



Center for Comparative and International Studies (CCIS) - Annual Report 2023

Qendra për Studime të Krahasuara dhe Ndërkombëtare (QSKN)

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1. Introduction

Overview of CCIS Mission and Focus Areas

In 2023, the Center for Comparative and International Studies (CCIS) continued its commitment to promoting sustainable development, good governance, and European integration. We enhanced social and economic inclusion, human rights, and digital innovation through policy research, capacity-building programs, and events. Our collaborations span government, private sector, civil society, and local communities in Albania and the Western Balkans.

2. Key Projects and Initiatives

- **Youth Participation in Digital Democracy (EYDR)**
 - **Description:** A new Erasmus+-funded project aiming to develop digital skills and raise awareness of digital rights among youth, especially those with fewer opportunities, in Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and Spain. The project focuses on empowering young people for active participation in digital democracy.
 - **Activities:** Regional alliances with media, youth organizations, universities, and public authorities to foster awareness, networking, and policy dialogue on digital rights.
 - **Duration:** 2023-2025
 - **Partners:** Scidev (Lead), Belgrade Center for Human Rights, YOUROPÍA, Erasmus Student Network AL, Agjencia Kombetare e Rinise, UZOR, Share Foundation, and CCIS.
- **DIGITCRESHE – Enhancing Creative and Cultural Education**



- **Description:** Erasmus+-funded initiative focused on improving higher education quality in the Creative and Cultural Sector (CCS) across the Western Balkans. This project supports student satisfaction, employability, and digital transformation.
- **Activities:** Conducting a baseline analysis of CCS education, involving desk research and expert interviews, and producing a national report to guide the project's goals.
- **Duration:** 2023-2025
- **Collaborating Institutions:** 16 institutions across Europe.
- **University to Society Collaborations for Inclusive Digital Transformation (U2SID)**
 - **Description:** Building on the USIA project, U2SID aims to promote inclusive digital transformation through collaboration between universities, businesses, policymakers, civil society, and media in the Western Balkans.
 - **CCIS Role:** Leads quality assurance and monitoring, ensuring alignment with Erasmus+ standards.
 - **Partners:** Includes universities and innovation agencies from Albania, Montenegro, Serbia, and the EU.
 - **Duration:** 2023-2025

3. National and Regional Engagement

- **Participation in UNDP Albania's "Future Trends and Signals" Session**
 - **Objective:** Discuss future trends and explore opportunities for positive change in Albania.
 - **Date:** November 2023
- **Member of COST Action CoREx**
 - **Objective:** Engage in comparative research on executive roles across Europe to deepen understanding of governance and improve democratic practices.
 - **CCIS Role:** Contributor to systematic knowledge-building on the executive triangle of political leaders, civil servants, and advisers.

4. Capacity-Building and Community Involvement

- **European Year of Skills 2023**
 - **Objective:** Through CCIS's projects, promote skills development for sustainable growth, increased innovation, and improved job competitiveness.
 - **Events:** Participation in campaigns across Europe highlighting skill-building opportunities.
- **Social Media Training with IRI**



- **Training Highlights:** CCIS staff, alongside other NGOs, engaged in a workshop led by IRI Press Secretary Austin Akers on effective social media strategies to combat misinformation and optimize outreach.
- **Women's Rights Conference**
 - **Event:** "Society begins with Women's Rights" conference organized by WAW in Durres, Albania, promoting women's roles and achievements in society.
 - **CCIS Representation:** delivered a presentation on CCIS's initiatives supporting women's empowerment in Albania.

5. Completed Projects

- **University to Society Innomediaries in Albania (USIA)**
 - **Funding:** Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education Program
 - **Duration:** 2021-2023
 - **Objective:** Foster collaboration between higher education and external sectors, creating a Quadruple Helix Network for knowledge co-production.
 - **CCIS Role:** Led quality assurance, ensuring the project's successful implementation and adherence to Erasmus+ guidelines.
- **Culture of Memory and the European Future of Albanian Youth**
 - **Funding:** National Youth Congress, Municipality of Tirana
 - **Objective:** Promote dialogue on the legacy of communist regimes and European integration through youth-led initiatives.
 - **Duration:** 2022-2023

6. Communications and Outreach

- **Social Media and Website**
 - CCIS has expanded its digital presence, actively engaging stakeholders and disseminating project updates and research findings via social media and the CCIS website.

7. Project Impact

- **Enhanced Digital Skills and Civic Engagement:** Through the EYDR and DIGITCRESHE projects, hundreds of youth in the Western Balkans are gaining digital skills and an understanding of their rights, enhancing civic engagement and supporting democratic participation.
- **Stronger University-Industry Links:** U2SID has facilitated partnerships between universities and the private sector, particularly in the digital and creative industries, creating pathways for knowledge sharing and innovation.



- **Promoting Inclusivity and Social Justice:** By involving diverse communities and marginalized groups, CCIS projects support equitable digital access and inclusivity, contributing to fair and inclusive digital transformation across the region.

8. Financial Sustainability

- **Funding Sources:** CCIS's projects are supported by various funding bodies, including the European Union's Erasmus+ Program, the National Youth Congress, and UNDP.
- **Resource Allocation:** The organization maintains strict adherence to financial best practices, guided by its Financial Management Handbook, ensuring efficient use of resources.

Year Fund Allocation: approximately €80,000.

- Programs: 75% (project activities, trainings, advocacy)
- Operations: 15% (administrative support, logistics)
- Research & Development: 10% (program enhancement, data analysis)
- **Sustainability Planning:** CCIS is exploring partnerships with private sector stakeholders, such as technology companies and regional development agencies, to diversify funding sources and maintain financial stability beyond current grant cycles.

9. Challenges

Navigating Regional and Cultural Differences: Working across multiple countries introduces complexities in aligning cultural, legal, and administrative practices. CCIS addresses this by actively involving local partners to tailor project implementation.

Digital Infrastructure Gaps: Limited digital infrastructure in certain Western Balkan regions has presented challenges, particularly in digital skills training. To mitigate this, CCIS has focused on accessible, low-bandwidth platforms and resources.

Data and Privacy Concerns: Addressing digital rights involves managing sensitive data responsibly, which requires continuous updates to CCIS's data policies to stay compliant with evolving regulations and ensure trust among participants.

10. Next Steps and New Areas for Collaboration

- **Expanding Good Governance Initiatives:** CCIS aims to initiate projects promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical governance practices in Albania and the Western Balkans, leveraging its networks to engage youth in monitoring and evaluating governance.
- **Youth for Employment Partnerships:** Recognizing the potential of the youth employment for sustainable growth, tourism to support social economic development of the WB.
- **Evidence-Based Policy and Data-Driven Decision Making:** CCIS seeks to build projects that focus on developing statistical competencies among young researchers, enhancing their ability to use data in policy analysis. This will involve collaborations with national statistical offices and data analytics institutions.



- **Enhancing Regional Data and Statistics Capabilities:** By establishing partnerships with statistical agencies and academic institutions, CCIS will support data literacy and evidence-based policy design, providing reliable insights for social and economic development initiatives.
- **Blue Economy Partnerships:** Recognizing the potential of the blue economy for sustainable growth, CCIS will explore partnerships focused on sustainable fisheries, marine conservation, and eco-tourism to support economic resilience and environmental sustainability.

11. Acknowledgments

CCIS extends its sincere gratitude to its dedicated team, project partners, and funders for their support throughout 2023. Special thanks go to the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, UNDP Albania, and the National Youth Congress. We also thank our partner organizations, for their collaborative spirit and commitment to shared goals. Together, we have laid a strong foundation for meaningful impact, and we look forward to expanding these partnerships to bring about sustainable change in the years to come.