
- Dissemination

Those were all marked as acceptable and hence the quality of the produced documents is in compliance with the project quality standards. On the other hand, the results from the project evaluation questionnaire indicated that the overall project management activities were sufficient as most of partners agreed that:

- Project Management is efficient
- Project objectives are clear
- The distribution of roles is clear
- The guidance of the Coordinator is effective
- The support of the Coordinator is sufficient
- Communication with the Coordinator is regular
- Communication with the Coordinator is of good quality
- All Partners are engaged in the project
- Project management procedures are clear
- Decisions are documented and disseminated
- Financial management procedures are effective

These results are presented in the following chart:

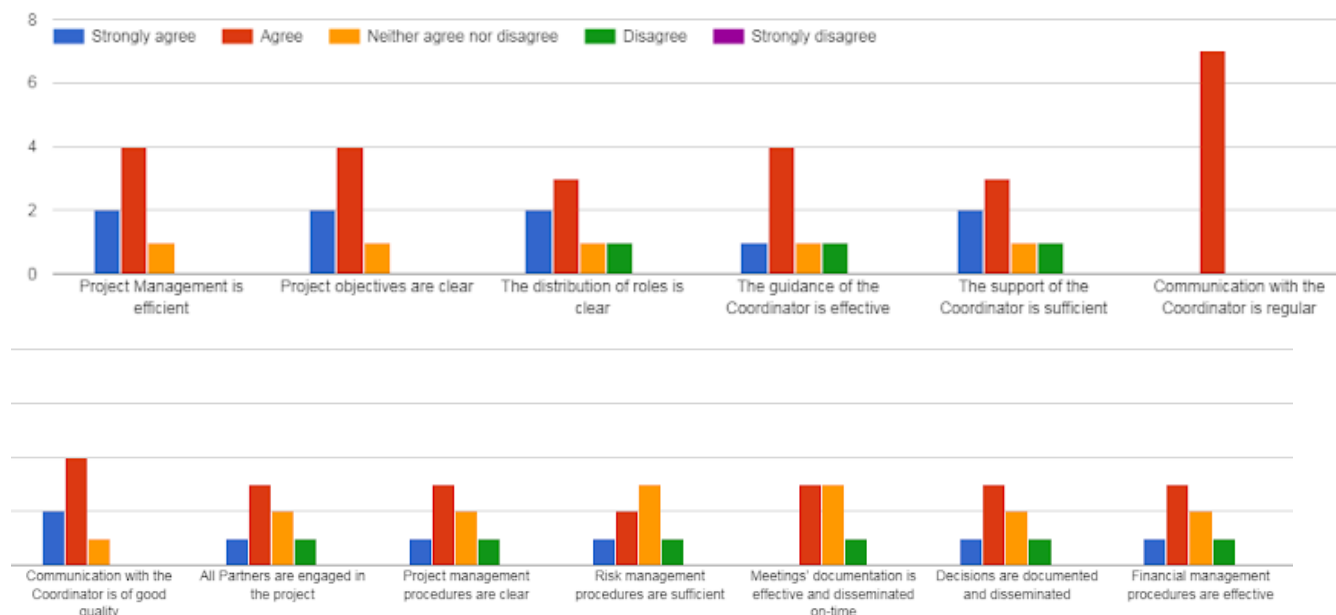


Figure 1: Results of the project management activities evaluation

However, there are some weaknesses or a need for additional improvements in this domain as there was no agreement among participating partners that the Risk management procedures were sufficient nor the Meetings' documentation was effective and disseminated on-time.

The above scenario also applies to the QA and monitoring measures in which these measures were adequate and effective as shown (Figure 2). There was an agreement among most of participating partners on the following:

- Monitoring and evaluation process is effective
- Project quality guidelines and monitoring procedures are clear
- Key Performance Indicators are SMART
- Project monitoring and quality load is sufficient
- Monitoring and quality assurance coordination is clear
- All Partners are engaged in the project monitoring and quality assurance process
- Project monitoring and quality assurance organization is clear
- Periodic reports are produced and disseminated on regular bases
- Follow-up of tasks is effective

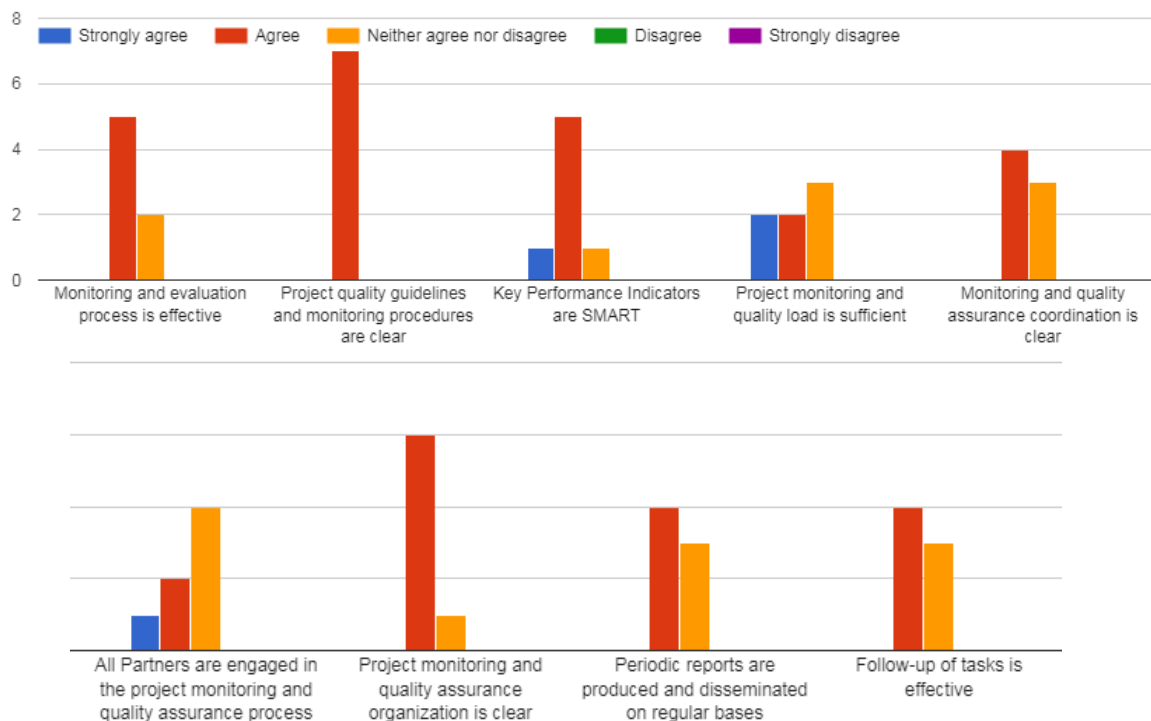


Figure 2: Results of the project monitoring and quality assurance measures evaluation

As shown in (figure 3) below and in terms of project workload and resources, most partners ranked project overall work plan as suitable and they indicated that allocated budget for staff tasks were sufficient. Moreover there was an overall agreement on the following:

- It is easy to respect the project schedule
- Tasks are clearly distributed
- My tasks within the project are clear
- I have enough time for my tasks
- I have enough resources for my tasks
- I have enough support from WP Leaders and Partners
- I understand what I have to do in the project

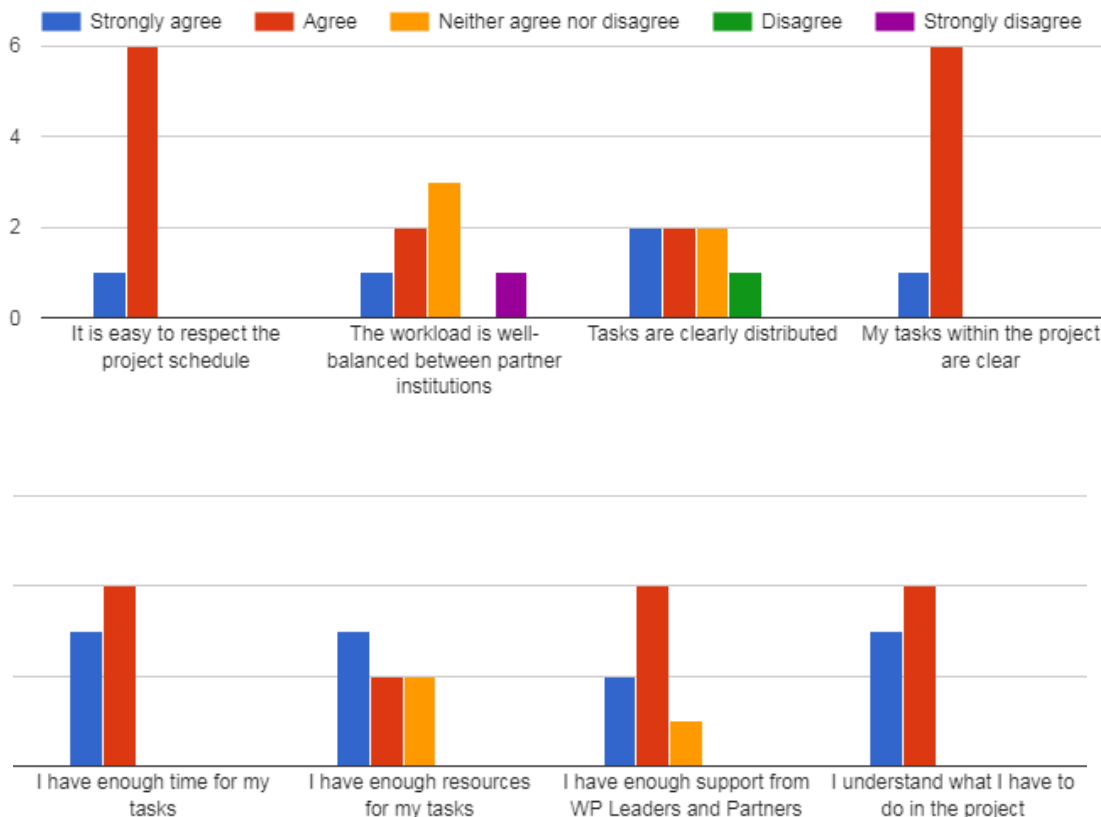


Figure 3: Results of the project workload and resources evaluation

However there was no agreement that the workload is well-balanced between partner institutions.

Finally, in evaluating partnership and collaboration, more than 50% of participating partners agreed that the mutual confidence of project partners was good, around 30% agreed that it was sufficient, and 14% indicated that it was well established. Similarly, they rated the effectiveness of internal communications with the same evaluation. Moreover, as shown on figure 4, most of partners were satisfied with the following:

1. Support by Partners in fulfilling activities
2. Support by the Coordinator in fulfilling activities
3. Communication among Partners is regular
4. Communication is effective
5. I got feedback when asking to Partners
6. Partners have interesting and complementary backgrounds
7. The multicultural aspects of the partnership is taken into account
8. All Partners contribute to discussions

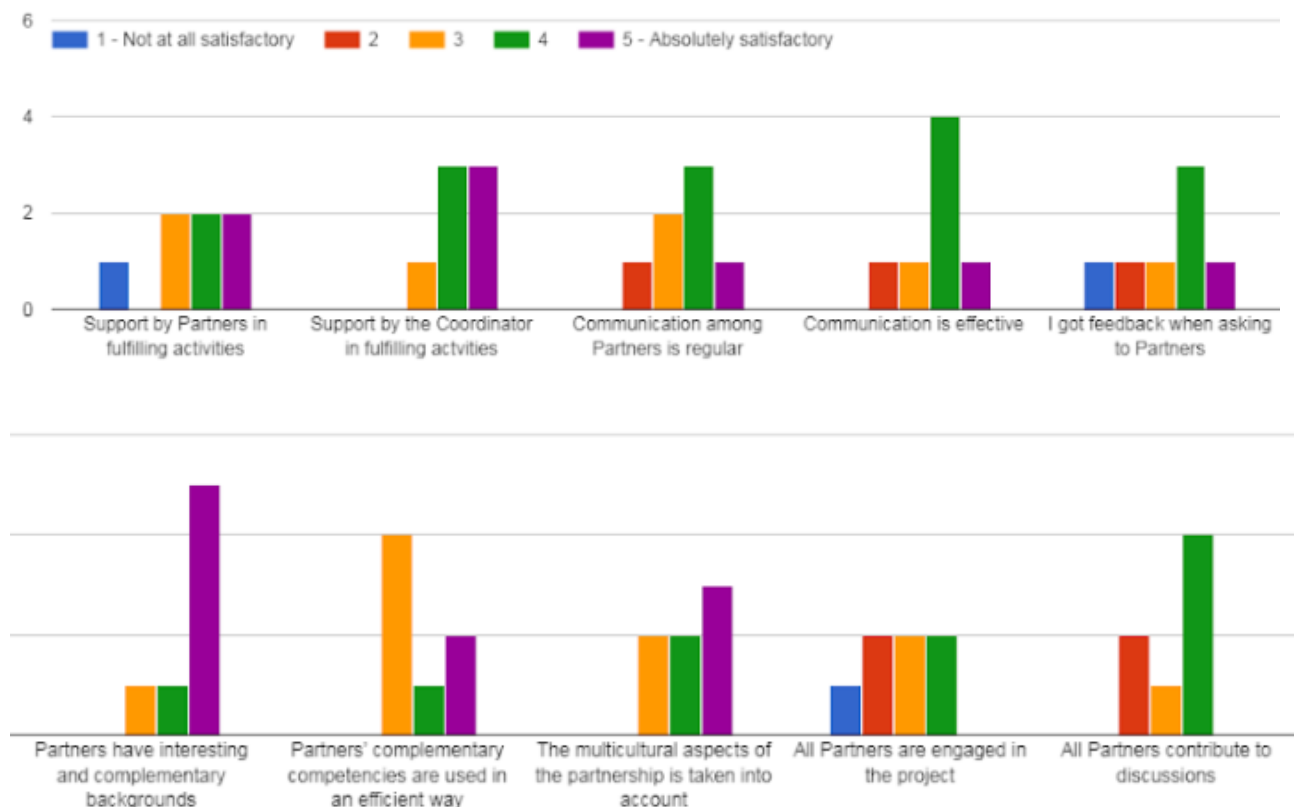


Figure 4: Satisfaction with the project partnership and collaboration activities

However, there was no agreement on the partners' complementary competencies being used in an efficient way, and partners were not satisfied since not all of them are being engaged in the project.

The above presented findings along with the partners' feedback indicate that the following KPIs were met and verified:

1. Availability of Management and Coordination Procedures
2. Availability of Risk Management Procedures
3. Availability of Project Organization and Governance Structure Document, Committees' Formations and financial management procedures
4. Availability of Quality Guidelines and Monitoring Procedures
5. Availability of KPIs
6. Results Publicity Plan
7. Diagnostic Tool
8. Training Needs Assessment
9. Deliverables Evaluation
10. Communication between project partners

While the following KPIs witnessed some deficiencies and needed additional improvements from the whole consortium to improve the overall project performance:

1. On-Time Completion Percentage
2. Meeting Documentation
3. Decisions Documentation
4. Periodic Reports
5. Usage of the project website
6. Meetings frequency
7. Project Website and Communication Portal

## 5. Recommendations and Feedback

The following set of recommendations should be considered in order to improve the whole project performance:

1. Follow the quality and dissemination plan of uploading the output and documents to the project website and update them on regular bases.
2. Establish regular meetings (could be online) for local partners in order to manage the progress of the project and exchange knowledge and experiences.
3. Project meetings should be used to define all future meetings, deadlines and tasks.
4. Produce a monthly statement/report, discuss issues in smaller groups, and highlight governance methodologies to other partners.
5. Hold a joint conference among the partners, NGOs, and external stakeholders.
6. The project partners should be more collaborative and dynamic, as not all partners provide feedback or answers to the coordinator or WP leaders' communication and requests.

On the other hand, the following weaknesses should be discussed within the next management meeting and corrective actions should be applied:

1. The lack of risk management procedures
2. The quality and availability of meetings' documentation and dissemination.
3. The unbalanced workload between partner institutions.
4. The inefficiency of using Partners' complementary competencies.
5. The low level of partners' engagement in the project.