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# U2SID - University to Society Collaborations for Inclusive Digital Transformation in the Western Balkans

## STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

(Deliverable 2.3)

Final Draft Upon Project Completion

(Approved March 2025 and revised April 2025 upon comments by the Project Officer)





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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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We extend our sincere gratitude to the project partners, whose collaboration and dedication have been crucial in the finalization and revision of this plan. We are also grateful to senior management in the project partners that have committed to the project sustainability in the long run.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Stakeholders Engagement and Sustainability Plan of the U2SID Project, finalized in March 2025, clearly defines a comprehensive strategic framework aimed at ensuring the sustainability and long-term impact of the project's achievements in fostering inclusive digital transformation within higher education institutions across the Western Balkans. Developed collaboratively by SCiDEV and project partners including universities, businesses, policymakers, civil society, and media stakeholders, this plan lays out concrete strategies and actions across multiple areas of focus.

The plan emphasizes enhancing digital competencies sustainably by continuing and institutionalizing successful initiatives such as the Digital Literacies Programme and by establishing robust alumni networks that engage regularly to maintain momentum and facilitate knowledge transfer. Innovative teaching methods piloted during the U2SID, particularly the Digital Transformation Challenge, are to be formally embedded within the curricula of partner universities, ensuring a continuous evolution of teaching methodologies informed by project learnings and evaluations.

Inclusive digitalization remains a core priority, with targeted awareness campaigns planned biannually, complemented by specialized programs developed explicitly for vulnerable groups, ensuring the project's inclusivity dimension is maintained and expanded. Regular stakeholder collaboration and structured engagement are ensured through ongoing forums, quarterly meetings, and formal partnership agreements, strategically designed to foster lasting collaboration among universities, policymakers, businesses, and civil society.

Financial sustainability is a crucial element, addressed through the strategic identification and pursuit of diversified funding sources. The secured Erasmus+ funding for the EduFair project on Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education (2024-2026), involving existing U2SID partners and extending collaboration networks into Kosovo, further solidifies financial continuity. Additionally, partners including the University of Shkodra, SCiDEV, CCIS, and others have jointly applied for new Erasmus+ Strand 3 funding aimed at developing a professional master's program in Cybersecurity and Digital Transformation, directly responding to stakeholder-expressed needs identified in the U2SID assessment phase.

Institutional sustainability is reinforced through structural changes within partner universities, notably the decision of the Academic Senate of the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi," which established dedicated directorates to embed the project's core objectives of digital competence and stakeholder collaboration firmly within its operational framework. The plan is also supported by formal bilateral agreements, such as the Memorandum of Understanding between SCiDEV and the University of Shkodra, as well as collaborative commitments involving the University of Korça, CCIS, and institutions from Montenegro.





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## ABBREVIATIONS

CCIS	Center for Comparative and International Studies (Qendra për Studime Krahasuese dhe Ndërkombëtare)
EACEA	European Union or European Education and Culture Executive Agency
EU	European Union
NASRI	National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation (Agjencia Kombëtare e Këkrimit Shkencor dhe Inovacionit)
PSC	Project Steering Committee
SCiDEV	Center Science and Innovation for Development (Qendra Shkencë dhe Inovacion për Zhvillim)
U2SID	University to society collaborations for inclusive digital transformation in the Western Balkans
UCG	University of Montenegro (Univerzitet Crne Gore)
UMSH	Mediterranean University of Albania (Universiteti Mesdhetar i Shqipërisë)
UNIBELGR	University of Belgrade (Univerzitet u Beogradu)
ADE	University of Belgrade (Univerzitet u Beogradu)
UNIKO	University „Fan S. Noli” of Korca (Universiteti i Korçës "Fan S. Noli")
UNISALENT	University of Salento (Università del Salento)
O	
UNISHK	University of Shkodra Luigj Gurakuqi (Universiteti i Shkodrës “Luigj Gurakuqi”)
WP	Work Package





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## I. ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

The Stakeholders Engagement and Sustainable Plan lays out the engagement strategy, objective, approach, and activities relevant to identify stakeholders and audiences of U2SID - University to society collaborations for inclusive digital transformation in the Western Balkans, an Erasmus + project, financed by European Education and Culture Executive Agency.

The Stakeholders Engagement and Sustainability Plan outlines the steps that will be taken to achieve the overall aim of the project as well as achieve sustainability to deepen the impact of the project by establishing a long-term vision through engaging stakeholders such as business, policy makers, civil society and media to build strong partnerships for transformation in higher education by developing a knowledge transfer and innovation brokerage unit, establishing a network of partners, developing adequate structures and processes, and strengthening competencies and capacities.

The document was developed by SCIDEV in collaboration with project partners and submitted as a deliverable as per the plan in the project. Based on the feedback from the Project Officer, the Stakeholders Engagement and Sustainable Plan was then revised and updated in February and March 2025 by the end of the project period. It was discussed with partners in the final event at the University of Shkodra on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2025 and submitted on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2025, following email circulation approval.

## II. BACKGROUND

Digital transformation must be done in an inclusive and safe manner and for this, the role of universities and their collaboration with civil society, business, policy, and media is of paramount relevance. Digital transformation cannot be safe without awareness raising and capacity building on privacy threats, data protection, and digital literacy, thus leading to overall digital rights. The project proposal's aim is to foster inclusive digital transformation in the Western Balkans through increased collaboration between universities with other stakeholders such as businesses, policymakers, civil society, and media.

The U2SID project supports the development and uptake of digital skills to make the digital transformation as comprehensive and inclusive as possible. The specific objectives of the U2SID project are: To strengthen digital competencies of teachers, students, and professionals through the development of a Digital Literacies Acceleration Programme as a collaborative program among universities on one side and businesses, civil society, local decision-makers, and media on the other; To improve innovative teaching methods through piloting a Digital Transformation Challenge for students as a project-based and solution-oriented learning based on mentoring, coaching and placement at businesses, civil society, local decision-makers, and media; To raise awareness on the importance of inclusive digitalization by including vulnerable target groups in the digitalization





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process.

The U2SID is in line with the Call objectives in Strand 2 for building and strengthening partnerships for transformation in higher education. The project is in line with the aim of the call to contribute to the innovation in higher education to enhance relevance to labor market, regional development, and society by strengthening university to society collaborations and setting up a Digital Literacies Accelerator Programme and Digital Transformation Challenge.

*Project proposal's aim:* To foster inclusive digital transformation in the Western Balkans through increased collaboration between universities with other stakeholders such as businesses, policy makers, civil society, and media.

*The specific objectives of U2SID are:*

SO1 – To strengthen digital competences of teachers, students, and professionals through the development of a Digital Literacies Acceleration Programme as a collaborative programme among universities on one side and businesses, civil society, local decision makers and media on the other.

SO2 – To improve innovative teaching methods through piloting a Digital Transformation Challenge for students as a project-based and solution-oriented learning based on mentoring, coaching and placement at businesses, civil society, local decision makers and media.

SO3 – To raise awareness on the importance of inclusive digitalisation by including vulnerable target groups in the digitalization process.

Participants

*Project Coordinator:*

UNISHK University of Shkodra Luigj Gurakuqi (Universiteti i Shkodrës “Luigj Gurakuqi”)

*Project Partners:*

- UNIKO University „Fan S. Noli” of Korca (Universiteti "Fan S. Noli", Korçë)
- UMSH Mediterranean University of Albania (Universiteti Mesdhetar i Shqipërisë)
- SciDEV Center Science and Innovation for Development (Qendra Shkencë dhe Inovacion për Zhvillim)
- CCIS Center for Comparative and International Studies (Qendra për Studime Krahasuese dhe Ndërkombëtare)
- NASRI National Agency for Scientific Research and Innovation (Agjencia Kombëtare e Kërkimit Shkencor dhe Inovacionit)
- UCG University of Montenegro (Univerzitet Crne Gore)
- UniBelgrade University of Belgrade (Univerzitet u Beogradu)
- UNISALENTO University of Salento (Università del Salento)







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### III. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

This section provides an overview of what stakeholder engagement and sustainability entails.

#### *Stakeholders engagement*

**A Stakeholder engagement** is a strategic process of interacting with stakeholders to gather information about a shared interest, preferences, and the potential for joint action. Learning about what other stakeholders get from us, want from us, or can do to us can contribute to decision-making in a way that is mutually value-producing and enhances sustainability.

#### *Sustainability*

**A sustainability plan entails** the ability of the project aim and results to be used and relevant even after the project has been concluded.

#### 3.1 Stakeholder engagement and sustainability plan

The main purpose of stakeholder engagement and sustainability is to contribute to the kind of sustainable development from which organizations, their stakeholders, and the wider society can benefit. By engaging stakeholders, universities may get an opportunity to better understand the market condition, promote their reputation, build trust and long-term collaborative relationships, as well as better understand and mitigate the threats and uncertainties related to the project.

The entire project is designed with a sustainability built-in strategy and to strengthen sustainability, the project activities have been developed based on the following approach: first, the project is in line with key national strategies and policies.

Second, the project expects to have an active participation of youth and relevant stakeholders including state and non state actors.

Third, the sustainability will be also enhanced by ensuring coordination and synergies with other initiatives such as USIA, and particularly the U2SID as a continuation of the USIA project. As such the USIA offices established in 3 other higher education institutions will strengthen the support for the continuation of the dissemination.

Fourth, the project activities are designed in such a way to ensure sustainability. For instance, the capacity building program will increase knowledge and competences of target groups. Also, the Accelerator programme ensures sustainability by capitalisation on experience, sharing information and knowledge. In





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the same way, the communication and dissemination plan will also serve for sharing lessons learnt and best practices, thus contributing to project sustainability.

The awareness raising campaign and communication plan will boost its visibility to reach as many stakeholders as possible. The project will engage stakeholders in a deliberate way.

**Financial sustainability:** Operating of the online platform will be achieved using the own fund and resources of project partners. Other major follow up activities will be implemented in collaboration with donors. The partners possess a lot of toolkits and information that will become available under the workshops and sessions for support to business ideas and start up program. The partners will initiate and support also existing and ongoing projects for replication and upgrade of this action and will potentially ensure financial sustainability through other donors, and not only EU funding. Project partners will channel additional organizational and donor funds to provide continuous services in the same area. The key donors are: European Union through Erasmus+, IPA, Digital Innovation Hub and other specific calls at local level; other bilateral donors such as the Albanian-American Development Fund; Austrian Development Agency; Swiss Development Cooperation and others.

**Institutional Sustainability:** Sustainability of the action will be ensured through increase of knowledge of the target groups, and through spillover of the knowledge towards peers, friends, and colleagues and towards more stakeholders through webinars and online library and towards public at large through visibility actions. Another element of institutional sustainability relies in the increase of competences of policy makers. The lead partner and the co-applicants are proposed as a consortium that is devoted around youth, digital democracy, digital rights and policy dialogue and capacity building and will provide for an infrastructure that will retain for future projects and secure additional funds on the issue. In that regard, the partners will keep an ongoing relationship with all the stakeholders in this action and will continue to provide necessary expertise and, logistic support to grassroots organizations after the project.

**Stakeholder engagement** is a highly relevant activity, an ongoing process. This process allows stakeholders to contribute to the decision-making process.

This process includes:

- Providing information
- Building capacity to equip communities and stakeholders with effective engagement.
- Listening and responding to community and stakeholder concerns.
- Including communities and stakeholders in relevant decision-making processes.
- Developing goodwill and understanding of objectives and priorities will lead to confidence in decisions.
- Establishing a realistic understanding of potential outcomes, and
- Building an understanding of the decision-making process.
- curricula development and improvement of teaching;





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- students' internships and job fairs;
- contribution to regional development, community, and society at large (engaged university) ;
- research quality and communication to diverse audiences;
- access to data, technology, decision making processes and real-life problems;
- research funds and joint projects;
- collaborative research;
- publication of applied and policy-oriented research;
- communication to external audiences and wider publics;

**The Engagement Plan** will describe the process of identifying stakeholders, and the approach to their involvement in collaboration with the higher education institutions to turn this cooperation network into a concrete product of scientific research based on objectives specified in the project.

The development of the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy will allow universities and researchers to work concretely on building a **Digital Literacies Acceleration Programme** to strengthen digital competences and collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and Stakeholders. Another objective is that of learning based on a project based Digital Transformation Challenge whereby students and staff will work on learning based on mentoring, coaching and placement at business, civil society, local decision makers and media. Furthermore, this collaboration will be expanded with vulnerable target groups to raise awareness on the importance of **inclusive digitalization**.

For the optimal organization of this strategy, the strategic plan is divided into two phases of implementation, which include:

- Detection of stakeholders and continuation of cooperation with all identified stakeholders.
- Construction of cooperation stages through examples of concrete collaboration and monitoring activities to measure the impact of this collaboration.
- More specifically, the first phase includes an overview of all dissemination opportunities identified through the experiences to date with all stakeholders identified through communication tools, such as event attendance (e.g., conferences, workshops, etc.), project presentations (e.g., to local stakeholders, etc.) and by online activities based around the project website, and through the main social platforms. The communication and dissemination activities have been designed and are addressed to target the key audiences and stakeholders and to maximize awareness of the project objectives, means, and results.
- The second phase involves the construction of collaboration phases through the construction of concretework to reach the objectives of cooperation of the university with all the stakeholders identified.





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### 3.2 Stakeholders mapping

The goal of the stakeholder mapping process is to determine which stakeholders must be involved in the project to have the greatest impact. The stakeholders are chosen based on the content, expected outcomes and implications of the project, as well as the available resources, the objectives of the engagement and the willingness or ability of the stakeholders to interact and participate in the project. It should be specified that the choice of stakeholders has a meaningful impact on the outcome of an engagement process.

Additionally, an effective representation can improve the ability of participants to learn and trust one another, whereas an unrepresentative or limiting participant selection can lead to less positive project outcomes and even greater conflict.

Stakeholder mapping is collaborative research, debate, and discussion process that draws on many views to identify a core list of stakeholders throughout the stakeholder range. Mapping can be broken down into three stages as determined below:

1. Identify all potential stakeholders
2. Assess and prioritize stakeholders' needs in terms of co-production and knowledge
3. Develop an understating of stakeholders

The U2SID unit will interpret the findings of the stages to determine what level of engagement is required, the role of the engagement, and finally, which techniques of engagement are to be used for each of the stakeholders. Stakeholder information will be recorded on the online collaborative platform of U2SID. In this platform, each partner institution will upload the required information according to Appendix 1. The stages of the stakeholder's engagement will include the following steps:

Project Stakeholders	Identification of those stakeholders is considered important to foster inclusive digital transformation in the Western Balkans through increased collaboration between universities with other stakeholders such as businesses, policy makers, civil society, and media.
Stakeholder analysis	Determining where stakeholders stand now in terms of their contribution and participation in the development of structures and processes that enable and nurture long-term and meaningful collaboration between universities, businesses, policymakers, civilsociety, and the media;
Stakeholder management	Determining the actions required to preserve or modify the stakeholders' positions within the map to increase proficiencies and capacities to co-produce knowledge and research that carries an impact, i.e. to network, knowledge acquisition, skills development, financial gains, exchange of experiences, mobility options, public exposure, and diversification of expertise to have a digital transformation in the Western Balkans.
Strategy review	Defining the method to determine whether engagement actions have been or are likely to be successful, as well as whether this strategy needs to be refined.



### 3.3 Stages

#### Stage 1 – Stakeholders Identification

During this phase, determined stakeholders will be responsible for not simply contributing to the project, but also in inspiring them to participate actively in it. All people, or groups of people, who may influence and can affect, or/and may have an importance in the project must be considered to identify all interested stakeholders. Stakeholder participation in the recognition process is also pursued to define and clarify the issues being evaluated, as well as to provide more detailed information about who might be affected by those issues. Provided that, by the conclusion of the project, higher education in Albania and Montenegro will strengthen the digital literacy of their students, teachers and professional at local level. Enhance the relevance of universities for the local and national labour market as well as regional development. It is necessary to stimulate cooperation between stakeholders and universities starting from local and national level ensuring capacity building and exchange of good practice and expanding it at Western Balkan level and EU and Western Balkan level.

The stakeholder identification process, on the other hand, should be often reviewed during the project to ensure that no groups or individuals are overlooked. This could imply recognizing new stakeholders who need to be involved. Stakeholders were initially chosen using the ex-ante strategy, in which stakeholders are defined ahead of time in connection to expected stakeholder categories, considering specific sectors or groups of interest, as well as specific responsibilities or activities of certain stakeholders. This was also tied to the previous partnership between universities and institutions. The identification of the stakeholders was also completed through the interaction and brainstorming process with project partners and other institutions engaging in comparable tasks.

Stakeholders	Reasons to involve	Benefits
Government / Policy makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provision of data access.</li> <li>-Encourage the dissemination of findings.</li> <li>-Assistance, insight, and competence in the development and implementation of a national strategy.</li> <li>-Assistance, knowledge and expertise in determining the regulatory and standardized framework.</li> <li>-Identify policy priorities and challenges, evaluate policy alternatives, put policies in place, and evaluate solutions;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Possibility of developing further policies based on rigorous scientific knowledge</li> <li>- Funding options for significant projects.</li> </ul>
		-Compile a database of the issue's



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Business Community	-Encourage the dissemination of findings and the ratification of policies. -Better evaluation of risks.	practices and leading methods. -Application of recommendations for policy development. -Increasing academic staff and students' interest related to new research topics
Civil Society Organizations	-Stronger networking with organizations. -Need a skilled workforce.	-The engagement resulted in better publicity. -Funding opportunities. -Usage of the data produced.
Media	-Extensive dissemination of project results. -Active connection to citizens.	-Resource for news/stories.

The project engagement plan foresees the identification of stakeholders who might be interested in collaborating with our universities, benefiting from:

- Increase Awareness: People have heard of the addressed issue
- Clearer Understanding: People understand the addressed problem and each partner needs
- Gain Acceptance: People understand the issue/problem addressed and accept their role in addressing it and what they need to do differently.
- Build support: People support the issue/problem that need to be addressed and are actively engaged in satisfying needs.
- Increase the pace of project progress

Following is an initial identification of the stakeholders' groups that are thought to be relevant as follows:

#### *Government/ Public Policy Making Institutions*

This stakeholder category includes the ministries (ministry of Foreign Affairs), municipalities (Shkodër Municipality, Korçë Municipality), district councils (Shkodër District Council).

These stakeholders will be involved in the project mainly in the following actions:

- Collaborate on the co-production of knowledge and research with impact in cooperation with trained students, lecturers, researchers, assistant lecturers, and master students.
- Participate actively in invalidating models and guidelines for best practices in setting up and operating the coordination network in partnership with universities.
- Engage in actionable knowledge and research coproduction with institutions.
- Enhance collaboration between multidisciplinary groups of local and international researchers through collaborative projects and initiatives.
- Dissemination of project findings to other institutions, with an emphasis on encouraging them to join the designed collaboration network.
- Take part in a communication campaign to promote awareness about the importance of partnership between universities and the public sector.

#### *Business Community*

This stakeholder category will be involved in the project mainly in the following actions:

- Contribute to the establishment of continuous cooperation relations with the university.







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- Evaluate the aspects in which it will have to collaborate with the university in the digital literacy acceleration programme.
- Adopting the proposed methodology of work.
- Dissemination of project findings to other institutions, with an emphasis on encouraging them to join the designed collaboration network.

### *Media*

This stakeholder category will be involved in the project mainly in the following actions:

- Assisting in the effective dissemination of university-based research.
- Assist in publicizing and disseminating the success stories of relationships formed throughout the project and afterward.
- Intensify collaboration with universities.
- Increasing awareness and trust across the network through exposure.
- To assist in the formation of a long-term collaboration with the university.

### *CSOs and NGOs*

This stakeholder will be involved in the project mainly in the following actions:

- Approach universities for benefiting from their knowledge and expertise.
- Maintain a database of local/national CPOs in the country,
- Maintains a database of international NGOs, their field of expertise,
- Monitors the CSOs/NGOs landscape: call for contributions, applications, funds,
- Maintains links with the PR unit of the university to enable successful dissemination of the partnerships created and the results obtained.

## **Stage 2 – Evaluation and Analysis**

The second stage of the stakeholder mapping process is to determine and evaluate stakeholders to classify them in terms of the influence of their cooperation.

To determine how stakeholders are best to contribute and how they will be affected by the project, it is more necessary to identify their interests and roles in the project and prioritize them according to their importance and influence on the project to achieve the main goal of this network creation, whose goal is to coordinate the efforts of the main actors to foster inclusive digital transformation in the Western Balkans.

### **Inform and Discuss**

Stakeholders should be properly informed about the capacity of the model network creation, the problem-focused on, the purposes, and the results to support them in identifying a problem,





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evaluating the alternatives, perceiving opportunities, and detecting plausible explanations. The information of each stakeholder group must constantly be adapted to their demands. Stakeholders should be informed and consulted on a variety of issues, including the parameters used to design the type of coordination, the methodologies used to impose susceptibility, the estimate of alternative transformation steps, and the decision-making process for establishing transformation strategies for stakeholders. It shall be taken care not to confuse stakeholders with knowledge that is outside of their area of commitment or competence.

Suggested tactics to be used at this stage are:

- local media/ internet portal
- reports
- websites/newsletters
- social networks
- conferences/ seminars/ webinars
- project events (and common agenda with other relevant ongoing projects)

### Involve

Stakeholders should work precisely with the university's trained responsible representatives (staff members, project students) during this phase to ensure that their interests and demands are fully recognized, accepted, and where pertinent, met through the definition of issues that should be supported in terms of scientific research.

Suggested tactics to be used at this stage are:

- advisory boards
- stakeholder forums
- participatory decision-making processes
- focus groups
- online engagement tools

### Cooperate

In this phase, stakeholders should collaborate with identified trained university representatives on relevant improvements features by producing valuable knowledge in providing explanations to simple questions, providing extensive counseling, essential training and expertise to meet their demands. This includes, for example, any measures required to ensure that these stakeholders are completely accomplished, such as developing solution oriented project based learning via optional techniques mainly in mentoring, coaching, placement in business, as well as identifying desirable results or outcomes.

Suggested tactics to be used at this stage are:

- joint projects
- partnerships
- multi-stakeholder initiatives
- Collaborative Online Platforms







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Several techniques can be used in the consultation process with stakeholders:

- questionnaires
- focus groups
- workshops
- open events
- Social media (online tools)
- stakeholder panels

### Stage 3 - Develop an understanding of stakeholders

It is critical to gain better knowledge of the motivations, interests, expertise, and capacity of identified stakeholders to interact when computing them and choosing how and when to engage with them.

Likewise, in this relation, it is important to explore.

- Relationships between universities and stakeholders that already exist.
- Relationships between stakeholders that are not anymore existing, lessons learned from these experiences
- To achieve objectives, appropriate communication methods must be used and adapted
- The knowledge that various stakeholders have could be useful.

It is crucial to conduct an analysis process that identifies the various degrees of involvement required, the stages at which engagement should occur, the relevant engagement activities, and any potential barriers to engagement. When a greater grasp of stakeholders is gained, this process becomes clearer.

Building trust-based relationships with stakeholders plays a vital role in ensuring successful collaborations. More than one engagement method does exist to best approach different stakeholders, depending on the level of confidence and relations established with them.

The communication strategy will facilitate effective communication with stakeholders using all the up-mentioned tools in fulfilling the objectives of the strategy. One of the prior objectives of this strategy is to transmit pertinent knowledge to potentially impacted stakeholders in a timely and appropriate manner and to create a regular two-way flow of information between universities and these stakeholders. Furthermore, support rigorous, prolonged, comprehensive, and renewed communication, education, and cooperation on the benefits of the established network to promote good public behavior change and support a wider use of scientific knowledge in relevant public policies.

Distinct stakeholder groups involving will be targeted through various communication activities. The key group of stakeholders are those who may be impacted by the project, which includes groups from local/national authorities, Academia, Civil Society, business, media, and Public Sector.

Transmitting information to the stakeholders: Informative materials and reports will be distributed to stakeholders who may be influenced by the project to provide advice on the project as an entity consisting





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of procedures and estimated impacts.

The U2SID unit will be in charge of completing and observing all stakeholder communication, digital knowledge transfer process, education, and information dissemination and publication, as well as establishing a focal point who will be in constant communication with all the interested stakeholders.

Collecting feedback and establishing two-way information flow: The Informative materials and reports shall identify how stakeholders can approach researchers and the appointed focal point. Periodic meetings will ensure that adequate and careful feedback is obtained from stakeholder groups.

Acknowledgment: Under the Public Communications Strategy, all necessary documents will be uploaded to the website and important documents and information will be distributed on the project website, which will combine the attending information: meetings and assigned agreements; various collaboration activities, and progress of network enrichment. Another essential aim of the communication strategy is to select the best digital communication platforms to keep stakeholders updated. Stakeholders are updated and informed appropriately through the publication of updates. Because they can engage broad groups of stakeholders, social media can be a very useful component of a communication strategy. Besides disseminating material, social media may engage and build connections with stakeholders. This takes the form of content sharing and token platform actions, such as “liking” or “re-sharing” content.





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## IV. SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

### Establish a long-term vision

The project has established a long-term vision to guide all activities. The vision has been developed in collaboration with all project partners as well as keeping in mind research conducted on needs of stakeholders, including businesses, policy-makers, civil society, and the media. Based on the WP1 work and assessment the project working group has started developing the program on digital literacies, workshops of mobility training have taken place with all the partners and universities involved. During this time-frame and activities the vision of the project has been communicated to all stakeholders and has been used to ensure that the U2SID project is sustainable in the long-term. This is by making sure that there has been effective engagement, communication strategy has been used in promoting the campaign, and roundtables between various stakeholders have been conducted to insure correct evaluation.

### Develop a stakeholder engagement plan

The U2SID project has developed a stakeholder engagement plan to engage all stakeholders, including universities, businesses, policymakers, civil society, and the media. The stakeholder engagement plan has been designed to build partnerships and ensure that the project's activities are aligned with the needs of stakeholders. The stakeholder engagement plan has been reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that it remains effective.

### Establish a network of partners

The U2SID project will establish a network of partners in to ensure that the project is sustainable in the long-term. The network of partners includes universities, businesses, policymakers, civil society, and the media. The network of partners has been developed in collaboration with all stakeholders.

### Strengthen competencies and capacities

The U2SID project has strengthened competencies and capacities of teachers, students, vulnerable groups to enhance the innovation in higher education through partnership via society collaborations in the region but also locally and increase the relevance of such partnership in the labor market, regional development, and society. The strengthening of competencies and capacities was implemented to ensure that the project is sustainable in the long-term and that it contributes to development and EU integration.

### Concrete Action Plan for Stakeholders Engagement

The following plan outlines specific steps and tasks that will be undertaken as part of the sustainability plan and stakeholders' engagement to provide concrete actions which are practical, measurable and catering to





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our work plan and the specific objectives of our project.

Each partner regardless of their task's deadline, should update every 6 months their engagement stakeholder's plan. The updates allow the project team to monitor and quickly reflect on the collaboration for all project activities, the stakeholders that provide a substantial involvement and contribution in the field of digital skills in the country.

### Specific tasks and roles

Task	Description	Role of each partner	Deadline
Development of Template for Stakeholders Database	SCiDEV prepares the template and instructs U2SID partners how to complete it	Each partner develops database of stakeholders	20.10.2023
Finalization of Stakeholders Database	SCiDEV puts together the final Database of Stakeholders and stored in U2SID Shared file	Each partners confirms final version	31.10.2023 Updated February 2025
Update of Stakeholders Database	Regular update of the database	Each partner updates every month	Ongoing till end of project Updated 30.09.2024 Updated 31.01.2025 Project Partners capitalize and use it for further engagement and opportunities
Engagement of stakeholders in the Digital Literacies Assessment	SCiDEV prepares the methodology, the tools, survey and focus group	Each partner conducts the research and focus groups with stakeholders and provides written report	15.12.2023
Organisation of mobility for	1 workshop 5 days in Belgrade with staff and	Uni Belgrade organises and prepares report of the workshop	13-16 December 2023 – Belgrade





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<p>training for staff and students</p>	<p>students</p> <p>1 workshop 5 days in Salento with staff and students</p>	<p>Uni Salento organizes and prepares the report for the workshop</p> <p>Uni Shkodra ensures visibility in social media and website article for both workshops</p> <p>Each partner promotes participation in their social media for each workshop</p> <p>Each partner informs stakeholders about the results</p> <p>Project partners prepare a new project application focusing on on AI and ethics in higher education based on experiences of USIA and U2SID under the leadership of SCiDEV</p> <p>University of Shkodra applies for project focusing on new curriculum for digital transformation in higher education and links to labor market such as: cyber security in cooperation with U2SID partners and other stakeholders included in the database.</p>	<p>Report of the workshop to be published on website 20 December 2023</p> <p>April 2024 – Salento, Italy</p> <p>Application submitted in 2024 and new project started on 01.11.2024</p> <p>Application submitted in February 2025</p>
<p>Collaborative training with lecturers and professionals from civil society, business, and policy on digital literacies</p>	<p>1 workshop in Podgorica with lecturers and professionals from civil society, business, and policy on digital literacies</p> <p>1 workshop in Shkodra with lecturers and professionals from civil society, business, and policy on digital literacies</p> <p>1 workshop in Korca with lecturers and professionals from civil society, business, and policy on digital literacies</p> <p>1 workshop in Tirana with lecturers and professionals from civil society, business, and policy on digital literacies</p>	<p>University of Shkodra based on the Digital Literacy Accelerator Programme provides concrete guidelines to Uni Montenegro, Uni Korca, UMSH on how to organise the collaborative training workshops with lecturers and professionals from civil society, business, and policy on digital literacies</p> <p>University of Shkodra ensures all trainings are delivered, visibility is ensured, and detailed reports are published on website</p> <p>CCIS does online evaluation form per each workshop, each partner ensures the form is completed at</p>	<p>All 4 workshops and reports to be completed as per deadline</p> <p>25-26 April 2024 Podgorica</p> <p>4 – 5 April 2024, Korca</p> <p>4 – 5 April 2024,</p>





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		<p>the end of the trainings</p> <p>Each partner is responsible for hiring services of trainers, engaging stakeholders, ensuring participation, developing agenda, organising workshop and deliver draft reports. Uni Shkodra based on all this input by each partner, develops overall report for task 2.3 including CCIS evaluation</p> <p>This report will feed in the post evaluation study to be developed and submitted by SCiDEV by 30.06.2024</p>	<p>Shkodra</p> <p>27-28 March 2024, Tirana</p>
Promotion and engagement of stakeholders	<p>Digital campaign</p> <p>Online events</p> <p>Media appearance</p> <p>Roundtables</p>	<p>SCiDEV completed the Stakeholders Engagement and Sustainability Plan and the Database</p> <p>During all project lifetime ALL partners engage stakeholders in their activities and promote this with website articles and social media posts. University of Shkodra follows this</p>	<p>Revised 28.02.2025</p> <p>30 June 2024</p>
Digital Literacy Accelerator Programme	Engagement of stakeholders of each partner university in the design, promotion and implementation of the programme and final evaluation	Each partner identifies the stakeholders to be engaged and ensures participation and promotion	26 February 2024
Study on results of WP2	SCiDEV publishes final assessment report and organized event to share with stakeholders	Each partner identifies the stakeholders to be engaged and ensures participation and promotion	30 June 2024
Manual for digital transformation and inclusivity in higher education	Partners develop and promote the manual with the stakeholders of each partner university in the design, promotion and outreach	Each partner identifies the stakeholders to be engaged and ensures participation and promotion	30 August 2024
Public events and final event	Partners engage with stakeholders in final event	Each partner identifies the stakeholders to be engaged and ensures participation and	Completed Final Event in Korca -





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	and university presentations	promotion	February 2025 Capitalisation and knowledge managet in Shkodra March 2025
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## V. PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY PLAN – AFTER THE PROJECT COMPLETION

This sustainability framework clearly outlines the strategic roadmap for embedding long-term impacts of the U2SID project within partner institutions and their broader communities beyond 2025. It emphasizes key areas such as Digital Competence Enhancement, ensuring sustained growth of digital skills through continuous implementation of the Digital Literacies Programme and the creation of robust alumni networks. The framework highlights the importance of institutionalizing innovative digital teaching methods, such as the Digital Transformation Challenge, and regularly updating teaching practices based on project learnings. It also underscores the critical role of Inclusive Digitalization by initiating targeted programs for vulnerable groups and regular awareness campaigns. Strong Stakeholder Collaboration is prioritized through ongoing forums and formal partnership agreements, alongside continuous Monitoring and Evaluation to inform and adapt strategies effectively. Financial sustainability is explicitly addressed through diversifying funding sources and securing ongoing operational funding. Institutional sustainability ensures capacity-building within the consortium and promotes knowledge-sharing across faculties. Lastly, Communication and Visibility, together with proactive Stakeholder Engagement, is planned systematically through structured communication, sharing best practices, and actively engaging youth and broader community stakeholders, ensuring the long-lasting relevance, impact, and visibility of the project's outcomes.

Area of Focus	Objective	Actions	Deadlines
Digital Competence Enhancement	Strengthen digital competencies sustainably.	a. Continuation of Digital Literacies Programme in each of 4 partner universities. b. Establish an alumni network and have regular meetings, at least twice per year in each of partner universities.	a. Q3 2025 onwards b. Q4 2025 onwards
Innovative Teaching Methods	Maintain and evolve digital teaching methods.	a. Institutionalize Digital Transformation Challenge in each of partner universities as achieved during U2SID. b. Update teaching methodologies regularly based on the lessons achieved during U2SID.	a. Annually (from Q4 2025) b. Bi-Annually (from Q2 2026)
Inclusive Digitalization	Promote inclusive digitalization awareness.	a. Conduct regular awareness campaigns. b. Develop programs for vulnerable groups.	a. Bi-Annual (from Q2 2026) b. Q1 2026
Stakeholder Collaboration	Foster lasting stakeholder collaborations.	a. Establish ongoing collaboration forums. b. Formalize long-term partnership agreements.	a. Quarterly (from Q3 2025) b. Q2 2026
Monitoring and Evaluation	Continuously assess and adapt strategies.	a. Conduct annual impact assessments. b. Revise and update strategies based on evaluations.	a. Annually (from Q4 2025) b. Bi-Annually (from Q1 2026)
Financial sustainability	Ensure ongoing financial support for project	a. Online Platform Operations: Secure funding for the continued operation of the	a. Quarterly (from Q3 2025)







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	activities post-2025.	online platform using the resources of project partners. b. Expansion of Funding Sources: Identify and engage with new donors for diversified financial support.	b. Q2 2026
Institutional Sustainability	Enhance the capacity of stakeholders for long-term project impact.	a. Strengthen the consortium infrastructure for future projects and funding. b. Ensure knowledge transfer with other faculties within the university of the Digital Literacies Acceleration Programme and Digital Transformation Challenge	Annual (Starting Q2 2026)
Communication and visibility	Maintain and expand project visibility and knowledge sharing.	a. Awareness Campaigns: Execute regular awareness campaigns to engage a broader audience based on the results of U2SID. b. Best Practices Sharing of U2SID results with other HEIs: NASRI and CCIS and SCiDEV can help to share the lessons learnt and best practices. c. Stakeholder Communication: Regular updates and communications with stakeholders as per the database developed and updated.	Annual (Starting Q2 2026)
Stakeholder Engagement	Foster active participation and collaboration with stakeholders for project sustainability.	a. Stakeholder Forums: Organize regular forums for stakeholder engagement and feedback based on the events organized during U2SID project implementation. b. Partnership Strengthening: Develop strategies to strengthen partnerships with state and non-state actors at the local communities where each university is based. c. Youth Involvement: Implement specific initiatives to engage and empower youth in digital literacies by working with the alumni network and students trained in U2SID.	Annual (Starting Q2 2026)





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## VI. SPECIFIC MEASURES FOR SUSTAINABILITY BY THE END OF THE PROJECT

**University of Shkodra – Project Leader ensuring sustainability of the U2SID approach through the re-organisation of the research, project and international structure as follows:**

The decision no. 21, dated 24 January 2025, protocol number 299, issued by the Academic Senate of the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi," concerns the reorganization of the Directorate of Communication, Scientific Research, Projects, and External Relations. It outlines the strategic restructuring of this directorate into two separate entities: the Directorate of Scientific Research and Internationalization and the Directorate of Public and Student Relations, with immediate entry into force.

The purpose of this reorganization is to effectively address contemporary challenges and align with long-term strategic objectives. It specifically responds to priorities outlined in Albania's National Strategy for Scientific Research, Technology, and Innovation (2023-2030), as well as strategic development goals of the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi."

According to the decision, the two newly formed directorates are structured as follows:

### I. Directorate of Scientific Research and Internationalization

It comprises three sectors:

- **Sector of Scientific Research and Projects:**  
This sector includes one Head of Sector (Përgjegjës) and two Specialist positions dedicated to the development, management, and implementation of scientific research and projects.
- **Sector of Internationalization** (previously External Relations):  
This sector includes one Head of Sector and two Specialist positions, maintaining and expanding international academic cooperation and enhancing participation in international research project calls.
- **Office of Excellence (Zyra e Ekselencës):**  
A newly established office, composed of one Head and two Specialist positions, responsible for training academic staff, enhancing research quality, disseminating updated research information, conference opportunities, and scientific publications, as well as providing targeted training sessions for various community sectors (economics, education, science).

### II. Directorate of Public and Student Relations

This directorate contains two sectors:





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- **Sector of Student Relations:**

It includes one Head of Sector and two Specialist positions, one for student/alumni relations (academic staff member with reduced teaching load) and another specialist dedicated to career counseling and general student support activities.

- **Sector of Public Relations:**

This sector has been significantly strengthened, now including a Coordinator (Head) responsible for public communication and overseeing university promotional activities. It further includes two specialist positions: one Graphic Designer (academic staff member with reduced teaching load), tasked with preparing promotional materials (flyers, posters, brochures), and one specialist dedicated to managing relationships with businesses and coordinating university events.

### Financial Implications

The financial effect of this reorganization amounts to a total of 1,776,725 Albanian Lekë (ALL). This budget covers the reduced teaching hours, hourly rates, and operational costs associated with each new or modified position:

- Coordinator of the Office of Excellence (Professor Associate or PhD): 30 reduced teaching hours at 1,295 ALL/hour, totaling 38,850 ALL.
- Specialists at the Office of Excellence (PhD level): two positions, each 20 reduced teaching hours at 940 ALL/hour, totaling 18,800 ALL each.
- Director of Public Relations (Professor Associate or PhD): 50 reduced teaching hours at 1,295 ALL/hour, totaling 64,750 ALL.
- Specialist for Business Relations (full-time employed): a total yearly allocation of 1,585,248 ALL.
- Public Relations Coordinator (promoted internally from specialist): total yearly allocation of 36,170 ALL.
- Graphic Designer Specialist (academic staff): 20 reduced teaching hours at 705 ALL/hour, totaling 14,100 ALL.

The decision emphasizes compliance with relevant legal frameworks and existing strategic guidelines, specifically referring to the university's internal regulation no.132, dated 27 April 2023, and related national legislation governing higher education and scientific research.

The decision of the Academic Senate of the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi" significantly strengthens the sustainability of the Erasmus+ U2SID project by formally embedding key principles of digital transformation, stakeholder collaboration, and capacity-building into the university's institutional structures. By creating dedicated units, particularly the Directorate of Scientific Research and Internationalization and the Office of Excellence, the university ensures a robust and permanent institutional foundation to continue advancing inclusive digitalization, a core U2SID priority. The explicit focus on continuous training, international collaboration, and proactive stakeholder engagement outlined in the decision means that the objectives initially developed under U2SID—especially improving digital





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skills and fostering inclusivity—are now sustainably institutionalized. Consequently, the decision ensures the project's long-term impacts, preventing dependency on external funding cycles, and solidifying U2SID's achievements as integral components of the university's operational and strategic framework.

In addition, the University of Montenegro's [strategic documents](#) outline the establishment of frameworks and conditions for institutional support of digital skills development, ensuring long-term sustainability.

The University Fan S Noli of Korça has actively facilitated practical student engagements through the use of Decision Support Systems (DSS) and data from its meteorological station, enabling around 70 local farmers to significantly reduce pesticide usage by approximately 40%, thus promoting more sustainable agricultural practices. Furthermore, the university has proactively developed new project proposals aimed at establishing specialized laboratories to enhance digital competencies, evaluating students' digital skills, and undertaking applied research focused explicitly on addressing the digital transformation needs and opportunities within the Korça region.

### Joint project proposals of stakeholders

The sustainability of the U2SID project's outcomes is further reinforced by proactive measures taken by its partners—University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi" (UNISHK), SciDEV, and CCIS—who have jointly applied for additional funding through the Erasmus+ Strand 3 for reforms in higher education. This follow-up initiative strategically involves stakeholders directly engaged during the U2SID project's assessment phase, including the Polytechnic University of Tirana, the National Authority for Cybersecurity (AKSK), and local SMEs, highlighting a strong collaborative approach. The proposal specifically aims at establishing a Professional Master program in Cybersecurity and Digital Transformation, directly addressing critical gaps identified by the U2SID assessment and responding to explicit demands articulated by these stakeholders. This strategic step not only demonstrates a coherent continuation and deepening of the U2SID project's core objectives, but also ensures that the advancements made in digital skills development and inclusive digitalization become deeply institutionalized and sustained through high-quality, stakeholder-informed academic programming.

### Secured funding focused on digital skills and digitalization in higher education

Project partners have been active in securing funding focused on digital skills and digitalization in higher education. For instance, University of Montenegro has been awarded the [DigiCreate](#), an innovative Erasmus+ virtual exchange project that connect young people from Germany, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Portugal, Spain, Serbia, and Montenegro. DigiCreate aims to develop digital, creative, and intercultural skills among 2,500 young creatives, fostering collaboration in the cultural and creative industries. It started at 2025 and will last 3 years.

Also, University of Montenegro coordinates the newly approved Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education project "[HAWKING](#)," focusing on enhancing digital skills in higher education. The project





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establishes mechanisms for a fair digital transition from secondary to higher education. It also improves the institutional and infrastructural environment at partner higher education institutions and improves teaching methodology. In this way, it bridges the digital gaps in education and student support. The participating countries are Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Turkey, Serbia, Cyprus, Slovenia and Portugal. Project started at 2024.

The University of Montenegro leads the MonteEDIH project, a [Digital Innovation Hub](#) aimed at supporting the digital and green transformation of Montenegrin SMEs and public sector organizations. Key partners include the Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro, University of Donja Gorica, ICT Cortex, and the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Center Tehnopolis. The project focuses on areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Blockchain, and High-Performance Computing (HPC), aiming to train at least 200 companies and facilitate substantial investments in digital transformation over four years. Project duration: 01/01/2025 – 01/01/2029.

In addition, Fan S. Noli University of Korçë has actively engaged in multiple projects and partnerships to boost digital skills development and advance digitalisation. These initiatives include EU-funded programs, and collaborations with domestic and international partners. Key recent initiatives are summarized below, with their objectives, timelines, partners, and sources for reference. UNIKO is participating in an Interreg IPA South Adriatic project informally known as "ILOFORDIGITAL", formally titled "*Industrial Liaison Offices (ILO) for empowerment of a cross-border Digital, entrepreneurial and professional skills network*" ([Ndërkombëtare - Universiteti "Fan S. Noli", Korçë](#)). This cross-border initiative (Italy–Albania–Montenegro) focuses on strengthening collaboration between academia and industry to drive digital innovation and skills development.

### New Erasmus Project focused on AI

The sustainability of the U2SID project's outcomes is further solidified through newly secured funding under the Erasmus+ initiative for the project "[EduFair](#)," which specifically targets Artificial Intelligence (AI) in higher education. This new project (2024–2026) directly builds on the needs and gaps identified by the U2SID project and study visits, ensuring a seamless continuation of its objectives. By including U2SID partners such as the University of Shkodra Korca, SCiDEV, CCIS, University of Salento and other stakeholders, "EduFair" strengthens the partnership and significantly expands its geographic scope, particularly through new collaborations with institutions and partners in Kosovo. This strategic expansion not only amplifies the impact of U2SID's achievements but also institutionalizes digital transformation and inclusive digitalization efforts across a broader regional context, thus providing a stable foundation for long-term cooperation and continued innovation in digital education.

In addition, University of Montenegro is engaged in the [METACOG](#) project which is an AI literacy programme designed to combat disinformation and fake news by fostering civic engagement and shared values in European societies. The project aims to equip European citizens, particularly higher education students and teachers, with the skills to identify disinformation and fake news through an innovative





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curriculum, teaching materials, and best practices. Through the development of innovative teaching materials, AI-based tools, and best practices, METACOG recognizes AI's dual role in both creating and countering disinformation. METACOG is funded under the Erasmus+ Programme (KA220-HED) and it will last from 01/09/2024 until 31/08/2027.

Also, in the 2024–2025 academic year, UNIKO launched a curriculum innovation project under the READ (Research Expertise from the Academic Diaspora) program. Titled "Implementation of Artificial Intelligence for university IT students," this initiative aims to modernize the computer science curriculum and enhance students' practical AI skills ([READ \(Research Expertise from the Academic Diaspora\)- Titulli i projektit : Implementation of Artificial Intelligence for university IT students - Universiteti "Fan S. Noli", Korçë](#)). It is a collaboration between UNIKO faculty and an Albanian diaspora expert in the field of Artificial Intelligence. UNIKO staff participating in the International Staff Week at Krems, Austria (April 2025), which focused on AI-driven transformation in universities.

### Bilateral Agreements

The sustainability of U2SID's impact is further reinforced by a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) established between SCiDEV and the University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi," explicitly dedicated to future collaborative projects. This strategic partnership ensures ongoing cooperation and mutual reinforcement beyond the project's lifespan. Additionally, SCiDEV and the university have already secured concrete funding through a specific EU-funded initiative in Albania, focusing explicitly on enhancing skills among journalism students. This initiative aligns directly with U2SID's core priority of fostering inclusive digital skills, thus institutionalizing and expanding the project's impact into targeted professional areas. These strategic actions significantly strengthen the sustainability and long-term relevance of U2SID's outcomes, embedding them firmly within institutional practices and broader professional networks.

Additionally, CCIS, SCiDEV, and the universities of Shkodra and Korça have committed to continued cooperation on joint future projects, ensuring long-term collaboration and sustained impact. Moreover, cross-border partnerships are being actively pursued, as demonstrated by joint project applications between the University of Shkodra, the University of Korça, and institutions in Montenegro, further expanding the project's geographical and institutional reach.









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