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Development Strategy of the University of Tirana (2023-2028)

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Introduction

The University of Tirana (UT) is the largest public university in Albania, established in 1957. It is consisted of eight main organizational units: six faculties and two research institutes (Faculty of Law, Faculty of Economics, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Social Sciences, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Faculty of History and Philology, Institute of European Studies, Institute of Applied Nuclear Physics, the branch of the University of Tirana, in Saranda), research centers and 38 administrative departments. The university offers the following programs: 37 first-cycle programs, 37 professional master programs, 72 Master of Science programs, 9 programs of third cycle, 7 Doctorate programs and 2 executive master programs. In 2022, the University has 779 full-time academic staff and 23,551 students.

The basic framework for the development of the University in the period from 2018-2023 has been set up through two key strategic planning and development documents including:

- The Development Strategy of the University of Tirana 2018-2023, which outlined the main principles and objectives that UT has set out for repositioning its role in society and embracing the so-called universities' Third Mission and
- The Strategic Plan for Scientific Research of the University of Tirana 2018-2022, which outlined the actions that UT will take to strengthen research capacities, increase its scientific research output, expand research-focused networking, improve science communication and knowledge sharing and increase access to and participation in international research fora.

Given the fact that these documents' time framework expired at the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023, an initial evaluation of their implementation has conducted in December 2022. The results, lessons learned, conclusions and recommendations from the evaluation process have served as the main input for drafting of the Development Strategy of the University of Tirana (2023-2028). Additionally, a number of specific factors and trends have been taken into consideration during the drafting phase of the document: (i) the development trends of the leading universities in the European Union and the Western Balkans; (ii) the overall environment in the Albanian system of higher education including funding, trends in admission of students, number of employed staff; (iii) the specific challenges identified within UT, etc.

As a result of that, the **main aim** of the Strategy is to create the framework for development of the University of Tirana in the period from 2023-2028 through setting-up of objectives, indicators and concrete measures that should be taken in order for UT to meet the challenges of the future.

Having in mind the leading role of the University of Tirana in the Albanian system of higher education, the number of students and academic staff, diversity of Bachelor, Master and PhD programs and its demonstrated commitment to advancement of scientific research and academic excellence, the University remains dedicated to achieving following **objectives**:

- ✓ To improve education and innovation of studies;
- ✓ To boost Internationalization and mobility;
- ✓ To advance scientific research and support innovation through excellent research centres and to improve the ranking position of the University;
- ✓ To strengthen social commitment, outreach and visibility;
- ✓ To support promotion of excellence of students, academic staff and administration, to support well-being and improve working conditions and infrastructure;



- ✓ To promote and support quality assurance within the University.

The Development Strategy of the University of Tirana (2023-2028) is also based on several other complementary university documents including: Institutional Strategy on Teaching of the University of Tirana (2022-2027); Document on the communication policies with students and the public at the University of Tirana (2022); Internationalization Strategy of the University of Tirana, Strategy of the University of Tirana for an environmentally friendly university (2022-2027) and other related documents.

For the purpose of continuous monitoring and assessment of the fulfilment of the specific objectives and indicators of this Strategy, a specific Methodological Note for Conducting Strategy Evaluation at the University of Tirana will be developed.

In order to achieve the objectives defined in the Strategy, it is of paramount importance to maintain the legally guaranteed autonomy and to continue the reliable and smooth cooperation between the various governing bodies and organizational levels of the University. In addition, all members of the University should be properly integrated into the decision-making process in accordance with the Law and university autonomy.

Above all, in order to achieve its objectives, the University of Tirana, as the main public higher education institution in Albania, needs sufficient and stable funds from the Government and other donors to be able to use them efficiently, fairly and to ensure financial and institutional stability as well as to support all the objectives set in this Strategy.



1. Improvement of education and innovation of studies

The University of Tirana is a public university that offers a full range of Bachelor, Master and PhD study programs, providing students with a wide access to them. UT study programs share the goals of developing education, culture, science and economy, and preparing the new generation with contemporary knowledge, capabilities and skills, in the service of freedom and diversity of ideas, for the construction and consolidation of a democratic society and the rule of law for the increase of well-being and human dignity, realized through lawful and transparent activities.

With the aim of attracting more Albanian and international students and as well as academic staff, the University is committed to increase the number of study programs to be delivered in Albanian and English language, especially in the Master and Doctorate study cycles. Furthermore, the University aims to attract and involve more stakeholders including the business community in the development and implementation of innovative study programs at all levels of studies. The purpose of this approach is none other than to provide more opportunities for students and equip them with skills to succeed as professionals on the job market as well as citizens engaged in the society. In that direction, UT has adopted an Institutional Strategy on Teaching of the University of Tirana (2022-2027) which creates the framework for the performance of the University in the forthcoming period.

All study programs at UT have as a common denominator: the promotion of critical and creative thinking with the aim of developing the spirit of democratic citizenship, creating a university public space characterized by free, serious debate and dedication to the public good. UT considers itself as an institution that aims, through study programs, to orient students towards analytical and interdisciplinary thinking and prepare them for competition in the labour market. At the same time, UT puts a special emphasis to attracting students from the disadvantaged background and persons with special needs through improvement of infrastructural facilities and financial support policies.

1.1 Specific objectives:

- 1.1.1. To promote excellence in education by a committed UT academic staff;
- 1.1.2. To link study programs with the labour market and boost the active involvement of the business community in the development and implementation of study programs;
- 1.1.3. To better map learning outcomes in the teaching process and offer competence-based curricula through innovative study programs;
- 1.1.4. To provide more opportunities for students, including improvement of their social and personal competences;
- 1.1.5 To support students with an average above 8;
- 1.1.6. To develop and promote short-learning programs, tailor-made programs, and other micro - credential programs;
- 1.1.7 To develop and support social dimension activities and life-long learning activities.
- 1.1.8. To develop and support inclusive and lifelong learning policies and activities.
- 1.1.9. To develop and support “smart specialisation S3” in all components of education and scientific research.



The fulfilment of the specific objectives will be assessed through the implementation and monitoring of the following:

Indicators

No.	Indicator	Year 1	Year 5
1.	Increase of fulltime staff employed at UT, respecting sustainable and continuous development within the framework of the academic titles (preference given to units that attract higher number of students)	+1% per year	+5%
2.	Establishment of cooperation with companies ¹ for purpose of practical teaching, internships and other forms of university–economy cooperation (depending on the students number)	At least 30 companies per university	At least 150 companies per university
3.	Involvement of companies in development/update of study program	At least 30 companies per university	At least 150 companies per university
4.	Participation of students in all cycles of study in scientific research at UT	At least 30 students per university	At least 100 students per university
5.	Participation of students in professional skills development courses by UT including Career Centre/s and trainings organized by Virtual Professional Development and Training Center at UT.	At least 5% of students per university	At least 20% of students per university
6.	Participation of PhD, Postdocs and Professors in professional development trainings including innovation in teaching, capacity building for project preparation and IT skills	At least 10% per university	At least 50% per university
7.	Development of a study program offered entirely in English language	At least 5 per university	At least 15 per university
8.	Development of distance study program offered entirely online	At least 1 per university	At least 3 per university
9	Opening joint programs	At least 1 per university	At least 4 per university

Concrete measures

No.	Indicator	Deadline
1.	Development and functioning of E-integrated system for management of student files, scores, payments of fees, distribution of information etc.	Year 2
2.	Improvement of the infrastructure in the service of education, scientific research and innovation, as well as services for third parties and community.	Year 3

¹ Public and private institutions, nonprofit organizations, business sector, etc.



3.	Simplified procedure of recognition of ECTS obtained by students through study abroad program	Year 2
4.	Develop a specific regulation for recognizing students' motilities.	Year 1
5.	Advocate for introducing online teaching programs into the Albanian legislation.	Year 2

2. Boosting internationalization and mobility

Internationalization in higher education has become a dominant trend as a proactive response to the opportunities, challenges and risks that accompany globalization. Students are attracted to opportunities to live and study abroad. Therefore, the internationalization of curricula plays a critical role in the formation of global competences, contributing to the intercultural dimension of the content of study plans and programs, so necessary in the competitive preparation of students who should be able to work in a world of growing global interdependence.

The University of Tirana is the leading university in Albania to implement the process of internationalization within its academic system. In that sense, the University has adopted a separate document - Internationalization Strategy of the University of Tirana for the period 2021-2026.

This phenomenon is now evident in several segments including: the increase in the mobility of UT and students, the expansion of international scientific research networks, cooperation between similar faculties offering double degrees, participation in international evaluation and quality assurance systems, global rankings, etc. In this perspective, the internationalization represents a crucial instrument for improving the institutional image by guaranteeing an increasing quality of teaching and scientific research.

In the field of international cooperation, the University of Tirana remains committed to further utilisation of multilateral scientific cooperation within EU programs (Erasmus+, Horizon Europe), CEEPUS program as well as other bilateral and multilateral opportunities. Given the fact that the international cooperation in the field of scientific research is one of the criteria for integration into the European Scientific Research Area - ERA, the University of Tirana continues to review and encourage the signing of bilateral memorandums and agreements of understanding and cooperation in the field of scientific research and innovation with prestigious universities with the aim of expanding the portfolio of high-quality collaborative programs with strategic partners.

2.1 Specific objectives:

2.1.1. To develop mid-term and long-term strategic partnerships and collaborations with the leading universities in the European Union and the Western Balkans;

2.1.2 To support and promote mobility of UT students and staff and to attract international students and academic staff and

2.1.3 To increase participation of UT in international projects, initiatives, networks and exchange.

The fulfilment of the specific objectives will be assessed through the implementation and monitoring of the following:



The fulfilment of the specific objectives will be assessed through the implementation and monitoring of the following:

Indicators:

No.	Indicator	Year 1	Year 5
1.	Number of signed partnership agreements (including within Erasmus+ program) with universities in the European Union and the Western Balkans	+5% per year	+25%
2.	Number of UT students participating in mobilities abroad	At least 70 students per university per year	At least 350 students per university
3.	Increased number of foreign students attending programs at UT in any capacity	At least 30 students per university	At least 120 students per university
4.	Increased participation of academic and administrative staff in international events abroad	+10%	+30%
5.	Increased involvement of international staff including Albanian diaspora in lectures, Committees for defence of MA and PhD thesis	At least 10 professors per university	At least 50 professors per university

Concrete measures:

No.	Indicator	Deadline
1.	Simplified procedures and better cooperation between parties involved to reduce the delays within the University (in the process of application for projects, implementation of projects, procurement).	Year 2
2.	Initiative and proposal for simplified national procedures for procurement of goods and services on international/national projects. ²	Year 1
3.	Promotional and outreach campaign to endorse the benefits of mobility	Year 1
4.	Development of plan for boosting cooperation with universities in the region	Year 1

² The procurement of goods and services in Tirana University is based on Albanian procurement Law and regarding international projects is based on concrete procedures of each specific agreement.



3. Advancing scientific research and support innovation through excellent research centres and improvement of the ranking of the University

The aim of the scientific research in the University of Tirana is to prepare Albanian specialists that would serve the country and would be able to navigate in an ever-changing world. Since its establishment, scientific research represented one of the main dimensions of the University of Tirana's activities.

UT intends to become a leader of research, enabling the benefit of society at national and international level. During the period of the application of the Development Strategy, based on the long-standing traditions of the University in terms of academic freedom and autonomy, a research culture will be promoted, characterized by the important role of innovation. In addition, the University of Tirana aims to develop the ability to disseminate research knowledge and research results at national, regional and international level; providing significant contributions to policy-making and economic growth and contributing effectively to the cultural, social and economic life of the society.

3.1. Specific objectives

- 3.1.1. To improve international ranking and visibility of UT;
- 3.1.2. To increase funding for scientific research through the absorption of public funds provided by national, regional and international sources and UT funds;
- 3.1.3. To advance quality of results of scientific research and promote academic staff with outstanding publication record and
- 3.1.4. To strengthen the cooperation between the scientific community and the private sector.
- 3.1.5. To support innovation attempts and activities/ innovation hubs.

The fulfilment of the specific objectives will be assessed through the implementation and monitoring of the following:

Indicators

No.	Indicator	Year 1	Year 5
1.	Increased funding for salaries of outstanding academic and administrative staff	As determined in the plan	As determined in the plan
2.	Increased institutional funding for scientific research	+2-3% per year	+10-15%
3.	Number of articles indexed in relevant scientific databases (Scopus, Web of Science etc.) published by UT academic staff	+10% per year	+50%
4.	Number of submitted applications for project funding by national donors/programs	5 applications per university	15 applications per year per university



5.	Increased number of submitted applications for project funding by international donors/programs as main applicant	At least 5 applications per university	At least 15 applications per university
6.	Increased number of submitted applications for project funding by international donors/programs as co-applicant	At least 5 applications per university	At least 25 applications per university
7.	Number of published books/monographs of staff supported by UT and selected through a transparent procedure (depending on the academic staff number)	+5 monographs per year	+25 monographs per university
8.	Number of published articles in journals ranked in Scopus, Journal Citation Reports and Web of Science. (depending on the academic staff number)	20 articles per year	100 articles
9.	Number of research projects developed/implemented in cooperation with the private sector	At least 5 projects per university	At least 25 projects per university
10.	Purchase of specific licensed software (SPSS, STATA, NVivo, etc)	1 at university level	5 at university level
11.	Establishment of a Cybersecurity Centre	1 at university level	1 at university level
12.	Organized trainings for applications to win a Patent	1 at university level	5 at university level

Concrete measures

No.	Indicator	Deadline
1.	Anti -plagiarism system fully operational, to start screening with Master thesis and to continue with PhD thesis and research papers	Year 2
2.	Developed institutional visibility policy for scientific research at UT	Year 2
3.	Improvement of the infrastructure in the service of education, scientific research and innovation, as well as services for third parties and community.	Year 1
4.	Plan for popularization of scientific research and its impact on society	Year 2
5.	Preparation of the UT Annual Report on the participation of UT staff in international research activities (projects, conferencies, workshops and publications) including the sources of funding	Year 1
6.	Promoting and supporting development of sabbatical years from academic staff	Year 3
7.	Establish partnership with innovation centers	Year 2



4. Strengthening social commitment, outreach and visibility

The University of Tirana contributes to the development of society through three pillars of the mission of the public higher education: education, scientific research, as well as service to the public, which constantly enrich and inform each other through the pursuit, dissemination and implementation of knowledge. Creating a steady student and academic community reinforces UT's mission to conduct teaching and research and to find and provide solutions to diverse issues in academia and beyond.

The social commitment is ensured through a holistic vision for a sustainable academy that fosters interdisciplinary connections for innovation, a closer connection of students with faculty, and partnerships with other stakeholders and beneficiaries. UT is open for generation of ideas, innovation and discovery.

Having this in mind, in 2022 UT has passed a special Document on the communication policies with students and the public which laid out the basic principles of communication with the target groups.

The University of Tirana aims to have an impact on the society through its activities in particular by educating young innovators, presenting research findings to the general public and also through increasing knowledge transfer activities and cooperation projects with the economy. Moreover, UT reaffirms its commitment to actively engage with the business and industry and to provide opportunities for interaction with its Alumni community, in order to lead the entrepreneurial approach for the future.

4.1. Specific objectives

4.1.1 To strengthen public outreach, information and awareness regarding UT and promote the University as intellectual hub of Albania;

4.1.2. To reengage with the Alumni community for the purpose of new initiatives;

4.1.3 To actively cooperate with the business sector in order to lead the entrepreneurial approach for the future

4.1.4. To promote new forms of cooperation with the private sector and general public in the field of sports, youth engagement, volunteerism, protection of environment and

4.1.5. To better facilitate the transfer of knowledge, adapted to the needs of the labour market.

The fulfilment of the specific objectives will be assessed through the implementation and monitoring of the following:

Indicators

No.	Indicator	Year 1	Year 5
1.	Number of followers of UT social media accounts	+10% per year	+50%
2.	Number of alumni registered in the UT database	At least 500 Alumni per year per university	At least 2000 Alumni per university
3.	Number of organized events with alumni (with at least 30 alumni)	5 events per university	20 events per university
4.	Number of internships realized through the university	At least 50 students	At least 250 students



5.	Number of volunteerism initiatives implemented by the UT units	At least 5 initiatives	At least 25 initiatives
6.	Number of non-academic forms of collaboration established with the private sector, business, industry, governmental and non-governmental organizations (training workshops, forums, industrial and technological innovations, start-ups and spin-offs)	At least 10 on university level	At least 25 on university level
7.	Number of companies represented on annual job fair	At least 20 companies on the fair	At least 60 companies on the fair

Concrete measures

No.	Indicator	Deadline
1.	Preparation of Annual Plan for the work of Career centre/s	Year 1
2.	Preparation of documents and IT solution for the Alumni network	Year 2
3.	Development of new forms for outreach and dissemination of results (newsletter, mobile app, other social media etc).	Year 1
4	Setting up an ad-hoc group to cooperate especially with the business sector for entrepreneurial purposes through the implementation of the new curricula	Year 2
5	Increase number of applications for projects in terms of entrepreneurship.	Year 2



5. Supporting promotion of excellence of students, academic staff and administration, supporting well-being and improved working conditions and infrastructure

Students are at the centre of University of Tirana's activities and policies. The University will actively promote excellence of students as well as the academic staff and administration. The excellent students and staff represent the driving force for development of the University and their work, participation and results will be supported by the University and its units.

At the same time, the University of Tirana is committed to assuring the well-being of the employees at work and improvement of the working conditions for students, academic and administrative staff, as well as the infrastructure to enable good working conditions for fulfilling the institution's objectives in the field of teaching and scientific research. UT has a register of its real estate, where there are lecture and seminar halls, laboratories, offices and other administrative facilities, sports grounds, land, etc. UT and its faculties develop their activities on a total area of land property of 190,597 m², with building area of 19,835 m² and usable area of 48,888 m². UT supervises the real estate construction and reconstruction projects, which are under its administration, through the Department of Funds and Investment Management, which is located at the UT Rectorate. This department supervises and is responsible for the implementation of the investment program after concluding the contract with the private entities, controls the progress of the work schedule and reports to the chancellor periodically.

UT conducts its teaching activity mainly in buildings built and reconstructed with contemporary quality materials, which meet the hygienic and sanitary conditions for students and academic and administrative personnel, avoiding elements of danger, as fire hydrants and emergency stairs have been installed, according to the required contemporary standards. UT is located far from industrial development areas or areas with pollution above the permitted rates according to the relevant standards.

UT remains committed to further modernise its facilities and digitalize services for its users in the period to come.

5.1 Specific objectives

- 5.1.1. To increase the attractiveness of jobs at the University of Tirana;
- 5.1.2. To advance the management of the institution (University and units) and cooperation between the academic and administrative staff as well as units of the University;
- 5.1.3. To improve UT infrastructure in order to create favourable conditions for teaching, professional development (including continuing education) and scientific work for academic staff and students including students with special needs;
- 5.1.4. To strengthen capacities of the International and IT office at UT and also capacities in the center for professional development;
- 5.1.5. To promote gender equality at all levels of the University;
- 5.1.6. To develop the role of the psychologist and career offices in order to support well-being and improve the services for students and staff;



5.1.7 To assure motivation and job satisfaction of the employees;

5.1.8. To address the emerging issues of climate change, protection of environment and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

5.1.9. To implement a full assessment of property assets of University in accordance with property legislation.

The fulfilment of the specific objectives will be assessed through the implementation and monitoring of the following:

Indicators

No.	Indicator	Year 1	Year 5
1.	Increased funding for salaries of outstanding academic staff (merit-based approach)	As determined in the plan	As determined in the plan
2.	Increased funding for database subscription	+20%	+50%
3.	Number of mutual activities organized among different units at UT for the purpose of collaboration and networking	+1 per unit	+5 per unit
4.	Increased number of staff hired in the international office in charge of support of preparation of project applications	+2	+5
5.	Increased number of staff hired in the IT office	+2	+5
6	Increased number of staff hired in the center for professional development	+2	
7.	Number of members of all boards, committees and management attending training to ensure effective governance	At least 20 at university level	At least 60 at university level
8.	Number of academic staff attending professional development training including pedagogical training	At least 20 at university level	At least 60 at university level
9.	Improvement of gender balance in the management structure of the University and the unit; Commission for promotion of academic staff and Commission for defence of MA and PhD theses	+3% in favour of the less represented gender at university/unit level	+15% in favour of the less represented gender at university/unit level
10.	Establishment of best student and professor merit-based award	+1	+1
11.	Offer for employment of best student/s at the university	+1	+5

Concrete measures

No.	Indicator	Deadline
1.	Action Plan for improvement of facilities for persons with special needs (if necessary)	Year 1
2.	Modernization plan (if necessary)	Year 1

3.	Action plan for improvement of gender balance at UT	Year 1
4.	Action plan for addressing the issues of climate change, protection of environment and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (with measures and actions to ensure compliance of the University's activity with the legislation, including controls for prevention and reduction of pollutant discharges into the air, land and water).	Year 1



6. Promotion and support for quality assurance

The role of quality assurance is of crucial importance in supporting higher education systems and institutions in responding to emerging changes and challenges while ensuring the qualifications achieved by students and their experience of higher education remain at the forefront of institutional mission. The University of Tirana is committed to quality assurance in all areas of its educational and research activities. Being a concept that is implemented in the recent years, the quality assurance is one of the biggest priorities UT is planning to address. In that direction, the University is led by the national legislative framework, existing institutional regulations and practices as well as the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Finally, UT is committed to continuously monitor the quality assurance and development indicators and prepare Action plan to address the identified shortcomings.

6.1. Specific objectives

6.1.1 To promote the benefits of an effective system for quality assurance for the development of the University;

6.1.2 To improve involvement of relevant stakeholders in the process;

6.1.3 To strengthen the capacities of the University and its units to implement the quality assurance process and efficiently address the identified shortcomings and

6.1.4 To create the “culture” of quality assurance in UT.

The fulfilment of the specific objectives will be assessed through the implementation and monitoring of the following:

Indicators

No.	Indicator	Year 1	Year 5
1.	Overall increase of the average satisfaction rate on student surveys	+0,1% (on university level)	+0,5% (on university level)
2.	Number of study programmes that fully meet the standards / % of accredited study programmes.	+5%	+20%
3.	Distributed results of surveys of students to the academic staff	100%	
4.	Number of participants attending trainings for quality assurance capacity building	15 at university level	60 at university level
5	Number of projects win on the issues of quality assurance	At least 1 per university	At least 3 per university
6.	Number of Action plans adopted to address shortcomings of the Internal evaluation reports	1 per unit	1 per unit
7	Number of mobility of the staff engaged with quality assurance issues	At least 5 per university	At least 20 per university

Concrete measures

No.	Indicator	Deadline
1.	Individual performance management system introduced	Year 2
2.	360 degrees evaluation introduced	Year 2
3.	Report on evaluation results and Action plan to address weaknesses published (unit level)	Year 1
4.	Establishment of a competent body in charge of the monitoring and assessment of the Development Strategy	Year 1

