Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance
in Higher Education

Activity Report
ARACIS
2023

BUCHAREST
www.aracis.ro

Member of:

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ENQA

Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
CEENQA

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

INQAAHE

European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education
ENAEE

The European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education
ECA

Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment

CoARA

Global Academic Integrity Network

GAIN

EUA Council for Doctoral Education

EUA CDE

The Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group
CHEA/CIQG

Registered in:
European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

EQAR

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LIST OF ACRONYMS / ABBREVIATIONS

A	Accreditation
ANACEC	National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova
ANC	National Authority for Qualifications
ANOSR	National Alliance of Students' Organisations in Romania
APO	Provisional authorisation to operate
ARACIP	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education
ARACIS	Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
BEx	Executive Board of the ARACIS Council
BFUG	Bologna Follow-Up Group
CEENQA	Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
CoARA	Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment
CNATDCU	National Commission for Attestation of University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates
DEQAR	The "Database of External Quality Assurance Results" Project
DD	Doctoral domains
DRIPCC	International Relations, Projects, Cooperation and Research Direction
ECA	The European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENAEE	European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ENRF	External Non-reimbursable Funds
EQAR	European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
ESF	European Social Fund
ESG	Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area
ESQA	The "Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities" Project
ESU	European Students' Union
ETER	European Tertiary Education Register
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
IOSUD	Institution organising doctoral studies
GD	Romanian Government Decision
GO/GEO	Government Ordinance / Government Emergency Ordinance
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
LC	EUR-ACE Label Committee
MICS	Managerial internal control system
MoE	Ministry of Education
NEEA	National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency (Bulgaria)
NEL	National Education Law
OG	Official Gazette of Romania
OGSG	Order of the Government's Secretariat General
OOR	Organisational and Operational Regulations
PASS	Public Administration Strengthening Strategy
PE	Periodic evaluation

QAFIN	Project "Improvement of public policies in higher education and better-quality regulations through updated quality standards"
QAR	Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education
REI	ARACIS Register of International Evaluators
RNE	National Register of Evaluators
RNE-A	Register of Employers' Representatives
RNE-S	National Register of Evaluators - Students
UEFISCDI	Executive Unit for Financing in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation
UNSR	National Union of Students in Romania
USR	Romanian Students' Union

PRESIDENT'S NOTE

Dear colleagues,

2023 was a year of challenges, but also one of satisfactions, both personal and professional. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude for the academic community, our partners involved in building a quality, internationally recognised higher education system, and all other public institutions and bodies with which ARACIS has collaborated. A special thanks goes to the Agency's staff, which I thank for their exemplary expertise, dedication, and involvement throughout this time.

In the last year, besides the constant activity focused on ensuring education at the national level, the Agency also showed significant international involvement, with active participation in debates and projects related to public policies in higher education, strengthening relationships with partners in the European Higher Education Area. Increased international visibility and the quality of the work led to significant increase in the number of requests from foreign higher education institutions. The Agency was asked to provide external evaluation of study programmes and higher education institutions abroad, thus contributing to the international recognition of our national education standards.

2023 was a year of great importance for ARACIS, as it marked a special moment by the successful completion of the Agency's fourth external evaluation since its establishment. The result was particularly relevant: renewed confirmation of ARACIS's quality as a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), and a 5-year registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). This European recognition comes to confirm the commitment and professionalism of the ARACIS team, as well as the constant effort to maintain a high-quality higher education system in Romania.

The fall of 2023 brought significant change in the landscape of higher education in Romania, as the Parliament adopted Law no. 199/2023, the Higher Education Law, giving the Agency greater responsibility, calling for the alignment of all aspects of external evaluation procedures with the provisions of the new law. The last part of the year was mostly dedicated to thoroughly preparing the new documents regulating the implementation of the external evaluation procedures. Particular emphasis was placed on compliance with European quality assurance standards and guidelines, ensuring transparent, rigorous approach of evaluations.

The end of 2023 brought about a number of significant changes in the structure of ARACIS. The ARACIS Council's membership was refreshed in terms of both teaching staff and students appointed by student federations. Electing the new members of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council and adding new members to the Permanent Speciality Commissions gave the Agency a new dynamism. This reconfiguration of the leadership and the evaluation commissions comes as proof of ARACIS's commitment to remaining a transparent, representative, and efficient institution. The diversity of perspectives and experiences with which the new members contribute will significantly strengthen the quality of the evaluation, and promote innovation in higher education quality assurance.

Improving the quality of education requires strong will, close collaboration, and deep mutual understanding. We are aware that the coming year will be dynamic and challenging, but we are confident that, through joint efforts, we will find innovative solutions that will contribute to significantly developing the higher education system, as well as scientific research. We are ready for close collaboration with all education and research stakeholders - higher education institutions, students, businesses, public authorities, and non-government organisations - to build a high-quality education system that will train young people for the challenges of this century.

Efficient implementation of the new evaluation processes is key to improving the quality of higher education and strengthening the image of ARACIS. It is vital for us to develop innovative services that will bring added value to education institutions, and support education institutions in their progress, at the same time strengthening the connections with our beneficiaries to ensure them that our recommendations and/or answers are adequate and quick, addressing the received feedback.

Respectfully,

Professor Dr. Eng. Valentin NĂVRĂPESCU,

ARACIS President

MISSION AND ATTRIBUTIONS IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

Mission

ARACIS' mission is to carry out the quality external evaluation of education provided by higher education institutions and by other organisations providing higher education study programmes, which operates in Romania with the aim of:

- certifying, according to quality standards, the capacity of education providing organisations to fulfil the beneficiaries' expectations;
- contributing to the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality;
- assuring the protection of direct beneficiaries of study programmes at higher education level by producing and disseminating systematic, coherent and credible information, publicly accessible, about education quality;
- proposing strategies and policies to the Ministry of Education (ME) in order to continuously improve the quality of higher education, closely correlated to the level of pre-university education.

Quality assurance attributions

- ✓ Regularly, based on best practices, formulates and reviews national reference standards and performance indicators for quality evaluation and assurance in higher education;
- ✓ Collaborates with the Ministry of Education and Research and ARACIS to develop and promote policies and action strategies to improve the quality of education in Romania;
- ✓ Organises annual consultations with higher education institutions to establish the priorities in quality assurance;
- ✓ Develops and publishes its own procedures for external quality evaluation in education;
- ✓ Concludes service contracts with national and foreign education institutions for the external evaluation of the quality of education programmes and providers specific to higher education, and for the inter-institutional evaluation of similar programmes;
- ✓ Carries out quality evaluation of higher education programmes and institutions, upon the request of the Ministry of Education; The terms for carrying out the evaluation activity are established by contract;
- ✓ Publishes the results of external evaluations;
- ✓ Publishes manuals, guides, summaries of best practice in quality evaluation and assurance;
- ✓ Regularly, every three years, develops system analyses on the quality of higher education in Romania;
- ✓ Works with similar agencies in other countries to develop and implement efficient measures for the improvement of the quality of higher education programmes;
- ✓ Develops the Code of Conduct of the ARACIS experts;
- ✓ Publishes an annual report on its own activity;
- ✓ Every three years, develops self-assessment reports evaluating the quality of its own activity, in preparation for external evaluations carried out by similar agencies of other countries.

According to the provisions of chapter VI of title IV of Law no. 199/2023 on higher education, as further amended and supplemented, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is a legal entity with the following legal characteristics:

a. it is an autonomous public institution,

b. it performs an activity of national interest. External quality evaluation in education is a contract-based activity carried out upon request, charged according to the tariffs approved by Government decision. The results of the main evaluation activity are reports with endorsements, based on which the Ministry of Education or the Government, as applicable, grant authorisation or accreditation or maintain the accreditation for the performance of the education process in higher education;

c. through external quality assurance and evaluation activities, it contributes to the mission of meeting the public interest, strengthening the society's trust in the Romanian higher education system, thus facilitating recognition of the studies and qualifications provided by higher education institutions, and enabling student and graduate mobility both nationally and beyond national borders;

d. it has both sole competence to deliver the external quality evaluation for acquiring provisional operation authorisation for organising university, post-secondary, and life-long learning education activities, and shared competence together with other EQAR-registered education quality assurance entities to provide external evaluation services for education quality assurance;

e. it operates independently, based on its own income and expenditure budget, and its revenues are generated from the tariffs charged for the various services it delivers;

f. it is the competent authority in charge with education quality assurance under the terms of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 49/2009, as further amended and supplemented, checking compliance with external evaluation requirements based on reviewing documents issued by any European Union Member State or third country, submitted by education providers/higher education institutions coming to organise and deliver higher education and post-secondary education activities in Romania;

g. has the obligation to meet and comply with quality assurance standards based on which EQAR member entities operate, and to maintain its membership in this register; in case of failure to comply with such obligation for a period of 2 years, a sanction shall be applied, according to which the right of ARACIS to perform external evaluations will be suspended until EQAR membership is regained.

As per Law 199/2023, ARACIS is entitled to perform contract-based professional activities in a specific field at national, European, and international level with a view to meeting a general public interest of quality assurance in education.

FOREWORD

This ARACIS 2023 Activity Report seeks to present the tasks established for and the activities carried out by the Agency between 03.01.2023 – 30.12.2023.

The Report was structured and finalised by the Research Office within the International Relations, Projects, Cooperation and Research Direction (DRIPCC).

Representatives of all the structures in charge with decision-making, coordination, execution and control at ARACIS participated in developing the report and contributed with supporting information and documents presenting the activities carried out, and proposed future measures aimed at improving the Agency's activities, namely:

Primary reporting and data processing was carried out by: Mariana Croitoru - Internal Audit Compartment; Emilia Mircea and Gianina Buiuc - Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office; Ion Tănase – Economic Direction; Carmen Mirian – Quality Assurance Direction; Marinela Lolea and Aureliu Perdeleanu – Organisation, IT, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction; Adriana Popoiu - International Relationships, Project Implementation, Communication, and Events Service; Emilia Gogu - Research Office.

The analysis of the report was performed by: Executive Board of the ARACIS Council: Professor Dr. Eng. Valentin Năvrăpescu – President; Professor Dr. Eng. Trașcă Teodor-Ioan – Vice-president; Professor Dr. Moldovan Nicoleta-Claudia - Director of the Accreditation Department; Professor Dr. Eng. Seghedin Neculai Eugen - Director of the External Quality Evaluation Department; Professor Dr. Eng. Marius Petrescu - Secretary General of the ARACIS Council.

The coordination and final drafting was performed by: Professor Dr. Eng. Valentin Năvrăpescu – President of ARACIS; Professor Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică – Director general; Professor Dr. Eng. Marius Petrescu - Secretary General of the ARACIS Council; Associate Professor Dr. Emilia Gogu – Research Office.

The drafting group thanks all the members of the ARACIS Council and everyone who contributed in producing the final form of this report.

The report was analysed and approved in the ARACIS Council – March 2024.

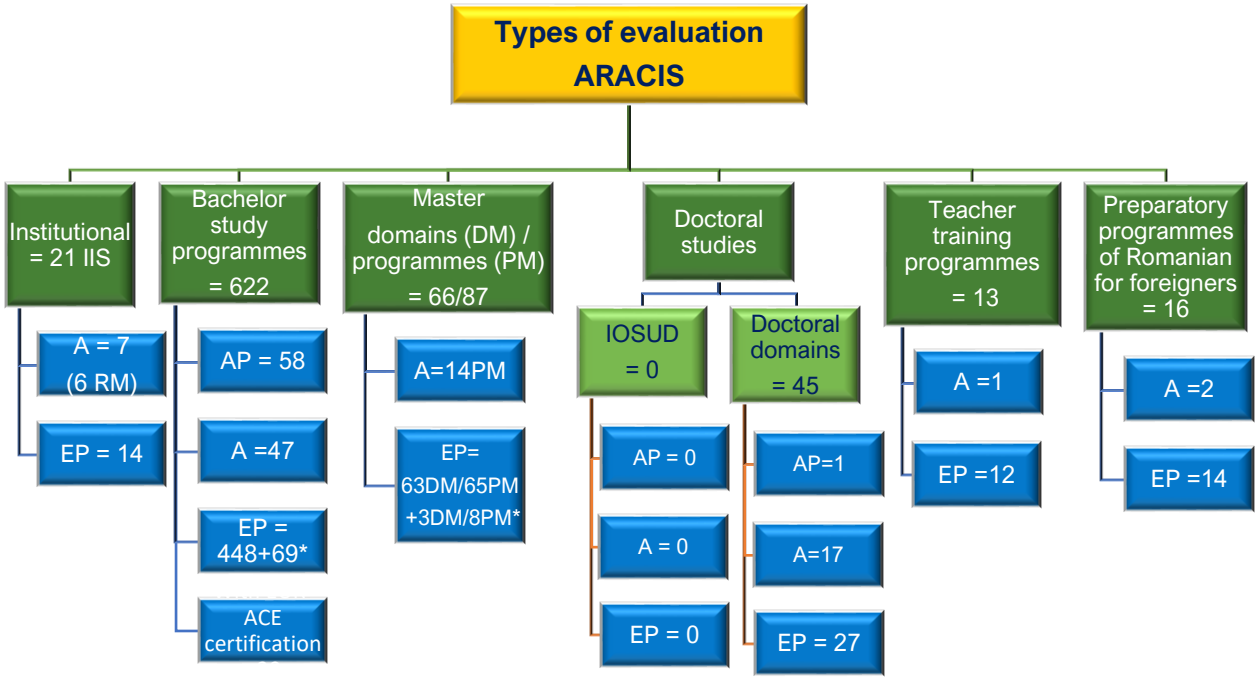
The Activity Report of ARACIS is published annually in Romanian and English language; the Report is public information, and is also available on the Agency's webpage: https://www.aracis.ro/rapoarte-interne-aracis/.

ARACIS ACTIVITY REPORT FOR YEAR 2023

In order to provide all stakeholders, structures and interested organisations, and the wider audience with a full picture of the activities of ARACIS, this report starts with a synopsis of statistic data on the results and external higher education quality evaluation activities carried out or completed by ARACIS in 2023, the existing human potential involved, and the Agency's participation in national/international projects.

The results of the activities of external evaluation of the quality of higher education carried out systemically by ARACIS in 2023 are presented below:

ARACIS activity in 2023 in figures



Key: AP- Provisional authorisation to operate; A- Accreditation; EP- Periodic evaluation.

Note: * within institutional evaluations.

RM -Republic of Moldova - ARACIS, in collaboration with ANACEC, carried out institutional evaluation for 6 universities in the Republic of Moldova, out of which 5 universities within the QFORTE project.

Figure 1. General summary of the external evaluations carried out by ARACIS in 2023

In terms of distribution, the number of external evaluations per types of evaluation at the level of the ARACIS Speciality Commissions is as follows:

C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 39 •Master domains evaluated = 6 •Master programmes = 14
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	• Evaluated bachelor programmes = 35 • Master domains evaluated = 2 • Master programmes = 4
C3 - Legal Sciences	• Evaluated bachelor programmes = 17 • Master domains evaluated = 4 • Master programmes = 1
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	• Evaluated bachelor programmes = 35 • Master domains evaluated = 11 • Master programmes = 9
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 31 •Master domains evaluated = 4 •Master programmes = 8
C6 - Economic Sciences I	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 41 •Master domains evaluated = 6 •Master programmes = 8
C7 - Economic Sciences II	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 32 •Master domains evaluated = 3 •Master programmes = 5
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and Sports	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 61 •Master domains evaluated = 4 •Master programmes = 9
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 20 •Master domains evaluated = 5 •Master programmes = 0
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 64 •Master domains evaluated = 8 •Master programmes = 12
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 69 •Master domains evaluated = 6 •Master programmes = 4
C12 - Medical Sciences	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 40 •Master domains evaluated = 3 •Master programmes = 4
C13 – Distance and part-time learning	•Evaluated bachelor programmes = 69 •Master programmes = 1

Figure 2. External evaluations performed by the ARACIS Speciality Commissions in 2023

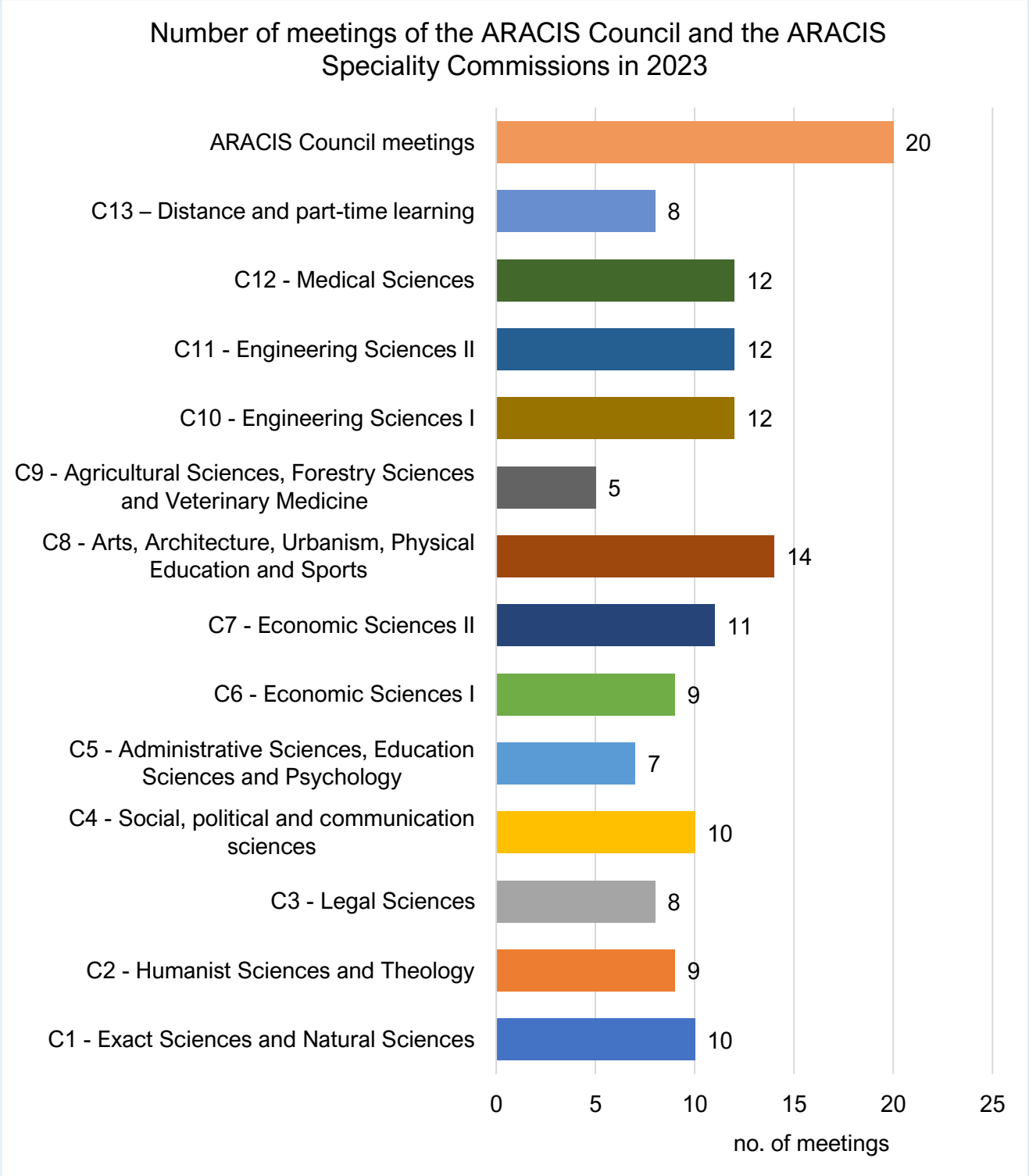


Figure 3. Number of meetings of the ARACIS Council and the ARACIS Speciality Commissions in 2023

The total number of evaluators registered in the National Register of Evaluators is 1923, as follows:

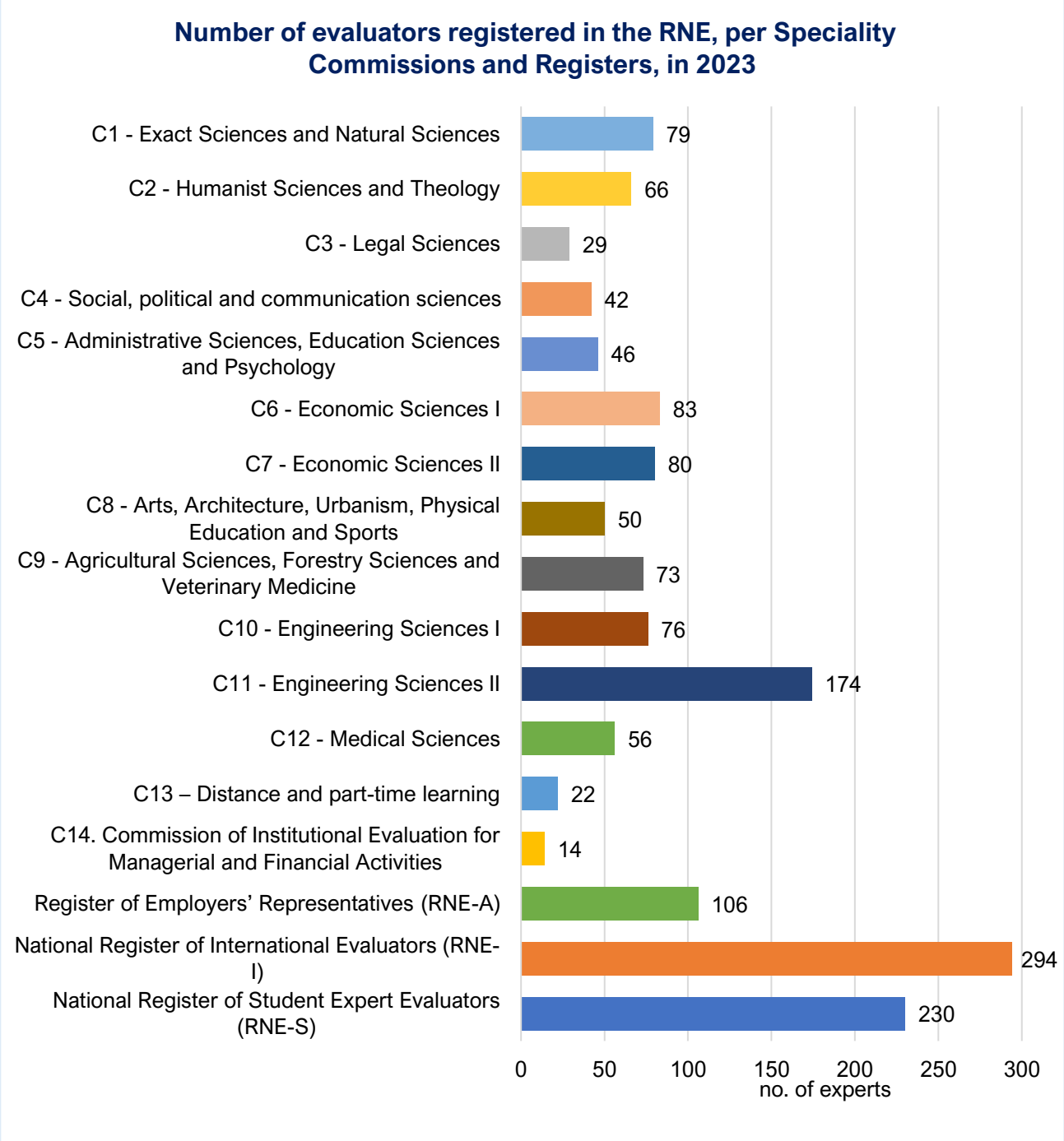


Figure 4. Number of evaluators registered in the RNE, per Speciality Commissions and Registers, in 2023

Furthermore, in 2023, ARACIS continued the implementation of the following international projects:

I. The IMINQA international project - "Implementation and Innovation in QA through peer learning (IMINQA)"

Project type: project co-funded under the ERASMUS+ Programme

Implementation period: 36 months (May 2022 – April 2025),
Budget: funding 499,855 EUR, out of which 43,642 EUR allocated to ARACIS.
This is an umbrella project developed to support the 2021-2024 proceedings of the Thematic Support Group C – Quality Assurance (created by the Bologna Follow-Up Group – BFUG).

II. The START international project – " Social inclusion, Tolerance, Acceptance and Realization for all sTudents "

Project type: project funded under the ERASMUS+ Programme, with ARACIS being a project partner.
Implementation period: 36 months, between June 2022 – May 2025.
The implementation of the START project is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria, together with the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Bulgaria (NEAA) and the Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants.

1 GENERAL ORGANISATION AND OPERATION ASPECTS

1.1 Background, legal framework, organisational structure and resources of ARACIS

1.1.1 Context

As a signatory member of the Bologna Declaration (1999), Romania has become part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Ensuring the quality of education is one of the main goals of the EHEA; to this purpose, in 2005, the ministers in charge with higher education have adopted the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). These were drafted based on a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in cooperation with the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association of Higher Education Institutions (EURASHE) and the European Universities Association (EUA).

Considerable progress was achieved at European and national level after 2005, both in relation to quality assurance and along other lines of action within the Bologna Process, such as the framework of qualifications, the recognition and promotion of the using of the results of learning, which all contributed to a paradigm shift towards student-centred learning and teaching.

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education - ARACIS was created to evaluate quality assurance in education. The Agency is managed by the ARACIS Council (the Council).

The Agency operates on the grounds of the provisions of the national laws in force and of the Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS, (further on referred to as the Methodology or the Methodology for evaluation) approved by Government Decision (GD) no. 1418/2006, amended by GD 915/2017. The modification was necessary after the ministers in charge with higher education embraced the new Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area at the Conference in Yerevan, Armenia in 2015.

ARACIS is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this status.

ARACIS is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and periodically undergoes the international external evaluation procedures required for maintaining this registration.

ARACIS is also a member of other international organisations or networks of higher education quality assurance agencies (CEENQA, ENAEE, INQAAHE, ECA, CoARA, GAIN, EUA-CDE and CHEA-CIQG), and is represented in their management bodies.

1.1.2 Legal framework

The institutional articles of association and the activity of ARACIS are regulated at national level through the following normative documents:

- Romanian Government's Emergency Ordinance (GEO) no. 75/2005 on quality assurance of education, as subsequently amended and supplemented, approved by Law 87/2006;
- Romanian Government Decision (GD) no. 915/2017 modifying the appendix to GD no. 1418/2006 approving the Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS, further on referred to as the "Methodology";
- GD no. 1731/2006 to approve the tariffs charged by ARACIS for the authorisation and accreditation per study programmes of higher education institutions and for the external evaluation of the quality of education;
- The National Education Law (NEL) no. 1/2011, as subsequently amended and supplemented (repealed on 03.09.2023);
- The Higher Education Law (HEL) no. 199/2023 (in force since 04.09.2023);
- GD no. 369/2013 approving the Methodology for accreditation of Master's study domains based on the accredited Master's programmes;
- Orders of the Minister of Education concerning regulation of and/or capitalisation on some specific evaluation activities, which are drafted periodically.

In carrying out its activities, according to the law, ARACIS drafts and uses its own regulations, which are approved by the Council:

- Guidelines for quality evaluation activities of higher education programmes and higher education institutions;
- Guidelines for the periodical external evaluation of the Master's study domains;
- Code of ethics and rules of conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS in assuring and evaluating the quality of higher education in Romania, further on referred to as the Code of Ethics;
- Specific standards for the external evaluation of the academic quality of bachelor and master programmes, used by the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions;
- Resolutions of the ARACIS Council and Decisions of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council (BEx) to address any current issues.

According to the provisions of the Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of ARACIS, approved by GD no. 1418/2006 and

amended by GD 915/2017, the Methodology provides the conceptual framework and describes the main activities and strategies envisaged in the authorisation / accreditation / periodical evaluation processes and the quality assurance and external quality evaluation processes. The operational and instrumental aspects are detailed in the Specific evaluation guidelines, further on referred to as the ARACIS Guidelines or the Guidelines, drafted by ARACIS in consultation with higher education institutions and other interested stakeholders and beneficiaries. The Guidelines, composed of several parts, are approved by the ARACIS Council. Depending on the developments concerning the requirements for quality assurance in higher education, the ARACIS Council may approve amendments and supplements to the Guidelines.

ARACIS is a body that is entitled by law to issue and propose opinions and recommendations to the MoE, based on its own assessments materialising its know-how/experience in the field; therefore, the ARACIS Guidelines and its appendixes are recognised in Romania as specific reference norms and regulations in the field of higher education quality assurance. The Methodology and the Guidelines ensure alignment with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (hereinafter referred to as the ESG), approved in 2015 at the Yerevan Conference by the ministers in charge with higher education in the EHEA, in which the quality assurance activities, policies and processes are explicitly defined.

1.1.3 The purpose of ARACIS activities

ARACIS' mission is to carry out the quality external evaluation of education provided by higher education institutions and by other organisations providing higher education study programmes, which operates in Romania with the aim of:

- ✓ certifying, according to quality standards, the capacity of education providing organisations to fulfil the beneficiaries' expectations;
- ✓ contribute to the development of an institutional culture of higher education quality;
- ✓ assuring the protection of direct beneficiaries of study programmes at higher education level by producing and disseminating systematic, coherent and credible information, publicly accessible, about education quality;
- ✓ proposing strategies and policies to the Ministry of Education in order to continuously improve the quality of higher education, closely correlated to the level of pre-university education.

ARACIS also carries out a number of other attributions contributing to fulfilling its mission to strengthen trust in the higher education, as follows:

a) issues an endorsement for the draft Government Decision approving the List of higher education domains and study programmes, higher education domains and programmes that are accredited or authorised for provisional operation, the territorial-administrative unit where they are delivered, number of transferable credits for each higher education study programme, form of education and tuition language/s, as well as the maximum number of students that can be schooled, as proposed by the quality evaluation agencies who evaluated each programme/domain. These are established annually by Government Decision for short-term higher education study programmes, bachelor studies, and master/doctoral study domains; the Government Decision is initiated by the Ministry of

Education before 31 March every year, in consultation with the CNR and according to an endorsement from ARACIS and the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC). The study domains in the list are correlated with the domains in the International standard classification of education, ISCED-F 2013.

b) checks compliance of higher education institutions with the additional number of seats, as approved by the Ministry of Education, within the limit of 10% of the maximum number of students that can be schooled, as established by ARACIS or by some other quality assurance agency for the requested study programme aimed at schooling European and third-country nationals, or for academic mobilities of the students based on governmental or university agreements or according to the approved special programmes, as provided by the law. The higher education institution has the obligation to inform ARACIS about the additional seats approved;
c) develops and approves quality standards, differentiated per domains, for the organisation of full-time education and/or research activities that can be provided in synchronous mode, by using specific electronic, IT and communication resources, differentiated per each individual study domain;
d) draws up specific, learning outcomes-focused quality standards for the carrying out of teaching, learning, research, practical training, and evaluation activities, separately for the different forms of organisation of full-time, part-time, and remote study programmes and in line with the study domains and the education cycles set forth in art. 26 para. (1) of Law no. 199/2023.
e) may request data from universities by using the single national higher education reporting platform - PNRUIS;
f) following consultations with ANC and CNR, proposes the list of double specialisations that can be organised, to be approved by order of the Minister of Education;
g) together with ANC, develops and proposes the framework methodology for the organisation and delivery of post-secondary study programmes for the vocational training of adults, to be approved by order of the Minister of Education;
h) carries out the evaluation for accreditation and the periodic evaluation of initial training programmes for pre-university teachers;
i) upon request of the Ministry of Education, develops studies on the impact of programmes and public policies to enable adaptation of the policies and financing;
j) in case of failure of a higher education institution to comply with the provisions of this law, upon the request of the Ministry of Education, the Agency may participate in monitoring the activity of such institution;
k) together with ANC, drafts and proposes the methodological framework for the vocational training programmes for adults and the micro credentials that can be granted to this purpose, to be approved by Order of the Minister of Education;
l) together with ANC, develops and proposes the methodology for the recognition of competences acquired by young people and adults in non-formal and informal education at the evaluation and recognition centres established by higher education institutions for such purpose, to be approved by Order of the Minister of Education;
m) contributes to drawing up the draft Government Decision on the domains and requirements for organising full-time and part-time master study programmes.

The main goal of the activity of ARACIS in Romania is to ensure high-quality higher education and vocational training, in order to enable development of competitive human capital.

According to its international status as an EQAR-registered agency, the Agency can also evaluate the quality of education in higher education institutions abroad, upon the request of such institutions, subject to compliance with the legal regulations of that country.

1.1.4 Organisational structure

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education is an autonomous public institution of national interest, a legal entity with competences related to carrying out external evaluation for quality assurance in higher education, post-secondary education, and vocational training of adults, operating independently based on its own income and expenditure budget.

In order to organise and achieve better efficiency of its activities, ARACIS has drafted its own Organisational and Operational Regulations (OOR), approved in their new version by the ARACIS Council through its Decision no. 250/H/22.09.2023.

The organisational structure (Appendix 1 - Organisational structure) of ARACIS includes the following components:

(1) the ARACIS Council;
(2) the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council (BEX);
(3) the Accreditation Department;
(4) the External Quality Evaluation Department (DEEC);
(5) the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators.
(6) The following permanent working structures are organised and operate in ARACIS:
   a) Permanent (speciality) Experts' Commissions;
   b) the Commission of Institutional Evaluation for Managerial and Financial Activities
   c) Advisory Commission;
   d) Discipline Commission;
   e) Ethics Commission;
   f) Monitoring Commission.
(7) ARACIS has its own Technical Staff composed of the following structures:
   a) Structures subordinated to the Agency's President
      i. President's Cabinet Office (BCP)
      ii. Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office (BJAIC)
      iii. Public Internal Audit Compartment (CAPI)
   b) Structures subordinated to the director general
      i. Quality Assurance Direction (DAC);
      ii. Organisation, IT, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction (DOIRUAP);
      iii. Economic Direction (DE);
      iv. International Relations, Projects, Cooperation, Research and Training Direction (DRIPCCF).
(8) The National Register of Expert Evaluators includes:
   a) the National Register of Expert Evaluators (teaching staff);
   b) the National Register of Student Expert Evaluators;
   c) the Register of International Expert Evaluators;
   d) Register of Employers' Representatives.

The ARACIS Council is composed of 21 members, selected through a public contest according to ARACIS's own procedure that includes professional and scientific competence criteria, professional prestige, etc., out of which: 17 university professors and/or associate professors with full tenure, employed under permanent individual employment contracts, experienced in education quality assurance; two students, representatives of nationally representative student federations; one representative of the higher education union organisation and one employers' representative.

Between 06.11 - 18.12.2023 a competition was held for selecting 6 (six) professor members of the ARACIS Council based on the Methodology for selecting professor members of the Council of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education through competition, approved by the Decision of the ARACIS Council no. 263/28.09.2023, and published in the Official Gazette, Part I, no. 903 of 06.10.2023.

On 26 September 2023, the procedure for appointing student members to the ARACIS Council for the academic year 2023-2024 was carried out; the appointed students were one ANOSR representative and one UNSR representative, based on the Methodology for appointing the representatives of student federations, the representative of employers, and the representative of the higher education union to the Council of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, approved by Decision no. 245/22.09.2023, published in the Official Gazette no. 856, Part I.

Furthermore, on 19 December 2023, the procedure for appointing the representative of the largest union in higher education was carried out, based on the Methodology for appointing the representatives of student federations, the representative of employers, and the representative of the higher education union to the Council of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, approved by Decision no. 245/22.09.2023, published in the Official Gazette no. 856, Part I.

The Council is the collective management structure of ARACIS and ensures the programmatic direction of the Agency. It sits monthly in an ordinary meeting, and whenever necessary in extraordinary meetings, convened by the president or the vice-president (if the president is absent).

The Council carries out the responsibilities laid down in the ARACIS OOR (Annex 2. – Members of the ARACIS Council - 2023).

The Executive Board of the ARACIS Council (BEx) ensures the steering of the current operations of ARACIS between meetings of the Council or according to the mandate granted by the ARACIS Council.

The Executive Board is composed of the president, the vice president and the secretary general of the ARACIS Council, the director of the Quality External Evaluation Department and the director of the Accreditation Department. As a rule, the Board has weekly meetings, and it can also meet whenever necessary, convened by the president or by the vice president when the president is unavailable. The meetings are conducted with at least 3 members present; they are chaired by the president or the vice president, and are conducted in person or online/in hybrid mode. The meetings of the Executive Board may be attended by the directors of the speciality directions of the Technical Staff, who will act as guests, and by other people invited by the president for the purpose of attending to any specific issues. The students who are members of

the ARACIS Council and the representative of the higher education union having the greatest number of members are permanent guests in the meetings of the Executive Board.

The Quality External Evaluation Department and the Accreditation Department are composed of quality assurance experts - members of the Council, and each coordinated by directors. These departments sit periodically for analysis and debates on the evaluation of education programmes and institutional evaluations, respectively. As a result of the debates, the departments draft their own reports, submitted to the Council, with substantiated proposals concerning the extent of compliance of the evaluated study programmes and higher education institutions with the standards and the quality indicators.

The ARACIS Advisory Commission is composed of important persons of the academia; its mission is to check the evaluation procedures and support the decisions of the Agency (Annex 3 - Advisory Commission).

The Ethics Commission of ARACIS ensures compliance with the Code of ethics and rules of conduct in the activities carried out by ARACIS in assuring and evaluating the quality of higher education in Romania. The activities of this Commission are presented at paragraph 1.1.9.

Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions. The ARACIS Council decided that 13 Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions should be operational. These commissions are subordinated to the ARACIS Council. The commissions operate based on the Regulations concerning the activities of the permanent speciality experts' commissions, approved by the ARACIS Council, and are assisted by a body of ARACIS expert evaluators listed in the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators (RNE). This body is composed of domestic and foreign university professors and associate professors with recognised professional activities and moral integrity, competence and experience in education quality assurance nationally and internationally. In order to become RNE-listed evaluators, the candidates undergo a transparent selection process regulated through a public procedure approved by the Council, available at: https://www.aracis.ro/registrul-national-al-evaluatorilor/.

Based on the Decision of the Council, the selection of new professors on the Permanent Speciality Experts' Commissions of ARACIS was conducted in December 2022, and new members were selected on the following commissions:

C1 - Exact sciences and natural sciences;
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences;
C10 - Engineering Sciences I;
C11 - Engineering Sciences II;
C13 – Distance and part-time learning.

Upon the expiry of the 4-year mandates of some of the members of the Permanent (speciality) Experts' Commissions of ARACIS, contests were conducted in January and October-November 2023, based on the Council's Decision, to select members on the vacant positions in these commissions. New members were selected in the following commissions as a result of these contests:

C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences;
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology;
C3 - Legal Sciences;
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology;
C6 - Economic Sciences (I);

C7 - Economic Sciences (II);
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Town Planning, Physical Education and Sport;
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine;
C10 - Engineering Sciences I;
C11 - Engineering Sciences II;
C12 - Medical Sciences;
C13 – Distance and part-time learning.

Pursuant to the provisions of H/107/1/25.11.2021, according to which the Permanent (speciality) Experts' Commissions shall include employers' representatives, a contest was held in June-July 2023 to select employers' representatives on the available positions in the Permanent Experts' Commissions; the total number of candidates who applied for the 10 commissions for which the selection process was organised was 13. 8 out of the 13 applicants were selected, with the selection process to be repeated in 2024 for the remaining vacancies.

Furthermore, the selection procedure for the student member of the Medical sciences - C12 Speciality Commission was recommenced, with one representative being selected for this commission too.

The Technical Structure of ARACIS is an executive structure with 93 staff positions at the beginning of 2023, out of which 53 staffed and 36 vacant.

2 contests were organised during 2023 for the vacant management and executive positions; the resulting situation is as follows:

Table 1. Filling up of the vacant management and executive positions in 2023

Type of employment	Number of people
Employees on management positions	-
New employees	2

Regarding participation in training courses/sessions for the development of skills/competences of the institution's employees, the situation is as follows:

Table 2. Participation in staff training courses/sessions in 2023

No.	Direction/Service/ Office/compartment	Title of course /training session / training / seminar / workshop	No. of participants
1.	Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office (BJAIC)	1 Public procurement - new information about legislation	2
		2. Ethics, integrity, and anti-corruption	2
		3. Accounting in public institutions	1
2.	Organisation, IT, Human Resources and Public Procurement Direction (DOIRUAP)	1. Ethics, integrity, and anti-corruption	2
		Document management - secretariat activities, archiving, library sciences - methods and techniques to ensure performance of the institution	1
		3.Public procurement, practice and legislative updates	3
		4. Document archiving and management	1
		5. Accounting in public institutions	2
		6. Data entering, validation and processing operator, table calculations module	1
		7. Digital skills development in the public sector. Priorities, developments and trends	1

No.	Direction/Service/ Office/compartment	Title of course /training session / training / seminar / workshop	No. of participants
3	International Relations, Projects, Cooperation and Research Direction (DRIPCC)	1.English language improvement training	2
		2. Communication in public administration	4
		3.Improvement course (Leadership development programme 2023)	1
4	Economic Direction (DE)	1.Accounting in public institutions	4
		2. Knowledge acquired on the European accounts system	2
		3.Preventive financial control-management financial control	2
5	Public Internal Audit Compartment (CAPI)	1.Ethics, integrity, and anti-corruption	1
		2.Legislation updates on public internal audit in Romania	1
6	Personnel of the Technical Staff of ARACIS	Workshop "General data protection regulation and its implications"	2
7	Personnel of the Quality Assurance Direction (DAC) and DRIPCC	International mobility of staff / experience exchange with other ENQA and CEENQA member agencies	5
		Training organised by the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)	3
		Seminar of the members of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)	3
		Workshop within the INQAAHE CONFERENCE 2023	1

Source: ARACIS systematisation

1.1.5 Financial activity

The ARACIS budget includes revenues generated from internal sources, namely fees for the external evaluation activities for provisional authorising to operate / accreditation and/or periodical evaluation of study programmes, Master's study domains and/or institutional evaluations, based on service contracts concluded with higher education institutions, and financial revenues such as interests and external non-reimbursable funds (ENRF).

The ARACIS Council approved an income and expenditure budget of Lei 27,690,072 for both incomes and expenditure (Figure 1), out of which Lei 1,641,737 incomes and Lei 358,132 for expenses under projects funded from ENRF.

As of 31 December 2023, the revenues collected by ARACIS were Lei 21,467,913, out of which Lei 403,741 from ENRF, while actual payments amounted to Lei 20,617,677, out of which Lei 146,698 from projects funded from ENRF.

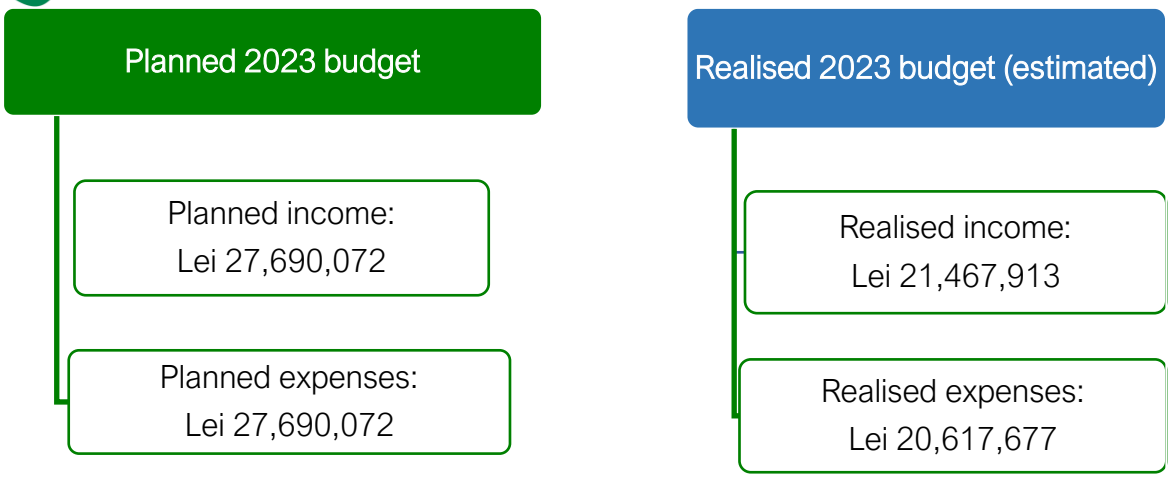


Figure 5. ARACIS income and expenditure budget for year 2023

These data were established in compliance with the applicable legal provisions in Romania.

As the data presented above indicate, there is a deficit on revenues of 6,222,159 Lei, out of which a deficit on collected revenues, amounting to 4,984,163 Lei for the core activity, and a deficit amounting to 1,237,996 Lei for the activity financed from ENRF and a deficit amounting to 7,072,395 Lei for expenses, out of which a deficit amounting to 6,860,961 Lei for the core activity, and a deficit amounting to 211,434 Lei for the activity financed from ENRF. The differences in the realisation of the revenues pertaining to the core activity mainly originate from evaluation processes not being completed by the end of 2023. The unrealised difference of 6,860,961 Lei of the expenses pertaining to basic operations is explained by the measures implemented in the evaluation process, especially as a result of the austerity measures imposed by the legislation in force.

1.1.6 Procurement of IT equipment and services

Tender books and/or technical specifications were drafted in 2023 for the procurement of various IT products or services. Thus, the following purchases were made:

Table 3. List of IT equipment and services purchased in 2023

No.	Equipment/Services	No.
1.	Video conference system licenses Cisco Webex	20 subscriptions
2.	Zoom Business license subscriptions	10 pcs
3.	Internet service subscription	2 pack
4.	Legislation service subscription	2 pack
5.	Antivirus licenses	140 pcs
6.	Grammarly Business licenses	1 pcs
7.	Software for online designing-editing-publishing	1 pcs
8.	Technical services - accounting programme maintenance	1 pack
9.	Computer system maintenance services	1 pack
10.	Maintenance services for copying machines	1 pack
11.	Annual maintenance of IP addresses	1 pack

1.1.7 Legal activities

In 2023 ARACIS was a defendant in 2 cases brought to court. The defence pleas were formulated for all cases, de jure and de facto, by drafting denials of claims and enclosing

supporting documents. Up to now, 1 of the cases on the docket of the courts is pending, and 1 case was lost.

The evaluation activities conducted in 2023 required a large number of expert evaluators to be involved; therefore, 810 quality evaluation contracts were concluded with Romanian expert evaluators, and 92 quality evaluation contracts were concluded with international expert evaluators.

14 Decisions of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council and 125 ARACIS Council Decisions were drafted for year 2023, pertaining to various circumstances and cases. All the Decisions of the Executive Board of the ARACIS Council and all Council Resolutions have undergone the internal transparency, communication, numbering and archiving procedures.

Furthermore, all templates of service contracts that ARACIS uses in its evaluation activity and signs with the higher education institutions, as well as the template contracts for quality evaluation, concluded by ARACIS with domestic and international expert evaluators have been drafted and updated.

1.1.8 Internal quality assurance

Internal quality assurance includes all the activities carried out by the Agency, namely external evaluation activities and professional and administrative activities carried out by the Agency's own staff.

Procedures were drafted and reviewed in 2023 concerning the internal activities carried out by the Agency's organisational structures, as well as procedures that regulate quality assurance in external evaluation processes.

The ARACIS Legal and Internal Quality Assurance Office, through the internal quality assurance component, coordinates and provides the required logistic support for the activities related to establishing, documenting, implementing, maintaining, and continuously improving the efficacy of the internal quality assurance system of ARACIS, and collaborates with all the Agency's internal structures for this purpose.

By applying the internal quality assurance system, the ARACIS management commits to:

- promoting a culture of internal quality assurance;
- to efficiently manage and continuously improve the Agency's processes and resources;
- to identify, integrate, and establish the interaction of all the elements of the internal quality assurance system within the Agency;
- to train the employees, including the members of the ARACIS Council, on topics regarding internal quality assurance, in order to increase awareness on the importance of the individual contribution for achieving the Agency's objectives;
- to improve awareness and promote the importance of internal quality assurance among the Agency's own staff, management, and technical structures composed of expert evaluators, bearing in mind the impact that the results of the external education quality assurance evaluation services provided by the Agency has in the society.

The maintenance and continuous improvement of the Internal quality assurance system complies with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), integrated with the Managerial Internal Control Standards (SCIM).

Policy declaration on internal quality assurance at ARACIS, published on the Agency's website, remains in force in 2023.

For the main processes, records were kept in 2023 for all documented information/records; thus, the following documents were approved and published on the website at the Agency's level: two sets of regulations; two methodologies; one procedure for general processes, and 5 (five) revised standards of the Speciality Commissions.

To ensure a homogeneous, coherent system for documenting procedures (for the support processes) at the level of the Agency, the ARACIS management maintained and supported the integration of the managerial internal control system (SCIM).

The process of controlling system and operational procedures is integrated in the activity of the technical secretariat of the Monitoring Commission, which is ensured by the BJAIC personnel.

The responsibilities of the Technical Secretariat of the Monitoring Commission are established pursuant to the Order of the General Secretariat of the Government no. 600/2018 on approving the Code of managerial internal control of public entities, pursuant to the decision of the ARACIS president on setting up the Monitoring Commission for the implementation and development of the SCIM, and to the Organisational and Operational Regulations of the Monitoring Commission.

The activities carried out in 2023 for the purpose of developing the managerial internal control system (SCIM) were as follows:

- ✓ Recording, centralisation and processing of the data submitted by the internal structures of ARACIS;
- ✓ Control of the system procedures (PS) and operational procedures (PO), by assigning codes to the procedures;
- ✓ Analysing the documented procedures for compliance with the minimal structure envisaged in the template presented in OSGG no. 600/2018, supplemented with the requirements contained in our own system procedure;
- ✓ Keeping updated records of all system procedures (SP) and operational procedures (OP) of ARACIS;
- ✓ Centralisation of the self-evaluation questionnaires evaluating the progress in the implementation of the managerial internal control standards, filled in by the ARACIS structure for the purpose of drafting the Synthetic report on the self-evaluation reports and the Summary on the progress of implementation and the development of the managerial internal control system;
- ✓ Drafting of the Report on the managerial internal control system.

In 2023, 7 (seven) operational procedures (OP) of the Agency were revised, and new editions were drafted for 22 (twenty two) operational procedures and 5 (five) system procedures related to the internal operations of the Agency.

The external feedback received from representatives of higher education institutions and other stakeholders on the external evaluation process and the activity of ARACIS teams of evaluators

is one of the main components of the internal quality assurance system. Thus, using the ARACIS activity evaluation questionnaires filled in by the institutions evaluated in 2023, the BJAIC personnel drafts a report.

Similar to the previous years, year 2023 was a year of progress in revising and implementing internal quality assurance procedures for the Agency's activities. However, the implementation of the managerial internal control system is a continuous, long-lasting process and requires comprehensive management instruments to be developed.

1.1.9 Professional and administrative activities

All ARACIS activities are carried out in compliance with the provisions of the Code of ethics and rules of conduct (hereinafter the "Code of Ethics"). The Ethics Commission of ARACIS operationally ensures compliance with the provisions of the Code of Ethics.

Through the provisions of its Code of Ethics, ARACIS aligns to the principles and provisions of the Expert Evaluators' Code of Conduct of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). The Code of Ethics is periodically improved; the edition in force is the 3rd edition, revised and supplemented, approved in the ARACIS Council Meeting of September 28, 2017. The Code of Ethics applies to all employees and external collaborators involved in ARACIS's activities.

The Ethics Commission of ARACIS has five members: a president, member of the Council, and four members, three of which are members of the Council – a professor, a student, and the representative of the higher education union, and the fourth one is appointed by the ARACIS Council among the permanent staff of the Agency. The Ethics Commission operates on a four-year mandate. The membership of the Ethics Commission, approved by the ARACIS Council on 14.01.2022, was modified because of the change of the representatives of the students' federations, on the ARACIS Council's meeting of 28.10.2022. The Secretariat of the Ethics Commission is composed of two members appointed by the ARACIS President among the permanent staff of ARACIS. The membership of the Secretariat of the Ethics Commission was changed by the ARACIS Council Decision no. 12 of 02.08.2021.

The Ethics Commission is assisted by a legal adviser who approves its resolutions.

External evaluation activities involve members of the Council, external expert evaluators from the categories listed in the RNE, and the Agency's own staff - speciality inspectors and/or experts involved in professional activities that are directly linked to the evaluation process. The ARACIS Advisory Commission plays a key role in monitoring compliance with the procedures and ethical norms during the institutional evaluation procedures.

As ARACIS assigns special importance to the compliance with evaluation procedures and ethical norms, the number of registered violations was very small throughout the operation of the Agency, and such violations were merely isolated cases. However, one notification regarding the conduct of a RNE member was registered in 2023. The ARACIS management notified the Ethics Commission, which then pursued all the stages set forth in the Code of Ethics.

The suspected breach of the provisions of the Code of Ethics concerned a member of the Selection Panel for filling the vacancies on the ARACIS Permanent (speciality) Experts' Commission.

The Ethics Commission followed the stages described in the Code of Ethics, namely the members of the Ethics Commission met and analysed the notification; a notification was formulated and sent to the person suspected to have breached the provisions of the Code of Ethics. Furthermore, the members of the Ethics Commission decided to invite all persons involved in the selection process to attend the debates. The draft resolution developed by the Ethics Commission was sent to the person suspected to have violated the provisions of the Code of Ethics, who was asked to formulate a representation; further on, the documents were forwarded to the BEx and then to the ARACIS Council. After reviewing the information presented in the Draft Resolution written by the Ethics Commission and after the debates, the ARACIS Council decided to approve the Draft Resolution. The decision of the ARACIS Council, no. 73 of 28.09.2023 was published on the Agency's web page.

1.1.10 Activity of the Public Internal Audit Compartment

The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) has the obligation to issue and submit its annual activity report on the public internal audit function to the Central Harmonisation Unit for Public Internal Audit (UCAAPI) and the Romanian Court of Accounts.

The annual activity report presents the progress in organising and operating the public internal audit structure as of 31 December 2023, and the public internal audit activity performed by the public internal audit structure at ARACIS during 2023.

The public internal audit function at ARACIS is established through an internal structure of the Agency, namely the Public Internal Audit Compartment.

According to the organisational chart of ARACIS, the Public Internal Audit Compartment is staffed with two public internal auditor positions. Currently, the Public Internal Audit Compartment is staffed with one public internal auditor position, while the other internal auditor position is vacant.

In terms of its operation, the Public Internal Audit Compartment is directly subordinated to the ARACIS President, and carries out its function independently from the Agency's activities.

In 2023, the public internal auditor of the Public Internal Audit Compartment was not involved in performing any auditable activities. For every public internal audit mission in 2023, the public internal auditor filled in a "Declaration of independence" showing that there are no personal incompatibility situations.

The Public Internal Audit Compartment issued specific methodological norms on carrying out public internal audit activities, in line with the provisions of point 1.4.1 of Annex no. 1 to Government Decision no. 1086/2013 approving the General norms for carrying out public internal audit activities. The specific methodological norms regarding the public internal audit activity were approved by the ARACIS President and endorsed by UCAAPI according to the Qualified Endorsement no. 40/13.05.2014.

In line with the Action plan for implementing recommendations, registered at no. 4986 on 26.07.2019, drafted following UCAAPI's Evaluation report no. 370.944/06.09.2016, which includes recommendation no. 2 on obtaining the unqualified endorsement of UCAAPI, the specific public internal audit norms were updated and submitted for endorsement in letters no. 7315/30.12.2021 and no. 994/21.02.2022; however, the drafts were returned with no endorsement, and the main cause for not granting an endorsement was as follows: "to provide

for the necessary measures to ensure performance of the management responsibilities specific to the public internal audit structure, including the supervisory activity".

The Programme for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity (PAIC), registered at no. 6.635/22.11.2021, was issued at the level of the Public Internal Audit Compartment of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The Programme for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity includes: the programme drafting methodology; the action plan, and the monitoring report.

The Programme for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity (PAIC) is updated regularly; the last update of the document was registered at no. 143/05.12.2023. Furthermore, the Action plan for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity was drafted in 2023 and registered at no. 144/05.12.2023. The action plan is the instrument that operationalises the Programme for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity, and its structure includes objectives, actions, performance indicators, deadlines, entities in charge, and comments.

The 2023 Report on the public internal audit activity quality monitoring was drafted and registered at no. 145/05.12.2023. The monitoring report of the Programme for quality assurance and quality improvement of the public internal audit activity presents the results of the evaluation of the progress on the achievement of the objectives established in the action plan. The Public Internal Audit Compartment was not evaluated by the Romanian Court of Accounts, UCAAPI or other entities during the reporting year (2023).

The public internal audit activity was planned by the Public Internal Audit Compartment of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) as follows:

- the 4-year multi-annual planning includes the missions for auditing the structures of the Technical Staff of the Agency, which are audited at least once in 4 years;
- the annual planning includes the missions to be carried out throughout one year, based on the results of the risk evaluation and the available audit resources.

The public internal audit missions included in the plan were selected according to the provisions of point 2.4.1.3. of Annex no. 1 to Government Decision no. 1086/2013 on approving the General norms for carrying out public internal audit.

The multi-annual public internal audit plan was drafted for a 4-year period, namely 2023-2026; the document was registered at no. 6.304/24.11.2022 and approved by the ARACIS President and registered at no. 6.558/13.12.2022.

The annual public internal audit plan was drafted before 30 November 2022, registered at no. 6.303/24.11.2022 and approved by the ARACIS President by 20 December 2022, and registered at no. 6.559/13.12.2022.

The public internal audit missions included in the Multi-annual 2023-2026 public internal audit plan and the 2023 Public internal audit plan were substantiated by the substantiation report registered at no. 6.305/24.11.2022, approved by the ARACIS President and registered at no. 6.559/13.12.2022, which includes a summary of the results of the relevant risk analysis for each public internal audit mission, the flag criteria and other specific elements considered in selecting those public internal audit missions.

The 2023 Public internal audit plan, registered at no. 6.559/13.12.2022, approved by the ARACIS President, includes 4 public internal audit missions, as follows:

- 4 regularity/compliance assurance missions, namely:

1. Regularity/compliance assurance mission regarding "Evaluation of the organisation and operation of the Quality Assurance Direction", regarding the field of specific functions; duration of auditing activities: 01.02.2023 – 28.03.2023.
2. Regularity/compliance assurance mission regarding the "Accounting system and reliability of the accounting system", regarding the financial-accounting field; duration of auditing activities: 29.03.2023 - 26.05.2023.
3. Regularity/compliance assurance mission regarding "Evaluation of the corruption prevention system, 2023", regarding other fields; duration of auditing activities: 29.05.2023 - 25.07.2023.
4. Regularity/compliance assurance mission regarding "Evaluation of the organisation and operation of staff employment and proper establishment of salaries and other rights", regarding the field of human resources, regarding the legal field; duration of auditing activities: 02.10.2023 – 24.11.2023.

All the 4 public internal audit missions included in the 2023 Public internal audit plan have been carried out.

No irregularities were found during the public internal audit missions carried out in 2023, and there have been no formulated recommendations that were not taken up by the ARACIS President.

20 recommendations were followed up, with the following results:

- 16 recommendations implemented within the established time limit;
- 4 recommendations not implemented, for which the time limit established for implementation has not been exceeded.

At the level of the Public Internal Audit Compartment, the attendance rate of the public internal auditor in professional training activities in 2023 was 100%. The average number of professional training days for the public internal auditor, according to Law no. 672/2002 on the public internal audit, as further amended and supplemented, is 15 days, which included:

- 4 days of training courses;
- 11 days of individual study.

1.2 Summary of activities

1.2.1 Management of current activities

During 2023, the BEx of the ARACIS Council sat in meetings that were usually organised weekly, and in extraordinary meetings organised whenever necessary. On such occasions, the BEx reviewed the requests and documents received by it for review and decision, and formulated resolutions, which were forwarded directly to the applicants or submitted to the ARACIS Council for review and approval.

In all these cases, irrespective of the form of the requests (letters, e-mail, phone requests, etc.), the responses were formulated within the legal deadline and within the limits of ARACIS's competence.

During the reference period, one appeal was filed regarding a bachelor study programme; the appeal was allowed and solved.

1.2.2 Collaboration with higher education institutions and other stakeholders

The Executive Board of the ARACIS Council organised hearings for the interested natural entities or the representatives of the interested institutions, such as: rectors of higher education institutions; presidents of associations or foundations; university professors; journalists; students, etc., and provided written answers to the requests of the higher education institutions in Romania and of other stakeholders.

The entire activity carried out by ARACIS in 2023 was based on expanding the collaboration with stakeholders with a view to assuring quality in the higher education system in Romania. ARACIS was an active partner of Romanian universities, and through its activities and projects supported their efforts towards assuring and improving quality, as well as the efforts of the MoE towards drafting and/or revising some national regulations in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

1.2.3 Students' involvement

Students are full members both in the ARACIS Council and in the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions; they attend the meetings of the BEx of the ARACIS Council and all evaluations carried out by the Agency, and are permanently involved in all the Agency's activities.

The National Register of Evaluators - Students (RNE-S) was updated in 2023 based on the information received from students' federations regarding continuation of the student status. The composition of the RNE-S, posted on the webpage of ARACIS, (http://www.aracis.ro/registrul-national-al-evaluatorilor) is periodically updated and supplemented.

ARACIS continued to engage students in all external evaluation processes, in line with the regulations in force in Romania and the provisions of ESG 2015. The process of selecting new student representatives in the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions in 2023 was carried out in compliance with the provisions of the Procedure for selecting and appointing students, members of the Permanent Speciality Experts Commissions.

1.2.4 Evaluation of the Agency's activity by beneficiaries and other stakeholders

The Agency pays great attention to how it carries out its activities in order to enable continuous improvement of such activities. To this purpose, after introducing and disseminating a feedback questionnaire in 2017 to gather information about how the evaluated institution perceives the activity of the Agency, the analysis of the questionnaire titled "Opinion of the representatives of the evaluated higher education institutions and other stakeholders about the external evaluation process and the activity of the ARACIS evaluation panels" – year 2023 continued in 2023.

Furthermore, the activity of ARACIS was evaluated through a comprehensive study on the activity and impact of ARACIS on the quality of higher education in Romania. The research started in 2022, focusing on the following target groups: students, graduates, professors, and employers. The number of respondents was 6,220. The volume of the validated sample per each target group is as follows:

No.	Target group	Sample size	No. of interviews
1	Students	1,709	30
2	Graduates	1,535	30
3	Professors	1,452	41
4	Employers	1,524	20
TOTAL		6,220	121

The study will be completed in 2024.

1.2.5 Studies and thematic analyses produced at the Research Office

According to the 2023 Operational Programme[1], the members of the Research Office, together with a team of experts from the Agency, worked on research studies and thematic analyses (AT), including:

a) Developing the Higher Education and Quality Assurance System Barometer – with a validated sample size of 81,786 people. The distribution of the sample per target groups is as follows:

No.	Target group	Sample size	No. of interviews
1	Students	77,275*	30
2	Graduates	1,535	30
3	Professors	1,452	41
4	Employers	1,524	20
TOTAL		81,786	121

Note: * The database was supplemented with the questionnaires made and validated in the QAFIN project.

The study will be completed in 2024.

This approach is a continuation of the activities presented in the Barometer of quality in the higher education system, published by ARACIS in 2015, and intends to continuously identify measures to improve the external quality assurance procedures.

b) Conducting a study on the ethics and academic integrity approach in external quality evaluation processes - the study will be presented to INQAAHE in April 2024.
c) The thematic analyses regarding the evaluation of doctoral study programmes have been completed:
   - ✓ Statistical analysis of the human potential involved in the external evaluation of doctoral studies
   - ✓ Analysis of the indicators, qualifications and recommendations resulted from the external evaluation of IOSUD, 2021
   - ✓ Analysis of the activity and quality of doctoral studies at the level of IOSUDs, 2021
   - ✓ Analysis of the level of internationalisation of the activity of doctoral studies at the level of IOSUDs - Criterion C.3
   - ✓ Analysis of the indicators and qualifications resulted from the external evaluation of doctoral domains.

Some of the thematic analyses were disseminated by the Agency's management in various domestic and international conferences.

[1] https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Plan-operational-al-ARACIS-pentru-anul-2023.pdf

Besides the studies, the following activities were conducted by the Research Office:

a) Drawing up of the 2022 ARACIS Activity Report (bilingual – Romanian and English)
b) Publishing of the QAR Magazine no. 12 vol. 1 and vol. 2 – year 2022[2]
c) Launching of the QAR Magazine no. 13 vol. 1 and vol. 2 – year 2023, and enlargement of the editorial and international reviewers' committee.

2 EXTERNAL EVALUATION ACTIVITIES AND THE NATIONAL EXPERT EVALUATORS' REGISTER

Approval by the ministers in charge with higher education of the new Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area – ESG 2015 at the Ministers' Conference of Yerevan (Armenia, May 14-15, 2015) brought about the need to revise the Methodology for external evaluation of ARACIS, approved by GD no. 915/2017 published in the Official Gazette of Romania, Part I, no. 25/11.01.2018[3].

For ARACIS, improving the criteria, standards and performance indicators is a continuous concern and a continuous process.

2.1 Evaluations conducted by ARACIS in 2023

The Agency's current portfolio of external higher education quality evaluation activities includes the following types of evaluation: Institutional evaluations; bachelor study programmes evaluations; Evaluations of master programmes / study domains; Doctoral school and doctoral domain evaluations; Evaluations of teacher training programmes, and Evaluations of Romanian language programmes for foreign students (figure 7).

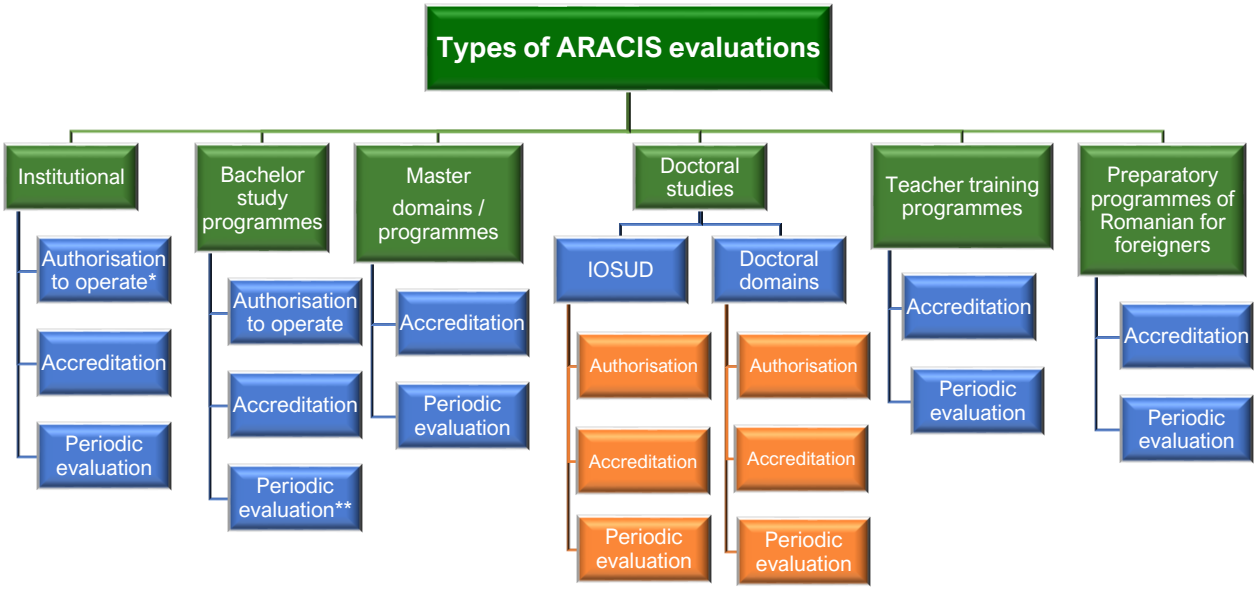


Figure 6. Types of evaluations in the ARACIS portfolio

*Key: * Granted by the Ministry of Education*

[2] https://www.aracis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/1.-QAR-total-vol12-nr.1-2-web-rev.pdf
[3] Decision no. 915 of 14 December 2017 modifying the annex to Government Decision no. 1418/2006 approving the Methodology for external evaluation, standards, reference standards and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

** *Implicitly EUR-ACE evaluations*

In 2023, ARACIS had 376 applications from universities requesting external quality evaluation for bachelor and master programmes; 63 requests for evaluation for the classification of new master programmes under accredited master domains[4]; 10 requests for external evaluation of the teacher training programme for certification of skills for the teaching profession, and 19 requests for evaluation of the preparatory programme of Romanian language for foreigners.

24 higher education institutions approached the Agency with requests for the periodic external evaluation of 129 master study domains (DSUM).

Furthermore, 10 requests for external evaluation of the academic quality (institutional external evaluation) and two requests for institutional accreditation in the Republic of Moldova were filed.

In 2023, 14 institutions organising doctoral studies (IOSUD) filed 23 requests for external evaluation for the setting up of new doctoral studies domains. Furthermore, ARACIS had 5 requests for external quality evaluation of doctoral study domains (evaluation after one year) after receiving a conditional accreditation qualification (requests from 3 IOSUD).

In order to respond to these requests, the Accreditation Department of ARACIS operated according to its prerogatives laid down in the ROF, as follows:

- drafting of the internal reports of ARACIS, with support from the staff of the technical structure of ARACIS, for the validation of the results of the missions for the evaluation of programmes for provisional authorisation (AP), accreditation (A) or periodical evaluation (EP) (for continuation of the accreditation);
- organising and managing the database of education programme evaluations;
- management and updating of the ARACIS National Register of Evaluators.

Table 4 gives a status of the study programmes in universities in Romania evaluated by ARACIS in 2023. Most of the evaluation activities were for accredited study programmes, evaluated periodically to maintain their accreditation.

Table 4. Total external evaluations carried out by ARACIS in 2023, per types of evaluation

TYPE OF EVALUATION	No. of evaluations
Institutional evaluations (EI)	21
Bachelor study programmes	553
Master study programmes	79
Master study domains (DM)	63
Preparatory programmes of Romanian language for foreigners	16
Teacher training programmes for certification of skills for the teaching profession DPPD	13
Higher education institutions organising doctoral studies (IOSUD)	0
Doctoral study domains (DD)	45

[4] This type of external evaluation was performed before the coming into force of Law no. 199/2023 on higher education. Decision no. 265/H/28.09.2023 of the ARACIS Council repealed the provisions of the *Procedure for external evaluation for categorising a new master study programme under an accredited master study programme,* part III of the *Procedures for the periodic external accreditation/evaluation of master study domains* approved by Decision no. 46/30.05.2017 of the ARACIS Council.

TYPE OF EVALUATION	No. of evaluations
Total evaluations	790

Source: Processed by ARACIS

The activities carried out by each Speciality Commission are summarised in Table 5. Most of the times, the Speciality Commissions had monthly meetings.

Table 5 Number of meetings and evaluated programmes, per Speciality Commissions and ARACIS Council meetings in 2023

Permanent (speciality) Experts' Commissions	No. of meetings	Bachelor programmes	Master domains	Master programmes
ARACIS Council meetings	20	-	-	-
C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	10	39	6	14
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	9	35	2	4
C3 - Legal Sciences	8	17	4	1
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	10	35	11	9
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	7	31	4	8
C6 - Economic Sciences I	9	41	6	8
C7 - Economic Sciences II	11	32	3	5
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and Sports	14	61	4	9
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	5	20	5	0
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	12	64	8	12
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	12	69	7	4
C12 - Medical Sciences	12	40	3	4
C13 – Distance and part-time learning	8	69	0	1
Total evaluated programmes	**-**	**553**	**63**	**79**

Source: Processed by ARACIS

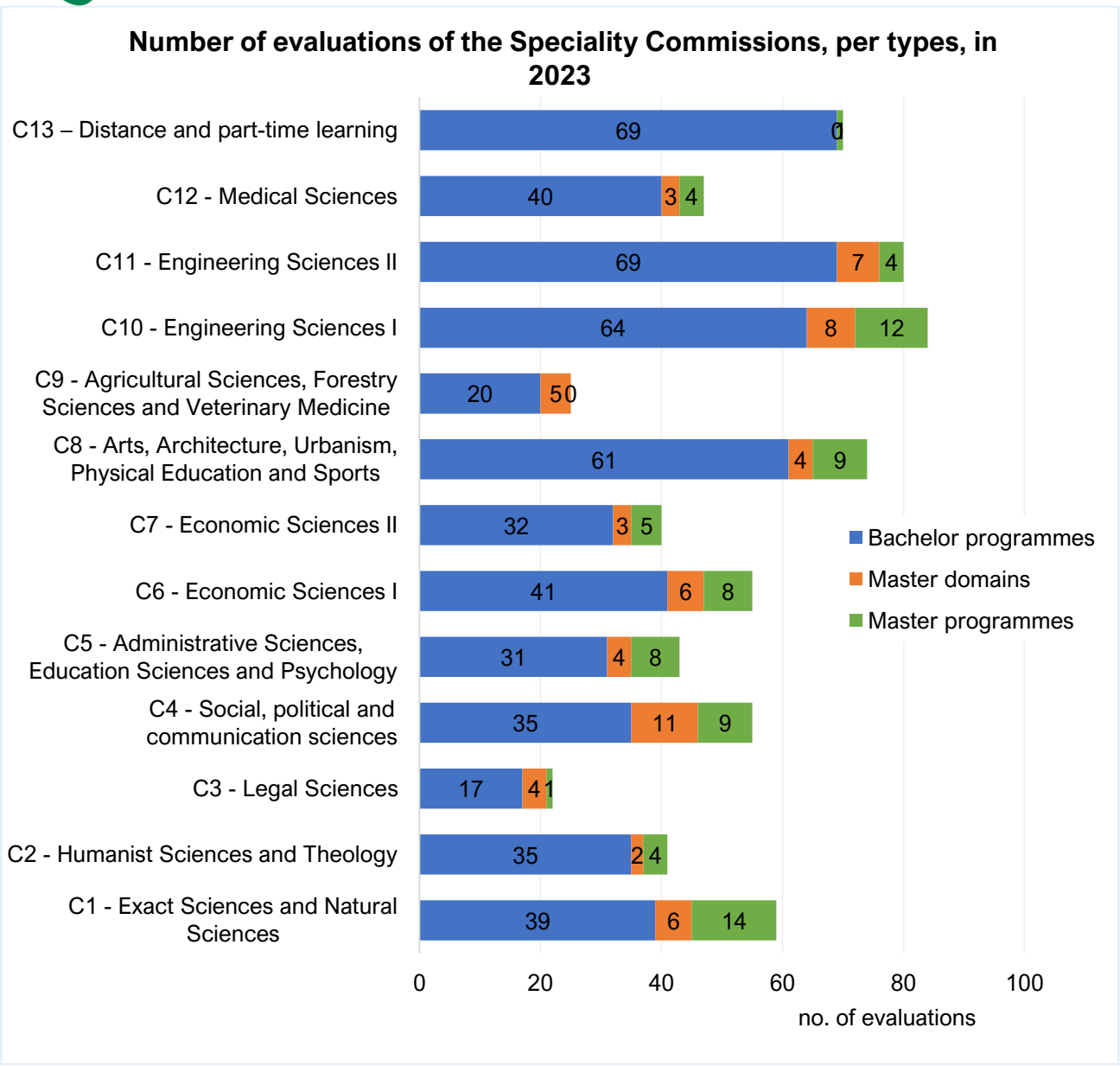


Figure 7. Number of evaluations of the Speciality Commissions, per types, in 2023

2.1.1 Institutional evaluations

In 2023, the figures related to the external evaluation of higher education institutions are as follows:

Table 6. Qualifications obtained in the institutional evaluations in 2023

Indicator	Qualifications obtained						Total institutional evaluations
	High degree of confidence	Confidence	Limited degree of confidence	No confidence	Institutional accreditation	Institutional non-accreditation	
No. of evaluations	10	4	-	-	7 *	-	21

*ARACIS, in collaboration with ANACEC, carried out institutional evaluation for 6 universities in the Republic of Moldova, out of which 5 universities within the QFORTE project.

Table 7. Programmes/domains evaluated within the institutional evaluations carried out in 2023

Type of programmes	Form of education			TOTAL
	Full time (FT)	Part-time (PT)	Remote (R)	
Bachelor programmes	61	2	6	69
Master domains				3
Master programmes evaluated in the 3 DM	8			8

In 2023, ARACIS provided the higher education institutions with the certificates certifying the qualifications awarded after the institutional evaluations performed by the Agency during the 2022/2023 academic year.

2.1.2 Evaluation of bachelor study programmes

A statistic report on the evaluations of bachelor study programmes evaluated by ARACIS in 2023 is given below:

Table 8. Evaluations of bachelor programmes by form of education in 2023

indicator	Form of education			Total evaluations
	Full time education (FTE)	Part-time education (PTE)	Distance education (DE)	
No. of programmes	484	26	43	553
Share %	87.5%	4.7%	7.8%	100%

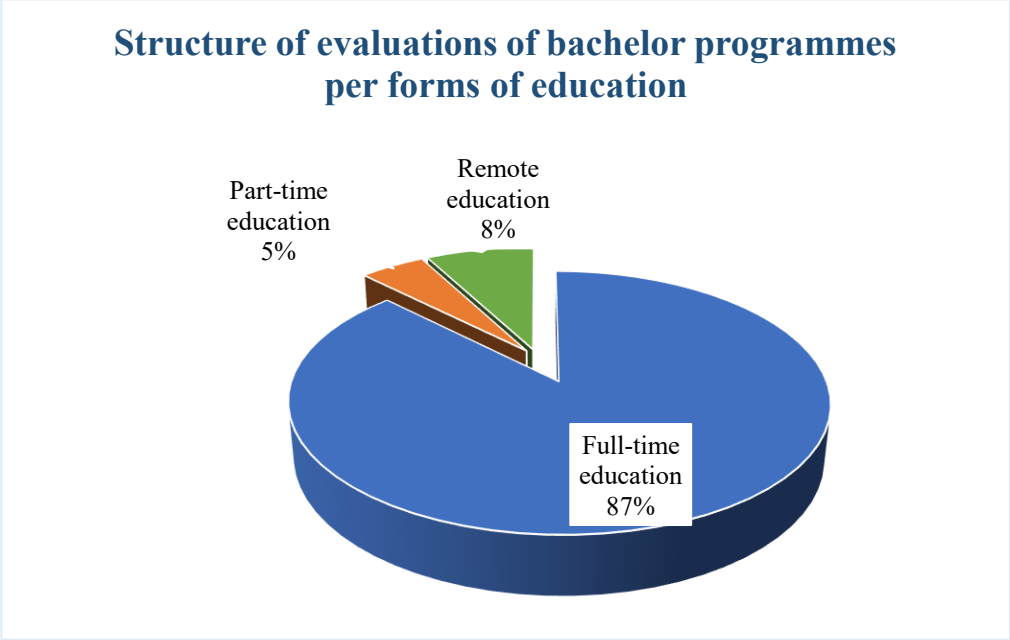


Figure 8. Structure of evaluations of bachelor programmes by forms of education

Table 9. Distribution of bachelor programme evaluations by type of evaluation in 2023

indicator	Type of evaluation			Total evaluations
	Provisional authorisation (AP)	Accreditation (A)	Periodic evaluation (EP)	
No. of programmes	58	47	448	553
Share %	10.49%	8.50%	81.01%	100%

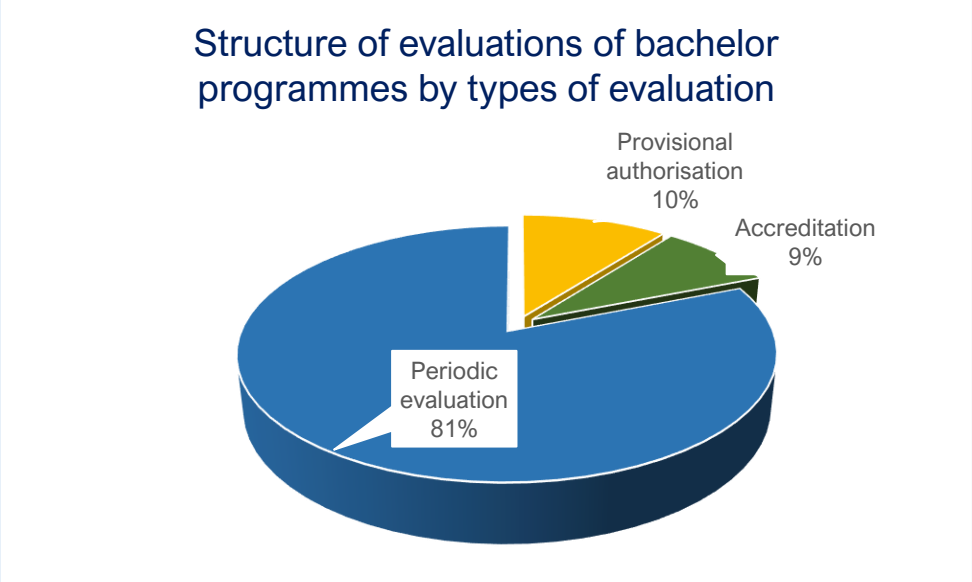


Figure 9. Structure of evaluations of bachelor programmes by types of evaluation

Table 10. Approvals obtained in the evaluation of bachelor programmes for Authorisation in 2023

Authorisation / Type of evaluation	Approvals obtained			Total
	Authorisation	Authorisation with monitoring	Non-authorisation	
No. of programmes	56	1	1	58
Share %	96.56%	1.72%	1.72%	100%

Table 11. Approvals obtained in the evaluation of bachelor programmes for Accreditation in 2023

Accreditation / Type of evaluation	Approvals obtained			Total
	Accreditation	Accreditation with monitoring	Non-accreditation	
No. of programmes	46	1	0	47
Share %	97.87%	2.13%	0%	100%

Table 12. Approvals obtained in the periodic evaluation of bachelor programmes during the periodic evaluation in 2023

Periodic evaluation/ Type of evaluation	Approvals obtained			Total
	Maintaining accreditation	Maintaining accreditation under monitoring	Accreditation withdrawn	
No. of programmes	430	18	0	448
Share %	95.98%	4.02%	0%	100%

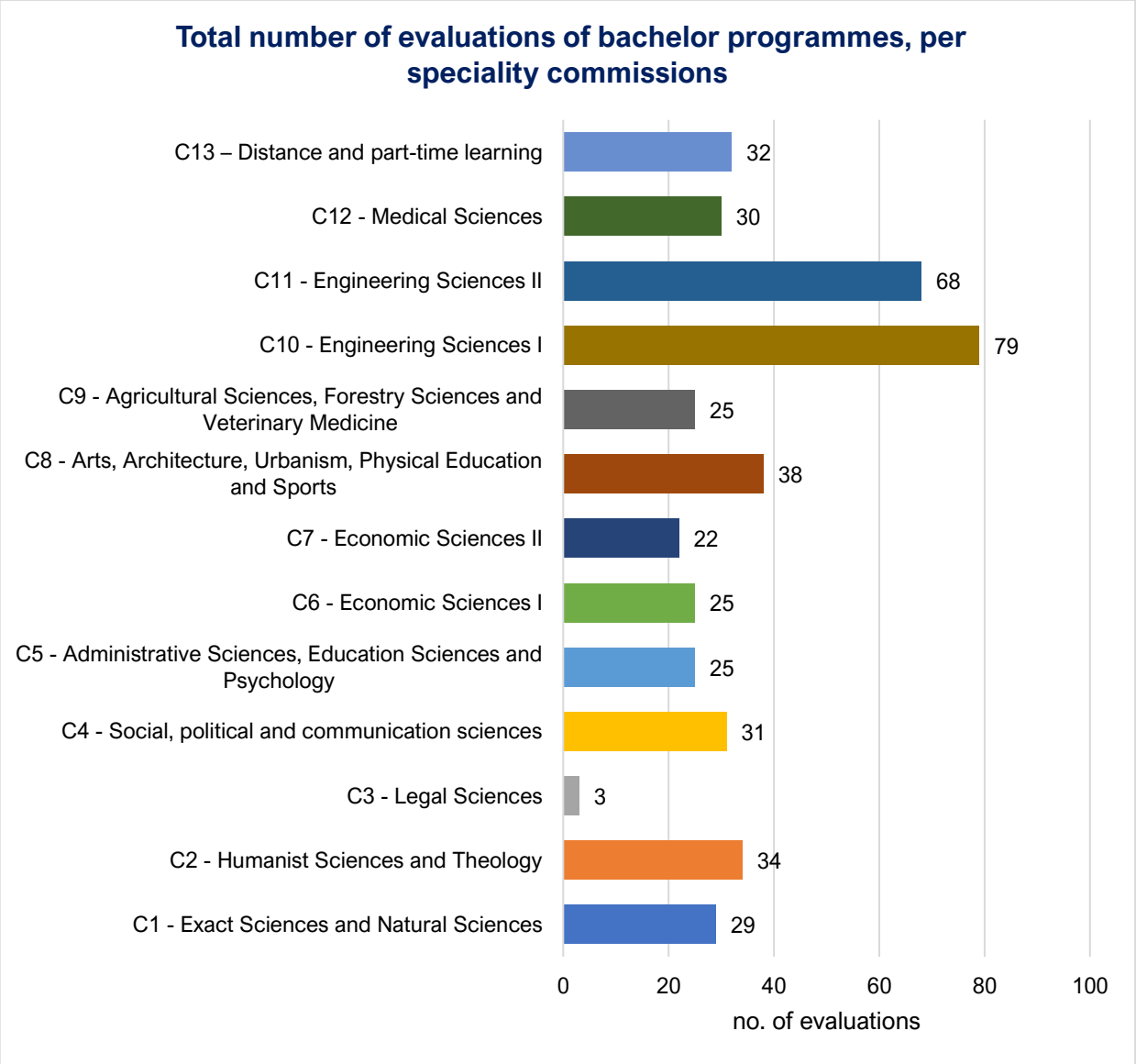


Figure 10. Total number of evaluations of bachelor programmes, per Speciality Commissions

Table 13. Number of evaluations of bachelor programmes, per Speciality Commissions

Commission	Bachelor programmes	Out of which:		
		Authori-sation	Accred itation	Periodic evaluation
C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	39	5	4	30
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	35	5	2	28
C3 - Legal Sciences	17	2	0	15
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	35	7	3	25
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	31	3	7	21
C6 - Economic Sciences I	41	0	4	37
C7 - Economic Sciences II	32	1	1	30

Commission	Bachelor programmes	Out of which: Authorisation	Accreditation	Periodic evaluation
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and Sports	61	3	8	50
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	20	3	3	14
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	64	6	1	57
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	69	10	3	56
C12 - Medical Sciences	40	10	2	28
C13 – Distance and part-time learning	69	3	9	57
Total evaluations	553	58	47	448

Source: Processed by ARACIS, February 2023

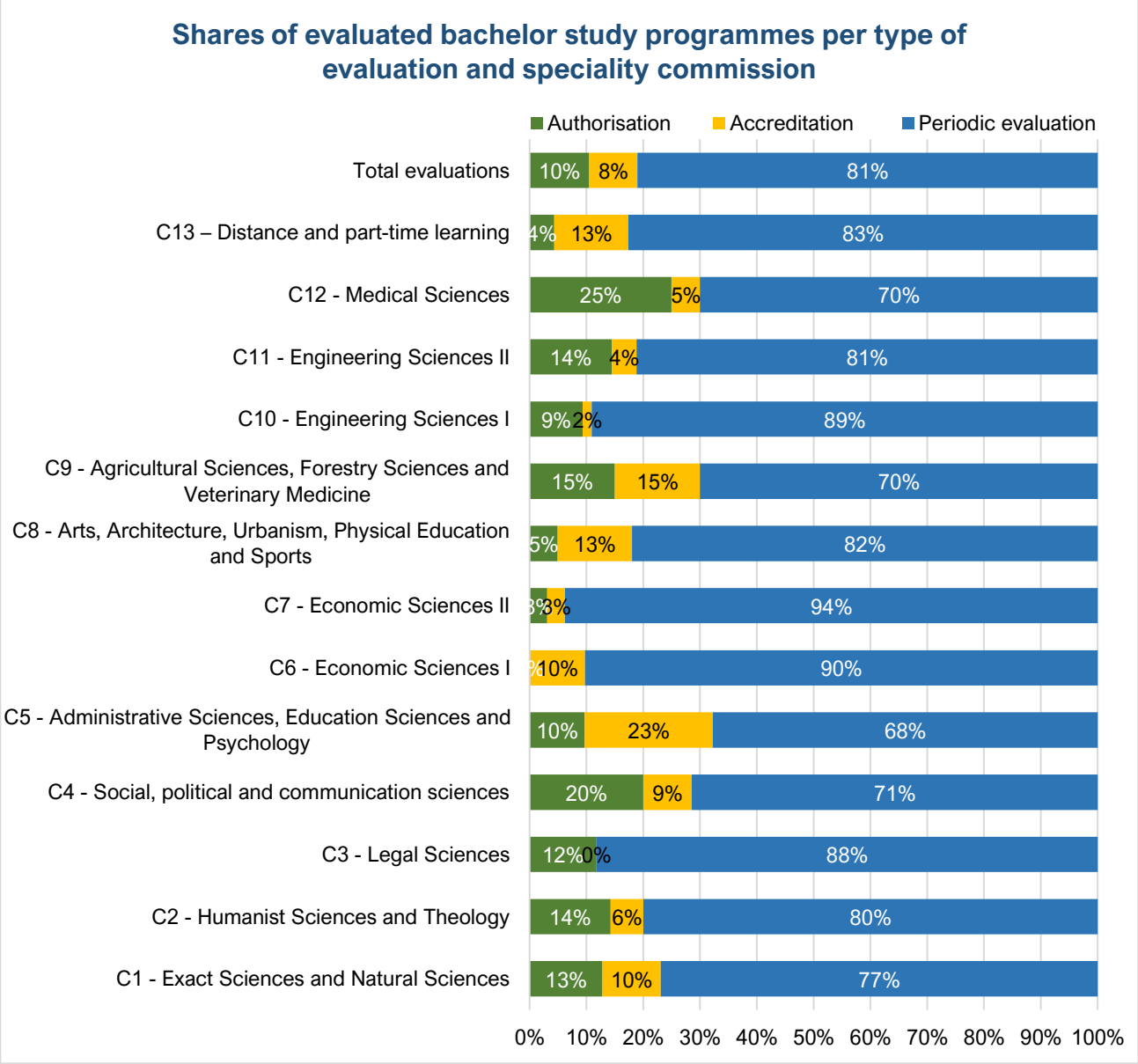


Figure 11. Structure of evaluated bachelor programmes, per types of evaluations and Speciality Commissions

Out of a total of 113 bachelor study programmes in engineering that have undergone periodic evaluations, 20 programmes also applied for EUR-ACE® certificate evaluation.

The list of EUR-ACE® certified bachelor programmes with certification granted by ARACIS in 2023 is given in Table 14.

Table 14. EUR-ACE certified bachelor programmes certified by ARACIS in 2023

No.	University	Study programme
1.	"Politehnica" National Science and Technology University, Bucharest	Applied electronics (tuition in English)
2.		Telecommunications technologies and systems (tuition in English)
3.		Road vehicles (in Pitesti)
4.		Machine construction technology (in Pitesti)
5.		Industrial economic engineering (in Pitesti)
6.	Technical Constructions University of Bucharest	Civil engineering (tuition in English)
7.		Civil engineering (tuition in French)
8.	"Transilvania" University of Braşov	Road vehicles (tuition in English)
9.		Engineering and business management
10.		Applied automation and computer sciences
11.		Electric engineering and computers (tuition in English)
12.		Land measuring and land registers
13.		Wood processing engineering
14.		Installations for constructions
15.		Civil, industrial, and agricultural constructions
16.		Industrial design (tuition in English)
17.	Technical University of Cluj-Napoca	Machine construction technology
18.	National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute"	Automated and Robotic Mechanical System
19.		Control Systems of Flight Vehicles and Complexes Engineering
20.		Electronic Components and System

2.1.3 Evaluations of master study programmes

A statistic report on the evaluations of master domains and study programmes evaluated by ARACIS in 2023 is given below:

Table 15.

Evaluations of master domains, by qualifications obtained in 2023

Indicator	Master domains evaluated		Total
	Maintaining accreditation	Accreditation withdrawn	
No. of domains	60 + 2 monitoring	1	63

Table 16. Evaluations of master programmes, by qualifications obtained in 2023

Indicator	For accreditation		For classification		Total evaluations
	Accreditation	Non-accreditation	classification	non-classification	

No. of programmes	13+1 monitoring	0	65	0	79
Total	14		65		

Table 17. Number of evaluations of Master domains and programmes, per Speciality Commissions

Commission	Master domains	Master programmes
C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	6	14
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	2	4
C3 - Legal Sciences	4	1
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	11	9
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	4	8
C6 - Economic Sciences I	6	8
C7 - Economic Sciences II	3	5
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and Sports	4	9
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	5	0
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	8	12
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	6	4
C12 - Medical Sciences	3	4
C13 – Distance and part-time learning	0	1
Total evaluations	62	79

Source: Processed by ARACIS

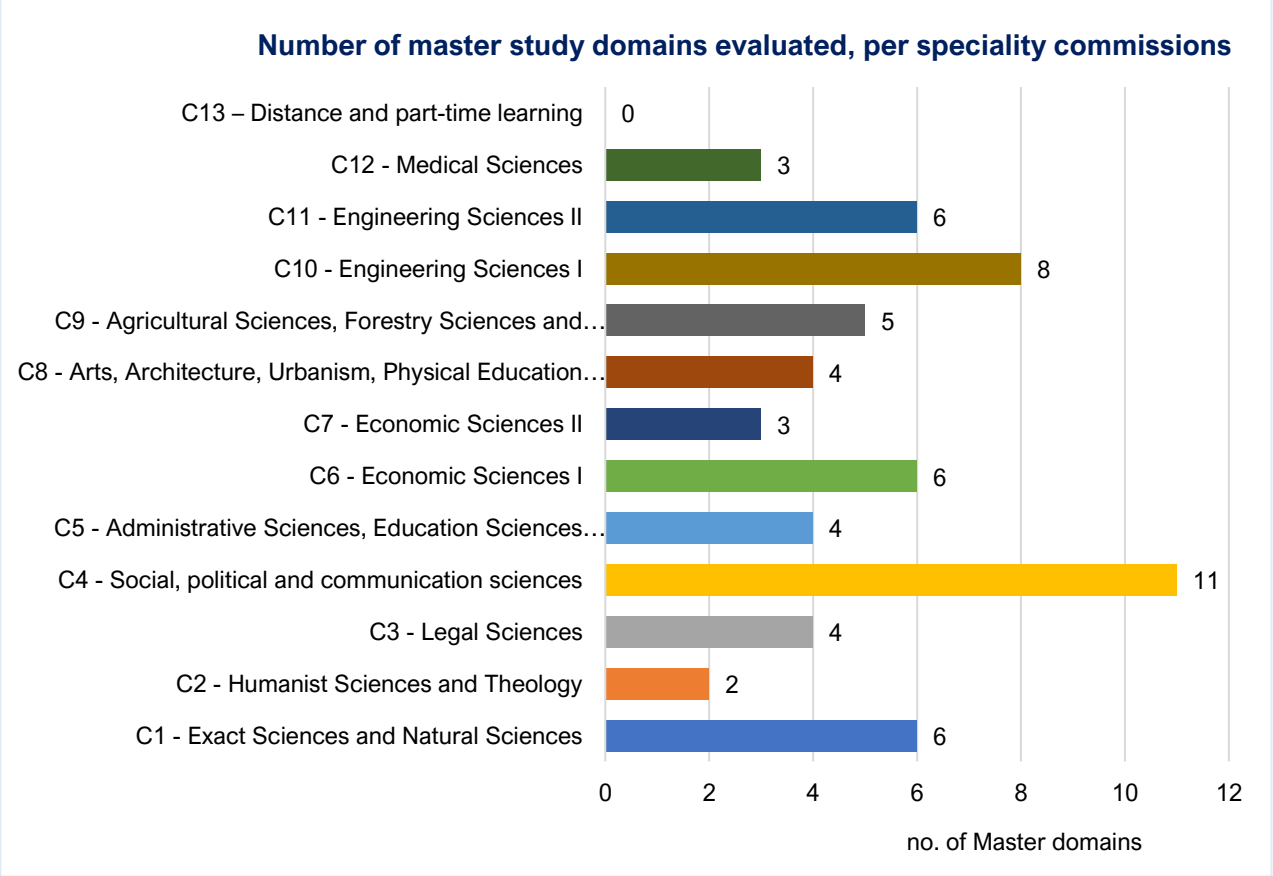


Figure 12. Number of Master domains evaluated, per Speciality Commissions

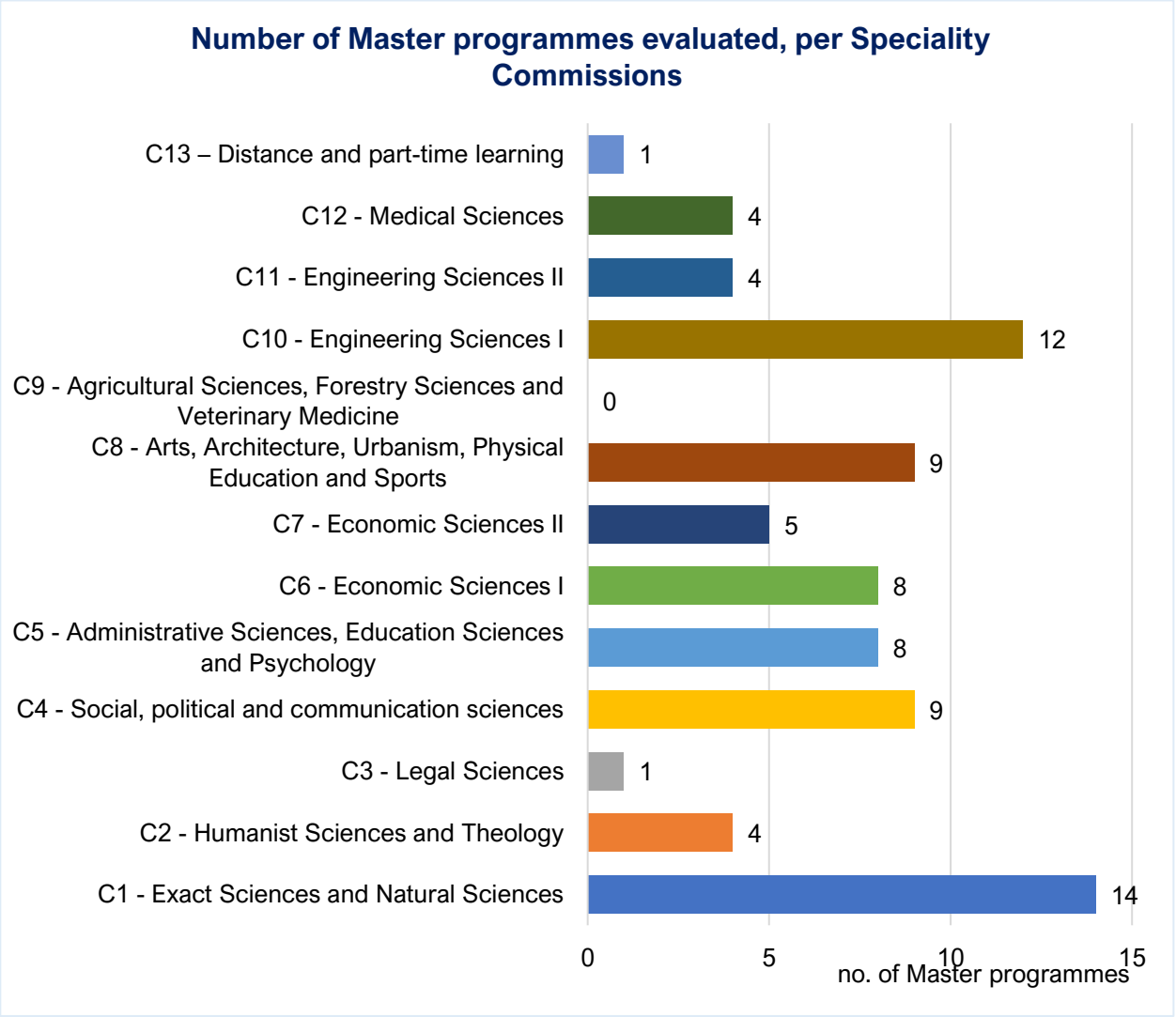


Figure 13. Number of Master programmes evaluated, per Speciality Commissions

2.1.4 Evaluations of doctoral study programmes

In 2023, ARACIS carried out the external evaluation of doctoral studies for 45 doctoral study domains (DD).

Table 18. General summary of the IOSUD and DD evaluation process in 2023

Type of evaluation	Number of evaluations
Institution organising doctoral studies	0
Doctoral domains (DD)	45

Table 19. Distribution of doctoral domain evaluations by type of evaluation in 2023

Type of evaluation	Type of evaluation			Total evaluations
	Provisional authorisation (PA)	Accreditation (A)	Periodic evaluation (PE)	
Doctoral domains	1	17	27	45

2.1.5 Evaluations of teacher training programmes

Table 20. Evaluations of teacher training programmes in 2023

Indicator	Type of evaluation		Total evaluations
	For accreditation (A)	Periodic evaluation for maintaining accreditation (EP)	
No. of programmes	1	12	13

2.1.6 Evaluations of "Preparatory programmes of Romanian for foreigners"

Table 21. Evaluations of "Preparatory programmes of Romanian for foreigners" by type of evaluation in 2023

Year	Type of evaluation		Total evaluations
	For accreditation (A)	Periodic evaluation for maintaining accreditation (EP)	
2023	2	14	16

2.1.7 International evaluations

2.1.7.1 Evaluation of the UNITA Alliance of European Universities

In 2023, ARACIS conducted the external evaluation of the UNITA Alliance of European Universities; the process was initiated upon the Alliance's request. The ARACIS Council validated the interim external evaluation report of the UNITA Alliance of European Universities at the meeting of 13 September 2023.

The evaluation of the UNITA alliance was conducted by ARACIS according to the provisions of the European Framework for Comprehensive Quality Assurance of European Universities, developed within the "Development of a European approach for comprehensive quality assurance of (European) university networks - EUniQ" project, funded through the Erasmus+ programme and implemented between May 2019 – November 2021. The EUniQ project was implemented by a partnership of eight quality assurance agencies, six ministries, including the Romanian Ministry of Education, and associations of stakeholders, namely ENQA, EUA and ESU.

The UNITA Alliance was established in 2020 by Università di Torino (Italy), Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour (France), Université Savoie Mont Blanc (France), Universidad de Zaragoza (Spain), Universidade Beira Interior (Portugalia), and Universitatea de Vest of Timişoara (Romania). UNITA also has a number of associated partners, such as international organisations, local authorities, universities, and representatives of the social-economic environment. After publication, early in July, by the European Commission of the results of the last call for projects aimed at alliances of European universities, the Transilvania University of Braşov has become full member of the UNITA Alliance, together with nine other European universities.

2.1.7.2 Evaluations in the Republic of Moldova

Within the project, ARACIS conducted QFORTE (Enhancement of Quality Assurance in Higher Education System in Moldova)five institutional evaluations for accreditation for the following

higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova: State University of Moldova; Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova; "Alecu Russo" State University of Bălți; "Bogdan Petriceicu Hașdeu" State University of Cahul; Academy of Music, Performance Arts, and Fine Arts of Chișinău.

Within this initiative, ARACIS harmonised its external evaluation methodology with the legal provisions of the Republic of Moldova by involving the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova and collaborating with the National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC). Furthermore, the external evaluation team included members nominated by ANACEC, who provided insights on the local context.

External evaluation reports have been validated by the ARACIS Council in July, and are available on the Agency's webpage: https://www.aracis.ro/evaluari-internationale-2/

Furthermore, in 2023, upon the request of the Free International University of Moldova (ULIM), ARACIS conducted the external institutional evaluation of ULIM. The ARACIS Council validated the results of the external evaluation of ULIM in the December meeting; the results are available on the Agency's web page.

2.1.7.3 Evaluations in Ukraine

In collaboration with the French agency Commission des titres d'ingénieur, ARACIS carried out the external evaluation of higher education programmes in engineering delivered by the National Technical University "Igor Sikorsky Polytechnics Institute of Kyiv" in Ukraine; the evaluation was carried out in hybrid mode.

Thus, ARACIS coordinated the evaluation of three bachelor study programmes, which included granting of EUR-ACE® certification, and nominated expert evaluators in the evaluations conducted by Cti for two master programmes.

Furthermore, these external evaluations were conducted in collaboration with the Ukrainian higher education quality assurance agency – National Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (NAQA), who nominated two expert evaluators to ensure better knowledge of the local context, as well as one observer.

2.2 The ARACIS National Register of Evaluators

The National Register of Evaluators is composed of: the National Register of Expert Evaluators (teaching staff), the National Register of Student Expert Evaluators, the Register of International Expert Evaluators, and the Register of Employers' Representatives (https://www.aracis.ro/registrul-national-al-evaluatorilor/).

The ARACIS National Register of Evaluators (RNE teaching staff), managed through the http://pfe.aracis.ro platform and later on through the platform developed under the QAFIN project, https://rne.aracis.ro, was built according to the provisions of art. 18 letter a) and b) and art. 191 point (10) of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on education quality assurance, as further amended and supplemented. The ARACIS National Register of Evaluators (RNE) was updated after the coming into force of Law no. 199/2023 on higher education, which, in art. 255, para. (1) letter a), stipulates that "ARACIS expert evaluators can be tenured professors who have a permanent employment contract, lecturers, associate professors or professors with experience in education quality evaluation".

RNE Teaching Staff is composed in line with the bachelor study domains included in the List of domains and specialisations/study programmes, approved every year by a Government Decision on approving the List of domains and specialisations/study programmes and the structure of higher education institutions, plus a section dedicated to remote and part-time study programmes.

Candidates are admitted into the RNE Teaching Staff via an electronic platform, based on the Procedure for the admission of candidates into the National Register of Expert Evaluators (teaching staff), approved by Council decision 73/H/31.03.2023 and updated by Council decision 262/H/28.09.2023.

Table 22. Number of evaluators on the RNE, per speciality commissions 2023

Commission	No. of RNE evaluators
C1 - Exact Sciences and Natural Sciences	79
C2 - Humanist Sciences and Theology	66
C3 - Legal Sciences	29
C4 - Social, political and communication sciences	42
C5 - Administrative Sciences, Education Sciences and Psychology	46
C6 - Economic Sciences I	83
C7 - Economic Sciences II	80
C8 - Arts, Architecture, Urbanism, Physical Education and Sports	50
C9 - Agricultural Sciences, Forestry Sciences and Veterinary Medicine	73
C10 - Engineering Sciences I	76
C11 - Engineering Sciences II	174
C12 - Medical Sciences	56
C13 – Distance and part-time learning	22
C14. Commission of Institutional Evaluation for Managerial and Financial Activities	14
Total RNE Teaching Staff	890
National Register of Student Expert Evaluators (RNE-S)	230
National Register of International Evaluators (RNE-I)	294
Register of Employers' Representatives (RNE-A)	106
Total RNE evaluators	1520

Source: Processed by ARACIS

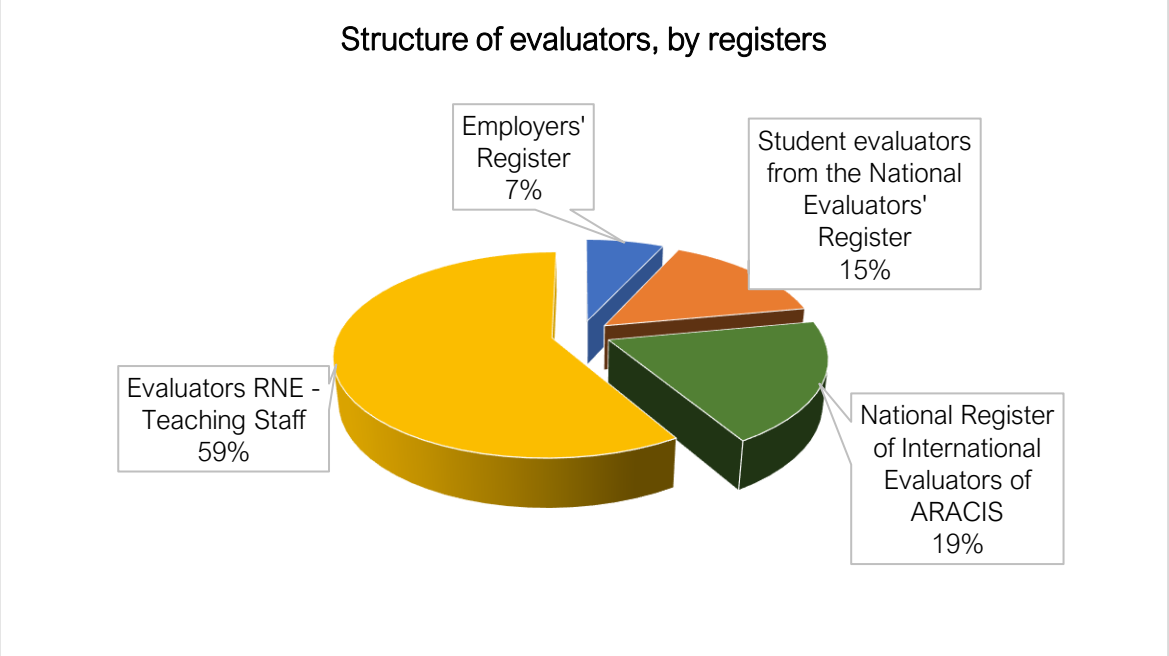


Figure 14. Structure of evaluators, by registers

Updating of the National Register of Evaluators - Students

In 2023, ARACIS supported student federations in organising one training session for students to become ARACIS student evaluators. The student training session on external quality evaluation in higher education was conducted between 20 – 27 April 2023, and was attended by 77 students.
After this training session and the updating of the National Register of Student Evaluators (RNE-S) of ARACIS, at the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year, the situation of evaluator students listed in the RNE-S is given in the table below:

Table 22. Number of student evaluators in the RNE-S, per nationally recognised federations, in 2023

Students federation	Number of student evaluators
National Alliance of Students' Organisations in Romania (ANOSR)	117
National Union of Students in Romania (UNSR)	75
Romanian Students' Union (USR)	38
Total student evaluators on the RNE – S	230

3 COOPERATION

3.1 National cooperation

ARACIS cooperates continuously with higher education institutions to fulfil its responsibilities related to the external evaluation in order to ensure the academic quality of higher education providers, institutions organising doctoral studies, higher education study programmes, Master study domains and doctoral study domains, on the grounds of the standards and evaluation methodologies.

Thus, upon the request of higher education institutions of Romania, the Specific standards for external academic quality evaluation of bachelor programmes for some of the Permanent (Speciality) Experts' Commissions were revised.

In 2023, ARACIS continued to have consultations with the Ministry of Education; the National Commission for Attestation of University Titles, Diplomas and Certificates (CNATDCU); the Executive Unit for Financing in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI); the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP), the National Authority for Qualifications (ANC), other higher education institutions, and other stakeholders (persons / structures / organisations), with the purpose to ensure quality in the higher education system.

Furthermore, throughout 2023, the Agency's representatives attended several events and working groups in the field of quality assurance in higher education, organised at national level by the Academic Ethics and University Management Council (CEMU), the National Rectors' Council (CNR), the Executive Unit for Financing in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI) or universities, and delivered presentations on topics related to quality assurance in higher education.

Thus, Professor Dr. Eng. Trașcă Teodor-Ioan, member of the ARACIS Council and president of the ARACIS Ethics Commission, attended the meetings of the Academic Ethics and Management Council (CEMU) conducted in January - December 2023.

Throughout 2023, President Associate Professor Dr. Octavian Mădălin Bunoiu attended several anniversary events organised by higher education institutions in Romania: Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest (5 April), University of Oradea (24 May), "Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava (20 June), National Physical Education and Sports University (13 June), Dunărea de Jos University of Galați (12 September), Business Management Institute of Bucharest (13 September), Transilvania University of Brașov (24 October).

On 27 April, the President attended the round table on "Where do I learn working?", organised by the Youth and Sports Commission of the Chamber of Deputies at the Romanian Parliament Palace to hallmark the European Year of Skills 2023.

Furthermore, on 14 November, the President of ARACIS attended the event organised by the National Alliance of Students' Organisations in Romania (ANOSR) launching the 2022-2023 National report on compliance with the Code of Students' Rights and Obligations in Bucharest.

3.2 International cooperation

ARACIS is registered in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and is a member of: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEENQA), International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE), European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA), Global Academic Integrity Network (GAIN), Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) International Quality Group (CIQG), and an affiliated member of European University Association Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE).

3.2.1 Activities within ENQA - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

ENQA external review of ARACIS

ARACIS is a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) since 2009, and it periodically undergoes the international external review procedures required for maintaining this status.

The Agency's external review is conducted every 5 years, and seeks to check the operations of the Agency against the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The result of the external review is the condition for ARACIS to remain an ENQA member and renew its registration in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR).

Within this context, the targeted review activities were continued in 2023. The targeted review focused on the ESG standards that were assessed as partially met in the previous external review, the new external evaluation activities carried out by the Agency, the material changes, while also seeking to provide support for the Agency's improvement.

Thus, the following stages were carried out in 2023:

- ✓ The external review visit was organised (the schedule of the visit, the list of interviewees, the topics to be discussed and the practical aspects of the visit were established in collaboration with ENQA);
- ✓ The ARACIS external review visit by ENQA, carried out at the ARACIS headquarters in 15-17 March 2023. The meetings and interviews carried out by the ENQA evaluation team were attended by more than 60 people: the Minister of Education, Mrs Ligia Deca; representatives of the National Centre for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (CNRED), National Authority for Qualifications (ANC), National Rectors' Council (CNR), together with representatives of the management of universities and quality assurance staff, students, employers, representatives of the Agency's management, expert evaluators, and members of the Technical Staff.

After the external assessment visit, ENQA drafted the External Assessment Report, which was forwarded to the Agency, first in its preliminary version for the Agency to check it and submit its views. The final external review report for ARACIS developed by the ENQA panel was validated by the ENQA Agency Review Committee in September 2023, and sent to the Agency together with the Report validation letter.

The result of the review was the basis for the renewed EQAR registration, approved by the EQAR Committee on 15 December 2023, valid until 30.09.2028. Furthermore, based on the result of the external review and the Decision to approve ARACIS's application to renew its EQAR registration, the Agency's representatives will carry out the necessary activities to reconfirm the Agency as an ENQA member in early 2024.

The result of the ENQA review and the documents related to this external review are available on our webpage under International co-operation - ENQA.

Participation in events

ARACIS representatives attended the main events/meetings organised by ENQA, namely:

- ✓ The annual ENQA and EQAR meeting on external quality assurance agency reviews, on 10 January, in Brussels, Belgium (participants: Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General);
- ✓ Meetings of the ENQA Executive Board, March - December (participants: Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General);
- ✓ ENQA members' forum, 18 – 22 April 2023. The event was organised in collaboration with the National National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) in Tbilisi, Georgia (participants: Associate Professor Dr. Octavian Mădălin Bunoiu, ARACIS President; Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General);
- ✓ Seminars in the ENQA Leadership Development Programme 2023, hosted by the Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education - A3ES (22 – 26 May), the Norway Quality Assurance Agency - NOKUT (20 – 22 September), and the Flemish Council of Universities and Colleges - VLHUR (15 – 17 November); participants: Mrs Adriana Popoiu, Head of International Relations, Project Implementation, Communication and Events Service (SRIIPCOE);
- ✓ Annual seminar organised by ENQA for advanced expert evaluators, 7 – 8 September, Barcelona, Spain; participants: Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Head of the ARACIS Accreditation Department;
- ✓ Alumni event organised within the ENQA Leadership Development Programme, 16 – 17 November, Brussels, Belgium; participants: Mr. Vlad-Nicolae Popescu, Head of the Doctoral Studies Evaluation Office;
- ✓ ENQA General Assembly, 24 – 27 October, in Dublin, Ireland. The event was organised in cooperation with Quality and Qualifications Ireland - QQI. At the General Assembly meeting, Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General of ARACIS, was elected for a new mandate as ENQA Board member and ENQA Vice-president.

3.2.2 Activities at EQAR - European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education

ARACIS has the obligation, under the law, to register in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and periodically undergo the external evaluation procedures envisaged for keeping this status.

ARACIS is registered in EQAR since 2009 and up to now has undergone three periodic external review processes to renew its EQAR registration.

In 2023, ARACIS continued the activities initiated in 2022 in the targeted review process conducted in line with the Terms of Reference for external evaluation agreed by ARACIS, ENQA and EQAR.

The result of ENQA's external review of ARACIS was submitted to EQAR on 29 September 2023. The EQAR Register Committee reviewed the Report on the external review of ARACIS produced in the external review coordinated by ENQA, and found that the report included sufficient evidence and review elements concerning ARACIS's level of compliance with the ESGs.

Based on the External review report and the considerations included in the Decision to approve ARACIS's application to renew its EQAR registration, the conclusion of the EQAR Committee is that ARACIS has proven its compliance with the ESGs.

Thus, on 15 December 2023, the EQAR Register Committee approved continuation of the Agency's EQAR registration for a five-year period until 30.09.2028, and the information was communicated in the letter on the approval of ARACIS's application to renew its EQAR registration.

The result of the ENQA review of the Agency and the documents related to this external review are available on our webpage under International co-operation - EQAR.

Furthermore, as part of the collaboration between ARACIS and EQAR, the sustainability activities under „The Database of External Quality Assurance Reports (DEQAR)" Project continued in 2023; the project is coordinated by EQAR, and ARACIS was one of the partner quality assurance agencies.

3.2.3 Activities within the ENAEE - European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education

ARACIS is a member of the European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE), and since 2013 it is authorised to award the EUR-ACE® Label certification for bachelor study programmes in the field of engineering, accredited based on ARACIS evaluations. ENAEE promotes the quality of education in engineering through EUR-ACE® certification as a means to strengthen trust in the engineering study programme accreditation systems.

Following the external evaluation process conducted by ENAEE (during 2021 and 2022), on 25 April 2023, the ENAEE Administrative Board, based on the recommendation of the EUR-ACE Label Committee, approved the renewed authorisation of the Agency to award EUR-ACE® label certifications, extended by 31 December 2025.

The representative of ARACIS at the EUR-ACE Label Committee is Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Head of ARACIS Accreditation Department.

Furthermore, Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache represented ARACIS at the ENAEE Committee for revising the EUR-ACE® standards and guidelines, which worked during 2023.

In 25-26 May, ARACIS hosted the meeting of the EUR-ACE Label Committee of ENAEE in Bucharest.

ARACIS was represented at the events organised by ENAEE in 2023, as follows:

- ✓ 21 March: Meeting of the Committee for revision of ENAEE standards/EUR-ACE label (participants: Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache);

- ✓ 8 - 10 November: General Assembly meeting of ENAEE and meeting of the ENAEE Committee/EUR-ACE® 2023 (participants: Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache).

3.2.4 Activities within CEENQA - Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

The Agency is represented at CEENQA by Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Director of the Accreditation Department of ARACIS, who on 3 June was re-elected as a member of the Executive Board of CEENQA.

ARACIS representatives continued to attend the main events organised by CEENQA in 2023, as follows:

- ✓ Meeting of the CEENQA Board (online), 11 January;
- ✓ Bi-monthly meeting (CEENQA Bi-Monthly Meetings), 18 January. The meeting was attended by Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Director of the ARACIS Accreditation Department, and representatives of the Technical Staff. Furthermore, Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache delivered a presentation on the topic of "Analysis of external evaluations of doctoral studies";
- ✓ Meeting of the CEENQA Board, 1 March. The meeting was attended by Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, ARACIS representative in the executive leadership of the Network;
- ✓ The annual workshop and the CEENQA General Assembly Meeting, 23 – 24 September;
- ✓ CEENQA Board meeting, 21 - 22 April, organised by ARACIS and hosted by "Transilvania" University of Brașov;
- ✓ CEENQA General Assembly meeting 2023 and Workshop on "People and Culture in QA Agencies", 2 - 3 June (Astana, Kazakhstan). At the Workshop, Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache moderated the panel on the "Impact of the digitalisation on the human resource practices in quality assurance agencies";
- ✓ Meeting of the CEENQA Board (online), 19 July;
- ✓ Bi-Monthly meetings of CEENQA members (online), 17 May, 26 July, 20 September, 15 November;
- ✓ ARACIS staff mobility programme at the ACQUIN quality assurance agency in Germany, 25 – 28 September. The mobility took place within the 2022-2023 Staff Exchange Scheme. The mobility was an opportunity to share best practices on topics of shared interest such as quality management and thematic analysis; stages of the evaluation process for accreditation of higher education institutions in Germany; procedure for accreditation of higher education study programmes; international cooperation, and aspects regarding European projects implemented by the hosting agency.

3.2.5 Activities within the INQAAHE - International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education

The Agency continues to be represented at INQAAHE by Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Director of the Accreditation Department at ARACIS, who was elected on the Network's Board of Directors in September 2021.

Ever since it was established, ARACIS is a member of INQAAHE and participates in the activities of INQAAHE, such as polls, electing the Network's management, promoting the events organised by INQAAHE, etc.

Thus, in 2023, ARACIS participated both in filling out the survey for quality assurance agencies and in disseminating the survey for higher education institutions in the "II Global Study" research. The survey is part of the "Global Trends in Tertiary Education Quality Assurance: Internal and External QA" project.

ARACIS was represented at the events organised by INQAAHE in 2023, as follows:

- ✓ Participation in the monthly meetings of the Board, and the weekly meetings of the Membership, Recognition, Forum INQAAHE 2024 and Global Study working groups (participant: Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache);
- ✓ Online workshop on "International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (ISGs): A Global Perspective and Benefits", 24 January (participant: Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache);
- ✓ "INQAAHE 17th Biennial Conference 2023" on a "Roadmap to Enabling Quality in Tertiary Education 2030", 29 May - 1 June 2023, in Astana, Kazakhstan. The event was hosted by the Kazakh quality assurance agency – Independent Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (IQAA); the participants from ARACIS were Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General of ARACIS, together with the representative of ARACIS in the Network management, Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache.

Organisation of the INQAHEE 2024 Forum

Following the filing of the application for hosting the 2024 INQAAHE Forum, approved by the INQAAHE Board, ARACIS, in collaboration with the "Politehnica" National Science and Technology University, Bucharest, will host the 2024 INQAAHE Forum in Bucharest on 10-12 June 2024.

Up to now, the company working on the Forum website has been contracted; communication activities were implemented on ARACIS's social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn) about the hosting of the INQAAHE Forum by ARACIS, and the call for contributions was disseminated to universities in Romania and to RNE (Teaching Staff) and RNE - International members.

The main topics that will be approached at the forum are: promoting civic engagement; closing the gaps for high-quality education; designing of study programmes with a social impact; promoting opportunities for all ages.

3.2.6 Activities within the ECA - European Consortium for Accreditation of Engineering Education

In 2023, the Agency's representatives attended the events organised by the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education - ECA, as follows:

- ✓ 23 January: Online meeting of the WG on Joint programmes, recognition, and innovation) (participants: Professor Dr. Roxana Vidican, member of the ARACIS Council, together with representatives of the ARACIS Technical Staff);

- ✓ 27 March: ECA members seminar in Hague, The Netherlands (participants: Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General, together with representatives of the ARACIS Technical Staff);
- ✓ 28 - 29 March: ECA's training programme on "Cultural Competence for Quality Assurance Professionals" in Hague, The Netherlands (participants: representatives of the Technical Staff of ARACIS);
- ✓ 22 – 23 June: ECA members' seminar, organised in Palma de Mallorca, Spain (participants: Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General);
- ✓ 18 – 20 December ECA members' seminar and training on: Internationalisation quality evaluation The two events were hosted by the French agency Hcéres in Paris (participants: Elena Catană, Expert of the Programme Accreditation and Evaluation Service of ARACIS).

3.2.7 Activities within the GAIN - Global Academic Integrity Network

The Global Academic Integrity Network - GAIN is a consortium of quality assurance agencies and integrity agencies from the entire world, launched in October 2022 by the Irish Agency for qualifications and quality assurance (QQI) together with the Australian quality and standards agency (TEQSA), the goal of which is to share information and approaches to combat and disturb business models of academic fraud service providers.

ARACIS joined the network early in 2023. On this occasion, the Agency's representatives attended the following online events:

- ✓ GAIN presentation meeting on 1 February, and network members' meeting on 15 February;
- ✓ GAIN meeting organised by the Irish QQI, together with the Australian TEQSA on 13 December;

  The online meeting was moderated by ARACIS, represented by Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General. The agenda of the meeting included topics such as: approving criteria for accepting new network members; fighting academic fraud through legislation and legal instruments, and information on the open letter that the GAIN members intend to disseminate within their national contexts.

3.2.8 Activities in the CHEA/CIQG - The Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group

In September 2023, ARACIS became a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group CHEA/CIQG.

As a member of the CHEA/CIQG, ARACIS can attend annual conferences/events/webinars, and has the possibility to collaborate with other experts in the CIQG community.

Furthermore, the Agency has access to the Quality International News (QI News) quarterly informative newsletter of CIQG, and can submit contributions for publication in the newsletter.

3.2.9 Other international collaborations and activities

3.2.9.1 Cooperation with other quality assurance agencies

During 2023, within its relationships with other quality assurance agencies in the European Higher Education Area, ARACIS signed two new memoranda, as follows:

The memorandum of understanding with the French Cti - Commission des titres d'ingénieur, signed by Associate Professor Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu, President of ARACIS, and Dr. Élisabeth Crépon, President of Cti, on 28 April 2023;

The memorandum of understanding with the French agency Hcéres – Haut Conseil de l'Evaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur, signed by Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, Director General of ARACIS and Prof. Thierry Coulhon, President of Hcéres, on 19 June 2023.

According to the provisions of the two memoranda, which are valid for a period of 5 years, ARACIS and the two French agencies intend to carry out cooperation activities, such as:

I. develop and implement joint quality assurance procedures and carry out external evaluations of higher education institutions (both institutional and study programme evaluations), training activities, consulting activities, innovation and research projects, when necessary;

II. perform joint evaluations of the alliances of European universities, when necessary;

III. participate in events, seminars or conferences organised by any of the parties;

IV. exchange of best practices between the departments of the two agencies on relevant topics, through various forms of communication such as webinars, study visits and other means;

V. recommend expert evaluators to be members of the registers of international experts of both agencies.

3.2.9.2 Bologna Follow-Up Group – BFUG

In 2023, Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, in her capacity as the Director General of ARACIS and representative of Romania in the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), attended the BFUG meetings as follows:

The meeting of the Bologna Follow-Up Group - BFUG 11 – 12 May 2023, in Stockholm, Sweden;

The main topics on the meeting's agenda concerned the progress in the work of the working groups established on the sides of the Bologna Process, and details regarding the future ministerial conferences that will be held in 2024 and 2027.

At the BFUG meeting, the ARACIS Director General presented the progress on the activities of the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA, in her capacity as co-chair.

Between 1 – 2 June, the third meeting of the Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance (TPG C) established within the BFUG was held. The meeting was organised in Astana by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Kazakhstan.

The progress on the Group's action plan was analysed at the meeting, and each member presented their activities. Other topics were cross-border quality assurance, quality assurance of transnational education, micro credentials, challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence for quality assurance in higher education. A comparative presentation of the results

of the survey for quality assurance agencies, students' federations, higher education institutions and governments, implemented within the "Quality Assurance Fit for the Future (QA-FIT)" about the progress on implementing the ESGs and future lines for development was given.

The meeting of the Board of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) was held on 2 October. The event was held in Tbilisi, Georgia.

The LXXXVI meeting of the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) was held on 16-17 November in Madrid, Spain.

Romania was represented in this event by the Director General of ARACIS and Hâj Cezar Mihai from the Executive Unit for Financing in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI). They presented the results of the Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA, and the report of the WG on Fundamental Values.

One important point of the meeting focused on the implementation of the three key commitments of the Bologna process, of which one is quality assurance according to the provisions of the ESG. Another relevant topic was the Ministerial Communique of Tirana (2024), with thematic discussions organised with a view to drafting it.

The fourth meeting of the Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance (TPG C) was held online on 5 December.

The meeting focused on aspects on the Group's working plan, such as the peer learning activity regarding the "European approach on quality assurance of joint programmes", quality assurance of European university alliances, micro credentials, and digitalisation of quality assurance processes.

Furthermore, the 40 participating members tackled on topics such as the contribution of the TPG C for the Tirana Ministerial Communique and discussions on the draft Bologna process implementation report.

3.2.9.3 Other international events attended by ARACIS representatives

As part of the international cooperation activities in 2023, ARACIS representatives attended the following:

- ✓ Annual 2023 CHEA/CIQG meeting on "Maintaining and Improving Quality Assurance: Today and Tomorrow", held in Washington, USA on 23-26 January;
- ✓ The event organised by the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education – EURASHE on the topic of "Skills Community of Practice" in Bilbao on 1 February;
- ✓ International "Higher education quality assurance and enhancement" forum, organised by the Azerbaijan Education Quality Assurance Agency – TKTA (Baku, Azerbaijan) on 18-19 May;
- ✓ The second EHEA-Africa conversation on academic recognition and prospects of this topic in the EHEA, Africa and Middle East, held online on 6 June;
- ✓ The 32nd annual conference of EURASHE, on "Skills for Europe – Mobilising Higher Education for the Green and Digital Transitions", hosted by the POLITEHNICA University of Bucharest on 8 – 9 June;

  At the EURASHE General Assembly meeting, Prof. Dr. Eng. Valentin Navrapescu, vice-president of ARACIS, was elected on the EURASHE Board for a 2023-2025 mandate.

- ✓ The "European Service-Learning, Democracy and Civic Engagement" summit, online event on 13 June;
- ✓ The Quality Audit Network meeting hosted by Hcéres on 15 – 16 June in Paris;
- ✓ The 6th meeting of higher education experts organised by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) on 20-21 June in Paris, France;
- ✓ The second Forum of European Universities Alliances held in Barcelona, Spain on 14 - 15 September. The purpose of the forum was to provide a space for dialogue and exchanging ideas around the most important topics that European alliances are facing today.
- ✓ International conference on higher education, on the topic of the Impact of quality assurance mechanisms on establishing a culture of quality, organised by the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) on 25-27 September in Pristina, Kosovo;
- ✓ The EDUtech_EUROPE 2023 workshops and conference on the topic of: "Inspiration in Education", held in Amsterdam, The Netherlands on 10 – 12 October;
- ✓ The "Bologna Hub in the Western Balkans" Conference, hosted by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Belgrade, Serbia on 19 – 20 October;
- ✓ The European Quality Assurance Forum 2023 - EQAF, a famous international conference on quality assurance in higher education, the topic of which was "Internationalisation in a changing world. New trends and challenges for quality assurance", 23 - 25 November. The event was hosted by the University of Aveiro, Portugal.

4 INFORMATION DISSEMINATION AND COMMUNICATION

4.1 The ARACIS web page

The main means of communicating information concerning the activities of ARACIS is the Agency's web page: ww.aracis.ro; the page was permanently updated in 2023 with information of public interest concerning the results of the evaluations conducted by ARACIS, the schedule of the external evaluation visits, information about recent developments in the Agency's activities, events organised by ARACIS or other activities.

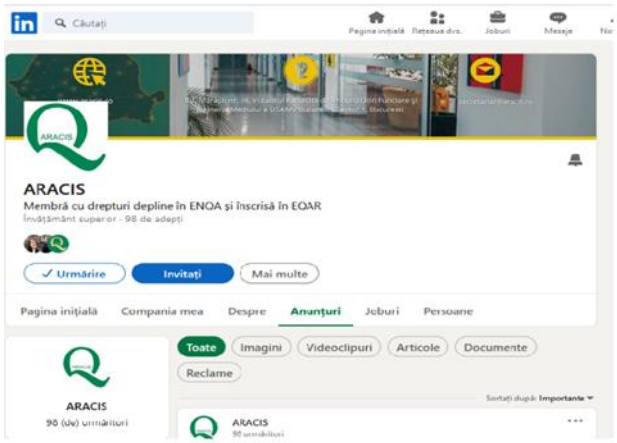
4.2 The ARACIS Facebook page

In 2023, ARACIS continued its activity on the Facebook page by conveying information about the Agency's activities, which was published constantly; at the end of 2023, the ARACIS page reached over 2,700 followers. The Agency will continue in 2024 its actions towards enhancing the transparency of its activities and decisions, and promoting information and dialogue in the field of quality in higher education at national and international level.

4.3 The ARACIS LinkedIn page

In 2023, ARACIS continued its activity on its LinkedIn page, aimed at increasing the accessibility and visibility of the information regarding ARACIS's international activities, so that such information can reach a wider audience interested in higher education quality assurance.

Furthermore, the Agency will continue to promote its events on LinkedIn in 2024, as well as other relevant higher education quality assurance information.



4.4 Newsletter

In 2023, ARACIS continued developing a regular Newsletter (online format), disseminated through publication on the Agency's web page and sending to the representatives of higher education institutions and other stakeholders interested in quality assurance in higher education.

4.5 National press monitoring

Furthermore, daily monitoring of the coverage of ARACIS in the national press and summarising of the articles on higher education published in the online press continued, and the resulting "Press Review" was sent to the members of the ARACIS Council and the technical staff of ARACIS.

4.6 Press releases and news

Press releases regarding the activities conducted by ARACIS were drafted and issued in 2022 to disseminate information to the Romanian public.

Information dissemination activities carried out by the Agency also had an international component, by submission of ARACIS's contribution on performing the first external evaluation of an alliance of European universities, UNITA - Universitas Montium, to be included in the

periodic e-newsletter published by ECA, and submission of information on ARACIS's activities to ENQA.

4.7 Subscriptions with international publications

To keep up to date with the current status and the trends in quality assurance in higher education in Europe and beyond, and to disseminate its own experiences related to the quality of higher education in Romania, ARACIS uses electronic and printed information means. Thus, ARACIS extended its subscription to the publication "Internationalisation of Higher Education - Policy and Practice" for 2023.

4.8 Subscriptions with national publications

In 2023, ARACIS subscribed to two national publications, "Tribuna învățământului" and "Market watch". Both publications are qualified media for higher education-related information.

4.9 "Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR)"

For 2023, ARACIS will publish, in the first part of 2024, a volume of the Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education (QAR), on two recommended topics:

- Quality Assurance in higher education beyond learning and teaching
- Quality Assurance to enable meaningful implementation of learning outcomes in higher education".

The QAR is an appreciated academic publication that focuses on aspects concerning quality assurance in higher education in Romania. The Review is intended as an instrument to facilitate practice sharing and communication between internal and external experts, including internationally, and contribute to promoting the development of a quality assurance culture. QAR targets the public interested in the theory, practice and policies in the above-mentioned field. ARACIS enjoyed the support of the ENQA and CEENQA Secretariats to disseminate information on the possibilities and requirements for publishing papers in the QAR.

5 PROJECTS

5.1 International projects - ongoing

5.1.1 The IMINQA project

General presentation

IMINQA is an umbrella project developed to support the 2021-2024 proceedings of the Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance (TPG C on QA) created by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG).

Together with the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), ARACIS is a partner in the IMINQA project, and the consortium is led by the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training.

The IMINQA project is co-financed under the ERASMUS+ Programme, and it is implemented over a period of 36 months (May 2022 – April 2025); the funding amounts to 499,855 EUR, out of which 43,642 EUR allocated to ARACIS.

Project aim

On one hand, the project focuses on the wider topic of quality assurance, and contributes to the implementation of the key commitment in this field in all the states of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA); on the other hand, it addresses specific topics with an innovative focus, such as micro credentials, quality assurance for European Universities, digitalisation of quality assurance processes.

Working packages

1. Project management, quality assurance, communication, monitoring and evaluation, dissemination;
2. Organising the meetings of the Thematic Peer Group C on Quality Assurance (TPG C);
3. Staff mobility;
4. Peer learning activities;
5. Quality assurance for micro credentials;
6. Quality assurance for the European University Alliances;
7. Digitalisation of quality assurance processes.

Activities

- 21 March: peer learning activities hosted by the Politehnica" National Science and Technology University, Bucharest. The topic of the meeting was "Cross-border Quality Assurance - CBQA and Quality Assurance of Transnational Education - TNE" as part of the TPG C activities;
- 22 – 24 March: study visit of the two experts from the French higher education quality assurance agencies HCÉRES and CTI, hosted at the ARACIS offices;
- 31 May: Meeting of the Cross-Border Board of the IMINQA in Astana (Kazakhstan);
- 1-2 June: the third meeting of the TPG C, organised in Astana by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of Kazakhstan. The progress on the Group's action plan was analysed at the meeting, and each member presented their activities. Among the topics were cross-border quality assurance, quality assurance of transnational education, micro credentials, challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence for quality assurance in higher education.
- 13-14 September: two meetings under the IMINQA project , organised in Brussels:
  - ✓ Third peer learning activity on the European approach on quality assurance of joint programmes, with a presentation of the results of the thematic analysis conducted based on the available DEQAR data regarding the progress in implementing the European Approach, and discussions on the benefits of using the Approach both from the point of view of quality assurance agencies and from the point of view of higher education institutions.
  - ✓ The meeting of the working group on quality assurance of micro credentials, with discussions on the document on micro credentials developed in the project (Approaches to Quality Assurance of Micro-credentials). A presentation was given of the first results of the data collected from quality assurance agencies on micro certifications and prospects for the future.

- 5 December: the fourth TPG C meeting. The meeting focused on aspects on the Group's working plan, such as the peer learning activity regarding the "European approach on quality assurance of joint programmes", quality assurance of European university alliances, micro credentials, and digitalisation of quality assurance processes. Furthermore, other topics included the contribution of the TPG C for the Tirana Ministerial Communique and discussions on the draft Bologna process implementation report.

  At this meeting, Prof. Dr. Eng. Iordan Petrescu and Mr Petrișor Țucă, ARACIS experts in the IMINQA project implementation team, delivered a presentation on the "Digitalisation of QA processes", including the results of the survey conducted under the project.

- 4-7 December: within the staff mobility programme, ARACIS hosted the study visit of a representative of the Italian National Agency for Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR). Presentations and debates on various topics were organised, such as: presentation of ARACIS and ANVUR; overview of the legal framework, procedures, and international evaluation activities carried out by ARACIS; presentation of the ARACIS IT and communication platforms, and experience sharing from ARACIS expert evaluators who participated in international evaluations.

5.1.2 The START project

Overview

In February 2022, the European Commission approved the project proposal for the "Social inclusion, Tolerance, Acceptance and Realization for all sTudents – START" project, funded under ERASMUS+, where ARACIS is a project partner.

The implementation of the START project is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria, together with the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Bulgaria (NEAA) and the Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants.

The project started on 1 June 2022 and will continue for 36 months, between June 2022 - May 2025.

Specific objectives of the project

The objectives of the project include developing a set of specific policy proposals, tools and legislative changes supporting social inclusion in higher education, and ensuring a required level of understanding of this phenomenon to facilitate the transition to open, more inclusive academic communities. Social inclusion will be supported along three lines of action, namely quality assurance, legal framework, and inclusive academic environment.

Working packages

1. Preparation, management, monitoring and evaluation;
2. Research, development of a mechanism and social inclusion policies;
3. Information events and conferences.

Activities

- 13 February: the second meeting within the START Erasmus+ project, held online. At this meeting, the project manager delivered a presentation on the "Social dimension coverage in quality assurance processes and activities in the EHEA – state of play and future proposals".

- 30 August: the third meeting within the START Erasmus+ project, organised online.
  At this meeting, both ARACIS and the partners from Bulgaria delivered presentations on the results of the first completed activity - research on a methodology for developing quality assurance indicators and indicators on the social inclusion of students from vulnerable categories, with a focus on migrants and disabled persons.

  To this purpose, the implementation team focused on the access of migrants and disabled persons to the European higher education system, identifying best practices in the European area regarding the social dimension in higher education, and evaluating the implementation of the social dimension at European level, with a view to structuring a set of indicators for it.

5.1.3 "Academic Ethical and Integrity Conduct Supported by QAAs" project

Overview

In January 2023, the "Academic Ethical and Integrity Conduct Supported by QAAs" project, submitted by ARACIS in the Call for proposals launched by INQAAHE, was selected for financing, and will be implemented between 1 February 2023 – 30 April 2024 (15 months).

The project aims to analyse how quality assurance agencies evaluate and support compliance with academic ethics and integrity values in higher education institutions.

To this purpose, the project team, coordinated by Prof. Dr. Teodor - Ioan Trașcă, member of the ARACIS Council and president of the Ethics Commission, developed the methodology and the research instruments, by identifying the target group and drafting the questionnaires that will be disseminated.

Activities

The main activities carried out under the project in 2023 were:

- reviewing the legislation and best practices on implementing ethics and academic integrity values in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA);
- identifying the national higher education institutions (belonging to the target group);
- developing the intended questionnaires;
- identifying the respondents (quality assurance agencies in the European area).

5.2 International projects where ARACIS acts as an associate partner

5.2.1 ED AFFICHE project

Overview

The ED AFFICHE project is funded under the European Union's Erasmus+ programme - "Pilot a joint European degree label" call for projects. The objective of the call was to allow alliances of higher education institutions and national authorities to examine, test, and facilitate the realisation of a "European degree" label based on a set of criteria co-created at European level.

Partners

The ED AFFICHE brings together six European Universities Alliances (Una Europa, Unite!, EU-CONEXUS, 4EU+, EC2U and CHARM-EU), with their 51 higher education institutions, covering 22 European countries.

The objectives of the project are:

- ✓ to provide an overview of the status of the joint programmes in the six participating European university alliances;
- ✓ to develop recommendations for designing a "European Degree" label with a view to maximising its appeal and potential impact;
- ✓ to contribute to developing a more inclusive, accessible, and transparent framework for the development of joint programmes;
- ✓ to ensure promotion of the Bologna instruments, as well as greater flexibility, capitalising on the synergies of the Bologna instruments and encouraging their full implementation;
- ✓ to promote innovative learning experiences stimulating the visibility, appeal, and competitiveness of the European higher education.

Activities:

The representatives of ARACIS attended the event organised under the ED AFFICHE pilot programme for a joint European degree, held online on 22 November.

5.2.2 SMARTT project

Overview

Screening, Mapping, Analysing, Recommending, Transferring and Transforming higher education international programmes (SMARTT) is an innovative project aimed at analysing, testing, and piloting the new criteria for realising a "European Degree" label. The SMARTT project is funded under the European Union's Erasmus+ programme - "Pilot a joint European degree label" call for projects.

This project is implemented between April 2023 - April 2024; it is coordinated by the Bucharest University, together with Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and CIVIS - Europe's Civic University Alliance.

ARACIS is an associate partner in the SMARTT project, which is implemented by four European Universities Alliances; 29 universities participate in the project, together with representatives of national authorities, non-government organisations and students organisations.

Implementation: April 2023-April 2024

Objectives:

The objective of the call was to allow alliances of higher education institutions and national authorities to examine, test, and facilitate the realisation of a "European Degree" label, based on a set of criteria co-created at European level. The "European Degree" label is a complementary certificate attached to the qualification of students who graduate from joint programmes delivered by multiple collaborating higher education institutions.

Activities:

ARACIS representatives attended the event for the dissemination of the SMARTT project results, organised by the Bucharest University on 5 September.

5.2.3 UNITA Recipes for internationalisation project

Overview

The main goal of the UNITA Recipes for Internationalisation project is to promote internationalisation of the study programmes of the UNITA partner universities in order to enhance opportunities for all students to develop international and intercultural skills.

ARACIS's role in this project is to provide support by contributing to and disseminating the study programme evaluation methodology.

At the same time, ARACIS will participate to developing and testing the international digital self-evaluation instrument, and disseminating this instrument to higher education institutions in Romania (who could use it in their own self-evaluation) along with all the results of the project.

Partners

The project is implemented by members of the UNITA Alliance of European Universities, and ARACIS is an associate partner.

Implementation period: December 2023-2026

Specific objectives of the project

- ✓ Promote internationalisation of study programmes;
- ✓ Develop a digital handbook for the internationalisation of study programmes;
- ✓ Create a digital tool to support self-evaluation of the level of internationalisation of higher education study programmes;
- ✓ Training in internationalisation.

Activities:

On 21 December 2021, the project was launched online.

5.3 National and international projects completed - in the sustainability-ensuring period

5.3.1 The QAFIN project

The beneficiary of the "Improvement of public policies in higher education and better-quality regulations through updated quality standards - QAFIN" project was: The Ministry of National Education (MEN) – Project Management Unit for Externally Funded Projects. In 29 May 2017 - 28 October 2021, the Ministry of Education in partnership with ARACIS, with technical assistance from the World Bank implemented the project "Improvement of public policies in higher education and better-quality regulations through updated quality standards – QAFIN" (SIPOCA/SMIS code 2014+ 16).

Implementation period: 29.05.2017 - 28.10.2021

Financing: The project is co-funded from the European Social Fund (ESF) through the Administrative Capacity Operational Programme 2014 - 2020, Priority Axis 1: Efficient public administration and judicial system, Specific objective/Operation 1.1: Development and introduction of joint systems and standards in the public administration to optimise citizen- and business environment-oriented decision-making processes, in line with the Public Administration Strengthening Strategy (PASS).

Total eligible value: 14,639,415.97 Lei, out of which 2,344,699.00 Lei is the applicant's contribution covered by LIDER

The purpose of the project was the achievement and implementation of evidence-based public policies, respectively the correlation of strategic planning with programme budgeting, in the field of financing of higher education institutions, through the enhancement of regulations regarding external quality assurance, classification and ranking of higher education institutions and study programmes. Also, the project aims at the improvement of the administrative capacity of the MEN and of ARACIS, by adapting structures, optimizing processes and training human resources, and enhancing the use of transparent public consultation mechanisms that ensure citizen participation in decision-making and by applying European quality standards.

In 2023, under the QAFIN project, ARACIS continued to develop and improve supporting IT instruments for the application of the developed guides, standards and procedures, and improve the IT system for the management of ARACIS's National Register of Evaluators, including the development / optimisation of the ARACIS website.

5.3.2 The DEQAR project

General presentation

The project "Database of External Quality Assurance Results", co-funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ programme, Key Action 3 was coordinated by EQAR; partners in the project were EQAR-listed quality assurance agencies, important European organisations (including ENQA), and a research partner; ARACIS was one of the partners.

The project was implemented between November 2017 - October 2019.

Project aim

The aim of the project was to develop a database to improve access to information on higher education institutions/higher education study programmes that were subject to external quality evaluations, in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

The participation of ARACIS in the project, as an EQAR-listed agency, was the result of the Agency's decision to contribute to the internationalisation of the Romanian higher education, by providing full information on the results of the external education quality evaluations that it conducts.

Activities

The DEQAR database was built from the ID of the higher education institutions contained in the ETER (European Tertiary Education Register). ETER is an initial database of European higher education institutions, still under construction, created at the initiative of the Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission. ARACIS participates in

the ETER as a focal point of the Ministry of Education for Romania, with project management, through the representative of the European consortium implementing the ETER, from the Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland.

DEQAR collects and provides direct access to the reports and decisions of all quality assurance agencies listed in the EQAR, which contributes to the transparency of the results of external evaluations and facilitates recognition of the higher education qualifications.

In 2023, the process of sending the evaluation reports of the evaluations of higher education programmes and institutional evaluations carried out in 2022 to DEQAR continued.

5.3.3 The ESQA project

General presentation

The project "Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities (ESQA)" was funded under the Erasmus + Programme, Key Action 3 – Support for (educational) policy reforms.

The project was implemented between May 2019 - June 2021.

In this project, ARACIS was a partner in the consortium led by the Ministry of Education (ME) as the national authority; the consortium included three European organisations that represent quality assurance (ENQA), universities (EURASHE) and students (ESU), along four other quality assurance agencies from France, Bulgaria, Denmark and the Republic of Moldova. The project was proposed in 2018 to support the Peer Support Group PS - C Quality Assurance created by the Bologna Follow-Up Group - BFUG to respond to the requirements of the topic concerning the Role and involvement of stakeholders in internal quality assurance, which was identified to require additional activities and clarifications.

Project aim

The project was concerned with how the involvement of wider categories of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities can be increased, starting by identifying a wider definition of the concept of "stakeholders", as well as the ways in which their interest to participate in activities for quality assurance in higher education institutions could be encouraged.

Specific objectives of the project

Increase the quality of higher education, in correlation with the beneficiaries' expectations, namely students, employers, and the whole society. ARACIS aimed at extending the concept of "stakeholder" and identifying a specific way, in line with the social-economic state of facts in Romania, in which such stakeholders could be involved in the external evaluation process.

Results

The main results achieved in this project are available at: https://www.aracis.ro/esqa/

The project results were disseminated within the peer learning activity on "Students' and staff's participation in higher education governance" on 6 November; the activity was attended by Director General, Prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică. The event was organised by the Executive Unit for Financing in Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation (UEFISCDI) and hosted by the National School for Political and Administrative Studies - SNSPA (Bucharest).

6. ACTIVITY SELF-ASSESSMENT IN 2023

The current activities continued in compliance with the regulations in force with a view to carrying out the mission undertaken by the Agency.

In 2023, the statistics regarding the external evaluations performed by ARACIS include the following:

- 21 institutional evaluations, with 10 "High degree of confidence" qualifications awarded; 4 institutions awarded "Confidence", and 7 institutional accreditations, out of which 6 international institutional accreditations at universities of the Republic of Moldova. During the last 5 years of activity (between 2019-2023), ARACIS evaluated 83 institutions (out of which 6 in the Republic of Moldova).
- 553 bachelor study programmes, out of which 87.5% - full-time education programmes, 4.7%- part-time education programmes, and 7.8% remote education programmes. The profile of the evaluations of bachelor study programmes shows a level of maturity of external evaluations, as 81% of the evaluations (448 programmes) were in the "periodic evaluation" phase, 8.5% were "evaluations for accreditation", and 10.49% - "evaluations for provisional authorisation". Overall, concerning the qualifications obtained from the evaluations performed, the maximum qualification was for "authorisation evaluations" - 96.56%, with 97.87% for "accreditation evaluations", and 95.98% for evaluations to "maintain accreditation".

  2,365 bachelor study programmes have been evaluated during 2019 – 2023 (including programmes subject to external evaluation within institutional evaluations). In a historical comparison of the evaluations of bachelor study programmes in that period, the share of programmes being awarded the maximum qualification is as follows: in 2019, 96.44%; in 2020, 92.63%; in 2021, 96.1%; in 2022 - 94.4%, and in 2023 - 96.2%.
- 63 master study domains were also evaluated this year, and accreditation was withdrawn for one domain as a result of these evaluations. 14 master programmes were accredited in new domains, and 65 were classified under existing domains;
- in 2023, ARACIS continued the external evaluation of doctoral studies[5], and evaluated 45 doctoral study domains;
- the number of evaluations for teacher training programmes was 13, out of which one programme was evaluated to obtain accreditation, and 12 programmes were evaluated to maintain their accreditation;
- the list of external evaluations carried out in 2023 ends with the evaluation of "Preparatory year programmes of Romanian language for foreigners", for which 16 evaluations were requested, out of which 14 seeking to maintain accreditation, and two to obtain accreditation.

[5] The first year when doctoral studies were evaluated by ARACIS was 2021

The recommendations and observations included in ENQA's Report (2018) continued to be implemented: The 2022-2026 ARACIS Strategy, published on the Agency's webpage, was the document based on which the actions and steps undertaken by the Agency were decided.

In 2023, the activities aimed at developing the Agency's webpage continued, and the reports are published on the webpage in a keyword-searchable format.

Implementation of measures for internal quality assurance continued:

- ✓ adjustment of the elements required for improving how the information received from universities is processed and used, based on the feedback questionnaire collected by ARACIS from the evaluated institutions;
- ✓ drafting and approving of the internal system and operational procedures. Implementation of the provisions of the internal system and operational procedures continued in 2023, and it remains a constant activity, as it is a major component of the internal quality assurance system.

Regarding the projects, activities were carried out in 2023 for the implementation of three national projects and to ensure sustainability of three other projects:

- ❑ The IMINQA project is co-financed under the ERASMUS+ Programme, and it is implemented over a period of 36 months (May 2022 - April 2025); the funding amounts to 499,855 EUR, out of which 43,642 EUR allocated to ARACIS.
- ❑ The START project is coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Science of Bulgaria, together with the National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Bulgaria (NEAA) and the Bulgarian Council for Refugees and Migrants. The project started on 1 June 2022 and will continue for 36 months, between June 2022 - May 2025.
- ❑ The "Academic Ethical and Integrity Conduct Supported by QAAs" project, submitted by ARACIS in the Call for proposals launched by INQAAHE, was selected for financing, and will be implemented between 1 February 2023 – 30 April 2024 (15 months).
- ❑ The "Improving public policies in higher education and enhancing the quality of regulations by updating the QAFIN quality standards" project, in partnership with the Ministry of Education - Unit for the Management of Externally Financed Projects. Implementation period: 29.05.2017 - 28.10.2021.
- ❑ The "Database of External Quality Assurance Results" project, co-funded by the European Union under the ERASMUS+ programme, Key Action 3 was coordinated by EQAR; partners in the project were EQAR-listed quality assurance agencies, important European organisations (including ENQA), and a research partner; ARACIS was one of the partners. The project was implemented between November 2017 - October 2019.
- ❑ The project "Effective involvement of stakeholders in external quality assurance activities (ESQA)" was funded under the Erasmus + Programme, Key Action 3 – Support for (educational) policy reforms. The project was implemented between May 2019 - June 2021.

The structure of the permanent staff in the Agency's internal directions and services changed significantly in terms of the number of positions and the people employed.

The financial activity of the Agency was appropriate and supported its mission. Continued analysis of evaluation costs and re-correlation with salary increases and other measures to keep up with the changes in the law continue to be necessary.

The enhanced international visibility of the Agency contributes to connecting the Romanian higher education to the SEÎS by:

- ✓ implementing activities to ensure the sustainability of the DEQAR project of the European Commission;
- ✓ The Director General, prof. Dr. Eng. Daniela-Cristina Ghițulică, continued to carry out her mandate as Vice-president of ENQA;
- ✓ Mrs Professor Dr. Eng. Simona Lache, Director of the Accreditation Department of ARACIS, continued her activity on the board of INQAAHE and CEENQA, and continued to represent ARACIS in the ENAEE structures. Professor Lache is also the ARACIS representative on the EUR-ACE Label Committee;
- ✓ continued publication of the QAR magazine no. 12, with the recommended topic "Is Online Education Here to Stay? How quality assurance should adapt? " which contains contributions of authors from Romania and from other countries.

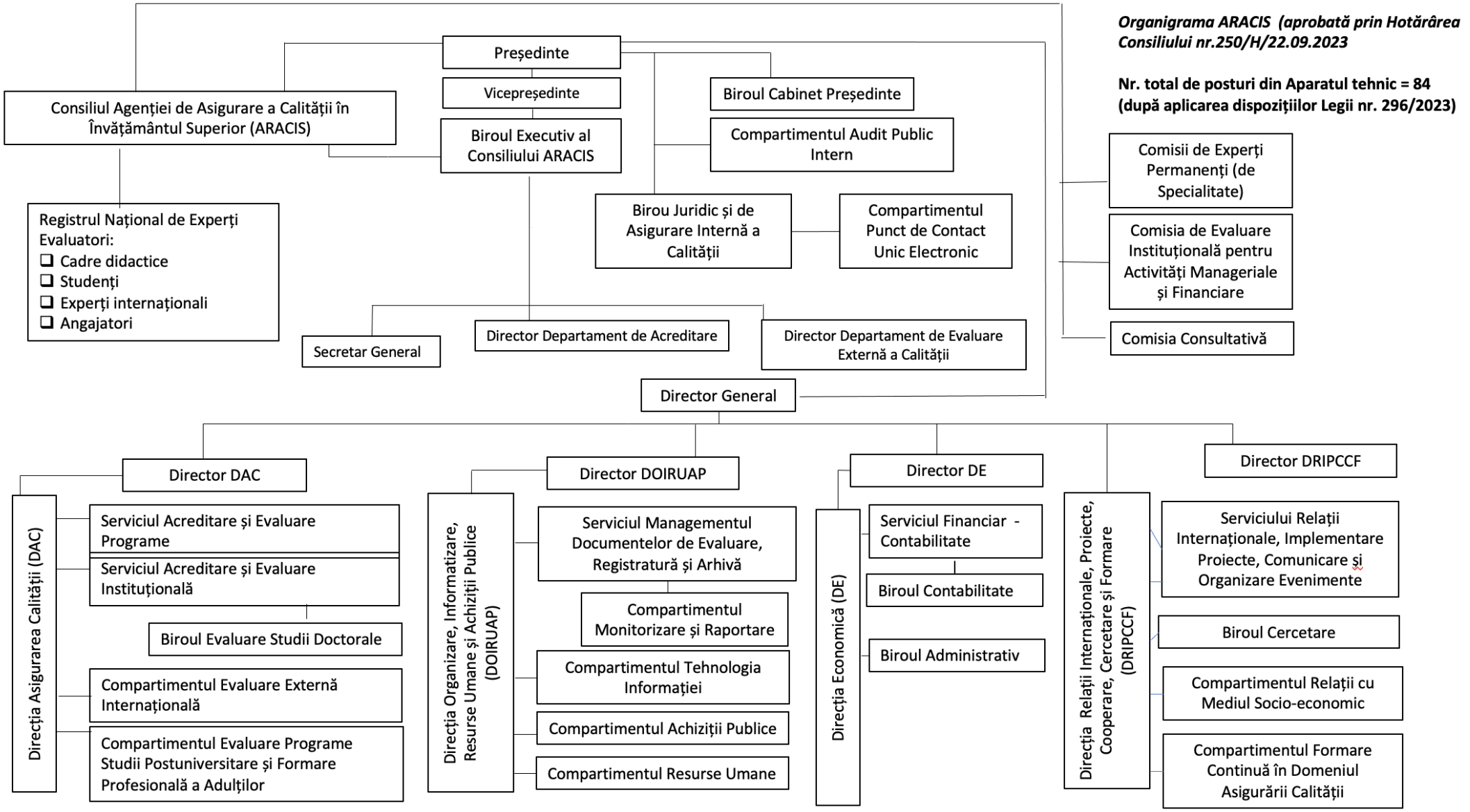
It is appropriate to mention that the quality and intensity of ARACIS's activity has improved in 2023 as a result of the measures taken by the Agency and the inclusion of the ENQA and EQAR recommendations; this is a trend that remains constant, in line with the requests and aspirations that all stakeholders have in connection with quality assurance in higher education.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 – ARACIS organisational structure

Organigrama ARACIS (aprobată prin Hotărârea Consiliului nr.250/H/22.09.2023

Nr. total de posturi din Aparatul tehnic = 84 (după aplicarea dispozițiilor Legii nr. 296/2023)



Annex 2 – Members of the ARACIS Council - 2023

Position	Name, surname
President:	1. Associate Prof. Dr. Octavian-Mădălin Bunoiu
Vice-President:	2. Prof. Dr. Eng. Valentin Năvrăpescu
Secretary General:	3. Prof. Dr. Eng. Dorian Cojocaru
Director of the Quality External Evaluation Department:	4. Prof. Dr. Eng. Neculai Eugen Seghedin
Quality External Evaluation Department	5. Prof. Dr. Ionescu Ecaterina 6. Prof. Dr. Opre Adrian 7. Prof. Dr. Eng. Petrescu Marius 8. Prof. Dr. Prelipcean Gabriela 9. Prof. Dr. Eng. Traşcă Teodor-Ioan 10. Dr. Eng. Erbaşu Romeo-Cristian 11. Student Tânțar Oana Alexandra
Director of the Accreditation Department:	12. Prof. Dr. Eng. Simona Lache
Accreditation Department:	13. Prof. Dr. Nagy Ladislau 14. Prof. Dr. Eng. Hadăr Anton 15. Prof. Dr. Anton Mihail 16. Prof. Dr. Ciolan Lucian-Ion 17. Prof. Dr. Mihai Florin 18. Prof. Dr. Roman Teodora Cristina 19. Prof. Dr. Vidican Roxana 20. Student Zamfir Ciprian-Constantin

Appendix 3 – ARACIS Advisory Board

No.	Name and surname	Institution	Position
1	Academician Ioan-Aurel Pop	"Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca	President of Honour
2	Prof. Dr. George Darie	Politehnica University of Bucharest	Member
3	Prof. Dr. Laurențiu Rece	Constructions Technical University of Bucharest	Member
4	Prof. Dr. Valentina Tudor	Agronomy Science and Veterinarian Medicine University of Bucharest	Member
5	Prof. Dr. Romiță Iucu-Bumbu	University of Bucharest	Member
6	Prof. Dr. Ioan Lascăr	"Carol Davila" Medicine and Pharmacy University of Bucharest	Member
7	Prof. Dr. Mirela Stoian	Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest	Member
8	Prof. Dr. Dan Dediu	National Music University of Bucharest	Member
9	Prof. Dr. Marko Balint	"Babeș-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca	Member
10	Prof. Dr. Dan Selișteanu	University of Craiova	Member
11	Prof. Dr. Iulian Ciocoiu	"Gheorghe Asachi" Technical University of Iasi	Member
12	Prof. Dr. Viorel Negru	West University of Timișoara	Member
13	Prof. Dr. Vasile Căruțașu	"Nicolae Bălcescu" Terrestrial Forces Academy of Sibiu	Member
14	Prof. Dr. Ovidiu Folcuț	Romanian-American University of Bucharest	Member
15	Prof. Dr. Florentina Munteanu	"Academica Plus" University Consortium "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad	Member
16	Prof. Dr. Viorel Șerban	Romanian Alliance of Technical Universities – ARUT Politehnica University of Timișoara	Member

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