



Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and Procedures Towards the Establishment of the Accessibility Units

**IDEA: Inclusive tertiary
Education in the West Balkans**

Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and Procedures Towards the Establishment of the Accessibility Unit POLIS UNIVERSITY

Executive Summary

The IDEA (Inclusive tertiary EDucation in the West BAlkanS) project has played a pivotal role in supporting the enhancement of the Accessibility Unit at POLIS University. This project has provided essential support for drafting and implementing a detailed policy for Students with disability, which serves as a foundational document for university's accessibility efforts. Furthermore, the IDEA project has facilitated the early launch and three-year pilot phase of the Accessibility Unit, enabling the acquisition of assistive technology and the gradual development of staff expertise. Ultimately, the IDEA project has been instrumental in propelling our commitment to inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. The primary purpose of establishing the Accessibility Unit at POLIS University is to facilitate a more inclusive and accessible learning environment within the institution. Such a unit is and will be dedicated to modernizing higher education practices and improving accessibility for all students, ensuring that education remains equitable and responsive to the diverse needs of our student body. By focusing on students with disabilities, including Specific Learning Disabilities (SwLD), POLIS aims to create a university culture that champions respect, combats disability discrimination, and fosters effective inclusion. Key Objectives of the Document:

- **Providing Context/Introduction:** Offering a thorough context for the creation of the Accessibility Unit, highlighting its integration within the Student Support and Career Counseling Office (ZMSKK) within POLIS University, and emphasizing its alignment with the goals of the IDEA project.
- **Defining Vision and Mission:** Clearly defining the unit's vision and mission, which are central to promoting inclusivity, respect, and the fight against disability discrimination within the university.
- **Pilot and Road-Mapping Phases:** Outlining the structured approach to the establishment process, including a pilot phase to test services and a subsequent road-mapping phase to transition to full implementation.
- **Staffing and Training:** Defining the recruitment and training plan for unit personnel to ensure they possess the necessary expertise and skills to deliver effective support and accommodations.
- **Evaluation and Monitoring:** Establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) and mechanisms for continuous evaluation, reflecting feedback from stakeholders for continuous improvement.
- **Sustainability and Integration:** Highlighting strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit and its integration into the university's strategic plan.

Introduction

The establishment and functioning of Accessibility Units is the tangible result that demonstrates IDEA's commitment to improving higher education accessibility in the Western Balkans.

In this regard, POLIS University has shown its commitment to establishing and strengthening a unit within the institution, dedicated to modernizing and improving the accessibility of higher education, particularly for students with disabilities (SwD or SwLD). This unit operates as an integrated part within the Student Support and Career Counseling Office (ZMSKK) at the university. This integration facilitates seamless coordination of services for students. In addition, by working closely with the ZMSKK, the Accessibility Unit has been able to leverage resources, expertise, and existing support mechanisms to enhance accessibility and inclusivity for students.

Before setting up the Accessibility Unit, POLIS University took proactive steps by creating a comprehensive policy that addresses the needs of students with disabilities. This policy serves as a strategic framework for promoting inclusivity and combating discrimination against students with disabilities.

Vision and Mission

Vision: "POLIS University envisions a future where institution exemplifies the highest standards of inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. Polis' vision for the Accessibility Unit is to foster a university culture that champions respect, combats disability discrimination, and embraces effective inclusion. Polis strives for an environment where every student, regardless of their abilities, can engage in learning without barriers, realizing their full potential."

Mission: "The mission of the Accessibility Unit at POLIS University is to create an inclusive and accessible learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of institution' student body. Polis structures are committed to modernizing higher education practices, ensuring equitable access for all students. Our mission centers on:

1. Providing tailored support: We aim to offer comprehensive support services and accommodations for students with disabilities, including Specific Learning Disabilities (SwLD), to ensure their academic success and personal growth.
2. Fostering respect: We work tirelessly to foster a university culture that values and respects diversity, eliminating discrimination against students with disabilities and promoting an inclusive atmosphere.
3. Collaborating for effective inclusion: We actively collaborate with faculty, staff, and students to create an environment where all individuals are valued, supported, and actively engaged in academic and extracurricular activities.
4. Continuous improvement: We are dedicated to the continuous improvement of our services through data-driven decision-making, stakeholder feedback, and ongoing training and development of our staff.

Polis' ultimate goal is to measure our success through improved student participation, retention, and academic achievements, ensuring that every student who passes through POLIS University leaves equipped for a future filled with opportunities and success."

Piloting Phase

Polis University has successfully completed the pilot phase of the Accessibility Unit, has confirmed the feasibility of the unit and assessed its initial impact, thus highlighting its significance to stakeholders. In alignment with Polis' core objective of enhancing institutional capacity to meet the diverse needs of institutions' student body, the Accessibility Unit continues to focus on:

- Generating demand for support services
- Strengthening institutional capacity
- Providing access to assistive technology
- Equipping staff with the necessary training to support students with disabilities

The pilot phase laid the foundation for the above-mentioned services by:

- Systematically and comprehensively registering the needs of disabled students during the admission process for all categories of programs
- Conducting individual assessments to identify the primary obstacles faced by students with disabilities during their educational journey
- Offering personal assistive technology services to provide the infrastructure and necessary tools for testing and evaluating available technology
- Adapting educational materials into accessible formats for students with disabilities
- Providing in-class assistance and making adjustments to classrooms and assessment conditions
- Offering individual and group academic counseling for students with disabilities
- Establishing a volunteerism service to assist students with disabilities on a day-to-day basis
- Evaluating the physical accessibility of our campus environment and facilitating access to college premises and educational activities through our Buildings' Accessibility Service
- Providing technical support for accessible library services, including hardware and software
- Developing guidelines to standardize procedures for students with disabilities
- Raising awareness of accessibility and inclusiveness at Polis University among staff and volunteers
- Ensuring equal participation of students with disabilities in national and international research projects through our Research Service.

There has been a dedicated team to oversee and execute the pilot phase. This team included representatives from the Accessibility Unit, faculty, students with disabilities, and other support staff from the Project Office. Polis University remains steadfast in its commitment to providing an inclusive and supportive educational environment for all its students.

Road-Mapping Phase

Following feedback from Polis University students and relevant stakeholders, the pilot phase of the Polis University Accessibility Unit has transitioned to its full establishment as an integrated part within the Student Support and Career Counseling Office (ZMSKK) at the university. Recognizing the need for further development towards accessibility and inclusiveness, the IDEA project has played a pivotal role in supporting the development of the Polis University Policy on Students with Disabilities, adjustments to the strategic plan and policies, adaptation of program curricula, and the training of staff involved in assistive services, among other initiatives. Additionally, given that most of our university facilities were already accessible to all students, only minor adjustments were needed, and specific classrooms were designated for assistive technology.

During the IDEA project, Polis University acquired the following equipment to serve students with disabilities:

1. **DELL Monitor SE2422H, 23.8" LED Edgelight System, FHD:**

These monitors, with their expansive 23.8" LED display and FHD resolution, have provided students at the Accessibility Unit with a visually immersive and clear viewing experience. Such a technology, contributes to an inclusive environment by ensuring optimal visibility for all users, regardless of visual abilities.

2. **Dell PC:**

In addition, Dell PCs have created the technological backbone of the Accessibility Unit, offering students a reliable and high-performance computing platform. This enables seamless access to digital content, online courses, and specialized software tailored to accessibility needs, fostering an inclusive learning environment.

3. **Laptop Dell NB G15 5511, Intel Core i7:**

Furthermore, Dell laptops, equipped with an Intel Core i7 processor, have provided students with a powerful and portable computing solution. Their high-performance features cater to diverse accessibility requirements, ensuring that students can engage in a flexible and inclusive learning experience.

4. **Headset Plantronics Professional BLACKWIRE C3220 USB-A BLACK:**

The Plantronics Professional headsets offer students clear and high-quality audio, facilitating effective communication and participation in virtual learning environments. This technology, has contributed to an inclusive setting by ensuring that auditory information is accessible to all.

5. **Tablet - Karnvas Studio 22 - 16GB SSD 240 GB:**

The Karnvas Studio 22 tablet, featuring a 16GB SSD and additional 240GB storage, has become a versatile tool for students at the Accessibility Unit. Its touch interface enhances accessibility, while the substantial storage capacity supports organized content management, ensuring an inclusive and interactive learning experience.

6. **CZUR Aura Pro Book & Document Scanner:**

The CZUR Aura Pro Book & Document Scanner has supported students to convert physical documents into digital formats, promoting accessibility through text-to-speech applications and streamlined document sharing. This ensures that educational materials are accessible to all students.

7. **HDV-15 4K Plus Camera:**

The HDV-15 4K Plus Camera has elevated visual experiences with its 4K resolution, catering to the needs of students with visual impairments. By ensuring clarity in visual content, it has contributed to an inclusive learning environment where educational materials are accessible to all.

8. **ORCAM READ:**

In addition, The ORCAM READ device, designed for individuals with visual impairments, has transformed printed or digital text into spoken words. This innovative tool has significantly enhanced the accessibility to written information, fostering independence and inclusivity in the learning process.

9. **Chester Creek Vision Board:**

Furthermore, the Chester Creek Vision Board, with its large, high-contrast keys, has addressed the needs of students with visual or motor challenges. Its design prioritizes ease of identification and comfortable typing, ensuring an inclusive and accessible typing experience.

10. **HOE-Keyboard:**

The HOE-Keyboard has also become a pivotal component for customized and accessible typing experiences. Its ergonomic design ensures comfort and efficiency in keyboard use, catering to diverse accessibility requirements within the Accessibility Unit.

11. **Camera Stand:**

These camera stands provide stable and adjustable platforms for cameras, facilitating the creation of high-quality visual content tailored for educational purposes within the Accessibility Unit. Their versatility supports various filming angles and scenarios, enhancing the inclusivity of visual materials.

12. **Keyboard Sticker:**

Keyboard stickers serve as a valuable accessibility aid, offering clear and tactile indications of key functions. Designed for students with visual impairments, these stickers have enhanced the usability of standard keyboards, promoting an inclusive typing experience.

13. **Web Camera Tellur:**

The Tellur web camera has contributed to enhance video communication within the Accessibility Unit, facilitating virtual interactions and inclusive participation in online classes. Its features support clear visuals, fostering an inclusive online learning environment.

14. **PolyCam Studio P009:**

The PolyCam Studio P009, designed for small to medium-sized conference rooms, has found its application in educational settings to support inclusive remote learning experiences. Features like real-time subtitles and advanced audio capabilities enhance accessibility for all students.

15. **Voice Amplifier:**

The Voice Amplifier has enhanced audibility in larger or noisy environments, ensuring that spoken content is accessible to all students within the Accessibility Unit or other facilities within Polis University. Its portable design allows for flexibility, supporting inclusivity in various learning scenarios.

16. **Hard Disk SSD 240GB:**

And finally, the additional SSD with 240GB capacity, has provided supplementary storage for efficient data management within the Accessibility Unit. This hard disc supports accessibility by accommodating diverse content needs and ensuring seamless access to resources for all students.

Staffing and Training

Polis' Accessibility Unit operates as an integrated part within the Student Support and Career Counseling Office (ZMSKK) at the university, supported by dedicated staff and utilizing available resources related to assistive services. Additionally, a part-time staff member has been appointed as the person in charge of students with disabilities (SwDs), responsible for their registration and accommodation.

To ensure the effective support of SwDs, staff education and training have been of paramount importance. Staff members across various departments, including the Accessibility Unit, Student Services, IT, and academic staff, have actively participated in training sessions conducted as part of the IDEA project.

The training initiatives encompassed various topics and were organized by international partners and institutions:

1. The National and Kapodistrian University of Athens facilitated a three-day online workshop on "Development of New Protocols and Drafting of Policy Papers with Normative Suggestions." The workshop offered insights into Greek national legislation for students with disabilities, assistive technology, support services, and the experiences of students with disabilities. Special emphasis was placed on the Accessibility Unit's role within the University, ensuring access to communication, the built environment, educational materials, classrooms, exams, and information.
2. Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, conducted a five-day virtual training program focused on Universal Design for Learning and various services for individuals with special needs. The training was designed for both academic and non-academic staff interested in inclusive education, assistive technologies, and support for students with disabilities.
3. The University of Limerick in Ireland organized a three-day online workshop on the development of policy papers and normative suggestions. The workshop shed light on the legislative framework for people with disabilities in Ireland, highlighting the significance of establishing a Disability Service unit. It covered various topics, including assistive technology, employment services, support services, and pre-entry support.

These training sessions culminated in the development of the Polis University Policy on Students with Disabilities and set the initial groundwork for the establishment of the Accessibility Unit within the Student Services Department at Polis University.

In addition to these training initiatives, Polis University staff physically participated in an Initial Training program organized by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

The training provided insights into the Accessibility Unit of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and the rights of persons with disabilities in Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro. NGO representatives also shared their experiences, challenges, and ideas related to disability services in these regions.

Furthermore, a training program on Built Environment Accessibility Consultants was conducted by Polis University in collaboration with the EU project partner, the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece). This program focused on building environment accessibility standards, legal frameworks, and the status of built environment accessibility in Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro.

The study visits to various international institutions, including the Teiresias Centre at Masaryk University, Czech Republic, provided valuable insights into services, support, and technological solutions for students with disabilities. These visits encompassed topics such as library and IT services, braille encoding, hybrid books, sign language in higher education, and more.

It is also worth mentioning that supplementary training sessions were conducted during the period of October–December 2023. The first one was held at the University of Limerick, focusing on the Training of Trainers to address the practical challenges faced by students with disabilities in their studies and employment. Additionally, a follow-up session was conducted at Catholic University "Our Lady of Good Counsel" for Training of Library Services' Coordinators, emphasizing assistive technology-based solutions. Moreover, at the University of Pristina, there was a comprehensive follow-up, involving a 4-day training for e-Accessibility Coordinators on assistive technology solutions, coupled with a subsequent follow-up training session for Academic Advisors focusing on support services for students with disabilities.

All the abovementioned comprehensive training and study initiatives have been instrumental in enhancing the accessibility and inclusivity of Polis University for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, aligning with the objectives of the IDEA project.

Evaluation and Monitoring

For Polis University, to drive meaningful organizational change, it is essential to establish a framework for regular, independent monitoring and evaluation. This framework aims to assess the effectiveness, appropriateness, timeliness, and achievement of goals by the Accessibility Unit. Key performance indicators (KPIs) play a pivotal role in evaluating and enhancing the Accessibility Unit's effectiveness. These KPIs include:

KPI	Measurement and monitoring timelines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of students with disabilities (SwD) enrolled 	per academic year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quantity and roles of student volunteers 	per academic year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of SwD participating in internship placements and securing employment 	per academic year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The count of training sessions delivered 	per academic year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The total supporting staff trained 	per academic year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of SwD benefitting from mobility opportunities 	per academic semester
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation and activities held in the International Day of Disabled Persons 	per day (International Day of Disabled Persons)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The volume of educational materials converted into accessible formats for SwD 	per academic year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The procurement of assistive technologies 	per academic year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The outreach to high schools to promote awareness of accessibility and inclusiveness at Polis University 	per academic year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The involvement of SwD in national and international research projects 	per academic year
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback reports on improvements in Polis University's inclusiveness and accessibility 	per academic year

The ongoing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are embedded in various reporting structures, such as college progress reports, annual reports detailing the number of SwD and their engagement in college activities, and the list of training participants. Crucially, the continuous improvement of the Unit depends on regular feedback from stakeholders. Additionally, the monitoring process will involve consultations with local disability communities and surveys to gauge the attitudes of SwD, Polis University staff, and other interested parties. These efforts collectively contribute to the ongoing enhancement and optimization of the Accessibility Unit's services.

Sustainability and Integration

Polis University is committed to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit to guarantee continued support for students with disabilities (SwD). To achieve this sustainability, Polis has implemented several key policies and strategies:

1. **Institutional Commitment:** The integration of the Accessibility Unit's services into Polis University's broader mission and values is a foundational aspect of sustainability. Polis is dedicated to fostering an inclusive educational environment where all students, regardless of their physical or learning abilities, can thrive. This commitment ensures that accessibility and inclusiveness are not merely short-term endeavors but enduring principles of the university.
2. **Strategic Planning:** The efforts of the Accessibility Unit are seamlessly integrated into Polis University's strategic plan. This alignment allows the Unit to contribute directly to the university's overarching goals and objectives. By embedding accessibility and inclusiveness as core elements of Polis's strategic vision, the university ensures that these principles will continue to be prioritized over the long term.
3. **Resource Allocation:** Polis University will continue to allocate the necessary resources to support the Accessibility Unit, both in terms of human resources and financial investments (especially after the termination/closure of the IDEA project). This commitment to resource allocation guarantees that the Unit can consistently provide high-quality services to SwD without being compromised by budgetary constraints.

4. **Capacity Building:** Polis will keep investing in the ongoing professional development and training of the staff involved in the Accessibility Unit. This investment ensures that the Unit remains equipped with the knowledge and skills required to adapt to evolving needs and best practices in the field of accessibility services.

Polis University's commitment to sustainability and the integration of the Accessibility Unit's efforts into its strategic plan reflects its dedication to creating an enduring culture of accessibility and inclusiveness. These policies and practices ensure that the university will continue to provide valuable support to SwD for years to come.

Conclusion

In summary, the pilot and road-mapping phases mark significant and transformative milestones in Polis University's journey to establish the Accessibility Unit within its institutional framework. The pilot phase has played a vital role in refining and validating Polis' support services, guided by invaluable input from students, faculty, and stakeholders, reinforcing the university's dedication to inclusivity and accessibility.

Looking ahead to the road-mapping phase, Polis University sits on the cusp of a significant transition from the successful pilot to a fully established unit. This phase entailed meticulous resource allocation, dedicated staff recruitment, and comprehensive training. It also encompassed the integration of assistive technology, curriculum adjustments for inclusivity, infrastructure enhancements, and the development of legal and policy frameworks. In unison, these processes reaffirm our unwavering dedication to fostering an environment where every student can thrive, regardless of their abilities. It is a testament to Polis' institutional commitment to inclusivity, equality, and respect for all. Through these phases, Polis has laid the foundation for a more accessible and inclusive educational experience, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to realize their full potential and succeed in their academic journey.

Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and Procedures Towards the Establishment of the Accessibility Unit

UNIVERSUM COLLEGE

Executive Summary

The IDEA (Inclusive tertiary EDucation in the West BAlkanS) project has been instrumental in supporting the enhancement of the Accessibility Unit at Universum International College. This project has provided essential theoretical and practical support for drafting and implementing a detailed policy for students with physical disabilities and learning disabilities which serves as a foundational document for the institution's accessibility efforts. In addition to this, the IDEA project has greatly facilitated the early launch and three-year pilot phase of the Accessibility Unit, thus enabling the acquisition of the needed assistive technology and the gradual development of staff expertise in order to improve the functioning of the office. In this regard, the IDEA project has been quite relevant in promoting the values of accessibility and inclusiveness in the context of higher education. The main reason behind the establishing the Accessibility Unit at UC is to ensure a more inclusive and accessible learning environment within the university. The role of the unit is to ensure that all students will have access to the necessary environment, resources and experts that assist them in having the right conditions for proper accessibility. In general, the Accessibility Unit which focuses on students with disabilities, including SwLD, UC aims to promote the necessary values and practices which ensure that students are provided with the right conditions to thrive in their academic and personal lives. Key Elements of the Document include:

- **Context/Introduction:** Offering a thorough context for the creation of the Accessibility Unit, highlighting its integration within the Accessibility Unit within UC and emphasizing its alignment with the goals of the IDEA project.
- **Vision and Mission:** Clearly defining the unit's vision and mission, which promote inclusivity, respect, and the fight against disability discrimination within the institution.
- **Pilot and Road-Mapping Phases:** Outlining the structured approach to the establishment process, which includes a pilot phase to test services and a subsequent road-mapping phase to transition to full implementation.
- **Staffing and Training:** This part defines the recruitment and training plan for unit personnel to ensure they possess the necessary expertise and skills to deliver effective support and accommodations for the purpose of ensuring the proper functioning of the Accessibility Unit.
- **Evaluation and Monitoring:** This part will set key performance indicators (KPIs) and mechanisms for continuous evaluation which will reflect feedback from stakeholders for continuous improvement.
- **Sustainability and Integration:** Sustainability and Integration part is concerned with the strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit and its integration into the university's strategic plan.

Introduction

The establishment and further development of the Accessibility Unit at Universum International College is the tangible result that demonstrates IDEA's commitment to improving higher education accessibility in the area of Western Balkans. In this regard, Universum International College has shown its commitment to establishing and strengthening a unit within the institution which is aimed at modernizing and improving the accessibility of higher education for students with physical disabilities and specific learning disabilities in order for them to be able to fully realize their potential. The Accessibility Unit at Universum International College has been able to leverage a variety of proper resources, expertise, and existing support mechanisms to enhance accessibility and inclusivity for students in relation to the requirements for more accessible higher education.

Before setting up the Accessibility Unit, Universum International College took proactive steps by creating a comprehensive policy that addresses the needs of students with disabilities and those who have specific learning disabilities. The policy will serve as a strategic framework for promoting the right practices that guarantee inclusive education for all students.

Vision and Mission

The Accessibility Unit at Universum International College envisions a campus where every student, regardless of physical or learning disabilities, can realize their full potential. Our mission centers on creating an inclusive environment by removing barriers hindering participation. We offer tailored support, raise awareness, and foster collaborations to enhance accessibility. Ultimately, our goal is to measure success through improved student participation, retention, and academic achievements, ensuring all students leave our institution equipped for future success.

Piloting Phase

IV.1 Objectives and expected outcomes of the pilot phase.

The establishment of an accessibility unit at Universum International College under the IDEA project was undertaken with clear objectives and anticipated outcomes. The primary aim was to enhance inclusivity and accessibility for students with diverse needs. The objectives included evaluating existing accessibility gaps, assessing the technology and equipment requirements, and developing comprehensive support services. Expected outcomes encompassed improved access to educational resources, a more inclusive learning environment, and enhanced academic success for students with disabilities. Additionally, the unit aimed to foster a culture of inclusivity throughout the institution.

IV.2 Activities carried out during the piloting phase

During the piloting phase of the accessibility unit at Universum International College, several critical activities were undertaken. These included conducting a needs assessment to identify the specific requirements of students with disabilities, procuring and implementing assistive technologies and equipment as recommended by the assessment, and training faculty and staff on inclusive teaching practices and technology utilization. Furthermore, outreach and awareness programs were initiated to inform the college community about the new accessibility services available

IV.3 Needs assessment for accessibility services

The development of initial support services within the accessibility unit included the creation of a dedicated physical space for accessibility resources and services, the establishment of a helpline for students seeking assistance, and the recruitment of accessibility staff who could provide individualized support. In conjunction with this, the IDEA project facilitated the purchase of specialized equipment and software tailored to the needs of students with disabilities, reinforcing the commitment to creating an inclusive educational environment.

IV.4 Development of initial support services

The development of initial support services within the accessibility unit included the creation of a dedicated physical space for accessibility resources and services, the establishment of a helpline for students seeking assistance, and the recruitment of accessibility coordinators who could provide individualized support. In conjunction with this, the IDEA project facilitated the purchase of specialized equipment and software tailored to the needs of students with disabilities, reinforcing the commitment to creating an inclusive educational environment.

IV. 5 Pilot testing of support services

As part of the piloting phase, support services were rigorously tested and fine-tuned to ensure their effectiveness. This involved soliciting feedback from students and faculty, making necessary adjustments to the assistive technologies and equipment, and refining the training programs for staff and educators. The feedback loop established during this phase was instrumental in shaping the ongoing evolution of the accessibility unit, ensuring that it continued to meet the needs of the college community effectively and efficiently.

Road-Mapping Phase

V.1 The transition from the pilot phase to full establishment.

The transition from the pilot phase to full establishment of the Accessibility Unit at Universum International College represents a pivotal moment in its evolution. As the initial phase allowed us to test the waters and gather valuable insights, this transition marks a commitment to a more comprehensive and sustained approach. Building on the lessons learned, it necessitates securing the necessary resources and support to ensure the unit's continued growth and effectiveness in promoting accessibility and inclusivity within the college community. It's a critical juncture where the unit's objectives and strategies align with the college's long-term vision, ensuring that accessibility becomes an integral part of the institution's ethos.

V.2 The key steps and activities involved in road-mapping

V.2.1 Stakeholder engagement and feedback

In the development of the Accessibility Unit at Universum International College, stakeholder engagement and feedback have played a crucial role. The college has actively sought input from various stakeholders, including students with disabilities, faculty and staff, disability advocacy organizations, and experts in accessibility. Through surveys, focus groups, and consultations, they have gathered insights into the unique needs and challenges faced by students with disabilities. This feedback has been instrumental in shaping the unit's policies, services, and infrastructure. It has also helped in identifying areas where improvements are needed, ensuring that the Accessibility Unit is responsive to the evolving needs of the college community. By involving stakeholders throughout the development process, Universum International College has been able to create a more inclusive and effective support system for students with disabilities.

V.2.2 Resource allocation

The resource allocation process for establishing the Accessibility Center at Universum International College involved a systematic approach. It began with a needs assessment, followed by the formation of a planning committee, the definition of clear goals, and the development of a detailed budget. Fundraising efforts were pursued to secure financial resources, while physical space and infrastructure were carefully planned. Staffing needs were determined, and resources were allocated for assistive technology, outreach, monitoring, and collaboration. Continuous improvement and accountability mechanisms were put in place, ensuring that the Accessibility Center remained responsive to evolving needs and fostered inclusivity across the college community.

V.2.3 Staff recruitment and training

Recruitment and training of staff for the Accessibility Unit at Universum International College have been strategically designed to ensure the unit's success in catering to students with disabilities. The college employs a rigorous selection process, focusing on hiring individuals with the requisite qualifications and a profound dedication to disability inclusion, coupled with a strong grasp of accessibility principles. Once selected, staff members undergo comprehensive training encompassing disability awareness, adherence to accessibility standards, proficiency in assistive technologies, effective communication skills, accommodation processes, conflict resolution strategies, continuous professional development, collaboration and teamwork, and cultural competency. This training equips staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to offer robust support and maintain an inclusive campus environment, aligning with the Accessibility Unit's commitment to ongoing improvement.

V.2.4 Assistive technology equipment mapping

The IDEA project has been very beneficial to Universum International College for the needs of the establishment of the Accessibility Unit. Our institution has greatly benefited from the wealth of equipment and assistive technology in particular. It must be emphasized that this technology will be utilized in such a way as it will permit the Accessibility Unit to assist both students with disabilities and those with specific learning disabilities. In addition to this, the institution will make sure that the current staff is knowledgeable regarding the proper use of assistive technology for the needs of our students. While the project has been crucial in helping UNI in developing the right infrastructure for providing a more inclusive environment, it must be emphasized that it is imperative for the institution to continue enriching the current list.

The list of the assistive technology equipment involves but it is not limited to the following equipment:

- DELL PC Optiplex
- DELL Monitor
- DELL NB 615
- Tablet- Kamvas Studio
- Headset Platronics Professional BLACKWIRE
- Webcamera 1080P
- ZOWEETEK Voice Amplifier
- Conference System Polycom Studio
- OrCam Read Smart- Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistive Reader
- CZUR Aura Pro Book & Document Scanner CET14R19050
- 4K Video Camera Camcorder
- Braille and Large Print English Letters Computer Keyboard Stickers (5Pcs)

Below you may find a description for the use of the abovementioned equipment:

At the Accessibility Unit of Universum International College, various technologies were employed to enhance accessibility and support individuals with disabilities. These technologies included assistive software and hardware, such as screen readers, speech recognition software, Braille displays, and adaptive keyboards, to assist students with visual or motor impairments. Additionally, the use of online learning management systems with accessibility features ensured that course materials and resources were available in multiple formats, catering to different learning needs. The Accessibility Unit also leveraged video captioning and transcription services to make multimedia content accessible to individuals with hearing impairments. Furthermore, the implementation of accessible web design practices and the use of responsive web design technologies ensured that the college's website and online resources were usable by individuals with various disabilities, including those using screen readers or voice recognition software. Overall, these technologies played a crucial role in creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment within the Accessibility Unit.

V.2.5 Curriculum and infrastructure adjustments

The project has been beneficial for the needs of the establishment of the unit as it has permitted Universum International College to work on further refining the current practices in relation to enhancing the inclusivity practices both when it comes to the development of the curriculum and material used to further enhance the approach toward students with disabilities and learning difficulties. In addition to this, the project has also been instrumental in developing and further refining the current infrastructure which will enable the institution to provide a much more professional environment that will provide much more effective inclusion practices.

V. 2.6 Legal and policy framework development

The legal and policy framework drafted by Universum International College for the IDEA project, aimed at ensuring inclusion for higher education students with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, encompasses key elements. It adheres to relevant legal compliance, defines covered disabilities clearly, emphasizes equal access to education, sets accessibility standards for infrastructure and digital platforms, outlines procedures for reasonable accommodations, mandates faculty training, offers comprehensive student support services, encourages awareness and communication, incorporates assessment and evaluation mechanisms, fosters collaboration, ensures data privacy, promotes Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and commits to continuous improvement. Tailored to specific needs and resources, this framework prioritizes inclusion and accessibility while considering legal obligations, best practices, and the evolving needs of students with disabilities. Consulting experts, disability service professionals, and affected students can enhance its effectiveness.

Staffing and Training

VI.1 The recruitment process for hiring staff for the Accessibility Unit.

Universum International College takes a diligent approach to staff recruitment for the Accessibility Unit, emphasizing inclusivity and expertise. We initiate the process with a comprehensive needs assessment, defining specific skill sets required to support diverse accessibility needs. Job descriptions and qualifications are crafted with a focus on academic credentials, along with a strong commitment to inclusivity. Our recruitment actively encourages applications from a diverse candidate pool and adheres to strict anti-discrimination and equal opportunity standards. Selection panels include diverse representation, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation. Continuous professional development is a priority, ensuring our Accessibility Unit staff remains current with assistive technologies and best practices. This process ensures that our team is both highly qualified and deeply dedicated to cultivating an accessible and inclusive educational environment for all our students.

VI.2 The training and professional development plan for unit personnel.

Universum International College is dedicated to the ongoing growth and expertise of our unit personnel within the Accessibility Unit. Our training and professional development plan is a structured and dynamic approach to ensure our team remains at the forefront of best practices in accessibility and inclusion. It encompasses a blend of internal and external opportunities, including regular workshops and seminars conducted by experts in the field. We encourage staff to pursue relevant certifications and advanced degrees to enhance their knowledge and qualifications. Furthermore, we foster a collaborative environment where team members share insights and experiences, promoting continuous learning. This commitment to professional development equips our personnel with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support our diverse student population and remain responsive to evolving accessibility needs. It must be emphasized that all training sessions held within the IDEA project have in fact been quite beneficial to strengthening the current skill set of the Accessibility Center at Universum International College. Moreover, the sessions that have involved AT training represent a novel method toward properly approaching inclusive education in the context of Kosovo's higher education.

Evaluation and Monitoring

VII.1 Key performance indicators (KPIs) assessing the effectiveness of the Accessibility Unit

The Accessibility Unit at Universum International College employs a range of key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess its effectiveness. These KPIs include metrics such as the successful implementation of accommodations, the satisfaction of students and faculty with accessibility services, the number of accessibility-related inquiries and requests, and the timely delivery of support. We also consider academic outcomes and retention rates for students who utilize accessibility services as a measure of our effectiveness in facilitating their educational journey.

VII.2 Main mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of services

To ensure ongoing monitoring and evaluation of services, we have established a robust set of mechanisms. Regular internal audits and quality assessments are conducted to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of our accessibility services. We utilize data analytics to track trends and patterns in service utilization, enabling us to make data-driven decisions for service improvements. Additionally, we maintain an open channel of communication with faculty, students, and staff, encouraging them to report issues or provide feedback, which is essential for continuous monitoring and evaluation.

VII.3 Incorporation of feedback from stakeholders for continuous improvement

Universum International College places great importance on incorporating feedback from stakeholders for continuous improvement. We actively seek input from students with accessibility needs, faculty members, and staff to understand their experiences and needs better. Feedback mechanisms include surveys, focus groups, and regular meetings where stakeholders can voice their concerns and suggestions. This feedback is then analyzed and used to shape our policies, procedures, and service offerings to better align with the evolving needs and expectations of our diverse community. This iterative approach ensures that the Accessibility Unit remains responsive and adaptable, striving for continuous improvement in accessibility services.

Sustainability and Integration

VIII.1 UNI policies for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit.

Universum International College has established a set of policies aimed at ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit. These policies encompass several key aspects. Firstly, financial sustainability is maintained through allocating dedicated budgetary resources to the Accessibility Unit, allowing for the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel and the procurement of necessary assistive technologies and resources. Secondly, we prioritize the incorporation of accessibility considerations into campus infrastructure and technology upgrades, ensuring that our physical and digital environments remain inclusive. Thirdly, we promote an inclusive culture within the institution by raising awareness and understanding of accessibility needs among all members of the college community. Lastly, the Accessibility Unit regularly conducts internal reviews and external audits to assess its performance, identify areas for improvement, and refine its strategies to meet the evolving needs of our diverse student body.

VIII.2 Integration of Accessibility Unit's efforts into Universum International College strategic plan

The efforts of the Accessibility Unit are seamlessly integrated into Universum International College's strategic plan. We recognize that accessibility and inclusion are fundamental to our mission and vision for the institution. As such, accessibility-related goals and initiatives are embedded throughout our strategic plan, reflecting our commitment to providing equitable access to education for all students. This integration includes specific objectives related to improving physical and digital accessibility, enhancing faculty and staff training, and fostering a culture of inclusivity. By aligning the Accessibility Unit's efforts with our broader strategic plan, we ensure that accessibility remains a central and enduring aspect of our college's mission and operations. Furthermore, as one of our main central goals is the concept of internationalization, UNI aspires to collaborate closely with our international partners in strengthening and further enhancing our accessibility practices which ensure that all students are able to fully realize their full potential.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Accessibility Unit within Universum International College is of paramount importance as it serves as the linchpin for promoting inclusivity and accessibility throughout the institution. This dedicated unit plays a pivotal role in ensuring that every member of our diverse student body, regardless of their individual accessibility needs, has an equal opportunity to access and excel in their education. By centralizing accessibility services, the Accessibility Unit provides a single point of contact for students, faculty, and staff, streamlining the accommodation process and reducing barriers to access. This not only enhances the overall experience for students with disabilities but also fosters a more inclusive campus culture where diversity is celebrated and accommodated. Furthermore, the Accessibility Unit is instrumental in raising awareness about accessibility and inclusivity among all stakeholders within the college community. Through education, training, and advocacy, the unit ensures that faculty and staff are equipped with the knowledge and tools to create accessible learning environments, while also championing the rights and needs of students with disabilities. In essence, the Accessibility Unit acts as a catalyst for positive change within Universum International College, promoting an environment where every student can thrive academically and personally. Its presence underscores our commitment to the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, making our institution more welcoming and empowering for everyone.

**Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and
Procedures Towards the Establishment of
the Accessibility Unit
UNIVERSITY “Aleksander Moisiu” Durrës**

Executive Summary

The Inclusive Tertiary Education in the Western Balkans (IDEA) project has been instrumental in advancing the Accessibility Unit at UAMD University. This initiative has been crucial in the development and implementation of a comprehensive policy for students with disabilities. This policy serves as a document guiding the university's efforts towards greater accessibility. Additionally, the IDEA project has enabled the early launch and a three-year pilot phase for the Accessibility Unit. This has facilitated the acquisition of assistive technology and the gradual development of staff expertise. Ultimately, the IDEA project has significantly contributed to our commitment to inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. The main purpose in the creation of the Accessibility Unit at UAMD University is to enable a learning environment within the institution that is more welcoming and accessible to all. This specialized unit is committed to the ongoing enhancement of higher education methods and enhancing accessibility for every student, guaranteeing that education remains just and adaptable to the various requirements of our student community. Through its emphasis on students with disabilities, encompassing Specific Learning Disabilities (SWLD), UAMD University aspires to foster a university culture that advocates respect and fosters effective inclusion. Key Objectives of the Document:

- **Providing Context/Introduction:** The Accessibility Unit aims to offer a comprehensive context for its creation, ensuring that it becomes an integral part of UAMD University's commitment to inclusivity and accessibility. The unit is integrated with Career Office in the university and emphasis its alignment with the goals of the IDEA project
- **Defining Vision and Mission:** The unit's vision and mission are to foster inclusiveness, promote respect, and combat discrimination against individuals with disabilities within the UAMD university.
- **Pilot and Road-Mapping Phases:** Outlining the structured approach to the establishment process, including a pilot phase to test services and a subsequent road-mapping phase to transition to full implementation.
- **Staffing and Training:** Defining the training plan for unit personnel to ensure they possess the necessary expertise and skills to deliver effective support and accommodations.
- **Evaluation and Monitoring:** Establishing performance indicators for continuous evaluation, reflecting feedback from stakeholders for continuous improvement.
- **Sustainability and Integration:** Highlighting strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit and its integration into the university's strategic plan.

Introduction

The establishment and operationalization of Accessibility Units stand as tangible manifestations that showcase IDEA's commitment to enhancing accessibility in higher education throughout the Western Balkans.

With regard to this, UAMD University has demonstrated its dedication to creating and reinforcing a specialized unit within the institution, with the primary goal of enhancing and advancing accessibility in higher education. This emphasis is particularly aimed at benefiting students with special needs. The unit operates as an integrated part with Career Office at the university.

Accessibility Unit is a student administration unit to support the study organization of students with disabilities and offers counseling and methodological support to students with disabilities and academic and administrative staff. The primary task is to provide maximum accessibility to all accredited degree programs at the University for the visually impaired, the deaf and hearing impaired, people with limited or restricted mobility and people with other types of disabilities. The unit will have also a lab of equipment in service of SwD. The technological devices that have come within the framework of the IDEA project have been placed in a lab with adequate space to have easy physical access to them. The assistive devices brought by the IDEA project are a great support for students with special needs who are in the process and will be students of UAMD in the future.

The Career Office and the lab of SwD are at the premises of the Faculty of Education of UAMD. The unit will be administered by an academic staff (the coordinator) specialized in the field of disability and teaching methods for students with disabilities in collaboration with the respective university units. The coordinator has three assistants who develop collaborate with each faculty in order to identify the students with disability enrolled at specific department and then to design a plan for the continuation of their study program. The assistants are full-time academic and administrative staff of the university who would work on part-time bases in the Accessibility Unit.

Vision and Mission

In accordance with all legal acts in force, Aleksander Moisiu University Durres (UAMD) is committed to implement an equal policy for all students with or without disabilities with the aim of providing them complete and most equal access to all aspects of university life. Aleksander Moisiu University aims:

- a) To guarantee the promotion and protection of the rights of students with disabilities (SwD) in UAMD to enable their full and effective participation in the studies offered by UAMD, the financial support for their studies and to guarantee the access of these students to all decision-making bodies, student activities, scientific research and all other activities offered by UAMD through assistance and support.
- b) To promote the culture of respect, the fight against disability discrimination and the promotion of effective inclusion of students with disabilities
- c) To determine the responsibility of all responsible structures of UAMD in the implementation of principles of inclusion and accessibility to reduce or even remove barriers for persons with disabilities in order to enable their equal participation in the activities and services of UAMD.
- d) Ensure quality and inclusive education and lifelong learning for students with disabilities or learning difficulties.

The unit's vision is to foster inclusiveness, promote respect, and combat discrimination against individuals with disabilities within the Aleksander Moisiu University. Meanwhile this unit's mission is the achievement in practice of coequal access to the academic studies of students with different abilities and needs, by providing environmental modifications, computer based assistive technologies, and to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities.

Aleksander Moisiu University currently offers and guarantees study opportunities for our students:

- with specific learning difficulties
- with autistic spectrums disorder
- with chronic diseases
- with visual/hearing loss
- with mobility impairment
- with psychological difficulties

Piloting Phase

Consultation Services for Program Selection:

UAMD has established a dedicated consultation service to engage with students individually. Trained advisors will guide students through a comprehensive exploration of available study programs, considering their academic interests, strengths, and potential challenges related to their special needs.

Activities:

- Conduct one-on-one sessions with students to understand their academic aspirations and preferences.
- Provide detailed information on available study programs, including curriculum structure and potential career paths.
- Assess each student's strengths, learning style, and any specific needs or accommodations required for successful academic engagement.
- Collaborate with academic departments to ensure accurate and up-to-date information on program accessibility.

Supporting Physical and Online Study Environment Accessibility:

UAMD has implemented measures to enhance accessibility in both physical and online study environments, ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, can fully engage in academic activities.

Activities:

- Conduct an accessibility audit of physical facilities to identify and address any architectural barriers.
- Integrate assistive technologies into the online learning platform to cater to diverse learning needs.
- Provide training sessions for faculty and staff on creating inclusive learning materials and using assistive technologies effectively.
- Establish a communication channel for students to report accessibility issues and implement a responsive system for prompt resolution.

Individualized Progress Plans According to Students' Needs:

UAMD plans also to implement and develop personalized progress plans for each student, ensuring that their academic journey is tailored to accommodate their unique requirements and optimize their learning experience.

Activities:

- Conduct thorough assessments of each student's learning preferences, strengths, and challenges.
- Collaborate with faculty to create customized learning plans, including appropriate accommodations and support mechanisms.
- Establish regular check-ins with students to evaluate progress, address concerns, and adjust plans as needed.
- Provide training for academic advisors and faculty on strategies for supporting students with diverse needs.

These detailed activities within each have created a comprehensive and inclusive pilot phase at UAMD, fostering an environment where students with special needs can thrive academically.

Road-Mapping Phase

The transition from the pilot phase to full establishment of the Accessibility Unit at UAMD represents a pivotal moment in its evolution. Following the initial phase, this transition marks a commitment to a more comprehensive and sustained approach. Transition from Pilot Phase to Full Establishment has included activities as described below:

Collaborating with healthcare professionals to conduct assessments, considering both physical and learning disabilities.

- Establish a confidential system for students to self-disclose their needs.
- Maintain open communication with students to understand their challenges and requirements.
- Create a database of diagnosed conditions to inform personalized support plans.

Ensuring that the physical infrastructure is inclusive and accessible for students with diverse needs.

- Conduct regular accessibility audits of campus facilities, addressing architectural barriers.
- Implement universal design principles in new constructions and renovations.
- Provide accessible transportation options for students with mobility challenges.
- Establish designated accessible spaces for studying, events, and socializing.

Integrating and leveraging assistive technologies to facilitate a supportive learning environment.

- Collaborate with IT specialists to identify and implement assistive technologies.
- Provide training sessions for faculty and students on using assistive tools.
- Ensure compatibility of digital platforms with assistive software.
- Regularly update and expand the range of available assistive technologies.

Guaranteeing that online platforms and resources are accessible to all students.

- Conduct regular accessibility audits of the university's virtual infrastructure.
- Provide training for faculty on creating accessible digital content.
- Ensure that online courses are compatible with screen readers and other assistive technologies.
- Establish a helpdesk for technical support related to online accessibility.

Equipping academic staff with the knowledge and skills to provide inclusive education.

- Conduct workshops for faculty on inclusive teaching methodologies.
- Promote the use of diverse teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles.
- Provide resources for creating accessible course materials.
- Encourage ongoing professional development for faculty in inclusive education practices.

Ensuring that all academic resources are accessible to students with diverse needs.

- Implement accessible formats for textbooks and learning materials.
- Create an accessible online library with resources in various formats.
- Collaborate with publishers to ensure the availability of textbooks in accessible formats.
- Train librarians to assist students in finding and utilizing accessible resources.

Key Steps in Road-Mapping process:

1. Online Open Day for Applicants, Parents, and Academic Staff
2. Host virtual events showcasing the university's accessibility initiatives.
3. Provide personalized sessions for applicants to discuss their needs.
4. Offer guidance on choosing study programs aligned with individual abilities.
5. Conduct assessments to identify learning difficulties and develop tailored study strategies.
6. Orient students to academic responsibilities and expectations.
7. Modify classrooms, exam settings, and events to accommodate diverse needs.
8. Develop personalized study plans for students requiring additional support.
9. Implement a system to track academic performance and address challenges.
10. Provide accommodations such as additional time or alternative formats.
11. Allocate extra time for students during examinations.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- Academic Staff:
 - Involve faculty in ongoing training on inclusive teaching and accessibility practices.
- Administrative Staff:
 - Train administrative staff on procedures related to accommodating students with special needs.
- Psychologists:
 - Collaborate with psychologists for student assessments and mental health support.
- IT Specialists:
 - Engage IT specialists in ensuring the compatibility of digital resources with assistive technologies.
- Experts in Support Centers:
 - Partner with experts from support centers, both within and outside the university, for specialized assistance.
- Student Volunteers:
 - Recruit and train student volunteers to provide peer support to students with special needs.
- Voluntary Community Involvement:
 - Establish partnerships with community organizations and advocates for shared resources and support initiatives.

List of equipment purchased in the framework of IDEA project:

1. Dell 3080 MT i5 16 GB SSD 512GBPCIeWin10Pro3Y;
2. DELL Monitor SE2422H 23.8;
3. Dell NB Latitude 3510 i5 15.6 8 GB 512 GB Win 10 3Y;
4. Tablet - Kamvas Studio 22 - 16gb ssd240 gb;
5. Headset Plantronics CC3220 USB A;
6. WebCamera 1080P 2 Mpx AutoFocus USB 2.0;
7. ZOWEETEK voice Amplifier with UHF WiFi Mic Headset;
8. Conference System Polycom Studio;
9. OrCam Read Smart (AI) Assistive Reader;
10. CZUR Aura Pro Book dhe Document Scanner;
11. 4K Video Camera Camcorder LUAZHECT 60FPS 48MP Wifi;
12. Braille Large PC Keyboard Stickers.

All the equipment purchased are installed in the accessibility center at the premises of UAMD.

Assistive technology equipment purchased under IDEA project:

- Assistive technologies for blind students/Assistive technologies for partially sighted students;
 - OrCam Read Smart (AI) Assistive Reader: handheld reader for people with low vision, dyslexia, reading fatigue or other difficulties. Using AI technology, it instantly reads any printed or digital text from books.
 - Braille and Large Print English Letters Computer Keyboard Stickers: Overlays - Labels for the Blind and Visually Impaired
 - CZUR Aura Pro Book and Document Scanner: book scanner with patented book Curve Flattening Technology™ and a smart lamp feature.
- Assistive technologies for hearing impairments.
 - ZOWEETEK voice Amplifier with UHF WiFi Mic Headset: System Speaker for Multiple Locations such as Classroom, Meetings, Promotions and Outdoors.
 - Conference System Polycom Studio all-in-one video conference camera & sound bar system.
- Assistive technology for cognitive and learning difficulties
 - Computers
 - Tablet
 - Conference System

Curriculum and infrastructure adjustments.

- Make the content more accessible (Summary of goals, resources and knowledge, glossaries of new terms, visualization of structural relations and their composition, etc.)
- Help users navigate and find content
- Create content that can be perceived in different ways
- Offer suitable support materials to help students with installation and ask that they familiarize themselves with the interface of the tools.
- Offer multiple options for communication, not only verbally, but also in written form or other way (e.g., hands-on activities).
- Working with printed materials: enlarged prints according to users' reading preferences (font size and face, line spacing, etc.)/ braille versions produced by braille embossers and supplemented by tactile graphics
- Different didactic and methodical approaches

Legal and policy framework development

- A Regulation on the Treatment of the SWD and SWLD was approved by the Academic Senate with decision no. 47 date 21/06/2021. One of the members of IDEA project who is specialized in learning and teaching methodologies for students with disabilities, drafted the regulation along with three other experts at the UAMD.
- Development of New Protocol
- Drafting Normative Suggestions

Staffing and Training

Below is given a summarized description of the staff involvement process when establishing the Accessibility Unit.

- The staff will be included in the center will be selected based on the procedures provided in the UAMD Statute, as well as in the Strategic Development Plan of the UAMD.
- The accessibility Unit at UAMD is run by the coordinator, whose main duty is to establish links between the unit and each faculty departments. The coordinator has three assistants who develop collaborate with each faculty in order to identify the students with disability enrolled at specific department and then to design a plan for the continuation of their study program. The assistants are full-time academic and administrative staff of the university who would work on part-time bases in the Accessibility Unit.
- The institution of UAMD follows recruitment and evaluation procedures, based on general and specific announced criteria that guarantee the selection of personnel with the appropriate level of qualification and in accordance with the nature and structure of the unit.

The training and professional development for unit personnel will be organized as below:

- Organizing of IT courses for staff of Accessibility Unit and students with special needs
- Organizing courses for staff of Accessibility Unit and students with special needs within the Lifelong Learning plan
- Collaborate with experts to help the students with special needs to deliver the individual accommodation in time and properly
- Consult accessibility of applications with special ICT experts in order to find the best option for students with special needs.
- Support the students for their needs
- Ensure that no one of students with disability is isolated or disadvantaged in UAMD.

Staff training under IDEA project includes as below:

- Online training conducted by Limerick University in Ireland. The training aimed to share the experience with the partners universities from Western Balkans regarding the way of operation of the disability service and the services provided to the students with special needs;
- Online training conducted by Masaryk University, Czech Republic. The training aims to share with the Universities from Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro, the experience of Masaryk University in inclusive education, support for students with special needs through assistive technology, support for students with dyslexia and psychological adjustments, support for students with physical problems using braille code, hybrid texts etc;
- Online training conducted by National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. The training was focused on recognition of universities from Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro, for the way the Students Support Unit with special needs work, regulations, work plan, infrastructure and so on;
- Training of Registrar Office, Voluntary Support & Transport Services' Coordinators conducted by National and Kapodistrian University of Athens under Work Package 2;
- Training of academic staff to provide accessible HE services for Students with Disabilities and Students with Learning Difficulties, in teaching, learning and assessment methods organized by Masaryk University, Brno.
- Training of Trainers on the practical challenges Swd face in their studies and employment and training of International Relations Offices' Coordinators & Career Officers organized by Limerick University in Limerick.
- Training by National and Kapodistrian University of Athens of the academic and administrative staff on Greek legislation for students with disability and the built environment accessibility service for SwD. Also, the training was focused on instructions guidelines for the accessibility academic advisors, volunteers' service for SwD, transportation service for SwD, production of accessible textbooks and support services for deaf and hearing. Another focus of training activities were digital accessibility and assistive technology for students with disability.
- Training of e-accessibility and library services' coordinators on AT based solution and training on the relay service organized in the Universum College in Pristina.

- Training of e-Accessibility Coordinators on the Relay Service organized in the University of Donja Gorica in Podgorica. The training was focused in the supporting of deaf students, supporting hard of hearing students, relay services and assistive technology for students with hearing loss. Another focus of training was the supporting of students with hearing loss in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro.

A series of other follow-up trainings have been held at the premises of University of Limerick, Catholic University "Our Lady of Good Counsel" and University of Pristina during the period October-December 2023.

Evaluation and Monitoring

The Accessibility Unit at UAMD employs a range of key performance indicators (KPIs) to assess its effectiveness. University considers academic activities (as described below) as a measure of our effectiveness in facilitating their educational journey.

Conduct regular and systematic assessments of study structures and programs in adherence to the Higher Education Quality Code.

- Schedule periodic reviews of study structures to ensure relevance and alignment with educational objectives.
- Engage faculty members, students, and external experts in the evaluation process.
- Collect and analyze data on curriculum effectiveness, student outcomes, and program impact.
- Implement recommendations from evaluations to enhance the quality of study structures and programs.

Establish a streamlined reporting mechanism for new activities and initiatives related to quality assurance across all UAMD units.

- Appoint Quality Assurance Coordinators in each unit to act as intermediaries for quality-related initiatives.
- Facilitate regular meetings with coordinators to discuss and document ongoing and upcoming quality assurance activities.
- Compile comprehensive reports that detail the progress, challenges, and outcomes of quality-related initiatives.

- Submit reports through the Office of Internal Quality Assurance and the Institutional Coordinator for further analysis and strategic planning.

Form committees to coordinate, compile, and report on quality assurance activities in various units of UAMD

- Establish committees comprising representatives from different units to ensure diverse perspectives.
- Provide training to committee members on quality assurance standards and practices.
- Regularly convene committee meetings to share updates, exchange best practices, and address challenges.
- Compile reports highlighting the collective quality assurance efforts and submit them to relevant authorities.

Utilize student questionnaires as a tool for monitoring and evaluating the academic process, with a focus on continuous quality improvement.

- Develop comprehensive questionnaires addressing various aspects of the academic experience.
- Administer surveys periodically to gather feedback from students on curriculum, teaching methods, and support services.
- Analyze questionnaire results to identify areas for improvement and commendation.
- Implement action plans based on feedback to enhance the overall quality of the academic process.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the Accessibility Unit through systematic assessments, including student evaluations for the learning process, academic staff, and infrastructure.

- Establish evaluation criteria for students to assess the impact of the Accessibility Unit on their learning experiences.
- Conduct regular assessments of academic staff within the Accessibility Unit, considering teaching methodologies and support provided.
- Evaluate the accessibility of infrastructure by considering physical and virtual spaces.
- Utilize feedback from these assessments to refine and enhance the services offered by the Accessibility Unit, ensuring continuous improvement and alignment with the institution's accessibility goals.

Sustainability and Integration

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit at UAMD is underpinned by a set of robust policies aimed at fostering its continual growth and effectiveness. These policies encompass a strategic vision for the unit's evolution, financial sustainability, and adaptability to emerging needs. The institution recognizes that accessibility is not a one-time initiative but an ongoing commitment requiring dedicated resources and strategic planning.

The integration of the Accessibility Unit's efforts into UAMD's strategic plan is a pivotal component of its sustained success. This integration ensures that accessibility remains a core principle embedded in the university's overarching goals and objectives. By aligning the unit's mission with the strategic vision of UAMD, it becomes an integral part of the institution's identity, fostering a culture of inclusivity and equal opportunity for all students. This alignment further solidifies the unit's importance within the broader context of the university's mission and values.

The incorporation of the Accessibility Unit within the existing structure of the university is not only a procedural necessity but a strategic imperative. Manifesting this integration in the UAMD Regulations documents is a deliberate step to institutionalize the unit's presence. This ensures that accessibility is not treated as an isolated initiative but is woven into the fabric of the university's governance. By doing so, a clear framework is established for the unit's operations, responsibilities, and reporting mechanisms, facilitating a seamless transition from project ownership to institutional ownership. This integration also underscores the university's commitment to sustaining accessibility efforts beyond the project's duration, demonstrating a long-term vision for inclusivity.

In essence, UAMD recognizes that the sustained success of the Accessibility Unit requires a multi-faceted approach. This involves the formulation of comprehensive policies, strategic alignment with the university's overarching vision, and formal integration within the institutional framework. Through these deliberate measures, UAMD not only safeguards the Accessibility Unit's continuity but also ensures that accessibility becomes an enduring principle deeply ingrained in the university's ethos.

Conclusion

The IDEA Project has played a transformative role in supporting and elevating Aleksander Moisiu University of Durres (UAMD) by facilitating the infusion of exemplary models and experiences from EU partners. By addressing the multifaceted needs of comprehensive education, the project has effectively enhanced UAMD's capacities to deliver a high-quality education. This collaborative effort has yielded significant outcomes, marking a substantial step towards creating a more inclusive and accessible learning environment. One of the notable achievements of this collaborative initiative is the acquisition of assistive technology equipment. The infusion of cutting-edge technologies aligns with the project's commitment to leveraging innovative solutions that break down barriers to education. This includes tools designed to enhance accessibility for students with diverse learning needs, fostering an environment where every individual can thrive academically.

In tandem with the adoption of assistive technology, IDEA Project has prioritized knowledge dissemination through comprehensive training programs for both academic and administrative staff. The focus on inclusive education in higher education not only enhances the competencies of the university's workforce but also ensures that the principles of inclusivity are woven into the fabric of the institution. This holistic approach to training contributes to a more supportive and understanding academic community. Additionally, the collaborative efforts have resulted in the development of new protocols and the drafting of normative suggestions. These frameworks serve as guiding principles, outlining the procedures and standards that underpin inclusive education at UAMD. The establishment of clear protocols ensures consistency in providing support and accommodations, fostering an environment where students with diverse needs can navigate their academic journey with confidence.

At the heart of these achievements lies the establishment of the Accessibility Unit within Aleksander Moisiu University. This unit stands as a pivotal milestone, embodying the university's commitment to inclusivity, accessibility, and the provision of a holistic educational experience. Beyond meeting legal requirements, the Accessibility Unit serves as a testament to UAMD's dedication to fostering a culture of diversity, equity, and educational excellence. Through the collaborative efforts facilitated by the IDEA Project, UAMD is not only embracing inclusivity but also setting a standard for quality education that is accessible to all, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and Procedures Towards the Establishment of the Accessibility Unit **UNIVERSITY OF DONJA GORICA**

Executive Summary

The IDEA (Inclusive tertiary EDucation in the West BAlkanS) project has played a pivotal role in supporting the enhancement of the Accessibility Unit in Montenegro at the University of Donja Gorica. This project has provided support for drafting and implementing a policy for Students with disability, which serves as a foundational document for university's accessibility efforts. Furthermore, the IDEA project has facilitated the early launch and three-year pilot phase of the Accessibility Unit, enabling the acquisition of assistive technology and the gradual development of staff expertise. Ultimately, the IDEA project has been instrumental in propelling our commitment to inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. The Accessibility Unit at the University of Donja Gorica was established with the core objective of enhancing inclusivity and accessibility in the learning environment of the institution. This unit is steadfast in its commitment to modernize practices in higher education and enhance accessibility for students, thereby upholding fairness and responsiveness to the diverse requirements of our student community. With a special emphasis on students facing disabilities, including Specific Learning Disabilities (SwLD), UDG strives to cultivate a university culture that promotes respect, combats discrimination against individuals with disabilities, and nurtures a climate of effective inclusion. Key Objectives of the Document:

- **Providing Context and Introduction:** Furnishing a comprehensive background on the formation of the Accessibility Unit, underlining its integration within the University of Donja Gorica and in cooperation with Association of Youth with Disabilities in Montenegro (AYDM), and emphasizing its alignment with the objectives of the IDEA project.
- **Defining Vision and Mission:** Clearly articulating the unit's vision and mission, which serve as the cornerstone for fostering inclusivity, respect, and combatting disability discrimination within the university.
- **Pilot and Road-Mapping Phases:** Describing the structured approach to the establishment process, which encompasses a pilot phase for testing services and a subsequent road-mapping phase for a smooth transition to full implementation.
- **Staffing and Training:** Establishing the recruitment and training plan for unit personnel to ensure they possess the requisite expertise and skills to provide effective support and accommodations.
- **Sustainability and Integration:** Emphasizing strategies to guarantee the long-term viability of the Accessibility Unit and its seamless integration into the university's strategic blueprint.

Introduction

The establishment and operation of the Accessibility Unit at the University of Donja Gorica exemplifies the university's dedication to advancing accessibility in higher education, particularly for students with disabilities, thereby manifesting the institution's commitment to the principles championed by the IDEA project in the Western Balkans. Situated within the Student Support and Association of Youth with Disabilities in Montenegro (AYDM), this unit seamlessly integrates its services, ensuring efficient coordination for students. This collaborative approach with AYDM has been instrumental in pooling resources, tapping into specialized expertise, and leveraging existing support structures to bolster accessibility and inclusivity for all students. Prior to the establishment of the Accessibility Unit, the University of Donja Gorica proactively laid the groundwork by formulating a comprehensive policy that specifically addresses the unique needs of students with disabilities. This policy serves as a strategic guidepost, underlining the university's dedication to fostering inclusivity and eradicating discrimination against students facing disabilities.

Vision and Mission

In accordance with all legal acts in force, University of Donja Gorica (UDG) implement an equal policy for all students with disabilities or students without disabilities with the aim of providing them complete and equal access to all aspects of university life.

University of Donja Gorica aims:

- To guarantee the promotion and protection of the rights of students with disabilities at UDG to enable their full and effective participation in the studies offered by UDG and to support the access of these students to all student activities, scientific research and all other activities offered by UDG through assistance and support.
- To determine the responsibility of all responsible structures of UDG in the implementation of principles of inclusion and accessibility to reduce or even remove barriers for persons with disabilities in order to enable their equal participation in the activities and services of UDG.

UDG's mission is committed to upholding the rights of students with disabilities, ensuring their active engagement in all educational and extracurricular facets offered by the university. We are dedicated to providing the necessary assistance and support to facilitate their holistic participation in academic pursuits, research endeavors, and all other university activities. Furthermore, UDG takes on the responsibility of implementing inclusive practices across all institutional structures, aiming to dismantle barriers and foster an environment of equal access and participation for individuals with disabilities – to accomplish its mission: *"UDG student – responsible citizenship in a global world!"*

The mission of Accessibility Unit is the achievement in practice of coequal access to the academic studies of students with disabilities by providing environmental modifications, Assistive Technologies, and Access Services.

Piloting Phase

Within project activities and in collaboration with Association of Youth with Disabilities in Montenegro - Establishment/Enhancement and operationalization of Accessibility Units/Student Advisory Office and Development of New Protocols and Drafting Policy Papers with Normative Suggestions have been done.

Considering the increasing enrollment of students with disabilities at the university and recognizing their specific requirements, a collaborative effort with the Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro (AYMD) was undertaken to evaluate the essential equipment needed to support these students effectively.

During the implementation of the ERASMUS + project "Inclusive tertiary education in the West Balkans - IDEA" reference number 618859-EPP-1-2020-1-AL-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP following equipment has been provided of the total amount of 22.484,46€ according to the needs and project plan as below:

No. Description of the equipment

- 1 Desktop 3888 Mini Tower (min 2.9–4.3 GHz, 12MB) 8GB DDR4 , min 1 TB SATA
- 2 Desktop min specification 1920X1080 Wide,Tn,1ms,AMD FreeSync,, 75Hz, 200cd/mA, 90A/65A, VGA x1,HDMI x1,VE
- 3 Laptop min specification 15,6" FullHD (1920x1080), Intel i5-10210U (up to 4.20GHz), 8GB DDR4 2666MHz (+free sl
- 4 Headphones min specification 2x3.5mm single jack, Frequency min 20Hz-20KHz, volume min 102db, cable length min 1.8
- 5 Bluetooth headphones, Bluetooth min (distance up to 15m), frequency: min 20HZ -20KHZ, .1
- 6 Headphones with specification USB Headset, rotating microphone with noise reduction, Plug&play and USB
- 7 Bluetooth over-ear headphones, Speaker size: min 50mm, Sensitivity min 102 db, dome.1
- 8 Web camera with cover, min 2MP, built-in microphone, Video resolution up to 30fps / 1080 P, USB A and USB.1
- 9 Glass Mouse without buttons
- 10 Foot Switch for Glass Mouse
- 11 Keys-U-Seer Large Print Keyboards
- 12 Jaws PROFESSIONAL , ILM software
- 13 ZoomText Magnifier / Reader software
- 14 Jouse+
- 15 OrCam Read Smart
- 16 EL.magnifier 15" LCD screen+battery+ XY table
- 17 BLACKWIRE C3220 USB-A, Black
- 18 BLACKWIRE 5220, USB-A, STEREO USB & min 3.5MM HEADSET
- 19 VOYAGER FOCUS UC B825, USB-A, Stereo BT Headset
- 20 VOYAGER FOCUS 2 UC USB-A, PREMIUM Stereo BT Headset
- 21 Studio USB Conference Camera
- 22 Tablet PC min 16GB SSD min 240GB

Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing that all the acquired equipment is not only accessible to our students but is also made available for use by the Association of Youth of Montenegro. This inclusive approach underscores our commitment to creating an environment that fosters equal opportunities and supports the needs of all community members, regardless of their abilities. We believe that this shared resource will greatly contribute to the empowerment and success of both our students and members of the Association.

Road-Mapping Phase

The University of Donja Gorica is currently in the midst of transitioning from the pilot phase to full establishment, with plans for realization in the near future.

- The critical stages and tasks associated with the road-mapping process are underway.
- Engagement with stakeholders and gathering of feedback are ongoing.
- Allocation of resources is being managed.
- Recruitment and training of staff have been partially accomplished – additional training of staff will be done during next two months of the project implementation.
- The mapping of assistive technology equipment has been completed.
- Development of the legal and policy framework is in progress.
- Establishment of the Accessibility Unit has been done on November 24th 2023 on the Senate University of Donja Gorica.

Following activities are planned to occur in the upcoming months:

- 1) Management of the Accessibility Unit at UDG – Coordinators of the Accessibility Units will be responsible for operationalization and functionality of the Unit: Communication with students, promotion of the Unit amounts the students at all levels (BSc, MSc and PhD).
- 2) Training and skills development – University of Donja Gorica will further diversify and continue to provide and develop learning pathway for all interested professors, associates, students, researchers, as well as high-school students. Here we will continue to cooperate with Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro (AYDM) in order to provide more diverse training opportunities.
- 3) Awareness Creation and Communication – Communication strategy and dissemination activities will be focused on developing an environment which is aware of the Unit benefits and advantages, which can develop opportunities through promoted resources, services and support. The aim is to create a friendly environment that appeals to and assists students with disabilities. The communication strategy is successfully positioning the Unit and disseminate more all activities among students not only to students with disabilities but among all. Plans in the next 6 months:
 - Organize info days and promotion of the Unit to all students and professors,
 - Promotion of the Accessibility Unit within enrollment campaign that UDG organize from February to May every year. (Also, we plan to organize event Horizon of possibilities and to promote Unit and support – this we plan to organize in cooperation with Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro (AYDM).
 - Signed MoU with Association of Youth with Disabilities of Montenegro (AYDM) regarding further cooperation and activities.

Staffing and Training

The Accessibility Unit at University of Donja Gorica is led by two coordinators: Maja Juncaj, based in the Student Service Office, brings extensive experience in student support. Complementing her is Tamara Tomic, Library Manager, an active participant in the IDEA and previous SINCH@E project, who has successfully completed comprehensive training. Together, they lead the unit with a shared commitment to inclusivity and empowerment for all students at the University of Donja Gorica. Their combined expertise promises to usher in a new era of accessibility and equal opportunity within the academic community.

Short biography:

MSc Maja Juncaj, is a PhD student MSc, – received Master degree in Finance and Business at Faculty for International Economics, Finance and Business (University of Donja Gorica) defended MSc Thesis titled “Blockchain: philosophy and methodology”. She was involved in several international and national scientific, projects as Inclusive tertiary EDUcation in the West BALKanS, Reforming doctoral studies in Montenegro and Albania –good practice paradigm (MARDS) as well as other Erasmus+ projects, IPA, etc.

Tamara Tomic, Master in Library Manager – Tamara has been involved in several international and national scientific, projects as Inclusive tertiary EDUcation in the West BALKanS, and SINCHE – Support and Inclusion of students with disabilities at higher education institutions in Montenegro.

It is imperative to highlight the comprehensive range of training programs through the IDEA project in which they actively participated, such as:

- Training of Registrar Office, Voluntary Support & Transport Services’ Coordinator
- Training of Registrar Office, Voluntary Support & Transport Services’ Coordinator
- Training of e-Accessibility & Library Services’ Coordinators on AT based solutions and Training on the Relay Service
- Training of e-Accessibility & Library Services’ Coordinators on AT based solutions and Training on the Relay Service

These trainings are crucial for ensuring that the coordinators are well-equipped to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. The first set of trainings focuses on the Registrar Office and Voluntary Support & Transport Services' Coordinator, providing them with essential knowledge and skills to effectively support students with disabilities in their respective domains. The second set, centered around e-Accessibility & Library Services' Coordinators, delves into assistive technology solutions and relay services. This empowers them to facilitate accessibility in digital resources and provide enhanced support to students in utilizing these technologies. Overall, these trainings are instrumental in enhancing the coordinators' capacity to create an inclusive environment that empowers all students, including those with disabilities, to thrive academically.

Having an accessible unit with coordinators in direct contact with students with disabilities is instrumental in ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to succeed in their academic pursuits. These coordinators serve as advocates and facilitators, bridging the gap between students and the resources they require. They play a crucial role in identifying specific needs and implementing tailored accommodations, allowing students with disabilities to fully engage with their studies. This direct connection establishes a foundation of trust and understanding, empowering students to communicate their challenges and seek the support they need. It also promotes a sense of belonging and inclusivity, fostering an environment where every student feels valued and capable of achieving their academic goals. In essence, an accessible unit with dedicated coordinators is indispensable for creating an educational experience that is truly equitable and enriching for all.

Evaluation and Monitoring

Within Evaluation and monitoring is crucial to involve Association of Youth with Disabilities in Montenegro who will be cooperates with staff in Accessibility Unit at University of Donja Gorica:

Goal #1

Increase awareness among students and staff regarding Accessibility Unit and activities in cooperation with Association of Youth with Disabilities in Montenegro

- **Indicators:** No. of students attend the promotion activities; No. of professors attend the promotional events & Preparation plan for promotion during enrollment campaign
- **Indicators:** List of participants; no. of event organized; no. of high-school students informed

Goal #2

Records of number of students involved in the Unit

- **Indicators:** No. of students involved & Documentation of agendas/attendance rosters from all training programs in cooperation with Association of Youth with Disabilities in Montenegro.
- **Indicators:** No. of attendees & Documentation of number of students supported within the Unit
- **Indicators:** No. of students & Comparative analysis of Goal #2 data with similar data from last year

A yearly report will be issued that presents the summative findings with aim to improve activities within the Unit.

Sustainability and Integration

At the University of Donja Gorica (UDG) the Accessibility Unit is part of the Students Service Office to be concerned with student issues, along with the International Cooperation Office. The unit is administered by an academic staff who already passed trainings on the topic of persons with disabilities and teaching methods for students with disabilities in collaboration with the respective university units and NGO sector representatives. UDG has embarked on a comprehensive and forward-thinking endeavor to ensure that every student, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, has equal access to the myriad opportunities offered by the institution. This commitment extends across various pivotal domains, commencing with an inclusive and meticulous recruitment process for the dedicated staff of the newly established Accessibility Unit. Equally crucial is the formulation of a robust training and professional development program tailored specifically for unit personnel. This program is designed to equip them with the necessary expertise and understanding to effectively address the unique needs of students with disabilities. By doing so, UDG aspires to foster an environment where inclusivity and accessibility are at the forefront of its educational mission.

One of the cornerstones of this initiative is the meticulous design of both physical and virtual environments. This involves a meticulous assessment of the accessibility of premises and the integration of technology to ensure that no student faces barriers in their pursuit of knowledge. This meticulous attention to detail not only adheres to legal mandates but also embodies UDG's unwavering dedication to inclusivity and equitable access. Central to this comprehensive approach is the thoughtful design of curricula. Furthermore, the emphasis on accessible teaching methodologies signifies a commitment to accommodating various learning abilities. UDG recognizes that the individualized needs of students with disabilities must be addressed on an individual basis, and this principle forms the bedrock of their inclusive educational philosophy. Within the ambit of the Accessibility Unit, a holistic and multi-faceted support system is envisaged. This includes providing essential guidance to students with disabilities, from their initial enrollment to the triumphant completion of their studies. The unit takes on the responsibility of orchestrating accessible enrollment procedures, devising personalized study plans, and facilitating individual tutoring or examination dates, where needed. Additionally, the unit acts as a liaison between students and faculty, ensuring that the academic experience is tailored to each student's unique needs. In collaboration with various university units and representatives from the NGO sector, the Accessibility Unit oversees an array of services that directly impact the lives of students. These services encompass a wide range of areas, including the provision of accessible educational materials, technical support, and the integration of Assistive

Technologies. The unit also plays a pivotal role in coordinating with the Technical Office to prepare and disseminate accessible learning materials. Furthermore, the Accessibility Unit extends its services to address the broader academic environment. This involves making adjustments to physical spaces, including libraries and laboratories, to ensure they are accessible. The unit also provides invaluable guidance to academic staff on producing accessible teaching materials, further enhancing the educational experience for all. Ultimately, the beneficiaries of the unit's services are diverse and far-reaching. These include students with a spectrum of disabilities, academic and administrative staff, as well as members of the broader public involved in education and accessibility endeavors. Additionally, academic and non-academic institutions dedicated to the education of individuals with disabilities find invaluable support in the services provided by the unit.

This comprehensive approach underscores UDG's steadfast commitment to creating an environment where inclusivity, accessibility, and equal opportunity are not just ideals, but tangible and integral aspects of the educational experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the road-mapping process undertaken by the University of Donja Gorica in establishing the Accessibility Unit has been marked by significant key points and milestones. Through initiatives like the IDEA project, as well as targeted training programs, the university has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to advancing inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. These efforts have culminated in the creation of a dedicated unit with coordinators who play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between students with disabilities and the resources they need to succeed.

The establishment of the Accessibility Unit at the University of Donja Gorica is a testament to the institution's dedication to fostering an environment where every student, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, can thrive. This unit serves as a cornerstone for inclusivity, providing tailored support and resources to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Through meticulous planning and implementation, the Accessibility Unit stands as a beacon of progress, upholding the values of respect, diversity, and equal opportunity within the university community. It is a testament to the belief that education should be a right afforded to all, and that barriers should be dismantled to make way for a more inclusive and accessible academic landscape.

**Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and
Procedures Towards the Establishment of
the Accessibility Unit
UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE, TIRANA**

Executive Summary

The IDEA (Inclusive tertiary EDucation in the West BAlkanS) project has played a pivotal role in supporting the enhancement of the Accessibility Unit at POLIS University. This project has provided essential support for drafting and implementing a detailed policy for Students with disability, which serves as a foundational document for university's accessibility efforts. Furthermore, the IDEA project has facilitated the early launch and three-year pilot phase of the Accessibility Unit, enabling the acquisition of assistive technology and the gradual development of staff expertise. Ultimately, the IDEA project has been instrumental in propelling our commitment to inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. The primary purpose of establishing the Accessibility Unit at University of Medicine in Tirana (UMT) is to facilitate a more inclusive and accessible learning environment within the institution. Such a unit is and will be dedicated to modernizing higher education practices and improving accessibility for all students, ensuring that education remains equitable and responsive to the diverse needs of our student body. By focusing on students with disabilities, including Specific Learning Disabilities (SwLD), UMT aims to create a university culture that champions respect, combats disability discrimination, and fosters effective inclusion. Key Objectives of the Document:

- **Providing Context/Introduction:** Offering a thorough context for the creation of the Accessibility Unit, highlighting its integration within the Student Support and Career Counseling Office (ZMSKK) within UMT, and emphasizing its alignment with the goals of the IDEA project.
- **Defining Vision and Mission:** Clearly defining the unit's vision and mission, which are central to promoting inclusivity, respect, and the fight against disability discrimination within the university.
- **Pilot and Road-Mapping Phases:** Outlining the structured approach to the establishment process, including a pilot phase to test services and a subsequent road-mapping phase to transition to full implementation.
- **Staffing and Training:** Defining the recruitment and training plan for unit personnel to ensure they possess the necessary expertise and skills to deliver effective support and accommodations.
- **Evaluation and Monitoring:** Establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) and mechanisms for continuous evaluation, reflecting feedback from stakeholders for continuous improvement.
- **Sustainability and Integration:** Highlighting strategies to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit and its integration into the university's strategic plan.

Introduction

The establishment and functioning of Accessibility Units is the tangible result that demonstrates IDEA's commitment to improving higher education accessibility in the Western Balkans.

In this regard, UMT has shown its commitment to establishing and strengthening a unit within the institution, dedicated to modernizing and improving the accessibility of higher education, particularly for students with disabilities (SwD or SwLD).

This unit operates as an integrated part within the Student's Career Counseling Office (Zyra e Keshillimit te Karrieres) at the university of Medicine. This integration facilitates seamless coordination of services for students.

In addition, by working closely with the Student's Career Counseling Office, the Accessibility Unit has been able to leverage resources, expertise, and existing support mechanisms to enhance accessibility and inclusivity for students. Before setting up the Accessibility Unit, UMT took proactive steps by creating a comprehensive policy that addresses the needs of students with disabilities. This policy serves as a strategic framework for promoting inclusivity and combating discrimination against students with disabilities.

Vision and Mission

This unit's mission is to bring innovative practices and technologies to higher education to ensure it remains up-to-date, relevant, and responsive to the needs of all students, including those with disabilities. A major focus is on making higher education more accessible to students with disabilities, including Specific Learning Disabilities (SwLD) or other impairments. This involves providing tools, support, and accommodations to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities.

Piloting Phase

During the piloting phase at UMT, a comprehensive set of activities was meticulously undertaken to lay the foundation for an effective Accessibility Unit. A paramount aspect of this phase was the rigorous needs assessment conducted for accessibility services. This involved a careful identification of students with diverse abilities within each faculty at UMT, categorizing their disabilities spanning areas such as movement, vision, hearing, and beyond. This thorough assessment formed the basis for understanding the unique needs of the student body, serving as a critical guide for the subsequent phases of the establishment process.

In response to the identified needs, the development of initial support services emerged as a crucial initiative. The task involved pinpointing UMT staff who could effectively engage with students possessing diverse abilities. Recognizing the career offices as a strategic hub for identifying such students, a decision was made to establish a standardized procedure for assessing disabilities based on their specific manifestations. This decision underscored the need for comprehensive training programs for both administrative and academic staff. The envisioned training programs addressed multifaceted issues ranging from understanding the diverse needs of students to refining skills in behavior management, teaching methodologies, and the nuanced assessment of students with varying abilities.

The piloting phase also encompassed the pivotal pilot testing of the support services that had been identified and developed. This testing phase not only gauged the efficacy of the services but also brought to light the need for further training initiatives. The emphasis shifted towards a twofold approach: first, an in-depth understanding of the challenges at hand, and second, devising effective solutions to address these challenges.

The iterative nature of the pilot testing phase proved instrumental in refining the support services, aligning them more closely with the nuanced requirements of students with diverse abilities. The insights gained during this phase laid the groundwork for a more informed and adaptive approach as the Accessibility Unit progressed towards full establishment.

Road-Mapping Phase

UMT has career counseling offices in all three faculties, which are part of UMT. The accessibility units have also been created in each of these three faculties. Throughout the project, UMT has taken care to train staff from the three faculties. Also, all the equipment provided through the project are divided in the three units, in accordance with the capacities that the respective faculties have

- The transition from the pilot phase to full establishment.

There was an immediate commitment and reaction of the stakeholders. The working group was set up at UMT, under the supervision of the Vice-Rector of UMT, Prof. Alma Idrizi. The funds were allocated from the project. All staff selected from the working group have been trained, including representatives of the career office, IT, administrative staff (secretaries, economists, lawyers) and academic staff. All the equipment obtained from the project are now near the career counseling offices in each unit (faculty) of UMT. In one faculty, the adaptation of the infrastructure that provides access for students with different abilities, has been completed, while in two other faculties we are looking for modalities to make this adaptation of the infrastructure. We have drawn up internal regulations for the operation of accessibility units and work protocols for these units (under the auspices of the IDEA project)

Staffing and Training

At the moment UMT is working with the existing staff, trained during the project. We are working to determine the exact job description for the people who will work in this unit and then negotiate to have additional staff in UMT, clearly defined in the structure of UMT.

The training and professional development plan for unit personnel.

- The trained staff, with the support of the Project, is currently working / drafting a training module for university staff (both administrative and academic)

Evaluation and Monitoring

The ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the Accessibility Unit at UMT are intricately designed to gauge its effectiveness and impact. Key performance indicators (KPIs) have been strategically selected to comprehensively assess various facets of the unit's operations. The number of consulted students serves as a fundamental indicator, reflecting the unit's reach and engagement with the student body. Additionally, the number of students assessed for their level of disability is a pivotal metric, offering insights into the depth and breadth of the unit's services.

Another crucial KPI is the number of students stabilized near UMT, providing a tangible measure of the unit's success in fostering an environment where students with diverse abilities can comfortably pursue their education. Simultaneously, tracking the number of students with unmet needs is essential for addressing gaps in support services, ensuring a holistic approach to inclusivity.

Equally significant is the metric related to the number of staff engaged in the process of evaluating students with different abilities. This indicator highlights the commitment of the UMT staff to actively participate in the evaluation process, emphasizing the collaborative nature of the Accessibility Unit's operations.

The main mechanisms employed for ongoing monitoring and evaluation include the systematic evaluation of the proposed indicators. Regular assessments of these indicators allow for a nuanced understanding of the unit's progress, illuminating areas of strength and areas that may require further attention. Additionally, individual interviews with both UMT staff and students with different abilities constitute a qualitative component of the monitoring process. These interviews provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of those involved, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the unit's impact on the ground.

Through this dual approach of quantitative and qualitative evaluation, the Accessibility Unit at UMT ensures a robust and responsive monitoring system, positioning itself for continuous improvement and sustained effectiveness in fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Sustainability and Integration

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit at UMT is a strategic priority, guided by a set of comprehensive policies. Central to this vision is the aspiration to integrate the Accessibility Unit seamlessly into the organizational framework of UMT. The objective is to establish the unit as a permanent fixture within the institution, symbolized by its inclusion in the organizational chart of UMT. This structural integration is not merely symbolic but represents a commitment to institutionalize inclusivity and accessibility as core values ingrained in the university's structure and ethos. Furthermore, the integration of the unit's efforts into UMT's strategic plan is deemed paramount for its sustained impact. This involves a meticulous alignment of the unit's goals, objectives, and action plans with the overarching strategic vision of the university. Crucially, a dedicated budget is identified as a linchpin for this integration. By delineating a clear and specific budget exclusively earmarked for the Accessibility Unit, UMT demonstrates a tangible commitment to allocating the necessary resources for the unit's sustained operation and growth. This financial commitment ensures that the unit can continue to innovate, expand its services, and respond dynamically to the evolving needs of students with diverse abilities.

In essence, the strategic vision for the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit at UMT hinges on both structural and financial commitments. The unit's seamless integration into the organizational structure and its alignment with the university's strategic plan, coupled with a dedicated budget, collectively establish a robust framework for the unit's enduring impact, fostering a culture of inclusivity that becomes an integral part of UMT's identity and mission.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the establishment of the Accessibility Unit at UMT University stands as a testament to the institution's unwavering commitment to upholding the universal right to education. By actively seeking and providing tools, support, and accommodations, the university strives to eliminate barriers and ensure equitable access to educational opportunities for all students. This initiative not only aligns with the constitutional guarantee of the right to education but also embodies a profound dedication to inclusivity and accessibility. The Accessibility Unit serves as a pivotal mechanism in translating these principles into tangible actions, acknowledging that every student, regardless of background or ability, has the right to pursue education. Through its endeavors, UMT University not only fulfills a legal obligation but also nurtures an environment where diversity is celebrated, and educational opportunities are truly accessible to all.

Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and Procedures Towards the Establishment of the Accessibility Unit

UNIVERSITY “Luigj Gurakuqi”, Shkoder

Executive Summary

The IDEA (Inclusive Tertiary EDucation in the West BAlkans) project has played a fundamental role in supporting the improvement of the Accessibility Unit at Shkoder University “Luigj Gurakuqi”. This project has provided an essential role in theory and practice for the design and implementation of a detailed and supportive policy for students with disabilities and learning disabilities. Likewise, the IDEA project has enabled the creation of a working group and the piloting of the Accessibility Unit, thus enabling the selection of the necessary assistive technology and staff training to improve the operation of the laboratory and the impact it will have in the future at our university and beyond its walls. The main purpose of setting up the Accessibility Unit at USH is to provide an accessible and suitable learning environment for all students within the university. The aim of this Unit is to ensure that all students have access to the appropriate environment, resources, experts and support staff that help them to have the right conditions for appropriate access. In general, the Unit, which focuses its work on students with disabilities, including SwLD, aims to promote the best values and practices for students as well as to create a new culture related to accessibility at the University of Shkoder. Key Objectives of the Document:

- **Providing Context/Introduction:** Offering a thorough context for the creation of the Accessibility Unit, highlighting its integration within the Student Support and Career Counseling Office within Shkoder University, and emphasizing its alignment with the goals of the IDEA project.
- **Defining Vision and Mission:** Clearly defining the unit's vision and mission, which are central to promoting inclusivity, respect, and the fight against disability discrimination within the university.
- **Pilot and Road-Mapping Phases:** Outlining the structured approach to the establishment process, including a pilot phase to test services and a subsequent road-mapping phase to transition to full implementation.
- **Staffing and Training:** Creating a plan for the recruitment and training of the unit's personnel to ensure that they possess the necessary skills to provide the most efficient support and adaptation to ensure the proper functioning of the Unit.
- **Evaluation and Monitoring:** In this part, the main performance indicators (KPI) will be defined, as well as the mechanisms that will be used for continuous evaluation, which will reflect the feedback from the interested parties for continuous improvement.
- **Sustainability and Integration:** This part is related to the strategies that will be used to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit and its integration into the strategic plan of our university.

Introduction

The establishment and operation of Accessibility Unit is the result of IDEA's commitment to improve access to higher education in the Western Balkans.

In this regard, the University of Shkoder has shown its commitment to the establishment and strengthening of a unit within the institution, which aims to facilitate, support and improve access to Higher education, especially for students with disabilities (SWD or SwLD). This Unit works in collaboration with the Dean of Students and the Office for Career Counseling at the university. This collaboration facilitates the seamless coordination of services for students.

The Accessibility Unit has been able to utilize the resources provided, expertise and existing support mechanisms to increase access and inclusion for students. Prior to the creation of the Accessibility Unit, the University of Shkoder took proactive steps by creating a comprehensive policy that addresses the needs of students with disabilities. This policy serves as a strategic framework for promoting inclusiveness and combating discrimination against students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Vision and Mission

The mission of this Unit is to provide the best practices for students with disabilities or learning disabilities in Higher education as well as to provide the latest technologies to suit the needs of these students. This would facilitate continuous access to information during the study period, eliminating possible barriers during their studies at Shkoder University.

Piloting Phase

The creation of the Accessibility Unit at the University of Shkoder within the IDEA project was undertaken with clear objectives and anticipated results. Its main goal was to eliminate barriers and access for students with disabilities. Objectives included assessing existing accessibility gaps, evaluating appropriate technological tools and software to facilitate accessibility, and creating a culture of inclusiveness among academic staff, non-academic staff and students at our university. This would create a very positive climate to increase the possibility of studying for a large number of students with disabilities.

- **Activities carried out during the piloting phase**

During the pilot phase of the Accessibility Unit at the University of Shkoder, some precautions were taken:

- Students and former students with disabilities at the university were contacted and they reported the problems they encountered during their studies.
- Feedback from the academic staff about the problems they have faced with SwD and SwLD.
- The selection and purchase of equipment for the Inclusive Laboratory was also made. Also we choose the university library as the most suitable environment for setting up the equipment for the new laboratory (Inclusive Laboratory).
- The university staff was also informed about the innovations of the Inclusive Laboratory.
- Information meetings were initiated with students, association representatives and academic and non-academic staff to inform about the new accessibility services available.
- Update and new topics of student lectures related to accessibility and inclusiveness. Introduction of thematic related to disability and assistive technology in the programs of: Teaching in Primary and Preschool Education, Psychology and Social Work in USH.

Road-Mapping Phase

The transition from the pilot phase to the full establishment of the Accessibility Unit at the University of Shkoder represents a key moment in its evolution. This transition consists on several steps. Below are given the key steps and activities involved in road-mapping:

- **Stakeholders' engagement (academic and administrative staff).**

In the establishment of the Accessibility Unit at the University of Shkoder, the commitment of the involved parties to receive feedback and to be part of its support has been very important. Also, the feedback has played a crucial role. The university has received data from the university staff, the main secretariat, the secretariat, from the students with disabilities, the teaching staff at the university. Information was also received from other actors outside the institution related to the accessibility and needs of these people. This information has enabled the creation of a more complete overview of the problems they encounter during their studies or even before they join the university as a student.

- **Resource allocation.**

The process of allocating resources for the creation of the Comprehensive Laboratory at the University of Shkoder included a systematic approach. In the beginning, the need for categories of technological equipment was assessed, which will be selected depending on the identified needs. Afterwards, the suitable and most favorable space was chosen for the placement of the laboratory, with the aim of making it easily accessible to all students of the faculties of our university. The conditions were modified in favor of a better accessibility and the most convenient conditions for the students and professors who will use it. The needs for active personnel in this laboratory were determined. This selection was the best for all university students, but also as a supporting laboratory for the new Professional Master's program in Special Pedagogy, newly opened at the University of Shkoder.

- **Staff recruitment and training.**

Recruitment and training of personnel for the Accessibility Unit at the University of Shkoder have been carefully designed to guarantee the unit's success in increasing access to students with disabilities. The University of Shkoder has appointed a person responsible for the management of the laboratory, who has been trained and is continuously supported by the IT staff of the university. The responsible person will be a key factor in welcoming, orientation, support for both students and academic and non-academic staff.

- **Assistive technology equipment laboratory.**

The IDEA project has brought a very good opportunity in setting up the Accessibility Unit. The University of Shkoder is very proud to have such a rich laboratory with contemporary technological equipment, which will bring a positive change in the quality of teaching and learning for students with limited abilities and beyond. Much of the wealth of equipment and technology auxiliary in particular. This Laboratory and the Accessibility Unit will help both students with disabilities and those with learning disabilities, but also for the preparation of assistant teachers for pre-university education schools. In addition, the institution will ensure that current staff are knowledgeable about the appropriate use of assistive technology for the needs of our students, supported by the university's IT and IT staff. This will lead to the need for constant updating of technological equipment and an increase in the demand for continuous improvement.

Below is given the list of assistive equipment and software benefited on behalf of IDEA:

ASSISTIVE TOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DELL Optiplex 3080 MT/Core i5-10505/16GB
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dell NB Latitude 3510, i5-10210U, 15.6" FHD, 8GB
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tablet - Kamvas Studio 22 - 16GB SSD 240GB
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HeadSet Plantronics Professional BLACKWIRE C3220 USB-A
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HeadSet Plantronics Professional FOCUS UC B825 WIRELESS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Voice Amplifier with UHF Wireless Microphone Headset
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conference System Polycom Studio, 4K, FOV-120°, 4xZoom, 5m USB 2.0 cable, Noise Block
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NexiGo Meeting 360, 8K Captured AI-Powered Framing & Speaker Tracking, 1080p HD 360-Degree Smart AIO Video Conference Camera, 8 Noise-Cancelling Microphones, and Speaker
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• OrCam Read Smart - Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistive Reader - Including Smart Reading Feature
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Jouse+
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Book & Document Scanner, Capture A3 & A4,
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4K Video Camera Camcorder 60FPS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wireless Bluetooth Wearable Hands-Free Mouse People with Disabilities & Others
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mouse Alternative
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foot Switch

- Braille and Large Print English Letters Computer Keyboard Stickers – Overlays
- HDE Large Print Keyboard Wired Large Letter Key Keyboard USB Keyboards for Visually Impaired (Yellow Keys)

SOFTWARE

- Dragon Naturally Speaking – Professional
- Ghotit Real Writer & Reader Software for Windows
- Jaws Screen Reader
- ZoomText Magnifier/Reader
- Fusion – Jaws and ZOOM Text

These technological devices and software will enable a better access to a wide range of students with limited abilities and will provide a more suitable and accessible environment for students, pedagogues and future teachers.

- **Curriculum and infrastructure adjustments.**

The project has been useful for the needs of the University as it has positively influenced the improvement of the infrastructure of the premises more accessible for students. The curriculum of some study programs has also been enriched with topics on inclusiveness and assistive technologies, starting from the trainings carried out during the project. It has also been worked on for possible suggestions in the legal framework as well as in the university regulation regarding a better accessibility of students with limited abilities in universities. Likewise, the IDEA project has offered quite good ideas for the realization of guides for the academic staff in support of students with limited abilities. All these modifications are the result of training and experience gained during this project. The establishment of the Inclusive Laboratory and the adaptation of the infrastructure of the university library will bring innovation to other possible changes in the infrastructure of the faculty buildings in support of students with limited abilities.

- **Legal and policy framework development.**

The legal and policy framework drawn up by the University of Shkoder for the IDEA project, which aims to ensure the inclusion of higher education students with physical disabilities and learning difficulties, includes key elements. It respects the relevant legal compliance, emphasizes equal access to education for all students, and provides comprehensive student support services, encourages awareness and communication, and is committed to continuous improvement. It values and prioritizes accessibility taking into account legal obligations and best practices for students with disabilities.

Staffing and Training

The University of Shkoder, in the framework of the establishment of the Inclusive Laboratory, has seen the need to have a person responsible for management, reception, coordination with the academic staff regarding its best management. This person has been trained and is continuously supported by the IT of the University and can play the role of trainer and facilitator for the students and academic staff who will use this laboratory. This prioritizes accessibility by targeting best practices for students with disabilities. The University of Shkoder aims to continuously increase the staff of the Accessibility Unit. Our training and professional development plan aims for the workforce to ensure best practices in access and inclusion for academic staff, non-academic staff and the students of our university. USH will also be provided with the necessary support from the working group and from external experts to improve the knowledge and support of students. Likewise, staff training on the use of laboratory equipment in support of students is a goal of the working group. The working group of the IDEA project has been part of continuous trainings by partners and has benefited from experiences, methods, facts in the support and inclusion of students with disabilities.

Below are listed the list of trainings on behalf of IDEA:

- 12.05.2021–18.05.2021 2021- Virtual visit at Kapodistrian University, Athens, Greece
- 24.05.2021–28.05.2021- Virtual visit to Masaryk University, Czech Republic
- 14.06.2021–17.06. 2021 - Virtual visit to the University of Limerick, Ireland
- 22.02.2022– 25.02.2022 - Training at the University of Donja Gorica, Podgorica
- 04.04.2022– .07.04.2022- Training at Donja Gorica University, Podgorica
- 20.06.2022–25.06.2022- Training at the University of Limerick, Ireland.
- 08.05.2022 - 11.05.2022. – Training at the University of Masaryk, Czech Republic.
- 09.11.2022 - 11.11.2022 - Training at Kapodistrian University, Athens, Greece
- 17.01.2023–19. 01. 2023- Training in Pristina, College Universum
- 17.10.2023–21-10.2023 - training at the University of Donja Gorica, Podgorica

A series of other follow-up trainings have been held at the premises of University of Limerick, Catholic University "Our Lady of Good Counsel" and University of Pristina during October–December 2023.

University of Shkoder aims to continuously increase the staff of the Accessibility Unit. Our training and professional development plan aims for the workforce to ensure best practices in access and inclusion for academic staff, non-academic staff and the students of our university. He plans support from the working group and from external experts to improve the knowledge and support of students. Likewise, staff training on the use of laboratory equipment in support of students is a goal of the working group.

Evaluation and Monitoring

The Accessibility Unit at the University of Shkoder uses the feedback of the students and, in the future, of the staff regarding the role of the Accessibility Laboratory and the facilitation of students' access to study facilities, infrastructure, libraries, etc. Also, the results of the students at the end of a subject or study period are also a good measure, also supported by the facilities they receive from the Accessibility Unit.

To ensure continuous monitoring and evaluation of services, the University of Shkoder carries out regular internal audits and quality assessments which are carried out to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of our accessibility services. As well as continued communication with the head of the Laboratory as well as with the lecturers interested in the use of this Laboratory. These elements bring a measurable assessment that will influence the continuous improvement of services

The University of Shkoder attaches great importance to feedback from stakeholders for continuous improvement. Students with access needs, members of the academic staff, non-academic staff, dean of students and other persons through meetings, focus groups and conversations give an assessment or concerns, which are analyzed and measures are taken for improvement or possible modifications. This would bring a greater responsibility, result and impact of the Unit in the community where it operates.

Sustainability and Integration

The University of Shkoder aims at a series of policies to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit. These policies include several key aspects. First, the expansion of interested persons to be included in the accessibility unit. Second, the impact for continued infrastructure improvement and technological improvements, ensuring that our physical and digital environments remain inclusive. Third, we promote an inclusive culture within the institution by increasing awareness and understanding of accessibility needs among all members of the college community.

Finally, the Accessibility Unit will also serve as a support to new programs and curricula in support of the disability, giving even more value to the work and the purpose of the study program.

University of Shkoder aims at a series of policies to ensure the long-term sustainability of the university's strategic plan in the future through the impact it will have with the results achieved, aiming for the highest impact at the university level and especially in the university's strategic plan.

Lately, the University of Shkoder has included under its academic programs, the Master's study Program in Special Pedagogy. The students included in this program are current teachers or even former students of the Teaching Faculty that mainly cover the north of Albania. The opening of this study program will not only be the recognition and support of pre-university education students, but also the recognition, support, promotion of the Inclusive Laboratory and the Accessibility Unit. The students will benefit from this laboratory and the Unit staff to be more responsible for the problems of the disabled but also to support this cause not only as professionals in the field, but also as human beings. This will affect the increase of the impact of the Unit and the Laboratory not only within the university environment but beyond it.

Conclusion

The creation of the Accessibility Unit at the University of Shkoder has a great value as it offers an innovation in the university system to support accessibility and inclusiveness. This Unit, set up especially for students with disabilities, provides easier access and more good opportunities for education and integration for this category of students. The Accessibility Unit also offers great support for study programs that will be in support of students with disabilities and learning disabilities, offering a service not only within the institution, but supporting the preparation of assistant teachers for students with disabilities and learning disabilities and to raise awareness and influenced the improvement of persons with disabilities in the city of Shkoder and beyond.

**Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and
Procedures Towards the Establishment of
the Accessibility Unit
Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel”**

Executive Summary

The IDEA (Inclusive tertiary EDucation in the West BAlkanS) project has played a crucial role in supporting the enhancement of the Accessibility Unit (Support Service for Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or Temporary Specific Needs) at the Catholic University Our Lady of Good Counsel. This project has provided the proper support for drafting and implementing a detailed policy for Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or Temporary Specific Needs, which serves as a foundational document for university's accessibility and inclusiveness efforts. The IDEA project has facilitated the early launch and three-year pilot phase of the Accessibility Unit/Support service, enabling the acquisition of main assistive technology and the gradual development of staff expertise and skills in this subject. The project has been instrumental in propelling the university commitment to removing any causes that may lead to marginalization and inequalities against the students in question in accordance and respect also with the principles of human dignity, the right of education, of freedom and autonomy of the individuals.

The primary purpose of establishing the Accessibility/Support Unit at the Catholic University Our Lady of Good Counsel is modernizing higher education practices and to facilitate a more inclusive and accessible learning environment within the institution. The aim is to assert/affirm, within the university environment, the principles of inclusion and autonomy of students recognizing their right, on an equal opportunity basis, without discrimination or privilege, to benefit from all available resources that are placed at the service of the university community, in particular the academic, administrative, human, information, material, and physical resources, in order to support their academic progress and study projects.

The AU/Support Service for students with disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or temporary specific needs, is the first contact point that plays a strategic role in welcoming and managing services to ensure adequate support for candidates for future students and for students with disabilities and/or SLD and/or temporary specific needs, as well as for teaching and technical administrative staff in carrying out their activities. The AU/Support Service aims to identify needs, define interventions, and monitor the correct implementation of procedures for an ever-improving fulfillment of educational needs and student needs.

Introduction

The establishment, functioning and further development of the Accessibility Unit/Support Service for students with disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or temporary specific needs at Catholic University Our Lady of Good Counsel is the tangible result that demonstrates IDEA's commitment to improving higher education accessibility in the area of Western Balkans and in particular in the universities involved. In this regard, Catholic University Our Lady of Good Counsel has shown its commitment to establishing and enhancing a unit/service within the institution which is aimed at modernizing and improving the accessibility of higher education for above mentioned candidates for students and students. This unit/service operates in close collaboration with the Rector's delegate for Equal opportunities, Admissions office, Deans, study programs/academic coordinators, secretariats/registrars, the Office of Educational and Research Projects to promote student participation in international mobility projects, the Career/ Job placement Office for job placement orientation of students or graduates, the Listening Desk (Counselling service), the Information Technology service for technical - informatics, technological, teaching tools aids and support, etc, the Library service for specialized materials and equipment through its lending service, various tools, devices or software for on-site use, etc., construction, architecture and maintenance responsible for physical accessibility in buildings and spaces, emergencies and security, and other facilities competent in carrying out procedures related to the provision of services required by students with disabilities and/or SLD and/or temporary needs at the university. The University has placed all available resources at the service of the university community, in particular the academic, administrative, human, information, material, and physical resources, in order to support the academic progress of these students. The Catholic University has taken proactive steps by drafting a comprehensive Regulation for inclusion, right to education, and services for candidates and Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or Temporary Specific Needs. The university adheres to the principle that academic, professional, and social integration of people with disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or temporary specific needs, is a shared responsibility of all members of the university community through interaction and coordination among various stakeholders. This Regulation, in accordance and respect with the principles of human dignity, the right of freedom and autonomy of the individual, governs the promotion of interventions and the provision of services for the integration and support of students with disabilities and/or SLD and/or temporary specific needs in order to ensure their right to education, access to the University, pursuit of studies, higher culture, participation in research, and promote inclusion in all areas of university life and entry into the labor market.

Vision and Mission

The Support Service for students with disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or temporary specific needs, is the first contact point that plays a strategic role in welcoming and managing services to ensure adequate support for candidates for future students and for students with disabilities and/or SLD and/or temporary specific needs, as well as for teaching and technical administrative staff in carrying out their activities. The Support Service aims to identify needs, define reasonable interventions, and monitor the correct implementation of procedures for an ever-improving fulfillment of educational needs and student needs.

Beneficiaries of interventions and services are entitled as below:

- To have access to study programs, to the activities provided by the University's educational offer and the services and facilities offered;
- To full inclusion in all areas of university life;
- To have equal opportunities for education, study and research;
- To receive information in an accessible format;
- To receive support, reasonable accommodation, and alternative measures and/or compensatory tools that do not detract/reduce the intended educational goals;
- To the confidentiality of information regarding their disability and/or SLD.

Piloting Phase

The establishment of an accessibility unit/support service at Catholic University under the IDEA project was undertaken with clear objectives, taking into account that some initial steps have been done before through the Counselling/listening desk service and decentralized support offered at Faculty level. The primary aim was to ensure adequate support for candidates for future students and for students with disabilities and/or SLD and/or temporary specific needs, as well as for teaching and technical administrative staff in carrying out their activities.

The objectives were to identify and assess the needs of students in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges they face, identify the gaps in infrastructure and physical space, assistive technology, provide necessary training to faculty, staff, and managers, develop a policy and procedure that govern the operation of the accessibility unit/support service, including accommodation request processes, confidentiality, conduct awareness campaigns within the institution and outside (high schools and civil society) to promote a culture of inclusion, diversity, and understanding of disability-related issues.

Expected Outcomes were to lead to an improved and accessibility, support services tailored to the candidates/students' needs in order to enhance entrance and academic performance, compliance with national policies and mission of the institution, reinforcing its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, more inclusive and accepting institutional and local culture that values diversity and actively seeks to support students, gather feedback from students, faculty, and staff involved to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments to the services, establish a sustainability plan. During the piloting phase, several critical activities were undertaken. These activities started first by identifying key staff and figures as faculty and staff that would be involved in the project activities and trainings in order to support the establishment of the AU/support service; defining at institution and faculties level the quota for SwD (Ministerial procedures); mapping and assessing of candidates and student's needs; of environment/physical accessibility and provide inputs for improvement to managerial level; of assistive technology within the institution and equipment to purchase through the project; training of the staff involved on inclusive teaching, administrative practices and assistive technology use; collaborating with different figures and roles within the institution and outside in order to improve services and procedures; developing a clear and comprehensive policy/Regulation for inclusion, right to education, and services for candidates and Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or Temporary Specific Needs

and including procedures, eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, the process for requesting accommodations etc; test services; awareness raising within the institution and outside; collect data and feedback and tracking of progress.

The needs assessment for accessibility services started by the project team responsible in collaboration with other faculties and services. Main activities for this purpose were: collecting data on the current state of accessibility and accommodations on the university (number and types of students with disabilities/LD and temporary needs), meetings/interviews and consults with students, secretariats, academic coordinators and staff for each study programme to understand their experiences, common themes and needs in terms of supporting students and staff, concerns raised, existing services and recommendations for eventual ones to provide, how they have been supported meanwhile, assessment and resources needed in terms of HR, trainings, technology, accessibility (physical infrastructure/spaces such as ramps, elevators, restrooms, and classroom setups). The development of initial support services during the pilot phase was done first starting by a clear communication to the target group (mainly candidates for students and students). A Regulation was developed including guidelines for eligibility, requesting accommodations, documentation requirements etc and this regulation has been improved during the pilot testing based on the piloting and feedback from the target group/stakeholders. Based on the candidates for students and students requests and needs, an evaluation has been made and have been identified the range of possible, realistic accommodations and services that address the diverse needs of students with disabilities, with Learning difficulties and temporary needs in the campus environment (by collaborating with other relevant offices, faculties and departments). The staff have transferred the know how gained through the trainings of the IDEA project to other colleagues and have been confronted with other experts in the subject. The equipment of the AU/support service with necessary assistive technology has been made through this phase also based on the current needs identified.

In the piloting testing phase, the types of support services were identified previously based on the needs of the candidates/ students and based on the resources of the university. The number of services required has been small, and the support services have been delivered to the candidates and students, providing them with the accommodations and assistance they needed in their entrance test and academic pursuit. Based on their feedback, the issues identified and addressed, have been improved and have been made the necessary adjustments. More students were aware of the service.

Road-Mapping Phase

The pilot phase showed an increase of interest and requests from students and a better comprehension of an inclusive educational environment. Transitioning from the pilot phase to full establishment of an Accessibility Unit/support service, will require more efforts and planning concerning the necessary budget and resources, the recruitment and training of qualified staff, improvement of physical accessibility, investment in assistive technology, ongoing evaluation of the performance and impact on student success to foster continuous Improvement, and ongoing commitment of managers and stakeholders.

- **Stakeholder engagement and feedback.**

In the development of the Accessibility Unit/support service at the Catholic university, stakeholder engagement from students with disabilities and SLD, faculty, staff, CSOs, and administrators and their feedback have played a crucial role. This has been incentivized through communication activities primarily. The feedback received, has been analyzed identifying common themes, needs and concerns and served as a base for drafting the institutional policies, support services, and infrastructure and technology improvement.

- **Resource allocation.**

The resource allocation process began with a needs assessment. The target group who needed support services was advised to contact the service as soon as possible, (possibly since the preadmission phase for the new candidates for students) so that all facilities and figures involved could assess and implement any useful measures, within the limits of material and human financial resources. The Students, in accordance with the guidelines, procedures, instructions, regulations, and policies in force at the University, recognizing their right, on an equal opportunity basis, without discrimination or privilege, can benefit from all available resources that are placed at the service of the university community, in particular the academic, administrative, human, information, material, and physical resources, in order to support their academic progress and study projects, in the best possible conditions and in compliance with the learning objectives set by the study programs, with personalized interventions based on their specific educational, physical, psychological, relational, and logistical needs expressed by each individual.

- **Staff recruitment and training.**

Currently, the staff involved in the project is managing the running of the AU/support service collaborating with the Delegate of the Rector for Inclusion and equal opportunities and with other faculties and services including the existing counselling/Listening desk. Through the training sessions of the project, the university staff has received comprehensive training in many topics related to disability culture, awareness, legal frameworks, assistive technologies and accessibility solutions, support services for different disabilities and Learning difficulties, organization of the work in an AU and collaboration with other services etc. These activities accompanied also by solid training materials, serve as a good base for the establishment of the AU/support service and resources for knowledge transfer for new eventual staff.

The normal/usual institutional recruitment process follows the procedures outlined in the HR manual for staff recruitment and professional development and career progress. The staff needs for recruitment for the AU/support service must emphasize in addition the commitment to diversity, inclusion, and accessibility through specific skills.

- **Assistive technology equipment mapping**

The IDEA project has made possible the acquisition of equipment and assistive technology for the set-up of the AU/support service at the Catholic University. Through the equipment will be assisted both students with disabilities and those with specific learning difficulties. In addition to this, the institution will make sure to enlarge the list of needed equipment or AT according to the specific needs and cases. The training sessions during the project lifecycle has made possible that the staff would gain expertise in the proper and correct use of the technologies through the know-how transfer of the EU partners in the project. The list of the assistive technology equipment involves but it is not limited to the following equipment:

- Assistive computer technology
- Assistive headphones
- Tablets
- Conference system

- Document converter
- Assistive/smart reader
- Document scanner
- Big key/adaptive Keyboards
- Speech recognition software
- Voice amplifiers

- **Curriculum and infrastructure adjustments.**

The University ensures that all students have equal access to education and can reach their full potential. In motivated cases, on a case-by-case basis the support service, can develop in collaboration with Faculties, Departments, teaching staff, internship supervisors, and other competent services and structures adjustments, or an adapted intervention plan or individual program according to the needs (without prejudicing academic standards and requirements, nor guaranteeing the successful completion of the study project of the student), containing compensatory tools, dispensatory measures, (adaptive technology, accessible materials), academic skills and competence enhancement pathways as well as directions for teachers for teaching adaptation and assessing progress for each user, and ensure implementation.

The AU/service support promotes universal design and accessibility, identifying and removing physical (including ramps, elevators, wider doorways, and accessible restrooms) and non-physical barriers that prevent the full recognition of the rights of individuals and may lead to marginalization.

- **Legal and policy framework development.**

The Catholic University "Our Lady of Good Counsel", adheres to the principle that academic, professional, and social integration of people with disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or temporary specific needs, is a shared responsibility of all members of the university community through interaction and coordination among various stakeholders.

The University Regulation for inclusion, right to education, and services for Students with Disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or Temporary Specific Needs has been drafted. This Regulation, in accordance and respect with the principles of human dignity, the right of freedom and autonomy of the individual, governs the promotion of interventions and the provision of services for the integration and support of students with disabilities and/or SLD and/or temporary specific needs in order to ensure their right to education, access to the University, pursuit of studies, higher culture, participation in research, and promote inclusion in all areas of university life and entry into the labor market.

It adheres to relevant legal compliance, outlines rights and obligation of candidates and students, of University, of faculties, of support service, defines procedures for reasonable accommodations, encourages awareness, collaboration and communication, promotes among members of the university community a respectful attitude towards students with disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or temporary specific needs and providing support in the application of the regulation, in particular to pedagogical teaching staff; ensures data privacy.

Staffing and Training

The normal/usual institutional recruitment process follows the procedures outlined in the HR manual for staff recruitment and professional development and career progress. The staff needs for recruitment for the AU/support service must emphasize in addition the commitment to diversity, inclusion, and accessibility through specific skills. The process is public and transparent, and positions are advertised through channels and platforms open to all candidates and public. The selection process is done through usual practices, review of applications, interviews, skills and qualifications assessment.

The university encourages an inclusive and accessible workplace culture that supports both staff and students with disabilities and LD and temporary needs. A training and professional development plan for personnel in an accessibility unit/support service is crucial to ensure that the staff is equipped with the knowledge, skills, and qualifications necessary to provide effective support through ongoing professional development programs. The University is committed and has a support policy for the continuous education and staff training. The university is committed to implementing training and research opportunities on issues related to disability and SLD internally and collaborating on national and international level.

The staff establishes ongoing consultation with external organizations, other universities, internal and external stakeholders regarding the policy of supporting students with disabilities/SLD and best practices especially in higher education. The staff that have benefitted from the training sessions in the framework of the IDEA project, shares valuable expertise with the eventual new staff and through the network of EU universities created by the IDEA project they can participate in different activities to remain up to date with the topics on the inclusion and special needs and exchange best practices.

Evaluation and Monitoring

In order to assess the effectiveness of the Accessibility Unit/Support service for students with disabilities and learning difficulties and temporary needs, some Key performance indicators (KPIs) that can help are: number of requests for accommodations, assistive technology, or other services; timely accommodation implementation, adjustment and effectiveness; the allocation and utilization of resources (human and financial); feedback on satisfaction of students and faculty/staff with the accessibility services and support provided; academic success of students; improvement, review and update the unit's mission, goals, and objectives to stay aligned with best practices and evolving needs.

- **Main mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of services.**

Some main mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating these services would be through data and feedback from students, faculty, and staff who interact with the accessibility unit/support service in order to identify room for improvement and draft plans for it; regular audits on physical environments and technologies to ensure that are in compliance with relevant accessibility standards and to remain up-to-date and aligned with students' needs; collaboration and dialogues with stakeholders, including CSOs, and ministries; perform QA internal and external reviews of the AU's policies, procedures, and practices; sharing testimonials and success stories to promote the unit's work.

- **Incorporation of feedback from stakeholders for continuous improvement.**

The process of incorporation of feedback from stakeholders for continuous improvement is essential to ensure that the services and resources provided are continuously responsive to the specific needs of the students. The feedback collected in various modalities is analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively and determined their impact to make significant improvements and changes. Changes are approved, implemented and incorporated in policies and regulations, communicated, and monitored their implementation to evaluate the effectiveness of the improvements.

Sustainability and Integration

The University is committed to removing any causes that may lead to marginalization and inequalities against the students in question and to prioritize accessibility as an integral part of its mission. Some key policies and long-term sustainability of the Accessibility Unit/support service strategies that the Catholic University will implement to achieve this sustainability are to collaborate with different stakeholders; expand the range of support services; to develop a comprehensive, long-term strategic plan for the Accessibility Unit/support service that outlines its goals, objectives, and actions/improvements over several years to be regularly reviewed and updated, allocate specific budget for the AU/support service covering staff costs/recruitment and training, resources, technology, and accommodations; to promote and implement universal design principles and raise awareness.

The efforts of the Accessibility Unit will be integrated into the new institution's strategic plan reflecting our commitment to providing equitable access to education for all students as it aligns with one of its missions and values, emphasizing what we want to achieve in terms of accessibility and inclusivity, encouraging the involvement of students with disabilities/LD in university decision-making processes and committees. the University, adheres to the principle that academic, professional, and social integration of people with disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or temporary specific needs, is a shared responsibility of all members of the university community through interaction and coordination among various stakeholders.

Conclusion

The establishment of the Accessibility Unit/support service within Catholic University is the main output of the IDEA project and it will facilitate inclusive education and equity of HE accesses for SwD and students with learning difficulties. Through the AU/support service, the Catholic University establishes inclusive education learning conditions and develops employment opportunities for SwD and students with learning difficulties, being one of the universities that gives this opportunity to students and enhancing its reputation. The university is committed to catholic values, diversity, inclusivity and academic excellence.

The Support Service for students with disabilities and/or Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) and/or temporary specific needs, is the first contact point that plays a strategic role in welcoming and managing services to ensure adequate support for candidates for future students and for students with disabilities and/or SLD and/or temporary specific needs, as well as for teaching and technical administrative staff in carrying out their activities. The Support Service aims to identify needs, define interventions, and monitor the correct implementation of procedures for an ever-improving fulfillment of educational needs and student needs.

The establishment of such a Unit will also raise awareness among the university community, as well as external stakeholders, about the needs and potential of students with disabilities and/or SLD. Also promotes a network of relationships with different organizations and entities in the territory that deal with disability and SLD, including decentralized school offices and secondary/high schools, associations, companies, and job placement agencies.

Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and Procedures Towards the Establishment of the Accessibility Unit

EPOKA UNIVERSITY

Executive Summary

The IDEA (Inclusive tertiary EDucation in the West BAlkanS) project has played a pivotal role in supporting the enhancement of the Accessibility Unit at EPOKA University. This project has provided essential support for drafting and implementing a detailed policy on the Students with disability, which serves as a foundational document for university's accessibility efforts. Furthermore, the IDEA project has facilitated the early launch and three-year pilot phase of the Accessibility Team, enabling the acquisition of assistive technology and the gradual development of staff expertise through the continues trainings conducted during the IDEA project. Ultimately, the IDEA project has been instrumental in propelling our commitment to inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. The establishment of the Accessibility Team at EPOKA University is a proactive initiative aimed at fostering a supportive and inclusive environment for all students with disabilities (SwD), in alignment with the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equal participation. This initiative demonstrates Epoka University's dedication to providing an enriching educational experience for all students and upholding its core values of inclusivity and equal opportunities. Key Objectives of the Document:

- **Providing Context/Introduction:** EPOKA University is dedicated to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment that upholds diversity, equal participation, and a sense of belonging for all students, including those with disabilities. The establishment of an Accessibility Team is a critical initiative towards achieving this commitment. The Accessibility Team under the Dean of Students Office acts as the welcome point that provides initial information and services for all SwD. At the same time, the coordinator of the Dean of Students Office (DoS) will function as secretariat for the smoothing of the participation in all aspects of the academic and social life of the institution enrollment and teaching procedure for the SwD at EPOKA University. Also, the starting of the establishment of the Volunteerism Service composed of students of EPOKA University that will be in function of the SwD.
- **Defining Vision and Mission:** The vision of the Accessibility Team at EPOKA University is to create an accessible and empowering educational experience for every student, ensuring inclusivity and equal opportunities. The mission entails developing and implementing policies, procedures, and initiatives that remove barriers and enhance accessibility for students with disabilities. This involves providing tools, support, and accommodations to ensure equitable access to educational opportunities.

- **Pilot and Road-Mapping Phases:** The pilot phase involves a carefully planned implementation of accessibility measures and support services within a select area of the university, allowing for testing, refining, and optimizing procedures. The road-mapping phase involves scaling successful practices to encompass the entire university, guided by data-driven insights and feedback. At EPOKA University, we started with drafting and approving of the policy on the Students with disability, which serves as a foundational document for university's accessibility efforts. By establishing the Accessibility Team, with a clear vision, well-trained staff, a robust evaluation process, and a structured pilot and road-mapping approach, we aim to foster an inclusive and supportive environment that empowers all students to thrive in their academic pursuits. Again, through the financing of IDEA Project we have purchased assistive technology which is crucial in the implementation of the project.
- **Staffing and Training:** Appropriate staffing with skilled and passionate individuals is essential for the success of the Accessibility Team. Proper training programs will be designed and implemented to equip team members with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively address the unique needs and challenges of SwD. The main focus of the trainings has been to the: Coordinator of DoS; Registrar's Office, Voluntary Support Service, Academic Advisors for SwD, Library Services; Assistive Technology, E-Technology, Building Environment Accessibility, Exam Accommodation Service. All the training of the staff is done by the colleagues of the universities who have the best practices in the establishment of the Accessibility Units (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Masaryk University, University of Limerick).
- **Evaluation and Monitoring:** Continuous evaluation and monitoring processes will be instituted to assess the effectiveness and impact of the Accessibility Team's efforts. Feedback mechanisms will be established to solicit input from students, staff, and stakeholders to inform ongoing improvements and ensure alignment with the university's accessibility goals. Continues improvement of the policies, procedure, forms, assistive technology and infrastructure based on the feedback of all stakeholders.
- **Sustainability and Integration:** Sustainability and integration strategies will be developed to ensure the longevity and seamless integration of accessibility initiatives within EPOKA University's culture and operations. This includes incorporating accessibility considerations into the university's policies, curricula, assistive technology, infrastructure, and practices to create a lasting and inclusive educational environment. Through a steadfast commitment to these pillars, EPOKA University aims to cultivate an atmosphere where every student, regardless of ability or disability, can thrive academically and personally, promoting a stronger and more diverse academic community.

Introduction

EPOKA University is deeply committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment that values diversity, ensures equal participation, and fosters a strong sense of belonging for all its students, including those with disabilities. To achieve this commitment, the university has taken a critical step by establishing an Accessibility Team. This team operates under the supervision of the Dean of Students Office and serves as the primary point of contact for SwD.

The primary role of the Accessibility Team is to offer essential information and support services to SwD, ensuring that they can fully engage with the academic and social life of the university. The Accessibility Team is composed of 20 staff responsible for different issues related to the accommodation of the SwD. This team plays a pivotal role in making sure that no student is left behind, and that all students, regardless of their abilities, have access to the resources and accommodations they need to succeed at EPOKA University. The Accessibility Team is not just a passive support structure; it also takes an active role in addressing any issues or concerns that may arise for SwD. They work closely with the various departments and units within the university to investigate and ensure that appropriate procedures and accommodations are put in place. This means that the Accessibility Team is proactive in identifying and eliminating barriers to accessibility and inclusion.

The Dean of Students Office plays a central role in this effort by providing coordination and secretariat support for the Accessibility Team. The coordinator of the Dean of Students Office acts as the point person for facilitating the participation of SwD in all aspects of university life. This includes ensuring a smooth enrollment process, accommodating their unique teaching and learning needs, and addressing any challenges they may encounter during their time at EPOKA University.

In addition to these institutional measures, EPOKA University is also taking steps to promote a culture of volunteerism and community engagement among its student body. The university is in the process of establishing a Volunteerism Service that will be staffed by EPOKA University students.

This service will focus on supporting SwD and further enhancing their experience at the university. By involving fellow students in this initiative, EPOKA University is reinforcing the sense of community and shared responsibility in ensuring that all students, regardless of their abilities, have the opportunity to thrive and succeed during their academic journey.

In summary, EPOKA University is actively working to create an inclusive and supportive environment for all its students, including those with disabilities, through the establishment of the Accessibility Team and the Volunteerism Service. These initiatives are designed to break down barriers, ensure equal access to education and opportunities, and promote a strong sense of community among all members of the university.

Vision and Mission

The Accessibility Team at EPOKA University is dedicated to fostering an inclusive and empowering educational environment for all students, with a steadfast commitment to equal opportunities. Our vision is to ensure that every student can access and engage in education without any hindrances, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

Our mission revolves around the proactive development and seamless implementation of policies, procedures, and initiatives aimed at dismantling barriers and enriching accessibility for students with disabilities. We are devoted to equipping our students with the tools, support, and necessary accommodations that guarantee a level playing field, granting them equal access to educational opportunities.

Piloting and Road-Mapping Phases

Piloting and Road Mapping Phases are critical components of our comprehensive approach to enhancing accessibility at EPOKA University. These phases are designed to systematically address the needs of students with disabilities, laying the groundwork for a more inclusive and supportive academic environment. Let's explore each of these stages more comprehensively.

Pilot Phase:

- **Objectives and Expected Outcomes:** The pilot phase sets clear objectives and expected outcomes. These objectives could include improving access to education for SwD, enhancing support services, and ensuring compliance with accessibility regulations. The expected outcomes may involve increased enrollment, higher academic performance, and a more inclusive campus culture.
- **Activities during the Piloting Phase:** This phase involves a series of activities. These activities may encompass creating accessible learning materials, modifying physical spaces, conducting staff training on disability awareness and inclusion, and establishing communication channels for feedback from SwD.
- **Needs Assessment for Accessibility Services:** An essential step in this phase is to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment. This assessment helps identify the specific requirements of SwD, such as assistive technology, academic accommodations, or physical access adjustments. Understanding these needs is crucial to tailoring support services effectively.
- **Development of Initial Support Services:** Based on the needs assessment, initial support services are developed. These services could include accessible transportation, accessible classroom materials, sign language interpreters, and accessible websites. The goal is to address identified barriers to inclusion.
- **Pilot Testing of Support Services:** The support services are tested within a select area of the university. This involves collecting feedback from both SwD and staff to refine and optimize the services. The pilot phase serves as a testing ground to ensure that the accessibility measures are effective and meet the needs of the students.

Road-Mapping Phase:

- **Transition from the Pilot Phase:** The road-mapping phase is about transitioning from the initial pilot phase to full-scale implementation. It's about taking the lessons learned from the pilot and applying them university-wide.
- **Key Steps and Activities Involved in Road-Mapping:** Key steps include expanding the accessibility initiatives to all areas of the university, replicating successful practices, and integrating accessibility into the university's long-term strategic planning. It involves setting clear milestones and objectives to track progress.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback:** Engaging with students, faculty, staff, and the broader community is vital. This phase includes collecting feedback, reviewing best practices, and ensuring ongoing collaboration with SwD to make necessary adjustments.
- **Resource Allocation:** Securing funding and resources for scaling up accessibility initiatives is crucial. This may involve budget allocation, seeking grants, or collaborating with external partners to sustain and expand accessibility efforts.
- **Staff Recruitment and Training:** Hiring and training additional staff to support the increased demand for accessibility services is necessary. Staff should be well-versed in disability awareness, assistive technology, and accommodation procedures. Accessibility Team has been established by the Decision of the Rectorate of EPOKA University No. 08, dated 08.11.2022. *Annex No. II. Accessibility Team at EPOKA University*. The Accessibility Team is composed of 20 academic and administrative staff employed full time at EPOKA University responsible for issues related to the accommodation of the SwD.
- **Assistive Technology Equipment Mapping:** Identifying and deploying the right assistive technology is an essential part of the road-mapping phase. This includes ensuring that all students have access to the assistive technology they need for their academic success. EPOKA University has purchased with the financing of the IDEA project assistive technology.
- **Curriculum and Infrastructure Adjustments:** Making necessary adjustments to the curriculum, both in terms of content and delivery, as well as addressing infrastructure improvements to ensure physical accessibility throughout the university.
- **Legal and Policy Framework Development:** As part of the road-mapping phase, it's important to solidify the legal and policy framework to ensure sustainability and compliance of accessibility efforts. This includes policies on inclusive education, anti-discrimination, and ongoing evaluation and improvement processes. Since the starting of IDEA Project EPOKA University has approved the policy on the Students with disability, which serves as a foundational document for university's accessibility efforts.

In summary, EPOKA University's approach to enhancing accessibility involves a well-structured pilot phase that paves the way for a comprehensive road-mapping phase. By following these meticulously planned stages, the university is committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment that empowers all students to excel in their academic pursuits, ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of education. Through these phases, the university aims to set a model for inclusive education that can be emulated and adapted by institutions worldwide.

Staffing and Training

Staffing and training are fundamental pillars of ensuring the success and effectiveness of an Accessibility Team, particularly in an educational institution like EPOKA University. Let's delve deeper into the importance of these elements and how they contribute to enhancing the support provided to SwD.

Staffing:

Skills and Passion: Appointing individuals with the right skills and a genuine passion for supporting SwD is paramount. These individuals should possess empathy, patience, and a strong desire to make a positive impact on the lives of those they serve. Their commitment to the cause is essential, as it directly affects the quality of services provided.

Diverse Expertise: It's crucial to build a diverse team that brings different expertise to the table. For instance, having staff with backgrounds in education, psychology, assistive technology, and counseling can help address the multifaceted needs of SwD.

Training Programs:

- *Customized Curriculum:* Effective training programs must be tailor-made to address the unique challenges faced by SwD. These programs should encompass a range of topics, from understanding various disabilities and their implications for learning to strategies for accommodating students effectively.
- *Targeted Training Groups:* As mentioned, specific departments and units within the university should receive targeted training. For instance:
 - *Coordinator of DoS:* The Director of Studies plays a pivotal role in the academic journey of students. Training them ensures that they are well-equipped to make academic decisions that consider the needs of SwD.
 - *Registrar's Office:* This office manages student records and academic processes. Training staff here is essential for proper documentation and record-keeping to ensure that accommodations are provided as needed.
 - *Voluntary Support Service:* Volunteers can play a vital role in supporting SwD. Training them helps ensure that they can provide effective assistance and emotional support.
 - *Academic Advisors for SwD:* These advisors need to understand the unique needs of their advisees and help them navigate their academic paths successfully.
 - *Library Services:* Ensuring that the library is accessible to all students is critical. Training library staff on how to assist SwD and provide accessible resources is essential.
 - *Assistive Technology and E-Technology:* These resources are invaluable for SwD. Training staff to assist students in using these tools effectively is essential.
 - *Building Environment Accessibility:* Ensuring that the physical infrastructure of the university is accessible is essential. This might include training maintenance and facilities staff.
 - *Exam Accommodation Service:* Staff involved in exam accommodations need to be well-trained to ensure that students receive the appropriate support during assessments.

Learning from Best Practices:

The decision to model EPOKA University's Accessibility Team after universities with successful Accessibility Units, such as the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Masaryk University, and the University of Limerick, is a strategic move. Learning from institutions with established best practices can expedite the development and effectiveness of EPOKA University's Accessibility Team. EPOKA University staff have been participating in more than 9 trainings the main topics are: - Initial Training of Registrar Office, Voluntary Service; Transport; - On inclusive education, universal design for learning, education for all. The infrastructure, IT and assistive technology, and other facilities that the Support Center for students with special needs "Teiresiás".

These experiences provide valuable insights into what works and what doesn't, helping EPOKA University avoid common pitfalls and adopt successful strategies right from the outset.

In summary, staffing and training are integral to creating an effective Accessibility Team at EPOKA University. The commitment to assembling a passionate and skilled team, customized training programs, and the wisdom gained from successful models all contribute to providing exceptional support for SwD and fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Evaluation and Monitoring

In our unwavering commitment to promoting accessibility within our academic community, we recognize that establishing and maintaining an Accessibility Team is just the beginning. To ensure that our accessibility efforts are not only effective but also impactful, we have implemented a robust system of continuous evaluation and monitoring. This system is designed to provide us with valuable insights, allowing us to refine our strategies, adapt to changing needs, and maintain alignment with our university's accessibility objectives.

Feedback Mechanisms:

To facilitate this process, we have established comprehensive feedback mechanisms. These mechanisms serve as a vital conduit for gathering input from various stakeholders, including students, staff, and community members. We understand that these diverse perspectives are invaluable in shaping the direction and success of our accessibility initiatives.

By actively seeking input from those directly affected by our efforts, we empower individuals to voice their concerns, share their experiences, and contribute ideas for improvement. This inclusive approach ensures that we remain responsive to the needs and expectations of our entire community.

Continuous Improvement:

The feedback received through these mechanisms serves as the cornerstone of our commitment to continuous improvement. It informs every aspect of our work, from policies and procedures to the development of forms and the integration of assistive technology. Infrastructure enhancements are also guided by this feedback to create an environment that is truly accessible to all. Through a cyclical process of assessment and adaptation, we aim to maintain a dynamic accessibility ecosystem that evolves in response to the ever-changing landscape of student needs, technological advancements, and emerging best practices in accessibility.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

In our pursuit of excellence, we have also established key performance indicators (KPIs) to gauge the effectiveness of our Accessibility Team. A fundamental KPI is the presence of experienced staff within the team. We understand that expertise is pivotal in addressing the multifaceted challenges of accessibility. Therefore, our KPI assesses whether all members of the Accessibility Team possess the knowledge, skills, and dedication required to make a meaningful impact in this field.

Policy Framework:

To ensure the provision of successful services for students with disabilities (SwD), we have crafted a dedicated policy, titled "On Students with Disabilities." This policy framework outlines our commitment to fostering an inclusive academic environment. It provides a roadmap for addressing the specific needs of SwD and serves as a guiding document for our Accessibility Team. Regular evaluations of this policy, coupled with feedback from stakeholders, guide its continuous refinement and adaptation to emerging requirements.

Incorporating Stakeholder Feedback:

The role of our stakeholders in shaping the trajectory of our accessibility initiatives cannot be overstated. Their input drives the evolution of our services and policies, and we remain steadfast in our commitment to incorporating their feedback. Their unique perspectives and experiences serve as the compass that guides our efforts towards an ever-more accessible university experience.

EPOKA UNIVERSITY's dedication to accessibility extends far beyond mere rhetoric. We have built a comprehensive framework for evaluation, monitoring, and adaptation, grounded in the invaluable input of our diverse stakeholders. By combining these essential elements, we ensure that our Accessibility Team remains agile, responsive, and effective in its mission to create an inclusive and accessible educational environment for all.

Sustainability and Integration

EPOKA University is dedicated to fostering a culture of accessibility and inclusivity. To ensure the enduring success and seamless integration of our accessibility initiatives, we are developing robust sustainability and integration strategies. These strategies encompass the incorporation of accessibility considerations into every facet of our university, from policies and curricula to assistive technology, infrastructure, and practices. Our goal is to establish a lasting and inclusive educational environment that accommodates the diverse needs of all our students, regardless of ability or disability. By steadfastly committing to these principles, EPOKA University strives to create an academic community where every student can not only thrive academically but also personally, ultimately promoting a stronger and more diverse academic ecosystem.

- Epoka University recognizes the importance of equipping our educational environment with the necessary resources to support SwD. To this end, with the financing of the IDEA project we have purchased assistive technology and equipment (*Annex III. List of Purchase assistive technology.*) These acquisitions will significantly enhance the learning experience for SwD, ensuring they have access to the tools they need to excel in their academic pursuits.
- EPOKA University is committed to seamlessly integrating the efforts of our dedicated Accessibility Team into our broader strategic plan. By aligning our accessibility initiatives with our strategic goals, we aim to create a more inclusive and accommodating environment for all students.
- Recognizing the financial challenges that SwD may face, Epoka University is dedicated to providing scholarship opportunities tailored to their needs. These scholarships are designed to support and empower SwD on their educational journey.
- EPOKA University is dedicated to raising awareness and fostering inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education. We conduct ongoing open forums for both our staff and students, creating a space for open dialogues and the sharing of ideas. By engaging in these conversations, we strive to build a more inclusive and supportive community that embraces the unique perspectives and needs of all our students. At the same time, through financing by IDEA project we have purchased promotional materials which serve for the dissemination of the of the project based also on the Dissemination Plan of IDEA Project.

At the same time, EPOKA University under the coordination of the leader of the project POLIS University has drafted the Dissemination Report Table for the IDEA Project where are included all the Trainings of the staff, Open forums, Publication of the Events on the web and social media, and preparation of a promotional video for the dissemination and raising awareness for the inclusion of the SwD in the higher education system.

Conclusion

EPOKA University has taken significant and comprehensive measures to create an inclusive and accessible educational environment for all its students, including those with disabilities. The establishment of the Accessibility Team and the Volunteerism Service demonstrates the university's commitment to breaking down barriers, providing equal access to education and opportunities, and fostering a sense of community among all members of the institution. Through a well-structured pilot phase and a thoughtful road-mapping phase, EPOKA University is addressing the unique needs of SwD systematically and proactively. The university draws inspiration from successful models in the field to expedite the development of its Accessibility Team, ensuring it can provide exceptional support to SwD. Staffing and training are recognized as vital components of this initiative, ensuring that the team is well-equipped to address the multifaceted challenges of accessibility. The university's commitment to continuous evaluation and monitoring, including feedback mechanisms, key performance indicators, and policy framework, reflects its dedication to refining strategies, adapting to changing needs, and maintaining alignment with accessibility objectives. To sustain and integrate these efforts, EPOKA University is embedding accessibility considerations into its policies, curricula, technology, infrastructure, and practices. The university is not only providing assistive technology but also offering scholarship opportunities for SwD, fostering awareness and inclusion, and aligning its accessibility initiatives with its broader strategic plan.

In summary, EPOKA University's commitment to accessibility and inclusion extends beyond rhetoric, as it has developed a comprehensive framework to ensure an enduring and inclusive educational environment for all its students.

Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and Procedures Towards the Establishment of the Accessibility Unit

UNIVERSITY OF PRISHTINA

Executive Summary

The IDEA (Inclusive tertiary EDucation in the West BAlkanS) project has been a cornerstone in the journey of fostering inclusivity in higher education by supporting students with special needs at the University of Prishtina. While the establishment of a formal Accessibility Unit may not be immediately realized, the university has demonstrated unwavering dedication to facilitating support structures within its existing institutional framework. This endeavor has been pivotal in shaping and implementing a comprehensive policy for students with special needs. This policy not only serves as a foundational document for the university's accessibility initiatives but is also a testament to the institution's commitment to promoting inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. It is a profound step towards ensuring that no student is left behind.

The University of Prishtina is actively engaged in redefining the roles of its administrative officers who handle student matters. A thorough job description is being crafted for these officers, with at least one designated per Faculty. These officers will assume responsibilities within the scope of accessibility units, with their expertise honed through training sessions led by project experts. Moreover, they will be equipped with resources acquired through the project, and additional training opportunities will be made available to them.

The primary objective underpinning the reassignment of roles to administrative officers is the creation of a more inclusive and accessible learning environment within the university. These officers are pivotal in ensuring equitable and responsive education catering to the diverse needs of the student population. Their focus on students with special needs, including Specific Learning Disabilities (SwLD), reflects the University of Prishtina's ambition to foster a university culture rooted in respect, the eradication of disability discrimination, and the promotion of effective inclusion.

Introduction

The appointment of new roles for administrative officers in the 14 Faculties of the University of Prishtina represents a pivotal moment in the institution's commitment to advancing higher education accessibility in the Western Balkans. This proactive approach exemplifies the university's dedication to fortifying its administrative capacity to meet the diverse needs of students with special requirements.

This cadre of officers, seamlessly integrated into the day-to-day administrative operations of the University of Prishtina, will act as a dynamic task force capable of coordinating efficiently to serve students with special needs. They will harness available resources, expertise, and support systems to advance accessibility and inclusivity in higher education. In preparation for the allocation of duties and responsibilities to these administrative officers, facilitated by the IDEA team, the University of Prishtina initiated a forward-thinking policy framework addressing the needs of students with special requirements. This policy functions as a strategic guidepost, actively advocating for inclusivity and striving to eliminate discrimination against this segment of the student body.

Vision and Mission

Vision: The vision for the administrative officers within the University of Prishtina is rooted in the transformation of the institution's approach to matters concerning students with special needs. It envisions a higher education environment that goes beyond the traditional boundaries and makes it genuinely inclusive, ensuring that every student, irrespective of their individual requirements, can fully participate and thrive within the academic community.

In a more detailed breakdown, the vision encompasses several key elements:

- **Holistic Inclusivity:** The administrative officers aspire to create an academic community where inclusivity is not just a buzzword but a fundamental ethos. They aim for an environment where every student, regardless of their specific needs,

feels welcomed, valued, and supported. This extends to students with disabilities, Specific Learning Disabilities (SWLD), and other unique requirements.

- **Equal Educational Opportunities:** The vision underscores the importance of providing equal educational opportunities to all students. It goes beyond mere access and focuses on tailoring the learning experience to accommodate diverse learning styles and needs. This means creating a level playing field where no student is disadvantaged due to their unique requirements.
- **Eliminating Barriers:** The administrative officers aim to dismantle the barriers that may hinder students with special needs from realizing their full potential. This includes addressing physical, informational, and attitudinal barriers that may exist within the institution.
- **Transformative Learning:** The vision entails a shift in the traditional paradigm of education. It strives to implement teaching and learning approaches that are adaptable and responsive, ensuring that every student's educational journey is a transformative and enriching experience.
- **Fostering Independence:** A key aspect of the vision is to empower students with special needs to become independent learners and active contributors to the academic community. This involves providing the necessary support, tools, and resources to enable students to self-advocate and navigate their educational path effectively.
- **Enhanced Diversity and Enriched Learning:** The vision celebrates diversity as a source of strength and enrichment for the entire academic community. It envisions a university where differences are valued and embraced, contributing to a more vibrant and dynamic learning environment.

Mission: The mission of the administrative officers is multifaceted and deeply committed to realizing the vision outlined above. It is a set of core principles and actions that guide their daily work:

- **Student-Centric Approach:** The primary mission is to place students at the center of decision-making and support systems. This means actively listening to their needs, challenges, and aspirations and tailoring solutions to address their unique requirements.

- **Advocacy and Support:** The officers act as advocates for students with special needs, ensuring that their voices are heard and their rights protected. They provide unwavering support in navigating the academic landscape, connecting students with necessary resources, accommodations, and services.
- **Accessible Learning Environments:** The mission involves actively working to create an academic environment that is universally accessible. This includes not only physical accessibility but also accessible learning materials, technology, and curriculum.
- **Collaboration and Training:** Administrative officers collaborate closely with faculty, staff, and fellow students to foster a culture of inclusion. They engage in ongoing training to stay informed about best practices and ensure they can provide the most effective support.
- **Continuous Improvement:** The mission entails a commitment to continuous improvement. Officers are dedicated to assessing the effectiveness of their efforts and seeking ways to enhance the inclusivity and accessibility of higher education continually.
- **Data-Driven Decision-Making:** The officers gather and analyze data to inform their actions and recommendations. This data-driven approach helps identify areas where improvements are needed and where best practices can be scaled.
- **Awareness and Education:** Part of the mission is to raise awareness and educate the entire university community about the importance of inclusivity and the specific needs of students with disabilities. This fosters a more understanding and supportive environment.

The vision and mission of the administrative officers revolve around fundamentally transforming the University of Prishtina into a place where every student, regardless of their special needs, has the opportunity to excel academically and become an integral part of the institution's vibrant academic community.

Piloting Phase

The Piloting Phase is a critical stage in the process of redefining roles for administrative officers within the University of Prishtina to enhance inclusivity and accessibility for students with special needs. This phase lays the groundwork for the larger initiative, and its success is vital for the effective implementation of these changes. Here, we'll elaborate on the two key components of the Piloting Phase: (i) involvement of stakeholders and solicitation of input, and (ii) the development of legal and policy frameworks.

1. Involvement of Stakeholders and Solicitation of Input:

Engagement with Key Stakeholders: This phase begins with active engagement with all relevant stakeholders. This includes university administrators, faculty members, students, students with special needs, disability support services, and external experts or organizations with experience in inclusive education. Stakeholders play a crucial role in shaping the initiative, as their perspectives and insights are essential for its success.

Consultation and Collaboration: The project team initiates a structured process for consultation and collaboration with stakeholders. This may involve interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, and workshops to gather diverse viewpoints and understand the needs, concerns, and expectations of different groups. By actively involving stakeholders, the project aims to create a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the initiative.

Needs Assessment: A thorough needs assessment is conducted to identify specific challenges and barriers that students with special needs face within the university. This assessment may encompass physical, academic, technological, and attitudinal barriers. It aims to provide a clear understanding of the existing gaps and opportunities for improvement.

Feedback Mechanisms: The stakeholders are provided with opportunities to provide ongoing feedback during the piloting phase. This feedback loop is essential for making timely adjustments, addressing concerns, and ensuring that the initiative remains responsive to the needs of the university community.

2. Development of Legal and Policy Frameworks:

Legal Review: In this phase, the existing legal framework related to special needs rights and education is reviewed thoroughly. This includes local and national laws, international conventions, and standards such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and relevant domestic legislation. The legal review ensures that the initiative aligns with and complies with all applicable regulations.

Policy Framework Development and finalization of regulation: Based on the legal review and stakeholder input, the project team collaborates with legal experts and policy advisors to draft a comprehensive policy framework that addresses the needs of students with special needs. This framework will outline the rights, responsibilities, and provisions for students with disabilities, as well as the roles and responsibilities of administrative officers and other stakeholders. In order to confirm that the regulation for students with special needs has been accepted as the guiding document at the University of Prishtina, the vice rector for quality assurance has issued a letter of recommendation with protocol number: 1/519 dated: 22.06.2023 to endorse the efforts of IDEA project and University of Prishtina's coordinator Prof. Dr. Naser Zabeli in supporting the advancement of inclusion of students with special needs in University of Prishtina and institutionalizing such mechanisms through this regulation.

Alignment with the University's Mission: Throughout the development process, the legal and policy frameworks are aligned with the University of Prishtina's broader mission and strategic objectives. This alignment ensures that the initiative is integrated into the university's core values and long-term planning.

Transparency and Communication: The legal and policy frameworks are communicated transparently to the university community. This involves sharing drafts, soliciting feedback, and creating awareness about the new policies and their implications. Clear communication is essential to ensure that all stakeholders understand the changes and their roles in implementation.

The Piloting Phase is a crucial juncture in the initiative to redefine roles for administrative officers at the University of Prishtina. It involves thorough engagement with stakeholders, solicitation of input, a legal review, and the development of legal and policy frameworks to establish the foundation for a more inclusive and accessible higher education environment. The success of this phase is instrumental in achieving the project's overarching goals.

Staffing and Training

The Staffing and Training phase is a pivotal component of the initiative to redefine roles for administrative officers within the University of Prishtina, with a focus on enhancing inclusivity and accessibility for students with special needs. This phase is integral to the successful execution of the project and ensuring that administrative officers are adequately prepared for their roles. Here, we will elaborate on the details of the Staffing and Training phase, particularly the training and continuous professional development of administrative offices across 14 Faculties who will be addressing issues related to students with special needs.

1. Training Program Development includes:

- Customized Training: A comprehensive and customized training program is developed to meet the specific needs of administrative officers who will be responsible for students with special needs. This program is tailored to address the diverse nature of disabilities and unique requirements that students may have.
- Multidisciplinary Approach: The training program incorporates a multidisciplinary approach, involving experts in special education, disability studies, psychology, and other relevant fields. It ensures that the training content is well-rounded and effective in addressing the challenges students with special needs may encounter.
- Legal and Ethical Frameworks: Administrative officers receive training on relevant legal and ethical frameworks related to disabilities and special education. This includes understanding disability rights, anti-discrimination laws, and ethical considerations in serving students with disabilities.

2. Content of Training includes:

- Awareness: Administrative officers are educated about various disabilities, including physical disabilities, sensory impairments, mental health conditions, and Specific Learning Disabilities (SwLD). They gain insight into the experiences and needs of students with these diverse disabilities.

- **Inclusive Education Practices:** The training emphasizes inclusive education practices, teaching administrative officers how to create a welcoming and accessible learning environment. It covers topics such as universal design for learning, accessible instructional materials, and inclusive classroom strategies.
- **Effective Communication:** Administrative officers learn effective communication strategies, including how to interact with students with special needs respectfully and inclusively. This training fosters an understanding of how to provide support without undermining a student's autonomy.
- **Assistive Technology:** Given the importance of technology in education, administrative officers receive training on assistive technologies that can aid students with disabilities. They learn to identify and provide access to the necessary assistive tools and software.

3. Continuous Professional Development includes:

- **Ongoing Training Modules:** Professional development does not end with the initial training. The project includes a plan for ongoing training modules. This ensures that administrative officers remain updated on best practices and can adapt to evolving needs and technologies.
- **Communities of Practice:** Administrative officers have access to communities of practice where they can share experiences, learn from each other, and collaborate to address complex issues. This fosters a culture of continuous learning and peer support.
- **Feedback Loops:** Regular feedback mechanisms are established to collect insights from administrative officers and students. This feedback informs future training modules, allowing the training program to be responsive to the specific needs of the university community.
- **The Staffing and Training phase** is a comprehensive and ongoing process that equips administrative officers with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively address the needs of students with special requirements. This commitment to training and professional development ensures that the university's administrative staff is well-prepared to promote inclusivity and accessibility within the institution.

4. Training under IDEA project

IDEA project also provided several training modules implanted within the scope of the project. Academic and administrative staff from University of Prishtina have participated in such training opportunities depending on the topic covered or staff profile and responsibilities. In the table below, we have summarized the training opportunities offered under IDEA project. Also, below we provide the list of other support mechanisms carried out under the IDEA project to support professional development such as workshops, study visits and other events related to professional development in the field of students with special need and inclusion in higher education

NAME OF THE TRAINING	RESPONSIBLE UNIVERSITY	TARGET AUDIENCE	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Initial Training of Registrar Office, Voluntary Support & Transport Services' Coordinators	Donja Gorica University in Podgorica	Students, Staff, social visitors	The main topics of the training were on the rights of persons with disabilities in Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, the sharing of best practices by the Accessibility Unit of the Kapodistrian University of Athens on the characteristics, registration, voluntary support service, transportation, staff skills, needs, particular cultural contexts for students with disabilities and learning difficulties.
Training of Built Environment Accessibility Consultants	Polis University	Students, Staff, social visitors	Universities discussed about standards, needs, the policy and legal framework and how accessible and inclusive are University campuses for students with disabilities in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro. Also, best practices were shared from the Accessibility Unit of the Kapodistrian University of Athens and the NGOs for disabled persons.

Initial Training of Academic Advisors: support services for SWD; Training of Academic Advisors on Inclusive Teaching, Learning & Assessment Methods; Initial Training of International Relations Offices' Coordinators & Career Officers	Donja Gorica in Podgorica University	Students, Staff, social visitors	The trainings focused on best practices on support services for Students with Disabilities by the academic advisors, on inclusive teaching, learning and assessment methods, as well as international mobility and career services from the International Relations and Career Offices at the Universities.
D2.3.7 Training of Trainers on the practical challenges Swd face in their studies and employment D2.3.12 Follow-up training of International Relations Offices' Coordinators & Career Officers	Limerick University	Students, Staff, social visitors	Follow-up Training
Follow-up Training of E-Accessibility Coordinators on the Relay Service	University Donja Gorica in Podgorica	Students, Staff, social visitors	Follow-up Training
Follow-up Training of Library Services' Coordinators on AT-based solutions	POLIS University	Students, Staff, social visitors	Follow-up Training

Follow-up Training of E-Accessibility Coordinators on AT-based solutions and D2.2.2 Follow-up Training of Academic Advisors: support services for SWD training	<i>In Prishtina</i>	Students, Staff, social visitors	Follow-up Training
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5. Equipment Mapping

In this section, we offer an overview list of the assistive technology equipment and software that University of Prishtina has benefited from IDEA and how the later have been integrated to the Accessibility Unit (specific officers in 14 Faculties administrations as specified in this report).

The IDEA project has offered a list of equipment to the University of Prishtina to support students with special needs in higher education. This equipment includes:

- Personal bundled computers / All-in-one PC (x14): These PCs are equipped with 10th Generation Intel Core i5 processors, 8GB DDR4 RAM, 256GB SSD, a 23.8" Full HD display, Windows 11, and various connectivity options. The administrative staff at the university will ensure that these computers are provided to students with special needs, ensuring they have the necessary hardware for their studies.
- Laptops (x3): These laptops include a high-performance Intel Core i7 processor, ample RAM and storage, and various features such as touchscreen functionality, which can be used by students with special needs. The project coordinator and faculty staff will allocate these laptops appropriately to support those who require them.
- Headsets (x14): These headsets come with features like noise cancellation and volume control, making them suitable for students who may need assistance with audio quality during virtual lectures or discussions. The administrative staff will distribute these headsets to the students who need them.

- Cameras for PC (x14): These cameras have features like autofocus and automatic low-light correction, which can be beneficial for students with special needs participating in online classes. Faculty staff will ensure that these cameras are available to those students who require them.
- Voice Amplifiers with Wireless Microphone Headset (x5): These amplifiers can be used in various educational settings, including classrooms and meetings. They can benefit students with hearing impairments or communication difficulties. The project coordinator and faculty staff will manage the distribution and usage of these amplifiers.
- Conference System Studio (x1): This advanced conferencing system can facilitate high-quality video conferences, making it accessible to students with special needs who require remote learning accommodations. Faculty staff will organize and maintain this equipment for use in virtual classrooms.
- OrCam Read Smart (x1): This AI assistive reader can be a valuable tool for students with reading difficulties. Faculty staff will provide this device to students who require it to access and comprehend text effectively.
- Book & Document Scanners (x2): These scanners, powered by AI technology, can help digitize books and documents, making them accessible to students with visual impairments. Faculty staff will manage and make these scanners available to those who need them.
- 4K Video Cameras (x2): These cameras can be used for recording lectures and tutorials, providing content in high quality for students with special needs. The project coordinator and faculty staff will oversee the use and distribution of these cameras.
- Braille and Large Print English Letters Computer Keyboard Stickers (x1): This keyboard sticker can assist students with visual impairments in using computers more effectively. The faculty staff will provide this sticker to the students who require it.
- The administrative staff of the 14 faculties, along with the project coordinator at the Faculty of Education, will collaborate to ensure that this equipment is distributed and used effectively to support the specific needs of students in higher education. They will identify and prioritize the students who require this equipment and provide the necessary training and support to ensure its optimal utilization. Additionally, they will maintain and service the equipment to ensure it remains in good working condition, making it a valuable resource for students with special needs.

Evaluation and Monitoring

Monitoring and Evaluation is a critical component of the initiative to redefine the roles of administrative officers within the University of Prishtina. It provides a systematic and data-driven approach to assess the effectiveness of the administrative officers' work in the 14 Faculties and ensures that the project remains aligned with its goals and objectives. This phase involves the establishment of key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate the impact and progress of the initiative.

1. Development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

Measurable Goals: The first step in this phase is to define clear and measurable goals for the administrative officers' roles. These goals should align with the broader mission of creating an inclusive and accessible environment for students with special needs. For example, KPIs may include increased student participation, higher academic success rates, and greater satisfaction among students with disabilities.

Quantifiable Metrics: KPIs are selected based on quantifiable metrics that allow for objective assessment. These metrics may encompass data such as the number of students served, the accessibility of academic materials, student retention rates, and the provision of necessary accommodations.

2. Data Collection and Analysis:

Data Sources: Data is collected from various sources, including administrative reports, surveys, interviews, and student feedback. Administrative officers play a crucial role in collecting and providing data, ensuring the accuracy and relevance of the information.

Data Analysis: The collected data is rigorously analyzed to assess the impact of administrative officers' actions. This analysis goes beyond quantitative metrics and includes qualitative insights, which can help in understanding the student experience better.

3. Regular Assessment:

Periodic Reviews: The monitoring and evaluation process is ongoing and periodic, with regular reviews conducted at defined intervals (e.g., quarterly, annually). These reviews help identify trends, track progress, and pinpoint areas that require improvement.

Feedback Loops: Feedback mechanisms are established to gather insights from students, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders. This feedback helps in assessing the qualitative impact of the administrative officers' efforts and making necessary adjustments.

4. Stakeholder Involvement:

Stakeholder Input: Input from stakeholders, including students with special needs and faculty, is actively sought during the monitoring and evaluation process. Their perspectives are invaluable in understanding the effectiveness of the administrative officers' work.

Collaborative Decision-Making: The findings from the evaluation process are used in collaborative decision-making. If improvements are needed, stakeholders work together to develop strategies and action plans to address any identified challenges.

5. Continuous Improvement:

Adaptation and Learning: The monitoring and evaluation process is not just about assessment but also about learning and adaptation. KPIs indicate progress in certain aspects of the initiative – the project team can adjust strategies and allocate resources

Best Practice Sharing: Best practices identified during the evaluation process are shared with other faculties and institutions, facilitating the dissemination of successful strategies for creating inclusive and accessible environments.

6. Reporting and Accountability:

Transparent Reporting: Regular reports on the monitoring and evaluation results are prepared and shared with the university administration and relevant stakeholders. These reports provide transparency and accountability in demonstrating the impact of the initiative.

Accountability Mechanisms: Accountability mechanisms are established to ensure that responsible parties, including administrative officers and relevant university departments, act upon the findings and recommendations of the evaluation process.

7. Review and Adaptation:

Periodic Reevaluation: The KPIs and the entire evaluation framework are subject to periodic reevaluation to ensure that they remain relevant and aligned with the evolving needs and goals of the university and its students.

Adaptation to Changing Needs: The monitoring and evaluation process is adaptive, allowing for adjustments based on the changing needs of students and developments in the field of inclusive education.

In summary, the Monitoring and Evaluation phase is a systematic and iterative process that assesses the effectiveness of the work carried out by administrative officers in the 14 Faculties. It involves the establishment of KPIs, data collection and analysis, regular reviews, stakeholder involvement, and a commitment to continuous improvement. This phase ensures that the initiative remains responsive, accountable, and aligned with its mission to create an inclusive and accessible learning environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the University of Prishtina's initiative to redefine roles for administrative officers in all 14 faculties is a commendable and forward-thinking endeavor. It reflects the institution's commitment to advancing higher education accessibility and inclusivity in the Western Balkans. The vision and mission established for these administrative officers underscore a transformative approach to education, one that seeks to eliminate barriers and provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their unique requirements.

The Piloting Phase of the project, involving stakeholder engagement, input solicitation, and the development of legal and policy frameworks, is a critical step in laying the foundation for a more inclusive and accessible higher education environment. The involvement of stakeholders ensures that the initiative is shaped by the perspectives and needs of the university community, and the legal and policy frameworks align with international standards and local regulations.

The Staffing and Training phase is pivotal, focusing on equipping administrative officers with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively support students with special needs. The commitment to ongoing training and professional development ensures that administrative staff can adapt to evolving needs and technologies, fostering a culture of continuous learning and peer support.

The equipment mapping section highlights the University of Prishtina's efforts to provide assistive technology to support students with special needs. The allocation and management of this equipment are essential for meeting the diverse needs of students and ensuring they have the necessary tools to excel academically.

Overall, the University of Prishtina's initiative represents a significant step towards creating an inclusive and accessible higher education environment, where every student has the opportunity to thrive. The commitment to transparency, collaboration, and continuous improvement is commendable, and the university's dedication to this cause is likely to have a profound and positive impact on the educational landscape in the Western Balkans.

Piloting and Road-Mapping of Processes and Procedures Towards the Establishment of the Accessibility Unit

International Business College Mitrovica

Executive Summary

The IDEA (Inclusive tertiary EDucation in the West BAlkanS) project has initiated and supported the establishment of Accessibility Unit at International Business College Mitrovica (IBC-M). The project's role reflects in providing essential tools for drafting and implementing the IBC-M Policy on students with disabilities. The Policy sets out requirements to support inclusion of students with disabilities (SwD) and students with learning difficulties. Inclusive education, entirely engaging all students in quality education, is effective in providing all students with equal opportunities to study, even with challenges that remain in its implementation. This refers to a complete approach throughout the whole study cycle, starting from the admission or enrolment in a college, dealing with technical issues regarding facilities and services, participation in programs and courses, and providing complete assistance to SwD which will be aimed at their full inclusion in the labor market upon graduation.

The developed Policy has provided a crucial base for further IBC-M intention in making the institution accessible for all students. As a result, the Accessibility Unit has been launched at IBC-M during the IDEA project life, empowering the investment in assistive technology and constant staff capacity building. The purchased equipment and IBC-M staff trained to utilize it has helped IBC-M to enable maximum accessibility and appropriate environment that will suitably accommodate all IBC-M students. Following this main goal, the Accessibility Unit's responsibility is to ensure that college meets its obligation towards SwD in providing legitimate academic standards and necessary logistic support access in facility, strongly dedicated to encourage SwD to be engaged with all college units and relevant staff.

This Accessibility Unit provides a range of supporting services to SwD aiming to help them to develop and build up knowledge, skills and competences, as well as assist them to reach their educational and professional goals. By focusing on students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties, IBC-M aims to offer an equal opportunities and involvement of SwD into the study process with the purpose of their full inclusion, providing access to flexible learning choices for achieving educational goals.

Introduction

The establishment and full operation of Accessibility Units is one of the most important, and at the same time tangible outcome of the IDEA project, demonstrating IDEA's commitment to improving higher education accessibility in the Western Balkans. Following this goal, IBC-M by establishing its Accessibility Units has shown efforts to provide an inclusive and accessible learning environment for students with disabilities and learning difficulties to achieve their fullest potential.

The IBC-M Accessibility Unit serves as a key touchpoint dedicated to supporting the range of access needs that students may have. As the integrated part within the Student Service, but in cooperation with all other IBC-M departments and staff, the Accessibility Unit provides individualized support services and resources to meet students' diverse needs.

The IBC-M Accessibility Unit, by making reasonable adjustments to meet specific requirements, strives to make everyone who wants to study at IBC-M to feel welcome and find the experience rewarding. The Unit is committed to ensuring that IBC-M does not discriminate against students with disabilities and learning difficulties in relation to access to information, lessons or assessment.

Vision and Mission

IBC-M, supported by its Accessibility Unit, will be a comprehensively accessible and universally inclusive of all students with disabilities, recognizing every individual as a respected and contributing leader of society.

The IBC-M Accessibility Unit is committed to promoting equitable access to education for all students with disabilities, expending opportunity for students to articulate their strengths and responding to their learning needs. The Unit provides students the possibility to reach their full potential by coordinating academic accommodations and support services, fostering a college environment of belonging, inclusion and respect.

Piloting Phase

The Piloting Phase of IBC-M Accessibility Unit is undertaken with the purpose of testing a feasibility of the Unit and evaluating its early impacts in order to inform stakeholders for its importance. Following the main goal reflected in building up institutional capacity to respond to diverse students' needs, the pilot phase aims to generate a demand for support services, build institutional capacity, ensure assistive technology and staff trained to provide needed support to students with disabilities. The initial step in this process is getting the need for accessibility services based on the needs assessment which has proven IBC-M potentials towards higher accessibility and inclusiveness. The initial support services, undertaken by the Unit in the pilot phase, are the following:

- Systematic and detailed registration of the disabled students' needs in the admission process,
- Individual assessment in order to determine main obstacles of SwD during the educational process,
- Personal assistive technology service offers the infrastructure and appropriate tools needed for testing and assessing an available assistive technology,
- Conversation of educational materials into accessible format for SwD,
- In-class assistance and adjustments to classrooms and assessment conditions,
- Individual and group psychological and academic counseling to SwD,
- Volunteerism service for SwD who needs assistance on a day-to-day basis,
- Buildings' accessibility service evaluates the physical accessibility of environment, facilitates and provides an access to college premises and educational activities,
- Accessible library service provides technical support regarding available hardware and software for SwD,
- Guidelines service provide instructions and standardization on procedures applied on SwD during their studies,
- Staff and volunteers service promotes awareness of accessibility and inclusiveness at IBC-M, raising general staff's awareness on disability issues,
- Web accessibility service provides accessible web page of IBC-M,
- Research service ensures equal participation of SwD in national and international research projects.

Road-Mapping Phase

After the respectful feedback of IBC-M students and other relevant stakeholders, the pilot phase of IBC- M Accessibility Unit has been transferred to its full establishment. Following the IBC-M need for further development towards accessibility and inclusiveness, the IDEA project has initiated and supported a development of the IBC-M Policy on students with disabilities, a certain adjustment in strategic plan and policy, adaptation of programme curriculum, training of staff involved in assistive services, etc. Considering that two IBC-M campuses have already been accessible to all students, only slight adjustments have been made and some classrooms were dedicated for assistive technology.

In addition, in the course of the IDEA project, IBC-M has purchased the following equipment in service of students with disabilities:

- **ZOWEETEK Voice Amplifier**

Zoweerek Volie amplifiers are designed for people who have difficulty speaking loudly. The device itself delivers a clear and soft sound and is able to cover up to 1000 square meters. The ultra-portable design of the loudspeaker gives the possibility to be worn around the waist. The device is widely used in teaching but it can be used for other purposes too. Key features and aspects of the ZOWEETEK Voice Amplifier:

Amplification: The device effectively amplifies voice, making it louder and clearer, allowing the speaker to be heard in larger or noisy environments;

Portable and Lightweight: The amplifier is compact in size and lightweight, making it easy to carry around;

Multiple Power Options: The ZOWEETEK Voice Amplifier offers various power options for convenience. It can be powered by built-in rechargeable batteries, which are long-lasting and provide extended usage time. Additionally, it can be powered by regular AA batteries, providing a backup option when the rechargeable batteries are low;

Volume and Tone Control: The device usually has adjustable volume and tone controls, allowing to customize the sound output according to preferences and the surrounding environment.

- **OrCam read smart**

The OrCam Read Smart is a sophisticated device that changes the way people with visual impairments access written information. Designed to be compact and wearable, the OrCam Read Smart integrates advanced artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies into a user-friendly device. By simply pointing the device towards any printed or digital text, such as books, newspapers, menus, or screens, the OrCam Read Smart instantly converts the text into spoken words. Its intuitive interface allows users to hear the text in real time, with the option to adjust the reading speed and volume to their preference. With its portable and accessible design, the OrCam Read Smart enables individuals with visual impairments to independently access and engage with printed information, enhancing their overall reading experience and enabling greater independence in their daily lives.

- **The HDE Large Print Keyboard**

The HDE Large Print Keyboard is a specialized keyboard designed to accommodate individuals with visual impairments or those who have difficulty reading standard keyboard keys. It features large, high-contrast key labels that make it easier for users to locate and identify specific keys. The keyboard typically has larger key sizes compared to regular keyboards, making it more comfortable for individuals with limited dexterity or motor skills. The enlarged key labels often use bold, easy-to-read fonts and high-contrast colors, such as black letters on white or yellow keys, to enhance visibility and legibility. Overall, the HDE Large Print Keyboard provides an accessible and user-friendly typing experience, enabling individuals with visual challenges to use computers more comfortably and efficiently.

- **Braille and Large Print English Letters**

Braille stickers are an option for creating a bilingual Braille keyboard. The stickers use an easy peel-and-stick method to install. Designed for the blind and visually impaired, the stickers provide Braille characters as well as easy-to-see big print letters displayed in high-contrast black on a yellow background.

- **Glassouse V I.3 Wireless Bluetooth Wearable Hands Free**

The Glassouse V 1.3 is a wireless Bluetooth wearable device designed to provide hands-free control of electronic devices for individuals with limited mobility. It is an assistive technology device that allows users to interact with computers, smartphones, tablets, and other devices by tracking head movements. The device is worn like a pair of glasses and features built-in sensors that detect the user's head movements, converting them into cursor movements on the screen.

This enables users to navigate through menus, click on icons, scroll through web pages, and perform other functions without the need for manual input.

The Glassouse V 1.3 connects to compatible devices via Bluetooth, offering wireless connectivity and eliminating the need for additional cables. It has a rechargeable battery that provides hours of usage on a single charge. The device is lightweight and adjustable to fit different head sizes comfortably. It is designed to be user-friendly, making it accessible for individuals with varying degrees of technical expertise. Overall, the Glassouse V 1.3 offers a practical and convenient hands-free solution for individuals with motor disabilities, empowering them to independently engage with digital devices and improve their overall quality of life.

- **Conference System Polycom Studio, 4K**

The Polycom Studio conference system is a high-quality audio and video solution designed for small to medium-sized conference rooms. While it can be used in various settings, including educational environments, its features can also benefit students with disabilities. Here are some potential use cases for the Polycom Studio in supporting students with disabilities:

Remote Learning: The Polycom Studio's 4K camera and wide field of view (FOV-120°) can facilitate inclusive remote learning experiences for students who are unable to attend classes physically. The high-resolution video and wide-angle view can provide a clear visual representation of the instructor, enabling students to follow along with gestures, visual aids, or sign language interpreters.

Accessibility for Hearing Impaired Students: The Studio system offers high-quality audio capabilities, including built-in microphones and speakerphones. For students with hearing impairments, this can help ensure that they can hear and participate in discussions during video conferences or virtual classes. Additionally, the system supports external speakers and audio devices, allowing for the integration of hearing aids or assistive listening devices.

Collaboration and Communication: The Polycom Studio can facilitate collaborative projects and discussions among students. Its wide-angle FOV allows for capturing a larger area, enabling students with mobility impairments to participate actively without feeling left out. The system's Pan-Tilt-Zoom (PTZ) camera functionality further enhances the ability to focus on specific participants, making it easier for students with visual impairments to identify who is speaking.

Captioning and Transcription: The Studio system can be integrated with third-party captioning services or software solutions to provide real-time captioning during video conferences or remote classes.

This feature benefits students with hearing impairments, language processing difficulties, or those who prefer visual text support for better comprehension.

Accessibility for Visually Impaired Students: While the primary focus of the Polycom Studio is on audio and video, it can also be connected to screen readers or other assistive technologies to support visually impaired students. Screen readers can audibly describe the video content, allowing visually impaired students to understand the context and actively participate.

- **Samsung Galaxy Tab S8+ (tablet)**

Using the Samsung Galaxy Tab S8+ for students with disabilities can provide them with various tools and features to enhance their learning experience and accessibility. Here are some key features you can enable:

Adjusting the font size, enabling color inversion or color correction, use high contrast text, or enabling TalkBack for spoken feedback. Also, it is possible to activate mono audio, adjust the sound balance, or enable subtitles and captions. The most valuable feature to be used for teaching and learning is Text-to-Speech: Samsung Galaxy Tab S8+ has a built-in text-to-speech feature. Students can highlight text and have it read aloud. This feature is very beneficial for students with visual impairments or learning difficulties. Closed Captions: While watching videos or multimedia content, enable closed captions or subtitles whenever available. This can greatly benefit students with hearing impairments. Screen Reader: TalkBack (Android's screen reader) in the Accessibility settings to have the tablet read out the text on the screen. Students can navigate through menus, apps, and web pages using spoken feedback. Listed above are just a few of the many features available to students with disabilities.

- **The NexiGo Meeting 360**

The NexiGo Meeting 360, 8K Captured AI-Powered PC is an exceptional device that offers a range of impressive features, including advanced Framing & Speaker Tracking capabilities. The NexiGo Meeting 360 with 8K features can be beneficial for students with disabilities in several ways. Here are some potential uses and advantages:

Enhanced Visual Experience: The 8K resolution provides incredibly sharp and detailed visuals, allowing students with visual impairments to have a clearer view of presentations, documents, or videos during online classes or meetings.

Real-time Subtitles: The NexiGo Meeting 360 supports real-time speech-to-text transcription, which can be particularly helpful for students with hearing impairments. Subtitles can be displayed on the screen, ensuring that students can follow the discussion or lecture accurately.

Zoom and Pan Capabilities: NexiGo Meeting 360 has high-definition cameras that allow zooming and panning. This can be advantageous for students with mobility limitations as they can easily focus on specific areas of interest, such as written content on a whiteboard or visual aids.

Improved Audio Quality: The Meeting 360 incorporates advanced audio technologies, such as noise cancellation and directional microphones. These features can help minimize background noise and ensure clear audio transmission, benefiting students with hearing impairments or auditory processing difficulties.

Interactive Collaboration: The NexiGo Meeting 360 supports interactive features like screen sharing, virtual whiteboards, and document annotation. These tools enable students with various disabilities to actively participate in discussions, collaborate on projects, and engage with the learning material.

Accessible Controls: The Meeting 360 have user-friendly controls and interfaces, making it easier for students with fine motor skill challenges or mobility impairments to operate the device independently.

Customizable Settings: The device offers customizable settings to adjust visual and audio parameters according to individual preferences. This feature can benefit students with sensory sensitivities or specific accessibility needs.

- **Nuance Dragon Professional**

Nuance Dragon Professional is a voice recognition software that allows users to control their computers and perform various tasks using voice commands. It is designed to enhance productivity and efficiency by enabling hands-free operation of a computer. With Nuance Dragon Professional, you can dictate documents, create emails, control applications, navigate the web, and perform many other tasks using only your voice. The software employs advanced speech recognition technology to accurately transcribe your spoken words into text. Some key features of Nuance Dragon Professional include:

Dictation: You can dictate documents and see the text appear on your screen in real-time. Dragon Professional has high accuracy and adapts to your voice over time, improving its recognition accuracy as you use it.

Voice Commands: You can control various applications and perform actions using voice commands. For example, you can open applications, save files, format text, and navigate through menus using spoken instructions.

Customization: Nuance Dragon Professional allows you to create custom voice commands for specific tasks or workflows. This feature enables you to streamline your work and automate repetitive actions, saving time and effort.

Integration: Nuance Dragon Professional integrates with popular applications such as Microsoft Office, web browsers, email clients, and other productivity tools. This integration allows you to dictate directly into these applications, improving your workflow efficiency.

Accessibility: Dragon Professional can be a valuable tool for individuals with physical disabilities or those who prefer a hands-free computing experience. It enables them to interact with their computers and perform tasks using voice commands, promoting accessibility and inclusivity.

- **Ghotit Real Writer & Reader software**

Ghotit Real Writer & Reader is a software application designed to assist individuals with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and other learning difficulties in reading, writing, and proofreading written content. The software is specifically developed for Windows operating systems. Here are some of its key functionalities:

Spell Checker: The application includes a powerful spell checker designed to detect and correct spelling mistakes. It is particularly effective in identifying and offering corrections for words that are commonly misspelled by individuals with dyslexia.

Grammar Checker: Ghotit Real Writer & Reader also offers a grammar checker that assists users in identifying grammatical errors and suggesting corrections. This feature helps improve the overall quality and coherence of the written content.

Word Prediction: The software incorporates an advanced word prediction tool that anticipates the intended word or phrase as the user types. This feature can significantly enhance writing speed and accuracy, particularly for individuals who struggle with typing or word recall.

Reading Assistance: Ghotit Real Writer & Reader includes a text-to-speech feature, which enables the software to read aloud the written content. This functionality helps users review and proofread their work, allowing them to identify errors or areas that require improvement more effectively.

Enhanced Dictionary: The application integrates an extensive dictionary with definitions, synonyms, and word usage examples. This feature supports users in expanding their vocabulary and selecting appropriate words to convey their intended meaning.

Personal Word Bank: Ghotit Real Writer & Reader allows users to create and manage a personal word bank, which includes frequently used or specific domain-related terms. This feature helps users maintain consistency in their writing and prevents repetitive spelling errors.

User-Friendly Interface: The software is designed with an intuitive and user-friendly interface, making it accessible and easy to navigate for individuals with different levels of technological proficiency. Overall, Ghotit Real Writer & Reader for Windows offers a range of powerful tools and features tailored to support individuals with dyslexia and dysgraphia in their reading and writing tasks. By providing real-time assistance and feedback, the software aims to enhance writing skills, improve productivity, and boost confidence for users facing challenges related to learning disabilities.

Staffing and Training

IBC-M Accessibility Unit operates within the Student Service, supported by its staff and using all available resources related to assistive services. In addition, one part-time worker has been employed as a person in charge for SwDs, responsible for their registration and accommodation. Staff education and training are critical support for SwD. IBC-M staff, including the Accessibility Unit, Student Service, IT, academic and other relevant staff, have been participating in trainings organized under the framework of IDEA project.

- The three-day online workshop on “Development of New Protocols and Drafting of Policy Papers with Normative Suggestions” was facilitated by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and brought together more than 40 participants from 13 partner institutions from Kosovo, Albania, Montenegro, Greece, Ireland and the Czech Republic. The workshop was a unique opportunity to have an insight into the Greek national legislation for students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties, assistive technology and support services of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, as well as the experience of students with disabilities shared with the participants. The special focus has been given to the accessibility unit that operate within the University, the unit dedicated to ensure access to interpersonal communication with the members of the academic community, access to the built environment of the university, access to the printed or electronic educational material, access to the board and the presentations in the classrooms, access to the exams/tests, and access to the information and the WWW content.

- Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, facilitated a five-day virtual training where were presented the implementation of Universal Design for Learning and the range of services provided to persons with special needs. The training was dedicated to both academics and non-academics interested in the topic of inclusive education, support to students with special needs, assistive technologies, support to students with dyslexia and psychological disorders, braille encoding, hybrid books, sign language in higher education, special math, language and sport courses, mobility etc. Throughout the whole event, participants got the opportunity to discuss all aspects of the service provision and the Centre's operational principles.
- The three-day online workshop, facilitated by the University of Limerick, Ireland was the third online workshop on "Development of New Protocols and Drafting of Policy Papers with Normative Suggestions". The workshop has provided an insight into the legislative framework in Ireland for people with disability emphasizing an importance of having a national organization specifically representing the 3rd level education sector (AHEAD). The special focus has been given to the establishment of a Disability Service unit or office, covering all steps in development, as well as administrative needs of a Disability Service (keeping records, issuing information such as reasonable accommodations for exams, etc.). In addition, some other topics have been discussed: assistive technology: the development and delivery of services in the area of technology for students with disabilities, employment services: the development and delivery of services in the area of student work placement and employment for students with disabilities, support services: needs assessments, support planning, academic success coaching, college skills access routes for students with disability accessing college (quotas, alternative entry routes etc.), the requirement for pre- entry supports, transition planning, etc. The previously mentioned three workshops resulted in drafting the IBC-M Policy on Students with Disabilities and initial steps for establishment of the Accessibility Unit under the Student Service Department at IBC-M.
- IBC-M staff were physically participating in an Initial Training of Registrar Office, Voluntary Support & Transport Services' Coordinator, organized by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA). The three-day training enabled to get familiar with the Accessibility Unit of National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, as well as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro. The representatives of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens have shared their experience regarding the Registrar Office, Voluntary Support Service, and Transportation Service for Students with Disabilities. On the mentioned topics, the NGO representatives (Albanian Foundation for the Rights of Persons

with Disabilities, Association of Paraplegic and Paralyzed Children in Kosovo, and Association of Youth with Disabilities in Montenegro) have shared their own experience, challenges and ideas for improvement in Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro.

- Training of Built Environment Accessibility Consultants was organized by the POLIS University in cooperation with the EU project partner: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece). During the three days training, participants worked on the topic of building environment accessibility definition and standards, the legal framework for built environment accessibility in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro, while universities as project partners from the Western Balkans shared their experience regarding the built environment accessibility status.
- Three-day training sessions, organized within the study visit to University of Donja Gorica in Podgorica, Montenegro, while the sessions have been led by international partners involved in the project: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece), Masaryk University (Czech Republic) and Limerick University (Ireland). IDEA international partners shared their expertise and experience in providing services for inclusive educations to all partners from Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania. Areas covered during the training: Training of Academic Advisor on Inclusive Teaching, including Learning & Assessment Method for students with disabilities and/or learning difficulties (SwD and/or SWLD). In addition, Initial Training of International Relations Office Coordinators & Career Officer for setting up adequate learning environment and for accommodating SwD, was also conducted. Participation of NGO representatives, Foundation for the Rights of Person with Disabilities (Albania), Association of Paraplegic and Paralyzed Children (Kosovo), and Association of Youth with Disabilities (Montenegro) was highly appreciative and beneficial for all participants. The main role of international partners in IDEA project is sharing the best international practice and building various capacities of relevant project staff from Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro towards fulfilling IDEA projects goals in the area of inclusive education for student with disabilities and learning difficulties.
- The study visit of the Teiresias Centre, the Support Centre for Students with Special Needs at Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic. The Teiresias Centre's mission is to guarantee accessibility of all study programmes at Masaryk University. The Centre's primary task is to provide maximum accessibility to all accredited degree programmes at the University for the visually impaired, the deaf and hearing impaired, people with limited or restricted mobility and people with other types of disabilities. In the University's organizational structure, the Centre is one of the offices at the Rectorate to be concerned with student issues, along with the Office for Studies and Office for Student Welfare. The Centre also coordinates the life-long

education programme for the blind. The three-day study visit was a unique opportunity to get familiar with the Teiresias Centre as an educational centre with its own student administration unit to support the study organization of students with disabilities, the centre that offers counselling and methodological support to high school students and teachers and is a research institution developing its own technological solutions, but collaborates with other national institutions on modifications of study materials and tests for students with disabilities, and publishes in Braille and runs a national digital university library. Centre's representatives have shared their experience related to the services provided to students with disabilities at Masaryk University, with a special focus on library and IT services. The study visit was dedicated to both academics and non-academics interested in the topic of inclusive education, support to students with special needs, assistive technologies, support to students with dyslexia and psychological disorders, braille encoding, hybrid books, sign language in higher education, special math, language and sport courses, mobility etc. Throughout the whole event, participants had the opportunity to discuss all aspects of the service provision and the Centre's operational principles.

- Two-day workshop at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, in Greece, was in line with the activities foreseen under the WP2: titled "Establishment/Enhancement & Operationalization of Accessibility Units." The purpose of the two-day workshop was for partners involved to share their views on the state of play of the project, ways to integrate accessibility into educational practice, ensuring that direct engagement of students and staff in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating accessibility units in each of the respective institutions involved in the project.
- Another three-day training session was organized at the EPOKA University in Tirana. The hosting institution was the EPOKA University in Tirana, while the sessions have been led by international partners in the project: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Greece). Participation of NGO representatives, Foundation for the Rights of Person with Disabilities (Albania), Association of Paraplegic and Paralyzed Children (Kosovo) and Association of Youth with Disabilities (Montenegro) was highly appreciative and beneficial for all participants. At the training, international partners shared their expertise and experience in providing services for inclusive educations to all partners. Areas covered during the training are the following: Registrar Office for Students with Disabilities, Voluntary Support Service and Transportation Service for SwD.

Evaluation and Monitoring

To bring about real organizational change, IBC-M needs to engage in regular, independent monitoring and evaluation to assess whether the services provided by Accessibility Unit are effective, appropriate, timely, and are meeting goals. For that purpose, the determined key performance indicators (KPIs) are critical to assessing and optimizing the effectiveness of the Accessibility Unit:

- Number of SwD enrolled,
- Number and disposition of student volunteers,
- Number of SwD with and internship placement and employment,
- Number of trainings delivered,
- Number of trainees trained,
- Number of SwD benefitting from mobility opportunities,
- Number of participants on International Day of Disabled Persons,
- Number of converted educational material into accessible format for SwD,
- Number of assistive technologies purchased,
- Number of high schools visited in order to promote awareness of accessibility and inclusiveness at IBC-M
- Number of SwD in national and international research projects,
- Feedback reporting improvement of IBC-M inclusiveness and accessibility,

Main mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of services are reflected in college progress report, annual report on number of SwD, their involvement in college activities, list of participants of trainings, etc. A crucial for ongoing evaluation and monitoring process of the Unit is regular feedback from stakeholders for continuous improvement. Monitoring could also include consultation with local disability communities, as well as a survey of the attitudes of SwD, IBC-M staff and all other interested parties.

Conclusion

Education is vitally important to a personal, social and academic development of each individual. Achieving someone's potential result in a person's ability to take part in the labor market, live independently and participate meaningfully in society.

International Business College Mitrovica recognizes the importance of creating a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of each person, so that each person can contribute fully to the development and well-being of the community.

The IBC-M Accessibility Unit, as an integrated part within the Student Service, serves to promote, protect and advance accessible, inclusive, discrimination and harassment-free education environment.



<http://idea-cbhe.com>



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