Deliverable D6.4:
Enrolment to ACHIEVE education programmes and scholarship allocation– Results (Year 1)

Deliverable D6.4

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Abstract

This report, Deliverable D6.4, presents an overview of the enrolment process, application trends, and initial scholarship allocation framework for the first year of the ACHIEVE master's programmes.

Versioning and contribution history

Version	Date	Authors	Notes
0.1	25/08/2025	Vilma Djala (EITD)	First version of D6.4
0.2	18/09/2025	Vilma Djala (EITD)	Formatting improvements and addition of data
0.3	26/09/2025	Vilma Djala (EITD) Andrea Biancini (EITD)	Revision of the final version

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Executive Summary

Deliverable D6.4, presents an overview of the enrolment process, application trends, and initial scholarship allocation framework for the first year of the ACHIEVE master's programme. ACHIEVE is a pan-European initiative designed to train specialists in Cloud, HPC, and Networking Infrastructure, bridging academia and industry through two double-degree programme and additional certification modules. Coordinated by EIT Digital, it involves higher education institutions and SMEs and industry partners across 6 countries.

Cycle 1 applications opened in November 2024 and closed in July 2025. D6.4 covers enrolment and scholarship allocation for the 2025/27 intake (Cycle 1).

The current deliverable presents early data from the Cycle 1 application period:

- o A significant proportion of applications were initiated by non-EU students, who accounted for 79 out of 106 applications (74.5%).

- o The gender ratio shows that 23 applications came from female candidates and 83 from male candidates, with women representing just under 22% of the total. This provides a useful baseline for future efforts to encourage more balanced participation.

- o Entry and Exit university preferences show a broad distribution on the Entry side, led by POLIMI and Aalto (9 each), followed by UBB (5) and UNITN, UR, and KTH (3 each). Exit choices, however, are much more concentrated, with KTH strongly preferred (26 selections), while Aalto (5) and UR (1) appear as the only other destinations

ACHIEVE offers a structured financial support system, including full and partial tuition waivers and scholarships of excellence. The programme originally aimed to allocate approximately 63 scholarships per cycle, distributed equitably among the partner universities. This deliverable will report detailed scholarship award data for the first recruitment cycle.

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The figures presented here are projections of enrolments and scholarship allocations. They provide a reliable indication of current trends; however, not all study offers have been accepted, some dropouts may still occur, and a portion of scholarships remains unassigned. Final numbers will only be confirmed at the start of the academic year. Given the lower-than-expected volume of applications, the project coordinator launched an additional call for cascade funding on 19 August, offering more scholarships to attract further candidates. This call will remain open until 21 October and is expected to help draw last-minute applicants and improve the overall intake. For these reasons, **the Cycle 1 figures presented in this report should be considered provisional**, with final data to be provided in the next deliverable.

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1 Timelines

1.1 EIT Digital Master School Application timeline (Academic year 2025/26)

As forewords, it is important to understand the EIT Digital Master School Application timeline for the Academic Year 2025/26. There are three application periods that span from November 2024 until June 2025. Study offers are usually issued one month after the closure of an application period. The Call for FSTP was published on the Funding and Tenders Portal, in alignment with the Call and the Grant Agreement (GA), and on the EIT Digital Master School application portal.
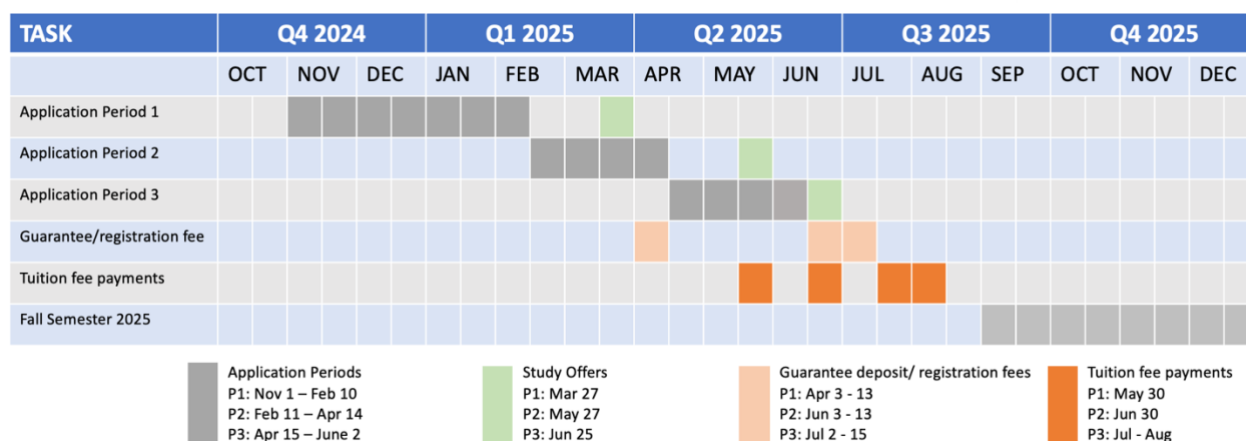
Figure 1: EIT Digital Master School Application Timeline (2024-2025)

Scholarships will not be paid directly to students, with the exception of the salary granted under the Scholarship of Excellence. Instead, scholarships are provided in the form of tuition fee waivers and, as such, do not entail any cash disbursement at the moment they are granted.

For this reason, the actual moment in which the FSTP cost associated with the cash occurs will be during the students' two-year study period, as tuition fee reimbursements are made to the universities on a semester-by-semester basis.

2 Enrolment and Scholarships allocation

Students applying to the master's programme are asked to indicate their preferences for both the entry and exit universities, selecting up to three institutions for each. Based on these preferences and the programme's internal criteria, each student receives a study offer that specifies the assigned entry and exit university, both chosen among those listed in their application.

After completing the first year at the designated entry university, some students may wish to change their exit university. However, such a change is not guaranteed. Each request is carefully evaluated, taking into account the agreement of the potential receiving university and the implications on any scholarship or financial support the student may have. If the request is approved, the student proceeds to the new exit university. If not, the student continues their second year at the originally assigned institution, as stated in their initial study offer.

In line with the objective of the DIGITAL-2022-SKILLS-03-SPECIALISED – Advanced Digital Skills call to promote global talent attraction — as stated in Section 2: "[…] academic excellence, research and innovative industries work together to attract and retain the best talents worldwide" — students from all nationalities are eligible to apply and enrol in the master's programmes developed under this action.

However, in accordance with the eligibility criteria described in Section 6 of the same document, financial support (such as scholarships or fee waivers) is restricted to students who are nationals of:

- EU Member States,

- EEA countries, or

- Countries associated to the Digital Europe Programme, or countries in ongoing negotiations for an association agreement, provided the agreement enters into force before the grant signature.

Furthermore, to meet the implementation requirements under Objective 2.2, the call specifies that consortia must:

> *"Ensure that at least 150 EU students are trained each year across the consortium," and*

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"Explain how EU and associated countries students will be financially supported (e.g. via scholarships or fee waivers or others) …"

Accordingly, the project allocated scholarships exclusively to EU and associated country students1, while maintaining open access to the master's programmes for all applicants regardless of nationality. This distinction between open enrolment and targeted financial support reflects the project's commitment to inclusivity, while fully complying with the funding constraints and implementation criteria defined in the call.

The figures presented here are projections of enrolments and scholarship allocations. They provide a reliable indication of current trends; however, not all study offers have been accepted, some dropouts may still occur, and a portion of scholarships remains unassigned. Final numbers will only be confirmed at the start of the academic year. Given the lower-than-expected volume of applications, the project coordinator launched an additional call for cascade funding on 19 August, offering more scholarships to attract further candidates. This call will remain open until 21 October and is expected to help draw last-minute applicants and improve the overall intake. For these reasons, **the Cycle 1 figures presented in this report should be considered provisional**, with final data to be provided in the next deliverable.

2.1 Framework for the ACHIEVE financial support to students

ACHIEVE provides eligible students the financial support to take part to the education programmes and offers scholarship programmes to promote diversity in terms of gender, age, social and economic background. ACHIEVE's scholarships allow the greatest number to have access to high-quality education in digital areas and increase diversity among students and future digital experts. The students awarded a scholarship will be financially supported during their two years of studies in the double-degree Masters' programme offered by ACHIEVE.

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[1] Table of countries participating to Digital Europe Programme: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/digital/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_digital_en.pdf

2.1.1 Eligible countries

The ACHIEVE scholarship programme is open to students who are nationals of eligible countries, specifically those belonging to EU Member States, overseas countries and territories (OCTs), countries associated with the Digital Europe Programme.

2.1.2 Eligible recipients

To qualify for financial support, students must first be enrolled and accepted into the double-degree Master's programme offered by ACHIEVE— Cloud, HPC, and Networking Infrastructure. Scholarships are awarded exclusively to those who meet these criteria and who demonstrate merit through a rigorous selection process. Merit is assessed primarily through the candidate's academic path to date, especially their performance in their bachelor's studies, and is evaluated as part of the selection process that precedes admission to the Master's programme.

2.1.3 Activities to be founded

The financial support provided through the ACHIEVE scholarship programme is intended to enable student participation in the two-year double-degree Master's programme. Funded activities include tuition fee coverage and, in some cases, living support to facilitate student mobility and engagement across partner universities.

The financial support provided through the SPECTRO scholarship programme is intended to enable student participation in the two-year double-degree Master's programmes. Funded activities include tuition fee coverage and, in some cases, living support to facilitate student mobility and engagement across partner universities.

Scholarships are composed of two distinct components:

- Tuition fee waivers (half or full), which are not paid directly to students but applied as a reduction of the tuition cost. The value of the waiver is determined before the start of Year 1 and covers both academic years of the programme. Students are invoiced for tuition fees twice per academic year— once in the fall semester and once in the spring semester. For students receiving financial support, the invoices will reflect the reduced tuition amount, and this is the moment when the support is formally materialised.

- Monthly allowances (only for recipients of the Scholarship of Excellence), which are paid directly to students to support their living costs. These monthly payments are calculated based on the Country Correction Coefficient (CCC) of the country where the student is studying, and may vary between Year 1 and Year 2 depending on the country of study for the supported student.

Three types of scholarships are available:

(1) **Scholarships of Excellence**, which include a full tuition fee waiver and a monthly living allowance adjusted according to the cost-of-living index of the host country (this adjustment is computed using the "Correction coefficients" published but Eurostat on its website);

(2) **Full Tuition Fee Waivers**, covering the entire tuition cost for both years; and

(3) **Half Tuition Fee Waivers**, which cover 50% of the tuition costs. These funding schemes are designed to reduce financial barriers and support talented students in accessing high-quality education in key digital technology domains.

The maximum financial support available per student depends on the type of scholarship awarded. The Scholarship of Excellence includes a full tuition fee waiver valued at €5,000 per academic year (€10,000 for the two years) and a monthly living allowance of €900, adjusted based on the Country Correction Coefficient (CCC) of the study location. Over the two years, this may result in a total support package exceeding €25,000 per student. Students receiving a Full Tuition Fee Waiver are granted €5,000 per year (€10,000 for the two years), while those with a Half Tuition Fee Waiver receive €2,500 per year (€5,000 for the two years).

In all cases, 50% of the financial support will be directly financed by the EU through the ACHIEVE grant, while the remaining 50% will be financed to students by the co-financing component provided by the EIT Digital Education Foundation.

2.1.4 Awarding criteria

The type and amount of financial support awarded to each student are determined through a structured, transparent, and merit-based evaluation process. Each eligible applicant is assigned a merit score on a scale from 1 to 5, which serves as the primary reference point for ranking and scholarship allocation. This score is based on four core elements:

1. Suitability of acquired bachelor degree for intended study programme;
2. Academic and professional background, with a particular emphasis on the performance in the applicant's bachelor's degree;

3. Curriculum Vitae, including any relevant work experience, extracurricular activities, and achievements, and entrepreneurial experience;
4. Motivation letter, in which candidates present their "Innovative potential". They are expected to describe their motivation for applying to the programme, propose an entrepreneurial idea, and explain their financial situation and need for support.

The merit score is initially assigned by two independent evaluators: the Local Programme Coordinators from the Entry and Exit universities selected by the applicant. These evaluations are then reviewed and harmonised by the Programme Leaders and the Quality Assurance Manager to ensure consistency across institutions and countries. Final scholarship decisions are taken jointly during a dedicated selection meeting involving all relevant academic and administrative stakeholders.

In addition to the merit score, scholarship awarding criteria include:

- Promotion of diversity and inclusion, with priority given to female applicants and applicants from EIT Regional Innovation Scheme (RIS) countries;
- Balance of scholarship distribution across partner universities and countries to maintain equity and ensure efficient use of available capacity.

2.2 Cloud, HPC, and Networking Infrastructure Master

This section contains summative tables with figures of the Master implemented in ACHIEVE:

2.2.1 Digital Europe KPIs

The main KPIs regarding the Cycle 1 of the master implemented in ACHIEVE have been the following:

- Enrolments leading to a degree: 0
  - o Female enrolments leading to a degree: 0
- People enrolled age 25 years and younger: 0
- Participants benefitting from financial support: 0
  - o Female participants benefitting from financial support: 0
- Participant completion rate for delivered programme   0
  - o Female participant completion rate for delivered programme   0
- Number of unemployed or inactive participants
  - o Male   0
  - o Female   0
  - o Non-binary   0

These number are in line with the fact that the data presented is provisional.

2.2.2 Enrolments Cloud, HPC, and Networking Infrastructure Master

	EU	non-EU	Total
Enrolment KPI target	100	-	100
Applied for programme	27	79	106
Applied for scholarship	27	-	27
Study Offers Sent	23	40	63
Offered scholarship	18	-	18

Table 1: ACHIEVE – Cycle 1

The first enrolment cycle of ACHIEVE demonstrates a promising foundation. A total of 106 applications were received, resulting in 63 study offers and 18 scholarships awarded. While the outcome remains below the overall KPI target of 100, these figures highlight the strong initial traction of the programme and its capacity to attract a diverse pool of candidates.

Interest to date has been markedly stronger among non-EU applicants (79) compared to EU applicants (27), underlining ACHIEVE's international visibility and appeal. At the same time, this imbalance points to a need for more focused outreach and tailored communication within Europe.

The conversion rates along the application pipeline show encouraging signs: once students apply, a significant share progresses to offers and scholarship awards, confirming both the relevance of the curriculum and the high motivation of applicants.

A key challenge observed in reaching the KPIs for EU students lies in structural barriers that affect the attractiveness of cross-border mobility schemes. First, there is often limited interest in pursuing mobility among EU students, who may prefer to complete their studies within familiar academic and social environments rather than relocating to another country. Second, many EU countries already host

strong, well-established HPC, Cloud computing and Infrastructure at their local universities, which compete directly with ACHIEVE's offer and often require less effort in terms of relocation or adaptation. Finally, the cost dimension plays a significant role: in several EU member states, higher education is either fully free or heavily subsidised, making tuition-free or low-cost local alternatives more appealing compared to a programme that requires mobility and potential living costs in multiple countries.
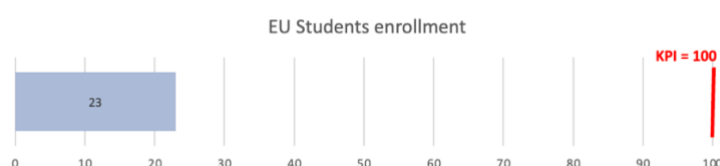

Figure 2: EU students' enrollment KPI

2.2.2.2 Distribution of the students first choice of study university

The table provides a breakdown of enrolment by university.

	Entry
UNITN	3
METU	0
UR	3
KTH	3
UBB	5
AALTO	9
POLIMI	9
UNS	0
	Exit
UNITN	0
METU	0

UR	1
KTH	26
UBB	0
AALTO	5
UNS	0

Table 2: ACHIEVE - Entry & Exit University numbers - Cycle 1

Among Entry Universities, AALTO and POLIMI attracted the largest share of first-choice selections. For Exit Universities, the distribution shows a clear preference for KTH, which stands out as the most popular destination.

2.2.2.3 Gender

This tables shows statistics for enrolments with a breakdown by gender.

	Female	Male	Total
KPI target (EU)	32	31	**63**
Applied for programme	23	83	**106**
Applied for scholarship (EU)	2	20	**22**
Study offers sent	1	17	**18**
Offered Scholarship	1	17	**18**

Table 3: ACHIEVE - Gender Distribution - Cycle 1

In Cycle 1, a total of 22 EU students applied for scholarships, of which 18 were awarded, corresponding to an overall allocation rate of 81.8%. By gender, 1 out of 2 female applicants received a scholarship (50%), while 17 out of 20 male applicants were successful (85%). This indicates that male candidates had a proportionally higher success rate in the allocation process.

Across the programme as a whole, 106 applications were submitted, with 23 from female candidates and 83 from male candidates. Despite this, female participation remains limited, particularly in scholarship applications (2 female vs. 20 male), underlining the importance of further efforts to attract women into the field of Cloud, HPC, and Networking Infrastructure.

The inclusion of female candidates among scholarship awardees nevertheless highlights the programme's commitment to supporting diversity in a competitive environment where male participation currently dominates.

It should also be noted that acceptance of study offers and final allocation of scholarships are still ongoing; the figures presented here remain provisional and subject to adjustment.

2.2.3.4 Region

This tables shows statistics for enrolments with a breakdown per RIS-Non-RIS countries.

	RIS Countries	Non-RIS Countries	Total
KPI target (EU)	32	31	**63**
Applied to programme	23	83	**106**
Applied for scholarship (EU)	18	4	**22**
Study offers sent	16	2	**18**
Offered scholarship	16	2	**18**

Table 4: ACHIEVE - RIS region students distribution - Cycle 1

In Cycle 1, a total of 22 EU students applied for scholarships, of which 18 were awarded, corresponding to an allocation rate of 81.8%. Broken down by region, 16 out of 18 RIS applicants received a scholarship (88.9%), compared with 2 out of 4 non-RIS applicants (50%). This highlights the strong performance of candidates from RIS countries in the allocation process.

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Across the programme as a whole, 106 applications were submitted, with 23 from RIS countries and 83 from non-RIS countries. While non-RIS countries account for the large majority of overall applications, the fact that most EU scholarship demand and awards are concentrated in RIS countries shows the programme's impact in supporting talent from structurally underrepresented regions.

As with other data points, acceptance of study offers and final scholarship allocations are still ongoing, and the figures presented here remain provisional and subject to adjustment.

2.2.3.5 Nationality

		Study offer Sent
EU/EEA	FRANCE	4
EU/EEA	GERMANY	1
EU/EEA	ITALY	14
EU/EEA	LITHUANIA	1
EU/EEA	ROMANIA	7
NON EU/EEA	BANGLADESH	1
NON EU/EEA	BRAZIL	1
NON EU/EEA	CAMEROON	2
NON EU/EEA	CHINA	26
NON EU/EEA	COLOMBIA	2
NON EU/EEA	ECUADOR	1
NON EU/EEA	ETHIOPIA	1
NON EU/EEA	GAMBIA	1
NON EU/EEA	GEORGIA	1
NON EU/EEA	GHANA	4
NON EU/EEA	GUATEMALA	1
NON EU/EEA	INDIA	6
NON EU/EEA	INDONESIA	1

NON EU/EEA	IRAN	6
NON EU/EEA	MYANMAR	1
NON EU/EEA	NEPAL	1
NON EU/EEA	NIGERIA	7
NON EU/EEA	PAKISTAN	7
NON EU/EEA	PHILIPINNES	1
NON EU/EEA	SINGAPORE	1
NON EU/EEA	SRI LANKA	1
NON EU/EEA	TAIWAN	1
NON EU/EEA	TURKEY	1
NON EU/EEA	UNITED KINGDOM	1
NON EU/EEA	UNITED STATES	3

Table 5: ACHIEVE nationality distribution for Cycle 1

In Cycle 1, 63 study offers were issued across both EU/EEA and non-EU/EEA countries, reflecting ACHIEVE's broad international reach.

Among EU/EEA countries, the majority of applications received were concentrated in Italy (14) and Romania (7). While France followed with 4 applications and Germany and Lithuania accounted for 1 each. This distribution indicates that Southern and Eastern Europe were particularly interested within the EU.

Among non-EU/EEA countries, the strongest interest came from China, with 26 offers, confirming the programme's visibility in Asia. Significant representation also came from Nigeria (7) and Pakistan (7), as well as India and Iran (6 each). Other countries were represented by smaller numbers of offers, ranging from 1 to 4, spread across Africa, Asia, and the Americas — including Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, the United States, and Taiwan.

This wide distribution demonstrates the truly global profile of ACHIEVE, with applicants spanning four continents. At the same time, it highlights clear clusters of demand in China, South Asia, and selected African countries, which could inform future outreach strategies.

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2.2.3 Scholarship distribution

2.2.3.1 Global numbers (Scholarship distribution)

The data presented only concerns students who applied to or were awarded a scholarship.

	Half-waiver	Full-waiver	Excellence	Total
Budgeted scholarships	21	35	7	63
Applied for a scholarship	0	14	8	22
Offered a scholarship	0	11	7	18
Granted	0	0	0	0

Table 6: ACHIEVE - Scholarship numbers for Cycle 1

Gender (scholarship distribution)

The data presented only concerns students who applied to or were awarded a scholarship.

	Female	Male	Total
Budgeted scholarships	32	31	63
Applied for a scholarship	2	20	22
Offered a scholarship	1	17	18
Granted	0	0	0

Table 7: Gender distribution for scholarships in Cycle 1

% of female students with scholarship

6%
With a KPI of 30%
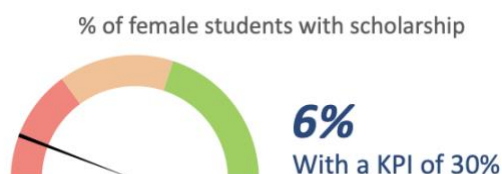
Figure 3: % of Female Students with Scholarship (KPI)

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Region (Scholarship distribution)

The data presented only concerns students who applied to or were awarded a scholarship.

	RIS Countries	Non-RIS Countries	Total
Budgeted scholarship	32	31	**63**
Applied for scholarship	18	4	**22**
Offered a scholarship	16	2	**18**
Granted scholarship	0	0	**0**

Table 8: RIS region distribution for students with scholarship in Cycle 1

% of students from RIS countries with scholarship

89%
With a KPI of 50%

Figure 4: % of students from RIS countries with scholarship KPI

Self-standing modules

No enrolment data can be reported at this stage, as the self-standing modules are still under development and have not yet been officially launched. In line with the project timeline, they therefore fall outside the scope of the current reporting period. However, preparatory steps have already been taken to enable recruitment once the modules become available. A dedicated page has been created on the Icarus platform (link), ensuring early visibility of the ACHIEVE modules for future learners. In parallel, awareness-raising activities targeting professionals and industry stakeholders are ongoing through project communication channels and partner networks.

Dedicated recruitment campaigns will be rolled out in the next reporting period, aligned with the completion of curriculum design (D3.1, February 2026) and the

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subsequent publication of the modules. These campaigns will contribute directly to the project's overall recruitment KPI of training at least **1,500 learners per year** across the master's programmes and self-standing modules, with a particular focus on upskilling professionals and engaging participants from RIS countries and underrepresented groups.

Each course will be carefully designed to support self-paced, online learning and is delivered through an open enrolment model, ensuring accessibility to a global audience of learners. The modules are structured to promote hands-on engagement, with a mix of video content, quizzes and exercises, case studies, and assessment tools, all aligned with current research and industry trends.

Conclusion

The first year of the ACHIEVE program, under EU funding, provides valuable initial data, revealing both successes and areas needing improvement. There are few actions that might support the program in achieving its ambitious goals further.

1. **Strengthening communication:**

   Proactive Feedback Mechanisms: Implement robust and diverse methods for collecting student feedback. This could involve regular surveys, focus groups, individual interviews, and informal feedback channels. The goal is to capture a wide range of perspectives and identify concerns early.

   Targeted Communication: Tailor communication strategies to specific student groups and addressing the gender ratio disbalance. For example, it is important to provide targeted information to prospective students from underrepresented groups or those who may require additional financial aid.

   Supporting Underperforming Universities: Identify partner universities that are not performing as well in attracting and enrolling students. Collaborate with these universities to develop tailored support strategies, such as joint marketing campaigns or specialized training for their outreach teams.

2. **Enhanced engagement with RIS countries and underrepresented groups:**

   Strategic Partnerships: Develop strategic partnerships with key universities and organizations in RIS countries. This includes actively participating in relevant educational events and collaborations, providing targeted information, and removing logistical barriers for potential applicants. Special

emphasis should be placed on highlighting opportunities for female students and reducing perceived or real barriers to application.

Targeted Outreach: Implement targeted outreach campaigns focused specifically on RIS countries. This may include translating marketing materials, utilizing local channels, and partnering with local influencers. These campaigns should also include content that reflects gender diversity in STEM and showcases successful role models from similar backgrounds.

The ACHIEVE program can enhance its effectiveness in attracting a diverse and highly qualified student body, ensuring its long-term sustainability and overall success.