# EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

## Report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative

European Education Area

# *Report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative*

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European Commission

# Foreword of the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs, and Preparedness, Roxana Mînzatu

Jacques Delors once said that history remembers those that look further and wider. Young Europeans, eager to explore new horizons through experiences and exchanges, embody this spirit. By doing so, they gain the knowledge and skills essential to thrive in a rapidly changing world. This ambition drives the European Universities alliances, which equip young people with future-oriented skills rooted in a shared European identity and academic values. At a critical juncture for Europe, these alliances are key to bolster the EU's competitiveness and preparedness.

The Enrico Letta Report on the future of the Single Market underscores the importance of the European Universities initiative. It introduces the notion of a 'fifth freedom' in our EU Single Market – the freedom to learn, research, innovate, and share knowledge across borders – and highlights the alliances as instrumental in achieving this vision.

With 65 alliances involving over 570 higher education institutions across 35 countries, the initiative is fostering unprecedented European collaboration across borders, disciplines, languages and cultures.

This report, 'Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative', showcases the transformational impact of the initiative. Students, academics, and researchers benefit from seamless mobility, enriched study opportunities, and pioneering transnational innovative programmes. These alliances not only equip young people with the skills, competences, and knowledge needed for the green and digital transitions, but also position Europe as a leading global study destination. They also strengthen ties with local communities and innovation ecosystems, while driving reforms across national and European higher education systems. They pioneer new instruments available to the entire higher education community, like the European Degree, a possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions, and they boost the Bologna Process implementation.

The European Universities initiative has demonstrated its potential, but much remains to be achieved. To scale its impact, sustained support from the Commission, Member States and all stakeholders is crucial.

The Commission is working to ensure sustainable funding under the next financial programming period, paving the way for these alliances to become the universities of tomorrow. You can count on my unwavering commitment to this vision.

**Roxana Mînzatu**

Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs, and Preparedness

# Executive summary

## The study

This study report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative presents the progress, achievements, and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative, and gives insights on remaining challenges. It provides recommendations to continue making the European Universities initiative a success in the long run. The report is a comprehensive attempt to assess what the alliances have achieved since their inception in 2019 and how they have transformed European higher education and transnational cooperation models.

The report builds on a rich body of information obtained through extensive desk research, stakeholder consultation activities[1], and the piloting exercise of a monitoring framework of the European Universities initiative, allowing to assess the progress and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative as a whole. Data for the monitoring framework was collected in the second half of 2023, offering a snapshot of the alliances' achievements at a certain moment in their development, without prejudice of the consideration of their progress achieved since then. The report's findings are also rooted in an extensive review of position papers of higher education stakeholder organisations, a growing body of academic literature on the European Universities initiative and the assessments of some Member States on the impact of the initiative in their country.

The report provides insights on the transformational impacts in the field of transnational institutional cooperation and shared governance; joint education provision and mobility; cooperation with society and economy; institutionalised cooperation in research and innovation of the alliances and the outcomes for the wider higher education system, including at national and European level. This executive summary gives an overview of the main findings; the main report provides the underlying evidence base.

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[1] Interviews, focus groups and workshops engaging representatives of European universities alliances, higher education stakeholders, including representatives of EU-level associations, European level students' unions, Member States and the European Commission.

## Main findings

### *Transformational potential of the European Universities alliances – the emergence of a new long-term strategic model of European transnational cooperation in higher education*

The European Universities initiative is a flagship initiative of the European Strategy for Universities[2] and key for the achievement of the European Education Area[3]. **The Initiative is supporting the setup of highly ambitious transnational alliances of higher education institutions** that **develop long-term structural, sustainable and systemic cooperation** in education, with synergies with research and innovation, at the service of society.

The EU leaders called for the creation of European Universities at the 2017 Gothenburg European Council to **"enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities"**. The alliances created in this context are unique compared to other cooperation models in higher education in view of their unprecedented scope and scale, transcending project-based approaches and going beyond a focus on a specific thematic or operational area. The alliances are gathering their institutions around joint **long-term strategies, conciliating excellence and inclusion** in highly ambitious bottom-up cooperation models enabling a **deep institutional level cooperation across departments, disciplines** and domains in education, research and innovation, at the service to society.

This study shows the **significant transformational potential and progress towards building fully fledged European Universities alliances and achieving the ambitious policy goals of the initiative, five years after its launch under Erasmus+ in 2019**. It is still relatively early to assess the full-scale impact of the European Universities initiative on European higher education institutions and higher education systems in Europe as a whole, as some of the alliances have only started very recently, in 2024 or even 2025. **It is thus expected for the outcomes and transformational potential of the initiative to increase over time, when more alliances are coming to maturity**.

**The alliances embody what Enrico Letta refers to in his report on the future of the EU Single Market as the *fifth freedom* – to learn, work together, research, innovate, share knowledge and capacity across borders**[4]. Evidenced as a "catalyst for renewed integration" in European higher education[5] and as an effective "tool for promoting European identity based on a common sense of belonging through everyday

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[2] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European strategy for universities*, 2022, p. 5 https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities

[3] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area*, OJ C, C/195, 7 June 2018, p. 7, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018XG0607(01))

[4] Letta, E., *Much more than a market – Speed, Security, Solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, April, 2024 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf

[5] Cino Pagliarello, M., 'Higher education in the single market between (trans)national integration and supranationalisation: exploring the European universities initiative', *Journal of European Integration,* Vol 44 Issue 1, pp. 149-164, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.2011266

practice"[6], the European Universities initiative already represents a fundamental achievement for the European Union of strengthened transnational cooperation in higher education, **bringing Europeans closer together, as an undeniable symbol of peace, cooperation and unity**.

**Academics, staff, researchers, students and leadership engaged wholeheartedly in building the alliances**, proven by their unwavering commitment to the success of the initiative. Thanks to their unprecedented mobilisation, the alliances pushed boundaries and innovated in transnational cooperation, leading the initiative to become, five years on, a cornerstone of the European higher education system that profoundly changed the way universities cooperate in Europe. European Universities alliances are seen as a new model of transnational cooperation in higher education with a long-term strategic outlook.

From its start in 2019, the initiative triggered an unprecedented interest and excitement of the European higher education community attracting a growing number of proposals over **five successive Erasmus+ calls**, and rapidly increasing from initially 17 alliances selected under the pilot phase of the initiative, gathering 114 higher education institutions, to currently **65 European Universities alliances**, gathering **over 570 higher education institutions of all types and sizes from 35 countries,** including all EU Member States as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, the Republic of North-Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye.

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[6] Frame, A., and Curyło, B., 'Bringing Erasmus home: the European universities initiative as an example of 'Everyday Europeanhood'', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2022.2134986

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**
Erasmus+

**Pilot phase of the European Universities**
**Second Erasmus+ call for proposals**
- **41 alliances**
- more than **280 HEIs**
- **31 countries** (incl. all Member States)
- Up to EUR **5 Mio/alliance** for 3 years

**2023 Erasmus+ call for proposals**
- **50 alliances**
- More than **430 HEIs**
- **35 countries** (incl. all Member States)
- Up to EUR **14,4 Mio/alliance** for 4 years
- Almost **1700 associated partners**

**European Degree Package –**
implementing the European Strategy for Universities commitments and delivering on a European approach for quality assurance and on attractive academic careers Commission Communication and Council Recommendation proposals, 2024

**Launch of the fully fledged European Universities initiative**
**2022 Erasmus+ call for proposals**
- **44 alliances**
- **340 HEIs**
- **31 countries** (incl. all Member States)
- Up to EUR **14,4 Mio/alliance** for 4 years
- Around **1300 associated partners**

**EU Heads of States and Governments mandate to create the European Universities alliances**
Council Conclusions, Gothenburg, December 2017

| OCTOBER 2018 | MAY 2021 | JANUARY 2022 | SEPTEMBER 2023 |

**PILOT PHASE**     **FULLY FLEDGED PHASE (Erasmus+ budget EUR 1.2 Billion)**

| DECEMBER 2017 | NOVEMBER 2019 | NOVEMBER 2021 | SEPTEMBER 2022 | MARCH 2024 |

**EU Higher Education Ministers confirm support and endorse concept of the European Universities alliances**
Council Conclusions on the European Universities initiative, 2021

**2024 Erasmus+ call for proposals**
- **65 alliances**
- More than **570 HEIs**
- **35 countries** (incl. all Member States)
- Up to EUR **14,4 Mio/alliance** for 4 years
- Over **2200 associated partners**

**Launch of the Pilot phase of the European Universities**
**First Erasmus+ call for proposals**
- **17 alliances**
- **114 HEIs**
- **25 countries**
- Up to EUR **5 Mio/alliance** for 3 years

**European Strategy for Universities, with transnational cooperation at its core and the European Universities as a flagship initiative**
Commission Communication, 2022

*Source: Prepared by PPMI*

A key strength of the initiative is its **inclusivity and geographical balance**. By bringing universities from North, South, East and West of Europe - including outermost regions, rural and remote regions and partners from the Western Balkans - closer together, the alliances hold great potential to **bring Europeans closer together**, and strengthen common understanding. This is **key to maintain peace in Europe**, in a world that is more and more polarised, and in an increasingly complex geopolitical context.

The respect for the diversity of the European higher education system is another key feature of the alliances. They **do not only include comprehensive universities, but also universities of applied sciences, technical universities and institutes of arts** among others, thereby fully valuing the richness of Europe's higher education.

The alliances work together with more than **2200 associated partners** across 43 **countries**, stemming from non-governmental organisations, enterprises, cities, local and regional authorities. As of 2022, the initiative has opened opportunities for higher education institutions from all Bologna Process countries to be associated to the alliances. In this context, the alliances are working together with almost **35 higher education institutions from Ukraine as associated partners**.

The alliances are going beyond a focus on a specific topic or operational area to cooperate across departments, disciplines and domains. In this transversal approach, some alliances have chosen specific themes as common threads for their deeper cooperation, whereas other alliances have a cross-cutting approach and address different focus areas. The below summary gives a non-exhaustive overview of some of the **main themes covered by the European Universities alliances**.

**65** European Universities alliances

**in 35 countries**
including **all EU countries**, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, the Republic of North-Macedonia, Norway, Serbia and Türkiye

Including more than **570** higher education institutions

Collaborating with more than **2200 associated partners**
including non-governmental organisations, enterprises, cities, local and regional authorities and other higher education institutions

## Summary of main themes covered by the European Universities alliances (non-exhaustive)

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES** — Erasmus+

| Theme | Alliances |
|---|---|
| **SUSTAINABILITY AND ENVIRONMENT** | 4EU+, AURORA, Arqus, CHARM-EU, ECIU, EUGLOH, EU-CONEXUS, UNITA, UNIgreen, EUGREEN, SUNRISE, EU4DUAL, EURECA-PRO, ENHANCE, CIVIS, SEA-EU, BAUHAUS4EU, T4EU, INVEST, EPICUR, EC2U, ERUA, EUNICE, EUniWell, EUTOPIA, RUN-EU, ULYSSEUS, Una Europa, UNIC, UNIVERSEH, COLOURS, INGENIUM, STARS EU, U!REKA SHIFT, ACROSS, EUNICoast, ChallengeEU, UNINOVIS, KreativEU, ARTEMIS, EUonAIR, PIONEER, EU-GIFT |
| **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION** | 4EU+, Arqus, CircleU.,CIVICA, CIVIS, EELISA, UNITE!, EUt+, EUonAIR, UNIVERSEH, EUNICE, NEOLAiA, UNINOVIS, EDUC, ENHANCE, ENLIGHT, YUFE, NeurotechEU, RUN-EU, T4EU, ULYSSEUS, Una Europa, UNITA, COLOURS, EULiST, STARS EU, U!REKA SHIFT, EUNICoast, OpenEU, ChallengeEU, HEROES, KreativEU, PIONEER, EuroTeQ |
| **HEALTH AND WELL-BEING** | 4EU+, CircleU., EUniWell, ENLIGHT, NeurotechEU, EUGLOH, E3UDRES2, EC2U, EPICUR, EUTOPIA, ULYSSEUS, UNITA, COLOURS, EU4DUAL, STARS EU, ChallengeEU, PIONEER, EuroTeQ |
| **SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES** | CIVICA, ERUA, EUTOPIA, UNIC, BAUHAUS4EU, ARTEMIS, HEROES, AURORA, ACE2EU, COLOURS, EMERGE, Una Europa, EUonAIR, ENGAGE.EU, EUniWell, FORTHEM, YUFE, UNITA, EULiST, EUPeace, ACROSS, IN.TUNE |
| **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP** | AURORA, RUN-EU, INVEST, ACE2EU, PIONEER, T4EU, STARS EU, NEOLAiA, U!REKA SHIFT, EDUC, ECIU, ENGAGE.EU, UNITE!, EU4DUAL, EUGREEN, INGENIUM, UNIgreen, ACROSS, OpenEU, ChallengeEU, EMERGE, HEROES, EU-GIFT |
| **ARTS, CULTURAL HERITAGE AND IDENTITY** | Una Europa, CIVIS, KreativEU, ARTEMIS, UNITA, BAUHAUS4EU, Arqus, EC2U, ENLIGHT, ERUA, EUniWell, EUTOPIA, FilmEU, ACROSS, SUNRISE, IN.TUNE |
| **GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION** | HEROES, UNIC, ERUA, EUGREEN, EUPeace, INGENIUM, NEOLAiA, OpenEU, EMERGE |
| **MIGRATION AND HUMAN RIGHTS** | ARTEMIS, EMERGE, ERUA, SEA-EU |
| **URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT** | T4EU, RUN-EU, PIONEER, CIVIS, EC2U, ECIU, ENHANCE, EU-CONEXUS, EURECA-PRO, INVEST, YUFE, ULYSSEUS, UNIC, U!REKA SHIFT, EUNICoast, ChallengeEU, HEROES, SUNRISE, ARTEMIS, EU-GIFT |
| **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT, PEACE AND DEMOCRACY** | Circle U., CIVICA, BAUHAUS4EU, ACE2EU, EC2U, ERUA, EUPeace |
| **ENGINEERING, MATHEMATICS AND TECHNOLOGY** | EELISA, EuroTeQ, Eut+, ULYSSEUS, UNIVERSEH, EULiST, UNINOVIS, SUNRISE, EUonAIR, EU-GIFT, ENHANCE, UNITE! |
| **COSTAL AND BLUE ECONOMY** | EU-CONEXUS, SEA-EU, EUNICoast |
| **SPACE** | UNIVERSEH |

European Education Area

The benefits of the cooperation with the European Universities alliances for students, staff members, the partner higher education institutions, external stakeholders and the wider higher education system are multiple. They are described and summarised further below.

## Benefits of cooperation within European Universities alliances

| Students | Staff | Partner higher education institutions | External stakeholders and society | Wider higher education system |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Widened educational and professional training opportunities | Expanded opportunities for pedagogical and professional training | Increased competitiveness, attractiveness for global talent and raised international visibility | Intensified cooperation with associated partners and local ecosystems, - including industry, public organisations, and civil society | Increased quality, attractiveness, visibility and acknowledgement on a worldwide scale |
| Supported development of key skills and competencies | Facilitated mobility opportunities, especially for administrative staff | Deep institutional level transnational cooperation and integration at all levels and development of innovative governance structures | Strengthened emphasis on challenge-based education and research, in collaboration with stakeholders | Boosting the Bologna Tools implementation |
| Promoted innovative pedagogies and flexible learning pathways | Enhanced internationalisation exposure opportunities | Enhanced capacity for pedagogical innovation and experimentation | Reinforced commitment to European Values, societal and civic engagement | Balanced mobility flows and consolidate brain circulation. |
| Facilitated mobility and internationalisation opportunities | Widened career perspectives | Improved capabilities, raised excellence and innovation, as well as efficiency gains, thanks to pooling resources, knowledge, infrastructure, data and services | Enhanced skill relevance for the local job market needs | Increased sharing of good practices and development of open access transferable resources |
| Student-, challenge-, and research-based, and inter-/trans-disciplinary transnational learning. | | | | Contributed to policy changes that reduced barriers for transnational collaboration in higher education at the national and European level |
| Enhanced democratic representation and decision making role | | | | |

### *Providing unparalleled opportunities for learning, professional development, mobility and networking for students, academics, researchers and staff of higher education institutions*

Together, the **65 alliances are the alma mater of about half of students in Europe who are now studying as part of a European Universities alliance**.

> *Combined, the partner universities involved in European Universities alliances involve over **11 million students**. With that, **about half of students in Europe** are now studying as part of a European Universities alliance.*
>
> *- Monitoring framework data*

**The opportunities available for students are significantly multiplied when their higher education institution is a part of a European Universities alliance.** They can benefit from the **European inter-university campuses** that the alliances have set up, with widened educational and professional training offer as the alliances have opened up their existing learning offers or developed new ones for students of the different partner universities. The alliances offer **student-, challenge-, and research-based, and inter-/trans-disciplinary transnational learning**. At the time of the

data collection for the present report, the **alliances had collectively set up more than 600 joint study programmes and courses at all levels**. While accreditation of joint degrees remains challenging due to persisting hurdles in national legislation, the multitude of these new joint learning activities combined with new flexible learning pathways has proved to be highly impactful in **expanding and innovating the learning offer of the partner institutions**.

> *The alliances had collectively set up more than **600 joint study programmes and courses** at all levels, including around 160 joint degree programmes. They also launched more than **430 short courses leading to micro-credentials**.*
>
> *- Monitoring framework data (data collected second half 2023)*

**The alliances have pioneered innovative frameworks for student and staff mobility**, facilitating diverse types of mobility including long-term physical mobility, developed multiple novel mobility formats, such as short-term, virtual and blended (for example the Blended Intensive Programmes), for students, academics, staff, and researchers. The new mobility formats led alliances to **complement traditional mobility opportunities with increased internationalisation exposure opportunities**.

Diverse **support measures**, including financial, made mobility more inclusive and accessible, broadening the target groups, while also integrating efforts towards sustainability. Alliances included green mobility principles and inclusiveness objectives in their joint strategies.

To further facilitate mobility, most of the alliances have also developed **joint mobility services, offices, and measures** such as **financial assistance, multilateral mobility agreements**, and **automatic recognition of intra-alliance mobility**.

**These efforts boosted both student and staff mobility.** While, in absolute numbers, further progress and efforts remain necessary to reach the 50% student mobility target in view of the total number of students studying in the partner institutions, data under the present report outline a **400% increase of intra-alliance students' mobility**, and a **200% increase in staff mobility** since 2019.

> *Although in absolute numbers, challenges remain and enhanced efforts are still needed towards the achievement of the 50% mobility targets, the alliances analysed under this study registered, in relative terms, a **400% increase in intra-alliance students' mobility**, and a **200% increase in staff mobility** over the first three years of their operation.*
>
> *- Monitoring framework data (data collected second half 2023)*

The widened educational opportunities have contributed to **equipping students with a range of key future-proof skills and competencies, increasing the relevance of the curricula and directly contributing to increasing students' employability**, including critical thinking, interdisciplinary knowledge, and entrepreneurial, creative, and transversal skills. This is increasing learners' personal fulfilment and is contributing

to increase the relevance of education for the jobs and society of tomorrow, ensuring that learning outcomes meet job markets' and societal needs.

**Many alliances built their educational offer by accounting for the skills gap between supply and demand in local job markets,** ensuring that students have the skills and competencies required, **expected to result in better employability**. Alliances have integrated their **associated partners** in these activities, in particular **companies and the private sector, enabling them to contribute to the curricula development** and to participate in the governance of the alliances.

**The alliances also reinforced commitment toward European values, including academic values and democracy by embedding these goals in their educational offerings** through activities preparing learners and the wider society for active citizenship, informing about the importance of the democratic process and of participating in it. They also connect learning with the social reality outside the classroom, and nurture skills needed for civic engagement, including multilingualism, interculturality, building greater trust in democratic institutions, raising interpersonal trust, and tolerance for diversity, as well as diffusing knowledge into the society (open education), inform citizens and promote the credibility and value of science and of the rigorous scientific processes involved in knowledge generation (open science). The alliances structured their operations to embody democratic and inclusive governance principles, leveraging their educational platforms to instil a sense of European citizenship and to foster the appreciation of diversity and unity. The alliances have put in place measures to **recognise and reward the civic and community engagement within study programmes, leading to enhancing civic engagement of their students**.

> *Almost 75% of the alliances* have established or are in the process of establishing departments, centres, living labs, or other structures and initiatives to support *citizen engagement*.
>
> *- Monitoring framework data (data collected second half 2023)*

**For the staff, the alliances offered diverse initiatives like joint pedagogical training, staff weeks or job shadowing placements** that are relatively less frequent or less structural in other transnational cooperation formats.

**By investing in the continuous growth of their staff, the alliances are enhancing individual career trajectories** and contribute to the overall excellence and innovation in European higher education. Staff in the European Universities alliances are benefitting from a larger pool of **professional development and networking opportunities to enhance collaboration in education and research**, as well as from enhanced **mobility opportunities for academics, researchers and staff** that stem from sharing resources and services between partners. Alliances offer **teaching training** equipping educators with cutting-edge methods and tools, provide **specific seed funding** to support academics and researchers in jointly developing innovative educational ideas, and support researchers, including early career researchers with professional development and up-skilling, training on research skills for students and academics, mainstream good practices at institutional level on doctoral training.

The alliances also expanded professional training opportunities for **administrative staff** - a target group that is not usually mobile or exposed to international working environments - offering unprecedented **exposure to internationalisation** through professional training opportunities and transformed mobility approaches with great

benefits in terms of skills development, reinforcing the sense of community, seamless integration, and capacity building across partner institutions.

## *A game changer for higher education institutions*

**Higher education institutions consider that their participation in European Universities alliances boosted their international visibility, attractiveness and competitiveness**, including by contributing to improving international ranking positions, reinforced joint publications, and a **stronger appeal for international talent** through transnational education opportunities and joint degrees in the partner institutions. This increased visibility also allowed institutions to forge new collaborations on a global scale and disseminate their outcomes to partner institutions across continents, contributing to the global visibility and reputation of EU higher education.

**The alliances have set up innovative and inclusive governance structures, showcasing commitment towards a long-term sustainable cooperation perspective, beyond project-based approaches,** engaging academic leadership, students and staff of partner institutions, also involving the associated partners at local, European and global levels from public and private sectors. Although there is still room for further progress with regard to the students' representation in the alliances and the democratic selection of student representatives, already **90% of the alliances' governance structures comprise a Student Board,** enabling the partner institutions to offer students a democratic representation of their voice in the decision-making processes of the alliance.

> **98%** *of the alliances include* **students** *in their governance with* **63%** *having full voting rights.*
>
> *- Monitoring framework data (data collected second half 2023)*

Such in-depth and long-term joint governance structures are a **shift change compared to past cooperation models**, signalling the alliances' deep commitment and comprehensive structural cooperation between the partner institutions, supported by their joint long-term strategies and visions. The sustainability and evolution of these governance structures show that **the alliances have evolved out of a project-based mindset towards projecting their institutions into a long-term cooperation**, with **fourteen alliances further formalising their collaboration through a legal entity** to date, allowing for an ever more sustainable cooperation, including through joint educational activities and facilitated management, distribution and acquisition of joint resources, as well as joint external representation. While several other European Universities alliances are considering the set-up of a legal entity, some indicated that they would **welcome an improved EU-level solution of a legal entity for alliances of HEIs to facilitate their collaboration and to gain in efficiency.**

**The European Universities initiative provides opportunities to achieve critical mass and better compete regionally, nationally, Europe-wide and globally through pooling resources, building on their partners' strengths**, including with regard to expensive equipment and joint support services. Pooling resources, knowledge and strengths contributes to **reducing fragmentation** across the European higher education sector, **raising quality and expanding educational offerings**. This **leads to efficiency gains** not only in terms of reduced operating costs through economies of scale, but also through a broader outreach to students, offering enhanced access to wider educational offerings at all levels.

*The alliances as key drivers for European level policy developments, enhancing attractiveness of European higher education, and increasing European competitiveness and integration*

**The alliances have demonstrated a transformational impact at EU level**. Through transnational dialogues, policy exchanges and deep cooperation, they have **furthered European integration and cohesion, increased social engagement, and made higher education more responsive and relevant to labour market needs, while promoting a common identity and common values, including academic values**[7].

**The alliances drove policy progress at EU level**, acting as pioneers in developing and testing innovative approaches to long-term structural and systemic cooperation in education, research, and innovation across Europe[8]. For example, the work of the alliances has been instrumental to inform the Commission proposal for **Blueprint for a European Degree**, as well as advancing work on **quality assurance and recognition, sustainable and attractive careers of academic staff, micro-credentials**, and the analysis of institutionalised cooperation instruments such as a possible European **legal status** for alliances of higher education institutions. The alliances have **boosted the implementation of the Bologna Process tools** and put a **spotlight on the remaining challenges in relation to their implementation.** Stakeholders call for continued work on the full implementation of existing tools for facilitating transnational cooperation and other necessary system-level reforms.

**The alliances' transformational impact at EU level has been broadly acknowledged by higher education stakeholders who strongly support the initiative as a distinctive feature of Europe's higher education landscape** that is harnessing institutions' capabilities, optimising resources and capacities availability, eliminating cooperation barriers, and maximising opportunities for European students, academics, staff and researchers[9,10]. A more detailed overview of the stakeholders' positions is discussed under Chapter 4 of the present report.

**Higher education stakeholders** such as the European University Association (EUA), Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research (CESAER), Universities of the Capitals of Europe (UNICA); League of European Research Universities (LERU), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities (The Guild), Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN), the Coimbra Group, European University Foundation (EUF); Student organisations at European level such as European Student Union (ESU) and European Student Network (ESN) as well as several national student unions[11]; Organisations promoting and/or funding higher education

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[7] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023 https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[8] CESAER, *Empowering excellence: European Universities Alliances as laboratories for success stories*, 2 July 2024, https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2024/20240702-alliances-position/20240702-cesaer-position-alliances-and-science-and-technology.pdf

[9] European University Association, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[10] European University Foundation, *Position paper on the European Universities initiative*, April 2018, https://uni-foundation.eu/uploads/2018_Position%20Paper%20on%20European%20Universities.pdf

[11] VVS (Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten – Flemish Union of Students in Belgium), SK RVŠ (Studentská komora Rady vysokých škol – Student Chamber of the Council of Higher Education Institutions in Czechia), DSF (Danske studerendes fællesråd – National Union of Students in Denmark), SYL (Suomen ylioppilaskuntien liitto – National Union of University Students in Finland) and SAMOK (Suomen opiskelijakuntien liitto), FAGE (Fédération des Associations Générales Etudiantes – Federation of General Student Associations in France),

internationalisation such as the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), and others **support the initiative as an important catalyst for policy discussions and reform** to facilitate transnational cooperation in higher education, acknowledging that the European Universities alliances have become **important instruments for advancing the European Education Area, driving institutional development and transformation**, as well as European competitiveness.

Stakeholders consider the initiative as a **significant driver for the Bologna Process** through, for example, the **mutual recognition of qualifications,** the **removal of barriers to mobility and for the establishment of joint programmes**. European Universities alliances have already demonstrated concrete added value to the participating higher education institutions as well as their communities of students, academics, researchers, and staff.

**Stakeholders also recognise the capacity of the alliances to enhance Europe's competitiveness and its leadership in education, science and technology**, based on their holistic, strategic, and long-term vision encompassing all the alliances missions of education, research and innovation at the service of society. Stakeholders found that the alliances have become a key part of the wider spectrum of cooperation, notably by creating new opportunities for institutions, staff and students, enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, increasing the attractiveness, visibility and international standing of the partner institutions, boosting student and staff mobility, strengthening the links between different university missions, developing a more strategic approach towards international collaboration, and helping to build Europe and foster European integration and cohesion.

For these reasons, many **stakeholders**, including the European Universities Association (EUA and the alliances themselves[12], **call for continued and comprehensive financial support for the alliances across all their missions**, based on open competition and excellence. This is to achieve their full potential and spur benefits to the entire higher education sector in Europe, continuing to create innovative environments for education and research cooperation across borders.

At the same time, several stakeholders from the university sector have asked:

⚑ To **avoid an overload of the European Universities alliances** due to the high number of different policy objectives linked to the European Universities initiative. They claim that not all challenges that society and higher education are facing can be solved through the work of the alliances. Against this background, they ask to **respect the diversity of models of European Universities alliances** in view of the long-term strategy of the alliances, as there is no one-size-fits-all governance model. The design of the European Universities calls for proposals, with the alliances in the driving seat of their joint long-term strategy, aims to address this concern.

⚑ To **ensure that transnational cooperation and related regulatory environments and funding streams benefit the entire higher education sector**, and not only those institutions part of the European Universities initiative. They ask not to create a two-tier system. Policy developments at European level,

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CREUP (Coordinadora de Representantes de Estudiantes de Universidades Públicas – Coordination of Student Representatives of Public Universities in Spain)

[12] European university Association, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation*, 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html and European Universities Alliances, *European Universities Alliances fully committed to making the initiative a success in a long term*, 2023, https://erua-eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/JointFOREUstatement_InvestmentPathway_clean.pdf

such as those linked to the Blueprint for a European degree, a European quality assurance and recognition system, sustainable and attractive careers, micro-credentials and a possible European legal status for alliances, in the design and testing of which the alliances are greatly engaged, are indeed addressing the whole higher education sector. Also, the Erasmus+ programme remains a widely accessible programme, enabling the support of broad **diversity of cooperation models**, also beyond the European Universities initiative, bringing great value to build a closely-knit higher education sector across Europe, building capacity in European higher education institutions and making them stronger together.

**Student organisations at EU level** – notably **European Students' Union and the Erasmus Student Network** – **actively support the objectives of European Universities initiative** that contributes to advancing the goals of the European Higher Education Area, notably linked to its central role in **promoting common internationalisation values and mobility, nurturing a shared European identity, and fostering global competitiveness in higher education**. Student organisations recognise the added value the alliances bring to students notably in terms of creating a European sense of belonging, strengthening the implementation of the Bologna Process tools and facilitating seamless and embedded mobility, automatic recognition and better alignment in the use of ECTS, as well as fostering internationalisation and interoperability.

Students' organisations found that the initiative is also fostering the **representation of students within the alliances' governance**, as well as **inclusiveness and diversity**. They argue though that **more efforts are still needed** in this regard, especially when it comes to **democratic representation of students**. Data gathered in the context of this study shows that **students are involved in the governance of 95% of alliances with 63% having full voting rights**.

Students are also cooperating across the alliances. Several European Universities alliances have launched a grassroots initiative to empower students and give them a say in the future of Europe. As a key outcome, the **European Student Assembly (ESA)** has been set up[13]. It takes place once a year in spring at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. It gathers a group of more than 200 talented students from several European Universities alliances across Europe to discuss about essential themes for the future of the European Union. The event is already at its 4th edition in 2025.

*The alliances as drivers for accelerating national policy developments, reforms and transformation of Europe's higher education systems*

**The alliances demonstrated transformational potential at the national level, enhancing the quality, attractiveness and competitiveness of the national higher education systems.**

**The Member States' support for the initiative** has been reiterated in the **2021 Council Resolution on a 'Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)'** that states that "higher education institutions will be encouraged to find new forms of deeper cooperation, namely by creating transnational alliances, (…) and through the full rollout of the European Universities initiative"[14]. The Higher Education Ministers of the EU Member States, through their 2021 **Council Conclusions on the**

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[13] For more information see: https://www.eucvoices.eu/
[14] Council of the European Union, *Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond* (2021-2030) 2021/C 66/01, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32021G0226%2801%29

**European Universities initiative bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education** confirmed the concept of European Universities co-developed with the higher education sector and the Member States and explored during the pilot phase of the initiative. The Member States expressed their continued commitment on the future development of the initiative and acknowledged the alliances' contribution to wider higher education strategic development[15]. The 2022 **Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe** also highlight that the alliances "have the potential to generate real European added value by achieving critical mass on a European scale through the long-term commitment of all involved parties"[16].

**The work of the alliances prompted numerous Member States to adapt legislation and policies to remove barriers to seamless transnational cooperation in higher education**, often benefitting all students, staff and institutions, and positively impacting the entire higher education sector by making it more accessible and cohesive across Europe. **Higher education institutions reported that the alliance context helped them to add value to national-level discussions on educational policy developments**[17]. Moreover, the **national HEIs participating in alliances form an important network able to drive the transformation of the whole sector and enrich study offers across their territories**, possibly contributing to cohesively revive EU regions[18].

The alliances have mobilised their efforts to work with Member States to further facilitate transnational cooperation, for example, by boosting the implementation of the Bologna tools at the **national level**, **automatic recognition**, removing legal barriers to **accreditation of joint programmes** and the delivery of **joint degrees**, recognition of **innovative mobility formats** in several Member States. Some Member States also adopted policies tailored to the European Universities alliances' needs and included the initiative in their national higher education internationalisation strategies, signalling a supportive stance and long-term strategic commitment towards the initiative.

**The alliances are pioneering new approaches and methods** for systemic institutional-level cooperation across all universities' missions, as well as innovative pedagogies, mobility models and joint educational offerings, thereby acting as testbeds and laboratories for the universities of the future. This is creating **added value for the entire higher education sector that can get inspired by the successful and less fruitful practices, understand what influenced success, build on the collective knowledge built within the alliances, and scale up good practices and success stories** at the level of higher education institutions or within other cooperation models.

The alliances **actively collaborated with institutions beyond their partnership in the broader higher education systems at the national level, helping to diffuse good practices and transferring results** such as scalable formats, blueprints and

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[15] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education*, OJ C 221, 10 June 2021, p. 14–24, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0610(02)

[16] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe*, OJ C 221, 21 April 2022, p. 14–24, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52022XG0421(02)

[17] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

[18] European Commission. *Youth for reviving (stagnating) EU territories*. 2024. Publications Office of the European Union. https://doi.org/10.2776/10088

roadmaps in relation to, for example, enhancing mobility strategies, innovative pedagogical approaches, novel governance structures for institutional level cooperation, ambitious diversity and inclusion strategies, etc. The data gathered under the Monitoring Framework shows that **almost 90% of the alliances are actively engaged in sharing good practices with other university networks and organise outreach and dissemination events**. **More than two-thirds of the alliances are actively publishing open-source educational and management materials.**

In this context, the work of the **Community of Practice FOREU4ALL**, supported by Erasmus+, gathering all alliances and set up in Autumn 2024 will be key. Their work is building on the efforts and expertise of their pre-existing informal cooperation structure (the Forum of European Universities FOR-EU 1 and 2) in forming active communities around strategic topics. **FOREU4ALL** could play an **instrumental role in the coming years in fostering a collaborative and supportive ecosystem where good practices and experiences are shared and disseminated, both among the alliances and with the broader European higher education sector**. The fact that FOREU4ALL also involves the European Students' Union (ESU), Erasmus Student Network (ESN), European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) is key to enable the alliances to collectively act as trailblazers fostering progress for the benefit of the entire higher education sector and society. In this respect, a cooperation with the Seal of Excellence holders[19] could further enhance the alliance's capacity as role model.

**Several national studies and position papers**[20,21,22,23] **analysed the impact of the European Universities alliances on their national higher education systems**, acknowledging their transformational nature, going beyond regular project-based cooperation models, finding **positive outcomes** notably in terms of **education quality, mobility, increased attractiveness and international visibility** in global rankings, **reinforced higher education institutions, potential to contribute to policy development at national and EU level**, as well as **enhanced students' representation**, **better quality in teaching and research**, forming a solid ground for a culture of innovation enabling to better respond to requirements of the current fourth industrial revolution.

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[19] The Seal of Excellence is a quality label awarded to proposals of universities alliances that did not receive funding through Erasmus+ due to budgetary constraints.
[20] Poszytek, P. and Budzanowska, A. (Eds.), *European Universities in Poland. Implementation of development strategy*, FRSE Publishing Key Concepts Series, vol. 13, Warsaw, 2023 http://dx.doi.org/10.47050/67587105; *Swedish higher education institutions' participation in European universities: Opportunities and challenges for universities and higher education in Sweden*, Swedish Council for Higher Education, (in Swedish), 2024 https://www.uhr.se/globalassets/_uhr.se/publikationer/2024/uhr-rapport-2024-3-svenska-larosatens-deltagande-i-europauniversitet.pdf
[21] European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, Daniel, K. and Le Gleut, R., *Political Opinion on the European Universities Initiative*, 24 October 2024 https://www.senat.fr/fileadmin/Commissions/Affaires_europeennes/Fichiers/Avis_politiques/AP_EN_universites.pdf
[22] Joensen, A., Hallbåter, M., and Charysczak, M., *Swedish higher education institutions' participation in European universities: Opportunities and challenges for universities and higher education in Sweden*, Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2024 https://www.uhr.se/globalassets/_uhr.se/publikationer/2024/uhr-rapport-2024-3-svenska-larosatens-deltagande-i-europauniversitet.pdf
[23] European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, Daniel, K. and Le Gleut, R., *Rapport d'information fait au nom de la commission des affaires européennes (1) sur les universités européennes*, Commission des affaires européennes du Sénat français, rapport des sénateurs Karine Daniel et Ronan Le Gleut, 2024 https://www.senat.fr/rap/r24-052/r24-0521.pdf

The alliances became a **catalyst for leveraging the modernisation capacity** and operating major shifts in the working culture in the higher education institutions, **empowering academics, staff, faculties and students, and engaging a broader spectrum of the academic community in the internationalisation activities**.

Another unique aspect about the alliances is that **the majority of Member States are currently financing[24] their national higher education institutions involved in the initiative**, either directly or indirectly as part of their core funding, thereby supporting the alliances to achieve their full potential.  Such additional national or regional support is **unique under Erasmus+ actions**. This unprecedented support is demonstrating political commitment due to the strategic role that Member States attribute to the alliances in their national higher education contexts, supporting the national goals to increase internationalisation, raise the quality and attractiveness of higher education and promote knowledge exchanges. **95% of the alliances analysed in the context of this study report that they receive national funding**, while for 3%, such support is further expected.

In practice, there is, however a **substantial variation in the level and modalities** of this national/regional level support given to higher education institutions participating in the initiative[25]. In the same vein, the **system-specific conditions and restrictions on the use of the national financing** risk narrowing down the level-playing field for institutions involved in the alliances. In practice, these differing support levels and funding modalities often result in a **loss of efficiency and effectiveness** when managing the different national-level sources. This different situation of the partner institutions poses risks for alliance cohesion. **Alliances suggest a more coherent approach to national/regional funding of their partner institutions**.

> €  **95%** *of the alliances analysed in the context of this study report that they receive* **national funding***, while 3% indicated such support is further expected.*
>
> *- Monitoring framework data(data collected second half 2023)*

### Reinforcing cohesion with the alliances' eco-systems and regions

One of the unique characteristics of European Universities alliances is the development of structured long-term multifaceted, engaged and inclusive **cooperation with their over 2200 associated partners** within their local ecosystems, leading to **strengthened links between academia, business, and society with high societal impact.** The associated partners include, for example, education and training institutions, and, **since 2022,** including **higher education institutions from the Bologna Process countries**, as well as businesses and industry, public authorities (including cities and regional authorities), science, innovation and technology organisations, civil society and students' organisations. The associated partners span across **43 countries all across the EU and beyond.**

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[24] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Jongbloed, B., McGrath, C., Boer, H. and Gayardon, A., *Final report of the study on the state and effectiveness of national funding systems of higher education to support the European universities initiative . Volume I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/885757

[25] European Education Area Strategic Framework Working Group on Higher Education, *Peer Learning Activity on the financing of European Universities at national level, 17-18 October 2023*, https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/core/api/front/document/110603/download

This transnational and inter-institutional collaboration with associated partners adds value by providing new perspectives for addressing local, regional, national, European and/or global challenges, deeply anchoring the alliances in their ecosystems and communities. **The alliances contribute to local and regional development** by offering a range of services to society, from contributing to stimulating economic activity and cohesion, civic and cultural activities, and making communities more attractive places to live and socialise. **About 55% of the alliances involve external stakeholders in their governance structures.** By deepening the quadruple helix interactions at the local level, the alliances stimulate knowledge creation and innovation in regional innovation ecosystems, improving knowledge transfer, reducing regional disparities, and contributing to job creation and competitive local economies.

The alliances also stimulate balanced mobility flows and consolidate brain and talent circulation linked to their rich and attractive transnational educational offering and mobility opportunities in local higher education institutions, responsive to the needs of their communities and innovation ecosystems. The monitoring framework of the European Universities initiative developed in the context of this study outlines that over **70% of the alliances developed or are in the process of developing quadruple helix cooperation initiatives**. The involvement of associated partners from local and regional businesses and civil society drove **innovation in pedagogies** and **shaped curricula that are more relevant for the labour market needs and for supporting green and digital transitions**.

> *__70%__ of the alliances developed or are in the process of developing __quadruple helix cooperation initiatives__.*
>
> *- Monitoring framework data (data collected second half 2023)*

### *Going further - concrete activities outlining the transformational novel nature of the alliances' work*

**What makes the alliances unique is the unprecedented scope and depth of their transnational cooperation, transcending project-based approaches through joint long-term strategies.** The alliances are going beyond a focus on a specific topic or operational area to cooperate across departments, disciplines and domains in education, research and innovation. The initiative is conciliating excellence and inclusion in highly ambitious bottom-up cooperation models already showing tangible progress and concrete results:

⬩ **The alliances developed inter-universities campuses** with **joint course catalogues** offering access to many courses available at each partner institution, taking place in different languages and across different disciplines and countries. Many alliances already have **functional digital campuses or learning platforms** to host joint learning offers and activities, as well as shared student and research services, equipment and infrastructures. The alliances also developed **joint quality assurance strategies** and set up **joint services, governance and management tools**, signalling their commitment to the excellence of co-created educational activities.

⬩ These developments resulted in **boosted and enriched joint education offerings** benefitting the students and serving as a testbed for the wider higher education sector.

⬒ Joining an alliance has often been a push to develop a robust **diversity and inclusiveness strategy** and monitoring mechanisms for their institution and pushed this up in the list of priorities of partner institutions.

⬤ **The alliances accelerated the uptake of innovative pedagogies by offering challenge-based, research-based, and inter-/trans-disciplinary transnational learning**. The alliances offered opportunities for their students to engage with their peers, academics, researchers, regional actors, industry and civil society through **challenge-based approaches,** enabling them to address challenges from an interdisciplinary perspective and cooperatively. Common topics for challenge-based approaches include sustainability, local ecosystems, gender equality, climate change, migration, democracy, diversity, inclusiveness, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

  ⬒ **The students' exposure to innovation and real-life challenges in the alliances** through learning/living labs, incubators, short programmes, specialisations, quadruple helix collaborations, knowledge centres, hubs, direct work with start-ups and local businesses through traineeships/ work placements/ internships, etc, has **enhanced future proof-skills and competencies, as well as soft skills** such as self-directed learning, critical thinking, inter-institutional teamwork, real-world relevance, and internal and external stakeholder engagement.
  ⬒ **Challenge-based approaches strengthened the links between academia, business, and society,** anchoring the alliances' educational and professional training offer in their local ecosystems, increasing their relevance and enabling knowledge transfer while raising students' awareness of challenges at local, European and global levels.
  ⬒ **Teaching is better informed by the latest innovations and technological developments**, supporting students who wish to become entrepreneurs and innovators of tomorrow.

  ⬒ **The alliances' private sector partners gained direct access to academic knowledge and resources and access to a pool of skilled talents from across Europe**, directly responding to local needs, fostering a vibrant innovation ecosystem and enhancing employability, benefiting students and the local communities and economy.

> The alliances evaluated developed *528 short courses* featuring *challenge-based learning* and launched *195 courses in cooperation with external stakeholders*
>
> - *Monitoring framework data* (data collected second half 2023)

⬤ **The alliances combined complementary strengths not available at any single partner institution by pooling expertise, knowledge, resources**, **and setting up joint governance structures within the alliances.** European universities alliances have also established a range of **joint services and structures** such as student, career guidance, research services or virtual campuses to facilitate collaboration and community building, building on a **shared pool of financial, human, digital, physical and intellectual resources, infrastructure, data and services**. Some already **share physical research facilities**, while others are planning the integration, reinforcing interoperability. The alliances also invested **seed funding for policy experimentation** and the setup of **joint educational and research activities.**

- Pooling strengths led to the alliances **enhanced capabilities and raised excellence and innovation levels** in partner institutions, contributing to **enhancing attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education.**
- Pooling resources **expanded educational offerings** to a wider range of students, staff and institutions within the alliances.
- Currently, **14 alliances set up legal entities** signalling their commitment towards long-term cooperation within the alliance, and enabling facilitated and more efficient pooling of resources.

> *14 alliances set up legal entities* signalling their commitment towards long-term cooperation within the alliance, enabling sustainable governance and funding, facilitated and more efficient pooling of resources, joint educational activities, as well as external relations. More alliances are in the process of setting up such legal entities.
>
> *- Monitoring framework data and recent developments*

**The alliances pioneered student-centred flexible learning pathways** by enabling their partners to develop a coherent and sustainable offer of flexible non-degree learning opportunities and/or opening up part of their learning offer to the students of their partner universities. The flexible learning opportunities are in most cases automatically recognised. Some are leading to **micro-credentials**, that students can access as independent modules. **Most of these flexible learning opportunities can be integrated with students' regular curriculum at home universities**. The joint non-degree educational offer developed by the alliances has significantly increased and became more innovative as they opened up their partners' learning offer, developed joint courses, offered short challenge-based learning and mobility opportunities, summer and winter schools, workshops and training, including micro-credentials, enriching their available offerings of flexible learning pathways, building on existing partners' curricula.

- Such **flexible learning pathways allow students to gain specific skills and competencies in a flexible manner**, tailored to their needs and those of a changing job market.
- **The learning offer of partner institutions became more diverse and more accessible** to a broader spectrum of students, fostering lifelong learning, recognising non-traditional learning experiences, and facilitating access to internationalisation exposure.
- These **flexible learning offers would likely not be available to such broad groups of students without the European Universities alliances** which are creating sustainable grounds for cooperation, including regarding funding.

With the support some of the alliances receive(d) under Horizon Europe and/or Horizon 2020 to develop their institutional cooperation in the field of research and innovation, **the alliances have developed a joint long-term research strategy, in full coherence with their educational strategies**. They have, for example, been establishing joint research support services, including facilitating researchers' mobility and cooperation and promoting attractive research careers for young people; as well as developing practices and activities promoting open science; mapping existing research facilities, and some have been offering mutualised access

to some of their research infrastructures, and working towards joint funding applications.

- **Alliances contribute to breaking silos between education, research and innovation,** implementing the framework conditions for building excellence in R&I so as to enable the mainstreaming of good European Research Area policies and practices at the institutional level.
- **Pooling resources has the potential to reduce the fragmentation of European education and research and innovation sectors, increase the** efficiency of public spending in research and innovation capabilities, support excellence in education and research, as well as a more balanced brain circulation and increased talent attractiveness.
- **A strengthened cooperation with the private sector and the innovation ecosystem within the alliances** has the potential to contribute to the deployment of technological advancements in all EU territories.

### *Materialising the initiative's full-scale potential is still hampered by significant challenges*

When implementing their ambitious long-term strategies, the alliances revealed stringent **challenges** at institutional, regional/national or European levels. Key elements where progress is still needed concern:

- **Legal and administrative barriers hampering the development of joint educational activities** at all levels, including the design and award of joint degrees, based on effective quality assurance and recognition, as well as of flexible learning pathways.
- **Scaling-up** participation in the alliances' activities **to reach out to the majority of the students' population,** engaging **all faculties and departments** of the partner institutions.
- Difficulties in reaching the **long-term target of 50% student mobility within the alliance**.
- Current **scope, scale and duration of financial support**. The **project-based approach** is not fully in line with the alliances long-term strategic vision, and there are difficulties in efficient mobilisation of synergies between different funding streams.
- **Democratic students' representation** in the alliances' governance structures can still be further enhanced.
- **Accessibility of students with fewer opportunities** and from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds to the alliances' activities can be further enhanced, with references made to the lack of affordable and adequate **student housing** (including for students on mobility), **cost of living, mental health and wellbeing**.
- **Insufficient time for and valorisation of staff engagement** in the alliances' activities, including in relation to career progression.
- **Remaining barriers to sharing and pooling of joint resources** among partner institutions, hampering efficiency.
- **Ensuring that all alliances implement** the mandated use of the standardised tools, data formats and services of **the European Student Card Initiative** to digitally manage inter-institutional agreements, learning agreements, and student mobilities and to provide incoming students with access to the same services as local students through the issuing and recognition of the European Student Card.
- **Difficulties to advance towards full interoperability and deploy and develop joint digital infrastructures** due to challenges related to tight digitisation schedules, resource constraints and the uncertainty of budget availability to allow

for long-term planning, the need to standardise business processes between institutions within an alliance, the diversity of standards and tools available and the different regulatory frameworks in each country.

**These challenges are of relevance** not only for the alliance partners, but also encountered by **the vast majority of higher education institutions** when cooperating at transnational level, also beyond the European Universities alliances. The depth and scale of the cooperation within the alliances revealed these challenges in a more acute manner.

At the same time, these **challenges triggered a dialogue between higher education institutions, the alliances and the national authorities that enabled to put these challenges on the top of the priorities in higher education institutions, Member States and at European level, driving institutional change and legislative progress** in seeking common solutions and alleviating barriers to transnational cooperation, with benefits for the entire higher education sector.

**Consequently, at EU level, further action has been taken or is underway**, with the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[26], the Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability[27], the Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable academic careers[28], the Blueprint for a European Degree[29], the work towards a European quality assurance and recognition system, towards a possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions, and towards the further development of the European Student Card Initiative with additional standardised services and tools.

### *Concrete transformational potential and achievements of the European Universities are clearly demonstrated, but deploying the untapped potential of the initiative calls for continued efforts*

**The long-term success of the initiative calls for intensified efforts for the upcoming phase of their implementation.** To materialise even further the significant potential demonstrated by the European Universities, the alliances' actions need to be upscaled, mainstreamed and deepened. The following key orientations emerge from the study:

- **Mainstream the alliances' joint activities across a majority of faculties and departments**, raising awareness and facilitating access, thereby enabling the initiative to deliver its benefits to a **larger student and staff body across its partner universities**.
- **Incentivise further enhanced student and staff participation in alliance activities and governance** through **raising awareness** of opportunities offered by the alliances throughout the whole student body, and **boosting the inclusivity**

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[26] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation*, OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1–8, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022H0413%2801%29

[27] *Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, Official Journal of the European Union, 2022/C 243/02*, 27.06.2022, CELEX: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(02)

[28] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education*, OJ C, C/2024/7282, 2024, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/7282/oj/eng

[29] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Blueprint for a European degree – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/496478

**frameworks** to reach out to students from underrepresented, disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds, as well as through **recognition** of student and staff participation, including through ECTS and the staff career progression, and through **enhancing the role of democratically elected students' representatives**.

- **Make mobility (physical, virtual and blended, long-term and short term) the norm**, with more mobility opportunities for students and staff **embedded across all curricula,** including a wider and more systematic **exposure to internalisation activities.**

- **Progress towards fully fledged European inter-university campuses,** including through offering **more embedded mobility opportunities**, launching **more joint degree programmes** leveraging the richness and diversity of all partners educational offerings and/or **increasing the offer of flexible learning pathways, including in a lifelong learning context**. In this context, the **blueprint towards a European degree**[30] can be a key enabler for European Universities alliances to deliver joint degree programmes, while flexible learning pathways, including through **joint micro-credentials** can complement the educational offering, enhancing flexibility and inclusion. To further enable the European inter-university campuses, **continue work towards digitalisation and increased interoperability**, including work on joint course catalogues, joint enrolment of students for joint educational activities, and learning management systems. In this regard, a higher education interoperability workgroup involving higher education experts including from the European Universities alliances is ongoing under the European Commission European Digital Education Hub[31], aiming to enable interoperable virtual learning environments through the development of a European Higher Education Interoperability Framework. The Framework aims to foster a more collaborative and innovative higher education ecosystem, improve educational services, and create a seamless experience for learners and educators.

- **Implement and evaluate the implementation of the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) by the alliances**, including by supporting the possibility of completing multilateral inter-institutional agreements, the use of ESCI standardised data formats, and the issuance and acceptance of European Student Cards (including in a digital format).

- **Continue strengthening the cooperation with the public and private sector actors in the alliances' innovation ecosystems**. **Deepen cooperation with the private sector** to reinforce the relevance of education and skills for the labour market needs and for supporting green and digital transitions, driving Europe's competitiveness and social cohesion.

- **Continue to align partners' institutional strategies and the ones of their alliance**, building on the alliances long-term education strategies with links with their research and innovation strategies, enabling the realisation of the long-term visions across all their missions. The role of a **strong leadership and effective governance structures** is instrumental in this regard, to ensure progress in the same direction and drive efforts to deepen and mainstream the alliances' activities, helping to materialise Enrico Letta's fifth freedom "to learn, work together, research, innovate, share knowledge and capacity across borders"[32].

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[30] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Blueprint for a European degree – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/496478

[31] European Higher Education Interoperability - European Education Area

[32] Letta, E., *Much more than a market – Speed, Security, Solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, April, 2024 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf

🔹 **Engage further with the broader higher education system** to further enact the trailblazer role of the alliances, benefitting the broader higher education community in the Member States.

*Sustainable funding across all alliances' missions remains pivotal to achieve added value and ambition for the alliances and the broader higher education sector*

The alliances and the European level higher education stakeholders identified discrepancies between, on the one hand, the **long-term strategic vision of the alliances across all their missions**, their high ambition and expected depth and scale of transnational cooperation activities, and, on the other hand, their project-based funding model. The unique structural setting of the alliances – joint long-term institutional strategic cooperation – is strategic for **breaking down silos between education, research and innovation and for creating the enabling framework conditions for excellence in education, research and innovation**. Many alliances and stakeholders argue that it is important to continue supporting and deepening the core education and governance dimension of the alliances, and to also support the alliances in their other missions, including institutional cooperation in the field of research and innovation.  In their view, this would fully unlock **the alliances' impact and transformational potential.** For this, **complementarity, coherence and efficiency of EU investment is paramount.** Only EU level funding can leverage benefits surpassing what could be achieved by individual Member States or organisations alone, mobilising critical mass of funding, resources and infrastructures, creating a positive dynamic around societal challenges and objectives going beyond organisational, regional and national boundaries, triggering EU added value and impact. As Erasmus+ funding for education and governance cannot cater for all alliances' missions and activities, such as increased institutional cooperation in research and innovation, other funding sources are needed to complement the core Erasmus+ funding. Many stakeholders and alliances therefore plead for enhanced **synergies between various sources of EU level funding and leveraging national and regional funding to allow for efficiency gains across all these missions**. Against this background, the **Commission is working towards an investment pathway for European Universities alliances**, aiming to offer a long-term comprehensive funding approach for the European Universities alliances for the financial programming period 2028-2034, complementing the core educational dimension funded under Erasmus+ with support across all alliances' other missions, seeking synergies with different EU instruments, as well as with national and regional funding.

# List of abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| **BIP** | Blended Intensive Programmes |
| **CESAER** | Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research |
| **COIL** | Collaborative Online International Learning |
| **DEI** | Diversity, Equity and Inclusion |
| **ECHE** | Erasmus Charter for Higher Education |
| **ECTS** | European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System |
| **EEA** | European Education Area |
| **EIT** | European Institute of Technology |
| **EMJMD** | Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degrees |
| **ERA** | European Research Area |
| **ESC** | European Student Card |
| **ESCI** | European Student Card Initiative (comprising European Student Card, Erasmus without Paper and the Erasmus+ app) |
| **ESU** | European Students' Union |
| **EU** | European Union |
| **EUA** | European University Association |
| **EWP** | Erasmus Without Paper |
| **FSP** | Flexible Study Pathways |
| **HEI** | Higher Education Institution |
| **IT** | Information Technology |
| **KPI** | Key Performance Indicator |
| **LERY** | League of European Research Universities |
| **MFF** | Multiannual Financial Framework |
| **MOOC** | Massive Open Online Course |
| **NERQ** | Network of Education and Research Quality |
| **NGO** | Non-Governmental Organisation |
| **QA** | Quality Assurance |
| **SAP** | Short-Advanced Programme |
| **SME** | Small and Medium-sized Enterprise |
| **SwafS** | Science with and for Society |
| **UAS** | University of Applied Sciences |
| **UIIN** | University Industry Innovation Network |
| **UNICA** | Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe |
| **YERUN** | Young European Research Universities Network |

# Glossary

**Bologna tools:** Set of frameworks and systems designed by European Higher Education Area (EHEA) members as part of the Bologna Process to ensure the comparability and compatibility of higher education standards across Europe, including external and internal quality assurance, recognition, degree system, diploma supplement, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, and European and national qualification frameworks.

**Bottom-up approaches**: Strategies, processes, and initiatives that originate from individual institutions, academic staff, or students themselves, rather than being imposed top-down by high-level bodies. It encourages innovation, collaboration, and development based on the needs, experiences, and insights of those directly involved in higher education systems.

**Challenge-based approaches:** Collaborative and hands-on approaches to teaching, learning, research and innovation where learners from different disciplines cooperate with researchers, companies, cities, regions, non-governmental organisations, and local communities to find creative and innovative solutions to real-life challenges.

**Citizen science**: Any activity that involves public participation in scientific research, collecting data, analysing results, and solving problems, bridging the gap between science, policymakers, and society.

**Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI):** Policies and/or practices designed to make people of various backgrounds feel welcome and ensure that they have support to perform to the fullest of their abilities in the study and work environments.

**European Education Area (EEA):** Fosters collaboration among European Union Member States to build more resilient and inclusive national education and training systems. The aim of building the EEA is to ensure that everyone in the EU has access to quality education and training by 2025.

**Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE):** Charter providing the general quality framework for European and international cooperation activities that a higher education institution may carry out within Erasmus+.

**European Universities alliances:** cross-border partnerships of higher education institutions and diverse associated partners established under the European Universities initiative. Although various literature and documents may refer to the alliances using acronyms such as EUA or EUa, this report maintains the use of its full name to ensure clarity and consistency and to avoid confusion with for example the European Universities Association (EUA).

**European Universities initiative:** Ambitious EU initiative aimed at establishing alliances among higher institutions across Europe, for the benefit of their students, staff, and society, implemented through Erasmus+ funding. Although various literature and documents may refer to the initiative using acronyms such as EUI, EUi, or EUin, this report maintains the use of its full name to ensure clarity and consistency.

**First and second call alliances:** European Universities alliances were funded by Erasmus+ under different calls for proposals. The "first call alliances" refer to the European Universities selected under the 2019 Erasmus+ call for proposals and reselected under the 2022 Erasmus+ call for proposals. The "second call alliances" refer

to the European Universities selected under the 2020 Erasmus+ call for proposals and reselected under the 2023 Erasmus+ call for proposals.

**Flexible Study Pathways (FSP):** Educational model that allows learners to select their pathway regardless of their prior coursework or degree. Numerous options are presented at each point of contact with learners. Learners' final path is unique and determined by their background, requirements, interests, and ability level.

**Innovative pedagogies:** Teaching and learning approaches that emphasise the creation of stimulating, engaging, and supportive learning environments. These approaches facilitate effective, relevant, and robust learning experiences that align with contemporary educational goals and the students' diverse needs.

**Joint degree:** A single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme[33].

**Joint degree programme**: Refers to a joint programme leading to a joint degree.

**Joint programme:** Refers to an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by different higher education institutions, leading to double/multiple degrees or a joint degree[34].

**Interdisciplinarity:** Combination of different academic disciplines integrating knowledge, methodologies, skills, and frameworks to generate new knowledge and theories focused on a common research goal.

**Knowledge hubs:** Centres or networks that aim to facilitate collaboration, co-creation, and dissemination of knowledge as well as finding new ways of working together.

**Knowledge square**: synergies between education, research, innovation, and service to society.

**Knowledge transfer:** Process by which academic research and expertise are transformed into practical applications, innovations, and solutions that benefit society, the economy, and the environment. It includes activities such as publications, collaborative and contract research, technology licensing and commercialisation, consultancy and advisory services, company creation, continuing education and professional development, and public engagement and outreach

**Lifelong learning:** learning activities undertaken throughout life to improve knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective

**Micro-credentials:** Records of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a small volume of learning. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent and clearly defined criteria. Learning experiences leading to micro-credentials are designed to provide the learner with specific knowledge, skills and competencies that respond to societal, personal, cultural or labour market needs. Micro-

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[33] European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education, *'Definitions'*, EQAR Website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/
[34] European Commission, *'Erasmus+: EU programme for education, training, youth and sport, Glossary of terms – Higher Education'*, Erasmus+ website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-d/glossary-higher-education

credentials are owned by the learner, can be shared and are portable. They may be stand-alone or combined into larger credentials. They are underpinned by quality assurance following agreed standards in the relevant sector or area of activity.

**Multilingualism:** Ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage regularly in more than one language in their day-to-day lives.

**Open education:** A way of carrying out education, often using digital technologies. Its aim is to widen access and participation to everyone by removing barriers and making learning accessible, abundant, and customisable for all. It offers multiple ways of teaching and learning, building and sharing knowledge. It also provides a variety of access routes to formal and non-formal education, and connects.

**Open science:** research approach based on open cooperative work that emphasises the sharing of knowledge, results, and tools as early and widely as possible by using digital technologies and new collaborative tools.

**Physical, blended, or virtual mobility**: Different modes through which students and staff can engage in cross-border learning, teaching, and research activities among higher education institutions in the European Union.

**PowerBI:** Business analytics tool developed by Microsoft that allows users to visualise data, create reports and dashboards, and share insights across an organisation or embed them in an app or website.

**Science dissemination:** Process of effectively communicating scientific knowledge, research findings, and discoveries to various audiences in a clear, accessible, and engaging manner. This involves translating technical information into formats that are understandable and relevant to non-experts to enhance public understanding of science, inform public discourse, and promote scientific literacy.

**Service learning**: Pedagogical approach that combines meaningful community services with academic instruction and reflection, designed to enrich students' learning experiences, instil a sense of civic responsibility, and contribute positively to communities.

**Skill development:** Process of enhancing and expanding learners' abilities, competencies, and knowledge necessary to succeed in their chosen field, adapt to the changing demands of the labour market, and contribute positively to society.

**Student-centred learning:** educational approach focused on the learners and their needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles of students. This approach implies a flexible curriculum and course content, active and collaborative learning, and the interactivity of the learning process.

**Support services:** teams, offices, or units dedicated to providing higher education staff, educators, researchers, and students with the necessary resources, guidance, and tools to advance their activities in teaching and learning, research and innovation, and/or service to society.

**Transdisciplinarity:** Approach to teaching and learning, research, and innovation that merges concepts, tools, and methodologies from diverse disciplines and involves collaboration with non-academic partners such as industry professionals, policymakers, community groups, and citizens.

**Work integrated learning:** Educational approach that integrates academic learning with practical workplace experiences. This strategy involves students participating in real-world professional environments, which may include internships, apprenticeships, service learning, and field projects as part of their academic curriculum.

# 1. Introduction

## *Scope of the study and outline of this report*

The European Universities initiative, launched in 2019[35], is a flagship initiative of the European Education Area and of the European strategy for universities supporting the formation of transnational alliances of higher education institutions.

The present Study on the **Outcomes and Transformational Potential of the European Universities Initiative** presents the **progress, achievements, and challenges** faced by the **41 European Universities alliances selected under the Erasmus+ 2019 and 2020 calls** for proposals, particularly zooming in on the 38 that participated in the monitoring framework exercise in 2023 and outlines the transformational potential of the initiative as a whole. This study is a comprehensive attempt to assess what these alliances have achieved since their inception in 2019 or 2020 and how they have transformed European higher education and transnational cooperation models. Data for the monitoring framework was collected in the second half of 2023, offering a snapshot of the alliances' achievements at a certain moment in their development, without prejudice of the consideration of their progress they achieved since then.

In addition, to ensure completeness and reflection of the most recent developments, **the statistical overview of the European universities alliances** presented in Section 5 of this report **covers all 65 currently operational alliances funded under Erasmus+ as of 2025**.

The study builds on a rich body of information obtained through extensive desk research, stakeholder consultation activities (interviews, focus groups, and workshops engaging representatives of European universities alliances, higher education stakeholders including representatives of EU-level associations, European level students' unions, Member States, and the European Commission), and the piloting exercise of the monitoring framework to assess the progress of the European Universities initiative.

The report's findings are also rooted in an extensive review of a growing body of academic literature on the European Universities initiative, as well as of an encompassing analysis of the European higher education stakeholders' positions and Member States assessments on the impact of the initiative.

The study report is structured following the policy goals of the European Universities initiative, which can be grouped into the below-listed areas of impact:

- Transnational institutional cooperation and shared governance;
- Joint education provision and mobility;
- Society and economy;
- Joint research strategies coherent with the other HEI missions;
- Outcomes for the wider higher education system.

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[35] European Commission, 'European Education Area: European Universities initiative', European Commission website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative

While the conclusions are presented separately for each thematic focus area of the alliances, **the interplay and synergies between the alliances' diverse missions and activities make the European Universities alliances unique and all the more impactful.**

The structure of the report also largely corresponds to the proposed monitoring framework to assess the progress of the European Universities initiative as a whole:

- **Section 2** outlines the methodology, data collected during the study and used for the preparation of this report;
- **Section 3** sets the scene by introducing the EU policy context and the policy goals of the European Universities initiative that provide structure to this report and to the monitoring framework to assess the progress of the European Universities initiative as a whole;
- **Section 4** provides a review of a growing body of literature on the European Universities initiative and European Universities alliances;
- **Section 5** gives an overview of the main characteristics of European Universities alliances, such as their geographical coverage, size, composition, and relation to other European networks of universities. It also includes alliances of the 2022, 2023 and 2024 calls offering a complete and up-to-date statistical overview.
- **Section 6** presents the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative as a whole, focusing on concrete outcomes and results achieved by alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.
- **Section 7** outlines the benefits and added value of the European Universities initiative for relevant target groups, including HEIs, students, staff, external stakeholders and the wider society.
- **Section 8** summarises the main challenges to transnational cooperation in higher education that European Universities alliances are facing.
- **Sections 9 and 10** offer policy orientations and advice and present the conclusions and way forward for the European Universities initiative.

This report is accompanied by a **monitoring framework** aiming to assess the **progress and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative as a whole**, in line with its policy objectives, as set down in the related Erasmus+ calls for proposals. The monitoring framework has been co-created with the stakeholders and is fed with data obtained through extensive consultations with alliances' representatives. Further information can be found under Section 2.4 and Annex I of this report.

# 2. Methodology

This report builds on a rich body of data collected through extensive desk research, stakeholder consultation activities including interviews, focus groups and a workshop, and the recent data collection exercise for the monitoring framework. This section briefly presents the data collection methods and their results.

## 2.1. Desk research and content analysis of documentary sources

We conducted a thorough review and content analysis of documentary sources for this study, including:

- EU policy documents, such as the European strategy for universities and a number of relevant Council recommendations;
- Relevant reports and studies of the European Commission, EUA, ESU, and other stakeholder organisations;
- Academic publications on the European Universities initiative and European Universities alliances;
- Application, progress, and final reports of the European Universities alliances selected under 2019 and 2020 calls for proposals;
- Websites of the European Universities alliances selected under 2019 and 2020 calls and the European Commission.

Apart from the progress and final reports of the alliances, which informed the overview of the alliances (Section 5) and an overview of the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative (Section 6), all the relevant documents and publications are referenced in the footnotes of the report.

## 2.2. Interview programme

The interview programme was launched in April 2022 and completed in December 2023. In total, 191 interviews were conducted. Table 1 presents a breakdown by stakeholder group.

**TABLE 1. INTERVIEW PROGRAMME**

| LEVEL | INSTITUTIONS/RESPONDENTS | INTERVIEWS PLANNED | INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED |
|---|---|---|---|
| EU | European Commission; EU-level stakeholder organisations and associations including HEI and student associations | 10-12 | 13 |
| National/Regional | National Ministries; Regional Ministries; National Rector's Conferences | 27: at least one per MS | 32: All MS, Macedonia and Norway |
| Institutional/ Alliance | Alliance coordinators; Staff and students of partner HEIs; Associated partners of the alliances | 133: 3 per alliance, 10 additional | 146: 41 alliances covered* |
| | **Total:** | **170-172** | **191** |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI. *interview programme also covered EU4ART and ATHENA alliances which were not re-selected for funding following the completion of the pilot phase of the initiative.*

We began the interview programme by conducting exploratory interviews at the EU and national levels. EU-level respondents included representatives of the European Commission and several EU-level university and student associations such as EUA, Coimbra Group, UNICA, ESU, and others. At the national level, we interviewed representatives of national and regional ministries of education and/or national rector

conferences from all EU Member States, North Macedonia and Norway. We have
stretched alliance-level interviews over a period of two years to not only obtain a
snapshot of alliance profiles but also to follow up on their progress and specific
initiatives. Between April 2022 and December 2023, we interviewed representatives of
41 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020 and conducted additional interviews on the good
practices identified in the study.

The interviews, except for a few written responses, were conducted using video-
conferencing tools, recorded, and transcribed. The transcriptions were coded using
NVivo qualitative analysis software[36] based on a pre-defined codebook organised by
topics discussed. This ensured that the whole study team has easy access to relevant
excerpts of all interviews on a specific topic, ensuring that no relevant information was
lost in preparation of this report.

## 2.3.  Focus groups

Eight focus groups were organised as part of the study. Four focus groups were
organised with staff and four with students of European Universities alliances. Each
focus group included representatives from two alliances. We aimed to combine alliances
of relatively different profiles in terms of thematic focus or outcomes. We have involved
four alliances selected in 2019 and four in 2020. The alliances, dates, and numbers of
participants in the focus groups are listed in Table 2Table 2.

**TABLE 2. FOCUS GROUPS ORGANISED**

| ALLIANCES | TARGET GROUP | DATE | NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS |
|---|---|---|---|
| UNA Europa and YUFE | Staff | 19 May 2022 | 10 |
| | Students | 20 May 2022 | 8 |
| E³UDRES² and Circle U. | Staff | 3 November 2022 | 13 |
| | Students | 10 October 2022 | 4 |
| FilmEU and EuroTeQ | Staff | 27 November 2023 | 6 |
| | Students | 1 December 2023 | 4 |
| CIVIS and EU-CONEXUS | Staff | 27 November 2023 | 11 |
| | Students | 8 December 2023 | 5 |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI*

The focus groups were organised online. Discussions were organised in breakout rooms
in the focus groups with more than ten participants. Thematically, the focus groups
covered highlights and success stories relating to the specific alliances, outcomes for
education and research, society and economy, governance and dissemination were
discussed. All focus groups followed the same structure and questionnaires. Same as
interviews, the focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and coded using NVivo
qualitative analysis software so that they could be seamlessly integrated into the study
findings.

## 2.4.  Monitoring framework

The study developed a monitoring framework to assess the progress and
transformational potential of the European Universities initiative, in first instance
following the pilot phase of the initiative (alliances selected under the 2019 and 2020

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[36] Lumivero, 'NVivo', Lumivero website, accessed 2 January 2025 https://lumivero.com/products/nvivo/

calls for proposals). Based on consultations with alliance representatives, representatives of stakeholder associations, Member States, and the European Commission (DG EAC), the following overarching principles were agreed upon for the monitoring framework:

- Evaluate the progress of the European Universities initiative as a whole, in line with its policy objectives, as set down in the related Erasmus+ calls for proposals. While data will be collected at the alliance level, with the exception of good practice cases, it will be presented in an aggregated manner only. The framework will not evaluate individual alliances.
- Respect the diversity of the European Universities alliances. For that reason, alliances are asked to provide data where possible and explain if/why certain criteria are not relevant for them.
- Include both qualitative and quantitative criteria allowing to contextualise significant outcomes that are difficult to quantify.
- Develop a longitudinal approach to assess the outcomes and transformational potential of the initiative over time; this is not supposed to be a one-off exercise.

The monitoring framework was developed based on extensive desk research, interviews and focus groups with relevant stakeholders, and continuous consultation with the European Commission, the European Universities alliances and the Member States to gather their feedback through e.g. a workshop and designated presentations. The timeline in Figure 1 outlines the progress towards finalising of the framework since July 2023. We launched a piloting exercise in July 2023 by distributing the questionnaire to the alliances and asking them to provide data and any comments they had on the questionnaire by the end of End 2023. **Data collection thus took place in the second half of 2023**. This means that since then **progress to date has even been higher**. It is thus important to note that the data resulting from the monitoring framework are an underestimation and that actual progress and results are higher.  It is therefore **suggested to repeat the data collection exercise at regular time intervals, to be able to measure progress over time and inform policy makers and the wider higher education sector**.

## FIGURE 1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE MONITORING FRAMEWORK



| July 2023 | July – Oct | Nov - Dec | January 2024 |

*Interviews, focus groups, desk research and workshop*

Launch
data collection exercise

Collect
data within alliances, supported by PPMI

Discuss
draft results with alliances and stakeholders

Adjust
the framework and integrate the data collected
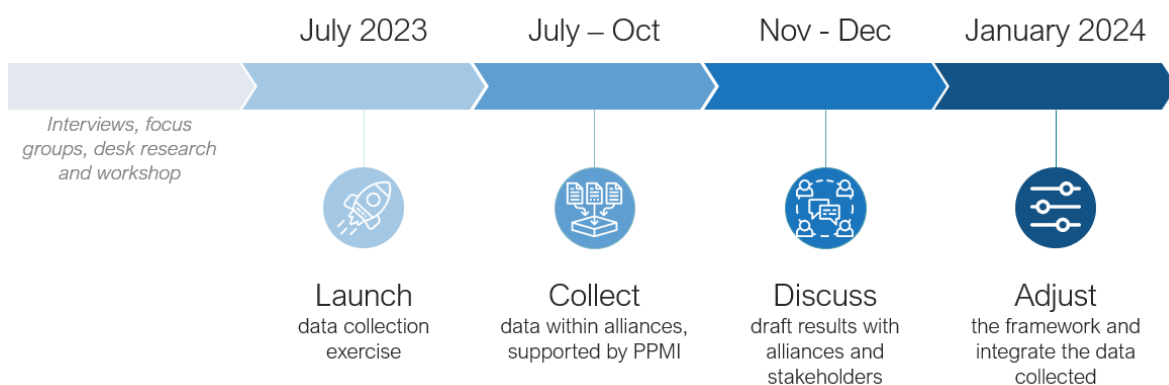
*Source: Prepared by PPMI*

We received data from 38 alliances from the pilot phase, selected under the 2019 and 2020 calls for proposals, that were expected to provide it[37] and from one alliance of the 2022 call. The monitoring framework data provided by those alliances is presented and discussed throughout this report. Apart from overall statistical data, the monitoring framework does not cover the data from new alliances selected as of 2022, given the start-up phase of their alliance at the time of the data collection. It is noted that none of the monitoring framework questions were mandatory. Therefore, the "blanks" reported in the charts of this report mean that some of the alliances did not respond to the respective question either because they could not provide the data or because it the topic at hand was less connected to their joint long-term strategy.

Based on this pilot exercise and the stakeholder consultations conducted since 2022, we have developed an updated version of the monitoring framework. It is divided into five dimensions aligned with the policy priorities of the European Universities initiative, as depicted in Figure 2.

## FIGURE 2. STRUCTURE OF THE MONITORING FRAMEWORK



- Alliance Governance and Cooperation
- Joint Education Provision and Mobility
- Society and Economy
- Research and Innovation
- Impact on the wider Higher Education System
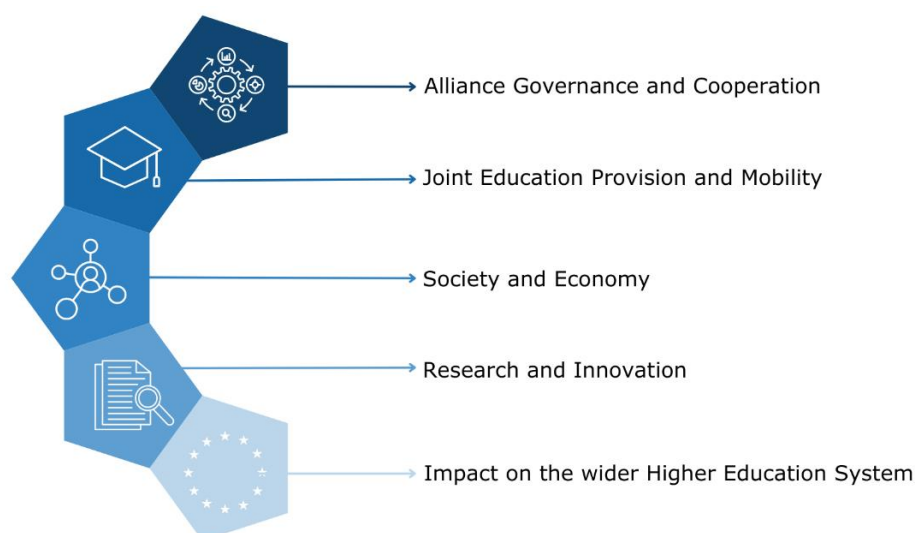
*Source: Prepared by PPMI*

## 2.5. Overview of the alliances

An overview of the European Universities alliances is presented in Section 5 of this report. It also includes the currently active alliances selected under the 2022, 2023 and 2024 calls for proposals. As part of the overview, we have conducted a social network analysis to explore the relationships between all the 65 currently active European Universities alliances and several other European networks of universities.

## 2.6. Factsheets

We have prepared factsheets for all the 65 currently active European Universities alliances. The factsheets build on data collected from alliance reports, websites, interviews and, most recently, the monitoring framework exercise. The aim of the factsheets is to present the profiles and showcase the key achievements of the alliances in an accessible and user-friendly manner.

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[37] Only alliances selected in 2019 and 2020 re-selected for sustainable funding were asked to provide the data.

# 3. Policy context and goals

## *3.1.* EU Policy context - European policy support for deeper transnational institutional cooperation in higher education

**European Universities alliances** are progressively building their capacity to further increase the quality, international competitiveness and attractiveness of the European higher education landscape and **are pivotal elements to deliver the European Education Area**. In this respect, European and national authorities are committed to removing barriers to transnational cooperation and to improving access to quality education for all.

At the **2017 Gothenburg Summit, EU leaders outlined a vision for education and culture**. In its 14 December **2017 European Council Conclusions**[38]**, the EU Heads of States and Governments** gave a mandate to the Member States, the Council and the Commission to create the European Universities alliances.

> " *Under the heading of 'Education and Culture',* "The European Council calls on Member States, the Council and the *Commission (…) to take work forward with a view to: (…) strengthening strategic partnerships across the EU between higher education institutions",* "encouraging the emergence of (…) European Universities", to "enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities".
>
> **European Council Conclusions, December 2017**

The Member States' support for the initiative has been reiterated in the **2021 Council Resolution on a 'Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)'**[39] that states that "higher education institutions will be encouraged to find new forms of deeper cooperation, namely by creating transnational alliances, (…) and through the full rollout of the European Universities initiative".

The Higher Education Ministers of the EU Member States, through their 2021 **Council Conclusions on the European Universities initiative bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education**[40] confirmed the concept of European Universities co-developed with the higher education sector and the Member States and explored during the pilot phase of the initiative.

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[38] European Council, *European Council meeting (14 December 2017) – Conclusions*, EUCO 19/1/17 REV 1, 14 December 2017, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf
[39] Council of the European Union, *Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond* (2021-2030) 2021/C 66/01, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A32021G0226%2801%29
[40] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education*, OJ C 221, 10 June 2021, p. 14–24, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0610(02)

**The Member States expressed their continued commitment on the future development of the initiative and acknowledged the alliances' contribution to wider higher education strategic development:**

"European Universities will contribute decisively towards achieving the ambitious vision of an innovative, globally competitive and attractive European Education Area and European Research Area, in full synergy with the European Higher Education Area, by helping to boost the excellence dimension of higher education, research and innovation, while promoting gender equality, inclusiveness, and equity, allowing for seamless and ambitious transnational cooperation between higher education institutions in Europe, and inspiring the transformation of higher education"[41].

"European Universities have the potential to be instrumental in adapting education, training and research for the digital age, (…) by developing European inter-university campuses, and to boost synergies between higher education and research, by implementing innovative models of digital learning and teaching, through Open Science, Open Education and Open Data practices"[42].

The alliances "are developing challenge-based approaches for shared education, research, and innovation to enhance interdisciplinary critical mass; they are sharing capacity and pooling resources, strengthening the attractiveness of academic and research careers, supporting institutional change, for example, through inclusive gender equality plans, and reinforcing co-operation with surrounding ecosystem actors; they are working towards open science and open education, engaging with citizens for solving societal challenges and reinforcing excellence in education and research for global competitiveness"[43].

The European Universities are seen as having "the potential to nurture entrepreneurship and transversal skills and fuel innovation through a flow of creative talents and are also acting as 'testbeds' for innovative teaching, interoperable virtual learning environments, seamless mobility and data exchange, fostering academic careers, open science, knowledge transfer, social innovation and service to society, and accelerators of transformation in these areas[44].

The **European strategy for universities**[45], adopted by the European Commission in January 2022, aims to strengthen the European dimension of higher education, as well as the synergies with research and innovation, to drive Europe's global role and leadership, to bolster Europe's recovery and response to the digital and green transitions and to deepen the European sense of belonging based on common values. The **European Universities are one of the Strategy's flagship initiatives**, a true cornerstone for the achievement of its objectives.

The European strategy for universities also stipulates the setting up of a **European Higher Education Sector Observatory** to provide evidence on the implementation of the European strategy for universities through a regularly updated European Higher Education Sector Scoreboard to assess the progress made across the EU, including on transnational cooperation. The monitoring framework on the European Universities that this study developed could contribute to the objectives of analysing and showcasing the performance of the European Universities initiative as a whole.

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.p.8
[44] Ibid.
[45] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Communication from the Commission on a European strategy for universities*, COM/2022/16 final, 2022, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities

Deep transnational cooperation at the institutional level in higher education is highly resource and effort-intensive, triggering several challenges to its implementation. This is why the European strategy for universities is accompanied by a **Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation**[46], offering a broad set of measures aimed at **removing the most pressing legal and administrative barriers** to deeper and more ambitious transnational cooperation for all types of alliances of higher education institutions. The Recommendation's objective is threefold: to reinforce the agility of higher education institutions when implementing innovative and creative deep cooperation models, notably through new measures and adapted legislation at the national and European level, to boost the implementation of existing Bologna tools, and to explore the feasibility of new instruments that are more adapted to the size and scope of deeper and multi-actor transnational cooperation models such as a joint European degree based on common co-created European criteria and institutionalised cooperation instruments such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions. These instruments will help the universities pool their capacity, resources and strengths together.

The 2022 **Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe**[47] invite the Commission and the Member States to support alliances of higher education institutions such as the European Universities "to reach their full potential by addressing the financial costs of transnational cooperation to cover all their missions in the longer term" and take "steps (…) to move towards a more sustainable, holistic and integrated EU funding perspective." The Conclusions highlight that:

> "the alliances demonstrate the potential of extensive and long-term institutional higher education cooperation" and "have the potential to generate real European added value by achieving critical mass on a European scale through the long-term commitment of all involved parties."

The 2021 **Council Recommendation on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe**[48] calls for "support in a concerted manner at Union and national level the further development of the 'European University' initiative as a catalyst for modern, inclusive and future-oriented higher education institutions in the Union."

Building on this robust policy orientations from the Member States, the Commission is now working along with the Member States and higher education stakeholders, students and the higher education institutions towards materialising these important commitments.

A key milestone is the March **2024 European Degree Package**[49]. Currently, many universities engaged in transnational education, under the alliances and beyond (e.g. Erasmus Mundus, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, European Institute of Innovation &

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[46] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation*, OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1–8, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022H0413%2801%29

[47] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe*, OJ C 221, 10 June 2021, p. 14–24, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52022XG0421(02)

[48] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation (EU) 2021/2122 of 26 November 2021 on a Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe*, OJ L 431, 2.12.2021, p. 1–9 , https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.L_.2021.431.01.0001.01.ENG

[49] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Blueprint for a European degree – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/496478

Technology Masters, etc.) face high barriers in the national legislations, despite 25 years of the Bologna process, leading to incompatibilities severely hampering or making impossible the setup of transnational joint degree programmes. The more partners they involve, the more complex the process becomes. European Universities alliances have already embarked on a number of such joint degree programmes, only to find out that they were forced to exclude some of their partners from certain joint programmes due to such high barriers. The European degree package comprises a Commission communication on a Blueprint for a European Degree, a **Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education**[50], adopted in November 2024, and a **proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system**. The Package presents a vision for the next phase of development of European Universities alliances, as well as any other types of consortia of higher education institutions, to develop innovative joint degree programmes and strengthen transnational cooperation in higher education, while increasing the global attractiveness of European higher education system. It also represents an opportunity for the Member States to evaluate their national systems.

**Looking into the future, at EU level, there is a strong commitment to further strengthening the European Universities.**

**President von der Leyen's Political Guidelines for the Commission 2024-2029**[51] recognise the alliances' importance for "attracting new talents and retaining the best and brightest minds here in Europe" and calls for strengthened "collaboration between research departments, higher education and business – notably by strengthening our University Alliances."

> **"** (…) it *also means attracting new talents and retaining the best and brightest minds here in Europe. To do this, I want to strengthen the collaboration between research departments, higher education and business – notably by strengthening our University Alliances.*
>
> **President von der Leyen Political Guidelines**

President von der Leyen's mission letter addressed to **Roxana Mînzatu**, **Executive Vice-President for Social Rights and Skills, Quality Jobs, and Preparedness** states that "You should continue work to (…) supporting European Universities alliances"[52], while the mission letter for **Ekaterina Zaharieva**, **Commissioner for Startups, Research and Innovation**, equally ask to " (…) help strengthen and incentivise cooperation between academic, private and public sector entities to create attractive career perspectives. As part of this, you will support the work to strengthen our University Alliances."[53] This indicates a **strong political will for supporting the alliances across all their missions, including research and innovation**.

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[50] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education*, OJ C, C/2024/7282, 2024, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/7282/oj/eng

[51] von der Leyen, U., *Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2025*, Strasburg, July 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf

[52] von der Leyen, U., Mission Letter to Roxana Mînzatu, Brussels, 17 September 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/27ac73de-6b5c-430d-8504-a76b634d5f2d_en?filename=Mission%20letter%20-%20MINZATU.pdf

[53] von der Leyen, U., Mission Letter to Ekaterina Zaharieva, Brussels, 17 September 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/130e9159-8616-4c29-9f61-04592557cf4c_en?filename=Mission%20letter%20-%20ZAHARIEVA.pdf

**President von der Leyen put education and skills development very high on the political Agenda**, in line with EU leaders' Strategic Agenda for the Europe 2024 – 2029 that makes investment in skills, training and **education a priority for Europe's strategic autonomy, economic strength, democracy and cohesion**.

**The European Universities alliances remain instrumental** in enhancing Europe's competitiveness and attractiveness, in view of their capacity to break silos between universities missions, as well as bridge the gap between education, research, innovation, industry and the civil society.

## 3.2. Policy goals

The two overarching goals of the European Universities initiative are promoting European values and identity and enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education[54]. The European Universities calls for proposals[55] further specified the policy goals, which were co-developed with representatives of Member States and stakeholders in 2019. They can be organised into five categories and several subcategories. They are summarised below and form the structure of this report.

### 3.2.1. Transnational institutional cooperation and shared governance

- **Joint governance and management structures:** Design and implement relevant and efficient joint management and governance structures with the participation of students and staff.
- **Internal cooperation:** Pursue a high level of systemic, structural, and sustainable institutional cooperation at all levels of the involved institutions across all their missions and different areas of activity and align HEIs missions/strategies with the ones of the alliances.
- **Sustainable and long-term cooperation between the alliances' partners:** Create sustainable cooperation mechanisms and, where appropriate, pilot or fully implement a common legal status for the alliance.
- **Quality assurance and data management:** Build joint quality assurance, institutional research, and data collection standards, structures, and processes to boost the excellence dimension of HE.
- **Shared resources and facilities:** Build on a shared pool of financial, human, digital, physical, intellectual, and administrative resources (e.g., infrastructure, data, services) to ensure joint capacity and capability and the implementation of digital tools, processes and services such as those enabled by the European Student Card Initiative.

### 3.2.2. Joint Education Provision and Mobility – building the inter-university campuses

- **Student and staff mobility:** Physical, blended, or virtual mobility of students and staff in any of the partner institutions. Practices and policies that support seamless mobility of students across the different campuses (e.g., automatic recognition, access to partner universities' facilities and services, use and acceptance of the European Student Card, digital completion of inter-institutional

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[54] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education*, OJ C 221, 10 June 2021, p. 14–24, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0610(02)

[55] In the Official Journal of the European Union: European Commission, *OJ C 384*, 24.10.2018, p. 4–7; *OJ C 373*, 5.11.2019, p. 12–15*; OJ C 473*, 24.11.2021, p. 23–26; *OJ C 444*, 23.11.2022, p. 16–19; *OJ C, C/2023/1262*, 28.11.2023*; OJ C, C/2024/6983*, 19.11.2024

and learning agreements through the Erasmus Without Paper network, broader implementation of Bologna tools).

🔹 **Joint, flexible, and innovative learning offer:** Create new joint, flexible and innovative curricula in the three cycles (Bachelor, Master and Doctoral).

🔹 **Student-centred learning and innovative pedagogies:** Implement student-centred learning approaches and innovative pedagogies that allow for student participation and foster deep learning, student autonomy and self-regulation.

🔹 **Key and strategic skills development:** Develop knowledge and equip students with critical thinking, interdisciplinary knowledge, entrepreneurial, creative, transversal, and strategic skills for the green and digital transitions through practical and work-based experiences.

🔹 **Lifelong learning:** Offer flexible learning opportunities and alternative pathways to learners at all stages of life, across disciplines and sectors, making lifelong learning a reality in HE, including through micro-credentials.

🔹 **Multilingualism:** Educate a new generation of Europeans who can cooperate and work in different European and global cultures and languages.

### 3.2.3. Society and Economy

🔹 **Graduate employability:** Improve students', researchers' and lifelong learners' skills and employability perspectives.

🔹 **Inclusive environment:** Enable access and participation of under-represented and disadvantaged groups, resulting in a student, academic and research body that better reflects the social, economic, and cultural diversity of the European population. Conciliate excellence and inclusion through bottom-up approaches.

🔹 **Regional and Civic Engagement:** Contribute to regional development and positively impact local communities and ecosystems through education and training, research, and knowledge exchange. Foster education and social and technological innovation to address societal challenges and improve societal well-being. They also allow students, academics, researchers, companies, and local authorities/actors to work jointly in European knowledge-creating teams and across disciplines through investigation and invention, thus reinforcing excellence in education and research as well as citizen engagement.

### 3.2.4. Research and Innovation

🔹 **Joint research activities:** Explore joint research and innovation (R&I) structures across the European Universities, while sharing research infrastructures and other resources. Develop a common research and innovation agenda and action plan to ultimately strengthen human capital, enabling balanced brain circulation, in synergy with the education mission of the alliances.

🔹 **Engaged research:** Strive to make the knowledge square (education, research, innovation, and service to society) a reality. Strengthen HEIs' links to the R&I landscape in Europe and its outreach towards society and the economy. Involve citizens, civil society, and public/city authorities in R&I.

🔹 **Open science:** Work towards mainstreaming comprehensive Open Science practices, including open education and open data practices.

🔹 **Innovation and knowledge transfer:** Create and share knowledge, developing new concepts, technologies, and innovation at unprecedented speed. Fuel innovation to support the establishment and scaling up of start-ups and SMEs in Europe by setting up and reinforcing technology transfer.

### 3.2.5. Outcomes for the wider Higher Education System

⬦ **Promotion of European values and identity:** Promote common European values and a strengthened European identity. Contribute to a more united, innovative, digital, connected, and green Europe based on European cohesion and solidarity.

⬦ **Attractiveness and competitiveness:** Reach a substantial leap in quality, performance, attractiveness, and international competitiveness of European HEIs.

⬦ **Dissemination beyond partner HEIs:** Act as role models for European higher education transformation. Enhance system-wide capacity building, organisational learning, peer learning among European HEIs, and policy learning.

⬦ **National level outcomes:** Stimulate systemic reforms within Member States to facilitate transnational higher education cooperation. Enable HEIs to advance in alignment with national HE policy goals.

⬦ **EU level outcomes:** Across Member States, consolidate the policy discourses, approaches to and support for transnational HE cooperation, showcase its potential to improve the quality of learning and teaching, research and innovation, and service to society. Raise the prominence of higher education and higher education policy in the EU political agenda.

The aforementioned policy objectives for the European Universities initiative, and especially the policy objectives for the European Universities listed in the Council Conclusions on the European Universities initiative[56] are summarised in the intervention logic presented in Figure 3. They reflect the structure of the following report sections and the monitoring framework.

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[56] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education*, OJ C 221, 10 June 2021, p. 14–24, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0610(02)

## FIGURE 3. INTERVENTION LOGIC OF THE EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES INITIATIVE

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES** Erasmus+

**OUTCOMES**

**INPUTS**

- **Core Erasmus+ funding**
- Other national and EU funding streams
- EU (and EHEA) policies

**OUTPUTS**

- Transnational higher education partnerships
- Joint long-term strategies
- European inter-university campuses

**Alliance governance and cooperation**

- Development of joint governance and management structures
- Deepened cooperation between partner higher education institutions
- Sustainable and long-term cooperation
- Development of quality assurance tools fit for university alliances
- Shared resources and facilities for better efficiency and integration

**Joint education provision and mobility**

- Increased student and staff mobility (interuniversity campus)
- Development of joint, flexible, and innovative learning offer
- Implementation of student-centred learning pedagogies
- Consolidated approach to lifelong learning
- Promotion of multilingualism

**Society and Economy**

- Increased graduate employability
- More inclusive higher education environment
- Increased civic engagement and cooperation with regional actors

**Joint research and innovation**

- Development of joint research activities
- Engaged research
- Mainstreamed open science practices
- Increased innovation and knowledge transfer

**Impact on the wider higher education system**

- Strenghtened European identity
- Increased attractiveness and competitiveness of partner higher education institutions
- Broad impact beyond partner higher education institutions
- National level reforms to facilitate transnational cooperation
- Increased prominence of higher education in the political agenda of the EU.

**EXPECTED IMPACTS**

- Improved inclusiviness and excellence of European higher education
- Reinforced higher education's contribution to EU society and economy
- Reinforced higher education's contribution to meeting the objectives of the EEA, ERA and EHEA
- More innovation and transformations in HE knowledge triangle: education, research, innovation and service to society

*Source: Prepared by PPMI*

# 4. Stakeholders' insights and recommendations

## 4.1 Methodological approach

This section presents a comprehensive review of European and national higher education stakeholders', students' and scholars' position papers, research, peer-reviewed publications and literature, including articles, book chapters, and conference papers on the European Universities initiative and the alliances, aiming to identify key themes, findings and recommendations.

This section identified the historical context of the initiative, European integration, cooperation and governance models, innovation in teaching and learning, mobility, societal dimension, research and innovation, European values, good practices, challenges, and transformational potential as the main themes. The section includes assessments and analyses that examine the implementation of the European Universities initiative by tracking its achievements, impacts, and challenges. The section aims to offer a comprehensive grasp of the initiative's complexities and enhance the understanding of its quantifiable impacts, despite the relatively short implementation period of the alliances.

The study implemented a taxonomic classification into document types. This perspective allows to understand the key discussions and nuances of the themes according to stakeholders such as associations, networks, unions, EU-level bodies, national-level bodies, and academics. We classified the documents into the following types:

- **Higher education stakeholders' position papers**: These documents express the views of associations and networks on the initiative, such as the European University Association (EUA), Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research (CESAER), Universities of the Capitals of Europe (UNICA), League of European Research Universities (LERU), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities (The Guild), Young European Research Universities Network (YERUN), the Coimbra Group, European University Foundation (EUF); student organisations such as European Student Union (ESU), European Student Network (ESN), organisations promoting and funding higher education internationalisation such as the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), and others.
- **EU-level studies and reports**: These studies were produced by diverse organisations with an EU-level perspective on the initiative and the alliances. This category includes the EUA, European Commission, HEInnovate, Hochschulforum Digitalisierung, Jacques Delors Institute, NVAO, and OECD.
- **Country-level studies**: These studies characterise the country-level impact of the participation in the European Universities initiative. They include studies or analyses sponsored or developed by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (Czechia), the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate (France), the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education (Norway), the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (Poland), the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (Spain), the Swedish Council for Higher Education (Sweden), the Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies (Portugal), as well as national student unions' positions such as VVS in Belgium, SK RVŠ in Czechia, DSF in Denmark, SYL and SAMOK in Finland, FAGE in France, CREUP in Spain. Also in France an upcoming country-study on the European Universities initiative is expected later in 2025.

- **Peer-reviewed publications**: This category includes scholarly articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings published in sources such as Tertiary Education and Management, Higher Education, Sustainability, Applied System Innovation, Compare, Curriculum Journal, Education Sciences, Contemporary European Studies, International Journal of Film and Media Arts, Globalisation Societies and Education, and Journal of European Integration, among others.
- **Theses**: Masters' level dissertations that include studies produced at Masaryk University (Czechia), Tampere University (Finland), University of Agder (Norway), University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück (Germany), and Utrecht University (Netherlands).

The study team conducted a thematic analysis to synthesise recurring issues, shared concerns, and findings discussed in the literature. This method is a structured approach to identifying patterns across studies, providing an overview of the key discussions.

The study used a mixed methods approach to define the sample of over 100 documents for this extensive analysis of key European and national level higher education stakeholders' position papers and literature review. The study used the following sampling techniques:

- Stakeholders' recommendations (Purposive sampling): The study includes key European and national-level higher education stakeholders' position papers and recommendations, as well as alliance representatives, academics, and international organisations who deemed these materials relevant to the study.
- Database search (sampling): The study is also enhanced with a search in the Scopus database using the keywords "European Universities initiative" and/or "European Universities alliance*" in the titles, abstracts, and keywords. This search produced 52 results as of October 2024, with documents published between 2019 and 2024. The document types comprised 50% articles (26), 38% conference papers (20), and 11% book chapters (6).
- Unstructured online search (Convenience sampling): the study used online search engines with "European Universities initiative" and/or "European Universities alliance*" as keywords, reflecting a convenience sampling technique to include easily accessible relevant documents and complement the sample.

## 4.2 Higher education institutions, students' and scholars' perspectives - strong support and recognition of European Universities transformational potential

Higher education stakeholders widely recognise the progress made by the European Universities alliances in a short period of time, their significant achievements, and transformational potential, praising the initiative's inclusive dimension, in terms of the diversity of types of higher education institutions and geographical balance, the depth of transnational cooperation established, acting as a trailblazer for the entire higher education system, and the variety of activities building foundations for lasting European inter-university campuses with seamless and inclusive mobility opportunities for students, academics, researchers and staff. Stakeholders equally draw attention to the necessary further improvements to realise the initiative's full potential and deliver on its high ambition, spurring benefits for the entire European higher education sector, and continuing to create innovative environments for education and research cooperation across borders. For that, stakeholders call for continued and comprehensive financial support for the alliances across all their missions.

**EU-level higher education stakeholders were actively involved in the co-creation of the European Universities initiative from its early stages and contributed to its continuous development, ensuring relevance for the entire higher education sector**. For instance, many stakeholders are part of the higher education stakeholders' group on the European Universities led by the European Commission. Higher education stakeholders are key contributors to shaping the European and national level policy agenda, notably through advocacy, representing their members' voices, including with rich position papers, supporting their members and facilitating dialogue by setting up dedicated European Universities working groups or organising dedicated events. This important support and continuous involvement with the initiative also materialises through the participation of several stakeholders[57] in the newly set up **Community of Practice for European Universities alliances, FOREU4ALL**[58].

> " *Transnational cooperation, including through alliances, is a unique feature of the European university landscape. It contributes to Europe's international attractiveness and competitiveness and enhances its resilience and future sustainability. To unleash the full potential of Europe's universities, make best use of capacities and resources and maximise opportunities for students and researchers in Europe, increased efforts are needed. Further facilitating and strengthening transnational cooperation is a prerequisite to achieving Europe's full potential through research, innovation and higher education. Alliances, such as those created under the European Universities Initiative, have become an important part of the wider spectrum of cooperation, notably creating new opportunities for institutions, staff and students.*
>
> **European University Association**

From the beginning, the stakeholders acknowledged the initiative's distinguishable role and recognised its potential to **bring higher education institutions' transnational cooperation to an unprecedented level, to increase quality, attractiveness, competitiveness and foster a European sense of belonging, for the benefit of students, staff and entire academic communities.** Stakeholders endorsed the European Universities concept, identifying the initiative as a "framework for transforming European higher education by promoting diversity, internationalisation, and cooperation"[59], with "potential to accelerate transnational cooperation and integration within higher education"[60]. **Stakeholders and scholars recognise the alliances' capacity to enhance Europe's competitiveness and leadership in education, science and technology** based on their holistic, strategic, and long-term vision encompassing all the alliances' missions in education, research and innovation at the service of society. The primary rationales driving the initiative are reinforcing European HEIs, tackling major societal challenges, and enhancing European

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[57] European Students' Union (ESU), Erasmus Student Network (ESN), European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), and European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

[58] Community of practice for European universities alliances and beyond | European Education Area, https://education.ec.europa.eu/news/community-of-practice-for-european-universities-alliances-and-beyond

[59] ESU, *ESUs position on European Universities Initiative*, September 2024, https://esu-online.org/esus-position-on-the-european-universities-initiative/.

[60] CESAER, *Statement on European Universities*, 2018, 6 December 2018, https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2018/20181206-statement-european-universities.pdf

integration[61]. The initiative's potential has three key features: (i) a long-term vision to strengthen competitiveness and shared values; (ii) an output-oriented approach with specific targets, such as inter-university campuses offering enhanced educational offerings, mobility and joint degrees; and (iii) a blend of new and traditional organisational and governance structures, incorporating bottom-up and top-down governance approaches[62]. **The initiative represents 'a new phase in European higher education integration**, pushing the agenda from intergovernmental policy processes towards institutional spill over[63,64]. The alliances are creating "more substantial, collective impacts across education, research, and civic engagement" and "have the potential to become enduring structures that reshape education in Europe, creating dynamic, interconnected institutions capable of addressing global challenges effectively"[65]. Researchers agree that the **European Universities initiative contributes to developing a shared European identity** through its bottom-up nature that strengthens collaboration practices[66].

**Higher education stakeholders acknowledge that the initiative became a distinctive feature of Europe's higher education landscape**, demonstrating the potential to harness institutions' capabilities, optimise resource and capacities availability, eliminate cooperation barriers, and maximise opportunities for European students and researchers[67,68]. Stakeholders indicate that the European Universities alliances have become **important instruments for advancing the European Education Area, driving institutional development and transformation**, as well as a **significant driver for boosting the implementation of the Bologna Process** through, for example, the work of the alliances fostering mutual recognition of degrees and the removal of barriers to mobility. The alliances are developing agile tools to support the advancement of the European Higher Education Area, going beyond the achievements of the Bologna Process[69]. The initiative is seen as "an opportunity to advance excellence in cooperation and bringing forward the European Education Area"[70], increasing its resilience and as a way to "further implement the European

[61] Fuchs, L., Cuevas-Garcia, C. and Bombaerts, G., 'The societal role of universities and their alliances: the case of the EuroTeQ Engineering University', *Tertiary Education Management*, Vol. 29, 2023, pp. 263–277, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-023-09126-x

[62] Cino Pagliarello, M., 'Higher education in the single market between (trans)national integration and supranationalisation: exploring the European universities initiative', *Journal of European Integration,* Vol 44 Issue 1, pp. 149-164, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.2011266

[63] Kanniainen, J., and Pekkola, E., 'Between harmonization and unification in the European higher education area: scenarios for the European university initiative', *Tertiary Education Management,* Vol. 29 2023, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-023-09131-0

[64] Hammann, A., *L'initiative ‹ Universités Européennes ›: L'héritage et les apports franco-allemands*, Master Thesis University of Potsdam, 2022, https://publishup.uni-potsdam.de/opus4-ubp/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/54168/file/mega5.pdf

[65] UNICA, Saso, L., Costreie, S., Iucu, R., and Carțiș, A., *The innovative role of European Universities alliances in the European Higher Education Area, 2024,* https://www.unica-network.eu/read-the-latest-paper-on-the-innovative-role-of-european-university-alliances-written-by-representatives-of-unica/

[66] Frame, A., and Curyło, B., 'Bringing Erasmus home: the European universities initiative as an example of 'Everyday Europeanhood'', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2022.2134986

[67] EUA European University Association, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[68] EUF, *Position paper on the European Universities initiative*, April 2018, https://uni-foundation.eu/uploads/2018_Position%20Paper%20on%20European%20Universities.pdf

[69] Gunn, A., 'The European Universities Initiative: A Study of Alliance Formation in Higher Education', In Curaj, A., Deca, L., and Pricopie, R. (Eds.) *European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade*, Springer, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5_2

[70] EUF, *Position paper on the European Universities initiative*, April 2018, https://uni-foundation.eu/uploads/2018_Position%20Paper%20on%20European%20Universities.pdf

Higher Education Area principles and tools"[71] ESU mentions its "potential to strengthen the implementation of Bologna tools, advancing the goals of the European Higher Education Area"[72], while LERU is identifying it as a "renewed momentum for the full implementation and simplification of the Bologna tools across the European Education Area"[73].

In the same time, stakeholders such as EUA also call to **ensure that transnational cooperation and related regulatory environments and funding streams benefit the entire higher education sector**, and not only those institutions part of the European Universities initiative. They ask not to create a "two-tier" system[74]. Advancing open and inclusive approaches that benefit all higher education institutions and society remains fundamental. Since the testbed approach leads to the acceleration of developments in institutions within the alliances, the initiative should avoid generating a divide among the diversity of higher education institutions[75]. Policy developments at European level, such as those linked to the Blueprint for a European degree, sustainable and attractive careers, micro-credentials and a possible European legal status for alliances, in the design and testing of which the alliances are greatly engaged, are indeed addressing the whole higher education sector. Also, the Erasmus+ programme remains a widely accessible programme, enabling the support of broad **diversity of cooperation models**, also beyond the European Universities initiative, bringing great value to build a closely-knit higher education sector across Europe, building capacity in European HEIs and making them stronger together.

As the initiative developed, **stakeholders are largely praising the inclusive feature of the European Universities initiative**. This not only concerns the **wide geographical coverage** and **diverse types of HEIs** participating but also the **diversity of models developed** by the alliances, building on their specific profiles and joint strengths. This also brings benefits to the students, as acknowledged by ESU, which is highlighting a "diverse landscape of alliances"[76], welcoming the creative solutions and multitude of approaches undertaken. **Effective governance models** have been crucial to deliver on the alliances' goals, in view of addressing the "challenge of balancing the institutional autonomy of each individual partner university with the pooled autonomy and future of an Alliance"[77]. Scientific reviews and research looked into cooperation and governance models in European Universities alliances and characterise the initiative as a "transnational institution-building process", emerging as the "next level of cooperation" with the potential to transform European cooperation in higher education[78]. Stakeholders such as EUA call for "national regulations and national and European funding criteria to support the development of fit-for-purpose,

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[71] EURASHE, *Statement on the Seal of Excellence awarded to Alliances within the European University initiative*, 4 October 2024, https://www.eurashe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Erasmus-Seal-of-Excellence-for-European-University-Alliances.pdf

[72] ESU, *ESUs position on European Universities Initiative*, (N.D).

[73] LERU, Lievens P., *Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024, p.8., https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf

[74] EUA, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[75] UAS4EUROPE, 16 May 2022; and Angouri, J., *Insight Paper: Transnational collaboration and mobility in higher education: Looking back - looking forward,* the Guild, June 2023, https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/insight-papers/the-guild_insight-paper_transnational-collaboration_june-2023.pdf; and YERUN, 23 June 2023.

[76] ESU, *ESUs position on European Universities Initiative*, (N.D).

[77] CESAER, 2 July 2024., https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2024/20240702-alliances-position/20240702-cesaer-position-alliances-and-science-and-technology.pdf

[78] Marques, M., and Graf, L., 'Pushing Boundaries: The European Universities Initiative as a Case of Transnational Institution Building', *Minerva*, Vol. 62, 2023, pp. 93-112, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-023-09516-w

sustainable and efficient governance models for cooperation"[79], advocating to "include the possibility (but not the obligation) to establish and engage with **legal entities**"[80].

Stakeholders recognise the European Universities initiative as "**an important catalyst for policy discussions** [… and] **for further reform to facilitate university cooperation across borders**"[81]. The initiative is widely seen as having enabled to bring higher education key role and challenges to the fore of European and national policy agendas, **driving legislative progress and reform at both national and EU levels,** towards facilitated transnational cooperation in higher education. For instance, studies found that the alliances exploratory work towards the development of a **European degree** and of a possible **legal status** for transnational alliances of higher education institutions[82] inform the development of future policies and initiatives to strengthen the European Education Area[83,84].

Stakeholders found that the **alliances have already demonstrated concrete added value to the participating higher education institutions**, notably by creating **new opportunities for institutions, students, academics, researchers, and staff** and by developing a **more strategic approach towards international collaboration** that leads to **enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, increasing the attractiveness, visibility and international standing of partner institutions**, **boosting student and staff mobility**, strengthening the links between different university missions, and helping to foster European integration and cohesion.

Stakeholders consider that alliances have the **potential to pioneer innovative approaches to long-term structural and systemic cooperation in education, research, and innovation across Europe**[85] and that they have "significantly contributed to **innovation in teaching, learning, mobility, and research collaboration**"[86], referring explicitly to achievements related to the development of joint programmes and interdisciplinary education and research ecosystems. The alliances are found to have the potential to generate institutional impacts by nurturing a transnational community of academics, researchers and stakeholders[87]. Moreover, stakeholders consider alliances as **testbeds for success stories, lessons learned, and good practices**, facilitating the analysis of effective approaches to transnational

[79] EUA, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] European Commission, *Results of the Erasmus + call for proposals on European policy experimentation in higher education: piloting a joint European degree label and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments*, 31 January 2023, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/results-of-the-erasmus-call-for-proposals-on-european-policy-experimentation-in-higher-education-piloting-a-joint-european-degree-label-and-institutionalised-eu-cooperation-instruments

[83] European Education and Culture Executive Agency - Eurydice, *The European higher education area in 2024 – Bologna process implementation report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/483185

[84] Letta, E., *Much more than a market – Speed, Security, Solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, April, 2024 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf

[85] CESAER, *Empowering excellence: European Universities Alliances as laboratories for success stories*, 2 July 2024, https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2024/20240702-alliances-position/20240702-cesaer-position-alliances-and-science-and-technology.pdf .

[86] LERU, Lievens P., *Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024, p.8., https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf

[87] The Guild, Statement: *The Guild's recommendations for the Investment Pathway of European Universities alliances*, 24 February 2024, https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/statements/the-guild_statement-on-investment-pathway-of-eui_feb24.pdf

cooperation in higher education[88] and potential transfer towards the broader higher education sector[89]. The alliances "often seen as experimental models, push the boundaries of traditional education, challenging established norms and creating new avenues for collaborative education across borders"[90]. Studies assessed the innovativeness, replicability, sustainability, and effectiveness of alliances' good practices[91], showcasing the implementation of the European Student Card, alliance communities, open labs, joint recognition, smart campuses, and academies for students and staff among the top good practices. In this context, stakeholders highlight **European Universities alliances' trailblazers role** that "positively impact broader ecosystems and landscapes, extending well beyond the partner universities"[92], enabling their experiences and good practices to flourish beyond the alliances, and contributing to the "modernisation of all European universities in general[93]".

At the same time, stakeholders have asked to **avoid an overload of the European Universities alliances[94]** due to the high number of different policy objectives linked to the European Universities initiative. They claim not all challenges that society and higher education are facing can be solved through the work of the alliances. Against this background, they ask to **respect the diversity of models of European Universities alliances** in view of the long-term strategy of the alliances, as there is no one size fits all governance model. They outline the importance of institutional autonomy in the design and implementation of alliance activities whereby higher education institutions have the freedom to shape their collaboration priorities and objectives within the alliances' framework[95]. This also implies developing dedicated support to strengthen leadership and governance capacity within the alliances[96]. The design of the European Universities calls for proposals, with the alliances in the driving seat of their joint long-term strategy, aims to address these concerns.

Stakeholders also pay tribute to the **important progress made by the European Universities to further develop mobility opportunities** including by **developing new mobility formats**, alongside pioneering **innovative teaching and learning approaches**. Studies outline that the initiative is promoting streamlined physical,

[88] CESAER, *Empowering excellence: European Universities Alliances as laboratories for success stories*, 2 July 2024, https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2024/20240702-alliances-position/20240702-cesaer-position-alliances-and-science-and-technology.pdf

[89] Ibid.

[90] UNICA, Saso, L., Costreie, S., Iucu, R., and Carțiș, A., *The innovative role of European Universities alliances in the European Higher Education Area, 2024,* https://www.unica-network.eu/read-the-latest-paper-on-the-innovative-role-of-european-university-alliances-written-by-representatives-of-unica/

[91] Arnaldo Valdés, R. M., and Gómez Comendador, V. F., 'European Universities Initiative: How Universities May Contribute to a More Sustainable Society', *Sustainability*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Issue 471, MDPI AG, Basel, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su14010471

[92] Ibid., p. 2

[93] EUF, *Position paper on the European University initiative,* 17 April 2018, https://www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10820561

[94] European University Association, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[95] Coimbra Group, *Statement on the Rolling out of the European Universities Initiative after the pilot phase*, 7 June 2021, https://www.coimbra-group.eu/coimbra-group-statement-on-the-rolling-out-of-the-european-universities-initiative-after-the-pilot-phase/; and UAS4EUROPE, *Position Paper on the Council Recommendation on Building Bridges for Effective European Higher Education Cooperation – Implementing the European Strategy for Universities,* 16 May 2022, https://uas4europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/UAS4EUROPE-Position-Paper_Building-bridges-for-effective-European-higher-education-cooperation.pdf; *and* The Guild, 24 February 2024.

[96] The Guild, Statement: *Which way forward for the European University alliances?, May 25* 2021, https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/statements/the-guild-statement_eui-which-way-forward.pdf ; and EUA, 20 June 2024.

virtual and blended mobility of students, academics, and staff[97] and the development of transnational joint course catalogues through virtual inter-university campuses[98]. ESN recognises the initiative's potential to remove barriers to mobility notably in terms of **automatic mutual recognition of learning outcomes**, and qualifies alliances' offers as "unique options for young people interested in studying abroad"[99]. Studies have shown that the alliances are experimental platforms for various novel mobility formats, such as short-term, long-term, online, hybrid. A master thesis study investigating the influence of the European Universities initiative on **student mobility**[100] highlighted **positive impact of the initiative in the emergence of diverse mobility formats**. The findings suggest that the initiative has increased the number of students participating in mobility (physical, virtual and blended). Alliances are also striving to address challenges related to administrative processes through simplification, implementation of support services, promotion of inclusive mobility, development of funding alternatives for students, and formulation of approaches to global-scale mobility with non-EU countries and other continents[101]. Stakeholders also highlight the increased **inclusive dimension** of the alliances for mobility and internationalisation opportunities, "providing **access to high-quality international experiences for all types of students**"[102].

EUA[103] outlines that "European cooperation in higher education requires a technical foundation to make the cross-border exchange between institutions a reality and to form digital bridges between partnered universities." In this context, stakeholders see **alliances as providing an "ideal space to progress on questions of interoperability of systems**"[104]. The progress achieved in terms of digital infrastructures and interoperable systems is recognised by stakeholders, notably with ESU stressing that "the efforts to enhance interoperability between HEIs, which aim to streamline the integration of systems, curricula, and administrative processes, are commendable"[105]. EUA underlines that "the focal point of current interoperability discussions in higher education at the European level remains the EUI and the ambition of university alliances to create platforms where learners can access materials and attend courses offered by many different institutions participating in the same alliance.

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[97] HEInnovate, Jongbloed, B., *Innovation in teaching and learning through internationalisation: Initiatives by the ECIU and EPICIR European University Alliances*, February 2023, https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/303153985/HEInnovate_Comparative_case_study_Internationalisation_1_.pdf

[98] Berger, F., Galati, N., and Witteler, S., 'Making Interoperablity Work: Challenges and Solutions for an Interoperable Higher Education System', Hochschulforum Digitalisierung, No.72, September 2023, https://hochschulforumdigitalisierung.de/sites/default/files/dateien/HFD_report_no.72_Making_interoperability_work.pdf

[99] ESN, Dias, R., Buseyne, S., Hadaad, Y., Topi K. et al., *ESNsurvey - XV Edition: Making Quality Mobility a Reality for All*, 2024, p. 55 https://esn.org/ESNsurvey?utm_source=ACA&utm_campaign=6a0d550224-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_07_31_09_02_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-edee6ed4f7-633068535

[100] Nygård, J, *Institutional impact of the European Universities initiative: understanding effects on mobility and internationalisation activities for students*, Master thesis Hochschule Osnabrück University of Applied Sciences, 2024.

[101] Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR) and Conseil des Rectrices et Recteurs (CRef), *Summary, conclusions and recommendations: European Universities alliances - Drivers of change and innovation in higher education*, 2024, https://vlir.be/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/European-University-Alliances-Drivers-of-Change-and-Innovation-in-Higher-Education-Summary-Conclusions-and-Recommendations.pdf

[102] LERU, Lievens P., *Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024, p.8., https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf

[103] EUA, Policy Brief: Developing common learning opportunities through interoperability, 18 November 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/briefings/developing-common-learning-opportunities-through-interoperability.html

[104] LERU, Lievens P., *Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024, p.8., https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf

[105] ESU ESUs position on the European Universities Initiative, 11 September 2024, ESUs position on the European Universities Initiative - European Students' Union

**The EUI has become an important vehicle for implementing core elements of European higher education policy, with alliances generating momentum – and providing testbeds – for rollout of key initiatives**."[106] However, the same EUA analysis also found that "**Progress among alliances – and among institutions within alliances – is often uneven and non-linear**." ESU are pointing that "in the long term, **interoperability must extend to all 5,000 HEIs in Europe**, not just those within alliances"[107]. EUA calls for further efforts to avoid siloed systems and to build an "**inclusive, interoperable European system**, based on common, open standards, which gives learners and teachers access to resources across institutions"[108].

Stakeholders emphasised the **initiative's potential to break silos between universities' missions** of education, research and innovation at the service of society, strengthening institutional excellence[109], thereby reinforcing capabilities in view of narrowing Europe's innovation gap and **fostering a balanced brain circulation**[110]. The initiative promotes comprehensive institutional partnerships that cooperate simultaneously across education, research, and societal engagement. For this purpose, alliances are addressing obstacles to the establishment of cross-border partnerships[111,112]. Nonetheless, stakeholders reminded of the **need to further facilitate such synergies between all missions with dedicated, appropriate, tailored funding mechanisms and instruments**. The Guild recognises the alliances' capacity to "further reinforce the interchange between research, teaching and innovation, and strengthen the institutional excellence"[113]. ACA explicitly welcomed this encompassing vision of excellence[114]. Similarly, EUA highlights the importance for the initiative to "encompass university missions in a bottom-up approach"[115], echoing the Coimbra group appreciation of the initiative being about "flexibility, creativity, bottom-up approach, inclusiveness, implementing an ambition with respect to fostering the quality of higher education and research"[116]. CESAER reminds that the "European Universities Alliances serve as both an opportunity and a tool for universities

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[106] EUA, Policy Brief: Developing common learning opportunities through interoperability, 18 November 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/briefings/developing-common-learning-opportunities-through-interoperability.html

[107] ESU ESUs position on the European Universities Initiative, 11 September 2024, ESUs position on the European Universities Initiative - European Students' Union

[108] EUA, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[109] The Guild, *Shaping European universities of the future: The Guild's recommendations for the European Universities initiative*, 23 March 2018, https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/position-papers/shaping-european-universities-future-the-guilds-recommendations-for-european-universities-initiative.html

[110] EUA, *The future of the European Universities Initiative*, 27 April 2020, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-future-of-the-european-universities-initiative.html

[111] EUA, Claeys-Kulik, A., Jørgensen, T., Stöber, H., et al, *International strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative: Results of the EUA survey,* April 2020, https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/international-strategic-institutional-partnerships-and-the-european-universities-initiative.html

[112] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[113] The Guild, *Shaping European universities of the future: The Guild's recommendations for the European Universities initiative*, March 2018, https://www.the-guild.eu/news/2018/Position-paper-European-university-networks.html

[114] ACA, *Position Paper on the European University Networks (EUN) initiative*, July 2020, https://aca-secretariat.be/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Position_Paper_on_the_European_University_Networks.pdf

[115] EUA, *The future of the European Universities initiative,* April 2020, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-future-of-the-european-universities-initiative.html

[116] Coimbra Group, *Statement on the Rolling out of the European Universities initiative after the pilot phase*, June 2021, https://www.coimbra-group.eu/coimbra-group-statement-on-the-rolling-out-of-the-european-universities-initiative-after-the-pilot-phase/

to enhance their overall mission of education, research and innovation" and calls for a "holistic, strategic and long-term vision for the alliances"[117] to enhance Europe's competitiveness.

**Student organisations at EU level – European Students' Union[118], the Erasmus Students Network[119] -** actively support the objectives of European Universities initiative that contributes to advancing the goals of the European Higher Education Area, notably linked to its central role in promoting common internationalisation **values,** nurturing a **shared European identity,** and fostering global **competitiveness in higher education**. Student organisations recognise the **added value the alliances bring to students** notably in terms of **strengthening the implementation of the Bologna Process tools and facilitating seamless credit mobility, automatic recognition and better alignment in the use of ECTS, as well as fostering internationalisation and interoperability**.

> " *The European Universities Initiative represents a significant step towards fostering deeper collaboration across higher education institutions in Europe. This initiative not only aims to enhance the quality of education but also to build stronger ties across borders, fostering inclusivity and interoperability. The European Students' Union welcomes these efforts, recognizing the value they bring to student mobility, diversity, and internationalisation. However, they also require further improvement to ensure that they are truly democratic, inclusive, and sustainable.*
>
> **European Students Union**

ESN also highlighted the challenges encountered by mobile students, shedding light on **persistent issues such as access to opportunities, financial support, and recognition. ESN acknowledges the potential of the alliances to promote seamless mobility by removing barriers such as grant portability and the mutual recognition of learning achievements.**

The alliances show a shared focus on **innovative approaches to teaching and learning**. Researchers indicated that **challenge-based learning** has allowed alliances to foster **inter- and trans-disciplinarity**, self-directed learning, critical thinking, inter-institutional teamwork, collaborative problem-based approaches, real-world relevance, and internal and external stakeholder engagement. Studies also highlighted that the alliances have excelled in teaching methods that foster **intercultural competence** development and support students in reflecting on intercultural communication through challenge-based learning[120]. This emphasis on innovative approaches highlights the value of alliances in transforming higher

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[117] CESAER, *Empowering excellence: European Universities Alliances as laboratories for success stories*, 2 July 2024. https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2024/20240702-alliances-position/20240702-cesaer-position-alliances-and-science-and-technology.pdf

[118] https://esu-online.org/esus-position-on-the-european-universities-initiative/

[119] ESN, Kalinova N., Kyriakou K., *Policy Brief - Navigating the future of European Universities Alliances: The Student Perspective*, 12 October 2023, https://www.esn.org/news/navigating-future-european-universities-alliances-student-perspective

[120] Boersema, F., *Can European University Alliances create intercultural competences? An exploratory, comparative-case study into the integrated approach of three European University Alliances regarding interculturality*, Master Thesis Utrecht and Masaryk Universities, 2021, https://studenttheses.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12932/41388/Final_Thesis%20Interculturality%20European%20Universities%20_%20Femke%20Boersma.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

education and addressing the evolving needs of students and society[121,122,123]. In terms of **skills development**, an ESN analysis[124] found that students believe that "the alliances can create significant academic benefits such as: strengthened role of students in shaping a more harmonised European higher education and institutional structures; more opportunities for international projects and course collaboration in interdisciplinary and problem-solving areas; shared resources and research cooperation; access to courses offered at the partner universities, increasing the quality of the curriculum and enriching the academic experience; professional networking opportunities; learning new languages." LERU points out that the alliances "join complementary strengths to address the skills gap by offering transnational life-long learning opportunities and micro-credentials for re-skilling and up-skilling"[125]. In this regard, "the development of a joint concept for **micro-credentials** and their implementation in European Universities alliances should be supported in the long-term[126]". UNICA also recognises the European Universities' innovation potential and welcomes alliances' emphasis on micro-credentials, identifying it as "one of the most transformative aspects of the European Universities initiative"[127]. Drawing attention on the specific role of universities of science and technology in shaping key technological developments' impact on societies, CESAER also stressed the initiative's key role to train "highly skilled graduates in disciplines such as science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (**STEM**) with the skills required for the 21st Century" is seen as "vital for Europe to be a globally leading knowledge economy and society"[128].

Students' organisations found that the initiative is fostering the **democratic representation of students** in the alliances' governance, as well as enhances **inclusivity and diversity**, although **more efforts are still needed** in both these regards. ESU outlines that, "for the alliances to fulfil their promise of inclusivity, more concrete measures are required to ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background or field of study, can fully participate in and benefit from alliance activities."

ESU also strongly calls for ensuring democratic involvement – for that "it is crucial that student representatives, who are already elected at HEI levels through the local student population, are integrated into the governance structures of the alliances. " Recent studies also concluded that student representatives perceived their engagement as effective in the personal, professional, democratic, and organisational

[121] Berger, F., Galati, N., and Witteler, S., 'Making Interoperablity Work: Challenges and Solutions for an Interoperable Higher Education System', Hochschulforum Digitalisierung, No.72, September 2023, https://hochschulforumdigitalisierung.de/sites/default/files/dateien/HFD_report_no.72_Making_interopera bility_work.pdf

[122] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[123] HEInnovate, Jongbloed, B., *Innovation in teaching and learning through internationalisation: Initiatives by the ECIU and EPICUR European University Alliances*, February 2023., https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/303153985/HEInnovate_Comparative_case_study_Internation alisation_1_.pdf

[124] navigating_the_future_of_european_universities_alliances_the_student_perspective.pdf ; Erasmus Students Network, 2023

[125] LERU, Lievens P.,*Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024, p.8, https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf

[126] LERU, Lievens P.,*Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024, p.5, https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf

[127] UNICA, Saso, L., Costreie, S., Iucu, R., and Carţiş, A., *The innovative role of European Universities alliances in the European Higher Education Area, 2024,* https://www.unica-network.eu/read-the-latest-paper-on-the-innovative-role-of-european-university-alliances-written-by-representatives-of-unica/

[128] CESAER, *Statement on European Universities*, 2018, 6 December 2018, https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2018/20181206-statement-european-universities.pdf

dimensions[129],[130]. Factors such as positive staff attitudes, separate student governance bodies, and alignment between expectations and actual decision-making power influence engagement effectiveness. Studies suggested that achieving meaningful engagement requires supportive structures and a positive institutional culture. Monitoring framework data gathered in the context of this study shows that **students are involved in the governance of 95% of alliances with 63% having full voting rights.**

**The alliances are also enhancing collaboration between higher education institutions and local stakeholders**, addressing local challenges from a transnational perspective, and contributing to the development of regional policies and strategies. Through the challenge-based approaches, the initiative **fosters societal engagement by articulating regional stakeholders to the alliances**. Studies have found that the involvement of a wider, transnational coalition in addressing local societal challenges has increased the motivation of local stakeholders to engage with the alliances[131],[132].

> " *Involvement of a wider, transnational coalition in addressing local societal challenges has increased the motivation of local stakeholders to engage with the alliances.*
>
> **European Parliament study**

ACA and the European trade union committee for Education welcome the initiatives' aim of creating more attractive careers and working conditions for academics, researchers and staff[133],[134]. They value the alliances' promotion of transnational cooperation, institutional transformation, promotion of innovation, role in systemic reforms, while Associations representing SMEs and the private sector value the alliances' deeper cooperation between higher education institutions and economic operators, including SMEs[135]. These associations advocate for **strengthening university-business cooperation**, for example, by co-designing educational programmes in partnership with the private sector to ensure that programmes better

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[129] Ebel, K., *Student Representatives' Perceived Effectiveness of their Engagement in European University Alliances' Governance Structures*, Master thesis Utrecht University, 2022

[130] Leja, K., *Student participation in the governance of university alliances: A case study of student participation at a European University,* Una Europa, Master thesis Tampere University, 2024, https://trepo.tuni.fi/handle/10024/158698 and https://studenttheses.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12932/42605/MA_Thesis_Ebel_publication.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

[131] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[132] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

[133] ACA, *Erasmus+ Consolidating efforts for an impactful future*, December 2023, https://aca-secretariat.be/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/ACA-statement-on-Erasmus-mid-term-review.pdf

[134] ETUCE, *Position on the European Universities Initiative and European Degrees*, 16 November 2021, https://www.csee-etuce.org/en/resources/statements/4631-etuce-position-on-the-european-universities-initiative-and-european-degrees-november-2021

[135] SMEunited, *Position paper on the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience*, 5 October 2020, https://smeunited.eu/admin/storage/smeunited/201005-smeunited-position-paper-eu-skills-agenda.pdf

respond to the skills needs of companies. Moreover, progression pathways from VET to higher VET and higher education need to be reinforced.

### *Remaining challenges stand in the way of reaching the alliances full potential*

The alliances have demonstrated their transformational potential and added value. But to actually bring transnational cooperation to the next level, stakeholders across the board also stress the need for continued efforts. Committed to making the initiative a success for the benefit of the entire higher education sector across Europe, stakeholders point to several remaining challenges, identifying areas where further concerted efforts are needed.

Alliances are seen as "testbed to identify and highlight challenges and obstacles to transnational cooperation"[136]. **Stakeholders point to legal and administrative barriers representing significant obstacles for seamless transnational cooperation.** They identify "favourable funding conditions and permissive legal frameworks […] as crucial for driving progress and educational excellence"[137], pointing particularly to the "**recognition of degrees and quality assurance systems**" to "**simplify the establishment of joint programmes**, and for **seamless mobility**, issues that were only partially addressed through the Bologna process"[138]. Studies have also identified **incompatibilities in regulations** at national level, leading to difficulties in implementing flexible study pathways[139] as well as**,** degree structures, ECTS degree requirements, academic calendars, grading systems, higher education entry requirements, and student selection criteria[140,141]. Alliances would benefit from a cross-institutional **quality assurance mechanism** allowing them to build an internal quality assurance system that ensures that the quality of their joint educational provision is to the highest standards. Implementing new organisational models and strategies with the alliances scale and scope can also often be challenged by diverse institutional and national frameworks related to academics' assessment, recognition and rewards, that hinder the implementation of strategies developed at the alliance level[142].

**Addressing these challenges requires action both at institutional and system levels** both being particularly relevant as the joint activities and educational provisions

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[136] EUA, *The future of the European Universities Initiative*, 27 April 2020, p.2 https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-future-of-the-european-universities-initiative.html

[137] CESAER, *Empowering excellence: European Universities Alliances as laboratories for success stories*, 2 July 2024, p.4., https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2024/20240702-alliances-position/20240702-cesaer-position-alliances-and-science-and-technology.pdf

[138] Ibid.

[139] Bossuyt, S., Brogueira, P., Castro, C., David, F., Dellabale, A., et al., 'Unite! European University: Main difficulties regarding Flexible Study Pathways identified by Partners with Impact on Joint Programmes – Results of a survey across Europe' in Jarvinen, H-M., Silvestre, S., Llorens, S., and Nagy B. V., (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 50th SEFI Conference (European Society for Engineering Education*, 2022, pp. 1866-1871, https://research.aalto.fi/en/publications/unite-european-university-main-difficulties-regarding-flexible-st

[140] HEInnovate, Jongbloed, B., *Innovation in teaching and learning through internationalisation: Initiatives by the ECIU and EPICUR European University Alliances*, February 2023, https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/303153985/HEInnovate_Comparative_case_study_Internationalisation_1_.pdf

[141] European Commission: European Research Executive Agency, O'Neill, G. and Acheson, H., *Progress of University Alliance Projects – Projects funded under Horizon 2020 IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020 Call - Pilot I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/533035

[142] European Commission: European Research Executive Agency, O'Neill, G. and Acheson, H., *Progress of University Alliance Projects – Projects funded under Horizon 2020 IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020 Call - Pilot I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/533035

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of the alliances expand[143]. At institutional level building trust among institutions, defining mutually beneficial goals, addressing institutional barriers, balancing or targeting resource allocation, and managing change processes is crucial[144,145]. At system level, stakeholders are calling for "urgent attention from policymakers at both national and European levels"[146]. **Overcoming these obstacles also calls for facilitating the full implementation of** existing tools for transnational cooperation such as **the Bologna Process tools, combined with system-level reforms**, and **new instruments such as the 'blueprint for a European degree'**[147].

Another issue standing in the way of reaching the alliances' full potential as identified by stakeholders is the need to **reach out and embark more students and staff in the alliances' activities**, notably by **mainstreaming the alliances' activities across all faculties and departments**. The current difficulties in this regard are linked with attracting and associating a growing number of faculties and departments to the alliances' activities, notably in view of their diverse focuses and interests. **Visibility and awareness** of the opportunities offered by the alliances towards the broader students and staff bodies is reported to be a challenge as well. An ESN survey showcases a relatively low percentage of awareness amongst students about the European Universities alliances, hinting to the need for further promotion to inform about the alliances' unique study opportunities notably through dedicated communication and outreach strategies[148,149]. Additionally, the alliances would gain from enhancing the communication of their benefits also to local stakeholders to clarify the alliances' concept and their potential role in the local ecosystems[150]. Literature also recommended addressing the visibility of the initiatives' benefits for stakeholders, media presence, and promotion in national languages[151].

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[143] Frederiks, M., Guibert, T., and Provijn, D., *Quality Assurance of European Universities Alliances: Aligning Internal/External QA and Student Involvement, EUniQ project*, 2023, https://www.nvao.net/files/attachments/.9844/Paper_Frederiks_Guibert_Provijn_QA_of_European_Universities_Alliances.pdf

[144] EUA, Claeys-Kulik, A., Jørgensen, T., Stöber, H., et al, *International strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative: Results of the EUA survey,* April 2020, https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/international-strategic-institutional-partnerships-and-the-european-universities-initiative.html

[145] Berger, F., Galati, N., and Witteler, S., 'Making Interoperablity Work: Challenges and Solutions for an Interoperable Higher Education System', Hochschulforum Digitalisierung, No.72, September 2023, https://hochschulforumdigitalisierung.de/sites/default/files/dateien/HFD_report_no.72_Making_interoperability_work.pdf

[146] LERU, Lievens P., *Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024, https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf

[147] European University Association, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024., https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[148] ESN, Kalinova N., Kyriakou K., *Policy Brief - Navigating the future of European Universities Alliances: The Student Perspective*, 12 October 2023, https://www.esn.org/news/navigating-future-european-universities-alliances-student-perspective

[149] ESN, Dias, R., Buseyne, S., Hadaad, Y., Topi K. et al., *ESNsurvey - XV Edition: Making Quality Mobility a Reality for All*, 2024, https://esn.org/ESNsurvey?utm_source=ACA&utm_campaign=6a0d550224-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2024_07_31_09_02_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-edee6ed4f7-633068535

[150] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

[151] Galán-Cubillo E., Serrano-Cobos, J., López-Navarrete A., 'Understanding European Universities Initiative as the limestone to cement Europe together: A review of existing literature', *Policy Futures in Education,* 27 September 2024.

EUA outlines the need for further efforts to "make best use of capacities and resources and maximise opportunities for students and researchers in Europe"[152].

**EU and national student unions and associations** that have expressed their positions on the European Universities initiative include EU-level organisations such as ESN and ESU[153,154,155], as well as national unions of higher education institutions' students such as VVS[156] in Belgium, SK RVŠ[157] in Czechia, DSF[158] in Denmark, SYL[159]and SAMOK[160] in Finland, FAGE[161] in France, CREUP[162] in Spain. They welcome progress in establishing **student governance frameworks within alliances**, which enable student boards to engage in decision-making processes. However, student unions and associations' advocate for further reinforcing the representative structures for democratic student participation, for instance by further reinforcing the implementation of democratic elections of student representatives, adopting student participation frameworks, and providing dedicated support to ensure effective student contributions to decision-making.

**Ensuring equal access and opportunities for all students** is also a key element outlined by the stakeholders, with more proactive measures to promote inclusion, for example through **an all-encompassing inclusivity framework**, tailored support systems, scholarships, inclusive learning environments, and automatic recognition of credits and qualifications across Europe, making **mobility more accessible** to a majority of students. Further recommendations include targeted support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, portability of grants, flexible learning pathways, mobility windows in the learning programmes, and further implementation of the European Student Card Initiative. ESU outlines that "For the alliances to fulfil their promise of inclusivity, more concrete measures are required to ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background or field of study, can fully participate in and benefit from alliance activities. "

Stakeholders also acknowledged the pioneering role of the alliances for new and innovative mobility formats. Nevertheless, challenges still remain, especially relating to **reaching the 50% intra-alliance students mobility targets.** They are caused by, inter alia, financial constraints, complex recognition of virtual and blended mobilities, limited access to mobility among students from lower socio-economic

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[152] EUA, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024, p. 1., https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html.

[153] ESN, Kalinova N., Kyriakou K., *Policy Brief - Navigating the future of European Universities Alliances: The Student Perspective*, 12 October 2023, https://www.esn.org/news/navigating-future-european-universities-alliances-student-perspective

[154] ESU, *ESU's opinion on the mid-term review of the European Education Area, 10 July* 2024 https://esu-online.org/esu-opinion-eea/

[155] ESU, *European Universities: It Is About the Students*, December, 2019, https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/European-Universities-It-Is-About-the-Students.pdf

[156] VVS, *Position European University Initiative*, 6 May 2024, Standpunt Europese Universiteiten ENG

[157] SK RVŠ, *20 priorit univerzity 21. Století*, 2023, https://www.skrvs.cz/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/20-priorit-pre-univerzitu-21.stoleti.pdf

[158] DSF, *Policy on International matters, https://www.dsfnet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Policy-paper-International-Matters.pdf*

[159] SYL: National Union of University Students in Finland, *Students' Europe – SYL's vision for EU engagement 2023–2025*, 2023 https://syl.fi/app/uploads/2023/01/Students-Europe.pdf

[160] SYL-SAMOK, *Higher Education Students' European Election Programme 2024,* 13 December 2023, https://samok.fi/samok-informs/higher-education-students-european-election-programme-has-been-published/?lang=en

[161] FAGE, *Profession de foi CNESER 2021-2023,* https://www.fage.org/ressources/documents/3/6975-FAGE_CNESER_2021-2023.pdf

[162] CREUP, *Posicionamiento sobre la internacionalización y movilidad del sistema de educación superior de españa,*https://www.creup.es/documentos/pu/posicionamientos/72AGO_PO_202211_Internacionalizacion.pdf

backgrounds, difficulties in aligning academic calendars, lack of awareness of the innovative mobility opportunities offered by the alliances, etc.

Stakeholders identify **current funding mechanisms for the alliances as a major constraint,** as primarily relying on **project-based logic**, hindering to leverage the full potential of deep transnational cooperation across all their missions. Studies have found that the need for diversifying funding sources, the time-limited nature of the funding scheme, and the uncertainty of future support hinders the long-term sustainability of the alliances[163,164]. This challenge entails maintaining motivation within the alliances and encouraging their leaders' engagement in the alliances' goals and long-term sustainability[165,166]. Stakeholders call for **long-term sustainable funding**, for **increasing synergies** between funding sources, and for **sustained support across all the alliances missions** of education, research and innovation at the service of society, necessary to fulfil the initiative's high ambition. EUA outlined that "for leveraging the full potential of deep transnational cooperation, higher education institutions must be able to develop it across all of their missions."[167]

> "*For leveraging the full potential of deep transnational cooperation, higher education institutions must be able to develop it across all of their missions. Greater funding alignment and simplification are perhaps what matter most.*
>
> **European University Association**

EUA calls for "providing a longer-term funding perspective for existing and new alliances through open competitive calls based on excellence in university missions. Such funding should be supplementary and not lead to a reduction in resources for other activities."[168] To ensure that alliances can continue developing the framework conditions for collaboration in education, mobility and research and innovation, EUA argues they need long-term sustainable funding through European investment[169,170]. **Alongside the educational dimension, they plead for dedicated support for universities and alliances that wish to further develop transnational cooperation in research and innovation**, based on open competition, enabling the establishment of joint structures to enhance research and innovation capacity and advance joint research and innovation initiatives. The EUA asks for **joint calls,**

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[163] EUA, Claeys-Kulik, A., Jørgensen, T., Stöber, H., et al, *International strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative: Results of the EUA survey,* April 2020, https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/international-strategic-institutional-partnerships-and-the-european-universities-initiative.html

[164] European Commission: European Research Executive Agency, O'Neill, G. and Acheson, H., *Progress of University Alliance Projects – Projects funded under Horizon 2020 IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020 Call - Pilot I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/533035

[165] Ibid.

[166] OECD, *The state of academic careers in OECD countries: An evidence review: OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 91, 2024, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-state-of-academic-careers-in-oecd-countries_ea9d3108-en

[167] EUA, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, June 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[168] Ibid.

[169] LERU, Lievens P., , *Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024., https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf

[170] European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, Daniel, K. and Le Gleut, R., *Political Opinion on the European Universities Initiative*, 24 October 2024 https://www.senat.fr/fileadmin/Commissions/Affaires_europeennes/Fichiers/Avis_politiques/AP_EN_univer sites.pdf

**combining funds from different EU programmes and providing one entry point for applicants, making the application process more efficient**. EUA considers that "greater funding alignment and simplification are perhaps what matter most" since "the desynchronisation of funds (…) generates a massive administrative burden for universities, with processes ridden with inefficiencies and an overall sense of uncertainty brought about by the temporary nature of the funding"[171]. To reinforce the research and innovation capacity of alliances to foster the European Research Area and contribute to the European Innovation Agenda, covering all universities missions, **dedicated funding under the next EU framework programme for research and innovation will contribute to accelerating institutional change and advancing institutional policies**[172,173].

In regard to **national funding**, EUA acknowledge that "European countries have set up funding schemes to support the participation of their universities in the European Universities Initiative. This is a welcome development, as it facilitates institutions' long-term planning and decreases dependency on project-bound funding"[174]. However, "modalities and amounts can vary significantly. This creates difficulties and uncertainty within consortia".[175] Thus, **stakeholders call for a more level playing field for national investment in the alliances and for "strengthening universities' core funding and financial autonomy** in order to enable them to invest in the type of transnational cooperation that best fits their vision, profile and strategy"[176]. This position is also supported by the Guild, who consider that "to create a level playing field, Member States should be encouraged to dedicate funding for R&I and educational activities of universities, including those participating in alliances, in their national operational programmes" [177]. The Guild calls for "sufficient support for the higher education sector. Universities must receive appropriate resources that enable them to embrace new challenges stemming from digitalisation, interdisciplinarity, educational transformation, and societal engagement. If we wish to deliver as a sector on initiatives such as the European Degree, European Universities alliances or the European Student Card, ambitions should be followed by investment and political support"[178].

**Stakeholders advocate for a longer-term funding outline, with support over 7-year funding**, with ESN emphasising the need to reduce bureaucratic hurdles and **enhance efficiency** by providing alliances with a stable financial outlook, while seamless mobility should continue in future funding schemes.[179] The Guild equally supports "the proposal for a 7-year funding perspective for alliances in Erasmus+ with a mid-term review to assess progress halfway. The predictability of the funding will

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[171] EUA, *The European Universities Initiative and system level reforms Current challenges and considerations for the future*, October 2022, https://www.eua.eu/images/publications/Publication_PDFs/briefing_eui_impact_on_system_level_reforms.pdf

[172] CESAER, *Empowering excellence: European Universities Alliances as laboratories for success stories*, 2 July 2024., https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2024/20240702-alliances-position/20240702-cesaer-position-alliances-and-science-and-technology.pdf

[173] EUA, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024. , https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[174] Ibid

[175] Ibid

[176] Ibid

[177] The Guild, *Open letter to the Executive Vice-President-designate for People, Skills and Preparedness*, September 2024, https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/statements/the_guild_openletter_minzatu.pdf

[178] Ibid.

[179] ESN, Kalinova N., Kyriakou K., *Policy Brief - Navigating the future of European Universities Alliances: The Student Perspective*, 12 October 2023, https://www.esn.org/news/navigating-future-european-universities-alliances-student-perspective

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**allow long-term planning and eliminate the administrative burden**"[180]. CESAER calls "**in relation to the educational mission, for open and competitive long-term funding under the successor to the Erasmus+** programme as part of the next EU long-term budget"[181].

LERU argues that all EU programmes should avoid overlap and unnecessary duplication, reinforcing each other through well-developed synergies. "**Synergies between EU programmes including the future Erasmus+ programme and FP10 should be stimulated and designated pathways should be developed for the alliances**"[182]. CESAER also defends the idea that, since the "alliances play an important role in realising the European Research Area and are contributing to the European Innovation Agenda" they "should be empowered to **leverage their unique consortia structures to receive funding from the European framework programme for research and innovation**"[183].

LERU also suggested that, in addition to **making synergies possible in the legal texts of programmes**, the Commission should consider developing, where most relevant, **complementary timelines or designated pathways from one programme into another**. This is vital so as to avoid funding gaps, loss of talent and innovation leakage. For the next European framework programme for research and innovation (FP10) such pathways should be developed with the successor of Erasmus+, for instance for the European Universities Alliances, but also for instance with the European Defence Fund, the European Space Programme, EU4Health, the Digital Europe Programme, with Cohesion Policy funds and any other relevant programme, possibly including programmes at Member State level.[184] Stakeholders call for strengthening the effective implementation of education and R&I in all four corners of the European knowledge square: Education, Research, Innovation and Service to Society, while studies are also outlining more specifically the need for synergies with initiatives and programmes such as HEInnovate, EIT, MSCA or the EIC[185].

The Guild acknowledge the potential of European Universities to boost the competitiveness of the European higher education sector and outlines that "the **sustainability of the initiative will require concerted efforts of national governments coupled with EU funding instruments**."[186] LERU emphasises that the initiative's long-term success requires "sustained, competitive and excellence-based **funding from European, national and regional sources**"[187], also highlighting the need for **national and regional investment to be established in a coordinated manner**[188]. Studies and position papers also concur concerning the

[180] The Guild, Statement: *The Guild's recommendations for the Investment Pathway of European Universities alliances*, 24 February 2024, https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/statements/the-guild_statement-on-investment-pathway-of-eui_feb24.pdf

[181] CESAER, *Empowering excellence: European Universities Alliances as laboratories for success stories*, 2 July 2024., https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2024/20240702-alliances-position/20240702-cesaer-position-alliances-and-science-and-technology.pdf

[182] LERU, Lievens P., , *Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024., https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf

[183] CESAER Ibid

[184] LERU Ibid

[185] Hammann, A., *L'initiative ‹ Universités Européennes ›: L'héritage et les apports franco-allemands*, Master Thesis University of Potsdam, 2022, https://publishup.uni-potsdam.de/opus4-ubp/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/54168/file/mega5.pdf

[186] The Guild, Statement: *The Guild's recommendations for the Investment Pathway of European Universities alliances*, 24 February 2024, https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/statements/the-guild_statement-on-investment-pathway-of-eui_feb24.pdf

[187] LERU, Lievens P., *Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024, p.12, https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf

[188] Ibid.

need to **establish a more level playing field with regards to the national funding strategies** for the initiative[189,190,191,192].

**Achieving interoperability still remains a key challenge for the alliances**. This entails establishing standardised and compatible processes and software solutions for managing enrolment, student data, campus services, and research projects, among others. Stakeholders identified a need to further promote interoperability within the European Universities initiative as a means to allow institutions to exchange data and processes seamlessly, provide access to materials and courses across different institutions to learners, and enhance mobility[193], thereby reinforcing the transformative potential of the initiative. Stakeholders are also pointing that towards the role model capacity of the alliances paving the way for the entire European higher education system: "in the long term, interoperability must extend to all 5,000 HEIs in Europe, not just those within alliances"[194]. EUA is also calling for further efforts to avoid siloed systems and to build an "inclusive, interoperable European system, based on common, open standards, which gives learners and teachers access to resources across institutions"[195]. LERU outlines that "it is important that the European Commission takes up a stronger role in coordinating various ongoing cross-border efforts to ensure outcomes and learnings reach the higher education sector more broadly"[196].

The alliances are also reporting persistent **challenges related to pooling of resources impacting the effective, efficient and impactful collaboration within alliances**[197]. Recent research on the initiative recognises that the initiative provides opportunities to achieve critical mass and better compete globally through pooling resources, enabling efficiency gains[198]. The constantly and rapidly evolving societies drive also change in higher education provision and cooperation – hence, some alliances felt the need to explore options for new instruments that are more adapted to the size and scale of their ambitious cooperation. The alliances need their deeper transnational cooperation to be recognised also from a legal perspective to facilitate cooperation, joint activities and common strategic decisions. Further details on the

[189] CESAER, *Empowering excellence: European Universities Alliances as laboratories for success stories*, 2 July 2024, https://www.cesaer.org/content/5-operations/2024/20240702-alliances-position/20240702-cesaer-position-alliances-and-science-and-technology.pdf.
[190] EUA, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024., https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html
[191] The Guild, Statement: *The Guild's recommendations for the Investment Pathway of European Universities alliances*, 24 February 2024, https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/statements/the-guild_statement-on-investment-pathway-of-eui_feb24.pdf
[192] LERU, *European Universities: no more lip service, time for action*, 12 May 2021, https://www.leru.org/news/european-universities-no-more-lip-service-time-for-action
[193] EUA, *Policy Brief: Developing common learning opportunities through interoperability*, 18 November 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/briefings/developing-common-learning-opportunities-through-interoperability.html
[194] Ibid.
[195] EUA, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024. , https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html
[196] LERU, Lievens P., *Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances,* 28 November 2024, p.12, https://www.leru.org/files/European-Universities-alliances_LERU-Paper.pdf
[197] Berger, F., Galati, N., and Witteler, S., 'Making Interoperablity Work: Challenges and Solutions for an Interoperable Higher Education System', Hochschulforum Digitalisierung, No.72, September 2023, https://hochschulforumdigitalisierung.de/sites/default/files/dateien/HFD_report_no.72_Making_interoperability_work.pdf
[198] Lambrechts, A.A., Cavallaro, M. and Lepori, B., 'The European Universities initiative: between status hierarchies and inclusion'. *Higher Education,* Vol. 88, 2024, pp. 1227–1247, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01167-w

legal statuses established by several alliances can be found under Section 6.1.3 of this report.

Equally important, the stakeholders highlight issues in regard to defining the role of **international collaborations beyond Europe and how non-EU countries can be involved**[199]. Higher education institutions are instrumental in building a stronger Europe in the world and by attracting global talent. By producing and diffusing high quality knowledge, by collaborating with partners worldwide, HEIs are part of Europe's strategy to address global challenges which call for global solutions e.g. on green and digital transitions, on strengthening technology-driven competitiveness, calling for joint efforts of the best creative and entrepreneurial minds from around the world. Europe needs to reach out to the rest of the world, to increase cooperation and boost the capacity of new and emerging centres of excellence in partner countries. While the primary goal of the European Universities initiative is to strengthen transnational cooperation and foster a genuine European dimension in higher education, several alliances expanded their partnerships beyond the EU as part of their internationalisation efforts[200,201]. Stakeholders like LERU advocate for **possibilities to include non-EU HEIs, including Swiss and UK universities as partners[202], indicating a widening relevance of the European Universities initiative.** At the same time, there is also **mutual interest from higher education institutions across the globe to cooperate with the alliances**. They are attracted to working together with European Universities alliances of universities across Europe, having access in such a way to the network of the different partner institutions in one go. This is in line with the position of several **alliances that seek ways to expand their partnerships beyond the EU as part of their internationalisation efforts**[203] **and also advocate for possibilities to include non-EU HEIs, including Swiss and UK universities, as partner**s[204205], **indicating a widening relevance of the European Universities initiative**.

To sustain these efforts, the Guild[206] advocates for supporting such international partners participation in the alliances by mobilising the EU's external action funds such as the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, while highlighting the strategic

[199] Andrée, D., 'A European University – A renewal of education?' In: Schwaag Serger, S., Malmberg, A., and Benner, M. (Eds.), *Renewing higher education: Academic leadership in times of transformation*. Lund University Press, Lund, 2021, pp. 129-166

[200] An inter-alliance event on internationalisation of European Universities alliances has been organised by CHARM-EU in September 2024, see: https://charm-eu.eu/event/internationalisation-of-european-universities-alliances-the-new-frontiers/

[201] Aurora Universities Network, *European Global Approach revisited – position paper by Aurora*, 2023, p. 6, https://aurora-universities.eu/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/AURORA-position-paper-on-EC-Global-Approach_210323_final.pdf

[202] LERU, *European Universities: no more lip service, time for action*, 12 May 2021, https://www.leru.org/news/european-universities-no-more-lip-service-time-for-action; LERU, 2024, LERU-message-to-EU-Commissioner-designate_Ekaterina-Zaharieva.pdf; Maximizing the impact of European Universities alliances, 2024, *European Universities alliances - LERU paper

[203] An inter-alliance event on internationalisation of European Universities alliances has been organised by CHARM-EU in September 2024, see: https://charm-eu.eu/event/internationalisation-of-european-universities-alliances-the-new-frontiers/

[204] Aurora Universities Network, *European Global Approach revisited – position paper by Aurora*, 2023, p. 6, https://aurora-universities.eu/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/AURORA-position-paper-on-EC-Global-Approach_210323_final.pdf

[205] LERU, *European Universities: no more lip service, time for action*, 12 May 2021 , https://www.leru.org/news/european-universities-no-more-lip-service-time-for-action

[206] The Guild, Statement: *The Guild's recommendations for the Investment Pathway of European Universities alliances*, 24 February 2024, https://www.the-guild.eu/publications/statements/the-guild_statement-on-investment-pathway-of-eui_feb24.pdf

importance of Erasmus+ in building sustainable partnerships with third countries as envisaged in the EU's Global Gateway strategy.

## 4.3 High-level Reports: Letta, Draghi, Heitor

Building on the sector's perspectives, recent forward-looking Letta[207], Draghi[208] and Heitor[209] reports **single out the key role of the European Universities initiative for Europe's competitiveness, strengthening the European higher education system and attracting global talent.**

The **Enrico Letta Report on the future of the Single Market "Much more than a market", is putting forward the concept of the fifth freedom** for our EU's Single Market: **to learn, work together, research, innovate, share knowledge and capacity across borders**. The European Universities embody this vision and are seen as central for realising the ambition of opening both learning and labour mobility in the European Single Market, which are necessary to fill skills and labour market gaps and leverage its opportunities. The Letta Report proposed to raise the alliances' budget to EUR 4.5 billion for 2028-2034[210].

> " *A leap to EUR 10 million annually for each alliance, culminating in 600 million euros per year across the current spectrum of [over] 60 alliances, could significantly amplify the development of joint programmes across a wider array of disciplines. Such an investment, with Erasmus+ shouldering two-thirds of this augmented funding, complemented by an array of EU programmes, embodies a strategic integration of European, national, and regional resources.*
>
> **Enrico Letta report "More than a market"**

The **Mario Draghi Report on "The future of European competitiveness**" emphasises that "labour shortages will be most pronounced in high-skilled, non-manual occupations – i.e. those requiring high level of education" and is outlining the **key role of the alliances to attain EU critical mass of talent in research and innovation**[211].

The **Commission Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon Europe, coordinated by Manuel Heitor** "Align, Act, Accelerate, Research, Technology and Innovation to boost European competitiveness", recognises that the alliances "enable universities to collaborate more deeply across Member States, sharing knowledge and resources to achieve common goals" and that the initiative "has proven its potential

[207] Letta, E., *Much more than a market – Speed, Security, Solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, April, 2024 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf
[208] Draghi, M., *The future of European competitiveness Part A | A competitiveness strategy for Europe,* September 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/strengthening-european-competitiveness/eu-competitiveness-looking-ahead_en
[209] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, *Align, act, accelerate – Research, technology and innovation to boost European competitiveness*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/9106236
[210] Letta, E., *Much more than a market – Speed, Security, Solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, April, 2024 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf
[211] Draghi, M., *The future of European competitiveness Part A | A competitiveness strategy for Europe,* September 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/strengthening-european-competitiveness/eu-competitiveness-looking-ahead_en

(…) to strongly contribute to the building-up of the European R&I ecosystem" [212]. The report outlines that significant progress has been achieved "despite their project-based funding"[213]. The report stresses that to "foster an attractive and inclusive RD&I ecosystem", it is crucial to strengthen the "alliances to promote learning and institutional cooperation and development across borders"[214]. Looking at the future, the Heitor report considers that the alliances should be supported to become "laboratories for knowledge development, learning across barriers and establishing good practices"[215]. The Report recommends "strengthening university alliances across Europe, promoting the 5th Freedom of Letta through student and researcher mobility, joint degrees and to better embrace the challenge of joint recruitment of young researchers/academics by multiple universities" and "joint governance systems across multiple universities in Europe"[216].

> **"** *Securing sustainable financial support across all university missions is vital to unlock the transformative potential of these alliances.*
>
> **Commission Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon Europe, coordinated by Manuel Heitor**

The high-level reports are thus confirming the role of the alliances in transforming higher education and breaking silos between education, research and innovation, recalling the need for sustaining the alliances financially across all their missions in order to unlock their transformational potential.

## 4.4 Country-level studies: national perspectives into impact and national-level challenges

Various studies, commissioned by diverse national authorities and agencies, have adopted a national-level approach to characterise the opportunities, benefits and challenges faced by the European Universities initiative in the context of national higher education systems. Certain reports were available only in national languages, so the research team used DeepL for machine translation. Studies for the following countries were analysed:

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[212] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, *Align, act, accelerate – Research, technology and innovation to boost European competitiveness*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/9106236
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.

- **Czechia**: Case studies on the participation of Czech universities in the initiative, developed in the Project Monitoring Internationalisation of Czech Higher Education (MICHE), funded by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports[217,218,219,220].

- **France:** Analytical report providing critical evaluation, policy recommendations, and contextual information on the participation of France in the European Universities initiative, commissioned by the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate[221]. Additionally, the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research commissioned a study[222] to understand the transformative effect linked to being a higher education institution part of a European Universities alliance, with the evaluation process based on case studies and expected to be published in spring 2025.

- **Norway**: Report systematising experiences on the participation of Norwegian universities in the initiative, developed by the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills[223].

- **Poland:** Book collecting diverse research contributions on the participation of Polish universities in the initiative, published by the Polish Foundation for the Development of the Education System[224].

- **Portugal**: Mixed methods study characterising the participation of Portuguese universities in the initiative, developed by the Centre for Research in Higher Education Policies (CIPES) and funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology[225].

- **Spain**: Report on quality assurance in European Universities alliances, developed by the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) [226]; Annual analyses of the Spanish higher education system by the

[217] Sundbäck-Lindroos, A., Tordai, P., Flander, A., Kiisler, K., Casten, D., and Ferencz, I., *Charles University participation in 4EU+ European University Alliance*, Monitoring Internationalization of Czech Higher Education (MICHE), 2022.

[218] Tordai, P., Flander, A., Kiisler, K., Casten, D., and Ferencz, I., *Czech Technical University participation in EuroTeQ European University Alliance*, Monitoring Internationalization of Czech Higher Education (MICHE), 2022.

[219] Casten, D., Ferencz, I., Kiisler, K., Sundbäck-Lindroos, A., Flander, A., and Tordai, P., *Masaryk University participation in the EDUC European University Alliance*, Monitoring Internationalization of Czech Higher Education (MICHE), 2022.

[220] Casten, D., Ferencz, I., Kiisler, K., Flander, A., and Tordai, P., *Palacký University Olomouc participation in Aurora European University Alliance*, Monitoring Internationalization of Czech Higher Education (MICHE), 2022.

[221] European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, Daniel, K., and Le Gleut, R., *Information report made on behalf of the Committee on European Affairs on European universities*, European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, Regular Session 2024-2025, (in French), 2024, https://www.senat.fr/rap/r24-052/r24-0521.pdf

[222] Délégation aux affaires européennes, Département de la stratégie de l'espace européen de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur, Ministère chargé de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche, *Démarche évaluative de 6 établissements français membres d'une EUI (vague 1) : analyse de contribution et cartographie des activités économiques.* Ongoing, 2025.

[223] Pedersen, S. and Wiborg, A., *Norwegian experiences with participation in European universities (EUI)*, Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, (in Norwegian), 2023, https://hkdir.no/no/rapporter-undersokelser-og-statistikk/les-rapporten/norske-erfaringer-med-deltagelse-i-europeiske-universiteter/innledning

[224] Poszytek, P. and Budzanowska, A. (Eds.), *European Universities in Poland. Implementation of development strategy*, Key Concepts Series, Vol. 13, FRSE Publishing, Warsaw, 2023, https://doi.org/10.47050/67587105

[225] Gogadze, N., Cunha, E., Aguiar, J., and Carvalho, T., *European University alliances: A case study of Portugal*, INTED2024 Proceedings, pp. 4537-4546, 2024, https://doi.org/10.21125/inted.2024.1176

[226] ANECA, *Study on quality assurance in European University Alliances, European Degrees and Micro-credentials in the Spanish University System*, (in Spanish), 2022,

Fundación Conocimiento y Desarrollo (CYD), including outlooks on the European Universities impact on the national system and universities' internationalisation strategies[227].

**Sweden**: Mixed methods reports on quality assurance and participation of Swedish universities in the initiative, developed by the Swedish Higher Education Authority and the Council for Higher Education[228,229].

**Several national student unions** analyse the initiative's impact in their context, referring to the European Universities in their respective strategies, policy and papers:

- VVS[230] (Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten – Flemish Union of Students in Belgium),
- SK RVŠ[231] (Studentská komora Rady vysokých škol – Student Chamber of the Council of Higher Education Institutions in Czechia),
- DSF[232] (Danske studerendes fællesråd – National Union of Students in Denmark),
- SYL[233] (Suomen ylioppilaskuntien liitto – National Union of University Students in Finland) and SAMOK[234] (Suomen opiskelijakuntien liitto),
- FAGE[235,236] (Fédération des Associations Générales Etudiantes – Federation of General Student Associations in France),
- CREUP[237] (Coordinadora de Representantes de Estudiantes de Universidades Públicas – Coordination of Student Representatives of Public Universities in Spain).

https://www.aneca.es/documents/20123/81862/Estudio-ATM_NIPO.pdf/a55dab5c-5a5c-9a8c-245e-e471dfe1e324?t=1672840598579

[227] Fundación CYD, *CYD Report 2024*, 2024, https://www.fundacioncyd.org/publicaciones-cyd/informe-cyd-2024/

[228] Kindberg, O., Annani, S., Steele, S., Ekroth, J., and Westin, G., *Transnational quality assurance: Swedish higher education institutions' experiences with quality assurance of European universities and joint programs*, 2024, https://www.uka.se/download/18.2ca0d3f8190a6afec6e76/1723802131077/Report%202024-14%20Transnational%20Quality%20Assurance.pdf

[229] Joensen, A., Hallbåter, M., and Charysczak, M., *Swedish higher education institutions' participation in European universities: Opportunities and challenges for universities and higher education in Sweden*, Swedish Council for Higher Education, (in Swedish), 2024, https://www.uhr.se/globalassets/_uhr.se/publikationer/2024/uhr-rapport-2024-3-svenska-larosatens-deltagande-i-europauniversitet.pdf

[230] VVS, *Position European University Initiative*, 6 May 2024, Standpunt Europese Universiteiten ENG

[231] SK RVŠ, *20 priorit univerzity 21. Století*, 2023, https://www.skrvs.cz/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/20-priorit-pre-univerzitu-21.stoleti.pdf

[232] DSF, *Policy on International matters, https://www.dsfnet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Policy-paper-International-Matters.pdf*

[233] SYL: National Union of University Students in Finland, *Students' Europe – SYL's vision for EU engagement 2023–2025*, 2023 https://syl.fi/app/uploads/2023/01/Students-Europe.pdf

[234] SYL-SAMOK, *Higher Education Students' European Election Programme 2024,* 13 December 2023, https://samok.fi/samok-informs/higher-education-students-european-election-programme-has-been-published/?lang=en

[235] FAGE, *Profession de foi CNESER 2021-2023 – agir en faveur d'un enseignement supérieur durable, accessible et vecteur d'émancipation,* https://www.fage.org/ressources/documents/3/6975-FAGE_CNESER_2021-2023.pdf;

[236] FAGE, *Bouge tes campus 2023-2025 – pour un enseignement supérieur durable, accessible et émancipateur, https://www.fage.org/ressources/documents/4/8161-FAGE-CNESER-2023-2025-c.pdf*

[237] CREUP, *Posicionamiento sobre la internacionalización y movilidad del sistema de educación superior de españa,*https://www.creup.es/documentos/pu/posicionamientos/72AGO_PO_202211_Internacionalizacion.pdf

**Reports acknowledge the strategic role that the initiative plays in stimulating national dialogues and reforms to facilitate cooperation in higher education, research, and innovation**[238,239]. The reports highlight national trends such as **enhanced student and staff mobility**, engagement in transnational projects, and international joint publications, indicating the eagerness and effectiveness of their institutions to engage in internationalisation [240,241,242].

The reports also highlight key motivations for higher education institutions to participate in the initiative. These include institutional advantages such as **enhancing educational quality, expanding international opportunities for students and staff, establishing new transnational collaborations, pooling resources, boosting international recognition, driving institutional modernisation**, and contributing to addressing diverse societal challenges. Involvement in the initiative also "brings stronger advocacy both in national and European level policy discussions"[243]. The initiative enables institutions to serve as experimental grounds for innovative ideas and contributes to developing evidence-based recommendations for policy modifications or new initiatives.

At system level, according to the analysed country-level reports, the European Universities initiative generates several **advantages for the national educational systems of participating countries:**

- **Enhancing opportunities for students, academics, researchers and staff:** Alliances are developing a broad range of transnational learning experiences, including challenge-based programmes, multidisciplinary and multilingual courses, joint degrees, and micro-credentials. They also foster international research partnerships, professional networks, communities of practice, and peer-learning opportunities for students, academics, staff and researchers across various institutional levels. **National student unions** welcome the European Universities initiative's positive outcomes on students' educational offer[244], for instance praising the studies' "truly international dimension"[245], the increased quality and diversity of language courses offers as well as the personalisation of students' learning pathways[246]. The student-

[238] Poszytek, P. and Budzanowska, A. (Eds.), *European Universities in Poland. Implementation of development strategy*, Key Concepts Series, Vol. 13, FRSE Publishing, Warsaw, 2023, https://doi.org/10.47050/67587105

[239] Joensen, A., Hallbåter, M., and Charysczak, M., *Swedish higher education institutions' participation in European universities: Opportunities and challenges for universities and higher education in Sweden*, Swedish Council for Higher Education, (in Swedish), 2024, https://www.uhr.se/globalassets/_uhr.se/publikationer/2024/uhr-rapport-2024-3-svenska-larosatens-deltagande-i-europauniversitet.pdf

[240] Budzanowska, A., Zygmunt-Ziemianek, A. E., Trynda, K., & Jankowska, R. B., 'Development of innovation culture. Teaching experiences of European University Alliance members. A case study from Poland.' in P. Poszytek & A. Budzanowska (Eds.), *European Universities in Poland. Implementation of development strategy*, 2023, pp. 63–80

[241] Gogadze, N., Cunha, E., Aguiar, J., and Carvalho, T., *European University alliances: A case study of Portugal*, INTED2024 Proceedings, pp. 4537-4546, 2024, https://doi.org/10.21125/inted.2024.1176

[242] Fundación CYD, *CYD Report 2023*, 2023, https://www.fundacioncyd.org/publicaciones-cyd/informe-cyd-2023/

[243] Sundbäck-Lindroos, A., Tordai, P., Flander, A., Kiisler, K., Casten, D., and Ferencz, I., *Charles University participation in 4EU+ European University Alliance*, Monitoring Internationalization of Czech Higher Education (MICHE), p. 3., 2022

[244] DSF, *Policy on International matters, https://www.dsfnet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Policy-paper-International-Matters.pdf*

[245] SK RVŠ, *20 priorit univerzity 21. Století*, 2023, https://www.skrvs.cz/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/20-priorit-pre-univerzitu-21.stoleti.pdf

[246] FAGE, *Profession de foi CNESER 2021-2023,* https://www.fage.org/ressources/documents/3/6975-FAGE_CNESER_2021-2023.pdf

centred focus of the initiative[247] and the increased and more inclusive mobilities opportunities[248,249] are seen as key assets.

- **Driving national system-level reforms**: Developments and innovations introduced by the alliances in national contexts contribute to accelerating national policy and regulatory changes, such as the promotion of innovation in teaching and learning, implementation of measures for digital and green transitions, the establishment of flexible learning pathways and micro-credentials, streamlining of regulations for the creation and recognition of transnational joint degrees, and fostering of collaboration between academia, the public sector, businesses, and civil society organisations.

- **Enhancing international competitiveness of higher education**: national higher education institutions consider that participating in the initiative boosted their international visibility and attractiveness, improved their global ranking performance, increased the availability of resources, and strengthened institutional capacity.

- **Fostering European integration:** Alliances can be a significant catalyst in facilitating European integration by enhancing cooperation of national higher education systems in EU countries, promoting regional development through transnational and intersectoral collaboration, and strengthening European identity and values. A joint statement from the French, German and Polish Rectors' Conferences also identified the initiative as a "test case of multilevel cooperation of the EU-Commission, Member States and regions crosscutting various policy fields"[250].

- **Enhancing societal impact of higher education:** The initiative incentivises universities to drive the development of sustainability and cross-sector collaboration strategies, frameworks, metrics, and monitoring systems within the alliances and, in some cases, within entire regions. It also fosters diverse communities of practitioners in various innovation ecosystems. Additionally, the initiative fosters national spillover effects that benefit society, the economy, and public welfare within the country.

The national-level reports outline the following **challenges and needs faced by the countries to effectively support the participation of their national higher education institutions in the European Universities initiative**:

- **Reviewing national regulatory barriers and streamlining administrative processes**: This challenge requires to look for strategies at the national level to facilitate transnational cooperation, develop ecosystem conditions to ease the development of joint programmes, including issuing joint degrees, integrating micro-credentials, recognising credits earned in mobility periods abroad, and enabling the setup of legal entities supporting pooling of resources among higher education institutions across borders, including by simplifying bureaucratic procedures and developing clear guidelines.

- **Enhancing all quality assurance systems**: quality assurance needs to foster continuous improvement and high level of transnational trust and accountability within higher education institutions. This requires agile and fit for purpose

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[247] VVS, *Position European University Initiative*, 6 May 2024, Standpunt Europese Universiteiten ENG

[248] DSF, *Policy on International matters*, *https://www.dsfnet.dk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Policy-paper-International-Matters.pdf*

[249] FAGE, *Profession de foi CNESER 2021-2023*, https://www.fage.org/ressources/documents/3/6975-FAGE_CNESER_2021-2023.pdf

[250] CPU, HRK, KRASP, Statement by the French, German and Polish Rectors' Conferences on European Research, Education and Innovation as well as University Policies, December 2018, https://www.hrk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/hrk/02-Dokumente/02-05-Forschung/CPU-HRK-KRASP_on_budget_European_Universities_and_regional_ecosystems_2018.pdf

quality assurance procedures for the evolving educational models. To facilitate transnational cooperation and the agility of higher education systems, robust internal quality assurance processes need to be supported, along with the development of strong institutional quality culture enabling a shift towards an institutional approach to quality assurance.

- **Enabling the alliances to fully engage with national higher education systems** by promoting inclusive participation, ensuring equitable access to resources, and fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange among all national higher education institutions. The sources emphasise the need for national governments to foster stakeholder collaboration and establish synergies between national goals and the initiative, recognising the initiative's potential to enhance the competitiveness of their higher education systems.

- **Providing adequate funding:** Complementary national funding is crucial to guarantee that higher education institutions fully engage in the initiative and enhance its overall impact. This implies revising national funding schemes to find adequate funding mechanisms. For example, the European Affairs Committee of the French Senate calls for a shift from a 'project' approach to a structured, long-term approach through sustainable, simplified funding. It advocates for establishing a mode of governance and/or a legal status for the development of alliances. In addition, it emphasises that the initiative should enhance the research component in higher education institutions[251].

- **Developing recognition mechanisms to sustain staff commitment**: The lack of recognition in career advancement and remuneration might undermine staff motivation and involvement, hindering the initiative's long-term goals. Country reports stress the need to move beyond one-off rewards and develop incentive schemes integrating transnational cooperation into career paths and evaluation processes, recognise the workload associated with new teaching forms, promote diverse academic roles, and support lifelong learning opportunities, for example, through specific allocations to institutions or bonus policies.

- **National student unions** advocate strongly and unanimously for enhancing democratic student representation in the European Universities alliances. Similarly, inclusiveness is a central point in their recommendations.

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[251] European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, Daniel, K., and Le Gleut, R., *Information report made on behalf of the Committee on European Affairs on European universities*, European Affairs Committee of the French Senate, Regular Session 2024-2025, (in French), 2024, https://www.senat.fr/rap/r24-052/r24-0521.pdf

# 5. Overview of the European Universities alliances

*The 65 European Universities alliances are very well geographically balanced, gathering over 570 higher education institutions from the North, South, East and West parts of Europe. 5The majority of the alliances cover all four regions in their composition. The average number of partners in an alliance is nine.*

*Over two thirds of the alliances comprise comprehensive universities, almost a quarter have mixed membership, with alliances of universities of applied sciences and specialised alliances of technical universities, art schools or distance-learning universities representing one in five. The alliances have become more diverse over time, increasingly uniting higher education institutions of different scale, profiles and focus, thereby strengthening the inclusiveness of the alliances and the initiative.*

*The alliances built solid networks of partnerships engaging diverse actors, embedding the alliances and their partner HEIs in their local ecosystems. The alliances partner up with over 2200 associated partners across 43 countries, including education and training institutions, various associations, businesses, SMEs, national and regional public authorities, research institutions, civil society organisations. The majority of the alliances have up to 60 associated partners.*

*Almost three quarters of HEIs participating in the European Universities initiative belong to at least one university network and in some cases these memberships have likely helped to form a European Universities alliance. Since the start of the initiative, the brand and image of the European Universities initiative has been growing stronger and an increasing number of alliances have been formed without building on previous collaboration within other networks, possibly indicating that forming a European Universities alliance might become a primary strategic international collaboration choice for European higher education institutions.*

## 5.1. Geographical balance

*This information should be viewed keeping in mind the different national higher education landscapes and organisations in the Member States, especially the proportion of higher education institutions partners in the alliances out of the total population of HEIs holding an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE).*

At the level of individual Member States, **in absolute terms, Germany (67) and France (64) have the most HEIs in European Universities alliances, followed by Spain (56) and Italy (46),** as these are also the largest Member States with a high number of HEIs holding an Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE).

## FIGURE 4. NUMBER OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ALLIANCES PER COUNTRY AS OF JANUARY 2025
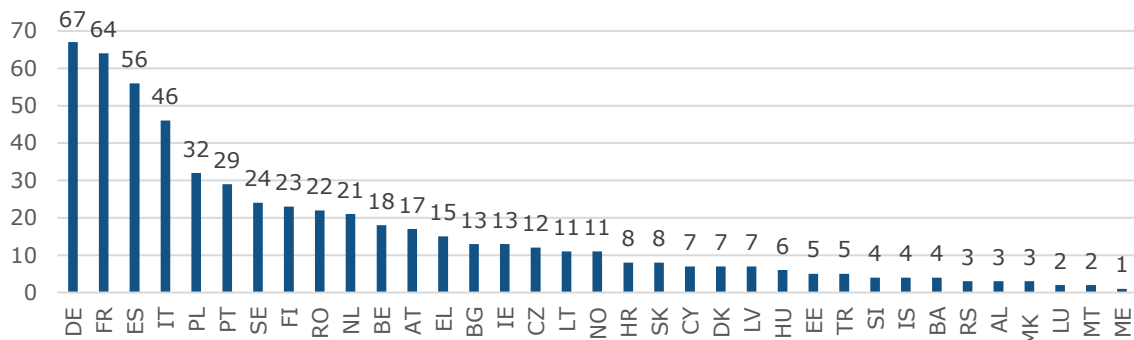


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/map. 65 alliances covered.*

**Relative numbers show Finland (62%), Iceland (57%) and Sweden (56%) as countries with the highest share of more than half of their HEIs participating in the European Universities**.

Out of the EU Member States, Spain, France, and Slovenia have the lowest shares of participating HEIs compared to their overall number of national HEIs holding an ECHE. Low relative participation rates relate to these countries having a high number of ECHE-holding institutions. France and Spain have over 1600 each, while Slovenia, a relatively small country, has 85. In comparison, Germany has 377 ECHE-holding institutions and Finland has 37.

## FIGURE 5. RELATIVE SHARE OF HEIS IN ALLIANCES PER COUNTRY (AS A % OF NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS HOLDING AN ERASMUS+ CHARTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (ECHE)) AS OF JANUARY 2025
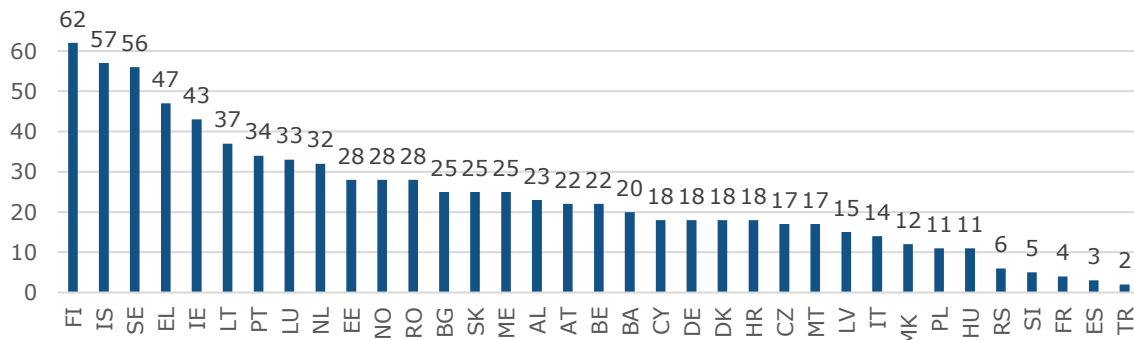


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/map and https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/higher-education-institutions-holding-an-eche-2021-2027 (last updated in October 2024). 65 alliances covered.*

Regarding geographical balance, all four regions[252] – **Central and Eastern, Northern, Southern, and Western Europe – are represented in the European Universities alliances. 58 alliances cover all four regions in their composition, while seven alliances cover three.**

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[252] Based on EU Vocabularies classification, https://op.europa.eu/en/web/eu-vocabularies

**204 HEIs in Western Europe are part of an alliance, 161 in Southern Europe, 116 in Central and Eastern Europe and 92 in Northern Europe** as shown in Figure 6.

**FIGURE 6. NUMBER OF HEIS IN ALLIANCES PER REGION AS OF JANUARY 2025**
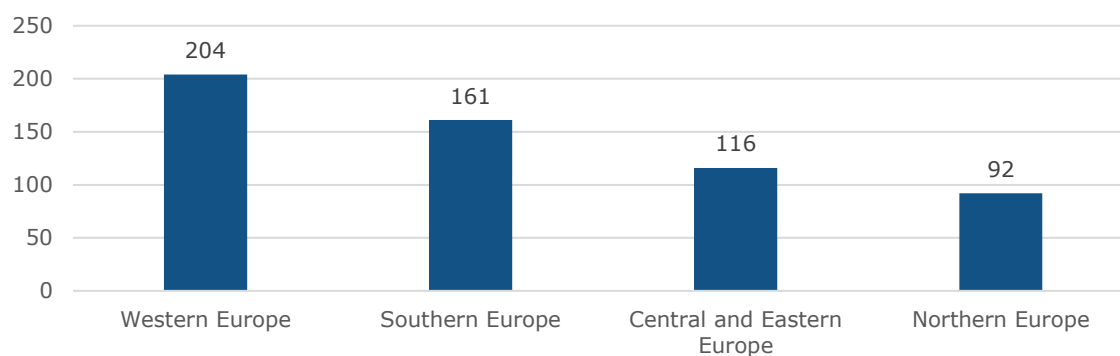


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the participant list received from EACEA in January 2025. 65 alliances covered.*

**FIGURE 7. SHARE OF ALLIANCES HEIS PER REGION AS OF JANUARY 2025**
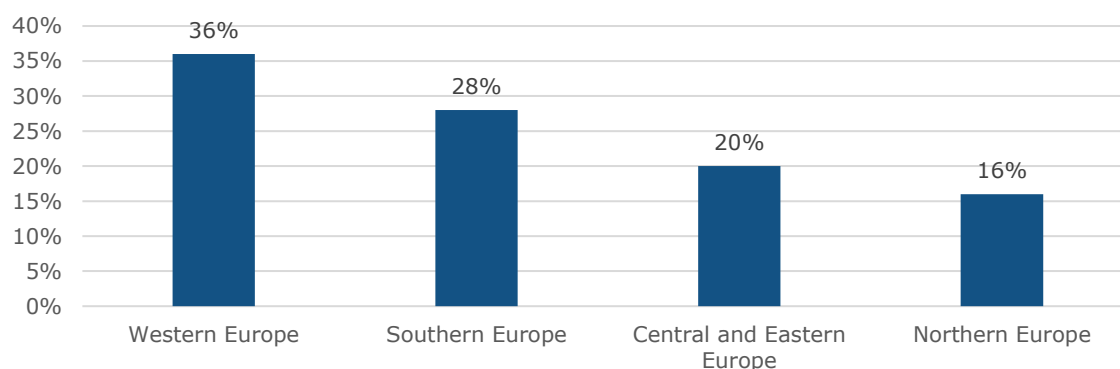


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the participant list received from EACEA in January 2025. 65 alliances covered.*

While Northern Europe has the lowest number of HEIs in the initiative in absolute terms, it relatively has the largest percentage share of HEIs in the initiative out of their total HEI population. More than one out of three HEIs in the region belong to a European Universities alliance (see Figure 8). It is followed by Central and Eastern Europe, Western Europe and Southern Europe. These percentages should be nuanced considering the overall numbers of HEIs across Europe holding an ECHE. For example, the relative share of alliance members in Northern Europe is high since the region hosts only 4% of all European HEIs, while 82% are concentrated in Western and Southern Europe (see Figure 8 Figure 9).

## FIGURE 8. SHARE OF HEIS PARTICIPATING IN ALLIANCES PER REGION (AS A % OF REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS HOLDING AN ERASMUS+ CHARTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (ECHE)) AS OF JANUARY 2025
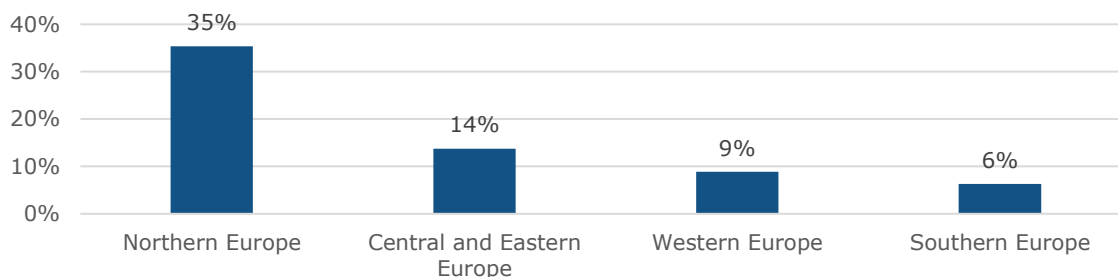


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the participant list received from EACEA in January 2025. 65 alliances covered.*

## FIGURE 9. SHARE OF HEIS PER REGION (% OF EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS HOLDING AN ERASMUS+ CHARTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (ECHE)) AS OF JANUARY 2025
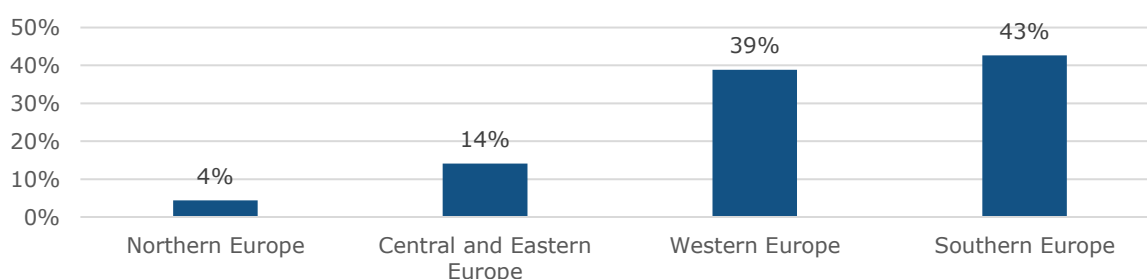


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/higher-education-institutions-holding-an-eche-2021-2027 (last updated in October 2024). 65 alliances covered.*

## 5.2. Composition of the alliances

**As of December 2024, the European Universities initiative united 573 higher education institutions under 65 alliances**[253].

17 alliances were selected in 2019, and another 24 in 2020. Four new alliances were selected in 2022, and one alliance of the 2019 call was not reselected for sustainable funding. Additionally, seven new alliances were selected in 2023, with one alliance of the 2020 call not being reselected. Another 15 alliances were selected in 2024, exceeding the initiatives' ambition to expand to at least 60 European Universities alliances uniting more than 500 HEIs[254].

Zooming in on the beneficiaries, **on average, a European Universities alliance consists of nine HEIs participating as full partners**. The size ranges from two alliances with six member HEIs and two with twelve, as seen in Figure 10. **Error! Reference source not found.**The minimum size requirement to form an alliance

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[253] This figure does not include the legal entities that the alliances have established. Data from https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/map, last accessed in January 2025, and participant list provided by EACEA in January 2025.
[254] European Commission: European Education Area, 'European Universities initiative', European Commission website, accessed 2 January 2025 https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative

remains at three HEIs eligible for a grant of EUR 3,24 million while alliances of nine or
more HEIs are eligible for EUR 14,4 million[255].

Most of the alliances of the 2019 and 2020 calls have expanded since starting their
activities and so converged in size with the 2022-2024 alliances starting at nine HEIs
on average. The average size of the alliances of 2019 and 2020 calls before expansions
was seven HEIs, with the smallest uniting four HEIs. The eligibility for the maximum
Erasmus+ funding clearly incentivised the alliances to open up for the participation of
more HEIs, thereby increasing inclusiveness.

## FIGURE 10. NUMBER OF HEIS PER ALLIANCE AS OF JANUARY 2025
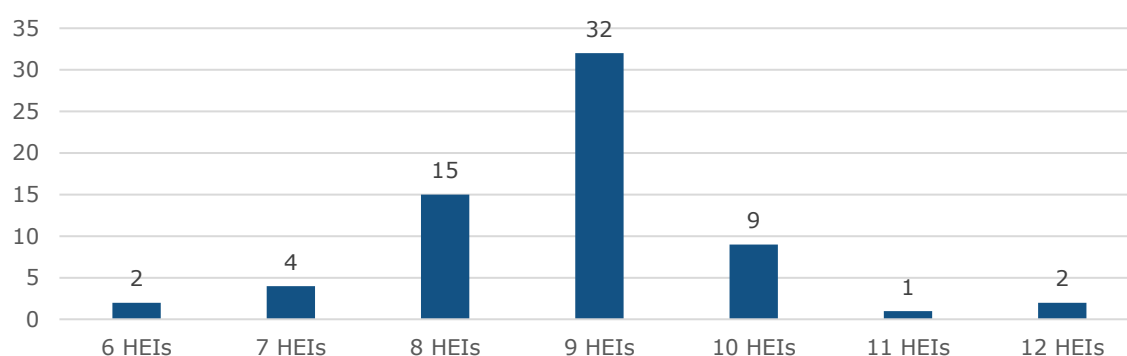


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on participant list received from EACEA in January 2025. The chart excludes
the discontinued alliances and considers the enlargement of the alliances of the 2019 and 2020 calls. Please
note that only beneficiaries/full partners are included. 65 alliances covered.*

Previous studies on the European Universities initiative highlighted that European
Universities alliances are often formed based on, for example, prior cooperation
between institutions, shared thematic specialisation or focus (art schools, technical
universities, universities of applied sciences, for example), and occasionally on
geographical criteria (universities located in coastal areas, in large cities, rural,
mountain and cross-border regions, or in post-industrial urban ecosystems)[256].

To explore the composition of alliances, **the present study classified them by the
majority of member HEIs with a specific profile.** If they make up at least half plus
one of the alliance members, the alliance was classified accordingly. This means, for
example, that INVEST uniting four universities of applied sciences and three
comprehensive universities is classified as mixed, same as EU4DUAL consisting of four
technical universities and five universities of applied sciences, while ECIU uniting eight
comprehensive universities, three technical universities and one university of applied
sciences is classified as an alliance of comprehensive universities.

Figure 11 provides a breakdown of alliances by type of member institutions, showing
that **more than half of the alliances comprise comprehensive universities** and
**almost one in four have mixed membership**, with **alliances of universities of
applied sciences and specialised alliances** of technical universities, art schools or
distance-learning universities **representing one in five**.

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[255] European Commission: Erasmus+, *Erasmus+ Call for proposals 2024*, 22 September 2023,
https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2024/call-
fiche_erasmus-edu-2024-eur-univ_en.pdf
[256] Stensaker, B., Maassen, P. & Rosso, A. The European University Initiative – investigating alliance
formation and initial profile developments. *Tertiary Education Manag*ement, Vol. 29, 2023 pp. 229–243
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-023-09125-y

## FIGURE 11. NUMBER OF ALLIANCES BY TYPE OF MEMBER INSTITUTIONS
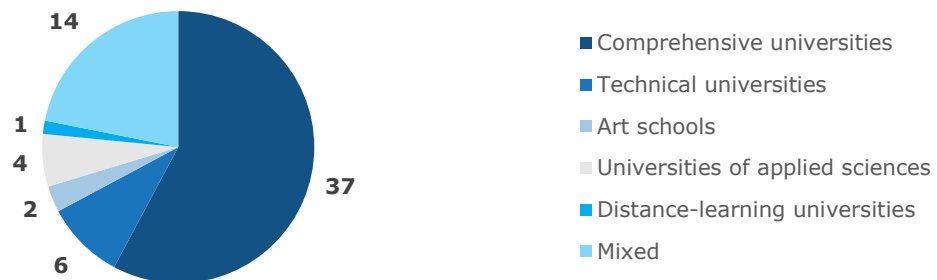


*Source: https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/map, participant list received from EACEA in January 2025 and websites of alliance HEIs. 65 alliances covered.*

Analysis of the composition of alliances by type of institution and call suggests that **the alliances have become more diverse over time**, **increasingly uniting HEIs of different profiles and focus**. The vast majority (14 out of 16) of the alliances selected in 2019 comprise broad profile comprehensive universities[257]. A smaller share, 14 out of 23 alliances selected in 2020[258] unite comprehensive universities. One alliance consists of art schools, one of universities of applied sciences, and three predominantly include institutions with a technical focus, while four alliances have a mixed profile. Three alliances selected in 2022 have mixed membership and one has a predominantly technical focus. Three alliances of comprehensive universities, two alliances of technical universities, one alliance of art schools, and one mixed alliance were selected in 2023. The results of the 2024 call for proposals continue the diversification and bring in a new category including six mixed alliances, five alliances of comprehensive universities, three of universities of applied sciences, and an alliance of distance-learning universities. While alliances of comprehensive universities make up the majority, mixed membership or specialised alliances have become increasingly popular from 2020 on and make up the majority (17 out of 26) of the alliances selected since 2022.

Data on individual HEIs involved in the European Universities initiative by type (Figure 12), shows that **almost two thirds of HEIs are comprehensive universities** followed by **technical universities constituting about one in five, while universities of applied sciences make up 15% followed by 3% of art schools and 1% of distance-learning universities**. The distribution largely reflects the classification presented above.

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[257] Excluding now discontinued EU4ART - Alliance for common fine arts curriculum.
[258] Excluding now discontinued ATHENA - Advanced Technology Higher Education Network Alliance.

## FIGURE 12. HEIS INVOLVED IN ALLIANCES BY TYPE AS OF JANUARY 2025
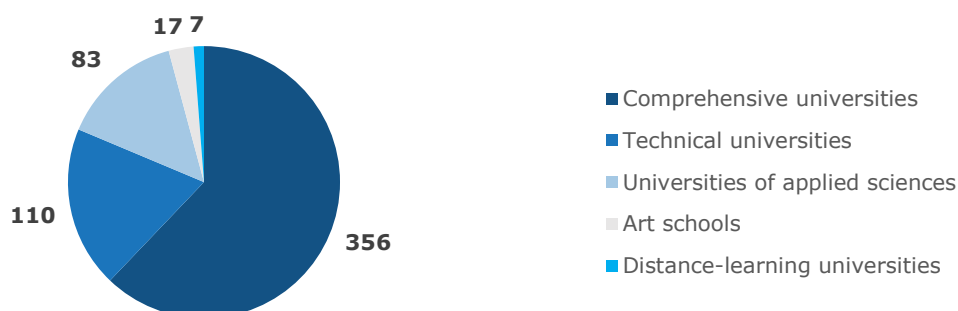


Legend:
- Comprehensive universities
- Technical universities
- Universities of applied sciences
- Art schools
- Distance-learning universities

Source: https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/map, participant list received from EACEA in January 2025 and websites of alliance HEIs. 65 alliances covered.

Under the present study, an analysis of alliance university rankings or the size of the alliances by student and staff figures *has not* been conducted. **Nevertheless, research suggests a growing diversity of the European Universities initiative** in those terms, **combining highly ranked and large universities,** which are more represented in the earlier calls for proposals, **with a growing number of small universities and unranked HEIs** either forming new or joining existing alliances under more recent calls[259,260,261]. This, again, points at the **increasing inclusiveness of the alliances and the initiative**.

European Universities alliances also engage with education and training institutions, university networks, research institutions, national and regional governments and public authorities, quality assurance bodies, businesses, SMEs, civil society organisations, various associations and other entities as **associated partners**. As of January 2025, alliances collectively had **2390 associated partners representing 2209 unique entities, since some organisations partner up with more than one alliance**.

**On average an alliance has 37 associated partners**, ranging from none to as many as 152. As shown in Figure 13, **the majority of the alliances have up to 60 associated partners**.

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[259] Lambrechts, A.A., Cavallaro, M. and Lepori, B., 'The European Universities initiative: between status hierarchies and inclusion'. *Higher Education,* Vol. 88, 2024, pp. 1227–1247, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01167-w

[260] Cino Pagliarello, M., 'Higher education in the single market between (trans)national integration and supranationalisation: exploring the European universities initiative', *Journal of European Integration,* Vol 44 Issue 1, pp. 149-164, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.2011266

[261]European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

## FIGURE 13. ALLIANCES BY NUMBER OF ASSOCIATED PARTNERS AS OF JANUARY 2025
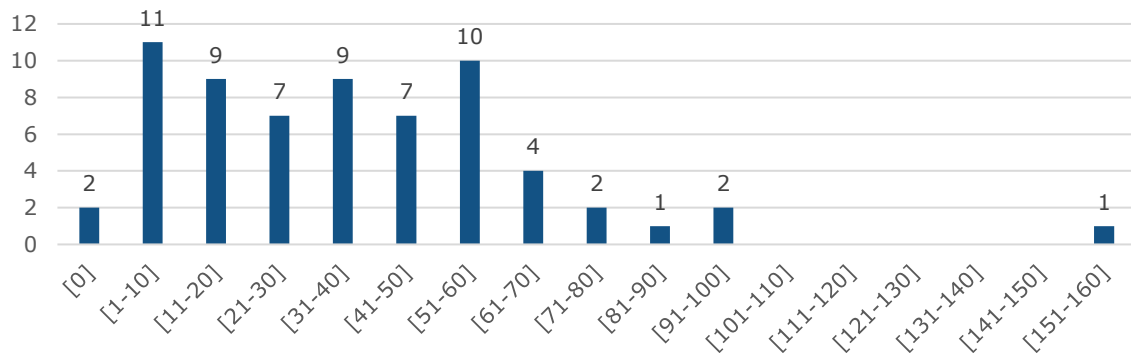


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on participant list received from EACEA in January 2025. The chart excludes the discontinued alliances and considers the enlargement of the alliances of the 2019 and 2020 calls. 65 alliances covered.*

Figure 14 provides a classification of associated partners of the alliances into five broad categories. About one in five associated partners is an education and training institution or a student association. Business, industry and entrepreneurship entities and public authorities make up about a quarter each.

## FIGURE 14. ASSOCIATED PARTNERS OF ALLIANCES BY TYPE AS OF JANUARY 2025
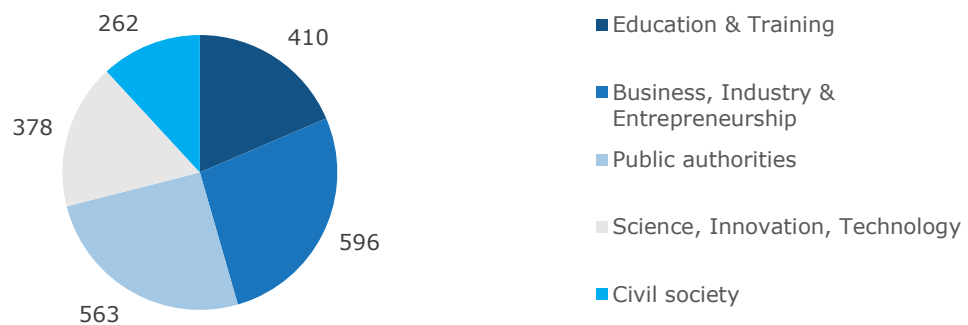


*Source: prepared by the study team based on participant list received from EACEA in January 2025. 65 alliances covered.*

Overall the analysis in this report indicates that **the alliances have built solid networks of partnerships engaging diverse actors across multiple sectors, embedding the alliances and their partner HEIs in their local ecosystems.**

**Associated partners[262] of the alliances come from 43 countries from the EU and beyond**. The most partners come from Spain (247), France (246) and Germany (223). Figure 15 provides a breakdown of associated partners by country.

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[262] The eligible associated partners for the European Universities cover several types of organisations: HEIs established in EU Member States or a third countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme, holding a valid ECHE Erasmus Charter for Higher Education. HEIs established in a third country not associated to the Erasmus+ programme that is part of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process) or in a Western Balkans country not associated to the Erasmus+ programme. Any public/private organisations from an EU Member State, third country associated to the Erasmus+ programme or from a Western Balkans country not associated to the Erasmus+ programme active in the field of education and training, research, and innovation or in the world of work. – *source: European Universities Erasmus+ call for proposal 2024.*

European Commission

## FIGURE 15. ALLIANCE ASSOCIATED PARTNERS BY COUNTRY AS OF JANUARY 2025
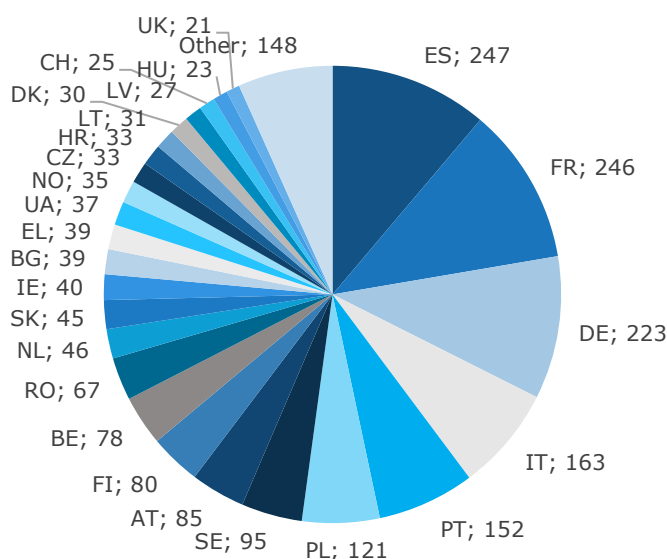


*Source: prepared by the study team based on participant list received from EACEA in January 2025 "Other" includes countries with fewer than 20 associated partners. 65 alliances covered.*

The analysis identified **186 HEIs among associated partners of European Universities alliance**s. **Most associated partner universities are in Ukraine** demonstrating strong support of the alliances followed by the **UK, signalling a persisting commitment to academic collaboration post Brexit**, and France. A breakdown of associated partner HEIs by country is presented in Figure 16.

## FIGURE 16. ASSOCIATED PARTNER HEIS OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCES BY COUNTRY AS OF JANUARY 2025
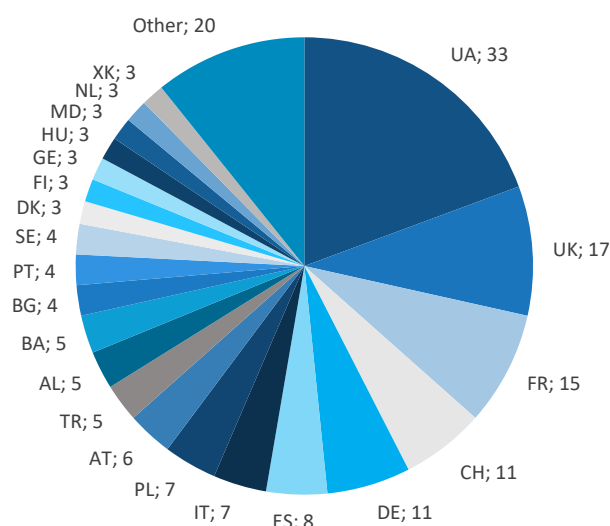


*Source: prepared by the study team based on participant list received from EACEA in January 2025. "Other" includes countries with two or fewer associated partner HEIs. 65 alliances covered.*

## 5.3. Participation in other university networks

Members of European Universities alliances are actively partaking in other EU-level university networks. It is important to note that **university networks and European Universities alliances are complementary and serve different purposes**, the former usually focusing on collective interest representation of HEIs and the latter providing an opportunity for operational transnational cooperation in higher education.

Several alliance coordinators interviewed for this study indicated that previous collaboration within other university networks helped them to find partners to form a European Universities alliance. Some of the networks have working groups on European Universities initiative and declare to aid their members in partner searches. Recent research on European Universities initiative also highlighted past collaboration and network memberships as an important factor in forming an alliance next to compatible disciplinary profiles of institutions[263,264]. However, Stensaker et. al. also emphasised that **European Universities alliances are a new, innovative form of collaboration rather than an extension of previous partnerships**[265].

The present study examined whether and how university networks influenced the formation of European Universities alliances by analysing membership overlaps between alliances and eight European networks of universities that were frequently mentioned by the interviewees[266], namely:

- European University Association (**EUA**)[267] is the largest and most comprehensive association representing more than 870 universities and national rector's conferences in 49 countries. 395 out of them, or **69% of participants of the European Universities initiative are members of the EUA covering all the alliances**.
- Universities of the Capitals of Europe (**UNICA**) unite 57 universities in 42 European capital cities. The network actively helps their members find partners to form a European Universities alliance; 36 out of 57 (or 63%) UNICA universities are members in 20 out of 65 European Universities alliances[268,269].
- **Coimbra Group** unites 40 universities in 22 countries. Of these, 31 (or 78%) now form part of a European Universities alliance. Furthermore, five alliances have set up a framework of cooperation with the Coimbra Group through associated partnership status[270].

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[263] Stensaker, B., Maassen, P. & Rosso, A. The European University Initiative – investigating alliance formation and initial profile developments. *Tertiary Education Manag*ement, Vol. 29, 2023 pp. 229–243 https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-023-09125-y

[264] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[265] Stensaker, B., Maassen, P. & Rosso, A., 'The European University Initiative – investigating alliance formation and initial profile developments', *Tertiary Education Manag*ement, Vol. 29, 2023 pp. 229–243 https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-023-09125-y

[266] With the caveat that possibly not all the relevant networks have been included in this analysis

[267]EUA, 'EUA landing page', EUA website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eua.eu/

[268] UNICA, *UNICA members in European University Alliances*, 2021, https://www.unica-network.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/EUA-List-Description_Mar2021.pdf

[269] UNICA, 'Activities', UNICA website, accessed 2 January 2025 https://www.unica-network.eu/activity/european-universities/

[270] Coimbra Group, 'CG takes active role at the II Forum of European Universities Alliances', Coimbra Group website, 26 September 2023, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.coimbra-group.eu/cg-takes-active-role-at-the-ii-forum-of-european-universities-alliances/

- League of European Research Universities (**LERU**)[271] consists of 23 members in 12 European countries. 16 universities (or 70% of LERU) are members of six European Universities alliances.
- Young European Research Universities Network (**YERUN**)[272] counts 23 universities from 16 European countries. 16 universities (or 70%) are part of seven European Universities alliances.
- **The Guild** of European Research-Intensive Universities[273] comprises 22 universities in 16 countries, 18 (or 82%) of which are part of seven European Universities alliances.
- **CESAER**[274] university network unites 58 universities of science and technology from 28 countries. 44 (or 76%) of them are part of 16 European Universities alliances.
- **Utrecht Network**[275] unites 30 universities in 24 countries, and 24 of them (80%) belong to a European Universities alliance.

- European Association of Institutions in Higher Education **(EURASHE)[276]** unites 70 members in Europe and beyond, including universities, rector's conferences, national organisations, and associations that focus on applied higher education. 16 members of EURASHE belong to 11 European Universities alliances[277].

Overall, **72% of HEIs participating in the European Universities initiative belong to at least one university network** listed above. 278 HEIs, or 49%, belong to one, 99 or 17% to two, 28 or 5% to three and nine HEIs, or 2%, belong to as many as four university networks, as shown in Figure 17.

**Only 15% of the HEIs that formed European Universities alliances in 2019 did not belong to any university networks**, while more than half belonged to two or more. Looking at the newer alliances, **the share of HEIs not belonging to any networks or only belonging to one** (EUA in most cases, considering that two out of three alliance HEIs are EUA members) **increases significantly**. Only 14 out of 233 HEIs selected under 2022, 2023 and 2024 calls for proposals belong to two university networks, while 92 do not belong to any of them.

The data suggests that university networks may have been an important venue for finding potential partners to form a European Universities alliance during while applying for the 2019 and, to an extent, 2020 calls for proposals. However, **their role in forming European Universities alliances seems to be decreasing**, as also

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[271] League of European Research Universities (LERU), 'LERU landing page', LERU website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.leru.org/

[272] Young European Research Universities Network (YERUM), 'YERUM landing page', YERUM website, accessed 2 January 2025 https://yerun.eu/

[273] The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities, 'The Guild landing page', The Guild website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.the-guild.eu/

[274] Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research (CESAER), 'CESAER landing page', CESAER website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.cesaer.org/

[275] Utrecht Network AGM, 'Utrecht Network landing page', Utrecht Network website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://utrecht-network.org/

[276] EURASHE, 'EURASHE landing page', EURASHE website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.eurashe.eu/about/

[277] As opposed to other networks of universities, EURASHE has a number of national organisations and associations as members, representing 560 universities of applied sciences as a whole. The low relative share of individual HEIs in EURASHE explains the relatively low participation in the European Commissions initiative.

noted by Lambrechts et al.[278] **This also hints at the increasing openness and inclusiveness of the European Universities initiative.**

**FIGURE 17. ALLIANCE HEI MEMBERSHIP IN UNIVERSITY NETWORKS (EUA, UNICA, COIMBRA GROUP, LERU, YERUN, THE GUILD, CESAER, UTRECHT NETWORK, EURASHE)**
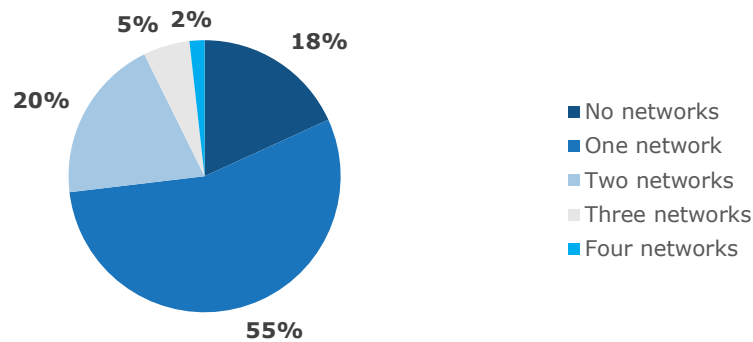


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on* https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/map *and respective university network websites.*

To delve deeper into the patterns of belonging to European networks of universities and European Universities alliances, a social network analysis was conducted showcasing connections and (overlapping) memberships in different networks and alliances. *For readability and clarity, two analyses were conducted: one for EUA having two in three HEIs participating in the European Universities initiative as members, and one for other eight university networks*. *Combining EUA with other networks in one figure would have led to sizes of nodes and relationships between them being difficult to spot and interpret.*

**The social network in Figure 18 shows alliance HEI membership in EUA**. The nodes in the figure represent 573 alliance HEIs (blue if they belong to the EUA and grey if they do not, not labelled for readability), 65 European Universities alliances (purple) and the EUA (blue). The edges indicate belonging to the EUA and to the European Universities alliances. As seen in the figure, **all the alliances have at least one EUA member and the majority have more**. The majority or even all the HEIs of the alliances closer to the centre of the figure belong to the EUA, underscoring the importance of the network in European higher education.

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[278] Lambrechts, A.A., Cavallaro, M. and Lepori, B., 'The European Universities initiative: between status hierarchies and inclusion'. *Higher Education,* Vol. 88, 2024, pp. 1227–1247, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01167-w

## FIGURE 18. SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES INITIATIVE HEI MEMBERSHIP IN EUA
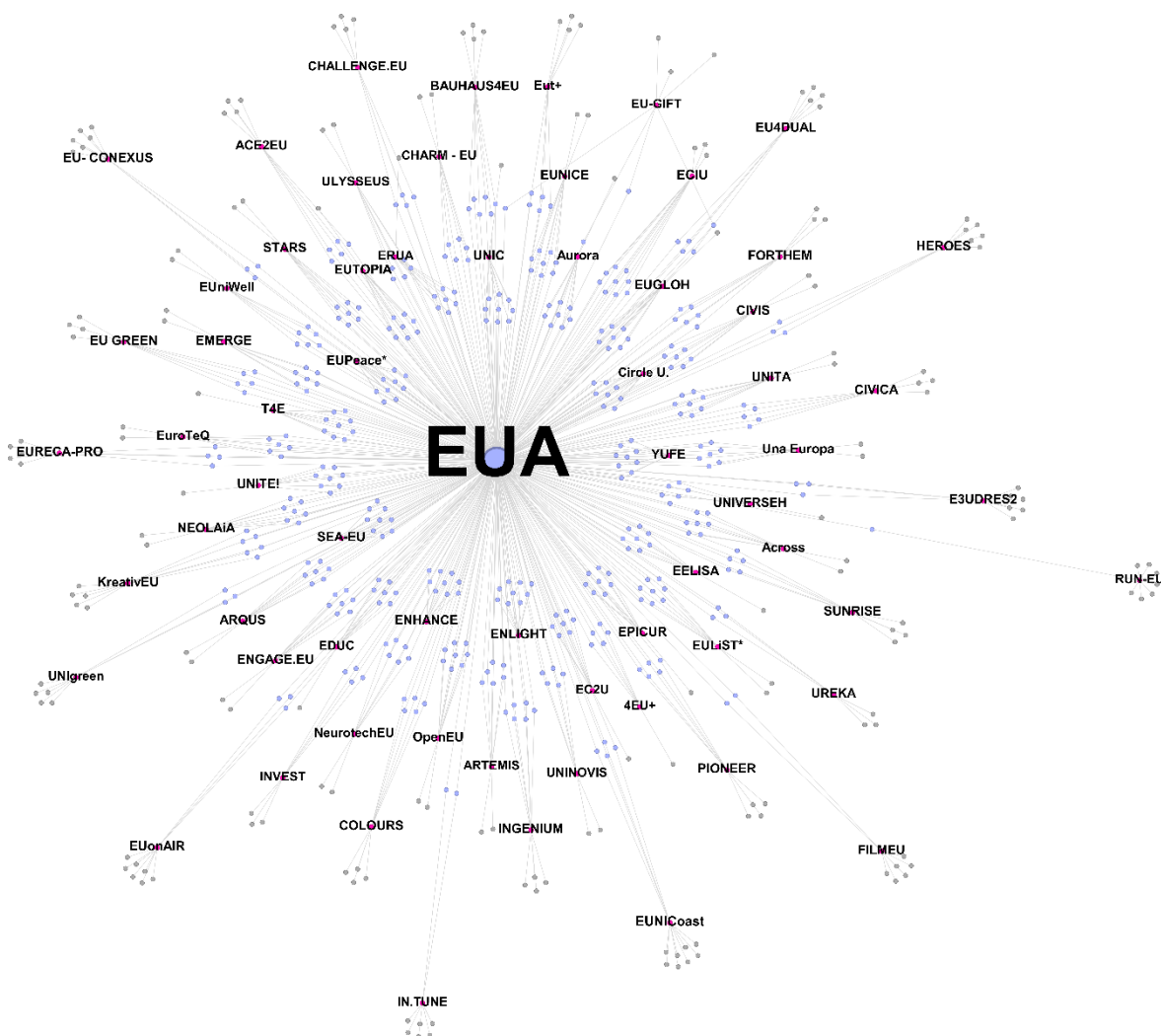


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/map and EUA website.*

The second network presented in Figure 19 covers eight other university networks: UNICA, Coimbra Group, LERU, YERUN, The Guild, CESAER, Utrecht Network and EURASHE. The nodes in the figure represent the 573 HEIs participating in the European Universities initiative (not labelled for readability), the 65 European Universities alliances, and the eight university networks analysed. The edges indicate belonging to a specific alliance or network. The size of the node and its label are proportional to the number of other nodes to which the specific node is connected. Since university networks have larger memberships spanning multiple European Universities alliances, these nodes are the largest. Out of the eight university networks, UNICA and CESAER have the most HEIs that also participate in the European Universities initiative, followed by Coimbra Group and Utrecht network, and the others. This is largely due to the smaller size of these networks, which is not reflected in the analysis. The low share of EURASHE alliance members (23%) is due to the fact that the network has a mixed membership of HEIs and other organisations, and so only a part of its members are eligible to join an alliance.

The nodes are coloured by modularity class – a network statistic that identifies communities within a network that are interconnected among each other and less so to the remaining network. The modularity score for this network is high, indicating a significant fragmentation: 39 distinct communities were identified, and only the seven largest are coloured. The remaining communities consist of alliances that have no or just one member of university networks. The division indicates that there is a substantial overlap in membership between Coimbra Group and the Guild (orange) while the Utrecht Network (light blue), CESAER (blue), LERU (yellow), UNICA (green), YERUN (red) and EURASHE (purple) form their own distinct communities.

**FIGURE 19. SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCES AND OTHER EUROPEAN NETWORKS OF UNIVERSITIES**
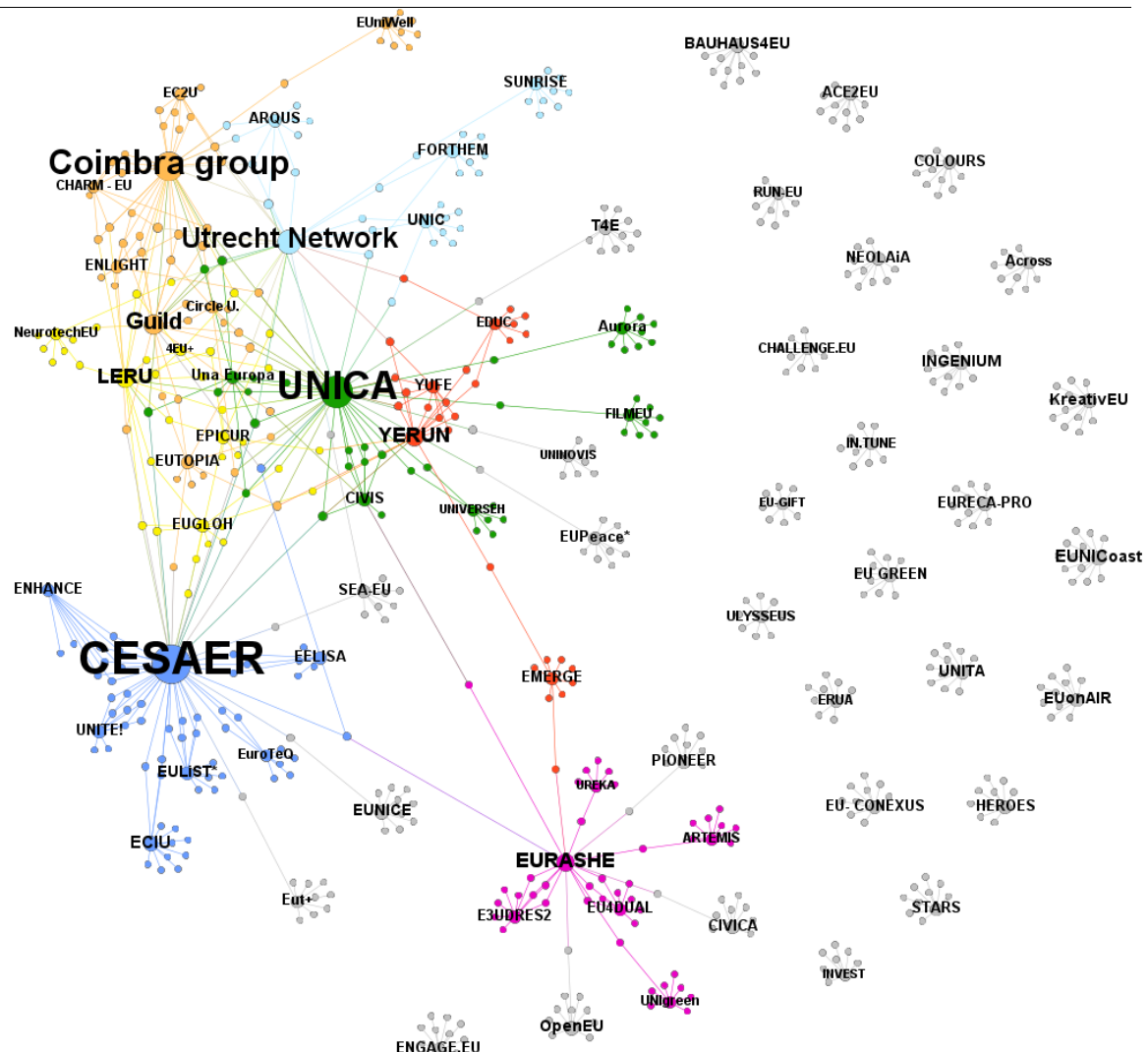


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/map and respective university network websites.*

**The social network analysis indicates that several alliances have likely
developed from previous collaborations within university networks**. For
example, CIVIS and Una Europa predominantly consist of UNICA members; The Guild
is well represented in EUTOPIA, Circle.U and ENLIGHT, while EC2U and CHARM-EU
have multiple members of the Coimbra group. EC2U representatives interviewed for
this study indicated that indeed this previous collaboration led to forming the alliance.
4EU+ and EPICUR predominantly unite LERU members, while YUFE – as also confirmed
in an interview – found its alliance partners through YERUN. A substantial share of
members of three alliances with a technical profile – Unite!, ENHANCE and EULiST* -
are members of CESAER, while E3UDRES2 and EU4DUAL focusing on applied sciences
and dual education both engage several members of EURASHE.

However, it is also evident that, while each HEI can only belong to one European
Universities alliance, the membership in university networks overlaps among a fairly
large group of HEIs on the top-left-hand side of the network in Figure 19. Some
alliances have members from different university networks, and some HEIs belong to
more than one network simultaneously. For example, Arqus unites members of both
Utrecht Network and Coimbra Group, EUGLOH is affiliated with both CESAER and LERU,
members of UNA Europa come from UNICA, The Guild and LERU.

**23 out of 65 alliances are not associated with any of the eight other university
networks analysed. 15 of them are the newer alliances of 2022, 2023 and
2024 calls**.  The network pattern indicates a **diversity of internationalisation
strategies** among HEIs in the European Universities initiative and its **inclusivity
character**. **The brand and image of the European Universities initiative is likely
growing stronger**. Compared to earlier stages of the initiative, **forming a European
Universities alliance might become a primary strategic international
collaboration choice for European higher education institutions**.

# 6. Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative

*European Universities alliances already demonstrate their transformational potential. They contribute to enhancing the quality, performance, attractiveness and global competitiveness of European higher education.*

*The alliances are bringing students unprecedented opportunities for rich student-centred challenge-driven study offerings across inter-university campuses across Europe, with embedded mobility and internationalisation opportunities and flexible learning pathways, available at the doorsteps of their students in their home regions. This contributes to balanced mobility flows and talent circulation.*

*Alliances have also demonstrated the potential to contribute to enhancing global visibility of EU universities, attracting global talent by offering transnational education and joint degrees highly appealing for international students and talent. The European Universities initiative provides opportunities to achieve critical mass and better compete regionally, nationally, Europe-wide and globally by pooling resources, building on the partners' strengths. This contributes to reducing fragmentation across the European higher education sector, raising quality and expanding educational offerings.*

*The alliances have built solid networks of partnerships engaging diverse actors across multiple sectors, including public and private bodies both locally and transnationally, engaging companies, civil society, governments and citizens – thereby embedding the alliances and their partner HEIs in their local communities and ecosystems, notably through challenge-based learning benefitting local and regional ecosystems. The widened educational opportunities in European Universities alliances are increasing the relevance of the curricula and directly contributing to students' employability. The European Universities initiative is contributing to by bridging skills gaps by equipping students with a range of key future-proof skills and competencies, offering joint alliance career services and strengthened collaboration with associated partners.*

*At national and EU levels, the alliances have achieved considerable impact, driving policy and legislative progress, enhanced European competitiveness and its leadership, while strengthening regional and higher education cohesion.*

*Alliances are also committed to the promotion of European values, including academic values, strengthening the European belonging, democracy and active citizenship.*

*The integrated long-term joint strategy of the alliances for education with, where possible, links to research and innovation, and service to society opens the possibility for alliances to go a step further and enhance their institutionalised cooperation in research and innovation.*

*The full-scale impact of the European Universities initiative on the wider higher
education systems in Europe is still to materialise due to its relatively recent
establishment, considering some alliances have only started very recently, in 2024
or even 2025, and the fact that it takes time to build sustainable partnerships with
such unprecedented ambition, scale and depth of the institutional transnational
cooperation levels, bearing tangible long-lasting outcomes in higher education and
research. It is thus expected for the outcomes and transformational potential of the
initiative to increase over time, when more alliances are coming to maturity and as
more challenges and barriers to the full potential of the alliances are being lifted.*

This section summarises the key findings of the study and **presents the progress of
the operational European Universities alliances selected under 2019 and 2020
calls for proposals** towards achieving the policy goals of the European Universities
initiative. The section starts by discussing the dynamics of alliance governance and
cooperation, continues with joint education provision and mobility, outcomes for
society and economy, joint research, and concludes with outcomes for the wider higher
education sector. While the aim to assess the outcomes and transformational potential
of the European Universities initiative as a whole, numerous examples of individual
alliances are introduced to provide concrete illustration of their diverse activities,
outcomes and transformational potential.

## 6.1. Transnational institutional cooperation and shared governance

### EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES
Erasmus+

## Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

- **European Universities alliances demonstrated their transformational potential in terms of enhancing the quality, performance, attractiveness and global competitiveness of European higher education.**

- **Students are the primary target beneficiaries of the European Universities initiative, and their involvement in alliance activities has been and is key to the success of the initiative. The increased involvement of a majority of students and staff** in the alliances' activities requires further efforts in terms of **awareness raising and facilitated recognition** of the activities developed within the alliance.

- **European Universities alliances have established a rich variety of innovative and inclusive governance structures** involving the academic leadership, staff and students of the partner institutions, as well as associated partners and external stakeholders, signalling a commitment to long-term collaboration and broad community engagement. **Almost all alliances involve students in their governance structures and in about two thirds of the alliances, students have full voting rights in these structures**. In several alliances, there is room for improvement for the democratic selection of students in the governance of the alliances.

- **Alliances are transcending the project-based mindset**. With their long-term cooperation strategies they are transforming the way higher education institutions work together. **Further progress is needed to ensure that alliances' activities are mainstreamed and deepened to engage a majority of their partner universities faculties and departments**, hence benefiting to a majority of their students, academics, staff and researchers.

- **For staff, the alliances enhanced seamless integration and the sense of community** across partner HEIs. The level of motivation and dedication is unprecedented. It is thus **crucial for the alliances to adequately recognise and reward their participation with additional incentives** such as more dedicated time and resources, financial recognition, career progression, or professional recognition.

European Education Area

*January 2025*

European Commission

## EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES
### Erasmus+

## Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

**At least fourteen alliances** have formalised their collaboration by establishing **legal entities** that ensure more sustainable governance and funding, **facilitate the pooling, management and acquisition of joint resources**, as well as the provision of joint educational activities and stronger ties with external stakeholders.

The majority of alliances have established **joint virtual campuses, joint course catalogues and shared learning platforms,** enabling **seamless virtual mobility and networking. Alliances are working to further enhance the interoperability of their services and physical campuses**, currently still hampered by differing national regulations, legal restrictions and various administrative settings.

**Erasmus+ allocated around EUR 1,2 billion funding for the initiative in the period 2021-2027**, complemented by the **alliances' own funds, as well as funding under other EU funding programmes** with a notable example under the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. **A majority of Member States are also supporting their national HEIs partners in an alliance.** In view of their scope, scale and ambition, the **financial needs of the alliances remain substantial and their financial sustainability is a key challenge.** The alliances, echoed by many stakeholders, call for enhanced synergies between various sources of EU level funding and leveraging national and regional funding to allow for efficiency gains across all the alliances' missions.

Many alliances have developed **joint quality assurance strategies**, committing to ensuring the high quality of their collaborative educational offerings.

European Education Area

### 6.1.1. Joint governance and management structures

As a part of developing deep institutional transnational cooperation, European Universities alliances are expected to design and implement relevant and efficient joint management and governance structures[279]. The development of new and specific governance structures is needed to integrate partners fully and sustainably. Alliances have been described as format builders and are expected to **innovate in their governance structures**[280]. The bottom-up approach established by the European Commission does not set a general governance model or a rigid time frame for alliances to develop their governance structures, which results in **a rich variety of governance models**[281].

All 38 alliances that participated in the first monitoring framework exercise reported to have set up new joint governance and management structures specifically for their activities, which is corroborated by literature[282]. While the names of the governing bodies differ across the alliances – a Steering Committee in one alliance might be called the Presidents' Committee or the Executive Board in another – the core governance structures and their functions tend to be similar. Figure 20 shows the most common governance and management bodies set up by alliances. It stands out that all alliances created a governing board and a management committee, and that **they all have or are in the process of setting up a Student Board.**

**FIGURE 20. WHICH GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES HAVE YOUR ALLIANCE ESTABLISHED?**
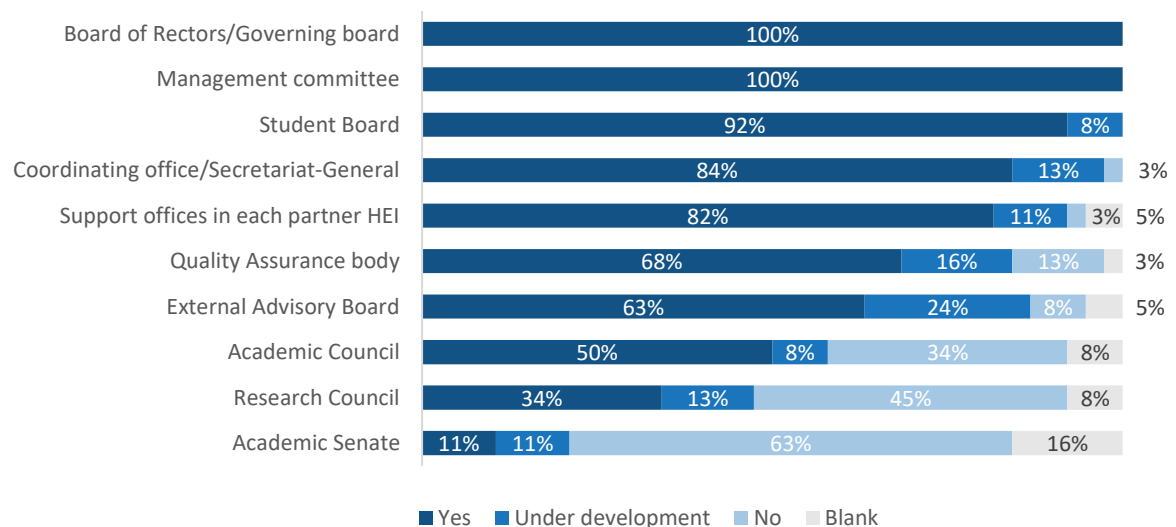


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

[279] European Commission, *Call for proposals Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities*, ERASMUS-EDU2024-EUR-UNIV, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2024/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2024-eur-univ_en.pdf

[280] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[281] Marques, M., and Graf, L.,, 'Pushing Boundaries: The European Universities Initiative as a Case of Transnational Institution Building', *Minerva*, Vol. 62, 2023, pp. 93-112, p. 101, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-023-09516-w

[282] Maassen, P., Stensaker, B. and Rosso, A., 'The European university alliances—an examination of organizational potentials and perils', *Higher Education*, Vol. 86, 2022, p. 956, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00951-4

Following the hierarchy of partner HEIs, the highest level of alliances' governance generally consists of a **Board of Rectors/Governing Board** with the academic leadership of partner institutions, either rectors or vice-rectors responsible for international cooperation, deciding on the strategic direction of the alliance. Securing the commitment and active involvement of the highest academic leadership of partner HEIs was reported by many alliances to be key to their successful development.

**Some alliances have created dedicated administrative units hosted either at one of the partners or in Brussels** (UNA Europa, CIVIS, ECIU University, to name some examples), **employing staff on a full-time basis to work on alliance matters**. When these dedicated offices are located in Brussels, they also facilitate active engagement of the alliances in EU policy-making processes. They play an important role in making sure services and activities are available to all partners:

> "We have the alliance central office, composed of six or seven people that are part of the human resources for the alliance. They provide services, activities, and actions that benefit the alliance, not just one partner. (…).They do a lot of work for the alliance. " – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

The implementation of alliance activities is usually led by **Management Committees**, which are composed of Work Package coordinators from partner HEIs. The day-to-day tasks are usually divided by the participating HEIs, each responsible for at least one Work Package based on their preferences, strengths, or expertise. They can be supported by various cross-cutting thematic working groups or task forces dealing with horizontal issues such as mobility, digital services, automatic recognition, legal aspects, etc. Often some designated staff is hired to run alliance activities, but it is also common that staff at international affairs departments within partner HEIs take over the coordination of alliance Work Packages along with their other tasks. Many interviewees underlined that the motivation and the additional working hours that these staff members put into the alliance management are crucial for its success. Alliances tend to have some incentive and reward structures for staff engagement, which are discussed in more detail in section 6.1.2.

The calls launched by the European Commission to fund European Universities alliances stated that student involvement in governance is highly valued: "students and staff at all levels of the participating organisations should be empowered to take an active role in the governance structures of the alliance, where the diversity of the student and staff bodies is reflected"[283]. Additionally, the involvement of students in alliances' governance has been a demand from European student organisations such as the European Students' Union (ESU)[284] and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN)[285]. More recently, the Tirana Communiqué[286] from the Bologna Process also emphasised the student and staff participation in governance of HEIs and contribution to decision-making as part of the fundamental academic values.

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[283] European Commission, *Call for proposals Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities*, ERASMUS-EDU2024-EUR-UNIV, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2024/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2024-eur-univ_en.pdf

[284] European Students' Union, *Resolution: Students' perspective on the first cycle of European Universities, towards the second call*, 2019, https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/BM76_Resolution_-A-students%E2%80%99-perspective-on-the-first-cycle-of-European-Universities-towards-the-second-call-.pdf

[285] ESN, Kalinova N., Kyriakou K., *Policy Brief - Navigating the future of European Universities Alliances: The Student Perspective*, 12 October 2023, https://www.esn.org/news/navigating-future-european-universities-alliances-student-perspective

[286] European Higher Education Area Ministers, *Tirana Communiqé, 2024*, https://ehea.info/Immagini/Tirana-Communique.pdf

**All of the alliance managers interviewed recognised the benefits of involving students in alliance governance and decision-making:**

> "It is great to have students represented on the alliance Academic Board. <…> It is much easier to discuss student issues if there is a student who warns us if we are going in the wrong direction" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

The monitoring framework data shows that **97% of the alliances already involve students in their governance. Furthermore, 84% already have a Student Board** (see Figure 20). Some of the alliances that did not do so during the pilot phase set up student boards or councils later. Our interviews and focus groups confirm that alliances typically do include students in their governing structures, albeit in very different modes. Some have designated student councils or forums, while others involve student representatives directly in the decision-making bodies:

> "Student representation at the alliance level was conceived as having student representatives in the execution and delivery phase in the first proposal, which means that as much as our opinions are heard, we are not discussing substantive matters relating to the alliance, but rather the implementation of concepts that have already been decided. In the new proposal, we think this is set to change. It will no longer be about project execution; it will be about representation" – *Focus group with students.*

While the role of students in alliance governance varies, most alliances (74%) have granted permanent positions to students as observers with speaking or advisory rights. Students are also very frequently invited to specific meetings (74%) and are granted full voting rights (63%) [287], as shown in Figure 21.

## FIGURE 21. WHAT ROLE DO THE STUDENTS HAVE IN ALLIANCE GOVERNANCE?
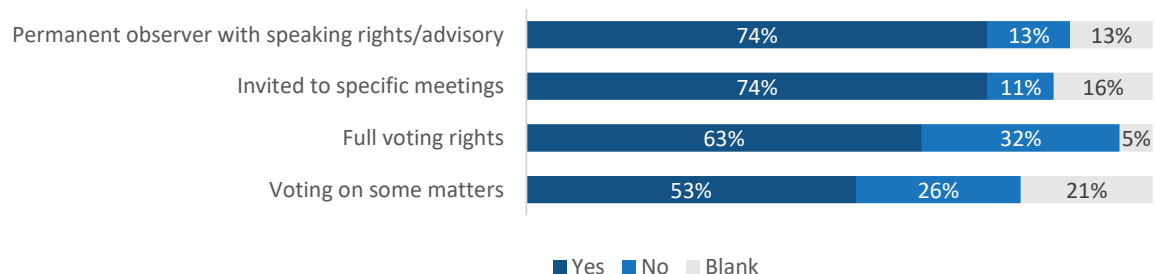


| | Yes | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|
| Permanent observer with speaking rights/advisory | 74% | 13% | 13% |
| Invited to specific meetings | 74% | 11% | 16% |
| Full voting rights | 63% | 32% | 5% |
| Voting on some matters | 53% | 26% | 21% |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

In the student focus groups and interviews with student organisations, **students highlighted that it is crucial to ensure that students not only participate in the governance of the alliances but also are elected in a democratic manner**. Several students reported concerns that some processes entail alliance students representatives being directly appointed to be a part of governance structures within the alliance, without necessarily being part of democratically elected structures at their HEIs:

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[287] In this round of the monitoring framework, alliances were not asked to specify in which governance body students had which role/voting right. This has been modified in the revised monitoring framework questionnaire, found in Annex A.

" (…) On the one hand, of course, it is nice to have students involved and contributing to
the alliance, but they cannot and could not ever replace the utility of having democratically
elected student representatives by the students themselves." – *Interview with student
representative*

Additionally, alliances do not always have a standardised approach to electing student
representatives:

"We have a Board with two student representatives per partner university, and it is up to
each university how they appoint those members" – *Focus group with students.*

The monitoring framework data (Figure 22) revealed that 34% of alliances directly
appoint their student representatives. Most alliances (74%) delegate the process to
existing student representatives within their institution. Importantly, **over half of the
alliances (58%) have established distinct electoral processes for
representatives of student interests in the shared governance of the alliance**.
**Although this approach may require additional effort, the students in focus
groups and interviews highlighted this as their preferred method**. Students
emphasised the need for open and democratic processes of student representation to
avoid a skewed representation of their needs within alliances. Figure 22 indicates that
alliances combine approaches when electing student representatives. This means that
a portion might be appointed directly, while others might be directly or indirectly
elected.

## FIGURE 22. HOW ARE THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVES ELECTED?
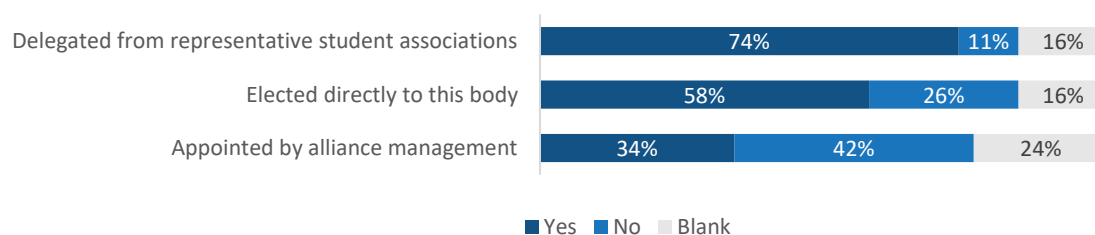
| | Yes | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|
| Delegated from representative student associations | 74% | 11% | 16% |
| Elected directly to this body | 58% | 26% | 16% |
| Appointed by alliance management | 34% | 42% | 24% |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data
covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

**While students can gain important skills and experience by participating in
alliances' governance, their activities are mostly voluntary and rarely
remunerated**:

"Currently, it is completely voluntary, but we are working towards remunerating students
<…>. However, last week, I just got back from a physical meeting, which was completely
covered by the alliance, so I did not have to pay anything out of my pocket"– *Focus group
with students.*

**The motivation and engagement of students could be increased by providing
tangible incentives and rewards.** Next to remuneration, other **recognition
mechanisms such as certificates or diploma supplements** could be considered.
Many alliances already use them to recognise and reward formal and informal learning
within the alliance, and so it could be extended to also recognise participation in
alliance governance. These considerations are further discussed under section 6.1.2.

**External stakeholders, such as local and regional, public, and private
stakeholders, are also frequently integrated into governing structures of the
alliances, often involved in advisory roles.** Advisory bodies may include non-
academic representatives, representatives of associated partners, regional or local

authorities, citizens' representatives, or national accreditation bodies, among others. For example, E³UDRES² has European experts in higher education policies, entrepreneurship, sustainability, regional development, and smart specialisation experts involved in the Advisory Board, offering strategic insight and reflection on global trends, challenges, and policies to the alliance.

The monitoring framework data shows that **63% of alliances have created an External Advisory Board**. Figure 23 highlights the varied nature of stakeholder categories involved in alliance governance. For-profit companies are slightly more prevalent (55%), followed closely by not-for-profit foundations, NGOs, and regional and local authorities, each participating in the governance of 50% of the alliances. National authorities and social economy actors are less common, featuring in 37% of alliances.

**FIGURE 23. WHICH STAKEHOLDER CATEGORIES ARE INVOLVED IN ALLIANCE GOVERNANCE?**
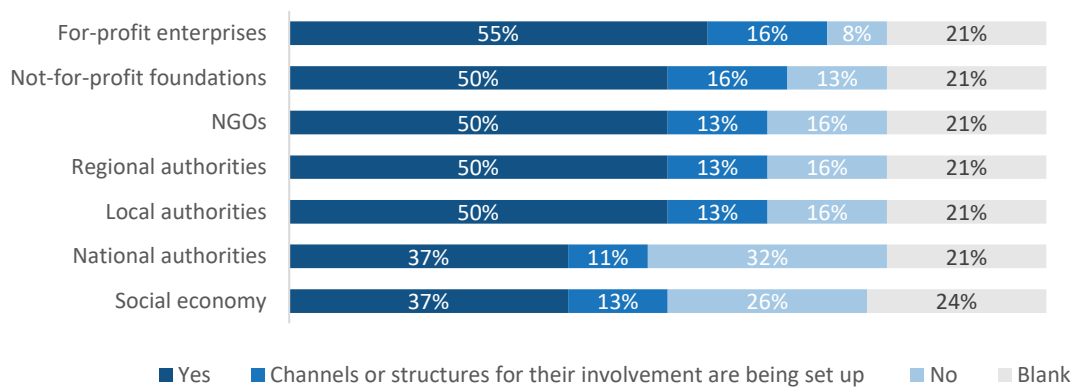


| | Yes | Channels or structures for their involvement are being set up | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| For-profit enterprises | 55% | 16% | 8% | 21% |
| Not-for-profit foundations | 50% | 16% | 13% | 21% |
| NGOs | 50% | 13% | 16% | 21% |
| Regional authorities | 50% | 13% | 16% | 21% |
| Local authorities | 50% | 13% | 16% | 21% |
| National authorities | 37% | 11% | 32% | 21% |
| Social economy | 37% | 13% | 26% | 24% |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

External stakeholders seldom hold permanent roles in alliance governance. In most cases (63%), they are invited to specific meetings rather than granted ongoing involvement. Moreover, their voting rights are limited: only 21% of alliances offer external stakeholders full voting rights[288], and 18% allow them to vote on certain issues, as illustrated in Figure 24.

**FIGURE 24. WHAT ROLE DO EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS HAVE IN ALLIANCE GOVERNANCE?**
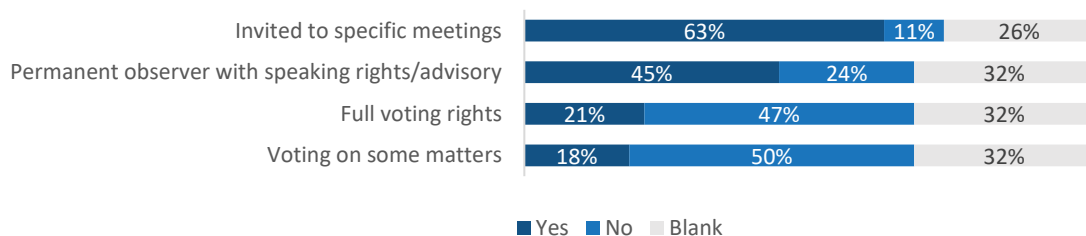


| | Yes | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|
| Invited to specific meetings | 63% | 11% | 26% |
| Permanent observer with speaking rights/advisory | 45% | 24% | 32% |
| Full voting rights | 21% | 47% | 32% |
| Voting on some matters | 18% | 50% | 32% |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

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[288] In this round of the monitoring framework, alliances were not asked to specify in which governance body stakeholders had which role/voting right. This has been modified in the revised monitoring framework questionnaire, found in Annex A.

In our interviews, alliances frequently reported having taken steps to increase the participation of external stakeholders in their governance structures, recognising that there is room for improvement in that area:

> "While from the ground level, we have been in contact with external stakeholders, and we have had very successful educational moments, we have been underusing them in terms of governance, meta-level and reflection. (…) We are making this governance evolve, the external stakeholder body will have another role, and we are going to be much more intentional about designing what they are going to do and why and how because these are very busy people as well." – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**Associated partners are also considered in alliances' governance and management structures**. While most of the time, associated partners from the business sector, public authorities and civil society are considered as external stakeholders, in some cases, HEIs that contribute to the alliance on comparable ground with the full partners are officially labelled associated partners since they are not eligible to participate in the alliance as full partners, in view of the selection criteria of the calls for proposals. This is most often the case with **higher education institutions from the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Ukraine**. The associated partners are not eligible to receive EU funding under the Erasmus+ programme. The formal distinction between full partners and associated partners in the cases of universities that fully contribute to the alliances' activities poses certain management challenges regarding their participation in formal governance structures of the alliance. **Nonetheless, these universities often still value their participation in alliances very highly**.

"ENLIGHT membership is an opportunity for the University of Bern to remain an active part in a rapidly changing European higher education landscape. Our membership will add a new dynamic to our future development as a university"[289]. *Virginia Richter, the vice-rector for development at the University of Bern, told SWI swissinfo.ch*

Overall, as highlighted by Marques and Graf, "there is a common understanding that the governance model [of alliances] should be guided by a participative and consensual approach involving many different actors in their setup"[290]. Our interviews show that **inclusive governance structures involving students and external stakeholders** can increase the outreach and awareness of the alliance in their communities and contribute to the sustainability of the alliances by making them more resilient to changes in academic leadership.

As seen in this section and confirmed in recent publications[291,292], the governance system of alliances is complex and includes a heterogeneous group of actors. A well-designed, inclusive, and effective governance framework has thus proved to be a touchstone of the alliances. **Alliance managers and staff further advocate for the mainstreaming of alliances as an integral part of partner institutions. T**his integration should happen at multiple levels, with the increased vertical involvement

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[289] Leybold-Johnson, I., 'Swiss universities rush to join alliances as EU talks stall', SWI website, 24 January 2023, accessed 8 January 2025, https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/sci-&-tech/swiss-universities-rush-to-join-alliances-as-eu-talks-stall/48220410

[290] Marques, M., and Graf, L., 'Pushing Boundaries: The European Universities Initiative as a Case of Transnational Institution Building', *Minerva*, Vol. 62, 20233, pp. 93-112, p. 102, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-023-09516-w

[291] Cino Pagliarello, M., 'Higher education in the single market between (trans)national integration and supranationalisation: exploring the European universities initiative', *Journal of European Integration,* Vol 44 Issue 1, pp. 149-164, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.2011266

[292] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

of staff and students being essential to alliances' sustainability. This aspect will be addressed in the next section.

Given their relatively recent establishment, alliance governance structures have been functioning as experimental models. As reported in the interviews and mentioned in the literature[293], they have evolved based on the alliances' own assessments of what works and what does not, as well as their evolving needs. Alliances seeking renewal of European Commission funding have frequently used the new application round as an opportunity to re-evaluate and modify aspects of their governance for the subsequent funding phase. For instance, several alliances have enhanced student involvement in governance by transforming student advisory boards into broader and more inclusive student forums or councils by the end of the pilot phase. Others have established working groups or boards focused on future legal status, joint funding applications, or financial sustainability. The pilot phase has been instrumental in testing these innovative governance structures, yielding valuable insights and increasing confidence in their efficacy.

With the emergence of these new types of multi-institutional governance structures, some alliances have adopted an open access policy to their governance documents, white papers and reports, supporting the sharing of best practices and the ample communication of their unique tools and frameworks among the alliances and beyond, aiding the development of other alliances and similar interinstitutional cooperation initiatives.

### 6.1.2.  Internal communication and cooperation

Along with robust governance structures, the **mainstreaming of cooperation and alliance activities throughout partner HEIs contributes to the long-term sustainability of the alliances**. To achieve the goal of creating "a much deeper level of transnational institutional cooperation between higher education institutions, leading to long-term structural, institutional transformation"[294], European Universities alliances need to ensure broad awareness and engagement across all partner HEIs. As described by Craciun, et al., "the higher the salience of the university alliance to its stakeholders, the more likely it is that students, faculty, staff, management, and leadership will participate in and initiate alliance activities"[295]. This perspective was also reflected in our interviews:

> "There is a core group of people that from the very beginning was very much involved in the whole alliance context. But if you really want to have an impact on your broader organisations, you need to move beyond that. And you need to involve other people" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**This mainstreaming of alliances in partner institutions involves cultivating widespread knowledge of the alliance's existence and encouraging the active involvement of internal (and external) stakeholders in its activities.** The objective is to foster a comprehensive community within each partner higher education institution directly engaged in alliance activities, encompassing a wide spectrum of

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[293] EUA, Estermann, T., Bennetot Pruvot, E., and Stoyanova, H., *Briefing: The governance models of the European University Alliances: Evolving models of university governance I*, March 2021, https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/eui%20governance%20paper%20new.pdf

[294] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for proposals: Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU2024-EUR-UNIV*, p. 11, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2024/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2024-eur-univ_en.pdf

[295] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, p.16, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

students, staff, and leadership. This approach, as recognised by alliance managers, is vital for amplifying the impact of the alliances and securing their sustainability and long-term viability. Box 1 presents a good example of community building across an alliance.

## BOX 1. EXAMPLE: CIVICA SOCIAL

### CIVICA SOCIAL

**↗ INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

**CIVICA**

Within their internal platform, CIVICA has launched an alliance own social media platform for students, researchers, faculty, and staff across the alliance. Members log in to CIVICA social using their university credentials. Within the platform, they can join thematic branches called "spheres", where they can communicate and collaborate by sharing messages, documents, images, surveys, events and more. Each sphere is a secure and independent sharing space. Members can create spheres for specific courses, themes of interest and more. All members are included in some spheres, such as the "what is new around CIVICA sphere".

**Relevant links and sources:**

Video introduction about CIVICA Social: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqhyNtsx_RE

**Related policy goals:**

**↗ SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

The monitoring framework data shows that about 83% of faculties at partner institutions take part in alliance activities. However, this number needs to be considered with the limitations of how involvement is defined and measured. Interviews with the alliances have shown that some alliances might consider that a faculty is involved if just one student or staff member takes part in alliance activities. Interviews reveal **that there is still much to do to make sure alliance activities are mainstreamed and engage partner universities as a whole**. Craciun et al., also indicate that alliances are not yet well embedded in their host institutions, with generally only parts of the partner institutions involved in alliance activities[296].

**A frequent reason relates to the thematic focus of some alliances, requiring further efforts to increase synergies and unleash the benefits of complementary perspectives from various faculties or departments**. For example, FilmEU alliance focuses on film and media studies and consists predominantly of film schools, but also has comprehensive research universities of Tallinn and Lusófona as members. Some faculties and departments of these HEIs cover a wider thematic scope, suggesting the need for specific strategic approaches to deeply embed the alliance across all partner institutions. To improve the outreach of the alliance

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[296] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, p.16, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

within its member institutions, FilmEU develops learning activities that cross different disciplines and focus on real-world challenges.

**Another challenge is finding the right counterparts for collaboration in alliance partner universities**. To mitigate it, several alliances have developed platforms and events such as Speed Dating to connect their students, staff and researchers based on their interests.

The interviews also showed other good practices to support the mainstreaming of the alliances in their partner institutions, which often involve communication efforts and the involvement of university leadership:

> "We do try to have news articles about events and things that are happening in the alliance on the internal university website at least once every two weeks. Then, we hold town hall meetings with all university employees three times per semester, and the alliance is usually mentioned in every one of them. Our Rector also thinks it is very important to keep sort of dripping the alliance into the organisation, which is very helpful" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**Beyond the importance of having the highest-level leadership of partner institutions supporting the alliance, interviewees also mentioned that engaging the leadership at the faculty and department levels is equally important.** Faculty deans, who have a more immediate presence in the daily activities of staff, play a pivotal role in mirroring the enthusiasm for the alliance expressed by the higher-level leadership.

With those efforts, some interviewees have reported a very high level of success in mainstreaming their alliances in the partner institutions:

> "At our institution, we have approximately 250 staff members, both academic and administrative. And if you look at the time dedicated to the alliance, I have approximately 50 individuals contributing hours in some way to the project. So that's already almost 20% of our staff contributing directly" – *Interview with institutional coordinator of one alliance.*

> "I would struggle to find a unit that has nothing to do with the alliance" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

> "Through the alliance we are challenged to also look at how we do things internally. And we have a couple of things where we have started working across departments, or across institutes. (…). And this is happening in other areas too where departments that did not necessarily collaborate all that much before now have an arena to do that" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

In the subsections below, we approach the achievements and challenges relating to communication and engagement in alliance activities from student and staff perspectives.

### *Student involvement*

**Students are the primary target beneficiaries of the European Universities initiative, and their involvement in alliance activities is key to the success of the initiative**. **Many alliances have chosen to adopt a co-creation approach, involving students from the very beginning of the collaboration**. Some of these alliances, like SEA-EU, YUFE, and EUGLOH, reported positive outcomes, noting that it fostered a sense of ownership among students and encouraged active participation:

> "What has actually made the first education offers successful was the co-creation with the students. We have involved students in the creation of the alliance and its idea since the beginning" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

> "The other important dimension of inclusion is that we have students involved not only by participating in events but in creating them. Not only doing the work but coming up with ideas, making requests, and identifying the needs. We have worked really hard <…> to have a truly participatory model with our student population, and we are getting somewhere great" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

This co-creative approach was strongly requested by student organisations such as the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and the European Students' Union (ESU). In their communications since the launch of the European Universities initiative, ESU constantly drew attention to the need for further involvement of students in the steering of the alliances, including the application drafting stage[297]. Similarly, ESN reports that "advanced student participation in the alliance's development and management will create a large number of follow-up benefits and will lead to increased student interest and engagement in the opportunities provided by Alliances"[298]. Our interviews indicate that student involvement in the drafting of the applications has significantly increased.

**Beyond the initial co-creation of the alliances, involving students in alliance activities can be challenging. One of the main challenges in student engagement within European Universities alliances is their lack of awareness of the alliance activities**. The 2023 ESN survey revealed that many non-mobile students were unaware of the European Universities initiative, with only 18% reporting knowledge of it[299]. Our student focus groups revealed that effectively communicating about alliance activities remains a complex task. Alliances also reported that communicating with students was hard in the early stages of the pilots because the number of concrete activities and initiatives to promote was limited, but this has been improving with the emergence of joint learning offers and numerous activities as the alliances' development progressed. **Communication is further complicated by differing institutional rules and restrictions at partner HEIs:**

> "This depends on every university and its internal procedures because they have their own rules of communication and different tools to reach the students. For example, there are some universities that can simply send an email to all students at the university. But on the other hand, there are universities in the alliance that are not allowed to do so because of the internal rules." – *Focus group with students.*

Another important challenge for student involvement, according to interviewees, is the relatively short period they spend at HEIs pursuing their degrees, creating a high turnover in student bodies and organisations. The high turnover of students poses a risk to the organisational memory of student-led bodies and creates discontinuity resulting in widely varying student engagement over time and across disciplines. **Alliances should aim to provide support and infrastructure to ensure continuity and organisational memory within their student bodies.**

[297] ESU, *Students' perspective on the first cycle of European Universities, towards the second call*, BM76 Sofia Resolution, 2019, https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/BM76_9c_Resolutions_6_CSC.pdf
298 ESN, Kalinova N., Kyriakou K., *Policy Brief - Navigating the future of European Universities Alliances: The Student Perspective*, 12 October 2023, https://www.esn.org/news/navigating-future-european-universities-alliances-student-perspective, p. 7
299 ESN, Kalinova N., Kyriakou K., *Policy Brief - Navigating the future of European Universities Alliances: The Student Perspective*, 12 October 2023, https://www.esn.org/news/navigating-future-european-universities-alliances-student-perspective, p. 4

The COVID-19 pandemic presented additional difficulties for student engagement in alliance activities. Physical events such as alliance days, student competitions or conferences could not take place due to travel or contact restrictions. The proliferation of digital meetings and distance learning in HEIs during the pandemic led to reduced student motivation to join additional online alliance activities. Furthermore, travel restrictions during the pandemic limited the perceived value of involvement in alliances, particularly in terms of international and cultural experiences.

**To address these challenges, interviewees indicated a range of approaches to increase student awareness,** including leveraging social media platforms, newsletters, and traditional methods such as signage and booths at campus events, like open days at partner universities. Many alliances have also focused on direct student-to-student communication, encouraging student council members or designated alliance ambassadors to participate in and promote these events:

> "The student council group is also participating in our webinars. They promote the alliance within their student union networks, which is really valuable <…>. There is a difference between policy officer and peers inviting students to events, the latter is much more effective" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**A common practice that alliances adopt to aid with community building is appointing student ambassadors**. One example is the EC2U Student Ambassadors, detailed in Box 2. EU-CONEXUS, TRANSFORM4EUROPE, 4EU+, Arqus, FORTHEM, CIVICA and CIVIS also have similar ambassador schemes.

## BOX 2. EXAMPLE: EC2U STUDENT AMBASSADORS

### EC2U STUDENT AMBASSADORS

**↗ INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

Created in 2022, the EC2U Ambassadors Programme involves students from all partner universities of the Alliance. They promote the Alliance and its activities and share their experiences across the EC2U campus.

EC2U Ambassadors lead a variety of communication activities to promote the Alliance and their engagement, organise student-led activities, and participate in EC2U events. The Alliance supports ambassadors with online trainings, personalised workshops, and by supporting the initiatives proposed by them.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EC2U Student Ambassadors: **https://ec2u.eu/for-students/students-ambassadors/**

Testimonial by EC2U student ambassador: **https://ec2u.eu/the-story-of-becoming-an-ec2u-ambassador-by-annimari/**

**Related policy goals:**

**↗ STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, website, and interviews*

Additionally, **some alliances have established dedicated roles or departments for community building and internal communications**. For instance, EDUC has appointed a community manager to identify participation drivers and barriers and to enhance internal engagement. Similarly, ECIU University has introduced a comparable role in its second funding phase and Unite! designated student liaison officers at each partner institution.

**Alliances have also developed a range of physical and virtual community-building initiatives**. FORTHEM has an online Buddy programme open to all students who would like to connect with fellows from other partner universities. Through this programme, students can gain international experience at home by participating in language exchange groups, book clubs and more. Other networking opportunities developed and widely implemented by alliances include alliance days, annual summits, joint photo and essay contests, pub quizzes, language cafes, discussion circles, and similar. EUTOPIA students developed a think tank to connect and share their research findings and achievements, promoting a sense of community, as described in Box 3.

## BOX 3. EXAMPLE: EUTOPIA STUDENT THINK TANK

### EUTOPIA STUDENT THINK TANK

**INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

EUTOPIΛ

The EUTOPIA Student Council developed a new student-led initiative. The EUTOPIA Student Think Tank (EUSTT) is a platform giving voice to European students' shared knowledge. It aims to empower young researchers across disciplines, building bridges between academia and societal impact. On the EUSTT website, students can publish their research in a collaborative, diverse, and inclusive environment. It also offers skill training to engage the student community in policy-shaping and policy-making processes to create positive impacts in society.

**eUSTT**

Eutopia Student Think Tank

**Relevant links and sources:**

Student Think Tank website: **https://www.eustt.org/**

Introduction to the EUSTT: **https://eutopia-university.eu/english-version/eutopia-student-think-tank-eustt**

EUSTT presentation video: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vWuXONzCexU**

**Related policy goals:**

**SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

**JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, website, and interviews*

In focus groups, **students noted that it is very important that alliances' communication presents specific activities in which they can be involved and clearly outlines the benefits of such engagement and how it can later be recognised, for example, with study credits.** YUFE presents an interesting example of how to recognise student involvement in different alliance activities with its Star System, described in more detail in the section on Joint, flexible, and innovative learning offerBox 30.

**It is also important to understand how student well-being and mental health challenges such as loneliness, isolation, depression and anxiety can impact their participation in alliance activities and how alliances can support them in these areas**. As reported by the EUA, based on the latest EUROSTUDENT survey, mental health issues and poor well-being are prevalent among students across

Europe[300]. Box 4 presents several activities from EUniWell to promote student well-being within the alliance and beyond.

**Students' engagement in alliance activities remains a key challenge despite progress made** in the outreach activities linked to the increasing number of diverse and concrete educational or extracurricular activities developed by the alliances. The alliances need to become increasingly visible at partner universities to ensure their activities benefit the majority of student and staff populations.

## BOX 4. EXAMPLE: EUNIWELL ACTIVITIES FOR STAFF AND STUDENT WELLBEING

### EUNIWELL ACTIVITIES FOR STAFF AND STUDENT WELLBEING

#### 🡕 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION

**EUniWell Employer of the Future**

EUniWell makes a strong commitment to becoming an employer of the future and putting employee well-being at the centre of its Human Resources (HR) activities. It aims to be an inclusive community committed to equality and diversity. As an employer, EUniWell strives to create a work environment that enables employees to fulfil their potential. EUniWell is conscious of the importance of building and establishing a strong Human Resources model that supports the undoubtedly challenging transition towards becoming a university of reference for Well-being in Europe and beyond.

They support streamlining the HR practises common to all partners, promoting HR best-practice exchanges, and exploring shared principles towards an EUniWell recognition and reward system and a joint EUniWell understanding – and practising – of leadership.

**EUniWell Student well-being**

Under the same calling to support well-being in its community, EUniWell has developed several activities to support student well-being, including:

- A conference on "Supporting student well-being across Europe" hosted by the University of Nantes in 2023.
- A "Good Practices Symposium on Student Well-Being" organised by scholars of the Universities of Birmingham, Florence, Leiden and Semmelweis.
- A "Student Well-being Week" at Leiden University

**Relevant links and sources:**

EUniWell 2030 Strategy: **https://www.euniwell.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Downloads/Key_documents/EUniwell_NK 08.pdf**

Student wellbeing week: **https://www.euniwell.eu/news-events/events/detail/student-well-being-week-at-leiden-university**

Good Practices Symposium on Student Well-Being: **https://www.euniwell.eu/news-events/article/good-practices-symposium-on-student-well-being**

Conference on "Supporting student well-being across Europe": **https://www.euniwell.eu/news-events/article/supporting-student-well-being-across-europe**

**Related policy goals:**

🡕 **JOINT GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES**   🡕 **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

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[300] EUA, The students are not ok, 2024, https://www.eua.eu/our-work/expert-voices/the-students-are-not-ok.html?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=social-linkedin-07-11-2024

### *Staff involvement*

Alliance managers we interviewed were generally proud of alliances' achievement in forming a community between their staff members. When asked about their alliance's biggest achievement, managers often mentioned the seamless integration and the sense of community formed between staff from different partner HEIs. They compared the alliances with other international collaborations and mentioned that the **cooperation between alliance staff is much deeper, and the level of motivation and dedication is unprecedented**:

> "I think all of these other international networks are hugely important, but they are really focused on very specific activities or very specific areas of the university. (…) With the alliance, it is really internationalisation at all levels, even units that usually have nothing to do with internationalisation" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

Still, getting sustained commitment of academic and administrative staff is seen as one of the biggest challenges of alliances. A EUA survey of 2020 found that higher education institutions perceived getting and sustaining the commitment of academic (72%) and administrative staff (62%) as challenges for their institution to participate in the initiative[301]. Our interviews found that **more than a lack of awareness of alliance activities, lack of time to get involved was seen as the main barrier by academics and administrative staff.** This challenge was further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, given the overwhelming workload that came with adapting university activities to the online format and digitalising learning offers, systems and research plans. In that sense, EUniWell makes significant efforts to promote the well-being of its staff, which can significantly help support its involvement in alliance activities (Box 4). The lack of time to be involved in alliance activities is closely related to the fact that alliances often rely on the intrinsic motivations of staff, with few initiatives to provide extrinsic motivators and incentives. **Alliances often have a few staff members solely dedicated to coordinating and managing alliance activities**, while most of the staff and academics, participate on top of their regular commitments.

**Therefore, it is crucial for the alliances to adequately recognise and reward staff participation with additional incentives to ensure their enthusiasm and dedication are maintained in the long run.** As recognised by an OECD review on the state of academic careers in OCED countries, for the European Universities alliances, "the greatest risk surrounding the ultimate goal of involving large sections of the academic communities in participating institutions in international activities appears to be lack of incentives for academics to become involved in a sustained manner"[302]. To respond to this challenge, the Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable academic careers[303] aims to enable higher education institutions to offer competitive working conditions that attract talented people and retain them in academic careers, including through the more even recognition of staff diverse roles in addition to research, such as teaching, development of transnational education activities, micro-credentials, or mainstreaming sustainable development in educational offerings.

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[301] EUA, Claeys-Kulik, A., Jørgensen, T., Stöber, H., et al, *International strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative: Results of the EUA survey,* April 2020, https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/international-strategic-institutional-partnerships-and-the-european-universities-initiative.html, p.23,

[302] OECD (2024), 'The state of academic careers in OECD countries: An evidence review', *OECD Education Policy Perspectives*, No. 91, OECD Publishing, Paris, p.70, https://doi.org/10.1787/ea9d3108-en.

[303] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education*, OJ C, C/2024/7282, 2024, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/7282/oj/eng

**Some forms of incentives cited by alliance managers are financial recognition, career progression, and professional recognition through certificates**. For example, UNIC has created a starting grant for academic staff to create modules or courses for the alliance. The financial incentive can be used to adapt existing courses or create new ones, as long as they are accessible to UNIC students and coherent with alliance objectives. SEA-EU implemented so-called tokens, which were a financial incentive rewarding efforts related to the alliance. However, SEA-EU plans to transform the existing tokens into a new form of incentive, as they have realised these direct financial incentives might also imply that alliance work is not a part of the staff's regular job description. **Alliances are also integrating alliance-related tasks into their staff contracts to ensure that they are not seen as an additional workload**.

**However, with few exceptions, alliances leave incentives for administrative and academic staff to be decided by each partner HEI without a centralised approach**. This is primarily due to different national labour laws, meaning that HEIs cannot always pay for alliance-related activities or change the career progression criteria freely. Salary levels also vary between partner countries, making it harder to adopt an integrated approach to financial incentives. Nevertheless, there are initiatives at national levels (for example, in Poland) largely driven by alliance HEIs to reform incentive and salary structures of HEI staff to better recognise and reward international collaboration. **The establishment of a legal entity for the alliance could bring benefits in this regard.**

### 6.1.3. Sustainability and long-term cooperation

One of the distinctive aspects of the European Universities initiative compared to other transnational and interinstitutional cooperation settings is the **long-term strategic vision of the alliances**. **Alliances are transcending the project-based mindset, being developed as a long-term cooperation agreement and endeavour, transforming the way higher education institutions work together**. As stated in the 2023 call for funding for European Universities alliances, they should "test diverse innovative and structural models for implementing and achieving systemic, structural, and sustainable cooperation"[304].

The monitoring framework data shows that the alliances recognise that **being a part of the European Universities initiative promotes more sustainable and long-term cooperation** than other collaboration arrangements and networks:

> "The alliance offers long-term, sustainable, efficient governance and management structures for large-scale institutional collaboration when compared to what could be achieved in many bi-/multilateral relationships" – *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

> "In the case of our university, participation in the alliance gives a common focus to the entire community. Up until now, even though there was some internationalisation alignment, schools and departments of the university had their own internationalisation strategies. With the alliance, it becomes easier to join forces towards a common goal" – *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

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[304] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for proposals: Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU2024-EUR-UNIV*, p. 5, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2024/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2024-eur-univ_en.pdf

"By being a long-time initiative supported by significant funding, we can focus on more structural and general compatibilities instead of short-term individual activities" – *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

Furthermore, **being in an alliance can impact the institutional strategies and the sustainability of partner HEIs**:

"A long-term partnership brings sustainability to small and medium-sized universities in an ever more competitive national and international environment" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

"Partner vision statements adopted words from the alliance's vision, which illustrates that our involvement in the alliance has influenced institutional positioning and strategic thinking" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

"The cooperation initiated in the framework of the alliance is having a significant impact on the long-term strategies of individual alliance partners" - *Monitoring framework responses provided by alliances.*

The idea that the alliances are transcending project-based approaches and transform partner higher education institutions is demonstrated through the alliances' concrete efforts and initiatives aiming to ensure sustainable cooperation in the long term, such as long-term strategies and concrete steps towards joint financial, legal, and organisational development. Maassen, Stensaker and Rosso also note that the high level of commitment from alliance members goes beyond formal documents associated with alliance formation, being reflected in their interviews with people in leadership positions in the alliances[305].

### *A legal status for the European Universities alliances*

In 2020, the European University Association conducted a survey[306] among 219 higher education institutions from 34 European HE systems. Even then, just two years after the launch of the European Universities Initiative, **59% of respondents identified administrative obstacles to cooperation due to different institutional structures and processes as one of the most significant barriers to deeper strategic cooperation**. **One of the barriers often raised by stakeholders is the lack of an appropriate institutionalised cooperation instruments for alliances of higher education institutions, such as a possible legal status**. They see a strong need for this to be able to share financial, human, digital, and physical resources, infrastructures, and services, as well as develop joint activities, including educational activities, more efficiently.

As with many aspects of alliances' activities, there are different strategies and approaches to ensure sustainable and long-lasting cooperation. Most alliances have signed collaboration or consortium agreements to formalise their cooperation. Some consider these agreements to be enough and aim to maintain a flat and flexible structure not entailing a separate legal entity. **Other alliances have tested or implemented a common legal status, and some even consider becoming a single university with joint admissions, recruitment procedures and a fully shared campus** (e.g. Eut+). This diversity is welcomed and valued within the

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[305] Maassen, P., Stensaker, B. and Rosso, A., 'The European university alliances—an examination of organizational potentials and perils', *Higher Education*, Vol. 86, 2022, p. 956, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00951-4
[306] European Universities Association, Position Paper – The future of the European Universities Initiative: The sector's perspective, April 2020, p. 1, https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/eua%20council%20position%20on%20future%20of%20eui.pdf

initiative, as it is a result and testament to the bottom-up approach implemented by the European Commission.

Among the managers we interviewed, there is a belief that a **legal entity helps to signal a long-term commitment to cooperation within the alliance**, which is also mentioned by Gagliardi[307]. Furthermore, as presented by the literature and corroborated in our interviews, a legal entity for the alliance can **also bring important practical benefits** such as facilitating "the shared management of funds available" and making it easier to "jointly participate in national and European competitions for access to further funding"[308]:

> "The legal entity (…) will also ease some of the financial aspects that we are working under" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*
> "From my point of view, the alliance needs a legal entity. It shows a commitment and it will be easier from the administrative point of view. From the financial point of view, in order to hire people, for example, if you want to hire administrators, or when you want to hire a project manager, now you have to do it in each of the universities. This is not only time-consuming but consuming in terms of finance. (…) For me, having a legal entity would facilitate enormously the internal function of the Alliance" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**A legal entity allows dedicated staff to be recruited and service contracts to be concluded on behalf of the alliance**[309], which could also serve to mitigate difficulties arising from staff turnover at all levels.

As reported in the **Commission Report[310] on the final outcomes of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects on the institutionalised EU cooperation instruments** that tested a legal status for alliances and where three European Universities alliances were selected for funding (ECIU, UNITA, Eut+, also involving as partners 4EU+, Una Europa, EU-CONEXUS, CHARM-EU, EURECA-PRO, T4EU, UNIC, UNIVERSEH, EU GREEN, EUniWell)[311], **there is a strong need among alliances for such instrument** to be able to share financial, human, digital, and physical resources, infrastructures, and services, as well as develop joint activities, including educational offer, more efficiently. And as well to make the governance and funding even more sustainable and to consolidate and facilitate external relation. A legal entity could for example help alliances solve some of the current legal and administrative barriers they face in recruiting staff, and ensure that the fiscal implications and social security of employees are clearly defined and managed. This is seconded by the Commission Report: "While national labour laws may still impose challenges, a unified legal entity could allow more clarity on the applicable laws and support fair treatment for all alliance staff" [312].

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[307] Ibid.

[308] Gagliardi, B., et al., 'The Path towards the European University in the Current EU Legal Framework: the Unita – Universitas Montium Experience', *International Journal of Film and Media Arts*, Vol. 7 Issue 3, 2022, p. 18, https://doi.org/10.24140/ijfma.v7.n3.01

[309] Ibid.

[310] European Commission, *Staff Working Document: Report on the final outcomes of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects: European degree (label) and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments*, SWD(2024) 191, 19 December 2024, https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVIII/EU/7446/imfname_11441548.pdf

[311] European Commission: Erasmus+, *Pilot institutionalised EU cooperation instruments to explore the feasibility for a possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions*, ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP-EUstatus, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/calls/pilot-institutionalised-eu-cooperation-instruments-to-explore-the-feasibility-for-a-possible-european-legal-status-for-alliances-of-higher-education-institutions

[312] European Commission, *Staff Working Document: Report on the final outcomes of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects: European degree (label) and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments*,

To date, **14 alliances have already established a legal entity under national laws**[313] including 4EU+, AURORA, Circle U, CIVIS, ECIU, EU-CONEXUS, EUNICE, EUniWell, FilmEU, UNA EUROPA, UNITA, EUTOPIA, E3UDRES2, YUFE and aiming to streamline and facilitate collaboration and pooling of resources. In all these cases, the alliances reported administrative and operational advantages as decisive factors for setting up a legal entity with a legal identity, demonstrating that the **European Universities alliances clearly recognise the added value of creating a legal status**. **Two of these alliances had pre-existing legal entities** in place prior to the initiation of the European Universities alliances.

Data gathered for the present report revealed that, in 2023, 12 European Universities alliances were in the process of developing a legal entity. Since then, four of these alliances (CIVIS, EUTOPIA, E3UDRES2, YUFE) have successfully launched their legal entities. The Unite! alliance is expecting to have its legal entity Unite! e.V. registered under German law in the first quarter of 2025. Among the alliances working on establishing a legal entity, two were aiming to set up a non-profit organisation under Belgian law, one was evaluating legal options under French, Belgian and Austrian law, and another was considering creating a non-profit organisation under German law. Several other alliances that took part in the survey indicated they were waiting for the progress and results of the Erasmus+ pilot projects before deciding on establishing a legal entity. Table 3 lists the alliances that reported to have legal statuses, and the specific types of legal entities they established.

Beyond the alliances, other cooperation models have also made significant strides in establishing a legal status to formalise their cooperation, e.g. the **University of the Greater Region (Uni-Gr)** through a non-profit association under Luxembourg law (nd but currently in the process of changing towards a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and for **The European Campus (Eucor)**, also through a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

## TABLE 3. EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCES WITH A LEGAL STATUS

| TYPE OF LEGAL STATUS | ALLIANCE(S) |
|---|---|
| **Registered association under German law (e.V.).** | 4EU+, EUniWell |
| **International non-profit association under Belgian law (AISBL/IVZW)** | Circle U, CIVIS, EU-CONEXUS, EUNICE, EUTOPIA, YUFE |
| **Non-profit association under Belgian law (ASBL/VZW)** | FILM-EU, Una Europa |
| **Foundation under Dutch law** | ECIU |
| **Association under Dutch law** | AURORA |
| **Not-for-profit organisation under Austrian law** | E3UDRES2 |
| **European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)** | UNITA |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI.*

As shown in Table 3, alliances have established different types of legal entities in search of a set up that suits their needs. However, the alliances report facing limitations with the legal entities. For example, some alliances reported that some legal arrangements allow to jointly participate in tender calls, but do not allow to issue joint

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SWD(2024)              191,              19              December              2024,
https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVIII/EU/7446/imfname_11441548.pdf
[313] For example: non-profit association under Belgian law, international non-profit association under Belgian law, foundation under Dutch law, registered association under German law, and registered association under Austrian law.

degrees. To solve these issues, alliances are currently exchanging and discussing about the benefits and challenges associated with each model:

> "There are definitely plans to set up a legal entity for our alliance, and we are currently exploring various models that could be followed. We have also been in contact with other alliances that have already done this and got their feedback on how well it works, what are the advantages and disadvantages" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

The findings from the Commission Report building on the work of four Erasmus+ pilot projects also revealed that **both national and EU level instruments explored have their shortcomings**, being insufficient for addressing the complexities of transnational cooperation or not fully adapted to address the needs of academic cooperation in transnational higher education. The Report findings recommend the **setup of a fit-for-purpose EU-level institutionalised cooperation instrument responding to the alliances' needs** that is voluntary, flexible and adaptable[314]. This is seconded by Gagliardi: "The establishment of a truly 'European university' is hindered by the limits of the existing options provided by the EU legal system, but it should also constitute an opportunity to reflect on the features of a new regulation which could be introduced in the future"[315]. In that sense, **several alliances indicated that they would consider adopting a legal entity or upgrading their national association once an EU-level solution suited for the European Universities alliances is available**.

## BOX 5. EXAMPLE: 4EU+ LEGAL ENTITY

### 4EU+ LEGAL ENTITY

#### ⚐ SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM COOPERATION

In April 2021, the governance scheme of 4EU+ evolved with the establishment of a legal entity, "4EU+European University Alliance e.V.", an association under German law. The Association hosts the General Secretariat of the Alliance and acts as an interface between the decision-making bodies of 4EU+ (Governing Board and Management Committee) and the local offices of each member university. The governance scheme also includes three working groups (Communication, Mobility and Education), composed of expert staff from each university. The Association collects an annual membership fee from the partners.

One important benefit of the legal entity for 4EU+ was that now the partner universities can centrally recruit designated alliance staff to work full-time on 4EU+ matters and jointly represent the member universities, for example at EU level. Own financial resources also give additional flexibility to the alliance in management of joint research projects and initiatives.

**Relevant links and sources:**

4EU+ governance structure: **https://4euplus.eu/4EU-672.html?test=1&**

**Related policy goals:**

⚐ INTERNAL COOPERATION          ⚐ JOINT GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

While several alliances have already established legal entities, **national regulations and legislation may not always allow for the incorporation of all partner HEIs**

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[314] European Commission, *Staff Working Document: Report on the final outcomes of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects: European degree (label) and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments*, SWD(2024) 191, 19 December 2024, https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVIII/EU/7446/imfname_11441548.pdf

[315] Gagliardi, B., et al., 'The Path towards the European University in the Current EU Legal Framework: the Unita – Universitas Montium Experience', *International Journal of Film and Media Arts*, Vol. 7 Issue 3, 2022, p. 14, https://doi.org/10.24140/ijfma.v7.n3.01

under a single legal entity. "Occasionally, the legal systems of individual Member States expressly exclude the establishment of corporations to pursue the institutional purposes of public universities"[316]. For example, in some countries, national regulations limit the opportunities for universities to join a legal entity in another country. **Both EU- and national level reforms would be necessary to facilitate the development of legal entities of university alliances willing to do so.**

### *Financial sustainability as a key enabler for transformational potential*

The 2020 EUA survey on international strategic partnerships underlined the need to provide additional resources for the development and implementation of their alliance as one of the main challenges for institutions participating in the European Universities initiative (84% of survey respondents indicating it)[317].

The **Erasmus+ programme 2021-27 responded to this need by securing higher and more sustainable funding** allocating **EUR around 1,2 Billion** to the European Universities alliances, considerably increasing the programme support compared to the pilot phase and offering a sustainable funding perspective for the funded alliances with a funding horizon until the end of this financial programming period. **The amount per alliances has almost tripled compared to pilot phase,** with a maximum EU funding of **EUR 14,4 million per alliance for four years**. This dynamic also shows great trust and commitment from the EU budget authority i.e. the Member States and the European Parliament in the transformational potential of the initiative and added value for the entire sector[318],[319].

In view of the ambition and depth of the cooperation, the highly resource-intensive needs for scaling-up the alliances' activities to reach a majority of students and faculties and achieve their full transformational potential for the entire higher education sector, the **financial needs of the alliances remain substantial**.

Recent studies have also highlighted **financial sustainability as one of the main challenges of European Universities alliances**[320,321].A specific challenge for the European Universities alliances is to find a more **encompassing funding model offering a more sustainable and level playing field** for their work and enabling them to **fulfil their vision across all their missions.**

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[316] Ibid., p. 19.
[317] EUA, Claeys-Kulik, A., Jørgensen, T., Stöber, H., et al, *International strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative: Results of the EUA survey,* April 2020, https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/international-strategic-institutional-partnerships-and-the-european-universities-initiative.html
[318] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992
[319] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education*, OJ C 221, 10 June 2021, p. 103, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0610(02)
[320] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992
[321] EUA, Claeys-Kulik, A., Bennetot Pruvot, E., Estermann, T., and Jørgensen, T*., The European Universities Initiative and system level reforms: Current challenges and considerations for the future*, 2022, https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/briefing_eui%20impact%20on%20system%20level%20reforms.pdf

All alliances are expected to contribute 20% of the budget submitted in their funding applications themselves[322]. This is usually covered through national co-funding or through membership fees. In the monitoring framework survey, 66% of alliances confirmed having their own funding mechanisms, which is relatively low considering the co-funding requirement.

**FIGURE 25. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE SELF-FUNDING MECHANISMS?**
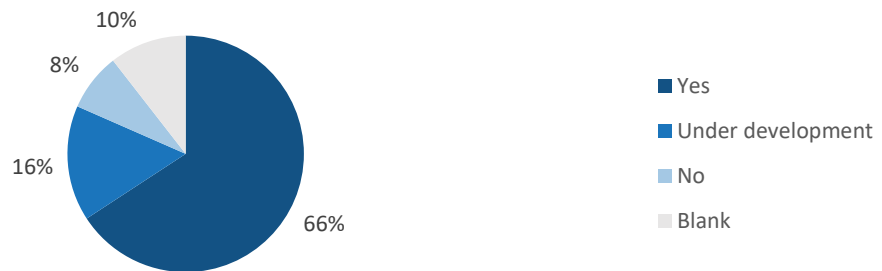


- Yes
- Under development
- No
- Blank

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

The most common source of self-funding reported by **three quarters of the alliances is own contribution by partner universities,** possibly in the form of a membership fee. Additionally, **one in five alliances also benefits from tuition fees** for executive education, life-long learning activities or degree awarding programmes.

**A vast majority of the 38 alliances (97%) have successfully secured external funding**. As shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**, the most common source of external funding for alliances is national or regional funding, with 95% of alliances reporting receipt of such funds.

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[322] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

## FIGURE 26. WHAT EXTERNAL FUNDING SOURCES ARE USED BY YOUR ALLIANCE?

| Funding source | Yes | In progress | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| National/regional funding | 95% | | 3% | 3% |
| EU: Horizon 2020 | 92% | | | 8% |
| EU: Other Erasmus+ sources | 87% | 3% | 3% | 8% |
| EU: Horizon Europe | 50% | 18% | 18% | 13% |
| EU: The EIT HEI initiative | 24% | 8% | 45% | 24% |
| Private funding | 16% | 13% | 45% | 26% |
| EU: The recovery and resilience facility | 16% | 5% | 61% | 18% |
| EU: Digital Europe | 13% | 18% | 47% | 21% |
| EU: Other | 11% | 5% | 53% | 32% |
| EU: Cohesion policy | 3% | 5% | 71% | 21% |
| EU: Invest EU | | 5% | 74% | 21% |

■ Yes   ■ In progress   ■ No   ■ Blank

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

**Member States continued support has been crucial**, materialised through diverse forms: direct support for national HEIs part of an alliance, or support for part of the institution's core funding, such as internationalisation budget. This funding is often performance-based. According to recent mapping exercises[323,324,] **almost all Member States are supporting their national HEIs in European Universities alliances,** creating a great drive for the European Universities initiative. However, it is important to note that not all partners within an alliance received national funding, nor that the sums are comparable. **National contributions remain heterogenous in scale, modalities and timeline.** This creates de facto imbalances between partners within an alliance and poses a **risk for alliance cohesion**. Alliances therefore suggest a more coherent approach to national/regional funding to partner HEIs.

Additionally, **national funds often come with spending restrictions,** typically requiring expenditure within the funding country. As a result, while a high percentage of alliances receive national or regional funding, it may not be accessible to all the partners within the alliance. Interviews indicated significant disparity in national funding among alliance partners. While some partner institutions benefit from substantial national support (for example, France and Germany), others receive little to no governmental funding. Although these variations in national financial backing have not markedly diminished the willingness of alliance partners to cooperate, they have affected their individual capacity to recruit and fund additional staff, remunerate students, or develop joint digital infrastructure.

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[323] European Commission, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Working Group on Higher Education., *Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on the financing of European Universities at national level,* Paris, October 17-18 2023.
[324] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Jongbloed, B., McGrath, C., Boer, H. and Gayardon, A., *Final report of the study on the state and effectiveness of national funding systems of higher education to support the European universities initiative . Volume I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/885757

The establishment of a legal entity within some alliances *(currently 14 alliances have setup a legal entity under national laws – please see precedent section for further details)* has facilitated more equitable distribution of national funds, yet the broader issue of alliances' national funding discrepancies remains.

Following national and regional funding, the **subsequent four most frequently cited funding sources are all EU-based**. Horizon2020 is the most common, secured by 92% of alliances, notably related to the Science with and for society call dedicated to the development of the research dimension of the European Universities alliances. Erasmus+ sources rank as the third most significant external funding source for alliances with 87% obtaining them. This high percentage may partly stem from Erasmus+ funding for student mobility and the Erasmus Mundus programme under which several alliances have launched joint master's degrees. Horizon Europe, the successor of Horizon 2020, ranks as the fourth most common funding source, used by half of the alliances, encompassing R&I framework programme actions including the EIT Higher education institutions initiative, Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions, the Excellence Initiative, etc.

Other funds alliances attracted stem from private sources and other EU programmes and funding mechanisms including the Recovery and Resilience Facility and Digital Europe.

The complexity of funding mechanisms for European Universities at EU level leads to the alliances encountering **substantial administrative challenges when managing various funding schemes and sources simultaneously**. The difficulty primarily lies in reconciling the diverse frameworks, applications, timelines, reporting requirements, and structures of different funding programmes. This requirement poses a significant hurdle to the alliances' aspirations for continuity and their long-term goal of developing transformative, meta-institutional structures.

Consequently, there is a **consensus among alliances on the benefit of increased complementarity between funding schemes**. The alliances call for enhanced coherence of and facilitated access to different EU funds, notably under the EU framework programme for Research and Innovation, which can bolster synergies between educational and research activities within the alliances, enabling their transformational potential across all their missions.

EU level higher education stakeholders, including students' unions, **advocate for a longer-term funding outline,** with support over for example 7-year funding, emphasising the need to reduce administrative burden and enhance efficiency by providing alliances with a stable financial outlook, allowing predictability of the funding and long-term planning.

**These elements point to the need for the upcoming investment pathway**[325].41 European Universities alliances issued a joint statement in October 2023 stating their commitment to the initiative and their support to the efforts made by the Commission to develop an investment pathway past 2027[326].

In this context, **the Commission is working with the Member States, the alliances, the European higher education stakeholders and the students towards an investment pathway** aiming to offer a long-term comprehensive

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[325] Ibid.

[326] European Universities Alliances, *European Universities Alliances fully committed to making the initiative a success in a long term*, 2023, https://erua-eui.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/JointFOREUstatement_InvestmentPathway_clean.pdf

funding approach for the European Universities alliances for the financial programming period 2028-2034, complementing the core educational dimension funded under Erasmus+ with support across all alliances' other missions (including for the institutional cooperation on R&I), seeking synergies with different EU instruments, as well as with national and regional funding.

The unique structural setting of the alliances – joint long-term institutional strategic cooperation across all missions – is strategic for **breaking down silos between education, research and innovation missions**. In the alliances view, it is thus important to support the alliances across all their missions to realise the alliances' impact and transformational potential. For this, complementarity, coherence and efficiency of EU investment is paramount.

**Only EU level funding can leverage benefits surpassing what could be achieved by individual Member States or organisations alone**, mobilising critical mass of funding, resources and infrastructures, and helps creating a positive dynamic around societal challenges and objectives going beyond organisational, regional and national boundaries, triggering EU added value and impact. **Without Erasmus+ as main funding source, the European Universities initiative will not be able to deploy its full potential** in future, considering the somewhat uneven and limited national/regional funding sources available for transnational cooperation at the scale prompted by the alliances.

In addition, as Erasmus+ funding for education and governance cannot cater for all alliances' missions and activities, such as for increased institutional cooperation in research and innovation, other funding sources are needed to complement the core Erasmus+ funding. As discussed in section 4, many stakeholders and alliances therefore plead for enhanced **synergies between various sources of EU level funding and leveraging national and regional funding to allow for efficiency gains across all these missions**.

### 6.1.4.    Quality assurance and data management

European Universities alliances are expected to strive for high levels of quality in their activities, which requires that different partners agree on common quality assurance practices and overall cooperate in matters of quality assurance  Given the innovative aspects of many activities conducted by alliances, and their unique goals and set-up, they need to define specific quality criteria, which often differ from practices already set in place by each partner.

As soon as the first European Universities alliances were created, alliances launched discussions on **how to develop quality assurance frameworks that were fit for the multi-campus features and comprehensive missions of the alliances**[327]. In response to this need, the EUniQ project was launched in May 2019, co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme. As stated on its website, "the objectives of the project are to explore various approaches to assess the quality of European Universities, to demonstrate the feasibility of organising assessments of European Universities, to develop an assessment methodology that takes into account supra-institutional policies, to undertake four pilot assessments of European Universities, and to, as a result, produce a development roadmap for QA agencies"[328]. Fredericks et al. show that the four alliances that participated as pilot projects in EuniQ mostly support the

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[327] NVAO, 'EUniQ Project', NVAO website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.nvao.net/en/euniq
[328] NVAO, 'EUniQ project: Project objectives and benefits', NVAO website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.nvao.net/nl/project-objectives-and-benefits

idea of considering the EUniQ framework for evaluation of the quality assurance of the alliance[329]. Box 6 presents the results of the EUniQ project for Unite! alliance.

## BOX 6. EXAMPLE: UNITE! MOBILITY FRAMEWORK

### UNITE! MOBILITY FRAMEWORK
⬆ **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

unite!

**Participation in EuniQ pilot evaluation of the European Universities**

Unite! was one of four European Universities alliances to participate in the EUniQ pilot evaluation of European Universities. Three independent experts, supported by process coordinators from two European quality assurance agencies, carried out a pilot evaluation and published an evaluation report following a two-day virtual inspection in November 2020. The evaluation report led to the implementation of a Quality Management Manual (QMM) in the alliance. The QMM links the overarching strategic goals of the alliance with the specific activities and makes use of member universities' existing quality management systems.

**Mobility framework**

In early 2020, Unite! decided to create a mobility framework to keep track of the alliance's activities and progress and guide its strategic development. The first challenge was to define the categories of mobility happening in the alliance, given the high number of new, innovative types of mobility that were emerging. After defining the categories of existing mobility formats, a working group started to define possible indicators to be used to track the progress of each activity. With the mobility framework in place, the alliance now implements a continuous monitoring of mobility activities.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Unite! Quality assurance evaluation:
**https://www.nvao.net/nl/attachments/view/evaluation%20unite-public%20summary**

**Related policy goals:**

⬆ **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

The establishment of a joint quality assurance plan for alliances usually starts with an analysis and comparison of existing quality assurance practices across partner universities. This approach allows to identify similarities and differences that can inform a collective strategy. In ENLIGHT, for example, the quality assurance offices from all partner universities collaborated to conduct a thorough comparative analysis of their quality assurance systems. It laid the groundwork for the development of a shared, self-directed ENLIGHT Quality Approach. Similarly, EUniWell developed a framework for a quality culture and indicators that aims to reflect the core values of the alliance, including well-being culture, inclusivity, more accessibility, and diversity[330].

As depicted in Figure 27, **the majority of alliances have either already developed (58%) or are developing (34%) a joint quality assurance strategy**. Quality assurance practices within alliances can generally be categorised into two distinct types: (1) Quality assurance of their educational offerings, and (2) Measurement of

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[329] Frederiks, M., Guibert, T., and Provijn, D., *Quality Assurance of European Universities Alliances: Aligning Internal/External QA and Student Involvement, EUniQ project*, 2023, https://www.nvao.net/files/attachments/.9844/Paper_Frederiks_Guibert_Provijn_QA_of_European_Universities_Alliances.pdf
[330] EUniWell, 'EUniWell Quality Culture Arena: Advancing quality assurance in EUniWell educational offers', 27 September 2023, EUniWell website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.euniwell.eu/news-events/article/euniwell-quality-culture-arena-advancing-quality-assurance-in-euniwell-educational-offers

## FIGURE 27. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE A JOINT QUALITY ASSURANCE STRATEGY?
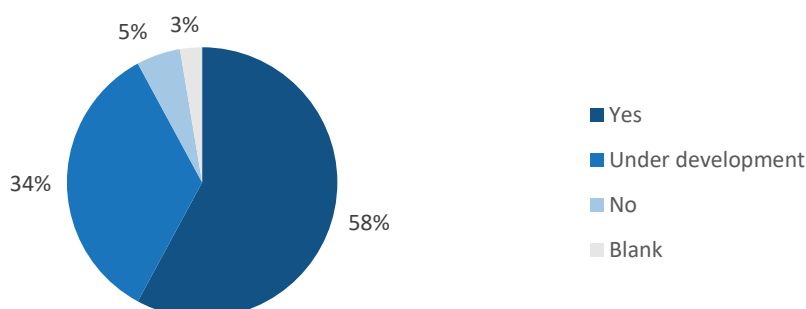


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*
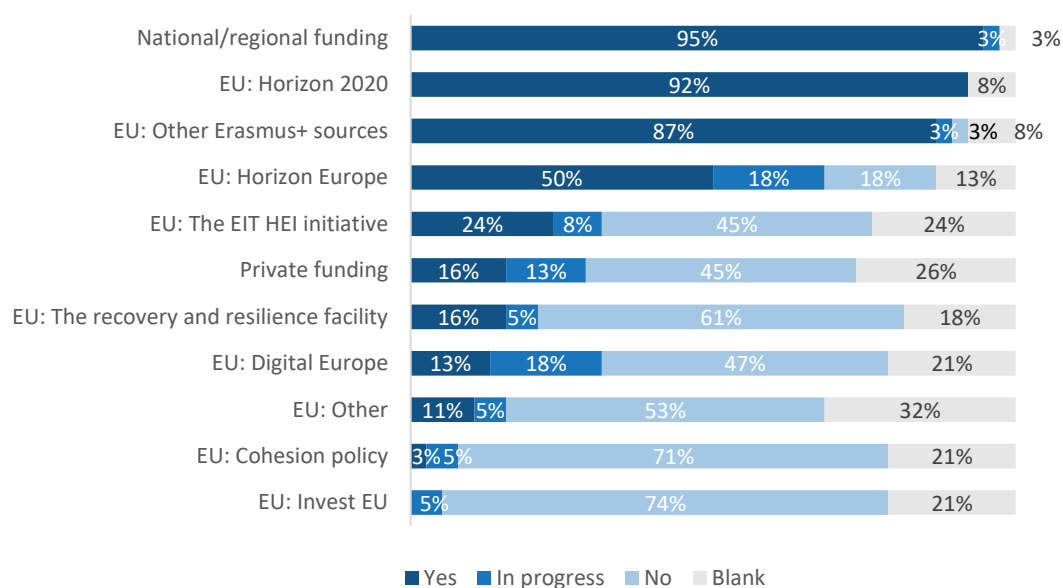
**In the process of drafting a joint quality assurance strategy, some alliances have gone a step further by producing comprehensive guides and documents. These resources facilitate the consistent implementation of QA procedures across the alliance**. For instance, NeurotechEU introduced the Education and Research Quality (NERQ) Compendium, encompassing various tools like questionnaires, report templates and checklists, and procedures to assist in the Quality Workflow.

When initiating new joint educational activities, it is important for alliances to establish suitable quality assurance mechanisms. Data from the monitoring framework indicates that **61% of alliances have already formulated a specific quality assurance plan for their educational activities**. This aspect of quality assurance may incorporate various elements, such as specific indicators and key performance indicators (KPIs), student satisfaction surveys, and other methods. For example, RUN-EU conducts research-based surveys among students participating in each Short-Advanced Programme (SAP) to ensure quality. Additionally, they hold feedback sessions with students at the conclusion of these SAPs, further enhancing their quality assurance process.

While it is not easy to define quality in higher education[331], funding application guides and objectives led some alliances to design their quality monitoring frameworks by specific indicators showcasing the progress towards the specific goals of the alliance. UNIVERSEH has implemented a Quality Assurance Process building on this approach and assesses the progress by annually collecting and analysing data from the partners. Similarly, Circle U. created a QA approach that starts with the creation of a theory of change outlining the expected impact and outputs of the alliance and including data collection and management practices.

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[331] Westerheijden, D.F., Stensaker, B., Rosa, M.J., *Introduction*, In Westerheijden, D.F., Stensaker, B., Rosa, M.J. (Eds) *Quality Assurance In Higher Education. Higher Education Dynamics*, Vol. 20. Springer, 2007, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6012-0_1

**This quality assurance method is not only about maintaining standards but also about enabling continuous improvement and evolution in line with the alliance's long-term vision and objectives**, as detailed in Box 7. **Such approaches are thus more likely to be implemented in the alliances rather than in other cooperation models due to their long-term vision**.

## BOX 7. EXAMPLE: CIRCLE U. QUALITY ASSURANCE STRATEGY

### CIRCLE U. QUALITY ASSURANCE STRATEGY
#### QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DATA MANAGEMENT

Circle U. monitoring and evaluation approach was created to support the alliance in a process of exploration and experimentation, generating new ideas to test the assumptions needed for change to happen, embracing its successes, and learning from its challenges as opportunities for adaptation to guide Circle U.'s vision and strategy.

**Theory of change**

The first step to implement Circle U.'s monitoring approach was to develop a theory of change (ToC) to determine the impacts that the alliance wanted to create, and how it will achieve them. Developing the ToC was a consultative process that drew on the experience and insights of staff and students across the partner institutions. The resulting ToC presents Circle U.'s enabling infrastructures, interventions, outcomes, and impacts.

**Results framework**

The monitoring, evaluation and learning approach developed by Circle U. is entirely embedded in its theory of change. Qualitative and quantitative indicators were developed to assess each of the aspects of the Theory of Change, assessing to what extent the anticipated results are being achieved and whether the identified assumptions and underlying beliefs about the project are valid. The final Results Framework has a total of 51 indicators.

**Data management**

Circle U. has a designated Senior Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer. The large amounts of data collected by partners through monitoring and evaluation activities over time are sent to the officer and processed, analysed, and shared. Proper data and knowledge management facilitates its use by project stakeholders.

**Data sources**

To complement data present in partners' reports and databases, Circle U. frequently conducts student surveys. These focus specifically on understanding what skills they've gained through alliance activities, such as communication and problem-solving, and their attitudes to certain aspects. They also implement regular feedback surveys at the end of all joint courses. Survey data, such as the number of students who report a significant change of mindset, feeds into the Results Framework.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Quality assurance guidelines and rules to develop joint learning activities and programmes: **https://www.circle-u.eu/resources/quality-assurance/d1.8_circle-u-quality-assurance-policy.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**
#### JOINT GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES
#### SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Joint degrees require complex accreditation procedures and harmonisation of criteria across the various participating countries**. Their accreditation and quality assurance aspects are discussed in greater detail in Section 6.2.

**Alliances face obstacles in joint data management due to different institutional and national regulations for data privacy and protection**. Most managers interviewed highlighted challenges in collecting data that is uniform and comparable across partner institutions. However, the monitoring framework data indicates that **approximately one-third of the alliances have already established a joint data governance strategy**, while an additional 53% are in the

process of developing one. Alliances reported several data management practices they commonly apply, as shown in Figure 28. The most prevalent aspect of shared data governance strategies is the establishment of policies for the exchange of research datasets. It is closely followed by the creation of policies for sharing student and staff data, followed by management data. **Some alliances have set up combined institutional data repositories or implemented policies for sharing of educational data.** However, only 16% of alliances have dedicated personnel for institutional research or data management, highlighting a potential area for improvement.

## FIGURE 28. WHAT DOES YOUR SHARED DATA GOVERNANCE STRATEGY ENTAIL?
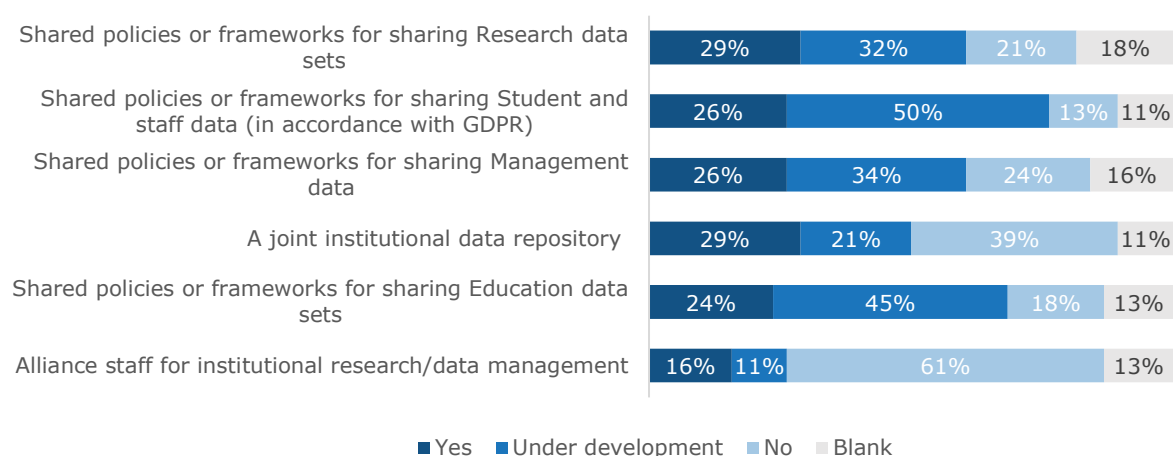
| | Yes | Under development | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Shared policies or frameworks for sharing Research data sets | 29% | 32% | 21% | 18% |
| Shared policies or frameworks for sharing Student and staff data (in accordance with GDPR) | 26% | 50% | 13% | 11% |
| Shared policies or frameworks for sharing Management data | 26% | 34% | 24% | 16% |
| A joint institutional data repository | 29% | 21% | 39% | 11% |
| Shared policies or frameworks for sharing Education data sets | 24% | 45% | 18% | 13% |
| Alliance staff for institutional research/data management | 16% | 11% | 61% | 13% |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

These practices of collecting, synthesising, and analysing institutional data are often referred to as institutional research practices and are imperative for alliances to ensure that their activities meet jointly defined quality standards. They can support strategic development, decision-making, institutional planning, and policy formation.[332] However, alliances still need to forge a better connection between data collection and strategic planning to advance their institutional research practices. Currently, data collection within alliances is often restricted to meeting the mandatory reporting requirements of funding bodies and is seldom utilised for institutional decision-making and planning. This issue is not exclusive to European Universities alliances; academic literature indicates that many European HEIs struggle with limited capacity and resources to effectively utilise data for strategic purposes[333]. To promote such data usage, alliances must ensure that it is readily accessible and comprehensible. For instance, EuroTeQ has developed a user-friendly indicator dashboard visualising key indicators of the alliance, as shown in Box 8.

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[332] Klemenčič, M., Šćukanec, N., & Komljenovič, J., 'Decisions Support Issues in Central and Eastern Europe' in Webber, K. and Calderon, A. (eds.), Institutional Research and Planning in Higher Education: Global Themes and Context, Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2015, http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9781138021433/
[333] Ibid.

## BOX 8. EXAMPLE: EUROTEQ INDICATOR DASHBOARD

**EUROTEQ INDICATOR DASHBOARD**

⬆ **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

EuroTeQ has made data collection and monitoring a priority since its inception. The alliance is a great example of how to use visualisation tools and technologies to show institutional research data.

**Indicator dashboards**

A monitoring dashboard uses Power BI to present quantitative data, such as the number of courses offered in the joint course catalogue and the number of students participating in alliance activities. The dashboard is divided into four main topics: studies and innovation, mobility, co-creation, and outreach. A separate dashboard includes information on the alliance budget and expenditures. The use of visualisation tools allows the data to be easily interpreted by alliance staff and facilitates the conversion of information into actions.

**Qualitative data collection**

EuroTeQ adopted a centralised approach, where one person within the alliance secretariat is responsible for data management. Each partner selects one person to communicate with the central data manager. Having these activities allocated to a few central people facilitates the timely and accurate delivery of information. Centralising data management also facilitates data protection and responsible management of sensitive information.


Balance between outgoing and incoming students per institution (ss 22/23)
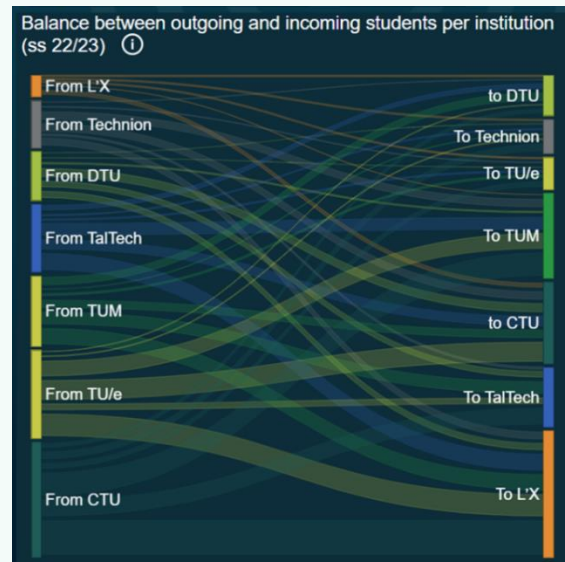
**Relevant links and sources:**

EuroTeQ monitoring and quality assessment: **https://euroteq.eurotech-universities.eu/docuwiki/wp1/**

**Related policy goals:**

⬆ **INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

### 6.1.5. Shared resources and facilities

**A key strength of European Universities alliances is the capability to build on a shared pool of financial, human, digital and physical, intellectual resources, infrastructure, data, and services** to improve the capacity and capability of all partners and to provide better services and activities to its community[334]. According to data collected from interviews and the monitoring framework, by opening existing services and facilities to alliance partners or setting up new joint services, partner universities have **increased the quality of all participating institutions.** This **facilitated the dissemination of good practices and extended the benefits of the alliance to larger student and staff bodies of partner universities**:

"That we can share our facilities, both physical and digital, is one of the most important outcomes of being in an alliance like this." - *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

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[334] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for proposals Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU2024-EUR-UNIV,* p. 6, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2024/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2024-eur-univ_en.pdf

"Part of why we built an alliance is because there were infrastructures and services
available on each of our campuses that interested the others. And so those services are
available to all members of the alliance" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

Monitoring framework data shows that **more than half of the alliances have
already included the sharing of resources and facilities in their strategic
plans**, and another 37% are currently in the process of doing so. An important step
in the process has often been mapping of available resources and drafting policies and
guidelines to share them:

"We have created a policy for sharing the infrastructure. There is a huge list of devices,
laboratories, and so on that we are able to use within the consortium. It is all mapped
already. <…> Of course, not everything that has been mapped can be used by partners
for free, but we also separately mapped the free resources and those that can be used
with extra funding in certain types of collaboration" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

By pooling expertise and resources, alliances were able to launch **joint support for
pedagogical innovation, teacher academies, joint internationalisation offices,
research, and student support services**, as shown in Figure 29. However, campus
integration is still at an early stage and there is space for progress. It is also evident
that integrating physical resources requires more time and effort, while **significant
progress has been made with services that can be delivered virtually.**

## FIGURE 29. WHAT ARE THE JOINT SERVICES/OFFICES OFFERED BY YOUR ALLIANCE?
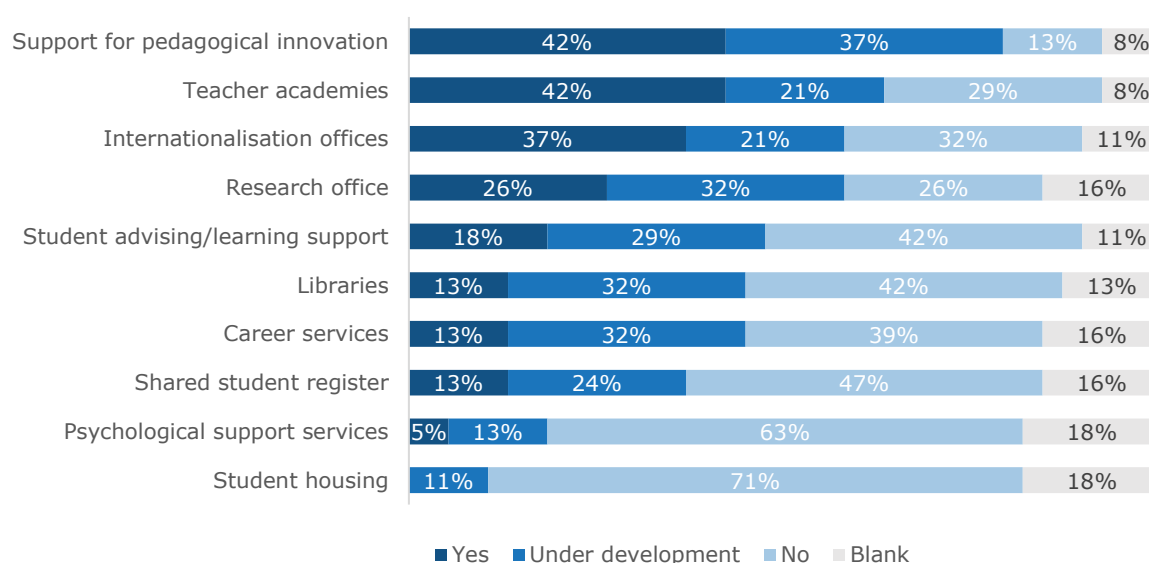
| Service | Yes | Under development | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Support for pedagogical innovation | 42% | 37% | 13% | 8% |
| Teacher academies | 42% | 21% | 29% | 8% |
| Internationalisation offices | 37% | 21% | 32% | 11% |
| Research office | 26% | 32% | 26% | 16% |
| Student advising/learning support | 18% | 29% | 42% | 11% |
| Libraries | 13% | 32% | 42% | 13% |
| Career services | 13% | 32% | 39% | 16% |
| Shared student register | 13% | 24% | 47% | 16% |
| Psychological support services | 5% | 13% | 63% | 18% |
| Student housing | 11% | | 71% | 18% |

■ Yes ■ Under development ■ No ■ Blank

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data
covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

The graph indicates that support for pedagogical innovation and teacher academies
are the most common shared services, with 42% of alliances already providing these
and another 21-37% developing them. **This collaboration demonstrates the
alliances' commitment to fostering educational innovation, excellence, and
teaching quality across their networks**. **Internationalisation offices**, which play
a crucial role in coordinating cross-border educational activities, managing mobility
and multicultural aspects of the alliance, **have been integrated by 37% of
alliances, with another 21% in the process of doing so**. Joint research offices
supporting joint research endeavours are operational in 26% of the alliances, with a

further 32% developing them. The example of ENGAGE.EU in Box 9 shows how the alliance created a new joint support structure that benefits researchers from all partner universities.

## BOX 9. EXAMPLE: ENGAGE.EU GRANT DESK

### ENGAGE.EU GRANT DESK

🢄 **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

ENGAGE.EU's shared Grant Desk is a virtual knowledge and expertise **centre** that connects the grant support teams of partner universities and shares funding opportunities to optimise the alliance's acquisition and use of external funding. The ENGAGE.EU Grant Desk team is composed of one staff member from each alliance partner.

In the process of setting up the Grant Desk, the task team published the report "Insights into European grant acquisition per university" examining practices at each partner institution in detail.

The Grant Desk's main tasks are to:

- Connect and strengthen support teams by sharing and building up expertise.
- Map, analyse, and categorise external funding schemes.
- Communicate opportunities within the alliance and actively support applicants.

Other planned activities for the Grant Desk include:

- A series of presentations about the goals and services offered by the Grant Desk to raise awareness and encourage the use of the service among researchers from partner HEIs.
- Virtual Expertise Workshop (online) to bring together the funding support teams from the seven partners to discuss good practices and encourage future collaboration.
- Info-sessions about specific grant opportunities (online).

**Relevant links and sources:**

ENGAGE.EU Grant Desk: **https://www.engageuniversity.eu/grant-desk/**

**Related policy goals:**

🢄 **JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**        🢄 **SUSTAINABLE COOPERATION**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Student advising and learning support services** are also highlighted, with 18% of alliances currently offering and 29% developing them. These services are vital in providing students with the guidance and resources needed to succeed in an increasingly complex and international learning environment. INVEST alliance brings an important example of pooling resources to improve students' experiences by developing an online academic advisor connected to the joint alliance learning offer, as explained in Box 10.

## BOX 10. EXAMPLE: INVEST ACADEMIC ADVISING SYSTEM (EDUC8EU)

### INVEST ACADEMIC ADVISING SYSTEM (EDUC8EU)
**⌁ SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

INVEST has developed and piloted EDUC8EU, an AI-based system that mimics the human experience in academic advising. This joint tool provides students with informed recommendations on study tracks within alliance partners.

Student information

Select learning pathway

Personality assessment

Perceived learning factors

EDUC8EU Engine

To make informed recommendations, EDUC8EU consolidates and analyses:

- Learner's personality;
- Learner's interests;
- Available academic options;
- Programme prerequisites;
- Academic advisors' knowledge and experience;
- Career requirements (skills, knowledge etc.) derived from several consolidated sources:
- ESCO (European Skills, Competencies, Qualifications and Occupations), the European multilingual classification of Skills, Competencies and Occupations. ESCO works as a dictionary, describing, identifying, and classifying professional occupations and skills relevant for the EU labour market and education and training;
- International Labour Organisation profiles;

O*net: An open platform where users can browse across 900+ occupations based on their goals and needs and then access comprehensive reports with requirements, characteristics, and available opportunities for their selected occupation.

EDUC8EU is an important part of a cohesive retention strategy developed for INVEST as it allows students to make the most of their studies and explore various study tracks offered by the alliance.

**The recommendation of EDUC8EU for the SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES IN ENERGY TRANSITION is:**

**Outstanding!** This is by far your true element; you not only fulfill the learning pathway conditions but you will excel and lead a successful and fulfilling career. Your dominant personality type is Investigative (Thinker). People with your behavioral tendencies lead to the acquisition of scientific and mathematical competencies which are important for this program. You should certainly INVEST!

**Relevant links and sources:**

EDUC8EU website: **https://educ8eu.invest-alliance.eu/engine/**

European Skills, Competencies, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO): **https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/about-esco/what-esco**

O*NET OnLine: **https://www.onetonline.org/**

**Related policy goals:**

⌁ **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

⌁ **INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Library and career service integration, crucial for student learning and post-graduation success, are featured less frequently but are under development by a significant proportion of alliances (32%). Interviewees reported that the integration of library resources is difficult due to copyright laws and restrictions. Still, this development suggests a forward-looking approach to student support that extends beyond the immediate educational context.

A shared student register, which would streamline administrative processes and enhance student mobility, is available in 13% of alliances and under development by 24%. Psychological support services and student housing are less common, with only 5-11% of alliances currently offering them, but many are actively working to develop these student welfare services.

Online course catalogues and joint learning platforms are also important parts of alliances' shared resources. Several alliances have developed shared digital platforms, comprehensive learning management systems that centralise registration to courses, and administrative platforms issuing digital credentials. According to our monitoring framework data, 68% of alliances have launched a joint course catalogue and 58% have interactive learning platforms. One interesting example is FORTHEM Digital Academy, described in Box 11.

### BOX 11. EXAMPLE: FORTHEM DIGITAL ACADEMY

## FORTHEM DIGITAL ACADEMY

### ⬈ SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES

The **FORTHEM Digital Academy** is an online platform for virtual mobility, provision of online courses, collaboration and networking for students and staff. It lists existing courses by partner universities open to all FORTHEM students, language courses and new joint courses related to focus areas of the alliance.

Its main goals are to:

- Jointly develop new learning modules that include instructor-led, self-paced, blended and self-study options;
- Share existing MOOCs developed by every partner university;
- Maximize possibilities for internationalisation at home by offering numerous English-taught courses online;
- Bring in pre-existing online language courses of partners and develop more courses in the alliance languages;
- Put in place language-related student tutoring and tandem-learning as online training from students for students.

The platform has been set up in Moodle and expanded with other tools in order to enlarge the learning possibilities for FORTHEM community members. It is accessible to students and staff through each university's own Moodle platform. The Digital Academy offers online language learning, MOOCs, training modules, and virtual mobility of students and staff.

### Relevant links and sources:

FORHTEM Digital Academy: **https://elearning.forthem-alliance.eu/**

### Related policy goals:

⬈ **MULTILINGUALISM**      ⬈ **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Taking the digital integration further, 37% of the alliances reported to have launched a fully-fledged digital campus, and a further 45% are developing one.** In the context of European Universities alliances, a digital campus refers to "shared interoperable digital infrastructure and solutions, assisted by institutions granting mutual access to infrastructure, services and training"[335]. The key features of a digital campus typically include virtual learning environments, collaborative tools, administrative services, cross-university credentialing, and social exchange platforms.

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[335] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation*, OJ 2022 C 160/1, 13 April 2022, p. 1-8, p. 2, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.C_.2022.160.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ%3AC%3A2022%3A160%3AFULL

Several alliances refer to their shared digital platforms as digital campuses, even though each of them contains a specific combination of resources and tools. Unite! Launched a *Metacampus platform,* which is a Moodle-based digital campus. It allows students to join the digital learning offer and activities of all partner institutions. EUNICE also launched a Moodle platform where students from all partners can enrol in joint courses and access course materials. ECIU University developed the ECIU Digital Platform and the XR Campus, which contain several characteristics of a virtual reality campus, as described in Box 12.

**BOX 12. EXAMPLE: ECIU UNIVERSITY DIGITAL PLATFORM AND XR CAMPUS**

## ECIU UNIVERSITY DIGITAL PLATFORM AND XR CAMPUS

**ECIU**

⤵ **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

**Digital Experience Platform (DXP)**

ECIU University launched a Digital Experience Platform with access to learning opportunities, support services, and a Learning Management System. It is a joint IT platform where all user services for students, teachers, researchers and societal actors are accessible. The purpose of this platform is to create a common digital "home" for all ECIU University learners. Users can create their profile, select and apply to ECIU University learning opportunities across the alliance, receive support and study guidance, as well as monitor and save their skills development and credentials. The platform is connected to the local systems of the ECIU University partners and provides secure ways for learners to connect and interact.

**XR Campus**
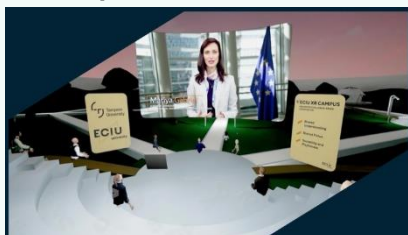


The alliance also piloted the ECIU XR Campus, a virtual-reality meeting place. Student teams from ECIU University developed an "Educational Metaverse" for ECIU University, a virtual-reality meeting place for students removing bottlenecks in remote collaboration to foster engagement, shared understanding and informal communication. The XR Campus Minimum Viable Product was launched in October 2021. The opening ceremony was held in XR Campus, involving a video greeting from EU Commissioner Mariya Gabriel. The ECIU XR Campus will be further developed soon to allow more activities and stakeholders to connect.

**Relevant links and sources:**

ECIU University alliance deliverable including DXP and XR Campus **https://www.eciu.eu/deliverables**

ECIU University Extended Reality (XR) Campus opening by EU Commissioner Mariya Gabriel **https://en.ktu.edu/events/eciu-extended-reality-xr-campus-opening/**

**Related policy goals:**

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**

⤵ **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

CIVICA developed a digital campus combining a social platform, joint learning systems and a PhD clinic, as described in Box 13.

## BOX 13. EXAMPLE: MY.CIVICA.EU

### MY.CIVICA.EU

**⌁ SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

**CIVICA**

CIVICA developed a joint digital campus that provides quick and secure access to several alliance resources. The my.CIVICA.eu platform can be accessed using partner university's credentials and leads to a page with the most recent news and updates on the alliance, as well as the following digital resources:

- A course catalogue where CIVICA members can explore courses and training programmes available, including a repository of digital content developed by the partner institutions.

- A page where CIVICA members can manage their enrolment to CIVICA courses, access schedules, and join live sessions for multicampus courses taught by professors from across the alliance. Students can also explore educational opportunities tailored to their level of study and interests.



- A forum called PhD Clinic, where early-stage researchers can identify and contact faculty members at the alliance partner universities whose expertise is relevant to their research topics.

- A social platform called **CIVICA Social**, where members can connect with fellow students, researchers, faculty, and staff across the CIVICA community.
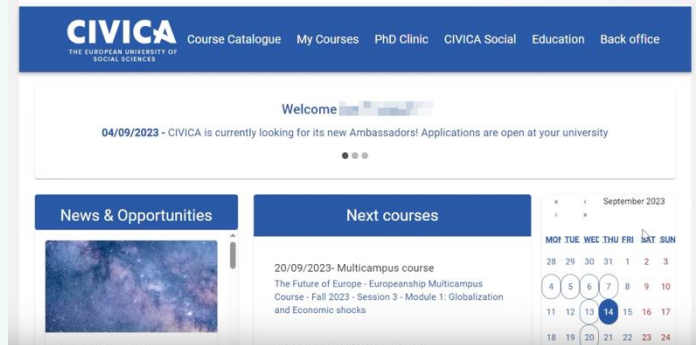
#### Relevant links and sources:

My.civica.eu platform: **https://my.civica.eu/**

Tutorial on how to use the platform: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqhyNtsx_RE**

#### Related policy goals:

**⌁ INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

**⌁ JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

YUFE also launched a Virtual Campus, which is divided into four separate platforms that outline courses and activities available to different stakeholder groups in the alliance, as described in Box 14.

**BOX 14. EXAMPLE: YUFE VIRTUAL CAMPUS**

## YUFE VIRTUAL CAMPUS

↗ **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

### Student Portal

The YUFE Student Portal is an integral part of the Virtual Campus, launched in November 2020, enabling students to engage with academic content from nine partner universities simultaneously. This portal provides a comprehensive manual to help students navigate the virtual campus effectively. Features include the Progress Tracker, offering an integrated overview of enrolled YUFE courses and activities, highlighting completed categories and outlining requirements for the YUFE Rewards – including various recognitions such as the YUFE Diploma Supplement and YUFE Stars (for more information on YUFE Stars, refer to **Box 30**). This platform is designed to enhance the virtual study abroad experience, complementing students' existing degree programmes and contributing to their personal and professional development.

| Student — | Staff — |
|---|---|
| Study across Europe at one of the first European Universities | Participate in Europe-wide career opportunities tailored to your needs |
| Visit the YUFE Student Portal> | Visit the YUFE Staff Portal> |
| Cities And Citizens — | Innovation and Entrepreneurship — |
| Experience Europe and co-create the future | Access and train the European workforce |
| Visit the YUFE Citizens Portal> | Visit the YUFE Entrepreneurship Portal > |

### Staff Portal

The YUFE Staff Portal is dedicated to facilitating local and international career development among staff across the YUFE partnership. It offers access to workshops, courses, and training programmes tailored exclusively for staff members of YUFE partner universities. This portal is particularly beneficial for PhD students and staff looking to advance their careers within the YUFE network, providing valuable resources and opportunities for professional growth and networking.

### Citizens Portal

YUFE Citizens Portal aims to bridge the gap between students, local citizens, civil servants, and enterprises. This portal is a central hub for community engagement activities, volunteering opportunities, and educational initiatives. By connecting the academic and local communities within YUFE cities, the portal promotes social responsibility, community involvement, and mutual learning among all participants.

### Entrepreneurship Portal

The YUFE Entrepreneurship Portal fosters innovation and entrepreneurial spirit within the YUFE community. This platform offers various extracurricular programmes such as the YUFE Entrepreneurial Training Programme, YUFE Challenge Teams, and the YUFE Incubation Programme. These initiatives are designed to enhance entrepreneurial skills, encourage multidisciplinary collaboration, and support the development of innovative business ideas. Participants can gain valuable experience, network with like-minded individuals, and contribute to European societal challenges, with certain activities leading to the YUFE Professional Star.

### Relevant links and sources:

YUFE Virtual Campus: **https://virtualcampus.yufe.eu/p/home**

YUFE Virtual Campus – Students' manual:
**https://www.umk.pl/yufe/studia/YUFE_Virtual_Campus_-_Students__Manual.pdf**

### Related policy goals:

↗ **INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER**       ↗ **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**The alliances strive to boost efficiency and foster research collaboration by sharing equipment, laboratories and other facilities**. Section 6.4.1. details further how alliances pool their resources to increase capability and develop joint research activities.

Alliances face a number of practical challenges of joining different IT systems and/or overhauling outdated digital infrastructures in some partner universities. Some of them relate to financial costs, difficulties finding the necessary IT staff, and others:

> "Another task force which we have to learn from is digitalisation. (…) There is no way that we would have one system across the alliance, but we have to find a way for the systems to communicate easily with each other" – *Interview with alliance manager.*

Many alliances are also preparing to grant physical campus access to students, academics, staff and researchers from partner HEIs to facilitate seamless mobility. For example, EDUC has piloted the use of the European Student Card as part of an Erasmus+ funded project and CIVICA strives to create a seamless European mobility space for social sciences and humanities.

A **full campus integration is a complex, resource- and time-intensive process facing many legal and technical hurdles**. Standardised tools, data formats and services would need to be further supported to enable progress towards the **inter-university campuses**. This can be achieved by increasing the uptake of the **European Student Card Initiative** (ESCI), particularly by joining the **Erasmus Without Paper network**, enabling the completion of multi-lateral inter-institutional agreements and learning agreements through the Erasmus Without Paper network and encouraging the uptake of digital European Student Cards (both through issuing European Student Cards and through recognising these cards). This will facilitate the digital administration of student mobility and access for incoming students to the same services as local students with their existing student cards, reducing administrative costs.

## 6.2. Joint education provision and mobility

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES** Erasmus+

**Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential**

➤ **The alliances have collectively setup a broad and diverse range of joint programmes and courses**, encompassing both short- and long-term activities, spanning various levels of education, including Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral programmes, and offering joint degrees, double degrees, flexible learning pathways, micro-credentials, and more. They encompass more than 600 joint study programmes and courses at all levels, including around 160 joint degree programmes. They also launched more than 430 short courses leading to micro-credentials.

➤ Together, they enhance the European transnational educational offer, fostering (embedded) transnational mobility, **promoting European values** and fostering **innovative pedagogies.** The enhanced and more diverse learning mobility offer of the alliances also stimulated **balanced mobility flows and consolidated brain and talent circulation across Europe.**

➤ However, alliances faced **substantial legal and administrative hurdles** when implementing transnational joint educational programmes and activities stemming primarily from the diverse national legislations, preventing in certain cases all partners within an alliance to participate in joint programmes. The work on the Blueprint for **European Degree** is a step towards addressing these challenges.

➤ **The alliances have pioneered innovative frameworks for student and staff mobility**, including long-term physical mobility, developed multiple novel mobility formats, such as short-term, virtual and blended, as well as enhanced internationalisation exposure opportunities.

➤ **Diverse financial support measures, recognition, joint mobility services made mobility more inclusive and accessible**, broadening the target groups, while also integrating efforts towards **sustainability**. Many alliances have embraced the **European Student Card initiative and joined the Erasmus Without Paper network,** enhancing the efficiency and digitalisation of administrative processes.

European Education Area

## Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

▸ **Alliances have achieved significant increase showcasing a 400% increase of intra-alliance students' mobility, and a 200% increase in staff mobility since 2019. However, reaching the target of 50% student mobility remains a persistent challenge**, calling for further progress and efforts to reach the alliances full potential in view of the total number of students studying in the partner institutions.

▸ The initiative also enhanced and **transformed administrative staff mobility** with new accessible alliance-wide networking and training opportunities, job shadowing and staff week initiatives. **For many staff members, alliances brought the first opportunity for international cooperation and exposure.**

▸ **The transformational potential of European Universities alliances also lies in their flexible learning pathways and non-degree educational offer** consisting of ample flexible, student-centred and challenge-based joint learning opportunities, including **micro-credentials, offering accessible and flexible opportunities for re- and up-skilling and lifelong learning.** They are expanding HEIs curricula, opening up further the learning offer of the partner institutions to students from all the different partner institutions, multiplying opportunities to personalise learning pathways and benefit from various mobility and internationalisation formats. These learning activities also foster **pedagogical innovation, supported by teacher training** jointly offered by many alliances.

▸ **Alliances substantially invest in student-centred learning frameworks and services**, enhancing the student experience across the alliance, and supporting student's academic progress and well-being.

▸ Alliances offer ample language learning opportunities and formats like traditional or online classes, language cafes or tandems to **foster multilingualism.**

### 6.2.1. Student and staff mobility

**Encouraging and increasing student and staff mobility is one of the main goals of the European Universities initiative**. To truly integrate partner HEIs, the European Universities alliances need to develop a range of practices and policies ensuring that students, academics, researchers, and staff can move and collaborate freely within the alliance. The following sections present a breakdown of alliances' practices and achievements in promoting student and staff mobility.

### Student mobility

**Mobility brings important benefits to student's skills development,
employability[336] and sense of belonging to the EU**[337]. Learning mobility is a key
component of transnational education. It has proven to be a highly valuable experience
for gaining knowledge and skills needed for personal, educational, and professional
development, for civic engagement and social inclusion. Mobility contributes to
**tackling skills deficit and gaps and accelerates skills development**.
Involvement in learning mobility also **strengthens the European dimension of
higher education** and supports institutions to enhance the quality of their learning
offer. Transnational mobility enables individuals to experience being European in a
more intense and direct way. Learning mobility fosters mutual respect, intercultural,
inter-community and intergenerational dialogue. In this context, the
**transformational character of the alliances' cooperation also resides in
fostering freedom of movement** among its partner universities, in line with the
Letta Report idea of a fifth freedom for the EU Single Market.

Still, "despite considerable efforts made and the success of the Erasmus+ programme
in fostering cultural exchanges and strengthening the European community, still too
few Europeans have the opportunity to study in other EU countries"[338]. As such, it is a
central focus for the alliances, underscored by the European Commission's mandate
that **embedded mobility at all levels (Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral)
should be a standard feature** in all of them[339].

The Commission's ambitious goal for the long run is for **at least 50% of students
within each alliance to experience** mobility, whether physical, virtual, or blended[340]
and **benefit from exposure to internationalisation**. To meet this objective, **half
of the alliances already have a joint strategy for student mobility, and a
further 47% are developing one**, as shown in Figure 30.

### FIGURE 30. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE A JOINT STRATEGY FOR STUDENT MOBILITY?
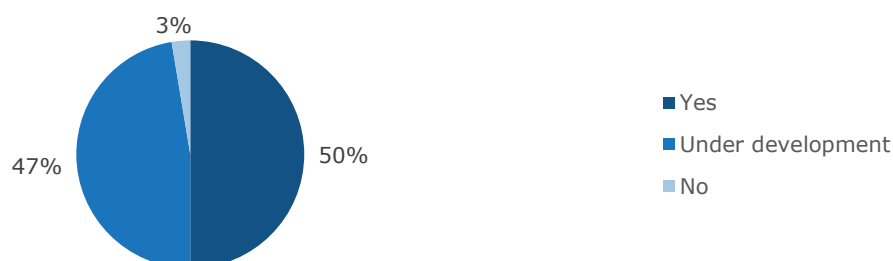


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data
covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

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[336] ESN, Allinson K., Gabriels W., *Maybe it will be different abroad: Student and Staff Perspectives on
Diversity and Inclusion in student exchanges*, ESN SIEM Project, 2021, https://siem-project.eu/documents/SIEM_Research_Report_2021_03.pdf
[337] ESN, Buseyne, S., Dias, R., Gabriels, W., Kalinova, N., *Participation in Learning Mobility as a driving force
to change the European Union: Breakout Report from the XV ESNsurvey*, 2024,
https://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/news/participation_in_learning_mobility_as_a_driving_force_to_ch
ange_the_eu.pdf
[338] Letta, E., *Much more than a Market - Speed, Security, Solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to
deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, April 2024, p.23,
https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf.
[339] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for proposals Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU2023-EUR-UNIV*, Version 2. p. 6, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-univ_en.pdf
[340] Ibid.

For example, Circle U. developed a Joint Policy Framework for Mobility, which covers all types of mobility and international exposure, whether virtual, blended, physical or other, for students and academic and administrative staff. The framework lists targets and key initiatives for each of the following six mobility priorities: 1) inter-institutional agreements, 2) environmentally friendly mobility, 3) inclusive mobility, 4) staff mobility, 5) embedded mobility, and 6) language preparation activities.

Data from the monitoring framework also shows that **32% of alliances have already established joint mobility services, and a further 53% are developing them**. For example, Unite! Joint Mobility Centre streamlines mobility administrative procedures by mapping, analysing, and harmonising procedures in place at partner institutions to identify and disseminate best practices. Similarly, in RUN-EU, experts from the European Mobility Innovation Centre monitor, analyse, assess, and advise on the improvement of mobilities within the alliance, aiming to increase student and staff mobility by combining traditional approaches with new, innovative, and sustainable forms of mobility. EUniWell has developed the Mobility Arena presented in Box 15 to address a similar goal.

**BOX 15. EXAMPLE: EUNIWELL MOBILITY ARENA AND MOBILITY SKILLS COURSES**

## EUNIWELL MOBILITY ARENA AND MOBILITY SKILLS

**⬆ STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

euni well European University for Well-Being

**Mobility Arena**
The Mobility Arena of EUniWell gathers all aspects of mobility. Dedicated working groups are established to approach mobility challenges and develop sustainable solutions that will enable European mobility journeys of the 21st century. The EUniWell Mobility Arena is led by a Steering Group, with representatives from the International Offices, or equivalent, at all partner universities and the EUniWell Chief Student Officer.

**Mobility Skills Courses**
EUniWell provides its students, faculty, and staff with a wide range of opportunities to gain skills that make them fit to actively contribute to the well-being of society and the environment both on European and global scales. Some of the activities in this context are gathered under the umbrella of EUniWell Mobility Skills (EMS), which offers language, inter-comprehension and intercultural communication training to EUniWell students, faculty and staff in order to foster a multilingual European habitus and increase understanding for transculturality in practice.

All students preparing for an EUniWell mobility are encouraged to select additional EMS courses from their host university to increase their language competencies. The EUniWell languages are English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Swedish. The offer in EUniWell Mobility Skills is provided broadly and in various formats, including courses, modules, lectures, and seminars, among other activities. The offer in mobility skills can be academic, non-academic, virtual, blended or on-campus.

**Relevant links and sources:**
Mobility Arena: **https://www.euniwell.eu/what-we-do/mobility-and-education**
EUniWell Mobility Skills courses: **https://www.euniwell.eu/what-we-offer/mobility-offer**

**Related policy goals:**

**⬆ MULTILINGUALISM**          **⬆ KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Reaching the target of 50% student mobility remains a persistent challenge**, with the current absolute figures of student mobility considered out of the total student population of the partner institutions not yet fulfilling the alliances' full potential. **The alliances' progress towards the target was hampered by diverse challenges**

**in the pilot phase,** starting with the **Covid-19 pandemic** and the major disruptions
it caused, the uneven implementation of **recognition of qualifications** obtained
abroad across partner HEIs, challenges relating to **defining and recognising
innovative mobility formats** (short-term, virtual, blended mobilities) in the national
or regional **legislative contexts,** as well as **insufficient funding**.

**In this context, several alliances have been calling for a clearer definition of
the 50% mobility target.** While the European Commission has given alliances the
autonomy to determine what constitutes a valid mobility trajectory in line with their
joint long-term strategy, including virtual, blended, physical as well as short-, medium-
and long-term mobility, alliances reported uncertainty about what can be considered
meaningful mobility, especially with regard to virtual and blended mobilities and
exposure to internationalisation activities. Some alliances are calling for a broader
definition of mobility encompassing broader internationalisation exposure
opportunities. Such broader definition would enable a more inclusive approach,
allowing more students to be exposed to internationalisation, complementary to the
physical, virtual and blended mobilities.

ESN also highlighted the challenges encountered by mobile students, shedding light
on persistent issues such as access to opportunities, financial support, and recognition.
ESN acknowledges the potential of the alliances to promote seamless mobility by
removing barriers such as grant portability and the mutual recognition of learning
achievements[341].

**Despite these challenges, the alliances have made significant strides in
boosting student mobility and enhancing internationalisation exposure
opportunities**. Over the past four years, in relative terms, there has been a more
than fourfold increase in student mobility (including virtual, blended, and physical
formats). Specifically, in the first three years of their existence, alliances selected in
2019 and 2020 reported a **448% growth in intra-alliance student mobility**[342], as
depicted in Figure 31. Since the COVID-19 pandemic still affected physical mobility in
this period, continued monitoring and data collection are needed to establish a
comprehensive timeline for accurately evaluating mobility trends within alliances.

**This substantial increase in student mobility is also related to the adoption of
innovative approaches that encompass a mix of long-term and short-term
mobility, as well as physical, virtual, and blended formats.** The physical mobility
restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the aim to achieve the
European Commission's 50% mobility target, have prompted alliances to explore new
mobility formats and expedite digitalisation efforts, as also corroborated by other
studies[343].

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[341] ESN, Buseyne, S., Dias, R., Gabriels, W., Kalinova, N., *Participation in Learning Mobility as a driving force
to change the European Union: Breakout Report from the XV ESNsurvey*, 2024,
https://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/news/participation_in_learning_mobility_as_a_driving_force_to_ch
ange_the_eu.pdf

[342] This figure represents the intra-alliance mobility growth comparing the first year of operation of alliances
(Y1), against their third year of existence (Y3). For alliances selected in 2019, the first year (Y1) corresponds
to the academic year 2019-2020, and Y3 to 2021-2022. For alliances selected in 2020, Y1 corresponds to
the academic year 2020-2021, and Y3 to 2022-2023.

[343] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F.,
Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and
perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023,
https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

**FIGURE 31. TOTAL STUDENT MOBILITY, ALLIANCES SELECTED IN 2019 AND 2020, YEAR 1 VS YEAR 3***
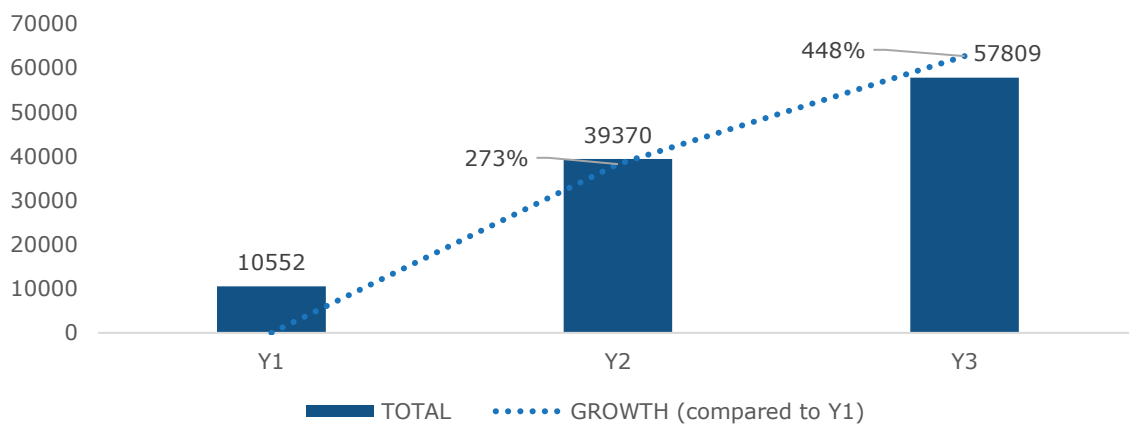


*The growth percentages both refer to the growth compared to Year 1.*
*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports to EACEA.*

As illustrated in Figure 32, before the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, most student mobility within alliances (67%) was physical. However, during the height of the pandemic (2020-2021), there was a major shift, with 77% of student mobility happening virtually. Even when mobility restrictions started to ease (2021-2022), more than half of the student mobilities within alliances remained virtual. The most recent data (2022-2023) still shows a significant rise in virtual and hybrid mobilities compared to pre-pandemic years, indicating that they might become a common practice. For example, Unite! has launched several Virtual Exchange Credit Programmes which offer virtual modules in specific disciplines, allowing students to broaden their study options by taking single courses offered by partner universities. Many other alliances offer joint online learning activities. Interviewees emphasised that it would be impossible to reach the mobility targets set by the European Commission without virtual and blended approaches.

**FIGURE 32. STUDENT MOBILITY BY TYPE, % (ALLIANCES SELECTED IN 2019 AND 2020)**
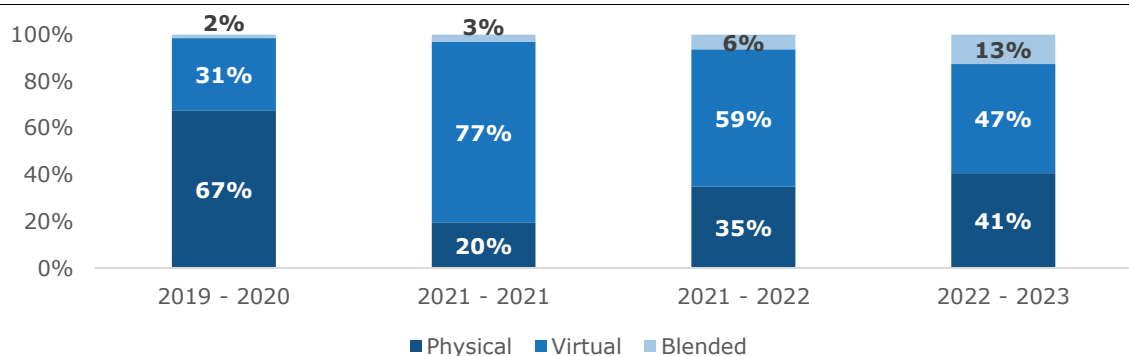


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports to EACEA.*

**Introducing a variety of mobility types and formats has brought several benefits, allowing HEIs with already high physical mobility rates to further benefit from increased intra-alliance mobility.** One interviewed alliance coordinator revealed that, while about half of their students already participated in physical mobility before joining the alliance, they embraced innovative mobility strategies after, including short-term and online options, which were not previously

common at the institution. This adaptation led to an increase in overall mobility figures, allowed some students to benefit from multiple mobilities, and **made mobility more inclusive to a broader student population**.

In terms of funding, student mobility relies on various sources, including Erasmus+ funds for individual learning mobility. As shown in Figure 33, **alliances have significantly increased the share of student mobilities funded by alliances' budgets.** However, growing funding needs to cater for the mobilities within the alliances' European inter-university campuses may mean that funding remains insufficient to meet the demands of alliance partners, also potentially impacting in several cases also other mobility cooperation with HEIs from outside the alliance. This raises a question on how to reconcile traditional mobility formats under Erasmus+ and specific mobility within the alliances. In response, some alliance coordinators plead for a new dedicated Erasmus+ funding action to support embedded and seamless mobility opportunities in alliances of higher education institutions pursuing deeper transnational cooperation as part of a joint long-term strategy.

### FIGURE 33. STUDENT MOBILITY BY FUNDING SOURCE (ALLIANCES SELECTED IN 2019 AND 2020)
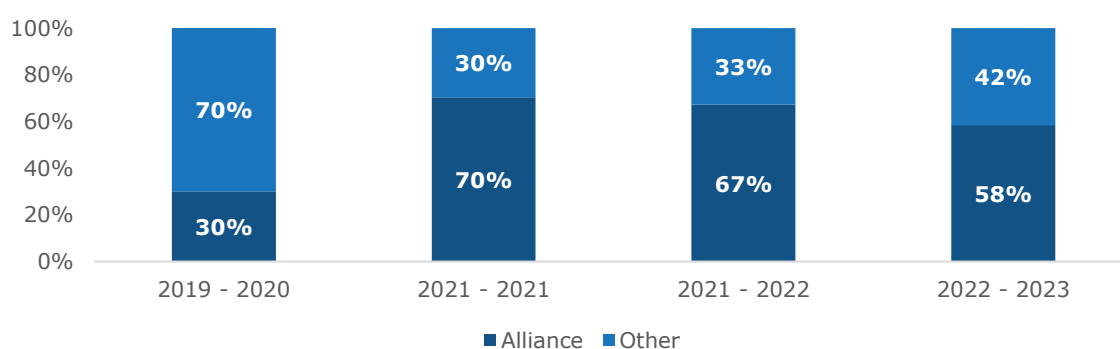


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports to EACEA.*

**Student mobilities within alliances include all levels of study**: most mobilities involve Bachelor's and Master' students, while Doctoral students are participating less frequently. as shown in Figure 34.

### FIGURE 34. STUDENT MOBILITY BY LEVEL (AVERAGE FOR THE ALLIANCES SELECTED IN 2019 AND 2020, 2019 - 2023)
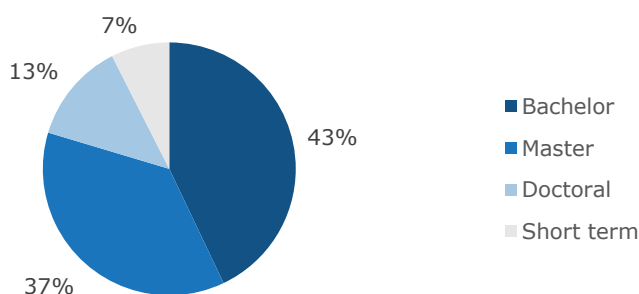


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports to EACEA.*

In their pursuit of innovative mobility formats, and to fully leverage the potential of virtual and blended mobilities, **alliances have significantly expanded the scope of mobility with internationalisation exposure opportunities** going beyond the

conventional semester or year-long physical mobilities typically supported by Erasmus+:

> "We have several goals, but everything is contributing to making students, lecturers and other employees more mobile. We plan to create new formats of learning like short programmes, living labs, and joint programmes. It is meant to boost the mobility of students. We also developed a digital campus so the students can pick courses from other universities easily, which also boosts mobility" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

According to monitoring framework data, **a substantial majority of alliances (95%) have, on top of long-term mobilities, also promoted short-term mobility opportunities**. One example comes from FilmEU Springboard Challenges, which promote short-term mobility for students to collaborate on filmmaking activities (Box 16).

### BOX 16. EXAMPLE: FILMEU SPRINGBOARD CHALLENGES

## FILMEU SPRINGBOARD CHALLENGES

filmeu

#### ↱ STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY

FilmEU Springboard Challenges bring together students from four partner institutions and challenges them to shoot films in diverse locations, fostering creativity and teamwork. So far, the alliance has organised three editions of the challenges. The students embarked on a filmmaking adventure across Belgium, Ireland, and Portugal to create a captivating short film.

During the production week in Portugal, Lusófona University hosted the event, providing a collaborative environment for students and tutors. Filming took place both at Lusófona studios and various locations around Lisbon, capturing the city's beauty.

This year's theme was "Fake News. Fake World. Fake Identity. Trust Yourself." At LUCA campus Narafi Brussels, students pitched their scripts and production plans, toured the campus, and familiarised themselves with the equipment, setting the stage for their filmmaking journey.

#### Relevant links and sources:

Springboard Challenges: **https://www.filmeu.eu/news/filmeu-springboard-challenge**

#### Related policy goals:

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

#### ↱ JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Furthermore, many alliances (82%) have been offering joint Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs), a new format of Erasmus+ mobility, launched in 2021.** They are "short intensive programmes that use innovative ways of learning and teaching, including the use of online cooperation" [344] (p.52). Participants have a mandatory virtual component where they "work collectively and simultaneously on specific assignments that are integrated in the blended intensive programme and count towards the overall learning outcomes"[345] (p.52). Box 17 describes the offer of BIPs at CIVIS alliance, which is one of the alliances highly dedicated to this new format of mobility. **Additionally, 53% of the alliances have diversified their mobility offer by extending it to internships and work-based learning opportunities.** The approach adopted by EPICUR (Box 18) is a good example of the implementation of diverse mobility initiatives.

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[344] European Commission. Erasmus+ Programme Guide Version 1 (2024): 28-11-2023. Available at: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/2024-Erasmus%2BProgramme-Guide_EN.pdf
[345] Ibid.

## BOX 17. EXAMPLE: CIVIS BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMMES

### CIVIS BLENDED INTENSIVE PROGRAMMES

⬧ **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

CIVIS is one of the leading alliances in organising these programmes, having offered more than 90 BIPs to date.

Each BIP is developed, organised, and taught by academics from at least three CIVIS member universities, and combines online teaching with a short period of physical mobility, at another university from the alliance.

CIVIS BIPs align with one of the five CIVIS Challenges, addressing some of the most pressing issues facing society and the world:

- Health
- Cities, Territories, and Mobility
- Climate, Environment, Energy
- Digital and Technological Transformations
- Societies, Culture, and Heritage

Each BIP corresponds to at least 3 and up to 6 ECTS credits, with certificates issued upon completion.

Participation in a CIVIS BIP is also recorded in the student's **CIVIS Passport**, an innovative tool that documents all CIVIS activities, credited and non-credited, received upon graduation.

Participating students receive a mobility grant of over 70 EUR per day of physical mobility (5 days). Additionally, students who opt for green travel may receive up to 4 days of extra support to cover travel days for a return trip, if applicable.

**Relevant links and sources:**

CIVIS BIPs: **https://civis.eu/en/learn/course-types/blended-intensive-programmes**
CIVIS Passport: **https://civis.eu/en/the-civis-passport**

**Related policy goals:**

⬧ **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

## BOX 18. EXAMPLE: EPICUR DISTANT INTERNSHIPS

### EPICUR DISTANT INTERNSHIPS

⬧ **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

Motivated by the impact COVID-19 restrictions had on student internships, three partners of the EPICUR Alliance came together to realise the European Partnership for Innovation in Distant Internships (EPIDI) project. EPIDI is co-funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ programme and focuses on university distance internships with an emphasis on identifying best practices, as well as developing e-learning modules on how to conduct a successful distance internship for all targets involved: students, employers, academic advisors, and university administrative staff.

EPIDI developed a Best Practice Guide and e-learning modules available in English, French, German and Polish. The results of this cooperation will be disseminated at the European level, through EPICUR, as well as at the national and regional levels.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Best practices guide: https://epidi.unistra.fr/websites/lge/epidi/BEST_PRACTICE_GUIDE_EPIDI-ENGLISH.pdf and E-learning modules: https://epidi.unistra.fr/en/e-learning-modules/e-learning-modules

**Related policy goals:**

⬧ **IMPACT BEYOND PARTNER HEIS**          ⬧ **GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Innovative mobility formats can help alliances in their efforts to make mobility opportunities more inclusive and sustainable**, which is supported by other studies[346] and our interviews:

> "We need to be much more inclusive, meaning that we offer mobility opportunities for everybody <…>. We know that students from less favourable socio-economic backgrounds are much less active in mobility schemes <…>. That is a major challenge to still overcome, and alliances like ours could really create opportunities. Another challenge we are facing in mobility is making it as sustainable as possible <…>and combining that with optimal international mobility is a challenge, so we will have to come up with clever and creative solutions there. <…> If we can use this alliance to do that, it already has been a great success by itself." – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**Alliances and stakeholders place a high value on the goal of inclusive mobility**. For example, ESU highlights that efforts to increase mobility in the EU need to pay special attention to groups currently underrepresented in mobility, particularly students with disabilities, mental health issues, older students, students with dependents and students from other marginalised groups[347]. While virtual mobility can serve as an alternative to extend the reach of mobility activities, ESU stresses that alliances need to create strategies to avoid a scenario where virtual mobility is the only option available to students from disadvantaged backgrounds[348]. In this context, ULYSSEUS MOB4ALL programme promotes the mobility of students with special needs through capacity building, as described in Box 19. Many other alliances also offer similar inclusion measures, for example Unite! IDEM pilot mobility programmes promote and facilitate the full participation of students with disabilities, refugee students and first-generation students in all mobility programmes between Unite! partner universities; EUTOPIA Inclusion Action builds on data from the partners and presents how universities can identify key disadvantaged student communities in a cross-institutional setting.

**To achieve high mobility numbers and promote innovative mobility formats, alliances implemented several support measures.** These measures encompass automatic recognition of learning outcomes achieved during mobility, financial assistance for mobilities, support services for mobile students, and broader implementation of Bologna Process tools, among others. **Among the various support measures undertaken by alliances, the promotion of automatic recognition of qualifications and European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits during mobility stands out as particularly crucial.**

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[346] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[347] ESU, *Statement on The Future of Education in Europe and a Prospective European Education Area*, 2018, https://esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/BM74_Statement_EEA.pdf

[348] ESU, *Resolution: A critical analysis of the European Commission's call for the European Universities Alliances*. 2018. Available at: https://esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/BM75_8b_Resolutions_5_ANOSR_fzs_UDU_.pdf

### BOX 19. EXAMPLE: ULYSSEUS MOB4ALL

## ULYSSEUS MOB4ALL

🠵 **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

Ulysseus MOB4ALL promotes the transnational mobility of students with special needs through capacity building, aiming to support these students in international mobility for educational purposes by enhancing the skills and knowledge of various actors, including professors, international relations staff, specialised unit staff, and tutor students. The project fosters cooperation among consortium members to transform participant HEIs' environments by developing and sharing individual-centred practices and protocols, thereby reducing inequality in access to resources and opportunities in higher education.

MOB4ALL Objectives:

- Promote the transnational mobility of students with special needs.
- Enhance the skills and knowledge of actors supporting these students in international educational mobility.
- Exchange, highlight, and apply valuable and transferable practices of mobility actions within Europe.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Mob4All webpage: **https://mob4all.ulysseus.eu/**

Mob4All report: **https://mob4all.ulysseus.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/02/MOB4ALL-GLOBAL-REPORT.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

🠵 **INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Seamless mobility is driven by robust mechanisms of **automatic mutual recognition** of higher education qualifications and learning outcomes abroad. Although automatic recognition of qualifications is part of the Bologna Process, it is not yet fully in place in many Member States. **Participation in the European Universities initiative and development of joint learning activities brought the issue to the fore and incentivised HEIs to review and reform their automatic recognition practices** to facilitate recognition of joint alliance courses and new types of activities such as short-term mobilities, online courses, challenge-based projects, civic engagement, or volunteering. The alliances have committed to fulfilling these standards and have put forward different ways of ensuring it. To support further progress, the **Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education**, currently under discussion with the EU Member States, aims to ensure that quality assurance and recognition systems in higher education support transparency, mobility and transnational cooperation, as well as maintaining high quality and mutual trust. This would benefit students engaging in learning mobility and hosting higher education institutions. This initiative is part of the Commission's 2024 European Degree package, while covering more than just the aim of developing a European degree.

**Multilateral mobility agreements are an important mechanism for ensuring the automatic recognition of mobility between alliance partners**, ensuring that mobile students have their experience recognised with ECTS. For example, EU-CONEXUS has adopted its Charter and Code for Automatic Recognition[349] in October 2022 and offers students to get automatic recognition of the outcomes and

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[349] EU-CONEXUS, *Charter and Code for Automatic Recognition of European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability EU-CONEXUS*, 2022, https://www.eu-conexus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/EU-CONEXUS-Charter-and-Code-of-conduct_compressed.pdf

qualifications of a learning period abroad, at all three cycle levels across partner universities of the alliance. The Arqus Open Mobility Agreement signed in 2019 guarantees full and automatic recognition of intra-alliance learning mobility and offers an unlimited number of places for Arqus students. YUFE automatically recognises the Bachelor's and Master's degrees of the partner institutions, as well as the high-school qualifications of its incoming students. The EELISA Charter for automatic mutual recognition and the ULYSSEUS Agreement on automatic recognition within the alliances are focusing on academic recognition of qualifications after having completed a programme and recognition of educational activities and validation of prior learning. Box 20 describes how ENHANCE managed to secure the recognition of ECTS in its European Education Pathways programme.

## BOX 20. EXAMPLE: ENHANCE EUROPEAN EDUCATION PATHWAYS

### ENHANCE EUROPEAN EDUCATION PATHWAYS

**⬏ JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

The European Education Pathways (EEP) are an exchange programme offered by ENHANCE Alliance. The aim of the EEP is to make stays abroad and the internationalisation of one's own studies as flexible and simple as possible. With the EEP, students of the participating pilot degree programmes have the opportunity to choose from an extensive range of courses offered by various ENHANCE partners.

The courses offered within the European Education Pathways are pre-approved and the recognition of ECTS in all partners is guaranteed. They are offered at Bachelor and Master level in the fields of mechanical engineering, energy engineering, computer science and urban planning.

The benefits of the European Education Pathways for students are:

- Access to the catalogue of pre-approved courses specially selected by all ENHANCE partners;
- Opportunity to easily build their own study plan by selecting from the list of courses inside the EEPs Catalogue;
- Automatic recognition of ECTS obtained abroad as part of the EEP.

**Relevant links and sources:**

European education pathways: **https://enhanceuniversity.eu/european-education-pathways/**

**Related policy goals:**

**⬏ STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

According to the monitoring framework data, 42% of alliances have already implemented a system for automatic recognition of ECTS credits for students participating in mobility activities within the alliance, as illustrated in Figure 35.

## FIGURE 35. HAS YOUR ALLIANCE IMPLEMENTED AUTOMATIC RECOGNITION OF ECTS FOR:
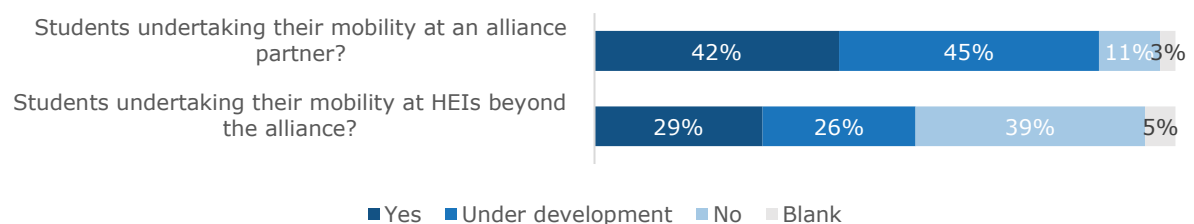


| | Yes | Under development | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Students undertaking their mobility at an alliance partner? | 42% | 45% | 11% | 3% |
| Students undertaking their mobility at HEIs beyond the alliance? | 29% | 26% | 39% | 5% |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

In addition, **many alliances noted that different academic calendars, learning management systems, and grading systems between partner universities complicate cooperation and can hinder student mobility**. **In response to these challenges, a substantial number of alliances have been working towards the implementation of the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI).** The ESC initiative[350] aims to support student mobility across Europe by digitising administrative processes and facilitating access to services for mobile students.

Figure 36illustrates the **percentage of alliance partners that have implemented the ESC**[351]. While less than one-third of alliance partners used it in 2019-2020, the number had quickly grown to **almost 80% of the alliances** by 2022-2023.

**FIGURE 36. AVERAGE SHARE OF ALLIANCE PARTNERS USING THE EUROPEAN STUDENT CARD**
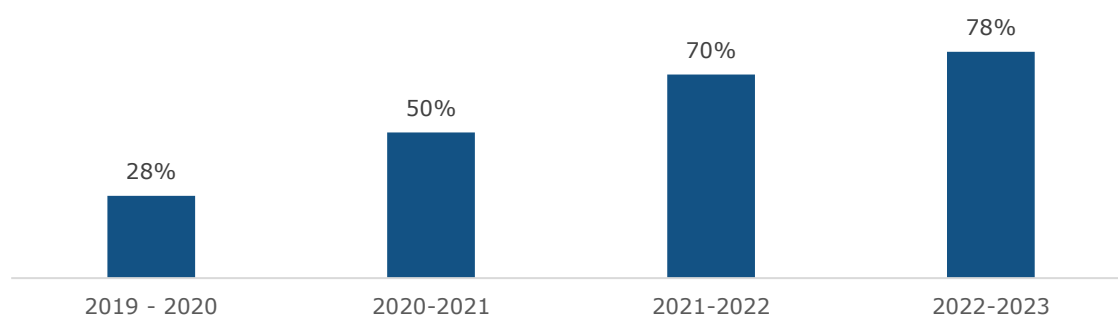


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports to EACEA.*

For example, EDUC alliance has been particularly active in promoting the use of the ESC. In the EDUCardS project, implemented in 2019-22, alliance partners tested the introduction of a European Student Card and EDUC students can now enter all libraries of the initial six EDUC partners. Alliance also joined the ESC Advisory Board in 2023 to follow European-level developments and advocate for joint infrastructural changes.

When it comes to the implementation of **Erasmus Without Paper (EWP),** monitoring framework data shows that **34% of alliances have already implemented EWP, with an additional 63% of the alliances planning to do so** reflecting the higher education institutions' need for administrative simplification and efficiency to cater for increased and more balanced mobility flows. The **implementation of EWP by the alliances can bring significant efficiency gains for the partner HEIs**. For example, a 2022 study[352] estimated that EWP could translate into savings of more than EUR 13.5 million annually across the Erasmus+ programme and a consequent 55% workload reduction for university administrative staff. Furthermore, a recent white

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[350] The initiative consists of three components: the Erasmus Without Paper (EWP) network, which enables higher education institutions to connect their mobility management systems and exchange information digitally based on common standards; the Erasmus+ mobile app, which provides students with useful information before, during and after their exchange abroad; and the European Student Card (ESC), which enhances existing students' cards enabling students to easily identify themselves and access student services during their exchange abroad. As a whole, the ESCI contributes to making student mobility simpler and more cost-efficient while reducing the quantity of paper, contributing to more environmentally friendly practices.

[351] Data presented Figure 36represents what alliances declared in their final reports, but it is likely that there are still different levels of implementation between HEIs.

[352] López-Nores, Martín, José J. Pazos-Arias, Abdulkadir Gölcü, and Ömer Kavrar. 2022. "Digital Technology in Managing Erasmus+ Mobilities: Efficiency Gains and Impact Analysis from Spanish, Italian, and Turkish Universities" *Applied Sciences* 12, no. 19: 9804. https://doi.org/10.3390/app12199804

paper[353] published by a member of the consortium leading the implementation of EWP estimates that, for example, a solution catering for the digital one-click renewal of inter-institutional agreements among HEIs participating in Erasmus+ student mobility, facilitated through EWP and - considering all entailed administrative concerns - could save a total of EUR 1 million in highly skilled administrator work hours, translating into EUR 30 million in savings across the higher education sector[354].

Furthermore, several alliances, like UNA Europa, ECIU University, ENGAGE.EU, EURECA-PRO, SEA-EU and Unite!, are experimenting with different **online solutions for seamless credit recognition and transfer**, such as blockchain technology. UNA Europa participated in the European Blockchain Services Infrastructure pilot and tested and shared good practices on the ESC.

Besides the structural changes needed to grant automatic recognition of qualifications or ECTS and implement the ESC or EWP, **alliances have also devised several tools to support students at all stages of their mobility experience, such as welcome desks, mobile apps or Buddy programmes**. One interesting example is the innovative EC2U app introduced in Box 21.

### BOX 21. EXAMPLE: EC2U MOBILE TUTOR APP

## EC2U MOBILE TUTOR APP

#### STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY

EC2U Mobile Tutor app provides interactive information on all the alliance institutions and cities to help both international and domestic students to find their way around and to integrate into one or more of the universities and cities of the EC2U Alliance. The app is available in English and in the local languages of the partner universities. Some features are available offline, and the font size of the app is adjustable to increase accessibility.

The app contains information on all EC2U partner universities and cities, including:

- Information about the city (everyday life; free time; food and beverage; local culture)
- A concise introduction of the alliance, the university and practical tips for studying including a Frequently Asked Questions section.
- Upcoming events
- City and university map.
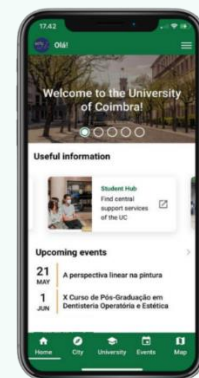
#### Relevant links and sources:

Guidelines for EC2U app: **https://ec2u.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/709/2022/08/MMT-EC2U-Guidelines-1.pdf**

#### Related policy goals:

#### SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Some alliances also arrange pre-mobility activities to support integration**, as illustrated by the EUniWell Mobility Skills courses described in Box 15. Similarly, UNIVERSEH partners organise pre-mobility meetings to prepare the students for the mobility experience, including information on the study programme, cultural and

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[353] Bacelar, J., Kuzmane, D., Meus, V., & Wyssling, J. (2024). Erasmus Without Paper Back to the Future White Paper, p. 14. European University Foundation. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11066283
[354] Ibid.

political context, weather, and relevant contacts at partner institutions. Arqus also has a pre-mobility programme, called Arqus moVEs, described in Box 22.

## BOX 22. EXAMPLE: ARQUS MOVES AND MOBILITY OBSERVATORY

### ARQUS MOVES AND MOBILITY OBSERVATORY

**arQus**

↱ **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

**Arqus moVEs: Virtual Exchanges for international mobility experiences**

Arqus Alliance has launched the pilot edition of Arqus MoVEs, a virtual exchange aimed at students embarking on an international mobility experience. Arqus MoVEs is a pre-mobility project designed to connect students from diverse academic, cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary backgrounds, enhancing soft and digital skills, fostering intercultural and global competence, and promoting multilingualism. It takes place prior to departure and lasts 8-10 weeks. Students' workload is estimated at around 2-3 hours per week and combines synchronous and asynchronous activities.
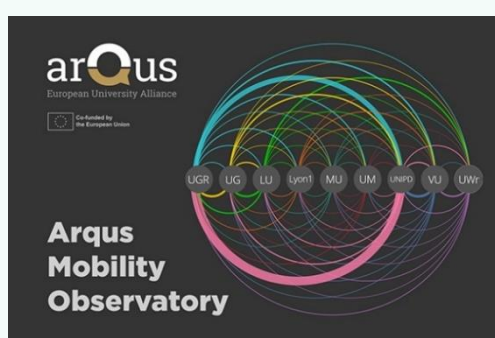
**Arqus Mobility Observatory**

The Arqus Mobility Observatory (AMO), launched by the Arqus on the Move team, aims to establish a sustainable mobility culture within the Arqus Alliance, leveraging the strengths and extensive experience in student and staff mobility of its university partners. AMO will monitor and facilitate mobility strategies, aiming to collect and analyse data to define the benefits of mobility, identify strengths, address challenges, and support strategic decision-making. It will provide annual reports highlighting mobility trends, types, gaps, and responses to EU priorities such as inclusion, digitalisation, and green mobility, to inform and guide the Arqus community.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Arqus Mobility Observatory: **https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/arqus-mobility-observatory/**
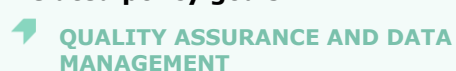
Arqus MoVEs: **https://arqus-alliance.eu/call/arqus-moves-virtual-exchanges/**

**Related policy goals:**

↱ **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

↱ **INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Alliances have made significant strides in promoting student mobility although the road ahead to reach the 50% intra-alliance mobility target remains long and challenging** still, notably in terms of outreach to the majority of the student body of partner HEIs, recognition, including for novel mobility formats and internationalisation exposure opportunities, funding.

**The alliances invested significant efforts into innovative expanded mobility formats,** introducing blended, short-term, and virtual mobilities, making student exchanges **more accessible and inclusive.** They have worked with their peers and national/regional authorities towards the necessary **changes in national or regional level legislation and administrative requirements.** Many alliances have embraced the **European Student Card initiative and joined the Erasmus Without Paper network**, enhancing the efficiency and digitalisation of administrative processes. These efforts have supported progress towards increasing student mobility rates within the alliances, demonstrating their commitment to fostering dynamic and diverse educational experiences.

The enhanced and more diverse learning mobility offer of the alliances also **stimulated balanced mobility flows and consolidated brain and talent circulation** by making these diverse internationalisation exposure opportunities available and accessible to students at local HEIs and their home regions.

### *Staff mobility*

The European Commission strongly emphasises promoting staff mobility, both academic and non-academic, in its funding call for European Universities[355].

The monitoring framework data reveals that **34% of alliances currently have dedicated joint strategies for staff mobility**, **with an additional 45% developing such joint strategy**, as shown in Figure 37. This drove a notable increase in the alliances' staff mobility figures and **indicates a growing recognition of its importance,** and a shift towards prioritising staff mobility within the alliances.

### FIGURE 37. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE A JOINT STRATEGY FOR STAFF MOBILITY?
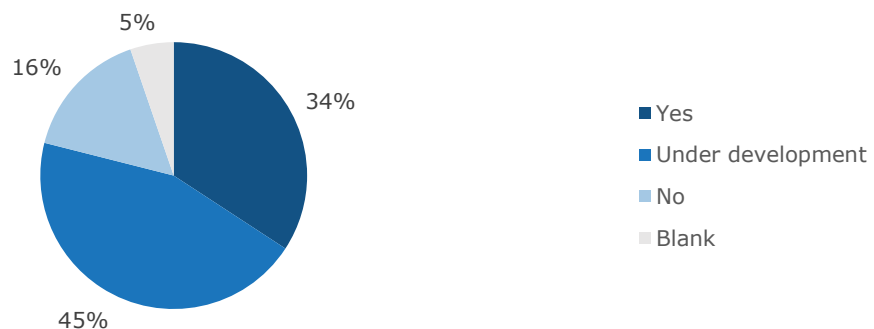


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

> "We are very happy that our staff and faculty members are getting more and more used to our alliance, and they are getting more active in applying for mobility funding" - *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**Intra-alliance staff mobility grew by a substantial 208% over the first three years of collaboration** of alliances selected in 2019 and 2020[356], as illustrated in Figure 38.

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[355] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for proposals Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU2023-EUR-UNIV*, Version 2. p. 6, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-univ_en.pdf

[356] This figure represents the intra-alliance mobility growth comparing the first year (Y1) of operation of the alliances selected in 2019 and 2020 against their third year of existence (Y3). For alliances selected in 2019 Y1 corresponds to the academic year 2019-2020, and Y3 to 2021-2022. For alliances selected in 2020, Y1 corresponds to the academic year 2020-2021, and Y3 to 2022-2023.

## FIGURE 38. TOTAL STAFF MOBILITY (ALLIANCES SELECTED IN 2019AND 2020) YEAR1 VS YEAR3*
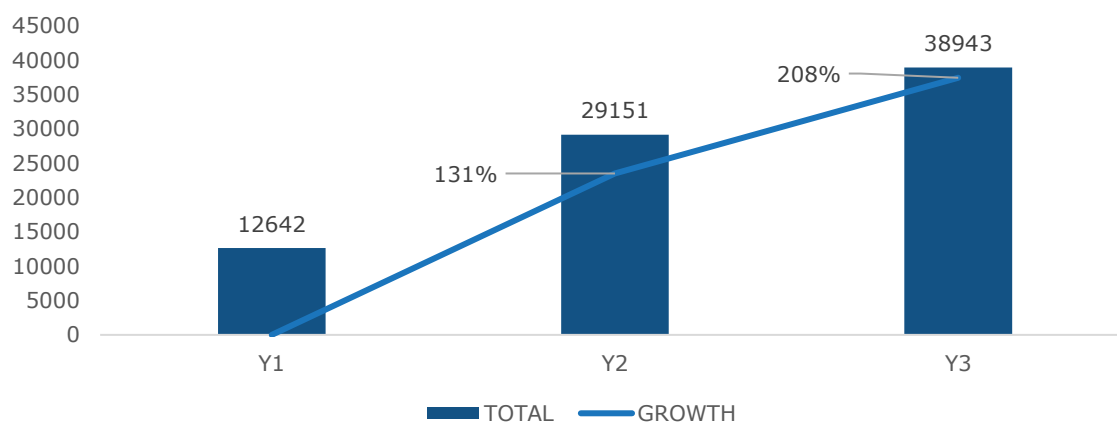


*The growth percentages both refer to the growth compared to Year1.*

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports to EACEA.*

As with student mobilities, alliances have been testing innovative blended and virtual formats for staff mobility. As depicted in Figure 39, virtual mobilities reached a peak during the COVID-19 pandemic, with 90% of staff mobilities in 2021-2022 happening virtually. As the pandemic restrictions were lifted, the share of physical staff mobilities began to grow again.

## FIGURE 39. STAFF MOBILITY BY TYPE % (ALLIANCES SELECTED IN 2019 AND 2020)
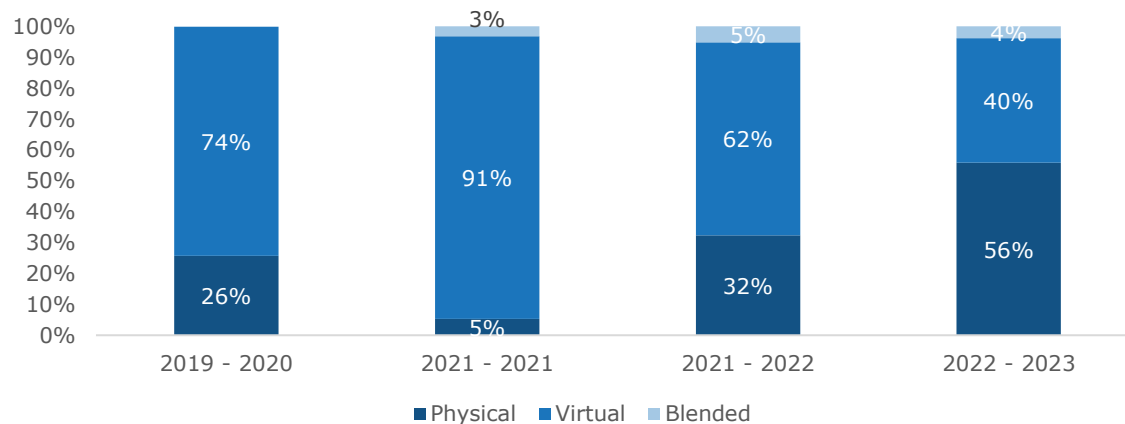


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports to EACEA.*

In terms of funding staff mobilities are almost exclusively funded through the alliance budgets. However, as shown in Figure 40, alliances have started diversifying their funding sources for staff mobility, which could indicate a positive step toward their long-term sustainability.

## FIGURE 40. STAFF MOBILITY BY FUNDING SOURCE % (ALLIANCES SELECTED IN 2019 AND 2020)
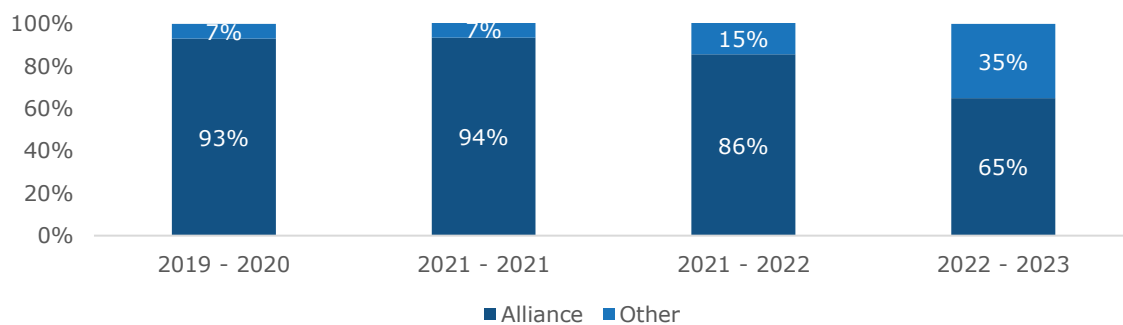


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports to EACEA.*

**As part of alliances' blended mobility for staff, there is a significant presence of Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs).** For example, ULYSSEUS has at least seven BIPs targeting staff members, academic and administrative staff[357]. Some of the topics offered by ULYSSEUS BIPs to staff include European Project management, Digital Soft Skills for Educators, and Multilingualism and Intercultural Competencies. These programmes are designed to **enhance the skills and competencies of staff** members, promoting innovative teaching and administrative practices across the participating institutions.

**Mobility of teaching staff can be valuable for fostering pedagogical innovation and curriculum refinement** through the sharing of teaching expertise among academics from diverse educational backgrounds:

> "These blended mobility formats are also good for teaching cooperation. It is not only students from the six partner universities coming together in a virtual or blended classroom but also learning scenarios that are created through cooperation among lecturers and teachers from two or three, sometimes up to four, or maybe more partner universities. We see that the teachers benefit from this exchange of learning practices and new methods" - *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

A variety of initiatives have been launched to enhance staff mobility, with the promotion of teaching staff exchanges as the most prevalent one, implemented by 89% of alliances as illustrated in Figure 41.

## FIGURE 41. WHAT INITIATIVES HAS YOUR ALLIANCE IMPLEMENTED TO BOOST STAFF MOBILITY?
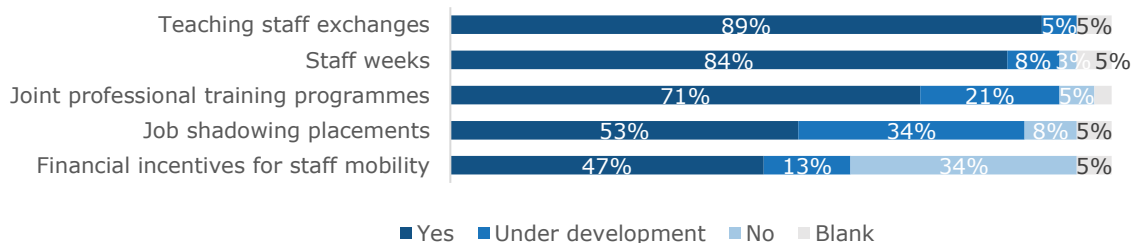


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

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[357] https://ulysseus.eu/academic-offer/?send_filters=1&method=&area=&target=&level=&location=&organizer=&ayear=&type=bip&calls=

In addition to academic staff mobility, **administrative staff mobility initiatives
have become increasingly popular** within the European Universities alliances. A
widely adopted approach by 84% of the alliances is staff weeks. Box 23 illustrates an
example of staff weeks developed by the EDUC alliance, and Box 24 presents an
initiative from E³UDRES² to bring together the alliance community in an annual event.
Additionally, a significant number of alliances offer joint professional training
programmes (71%) and job shadowing placements (53%). Alliances such as EU-
CONEXUS and CIVICA have incorporated job shadowing into their staff mobility
strategies. In these initiatives, administrative staff visit partner institutions to gain
insights into and document practices in areas of mutual interest.

## BOX 23. EXAMPLE: EDUC STAFF MOBILITY INITIATIVES

### EDUC STAFF MOBILITY INITIATIVES

↑ **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

European
Digital
UniverCity

#### Staff Weeks

The EDUC Alliance organises thematic Staff Weeks for academic and non-academic staff across the eight
partner universities to foster networking, collaboration, and international experience. These events
represent an excellent opportunity for staff to engage internationally, share best practices, and learn from
one another, emphasising the creation of a unified European educational culture.

The Staff Weeks are designed to support physical mobility to partner institutions, backed by Erasmus
grants, allowing staff to immerse themselves in different cultural and academic environments. The
diversity of programmes ensures there is something beneficial for both academic and administrative staff,
promoting an inclusive approach to international education and collaboration.

#### Staff Mentoring Programme

The EDUC Staff Mentoring Programme is an innovative initiative designed to connect employees from
different partner universities, facilitating professional development and network expansion within a
supportive European community. This programme pairs one mentor with one mentee for a period of three
to six months, focusing on staff members from international offices and European project offices during
its pilot phase in 2024.

The programme aims to enhance knowledge and skills, promote networking, share expertise and best
practices, and improve mentoring and communication abilities. It is an excellent opportunity for both
mentors and mentees to develop professionally and personally while contributing to an inclusive European
educational culture.

#### Relevant links and sources:

Upcoming Staff Weeks: **https://www.educalliance.eu/news/overview-of-upcoming-staff-
weeks-organized-by-our-partner-universities**

EDUC Staff Mentorship Programme: **https://www.educalliance.eu/news/call-for-mentors-and-
mentees**

#### Related policy goals:

↑ **INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

## BOX 24. EXAMPLE: E³UDRES² INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT CIRCUS

### E³UDRES² INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT CIRCUS

E³UDRES²

**STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

The E³UDRES² International Engagement Circus (IEC) is a 2.5-day event designed to foster in-person connections within the E³UDRES² network, which typically interacts online. Hosted annually by one of the alliance's partnering institutions, the event brings together students, staff, and regional entrepreneurs to deepen relationships and collaborate on innovative solutions through interactive workshops and networking activities.

At the IEC, students are vital for driving innovation, while E³UDRES² staff act as the cohesive force, facilitating integration and collaboration. Regional entrepreneurs play a crucial role in ensuring the event's regional relevance and addressing contemporary challenges effectively.

This annual gathering not only promotes networking and learning but also advances the broader goal of developing a connected and resilient European University.

**Relevant links and sources:**

E³UDRES² International Engagement Circus: **https://eudres.eu/international-engagement-circus**

**Related policy goals:**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

**INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

The interviews with alliance and institutional coordinators have shown a marked contrast in the promotion and uptake of mobility opportunities for academic and non-academic staff. While academic staff mobilities such as teaching exchanges, research stays or conference participation are rather conventional, initiatives for administrative staff are often seen as a novelty that is more challenging to promote within a group that often has no or limited mobility experience.

The wide variety of alliance activities for academic staff also means that they can choose activities that best fit their availability. They can get involved in high-commitment initiatives, such as offering a full course within the alliance, but they can also engage in activities that require less investment, such as joining a language or pedagogical training. Many alliances offer activities such as academic and pedagogical trainings, microgrants for research, intercultural and language trainings, post-doctoral positions, or seed funding for development of joint learning activities. EUGLOH, for example, provides seed funding for teachers to develop joint courses, as described in Box 25.

## BOX 25. EXAMPLE: EUGLOH'S INCENTIVES FOR TEACHER PARTICIPATION IN ALLIANCE ACTIVITIES

### EUGLOH'S INCENTIVES FOR TEACHER PARTICIPATION
**INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

**Seed Money Programme**

The EUGLOH Seed Money Programme aims to enable teachers to create new joint learning pathways. By using the strengths of the respective universities, the EUGLOH partners can help tackle the global health challenges that society faces in a very broad sense. The programme also offers teachers the opportunity to network internationally, by working with other teachers at the EUGLOH partner universities. The seed money for approved projects can be used for covering salaries, costs for travel and meetings as well as other costs. The partners will share the funding as outlined in their application. Teachers can apply for funding for the following activities:

- **Seed money for Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL):** A COIL is a common virtual component of existing courses in which students collaborate. At least two different partner universities must be involved. The seed money of up to 10 000€ per COIL are to be split between the partners.

- **Seed money for developing courses:** The intention of developing the course should be that it will later be part of the EUGLOH course offer in one of the relevant EUGLOH Work Packages or held as an Erasmus Blended Intensive Programme (BIP). The partners must have the intention that the course can be offered multiple times. The seed money of up to 15 000€ per course needs to be split between two partners or more.

- **Seed money for developing programmes:** The programme developed can be a Master's Programme of between 60 and 120 ECTS. The joint programme can be developed with the intention of applying for an Erasmus Mundus Joint Programme, but it is not a requirement. The seed money of up to 50 000€ per programme needs to be split between three partners or more.

**Visiting Lecturer Programme**

The EUGLOH Visiting Guest Lecturer Programme enables teachers to offer guest lectures and make it easy for course leaders to find lecturers among their EUGLOH colleagues. It may also enable contacts that can lead to the creation of joint courses, joint programmes, transnational teaching innovation groups, or any other type of collaboration. As of 2024, it offered more than 100 teaching opportunities.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Seed Money Programme: **https://www.eugloh.eu/study-and-mobility/seed-money-programme**

Visiting Lecturer Programme: **https://www.eugloh.eu/study-and-mobility/visiting-guest-lecture-programme**

**Related policy goals:**

**STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITIES**

**JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, website, and interviews*

An important distinction of academic staff is that they are often already involved in international collaborations in their research. Science is inherently cross-border, and scientists often cooperate internationally for research. Interviewees recognised that academic staff are easier to engage because they are accustomed to international collaborations and able to benefit greatly from new ones. **The academic staff we interviewed underlined that the level of collaboration for teaching activities within alliances is unprecedented and brings important benefits.** These will be addressed in more detail in Section 6.2

**Administrative staff, on the other hand, were rarely benefitting from mobility opportunities before the creation of the alliances**. Unlike academics, they are often not used to international collaboration in their daily activities. For many

interviewees, **alliances brought the first opportunity to collaborate internationally to such a deep level**:

> "The alliance created European networks not only among academics and researchers, who often benefit from other collaborative projects, but also among administrative and professional service staff, who often have limited involvement in European projects and initiatives" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

> "Our alliance also contributes to the internationalisation of services and staff that were not previously impacted. This enables partners to embed European cooperation into not only their academic structures but also their administrative structures" - *Monitoring framework response provided by alliance.*

> "For the first time, employees with specific competence in the most diverse fields had the opportunity to get in contact with peers from several different countries and get new perspectives on their profession and possible applications in a European perspective" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

> "It's really internationalisation at all levels, even units that usually have nothing to do with international collaboration, such as our curricular affairs unit. Now, because we have multicampus courses, they participate in meetings with colleagues from other partners. And even though the main idea of these meetings is to deliver activities, they also get to learn a lot about how things happen in the other universities" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

> "But I think the story that is more difficult to tell, on paper anyway, is the fundamental changes that are happening throughout an institution just in terms of how people see education, even that mobility is now is being more and more seen as core, not as unusual. And that mobility is not restricted to just students or to academic staff. In general, people weren't thinking about even Erasmus officers, or administrators, or HR staff having the opportunity to be mobile and what that might mean to their careers and to the institutions. And now that is a thing" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**Some interviewees also reported that staff mobility often translates into direct benefits for students:**

> "And the students can get better support. Because many people from the professional staff are going for an exchange for some time to another university, they bring new ideas and they also understand better the needs of the students coming during the exchange from different universities because they have been there." – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

Similar to academic staff, administrative staff have a wide variety of alliance activities that they can join. They can take language courses and intercultural competencies training, participate in dissemination activities such as media collaborations and conferences, exchange best practices with partner universities in their fields of work through staff weeks, undertake short-term mobility through job shadowing placements, and more.

Because of the lack of international experience and exposure of many administrative staff, mobility initiatives targeting this group often evoke a mix of enthusiasm and apprehension. Unlike their academic counterparts, administrative staff frequently cite language barriers and differences in work standards and cultures as challenges to mobility. However, despite these obstacles, **administrative staff mobility initiatives have led to overwhelmingly positive experiences**. They are crucial for fostering truly international and interconnected higher education institutions. The international experiences gained by administrative staff contribute to **creating a more inclusive environment for students by enhancing cultural awareness of staff**

**working in different roles in each partner universit**y. The exchanges also offer **valuable insights into the operational aspects of academic institutions in different contexts,** potentially acting as catalysts for transformative changes in their home institutions.

### 6.2.2. Joint, flexible, and innovative learning offer

European Universities are tasked with the creation of new joint, flexible, and innovative learning offerings, aimed at empowering students at all levels to tailor their own educational journeys[358]. The provision of joint educational offer, flexible learning pathways and procedures of recognition, accreditation and certification are seen as some of the most important features to be developed in the alliances[359]. In alignment with this objective, the **alliances are actively developing a broad and diverse range of joint learning activities spanning various levels of education, including Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral programmes,** recognised in multiple formats such as specialisations, **joint degrees, double degrees**, **flexible learning pathways, micro-credentials**, and more. Additionally, these offerings encompass both **short- and long-term activities**. The following sections present the main achievements of the European Universities alliances divided by degree awarding and non-degree educational offer.

#### *Programmes leading to a joint or multiple degree*

As mentioned in the European Council conclusions of 14 December 2017, European Universities alliances should "enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities"[360]. **This type of study offer is still not common for most Europeans, but the alliances are making significant progress towards mainstreaming it**, having already launched 159 joint study programmes[361] at all levels (Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral).

The development of innovative transnational joint programmes does not come without challenges. Our interviews identified that alliances often struggle to align legal frameworks, academic calendars, accreditation requirements, requirements for tuition fees and administrative practices of degree-awarding institutions, which is corroborated by other studies[362,363]. Despite the challenges, alliances see the added

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[358] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for proposals Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU2023-EUR-UNIV,* Version 2. p. 6, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-univ_en.pdf

[359] Marques, M., and Graf, L., 'Pushing Boundaries: The European Universities Initiative as a Case of Transnational Institution Building', *Minerva*, Vol. 62, 2023, pp. 93-112. , https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-023-09516-w

[360] European Council, *European Council meeting (14 December 2017) – Conclusions*, 2017, p. 3, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf

[361] Based on the data collected in October 2023, during the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.

[362] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140, and Gunn, A., 'The European Universities Initiative: A Study of Alliance Formation in Higher Education', In Curaj, A., Deca, L., and Pricopie, R. (Eds.) *European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade*, Springer, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5_2

[363] Bossuyt, S., Brogueira, P., Castro, C., David, F., Dellabale, A., et al., 'Unite! European University: Main difficulties regarding Flexible Study Pathways identified by Partners with Impact on Joint Programmes – Results of a survey across Europe' in Jarvinen, H-M., Silvestre, S., Llorens, S., and Nagy B. V., (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 50th SEFI Conference (European Society for Engineering Education*, 2022, pp. 1866-1871, https://research.aalto.fi/en/publications/unite-european-university-main-difficulties-regarding-flexible-st

value in learning how to work collaboratively across these differences[364].Further details on the challenges faced by the alliances are discussed in Section 8 of this report.

**Establishing new joint educational programmes at Bachelor's level is seen as the most challenging,** when compared to joint Master's and Doctoral programmes. National governments often have stricter requirements and restrictions for the accreditation of Bachelor's programmes, including specifications on the content of the programme, and sometimes on the language of instruction. Still, several alliances have already launched, or will soon launch joint Bachelor's programmes, with Una Europa being the first to do so, admitting the first cohort of students to its joint Bachelor of Arts in European Studies in September 2022 (see Box 88).

**With fewer barriers for accreditation, joint Master's programmes are the most common** joint degree awarding programmes offered by the European Universities alliances. CHARM-EU has an interesting example of a joint Master's programme with an embedded mobility component and a connection to global challenges and green skills, as presented in Box 26.

## BOX 26. EXAMPLE: CHARM-EU JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME

### CHARM-EU JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME

**⭧ JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**                    CHARM-EU

In 2021 CHARM-EU launched the Joint MA in Global Challenges for Sustainability applying an interdisciplinary challenge-based approach and offering flexible learning pathways. The 90 ECTS MA programme lasts for 18 months. Mobility is compulsory in the second semester, and there are hybrid and online options for mobility throughout the student journey.

**Joint degree**

The degree is accredited and jointly awarded by five partner universities: University of Barcelona, Trinity College Dublin, Utrecht University, Eötvös Loránd University and University of Montpellier. The programme is accredited in Spain, Ireland, the Netherlands**,** and France and is valid by the force of law in Hungary.

**Capstone project**

During their final semester, students work collaboratively in a Capstone Project Student teams, collaborate with academics and external stakeholders to identify, analyse and address sustainability challenges. Both external stakeholders and academics can submit a challenge that they would like to collaborate on with students.

**Buddy system**

To help students integrate in the CHARM-EU educational system and at their mobility location, CHARM-EU created a Buddy System. Buddies receive training from their university to be there for CHARM-EU students in different matters.

**Inclusion and diversity**

During the application process, applicants have the option to self-disclose whether they are a member of an underrepresented group to obtain the inclusion points in assessing their candidacy.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Programme website: **https://www.charm-eu.eu/masters/globalchallenges**

Paper on Best Practices for Sustainable Inter-Institutional Hybrid Learning at CHARM-EU European University: **https://www.mdpi.com/2227-7102/12/11/797**

**Related policy goals:**

**⭧ STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**          **⭧ INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**          EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

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[364] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

European Commission

Some alliances successfully applied for Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's programmes (EMJMD) funding under Erasmus+ to co-finance joint master's programmes. The funding within this action supports programme development and offers scholarships for students. FilmEU will soon launch an EMJMD, developed jointly with alliance partners. Six partners of EU-CONEXUS also joined forces to launch an EMJMD in Marine Biotechnology, as detailed in Box 27.

## BOX 27. EXAMPLE: EU-CONEXUS JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME

### EU-CONEXUS JOINT MASTER'S PROGRAMME

⬆ **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

EU-CONEXUS launched the Erasmus Mundus joint Master programme in Marine Biotechnology with the participation of six of its partner HEIs. In its first call for applications, the programme received more than 100 applications from 28 countries and enrolled 25 students, representing 18 nationalities. Students are eligible for EMJMD scholarships covering tuition fees and living costs.

**Different specialisation options**

- Innovative Bioproducts for Future
- Blue Biomass
- Marine Biorefinery
- Aquaculture Biotechnology

**Learning outcomes**

- Discovery and development of marine-derived molecules and innovative marine natural products using state-of-the-art techniques.
- Effective communication of scientific results to colleagues, customers, and collaborators through coherent and cohesive written and oral discourses.

**Stakeholder involvement**

This programme has been built by EU-CONEXUS in collaboration with stakeholders to match the actual needs of the biotechnological sector. Companies and research centres are also involved in the teaching of the programme.

- Integrating problem-solving and innovative solutions into current sector challenges.
- Teamwork in multidisciplinary and international teams.
- Management of innovation projects, transfer of R&D and protection of industrial and intellectual property.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Programme website: **https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/marine-biotechnology/**

**Related policy goals:**

⬆ **STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

⬆ **CHALLENGE-BASED APPROACHES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Several alliances are in the process of developing joint Doctoral programmes.** UNA Europa has launched a PhD in Cultural Heritage with joint supervision by professors from at least two alliance partners and seamless mobility opportunities. CIVICA is envisioning the creation of a European Doctoral school for social sciences, including joint supervision and shared campus access between alliance partners. A number of alliances offer joint supervision and training in research or transversal skills to doctoral students. They underlined that integrating Doctoral programmes is less challenging than Bachelor's or Master's degrees since joint supervision and mobility of Doctoral researchers does not require simultaneous enrolment at multiple institutions.

An important part of the mandate for European Universities regarding joint degrees is to provide **flexible learning pathways**, giving students at all levels the possibility to "customise their own flexible curricula, choosing where and what to study, within the confines of pedagogically sound and logically structured study programmes"[365].

Monitoring framework data indicates that **over half of the alliances have successfully developed new joint study programmes featuring flexible curricula,** and another 39% are developing them. In parallel, **nearly half of the alliances (45%) have modified their existing degree programmes to enable students to personalise their curricula by incorporating courses from partner universities**, creating so-called flexible learning pathways**.** The progress made in fostering curriculum flexibility is shown in Figure 42.

### FIGURE 42. WHICH NEW INITIATIVES HAVE YOU CREATED TO OFFER JOINT FLEXIBLE LEARNING PATHWAYS FOR STUDENTS?
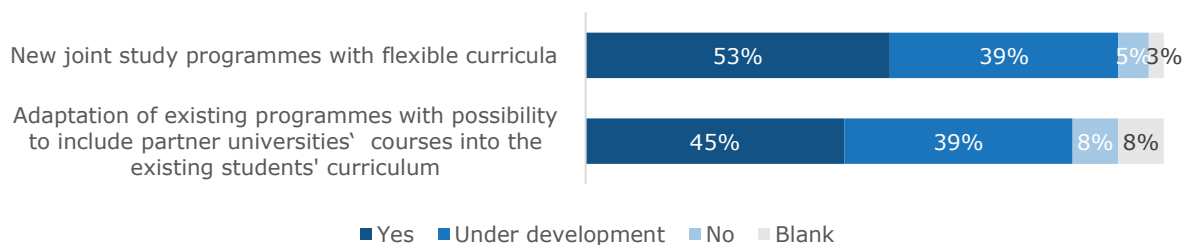
| | Yes | Under development | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| New joint study programmes with flexible curricula | 53% | 39% | 5% | 3% |
| Adaptation of existing programmes with possibility to include partner universities' courses into the existing students' curriculum | 45% | 39% | 8% | 8% |

■Yes ■Under development ■No ■Blank

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

**At every academic level, Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral, alliances face the challenge of how to appropriately recognise transnational experiences within joint programmes that lead to higher education qualifications.** Typically, they must decide between awarding a single joint degree or multiple degrees. Awarding a single joint degree is a complex process, largely because the requirements to award degrees vary considerably between Member States. Consequently, in most of the alliances that opted for joint programmes, not all partners can fully participate.

To circumvent the challenges associated with issuing joint degrees, several alliances have opted for dual or multiple degree models. In this approach, students receive more than one full degree, each conferred by one of the partner institutions. Study periods completed at partner institutions are validated and recognised by the other partners in a similar manner to traditional exchange programmes. This approach facilitates the accreditation process for each partner individually in their own national context, but overall it multiplies the number of procedures necessary for the accreditation of one single programme and students are treated in a different way when it comes to the degree, depending on their home university. It is therefore highly important that alliances work together with the European Commission in improving communication about the benefits and added value of joint degrees, and that Member States contribute to removing persisting hurdles to their accreditation.

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[365] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for proposals Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU2023-EUR-UNIV*, Version 2., p. 6, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-univ_en.pdf

The Commission published in the 2022 **Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities**[366] where the road towards a European degree, based on European criteria, was presented as one of the flagship actions to address these challenges. According to the Commission, "The aim of the European degree is to cut red tape and simplify the development and delivery of innovative joint degree programmes by providing a common level playing field for universities in Europe. (…) Such a European degree would be based on a shared set of European criteria to be agreed by all Member states."[367] The **Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation**[368] invited the Commission to pilot, as a first step, criteria for a European degree label to be awarded as a complementary certificate.

As a follow up, in 2022, the Commission launched the **call for European policy experimentation in higher education**[369]. Under this call, alliances of higher education institutions and national authorities could **examine, test and facilitate the delivery of a European degree label based on the common co-created European criteria**. The call selected **six projects**, involving **21 European Universities alliances** listed in Table 4. The Report on the final outcomes of these Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects has been released by the Commission on 19 December 2024. **The pilot projects concluded that a European degree would represent a significant advancement in European higher education, contributing to enhancing its excellence and competitiveness**. The Report details the findings and recommendations of these projects, as well as potential next steps for implementing of a European degree[370].

The results of these Erasmus+ pilot projects informed and are the founding evidence base for the **Blueprint for a European degree**, presented by the Commission in March 2024, under the **European Degree Package**, along with two accompanying proposals for **Council recommendations** on a **European quality assurance and recognition systems**[371] and on **attractive and sustainable careers** in higher education[372].

The strong involvement and interest of the alliances in the pilot projects outlines that **some alliances would consider the European degree as the logical next step in their development**, allowing them to remove red tape and overcome barriers for

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[366] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Communication from the Commission on a European strategy for universities*, COM/2022/16 final, 2022, p. 5, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities

[367] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. *Commission Staff Working Document: Report on the final outcomes of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects: European degree (label) and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments*, December 2024, https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVIII/EU/7446/imfname_11441548.pdf

[368] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (2022/C 160/01), OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01)

[369] Erasmus+ Programme, Call for proposals, European policy experimentation in higher education, ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP-EUdegree, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2022/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2022-pol-exp-he_en.pdf

[370] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. *Commission Staff Working Document: Report on the final outcomes of the Eramus+ policy experimentation projects: European degree (label) and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments*, December 2024, https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVIII/EU/7446/imfname_11441548.pdf

[371] Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education, COM(2024)147 final, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/105c5bf0-ec49-11ee-8e14- 01aa75ed71a1/language-en/.

[372] EUR-Lex - 32024H07282 - EN - EUR-Lex

the set of ambitious transnational joint degree programmes, enabling their students and regions to tap the full potential of their alliances. As such, the projects not only tested the feasibility of the European Degree label but also served as a platform driving collaboration between the alliances.

## TABLE 4. INVOLVEMENT OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCES IN THE EUROPEAN DEGREE ERASMUS+ PILOT PROJECTS AS FULL OR ASSOCIATED PARTNERS

| PILOT PROJECT | ALLIANCES INVOLVED |
|---|---|
| European Degree – Advancing, Facilitating and Fostering International Collaboration in Higher Education (ED-AFFICHE) | UNA Europa; Unite!; EU-CONEXUS; 4EU+; EC2U; CHARM-EU |
| European Degree Label institutional laboratory (EDLab) | Arqus; ENLIGHT; EUTOPIA; SEA-EU |
| ETIKETA – FilmEU Degree label | FilmEU |
| Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education (FOCI) | ECIU University, YUFE; EPICUR |
| Joint European Degree label in engineering – Toward a European framework for engineering education (JEDI) | ENHANCE; EELISA; EUT+ |
| Screening, mapping, analysing, recommending, transferring, and transforming HE international programmes (SMARTT) | CIVIS; EUTOPIA; NeurotechEU; UNITA |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on information extracted from ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP-Eudegree.*

### *Non-degree educational offer*

While degree-awarding joint programmes are a key and growing part of educational offers within alliances, a considerable proportion of their educational activities involve modular and flexible activities that do not culminate in degrees[373]. These flexible learning formats were highly requested by stakeholders like the ESU[374] as they are important components of an inclusive educational offer.

Interviewees argued that these activities are easier to develop, can provide excellent **testbeds to experiment with innovative pedagogies and student-centred flexible learning pathways, while preparing the ground for fully-fledged joint educational programmes and degrees**. European Universities initiative allowed partner HEIs to develop a coherent and sustainable pool of non-degree learning activities:

> "The formats of shared courses, summer schools and other short-term programmes are developed across partners with a clear concept, coherence and sustainable structures and processes in place which would not have been developed without the alliance" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

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[373] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[374] ESU, *Resolution: Students' perspective on the first cycle of European Universities, towards the second call*, June 2019, https://www.esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/BM76_Resolution_-A-students%E2%80%99-perspective-on-the-first-cycle-of-European-Universities-towards-the-second-call-.pdf

**The pool of opportunities available for students is significantly enhanced when their university is a part of a European Universities alliance**, as partner HEIs often open their existing learning offer to students from across the alliance:

> "While the consortium consists of like-minded universities that have many things in common, our partners still differ <…> in academic fields, research, and education. In the field of education learners can choose flexibly from a larger pool of learning opportunities, different in nature, educational setting, culture and sometimes language" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**Furthermore, learners can often undertake non-degree educational activities as independent modules and integrate them with their regular curricula at home universities**. This flexibility makes the **learning offer accessible** to a broad spectrum of students, extending beyond those enrolled in full joint degree programmes within the alliances. For example, Transform4Europe launched several common core modules on three core topics that can be taken by bachelor students from all HEIs in the alliance. The tracks do not lead to a degree, but an additional certificate is issued, as explained in Box 28.

**BOX 28. EXAMPLE: TRANSFORM4EUROPE TRACK**

## TRANSFORM4EUROPE TRACK

↗ **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

Transform4Europe alliance gives students the opportunity to incorporate a European-oriented course offer at the bachelor's level into their studies, leading to a certificate with up to 24 ECTS credit points. The Transform4Europe Track consists of common core modules on the topics of Knowledge Entrepreneurship, Languages and Intercultural Competencies and European History, Politics, Culture, Law and Economy, as well as optional challenge-based modules on digitalisation, ecology, sustainability, social change and inclusion. The universities offer core and challenge-based modules every semester, and students build their own Transform4Europe Track at their own pace and interest in the pre-selected track. All the selected courses are recognised at the student's home university, either as part of their main field of study or as additional elective courses.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Alliance course offer at bachelor level: **https://us.edu.pl/european-university/course-offer-at-bachelor-level-3/**

**Related policy goals:**

↗ **KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**  ↗ **STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND**
                               ↗ **INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Table 5 categorises the various types of non-degree educational activities offered by alliances as identified in the monitoring framework. When examining Table 5, it is important to recognise that overlaps may exist between different categories of activities. For example, a joint semester-long course could also encompass entrepreneurship elements. Therefore, the total count of joint educational activities cannot be simply derived by summing the figures in each row of the table. This aspect

has been addressed while developing the final version of the monitoring framework by asking alliances to only count their offers on three types of activities[375].

## TABLE 5. NEW JOINT EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OFFERED BY THE ALLIANCES

| TYPE OF ACTVITIY/COURSE | NUMBER |
|---|---|
| Challenges (short courses with challenge-based learning) | 528 |
| Joint courses (regular semester courses) | 442 |
| Short courses leading to micro-credentials | 431 |
| Entrepreneurship-related courses | 334 |
| Summer/winter schools | 263 |
| Research-based courses | 200 |
| Courses created in collaboration with non-academic external stakeholders (industry, governmental institutions, NGOs, etc.) | 195 |
| Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) | 123 |
| Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs) | 76 |
| Work-based courses | 44 |
| Student incubators | 5 |

*Source: Prepared by the study team based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

As illustrated in Table 5, these activities encompass a wide range of formats, each designed to cater to diverse learning preferences and needs. Leading the way, challenges, or **short courses with challenge-based learning, demonstrate the alliances' commitment to practical, problem-solving education**. These courses offer students hands-on experience in tackling real-world problems, thereby enhancing their critical thinking and collaborative skills. This type of activity will be further elaborated upon in Section 6.3. Close behind are joint courses delivered as regular semester courses. These courses provide a structured learning experience and facilitate the integration of knowledge from various academic fields, promoting interdisciplinary learning. They can be easily integrated into students' degrees as elective courses or specialisations, as shown in Box 29.

**Short courses leading to micro-credentials reflect a growing trend in higher education**. These courses offer students the opportunity to acquire specific skills or knowledge in a short period, making them **strategic for continuous professional development**. Micro-credentials are explored further in Section 6.2.4, focusing on lifelong learning activities.

**Entrepreneurship-related courses, crucial in preparing students for the dynamic demands of the modern workforce,** align with the alliances' objective to foster entrepreneurial skills among students. They will be elaborated upon in Section 6.2.4, detailing the development of key skills for students.

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[375] We asked them to provide number of: Short courses leading to micro-credentials (excluding summer/winter schools or MOOCs here); Summer/winter schools; and MOOCs.

**BOX 29. EXAMPLE: INVEST BACHELOR'S SPECIALISATIONS**

## INVEST BACHELOR'S SPECIALISATIONS

### ⚘ JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER

INVEST has seven Bachelor Specialisation studies that started in 2023:

- Developing viable communities (Slovak University of Agriculture)
- European sustainable leadership in regional development (University of Agribusiness and Rural Development)
- Sustainable agriculture (University of Agribusiness and Rural Development)
- Forestry adaptation to a changing environment (Karelia UAS)
- Sustainable business development (Slovak University of Agriculture)
- Sustainable communities in energy transition (Karelia UAS)
- Society 5.0 and digital transformation (University of Thessaly)

The specialisation studies are intended for 3rd and 4th year bachelors and exchange students. A specialisation year consists of 2 semesters of 30 ECTS credits each. The first semester comprises 5 or 6 study units conducted in the partner university that leads the specialisation. The second semester can be done from the student's home country and includes a thesis.

Students who successfully complete their specialisation receive an INVEST certificate in addition to the diploma from their own university.

**Relevant links and sources:**

INVEST Bachelor studies: **https://www.invest-alliance.eu/en/Home/Studies?type=bachelors**

**Related policy goals:**

⚘ **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

⚘ **STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND**
⚘ **INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Summer and winter schools provide intensive, focused learning experiences.** These schools are an excellent way for students to deepen their understanding of specific subjects. They enable short but immersive mobility experiences at alliance partner institutions and have received very positive feedback from the students so far. Alliance summer schools often apply challenge-based learning methodologies, can consist of site visits or engage with local communities and ecosystems, and focus on societal challenges, sustainability, green transition or democracy.

**Research-based courses highlight the alliances' emphasis on integrating research into teaching**. These courses provide students with exposure to research methodologies and critical analysis.

**Courses created in collaboration with external stakeholders** ensure that the educational offerings are aligned with current industry standards and societal needs, providing students with relevant and practical insights.

**Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)** leverage digital platforms to **reach a broader audience beyond alliance students**. These courses are particularly effective in facilitating international learning experiences and expanding access to education.

Lastly, **work-based courses and student incubators**, although less frequent, play a vital role in **offering practical, work-oriented learning experiences**. These formats provide students with valuable exposure to real-world work environments and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Although these joint educational activities do not culminate in full degrees, alliances are innovatively exploring various methods to acknowledge student participation in these programmes. Many alliances have introduced their own forms of **recognition,** such as **diploma supplements or certificates**. For instance, FORTHEM is launching an ECTS Passport to automatically recognise credits obtained through alliance activities. YUFE has a diploma supplement awarded for completing YUFE Student Journey that recognises volunteering activities, joint alliance courses, and language training, as described in Box 30.

**BOX 30. EXAMPLE: YUFE STAR SYSTEM AND STUDENT JOURNEY**

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## YUFE STAR SYSTEM AND STUDENT JOURNEY

🢂 **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

### Star system

YUFE Star System was developed to support the recognition of students' efforts in mobility, language learning, professional training, job shadowing, and community volunteering. They work as badges awarded as a recognition of participation in different extracurricular activities offered by YUFE.

The YUFE Star System consists of 4 Stars:

▪ Mobility Star: The YUFE Mobility Star has different levels. For each level of a Mobility Star, students need to complete a minimum of 12 ECTS of academic courses at other YUFE universities or acquire one additional Star through other activities offered by other YUFE universities.

▪ Language Star: Students have to complete four activities for their Language Star: one formal YUFE language course, two practice and experience activities, and one reflection activity (by completing at several stages the personal development plan on the Virtual Campus).

▪ Professional Star: Students should complete either a Challenge Team or the Entrepreneurial Training Programme.

▪ Civic Star: Students need to volunteer a minimum of 50 hours or, for YUFE@Home, spend at least one semester in the programme with active involvement with the community.
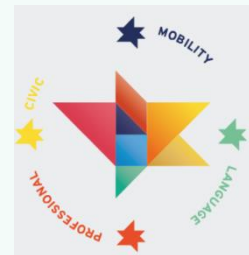
### Student Journey

The YUFE Student Journey provides students with the chance to design their own educational trajectories. The programme spans up to 4 consecutive semesters, allowing students the freedom to determine and organise the precise duration of their academic experience. Upon joining the YUFE Student Journey, students gain access to a diverse range of activities, including academic, language learning, and volunteering opportunities, many of which are available online. Students are also eligible to enrol in on-site courses at other partner universities. To receive a certificate, students must obtain a minimum of 12 ECTS for online, physical or blended academic courses at another YUFE partner, obtain YUFE Stars (described above), participate in at least three lectures by the YUFE Academy, and take part in induction courses. On average, YUFE students enrol in five courses during their YUFE Student Journey and go to three other YUFE partners across Europe to complete them.

### Relevant links and sources:

YUFE Student Journey: **https://yufe.eu/students/**

YUFE Star System FAQ: **https://yufe.eu//faq/#FAQStars**

### Related policy goals:

🢂 **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**    🢂 **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**    EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

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*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Facilitating the recognition of varied learning experiences within alliances plays a crucial role in encouraging student participation**. Whether these experiences **contribute to students' degree programmes through ECTS** credits or are acknowledged through certificates and diploma supplements, it is essential to value and formally recognise their engagement. Another example of how alliances have been promoting the recognition of non-degree educational offer is the EELISA credentials, described in more detail in Box 31.

**BOX 31. EXAMPLE: EELISA COMMUNITIES**

## EELISA COMMUNITIES
#### ⬐ JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER

**EELISA Communities** are open virtual networks that embrace the inclusion of different stakeholders from all EELISA universities contributing to a common mission that is based on solving diverse challenges. EELISA community members share a common interest and offer or participate in learning, research, innovation and third mission activities in the European Engineering Learning Innovation and Science Alliance.

There are currently 45+ communities active on EELISA's platform. Each community offers activities related to their topic and an open shared space for discussions. Each EELISA community must have:
- Participants from at least two EELISA institutions from at least two different countries;
- Three activities/year with at least one of them conducted jointly between different partners. These can include MOOCs, research symposia, hackathons, summer schools etc.;
- One main point of contact;
- Community name and a community mission referring to Sustainable Development Goals.

**Credit recognition**

EELISA Communities are strongly connected to EELISA credentials. EELISA credentials are the recognition of knowledge and skills acquired by participants in EELISA community activities and include multiple learning badges.

A badge comprises the information on which SDG and which learning outcome an EELISA activity provided in an EELISA Community addressed. Badges are collected according to levels of impact (1 to 5) on the 17 UNs Sustainable Development Goals:
- 1 = discovery (e.g. attending a conference)
- 2 = knowledge (e.g. attending a lecture with exercises and scenarios)
- 3 = engagement (e.g. organising a public communication)
- 4 = action (e.g. propose a project)
- 5 = transformation (e.g. implement a transforming action with KPIs)

After consolidating data from 73 activities organised in the context of EELISA Communities, the alliance awarded EELISA Credentials to 1341 students in 2023.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EELISA communities: **https://eelisa.eu/communities/**

EELISA recognition system: **https://eelisa.eu/eelisa-recognition/**

**Related policy goals:**

⬐ **CHALLENGE-BASED APPROACHES**  ⬐ **INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

While many alliances chose to offer both joint degree programmes and non-degree activities, some made a strategic choice to focus on non-degree educational activities, showcasing the rich diversity of approaches. For example, partner institutions of CIVICA focus on other joint learning initiatives as part of the alliance agenda, such as a challenge-based CIVICA Engage Track for Bachelor's students, Europeanship multicampus course involving professors from different alliance universities for master's students as well as a joint online course catalogue for Doctoral researchers. Similarly, ECIU University alliance focuses on flexible, personalised learning pathways and experiments with micro-credentials. The alliance opted for joining the course offer of partner universities to enable students to choose what is most relevant for them.

### 6.2.3. Student-centred learning and innovative pedagogies

The Council Conclusions on the European Universities initiative[376] argue that the alliances can be important accelerators for transforming and innovating learning and teaching methods. As put by Marques and Graf, alliances "are considerably focused on the development of inter/multi/cross-disciplinary, innovative, integrated and cross/intersectoral curricula, with a transnational, flexible and diverse, and inclusive orientation"[377].

Many interviewed alliance representatives underlined that while innovative pedagogies and student-centred learning approaches were already being implemented in partner universities before joining an alliance, **the clear mandate of the European Universities initiative to promote innovative pedagogies, and the influx of additional funds that came with the alliances accelerated the implementation of these practices**. Responses from the monitoring framework confirmed the added value of alliances in promoting pedagogical innovation and experimentation:

> "In terms of education, the alliance offered a unique opportunity <…> for creating and piloting innovative, flexible and challenge-based education formats" – *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

> "Didactical methods have become more experimental, and learner-centred" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

Alliances have created **several support structures and tools to promote pedagogical innovation** in their learning activities. Figure Figure 43 presents some of these training and support activities.

**FIGURE 43. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE ANY JOINT PEDAGOGICAL TRAINING OR SUPPORT FOR PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATION?**
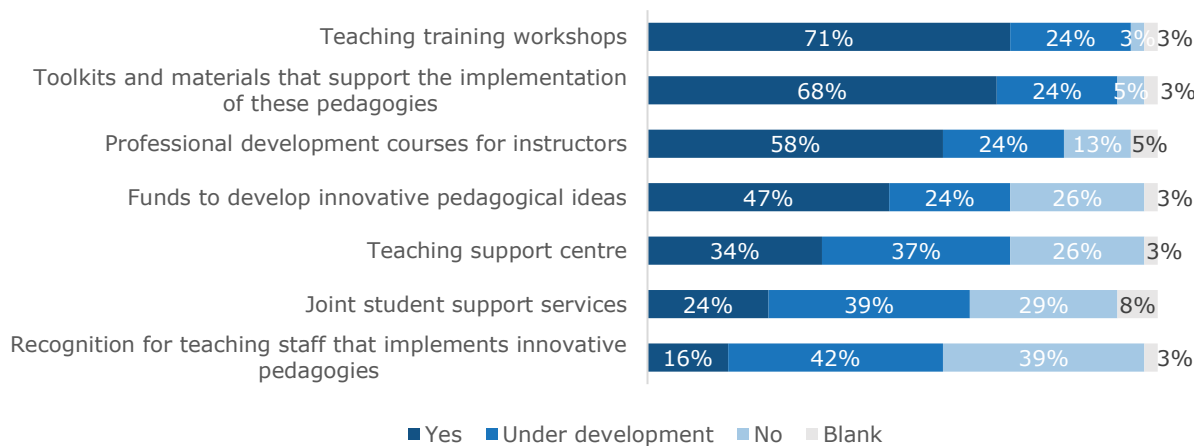


| | Yes | Under development | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching training workshops | 71% | 24% | 3% | 3% |
| Toolkits and materials that support the implementation of these pedagogies | 68% | 24% | 5% | 3% |
| Professional development courses for instructors | 58% | 24% | 13% | 5% |
| Funds to develop innovative pedagogical ideas | 47% | 24% | 26% | 3% |
| Teaching support centre | 34% | 37% | 26% | 3% |
| Joint student support services | 24% | 39% | 29% | 8% |
| Recognition for teaching staff that implements innovative pedagogies | 16% | 42% | 39% | 3% |

■ Yes  ■ Under development  ■ No  ■ Blank

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

Teaching training workshops are a predominant activity, with 71% of alliances already offering them, showcasing a strong commitment to enhancing teaching methodologies. A further 24% are developing them, indicating a near-universal uptake. These

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[376] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education*, OJ C 221, 10 June 2021, p. 103, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0610(02)
[377] Marques, M., and Graf, L., 2023.

workshops are a key initiative for **faculty development, providing educators with the latest innovative pedagogical methods and tools, such as challenge- and service- based learning or engaging virtual classrooms, to enhance their teaching**. They facilitate **exchange of best practices** and suggest a strong commitment to continuous professional development across the alliances. For example, Unite!TaL Teaching and learning Academy provides pedagogical training programmes and web seminars to staff of partner institutions including 3-day bootcamps for pedagogical experts and academic staff. Another interesting approach to teaching innovation is offered by Arqus alliance, as described in Box 32.

## BOX 32. EXAMPLE: ARQUS TEACHING INNOVATION

### ARQUS TEACHING INNOVATION

**STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

**Teaching and Learning Quality Commons**

Arqus is working to develop a common understanding of quality teaching and learning, considering that every university within the Arqus Alliance has its unique traditions, specialisations, and therefore also its specific understanding of excellent teaching.

**Teaching Excellence Award**

The Arqus Teaching Excellence Awards honour teachers from all disciplines across the alliance. This prestigious award celebrates those who are recognised for their excellence and innovation in university teaching. Having already completed two editions, the awards have established themselves as a significant accolade within the academic community.

The Arqus Teaching Excellence Awards are presented in two distinct categories:

- Arqus Teaching Excellence Award for Enabling Research-Based Teaching;
- Arqus Teaching Excellence Award for Enabling Students.

These categories reflect the alliance's commitment to recognising and promoting teaching practices that not only enhance research-based learning but also empower students in their educational journey.

**Workshops on Teaching**

The Arqus alliance has launched a series of workshops as part of their Teaching Innovation Initiative. These workshops, organised by each Arqus partner HEI, are designed to be delivered by experienced teachers specialising in various strategies, methodologies, and technologies for active learning.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Arqus Quality Commons: **https://arqus-alliance.eu/arqus-teaching-innovation/teaching-and-learning-quality-commons/**

Teaching Excellence Awards: **https://arqus-alliance.eu/arqus-teaching-innovation/arqus-teaching-excellence-awards/**

Workshops on teaching**: https://arqus-alliance.eu/arqus-teaching-innovation/teaching-innovation-workshops/**

**Related policy goals:**

**QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

**SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Similarly, Circle U. has launched a Teaching Innovation Lab, called CU.til. Its planned activities include creating a network and Community of Practice on teaching and learning innovations, and facilitating the sharing of relevant resources:

## BOX 33. EXAMPLE: CIRCLE U. TEACHING INNOVATION LAB (CU.TIL)

### CIRCLE U. TEACHING INNOVATION LAB (CU.TIL)

**STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

The CU.til's mission is to enhance the quality of teaching and learning through student and staff collaboration. The activities of CU.til are organised in 5 main strategic elements:

- Curricular innovation: Co-designing pedagogical projects by including stakeholders (courses, summer school, training sessions, etc.)
- Collaborative research: Developing collaborative research (students & staff) based on CU learning and teaching activities: impact measurement/analysis of pedagogical innovation, learning environment, student co-research opportunities, etc.
- Engagement: Fostering students' and teachers' agency and ownership in their own learning (inquiry-based learning, research-based learning, service learning, etc.)
- Internationalisation: Enhancing virtual, physical and blended mobility of CU staff and students, networking and working collaboratively
- Professional development: Enhancing capacity to reflect on action and experience so as to engage in a process of continuous learning and personal growth (reflective practitioner, community of practice)

CU.til's activities started in February 2024 with a kickoff meeting, followed by a CU.til Week in September 2024, which included training modules, a co-creating lab, and a coaching lab for academics, students, teacher trainers, and educational developers.

**Relevant links and sources:**

CU.til webpage: **https://www.circle-u.eu/about/platforms/til/**

CU.til Guide: **https://www.circle-u.eu/about/platforms/til/cu.til.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

**SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Additionally, the monitoring framework data shows that **most alliances (68%) have provided toolkits and materials that support the implementation of innovative pedagogies**, with an additional 24% in the process of developing them. These toolkits are essential as they offer practical guidance and resources that help instructors integrate new teaching methods into their courses. They are also often **open access to impact the wider higher education system beyond alliances.** For example, Neurotech[eu] developed an innovative pedagogy handbook focused on digital approaches to teaching (Box 34).

European Commission

## BOX 34. EXAMPLE: NEUROTECH<sup>EU</sup> INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGY HANDBOOK

### NEUROTECH<sup>EU</sup> INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGY HANDBOOK

NEUROTECH<sup>EU</sup>

↗ **STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

The NEUROTECH<sup>EU</sup> Innovative Pedagogy Handbook, developed by faculty and administrative staff from the founding universities of NeurotechEU aims to build a trans-European network of excellence in brain research and technologies. This handbook helps readers select the most appropriate digital tools and platforms by outlining their purposes, advantages, and limitations.

Intended as a continuously expanding resource, the document offers innovative teaching methods useful for NTEU members. It reflects past and future activities in the NTEU Pedagogy Field-Lab (PFL), where suitable teaching approaches are developed and tested. Following a brief introduction, the handbook provides examples of teaching innovations by NTEU members, suitable for delivering NTEU content to students and other target groups. The handbook is regularly updated with new tools and approaches as they are developed, tested, and implemented.

**Relevant links and sources:**

**Neurotech<sup>EU</sup>**, *Innovative Pedagogy Handbook*, **2023, https://theneurotech.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/UE_Pedagogy_Handbook_250523-1.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

↗ **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Another interesting example is the FilmEU pedagogical handbook, which describes the alliance's own pedagogical approach, called Samsara, detailed in Box 35.

## BOX 35. EXAMPLE: FILMEU SAMSARA MODEL

### FILMEU SAMSARA MODEL

filmeu

↗ **STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

FilmEU developed its own pedagogical model under the premise that artistic teaching and research must be a practice-based endeavour, engaged with societal problems. Building on the principles of design thinking, social constructivism, and the Trinity Bridge 21 model, the alliance created the Samsara model.

In the process of creating the Samsara model, FilmEU researched exceptional pedagogical approaches across the Alliance, which were later compiled in an open-access report. Samsara proposes that artistic teaching, learning, research, and production are practice-based, collaborative endeavours that engage ethically and actively with societal problems through the creative use and mediation of technology. FilmEU created a Pedagogical Handbook to present the Samsara Pedagogical Framework and provide guidelines and teaching strategies to implement Samsara and Challenge-Based Learning.



**Relevant links and sources:**

FilmEU Handbook on Pedagogical Guidelines: **https://www.filmeu.eu/images/files/D-2.2-Handbook-Pedagogical-Strategies-and-Guidelines.pdf** and Report on pedagogical best practices in the alliance: **https://www.filmeu.eu/images/files/Report-on-Pedagogical-Best-practices-in-the-Alliance.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

↗ **CHALLENGE-BASED APPROACHES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES
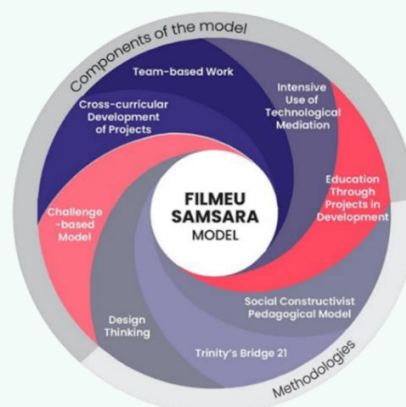
*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Furthermore, **almost half of the alliances (47%) offer seed funding for teachers to jointly develop innovative pedagogical ideas.** One example is the EuroTeQ Teaching Fund, described in Box 36.

### BOX 36. EXAMPLE: EUROTEQ TEACHING FUND

**EUROTEQ TEACHING FUND**

⌁ **STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

**Teaching Fund**

The Teaching Fund aims to promote an open educational approach, providing innovative formats for and together with European partners. EuroTeQ primarily supports blended learning approaches or virtual teaching formats that act as a catalyst for interaction between disciplines as well as contribute to the understanding of value creation processes. These can be existing course offerings that take up the EuroTeQ idea or new formats to be developed, such as a micro-credential – a new form of qualification for specific competencies. From 2021-2023, more than 50 projects were funded under the Teaching Fund programme.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EuroTeQ Teaching Fund Projects: https://euroteq.eurotech-universities.eu/initiatives/learning-labs/collaborative-teaching-learning/

EuroTeQ Learning Lab and teaching funds: https://euroteq.eurotech-universities.eu/initiatives/learning-labs/

**Related policy goals:**

⌁ **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**One-third of the alliances have established teaching support centres**, with 34% developing them. These centres provide teachers with access to training materials, technological tools, and support staff, helping them to integrate new approaches into their curriculum and thus enrich the learning experience. An example of such centres is the RUN-EU Future and Advanced Skills Academies, described in Box 37.

### BOX 37. EXAMPLE: RUN-EU SKILLS ACADEMIES

**RUN-EU SKILLS ACADEMIES**

⌁ **STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

**Future and Advanced Skills Academies**

The RUN-EU's Future and Advanced Skills Academies (FASA) develop, coordinate, and assess innovative learning offers of the alliance. FASA identifies and promotes innovative pedagogical models and practices to be used in the creation of challenging and flexible study programmes that enhance transdisciplinarity and mobility, especially focused on improving the RUN-EU Short Advanced Programmes and the Double and Joint Degree Programmes.

FASA is led by HAMK and co-led by the Polytechnic of Leiria, it also has institutional offices distributed across the different partner universities. It works based on three different teams:

- **Pedagogy Team** focuses on the pedagogical approach of the programmes;
- **Skills Team** identifies the advanced competencies to be developed;
- **Audit Team** ensures the quality and relevance of the programme.

**Relevant links and sources:**

**Information on FASA: https://run-eu.eu/fasa/**

**Related policy goals:**

⌁ **KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**          ⌁ **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Joint student support services** are also part of the landscape, with 24% of alliances providing, and 39% developing them. This reflects a **substantial investment in student-centred learning frameworks, aimed at enhancing the student experience across the alliance**. These services are designed to support student's academic progress and well-being, offering personalised guidance on study skills, and mental health support and facilitating access to resources across the alliance.

**Teaching certification programmes, which provide a formal recognition of teaching excellence and pedagogical competency** appear to be less widespread among the alliances. Only 13% are currently offering such programmes and 26% are developing them. Our interview data reveals that there is a **general lack of recognition for teaching staff who pioneer innovative pedagogies. It is crucial to explore methods to recognise and reward the achievements of these educators.** Such recognition acts not only as a motivation but also plays a key role in promoting the spread of effective and innovative teaching practices throughout the alliance. For this purpose, Transform4Europe has launched an Innovative Teaching Award, presented in Box 38.

### BOX 38. EXAMPLE: TRANSFORM4EUROPE INNOVATIVE TEACHING AWARD

**INNOVATIVE TEACHING AWARD**

**TRANSFORM 4EUROPE**

↱ **STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**



The T4EU Innovative Teaching Conference provides a platform for academics to exchange best practices across Europe. This practice facilitated best practice sharing in innovative teaching, enhanced mobility opportunities for students and staff, sharing of resources, and new collaboration formats and schemes. The T4EU Innovative Teaching Award is a contest announced among the members of the Alliance.

Good practices in the following categories can be provided in an application:

- The growth of students' entrepreneurial mindset;
- Inclusive teaching and learning in higher education;
- Digitally enhanced learning and teaching;
- Internationalisation of teaching and learning.

These categories are in line with the Transform4Europe alliance's main horizontal focus areas:

- Digital transformation and smart regions;
- Environmental transformation and sustainability;
- Societal transformation, community building and inclusion.

A monetary prize of EUR 2500 is awarded for the realisation of innovative or creative teaching projects. The applications are evaluated, and the winners are selected by a mixed committee. The Selection Committee is composed of one representative per alliance institution including members of the teaching staff, students, and independent experts.

The award aims to identify, acknowledge and recognise innovative teaching practices, provide opportunities for sharing and exchanging best examples, and encourage cooperation in the alliance.

**Relevant links and sources:**
Call for applications for innovative teaching award: **https://transform4europe.eu/t4eu-innovative-teaching-award-2023/**

**Related policy goals:**

↱ **KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**   ↱ **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Our interviews revealed that **challenge-based learning is probably the most frequently implemented innovative pedagogy by European Universities alliances**, which is corroborated by Craciun et al[378]. Beyond focusing on specific disciplines, challenge-based courses and degrees **address real-world challenges from a transdisciplinary perspective**. Having a readily available set of partner HEIs and associated partners from other fields allows to easily bring international teams of students together to work on real-life challenges proposed by a **wide range of external stakeholders including companies, municipalities, public institutions**, and others. According to Craciun et al., the challenge-based learning approach is generally more **likely to attract an interdisciplinary group of students and provides a way forward towards tackling global challenges such as sustainability**[379]. Jongbloed, analysing the cases of ECIU and EPICUR, also found that "the didactic approach and the collaborative, problem-based approaches (…) build a distinct set of competencies in the students and have great potential to foster their critical thinking and intercultural competencies" and "encourage civic engagement among students"[380].

Most alliances have developed challenge-based capstone projects, missions, learning labs, short programmes, or specialisations of varying duration, usually spanning from one or two weeks to a semester. **These initiatives strengthen links between academia, business, and society, enable knowledge transfer, raise students' awareness of challenges from local to European and global levels and teach to address them sustainably and from an interdisciplinary perspective**. Common topics for challenge-based projects include sustainability, local ecosystems, gender equality, climate change, migration, democracy, diversity, inclusiveness, and others, often related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, EUTOPIA's Connected Communities are integrated thematic networks where teachers, researchers, and students strengthen existing good practices in challenge-based learning and research, as seen in Box 39.

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[378] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[379] Ibid.

[380] HEInnovate, Jongbloed, B., *Innovation in teaching and learning through internationalisation: Initiatives by the ECIU and EPICIR European University Alliances*, 2023, https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/303153985/HEInnovate_Comparative_case_study_Internationalisation_1_.pdf

## BOX 39. EXAMPLE: EUTOPIA CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

### EUTOPIA CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

**EUTOPIΛ**

🡕 **STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

The EUTOPIA educational model explicitly aims to be a driving force for the continuous innovation of curriculum development in the European Higher Education Area, and broader education agenda. Existing and operational Connected Learning Communities (CLCs) and more recently launched Connected Communities (CCs) thematically cover a wide range of priorities: sustainable development goals, climate change, urbanism, active citizenship, digital and green transition, and education. CLCs and CCs enable the partner universities to capitalise on their potential for innovation and societal impact based on existing good practices. They provide the environment for connecting existing practices in all domains of activity.

Today's CC's are integrated thematic networks where teachers, researchers, and students cooperate in cross-campus knowledge activities. The CC's are aligned with the EUTOPIA alliance vision on openness and aim to bridge the typical divides that still characterise academia:

- Connecting academia and society by focusing their knowledge activities on key challenges in the society, and thereby involving a wide range of external stakeholders in the business world, the public sector, and cultural organisations;
- Teaching and Research by combining participants' experience and testing different formats of cross-campus cooperation and creating impact that goes beyond the ad hoc experience of staff and students involved;
- Inclusion by opening up the knowledge to a wide range of potential learners by using flexible and/or blended formats for cross-campus cooperation.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Description of the education model: **https://www.upf.edu/web/eutopia/educational-model**

Integrated connected communities: **https://eutopia-university.eu/english-version/integrated-connected-communities**

**Related policy goals:**

🡕 **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

🡕 **EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY**

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Another interesting example of the application of innovative learning tools in alliances is UNIVERSEH's use of remote and interactive experimentation platforms, which bring live data from aerospace experiments to the alliance classrooms, as described in Box 40.

## BOX 40. EXAMPLE: UNIVERSEH INTERACTIVE AND REMOTE EXPERIMENTATION PLATFORM

**UNIVERSEH AND INTERACTIVE REMOTE EXPERIMENTATION PLATFORM**

**UNIVERSEH**

➤ **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

UNIVERSEH joined the IREAL (Interactive Remote Experimentation for Aerospace Learning) Platform to digitalise scientific lab experiments and support active learning.

IREAL digital platform allows students and researchers to conduct lab experiments remotely from any device, ensuring accessibility and scalability regardless of class size. Unlike simulations, IREAL captures real experimental data from physical installations, providing realistic and accurate results. The platform supports multiple science fields and continually updates its offerings, providing a comprehensive, always-on resource for aerospace and other scientific education. ISAE-SUPAERO (Higher Institute of Aeronautics and Space, part of the University of Toulouse) developed the platform and through the support of UNIVERSEH it will be enhanced and used at the alliance level.

Some of the digitalised experiments include:

- Airplane stability: Using a wind-tunnel experiment to show the behaviour difference between a stable and an unstable aeroplane.
- Stokes' law and viscosity: Estimating fluid viscosity by measuring the fall time of a sphere in the liquid using a 'falling ball' viscometer.
- Centrifugal water pump: use of centrifugal pumps in transporting fluids by generating centrifugal forces with a rotating pump impeller.
- Luna Lab Velocity: Observation of diverse speeds on a lunar rover with varying environment configurations.

**Relevant links and sources:**

UNIVERSEH Pre-requisites for hybrid learning and virtual classroom: **https://universeh.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/D-4.6-Prerequisites-for-hybrid-learning-and-virtual-classroom.pdf**
IREAL platform: **https://ireal.isae-supaero.fr/www/**

**Related policy goals:**

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**

➤ **JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Alliances also use their structured cooperation framework to reflect on the future of the teaching profession and advance teacher education across all educational levels.** ENLIGHT Teacher Education Network focuses on the internationalisation of teacher education programmes, including on intercultural and professionally oriented skills of future school teachers. Some alliances also utilise synergies with Erasmus+ Teacher Academies, for example CIVIS or EUniWell who aim to establish School Networks for teachers as part of the alliance. EUniWell also organises a School Ambassador Programme targeting the promotion of European values and educational opportunities at both primary and secondary levels.

### 6.2.4. Key skills development

Several studies highlight the need for Europe to address the skills shortages and gaps in order to strengthen its competitiveness[381],[382]. At political level, the **importance of skills development for the future of Europe, its competitiveness and strategic autonomy in key sectors such as the green and digital transitions, has been increasingly emphasised, including in President's Ursula von der Leyen Political Guidelines** for the next European Commission 2024-2029. This political impetus is embodied by the Commission's vision of establishing a **Union of Skills**. The guidelines highlight that Europe needs to be able to respond quickly to the labour market's skills needs and those of the green and digital transitions[383]. As outlined in the Draghi Report, "competitiveness today is less about relative labour costs and more about knowledge and skills embodied in the labour force"[384] while "labour shortages will be most pronounced in high-skilled, non-manual occupations – i.e. those requiring high level of education". In this context, **higher education institutions and the alliances are instrumental in delivering on the ambitions.**

In that sense, alliances extended their focus beyond specific subject knowledge and assist students in developing key transferable skills. These skills are essential for enabling students to become actively engaged citizens and to adapt to the rapidly evolving world of work, while developing the green and digital skills that are increasingly demanded by society[385]. Esparza Masana and Woolford also report that the alliances have been very successful in ensuring that learning outcomes meet job markets' needs and that curricula integrate 21st century skills[386].

**Alliances promote the development of key skills in two main ways, first, by embedding the skills as learning outcomes in courses and degrees, and, second, by developing specific courses and learning activities that aim to develop those skills**. Figure 44 provides a clear indication of how European Universities alliances are integrating key skills into their educational offers to support the development of well-rounded, adaptable graduates who are equipped to thrive in a modern and connected world.

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[381] Ibid. p. 9

[382] Letta, E., *Much More than a Market: Speed, Security, Solidarity - Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, April 2024. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf

[383] von der Leyen, U., *Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2025*, Strasburg, July 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf

[384] Draghi, M. *The future of European competitiveness: Part A | A competitiveness strategy for Europe*, September 2024, p. 9 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961_en

[385] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for proposals Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU2023-EUR-UNIV*, Version 2. p. 6, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-univ_en.pdf

[386] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

## FIGURE 44. TO WHAT EXTENT DO ALLIANCE PROGRAMMES, COURSES, AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF KEY SKILLS

| Skill | Yes, integrated into existing courses | Yes, as separate courses or training sessions | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Problem-solving skills | 82% | 11% | | 8% |
| Digital skills | 71% | 21% | | 8% |
| Intercultural skills | 71% | 18% | | 11% |
| Entrepreneurial skills | 66% | 24% | | 11% |
| Green skills | 71% | 13% | 8% | 8% |
| Democratic competencies/citizenship | 63% | 13% | 16% | 8% |

■ Yes, integrated into existing courses  ■ Yes, as separate courses or training sessions  ■ No  ■ Blank

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

The data reveals that **problem-solving skills** are given the highest priority, with a significant 82% of alliances incorporating these skills into existing courses and 11% offering separate courses to support their development, totalling 93% of the alliances. This integration aligns with the current educational focus on developing students' abilities to navigate complex issues and devise effective solutions.

**Digital skills are similarly prioritised**, with 92% of alliances incorporating them into their educational offer. This reflects the critical importance of digital literacy in today's technology-driven world, as they form the foundation of a modern, innovative economy. As described by the Letta Report, "pan-European programmes dedicated to enhancing digital skills and literacy are imperative for empowering citizens to fully participate in the knowledge economy"[387]. The importance of developing digital skills is reflected in the decision to establish the EU Digital Decade, which aims for at least 80% of Europeans aged 16-74 having basic digital skills[388]. Yet, Europe still has digital skills gaps, with many Europeans lacking basic digital skills, a problem which is even greater in rural areas, as well as further needs for high level specialist skills[389, 390].

Box 41 describes the example of ENGAGE.EU, which launched a joint programme on Digital Transformation and Work Integrated Learning.

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[387] Letta, E.., *Much More than a Market: Speed, Security, Solidarity - Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizen*, April 2024, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf
[388] European Parliament, Council of the European Union, *Decision (EU) 2022/2481 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 December 2022 establishing the Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030*, OJ L 323, 19 December 2022, p. 4–26., https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2022/2481/oj
[389] Letta, E. *Much More than a Market: Speed, Security, Solidarity - Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, April 2024, p. 21, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf
[390] Draghi, M. The future of European competitiveness: Part A | A competitiveness strategy for Europe, September 2024, p.9 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961_en

## BOX 41. EXAMPLE: ENGAGE.EU JOINT PROGRAMME ON DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

### ENGAGE.EU JOINT PROGRAMME ON DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

**KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

**Joint programme in Digital Transformation**

The Joint Programme in Digital Transformation equips students with the latest technology skills and knowledge to understand data, leverage digital disruption, create societal impact, and prepare for a digital future. The programme includes working with some of the largest tech and digital companies on innovative case studies and workshops. The programme ends with an in-person summer seminar at one of the partner universities. The programme addresses the world's greatest digital transformations, technologies, and solutions.

**Work Integrated Learning**

WIL is an educational approach using relevant work-based experiences to provide lifelong learners with the opportunity to integrate theory with the meaningful practice of work. The programmes consist of intensive courses addressing topics linked to sustainable development. Each format includes a variety of activities that are organised around two main phases: Input and Implementation. By leveraging and combining new knowledge and skills with their existing know-how and experience, WIL participants achieve meaningful positive impact and learn to become effective changemakers in their professional environment.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Information session on Joint Programme in Digital Transformation 2023:
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5wy8ramSS8&source_ve_path=MjM4NTE&feature=emb_title** and Presentation of the Work Integrated Learning Programme:
**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LRJVE145WM**

**Related policy goals:**

**JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**　　　**SUSTAINABLE COOPERATION**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

European Universities are also exploiting synergies between initiatives such as the European Cybersecurity Skills Academy and funding instruments such as Digital Europe Programme. They play a key role to enhance digital skills development including for young people, notably identified as strong possible contributors to the industry-academia network to bridge cybersecurity skills gap[391]. Several alliances also developed Master's in specialised digital fields like the Arqus Master's Programme in International Cybersecurity and Cyberintelligence or the "GreenChips-EDU[392], allowing for the set-up of joint programmes to train the urgently needed specialists for the semiconductor industry set up by 6 Unite! partners.

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[391] European Commission, 'News Article on the launch of Industry-Academia Network to bridge cybersecurity skills gap', European Commission Digital Strategy website, 2024, accessed 2 January 2025, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/news/commission-launches-industry-academia-network-bridge-cybersecurity-skills-gap

[392] GreenChips-EDU project website, accessed 15 January 2025, https://www.tugraz.at/projekte/greenchips-edu/home. GreenChips-EDU project, https://www.tugraz.at/projekte/greenchips-edu/home, last accessed on 15 January 2025.

Also related to the **development of digital skills**, alliances have been increasingly focusing on supporting students and staff in using Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. Students can gain relevant AI skills through degree programmes, such as Ulysseus Joint Master's Degree in "AI for Business Transformation"[393], and short courses, such as Una Europa's MOOC on "AI in Society"[394], 4EU+'s online course on "Thinking AI"[395], and EHANCE's summer course on "Ethics and Epistemology of AI"[396]. Alliances also foster AI skills in staff, with initiatives like Una Europa's Staff Week "Embracing AI for Professional Development"[397].

Beyond digital skills, Figure 44 shows that **intercultural skills**, equally essential in our globalised society, are also being actively promoted by 89% of the alliances, indicating a strong commitment to fostering global awareness and cross-cultural communication skills. These are also part of a successful student mobility strategy and contribute to promoting European values.

**Entrepreneurial skills**, pivotal for driving innovation and economic growth, are supported by 90% of the alliances, highlighting their commitment to preparing students for the evolving demands of the labour market and society. As shown in Table 5, alliances have launched **334 entrepreneurship-related courses**. These initiatives are usually **connected with external stakeholders** as drivers of societal engagement within alliances. They often entail **learning through practice** and embed **challenge-based** learning approaches, encouraging students to develop their own solutions to business and societal problems. One example is the FORTHEM International Start-up Days. To join the three-day event, students from all the FORTHEM partner universities applied with individual business ideas. Selected students were then invited to learn essential skills of entrepreneurship and starting a business. Additionally, as described in Box 30, YUFE Star System includes a Professional Star that rewards personal and professional development activities focused on developing an entrepreneurial and creative mindset. Circle U. also offers a dedicated course on "Entrepreneurial Change-making", which covers innovation and entrepreneurship to tackle major social, economic, and environmental challenges. Participants have online seminars by professors from different universities and work in multidisciplinary and multicultural teams to develop a business idea.

Aligned with the global urgency for sustainability and EU priorities related to the green transition[398],[399], **green skills** are included in 84% of the alliances' programmes. Alliances' programmes demonstrate a commitment to **fostering environmental awareness, promoting climate and environmental literacy across all levels and disciplines, and adopting whole-institution approaches to sustainability**.

[393] Ulysseus, 'Joint Master Degree in AI for Business Transformation', Ulysseus website, accessed 7 January 2025, https://ulysseus.eu/academic-offer/joint-master-degree-in-ai-for-business-transformation/

[394] Una-Europa, 'MOOC on "AI in Society"', Una-Europa website, accessed 7 January 2025, https://www.una-europa.eu/study/mooc-ai-society

[395] 4EU+, 'Thinking AI: Bringing together ethical, legal and social aspects of AI', 4EU+ website, accessed 7 January 2025, https://4euplus.eu/4EU-464.html#:~:text=Thinking%20AI%20-%204EU%2B%20Alliance%20Thinking%20AI%20Thinking,Center%20for%20Artificial%20Intelligence%29%20and%20the%204EU%2B%20Alliance

[396] EHANCE, 'Ethics and Epistemology of AI - Enhance Summer Course', accessed 7 January 2025, https://www.tu.berlin/en/philtech/study-and-teaching/courses/ethics-and-epistemology-of-ai

[397] Una Europa, 'Staff Week "Embracing AI for Professional Development"', 2024, accessed 7 January 2025 https://www.una-europa.eu/calendar/una-europa-staff-week-2024-embracing-ai-for-professional-development

[398] Draghi, M., The future of European competitiveness: Part A | A competitiveness strategy for Europe, September 2024, p. 9 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961_en
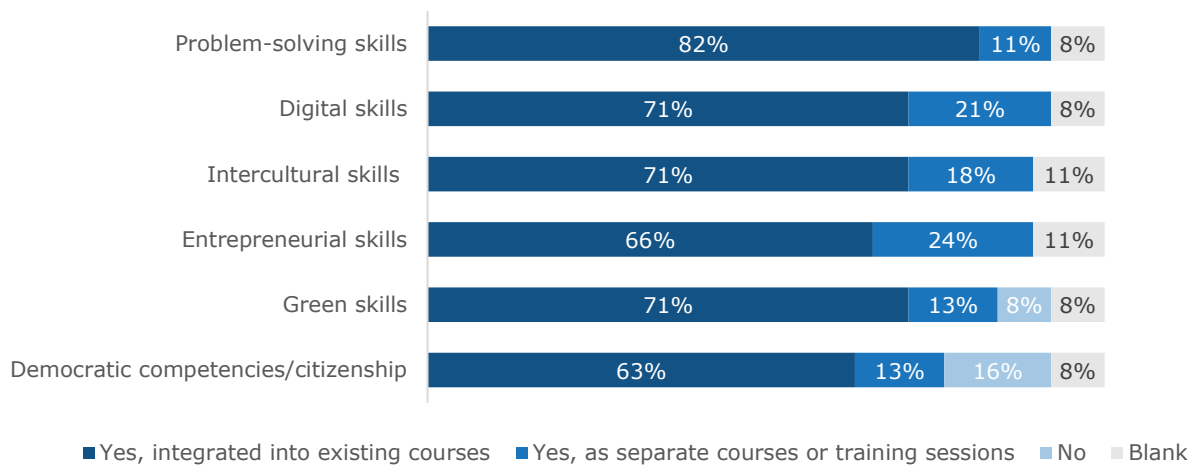
[399] von der Leyen, U., Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2025, Strasburg, July 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf

They also provide opportunities for **climate upskilling and reskilling** through lifelong
learning, including flexible learning modules some leading to micro-credentials, while
**integrating climate-relevant research into education**. Examples of the alliances'
activities to develop green skills are Circle U.'s project on Conceptualising and
Operationalising 'Sustainable Education' (COSE), which supported the design of new
pedagogical initiatives across the Circle U. alliance geared towards sustainable
education initiatives[400]; AURORA developed 10 ECTS credit micro-credentials on
"Sustainability & Climate Change" allowing students who successfully completed this
programme to receive a digital certificate from the alliance issued by one of the
partners, Una Europa micro-credential programme in Sustainability[401] gives a holistic
understanding of global sustainability challenges and how to address them; and offers
a flexible way to supplement degrees from any discipline with research-based
knowledge on sustainable development and skills.

Furthermore, the development of **democratic competencies and citizenship**,
crucial for nurturing informed and engaged citizens, is supported by 76% of the
alliances, reinforcing the role of higher education in strengthening democratic
European values. These activities are described in more detail in Section 6.5.1,
dedicated to the Promotion of European values and alignment with EU priorities. One
important example comes from the Circle U. Knowledge Hub on Democracy, which
aims to develop strategies to strengthen democracy and civic engagement, as
described in Box 89.

Finally, alliances have supported the development of **soft skills to boost student
employability**. EUGLOH, for example, launched a joint short-term programme
focused on communication and presentation skills, as described in Box 42.

### BOX 42. EXAMPLE: EUGLOH JOINT SHORT-TERM PROGRAMMES

**EUGLOH JOINT SHORT-TERM PROGRAMMES**

**KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

One of the alliance's main goals is to enable its students and staff to experience stays at partner
universities. To achieve this, EUGLOH is creating opportunities for short-term mobilities, such as
workshops, summer schools, internships and conferences across its network. These joint short-term
programmes are dedicated to the development of transversal skills, entrepreneurial or specific
competencies including entrepreneurship.

One example of these courses is the short programme in Communication and Presentation Skills in
Professional Environment. The course contained online lectures about verbal and nonverbal
communication, interactive sessions to apply the theoretical knowledge in practice, case study analysis
and small group projects that should enhance the communication process in professional environments.
The last course took place in person at the University of Novi Sad. Students received a scholarship to
cover their travel and accommodation costs.

The course was open to EUGLOH students at all levels.

**Relevant links and sources:**

**EUGLOH Short Course on Communication and Presentation Skills:**
**https://www.eugloh.eu/events/communication-and-presentation-skills**

**Related policy goals:**

**STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITIES**

EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

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[400] Circle U., *White paper on the future of higher education, science and universities*, 2023,
https://www.circle-u.eu/resources/publications/future-of-higher-education/white-paper-future-higher-
education.pdf
[401] UNA Europa, micro-credential programme in sustainability, accessed on January 15, https://www.una-
europa.eu/study/microcredential-sustainability

When alliances choose to integrate key skills into existing courses, it is important that they clearly outline the skills developed in each learning activity and that they create tools to ensure that teachers can successfully implement and measure the skills gained by students in their courses. The approach of Aurora, which developed several important tools to measure learning outcomes and key skills developed by students is detailed in Box 43.

### BOX 43. EXAMPLE: AURORA'S ACTIVITIES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF KEY SKILLS

**AURORA ACTIVITIES FOR KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**                    △UROR△

   ↑ **KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

The Aurora Competence Framework (ACF) offers diverse tools to help academic teachers to articulate learning outcomes and to integrate those in their regular classes. It helps them to assess the actual development of the identified competencies. The ACF reflects the Aurora Education Vision: the alliance must equip students with not just the subject expertise, but also the broader skills and mindsets to contribute to society. Thus, the ACF consists of three components that have distinct, but complementary and synergistic impacts:

**Social entrepreneurship competencies**

The Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation Scales to Measure Impact Competencies (SEISMIC) was created by Aurora to measure whether the alliance is able to equip students with the skills and mindset to address key societal challenges through social entrepreneurship and innovation. While SEISMIC has been developed as a tool to assess aggregated data at the level of study programmes, it can also be used by students for self-assessment.

**Learning outcomes**

LOUIS is a tool based on the VALUE Rubrics to strengthen the general academic and personal learning outcomes in courses and programmes in university education. It bridges the gap between the broad and generic descriptions of general competencies in Qualification Frameworks and national or institutional policy documents on the one hand, and, on the other hand, observed and desired students' performance, demonstrating growth in such general competencies.16 competences were defined is the LOUIS tool.

**BEVI (Beliefs, Events, Values Inventory)**

The Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) is an accessible, adaptable, and powerful analytic tool that can be used to measure the impact of teaching, learning, and training activities on the mindsets of students and staff. It is currently in use in Aurora to better understand and handle the diversity of students in terms of their fundamental beliefs and attitudes that influence their learning.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Aurora Competence Framework: **https://aurora-universities.eu/aurora-competence-framework/**

Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation Scales to Measure Impact Competencies:

**https://aurora-universities.eu/new/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/SEISMIC.pdf**

LOUIS Tool: **https://aurora-universities.eu/new/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/All-rubrics-hyperlinked_Vs29_11_2022.pdf**

Value Rubrics: **www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics**

**Related policy goals:**

↑ **QUALITY ASSURANCE AND DATA MANAGEMENT**

↑ **EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

One of the goals of the European Universities alliances, as expressed in the *Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative - Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society* was to make lifelong learning a reality in higher

education[402]. Lifelong learning is essential to meet the needs of a society in fast transformation due to technological development, growing impact of digital and green transitions, the developments in the field of artificial intelligence, or demographic changes. It is increasingly seen as a priority to ensure European competitiveness and reinforce its autonomy in strategic sectors: "The EU must ensure that all workers have a right to education and retraining, allowing them to move into new roles as their companies adopt technology, or into good jobs in new sectors"[403].

However, Europe is still far from achieving the 2030 target that at least 60% of adults should participate in training every year[404], as "participation in adult education and training is relatively low overall and varies significantly across the EU"[405].

Lifelong learning opportunities are very diverse, as they present opportunities to accommodate non-traditional learners, meet the demand for new skills in the labour market, and engage learners, regardless of their previous qualifications or backgrounds, promoting reskilling and upskilling opportunities[406]. **Lifelong learning offers are often developed by the alliances in close cooperation with external stakeholders responding to their needs to train and upskill their staff.**

Our monitoring framework data shows that while only 16% of the alliances have a joint strategy for lifelong learning, more than half (53%) are currently developing one. Figure 45 specifies the initiatives undertaken by European Universities alliances to support lifelong learning.

## FIGURE 45. WHICH INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT LIFELONG LEARNING HAS YOUR ALLIANCE IMPLEMENTED?
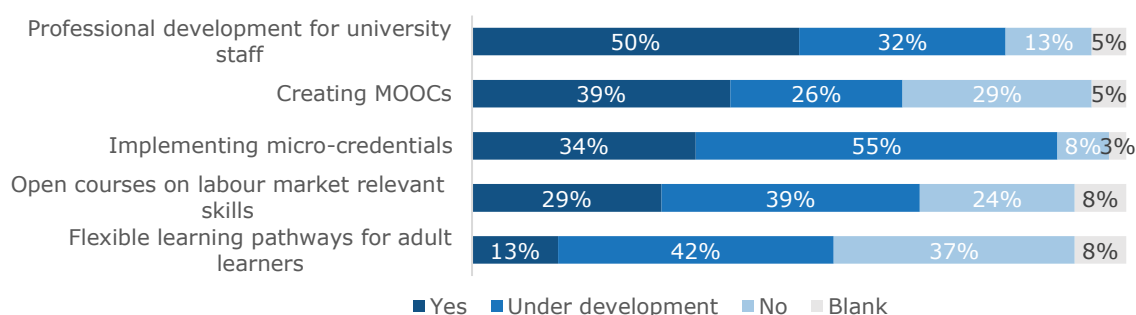


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

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[402] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education*, OJ C 221, 10 June 2021, p. 14–24, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0610(02)

[403] Draghi, M., The future of European competitiveness: Part A | A competitiveness strategy for Europe, September 2024, p.15 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961_en

[404] European Year of Skills, *Commission kick-starts work on the European Year of Skills,* 27 January 2023, https://year-of-skills.europa.eu/news/commission-kick-starts-work-european-year-skills-2023-01-27_en

[405] Draghi, M., The future of European competitiveness: Part A | A competitiveness strategy for Europe, September 2024, p.33 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961_en

[406] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on the European Universities initiative – Bridging higher education, research, innovation and society: Paving the way for a new dimension in European higher education*, OJ C 221, 10 June 2021, p. 14–24, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52021XG0610(02)

**Professional development for university staff is actively pursued by 50% of alliances,** reflecting a commitment to continuous learning within academia itself. Additionally, 32% are in the process of establishing such development opportunities, recognising that continuous staff education is foundational to the broader learning ecosystem.

To widen the impact of lifelong learning offers, alliances often develop hybrid of fully online activities. These accommodate learners with full-time jobs and are accessible to people in multiple locations. One of the most common online activities for lifelong learning are MOOCs as shown in Table 5. 39% of alliances already offer MOOCs, and further 26% are developing them. To host MOOCs, alliances sometimes create dedicated platforms, or partner with existing platforms focused on short courses. For example, 4EU+ partnered with Coursera to host their lifelong learning courses, as described in Box 44.

## BOX 44. EXAMPLE: 4EU+ MOOCS

### 4EU+ MOOCS

#### ⚐ LIFELONG LEARNING

4EU+ Lifelong learning curriculum includes two free MOOCs hosted on the Coursera platform. The two available courses are:

**European Citizenship – Development, Scope, and Challenges**

- All citizens in the EU are granted European Citizenship on top of their national citizenship. Which rights and opportunities does this supra- and transnational citizenship provide? And what are the challenges and dilemmas of the two-level citizenship – for individuals, for the Member States and for the union? This course examines the development, the scope and the challenges of European Citizenship.

- With lecturers from six of the 4EU+ universities, this course has been taken by more than 400 students so far.

**Data Literacy – What is it and why does it matter?**

- This course approaches data literacy from three perspectives: Data in personal life, data in society, and data in knowledge production. The aim is threefold: 1. To expand one's skills and abilities to identify, understand, and interpret the many roles of digital technologies in daily life. 2. To enable students to discern when data-driven technologies add value to people's lives, and when they exploit human vulnerabilities or deplete the commons. 3. To cultivate a deeper understanding of how data-driven technologies are shaping knowledge production and how they may be realigned with real human needs and values.

- With lecturers from five of the 4EU+ universities, this course has been taken by over 350 students so far.

**Relevant links and sources:**

4EU+ MOOCs: **https://4euplus.eu/4EU-408.html**

Course in European Citizenship: **https://www.coursera.org/learn/european-citizenship**

Course in Data Literacy: **https://www.coursera.org/learn/data-literacy-what-is-it-and-why-does-it-matter**

**Related policy goals:**

⚐ **EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY**

⚐ **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

European Universities collaborate with local stakeholders, including companies and private sector to **identify competences and skills needed for the labour market** to equip learners with future-proof skills and enhance employability, also in a lifelong learning perspective. **European Universities play an active role to prepare graduates by developing flexible, personalised education and training**

**initiatives, including by developing, testing and mainstreaming micro-credentials**.

**Micro-credentials are a key element of the alliances' lifelong learning offer, with 34% of alliances already offering, and a significant 55% developing them**. "A micro-credential is a proof of the learning outcomes that a learner has acquired following a short learning experience. These learning outcomes have been assessed against transparent standards"[407]. Micro-credentials are, therefore, a way to recognise learning experiences, and can be rewarded for completing MOOCs, short courses, and other activities.

**Experimentation with micro-credentials beyond degree programmes allows alliances to offer more flexible learning pathways to students, foster lifelong learning and recognise non-traditional learning experiences.** This indicates a **shift towards modular learning**, allowing individuals to gain specific skills and competencies in a flexible manner, tailored to the needs of a changing job market. ECIU University has been very actively engaging in the development of micro-credentials both in its learning offer and at the policy level.

### BOX 45. EXAMPLE: ECIU MICRO-CREDENTIALS JOURNEY

#### ECIU MICRO-CREDENTIALS JOURNEY

**ECIU**

🢔 **LIFELONG LEARNING**

ECIU University has been a pioneer of micro-credentials in Europe. **The Alliance has published 3 white papers on the subject**, including reflections, alliance best practices, lessons learned and recommendations.

The **ECIU University is the first alliance to issue e-sealed micro-credentials** issued using the EDC (European Digital Credentials). ECIU University provides centralised credentials with an ECIU e-seal, ensuring that they are forgery and tamper-proof and meet European standards for digital credentials.

These micro-credentials detail the competencies acquired during the learning process, including levels of expertise and ESCO (European Skills, Competences and Occupations) classifications. They can be easily stored and managed on the Europass platform. Through the ECIU Engage platform, students can navigate through personalised learning pathways, supported by tools such as a motivation scan and a competence passport, which helps to track the progress of their skills development. This personalised approach enhances students' employability and supports their lifelong learning journey.

#### Relevant links and sources:

News on e-sealed micro-credentials: **www.eciu.eu/news/a-milestone-reached-eciu-university-is-the-first-european-alliance-to-issue-e-sealed-micro-credentials**

European Digital Credentials: **europass.europa.eu/en/stakeholders/european-digital-credentials**

ECIU 1st micro-credential white paper: **www.eciu.org/news/micro-learningvaries-from-online-courses-to-study-packages**

ECIU 2nd micro-credential white paper: **www.eciu.org/news/paving-the-roadfor-the-micro-credentials-movement**

ECIU 3rd micro-credential white paper: **www.eciu.org/news/presentation-of-thethird-eciu-university-micro-credentials-paper-avision-for-european-learners-values-and-priorities**

#### Related policy goals:

🢔 **DISSEMINATION BEYOND PARTNER HEIS**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

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[407] Shapiro, H., Andersen, T., and Nedergaard Larsen, K., *Final Report: A European Approach to Micro-credentials*, 2020, p. 10, https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/european-approach-micro-credentials-higher-education-consultation-group-output-final-report.pdf

UNA Europa has also been experimenting with different activities for lifelong learning initiatives, including micro-credentials, as explained in Box 46.

**BOX 46. EXAMPLE: UNA EUROPA MOOCS AND MICRO-CREDENTIALS**

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**UNA EUROPA MOOCS AND MICRO-CREDENTIALS**

🢅 **LIFELONG LEARNING**

UNA Europa has developed a vast offer of short courses, including Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), micro-credentials and lifelong learning certificates:

**MOOC on Artificial Intelligence and Society** launched in the summer of 2022. The MOOC supports learners to engage critically with the basics of AI and its related ethical issues, as well as its impacts on different sectors of society - including justice and jurisprudence, health care, and democratic participation. The MOOC examines how society could address these issues, and how the societal impact and relevant values can be taken into account in design, implementation, and deployment of AI. The study is self-paced, and fully online.

**Micro-credential** in Sustainability consists of five MOOCs which, once completed, award the learner with 10ECTS issued by the University of Helsinki on behalf of UNA Europa. After an introductory course, students take four additional courses covering the environmental, economic, and social aspects of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

**Lifelong learning certificates** in 'Data Science' and 'Sustainability' offer the opportunity for learners outside of alliance partner universities to experience courses with instructors from multiple European universities. The lifelong learning courses have admission requirements related to previous studies. They can involve blended, face-to-face, and distance learning. Studies are usually restricted to certain months and days of the year, and thus not self-paced.

**Relevant links and sources:**

MOOC AI in Society: **https://www.una-europa.eu/study/mooc-ai-society**

Micro-credential in Sustainability: **https://www.una-europa.eu/study/microcredential-sustainability**

Lifelong Learning Certificate in Data Science: **https://www.una-europa.eu/study/data-driven-decision-making**

Lifelong Learning Certificate in Sustainability: **https://www.una-europa.eu/study/lifelong-learning-certificate-in-sustainability**

**Related policy goals:**

🢅 **KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**  🢅 **JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

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*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

## 6.2.5.  Multilingualism

European Universities alliances are expected to cooperate and work with different cultures, in different languages and across borders[408]. Fostering multilingualism is one of the policy objectives of the European Universities initiative and the European Education Area [409], aligning with the European Union committed efforts to respect, preserve and promote linguistic diversity[410]. In the December 2017 European Council

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[408] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for proposals Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU2024-EUR-UNIV,* Version 1, p. 964 https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2024/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2024-eur-univ_en.pdf

[409] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area,* OJ C 195, 7 June 2018, p. 7–12, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018XG0607(01))

[410] The Treaty on European Union, Article 2 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1505459066545&uri=CELEX:12016M003

Conclusions[411], the heads of state or government of the EU have called to take work forward with a view to enhancing the learning of languages, so that more young people will speak at **least two European languages in addition to their mother tongue**.

Multilingualism is one of eight key competencies needed for employability, personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, active citizenship and social inclusion, as outlined by EU Member States in the Council Recommendation on key competencies for lifelong learning[412]. Moreover, multilingualism is recognised as a valuable asset in a globally competitive environment[413]. In fact, the Letta Report[414] stresses the importance of languages to take full advantage of the education and employment opportunities in the Single Market. Beyond academic and economic enablers, languages are intrinsically linked to cultural and personal identities and part of shared inheritance. The promotion of linguistic diversity is therefore not only envisaged to strengthen citizens' opportunities in terms of employability but also to facilitate access to services and rights and, importantly, to contribute to solidarity and tolerance through enhanced intercultural dialogue and social cohesion. In this sense, language competencies are at the heart of building the European Education Area, being essential for mobility, cooperation and mutual understanding across borders. This is in line with what European citizens identify as a priority, with 76% agreeing that improving language skills should be prioritised as a policy objective in a Eurobarometer survey[415].

Illustrating their European added-value, **alliances promote multilingualism in an encompassing manner, notably by fostering the development of language skills and intercultural competencies**, building on enhanced capacities and mutualising resources, advancing language education, developing multilingual (and multicultural) policies contributing to institutionalise their cooperation, dedicating efforts to preserve linguistic diversity.

**Alliance representatives have identified language proficiency as a key factor influencing both involvement in alliance activities and the mobility of students and staff between partner institutions**. A 2018 Flash Eurobarometer survey 466 "The European Education Area" shows that while around 80% of respondents can read and write in more than one language, only 66% of them say they would be able to follow a (higher education) course in more than one language[416]. Offering sufficient opportunities for students and staff to become more comfortable with learning experiences in other languages is, therefore, key to increased mobility and integration within alliances. Alliance representatives noted that lower-grade students and administrative staff are the groups who often lack a second-language proficiency and would benefit the most from language learning. To mitigate this issue, alliances such as Arqus are implementing joint strategies for staff development which define standards for multilingual and cross-cultural competencies or offering automatic recognition of joint or existing language certificates at partner universities.

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[411] European Council, *European Council meeting (14 December 2017) – Conclusions*, EUCO 19/1/17 REV 1, 14 December 2017, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/32204/14-final-conclusions-rev1-en.pdf

[412] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning (Text with EEA relevance)*, OJ C 189, 4 June 2018, p. 1–13 https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)

[413] Pietrzyk-Kowalec, P., 'Multilingualism and the Job Market in the European Union: A Comprehensive Analysis', *Proceedings of the World Conference on Education and Teaching*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2023, pp. 1-8, https://doi.org/10.33422/etconf.v2i1.71

[414] Letta, E., April 2024, p.90.

[415] European Commission, *Special Eurobarometer 540 Europeans and their Languages*, 2023, https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2979

[416] European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, 'Flash Eurobarometer 466: The European Education Area', version v1.00, 2018, accessed 2025-01-04, http://data.europa.eu/88u/dataset/S2186_466_ENG

Additionally, **alliances consider it vital to maintain linguistic diversity** reminding that languages are more than sole communication tools, being intrinsically intertwined with academic traditions, epistemologies and cultural identities. Promoting multilingualism and plurilingualism, therefore, is not only a means to increase mobilities within the alliances but also a mission in itself related to promoting local cultures and European languages, cultivating epistemic diversities and enhancing mutual understanding. In other words, alliances emphasise the value of multilingualism as a means to "strengthen Europe"[417], thereby reinforcing a fundamental aspect of the European Union. The important connection between multilingualism, European identity and cultural diversity is evident, for example, in EC2U's Joint Master in European Languages, Cultures and Societies in Contact, as described in .Box 47

**BOX 47. EXAMPLE: EC2U MASTER'S DEGREE IN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES, CULTURES AND SOCIETIES IN CONTACT**

**EC2U MASTER'S DEGREE IN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES, CULTURES AND SOCIETIES IN CONTACT**

**⌁ MULTILINGUALISM**

The EC2U Joint Master "European Languages, Cultures and Societies in Contact" is a 2-year Master's Degree programme (120 ECTS) that offers students an in-depth understanding of the European linguistic, cultural, and social landscape through advanced research methods.

The EC2U Campus provides students with the opportunity to study abroad, gain multicultural experiences, and expand their professional networks. Throughout their learning journey, students must study at least two semesters abroad, and can study at up to four EC2U universities.

Students can personalise their curriculum: aside from a mandatory common online course of 10 ECTS for each of the first three semesters, students can define the rest of their study plans in accordance with the course offerings of their chosen universities. The fourth semester is dedicated to a possible internship and thesis preparation, providing practical experience and an opportunity to apply their acquired knowledge.

**Relevant links and sources:**

About the Master's Degree: **https://ec2u.eu/for-students/ec2u-master-programmes/european-languages-cultures-and-societies-in-contact/?_sf_s=multilingual**

**Related policy goals:**

**⌁ JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

**⌁ STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Furthermore, multilingualism in alliances is more than just teaching new languages, but providing students with opportunities to use them. As stated by Circle U. in a paper on The Stake of Multilingualism and Cultural Diversity in Europe:

> "Multilingualism is not a state, it is an action. Just like any language, multilingualism is something that has to be done. Because language, like multilingualism, only exists when it is used in communication by speakers. Multilingualism thus requires, on the one hand, that individuals master two or more languages to a certain degree. On the other hand, multilingualism means the actual use of several languages within social structures (institutions, groups, societies). This means that multilingual individuals must be in an

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[417]EUTOPIA, 'EUTOPIA representatives meet the King and the Queen of the Belgians in Paris during their State Visit to France', EUTOPIA website, 2024, accessed 2 January 2025, https://eutopia-university.eu/english-version/partner-news/the-king-and-the-queen-of-the-belgians-meet-vub-and-cy-representatives-in-paris-during-their-state-visit

environment where they can and want to communicate with other individuals in different languages."[418]

In that sense, UNITA has a noteworthy approach to promoting multilingualism within the alliance through Intercomprehension of Romance languages, as explained in Box 48. Intercomprehension was also approached by EUniWell with the Blended Intensive Programme "Intercomprehension among six languages".

## BOX 48. EXAMPLE: UNITA INTERCOMPREHENSION FOR ROMANCE LANGUAGES

### UNITA INTERCOMPREHENSION FOR ROMANCE LANGUAGES

#### � MULTILINGUALISM

One of UNITA's core values is the active use of Romance languages alongside English in education, research, innovation and management, in order to enhance linguistic diversity and promote inclusion. By promoting mutual understanding and learning of Romance languages, the Alliance aims to contribute to make multilingualism an essential element of the European way of life. As part of the Alliance's activities, UNITA organises intercomprehension trainings for students, academic and administrative staff, where they learn strategies to apply in a context of linguistic proximity. At the end of the course, participants receive a digital certificate recognised by their home university. In addition to the training sessions, UNITA also shares online multilingualism materials on its website, such as videos with exercises and linguistic strategies for intercomprehension.

One of the innovative ways UNITA promoted Intercomprehension was through an escape room held during the Researchers' Night at the University of Turin. By incorporating language-based puzzles and exercises, escape rooms can be used to improve intercomprehension skills, as participants have to communicate and work together to understand the clues and solve the puzzle to move on to the next exercise. This challenge can help break down language barriers, improve cross-cultural communication and increase language fluency, as was successfully demonstrated during the event.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Escape room for Intercomprehension purposes: **https://univ-unita.eu/Sites/unita/en/Pagina/unita#recipes**

**Related policy goals:**

� **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

� **STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Despite their significant achievements, alliances' efforts to promote multilingualism do not come without challenges. Although not specific to alliances' context but part of broader trends in higher education, the alliances have to manage the challenge of "the growing *Englishisation* of HEIs for the sake of internationalisation and global competition"[419]. Nonetheless, the use of English as a lingua franca also facilitates communication and knowledge dissemination across alliances' partners opening exchange and mobility opportunities, enabling English language skills development, contributing to building a strong alliance identity, a European sense of belonging and to building intercultural competences. Furthermore, Kjellgren, Taylor and van der Laan, based on an analysis of Unite! Alliance, highlight that the uptake of language courses is not always sufficient and that these courses still represent only a small part

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[418] Circle U. *Conference Programme: European universities as actors in multilingualism - Circle U. think and do Tank on the future of higher education*, 2023, p.1. https://www.circle-u.eu/events/2023/circle-u.-multilingualism-conference.pdf

[419] Dafouz, E., 'Exploring the conceptualisation of linguistic diversity and multilingualism in the construction of (Transnational) European Universities: the case of UNA Europa', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, Vol. 45, No. 4, 2021, pp. 759–774. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1920964

of students' credits during their study programme[420]. Another challenge identified in the study is the confusion of concepts and terms used to describe multilingualism activities. The authors recommend the development of an alliance policy on language and cultural competence. Unite! later implemented such a policy, called the joint Multilingualism and Multiculturalism policy, outlining steps to integrate these values into its joint education and research activities, including a framework to monitor progress. Monitoring framework data shows many other alliances have been drafting policies and strategies to support multilingualism, as seen in Figure 46.

## FIGURE 46. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE A MULTILINGUALISM STRATEGY?
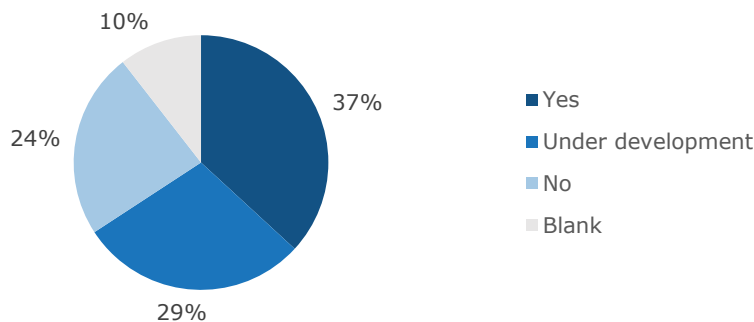


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

Several other alliances established multilingualism policies at their alliance level. For instance, Arqus, ERUA, Unite!, YUFE and EPICUR included multilingualism at the top of their strategic priorities. EuniWell and ERUA organised a cross-alliance symposium to share updates on Living Language Policies and launch the ERUA Language Policy. YUFE includes academic courses in all partner languages in its YUFE student journey. EPICUR developed a joint European Model Language Policy, as detailed in Box 49.

Figure 47 provides a breakdown of the specific activities that European Universities alliances are implementing to support multilingualism, language learning and proficiency among students and staff.

## FIGURE 47. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES?
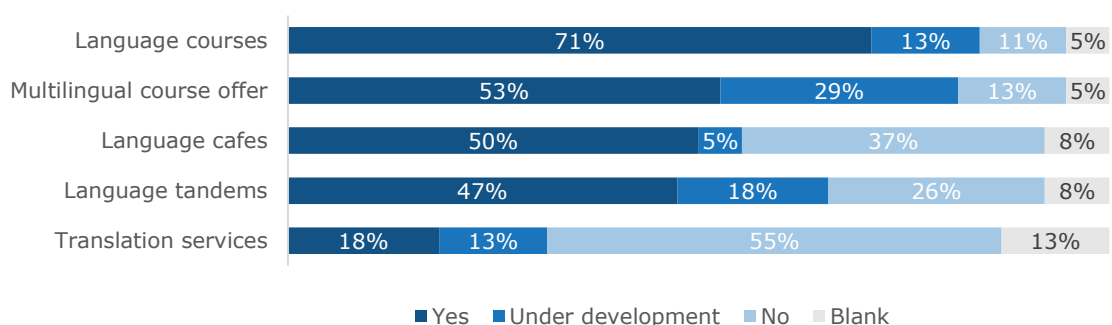


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

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[420] Kjellgren, B., Taylor, D. and Laan, M*... Struggling at the core: multilingualism and multiculturalism in a European University Alliance*, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, Barcelona, 2022, pp. 1260-1273. 10.5821/conference-9788412322262.1297.

## BOX 49. EXAMPLE: EPICUR MULTILINGUALISM ACTIVITIES

**EPICUR MULTILINGUALISM**

🖈 **ACTIVITIES MULTILINGUALISM**

**EPICUR European Model Language Policy**

The primary goal of the EPICUR model language policy is to offer and promote a model framework for language governance for European HEIs and European Universities alliances, with the aim to:

- Foster inclusiveness, diversity, and accessibility both at the institutional as well as at the European alliance level

- Preserve the use of national and regional languages in an academic environment

- Further European and international collaboration, including student and staff mobility

The model is also being shared with other European Universities alliances, which contributes to improving the model itself, sharing good practices between alliances, and bringing the impact of EPICUR beyond partner HEIs.

**EPICamp on "Mobility, Migration, Multilingualism: Shaping European Identities and Languages Past and Present"**

EPICamps are virtual, interactive events aimed at young scientists from the EPICUR alliance in order to create a space for exchange, collaboration and academic matchmaking between scientists from different disciplines and areas. The first EPICamp of 2021 took place under the umbrella of the challenge "Mobility, Migration, Identity", bringing together scholars from a broad spectrum of disciplines and fields, inviting multiple perspectives on these topics.

Reinforcing EPICUR's strategic commitment to multilingualism, the alliance released a Statement on commitment to multilingualism in 2020, signed by all partner universities.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EPICUR European Model Language Policy: **https://epicur.education/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/EPICUR-European-model-language-policy7.pdf**

EPICamp: **https://epicur.education/event/epicur-research-first-epicamp-in-october-2021-mobility-migration-multilingualism/**

Mobility, Migration, Multilingualism: Shaping European Identities and Languages in Past and Present: **https://boku.ac.at/fileadmin/data/themen/EPICUR/Research/1._EPICamp/Call_for_Participation_1st_EPICamp.pdf**

Statement on commitment to multilingualism: **https://epicur.education/epicur-statement-on-commitment-to-multilingualism-2/**

**Related policy goals:**

🖈 **INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**          🖈 **IMPACT BEYOND PARTNER HEIS**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Language courses are the cornerstone of multilingualism efforts, with 71% of alliances offering them, reflecting a widespread commitment to linguistic development. These courses are fundamental in equipping students and staff with the language skills necessary for full participation in alliance activities, encouraging learning a new language besides English, and for mobility and fostering personal and professional growth. Multilingual courses, offered by 53% of alliances and developed by 29%, underscore the strategic priority to maintain linguistic diversity and promote the languages of partner universities' countries. Language cafes offered by 50% of alliances, and language tandems offered by 47% provide an informal yet effective platform for language practice, allowing learners to enhance their language skills in a relaxed and sociable setting. They enable a reciprocal language exchange, allowing individuals to learn from each other in a mutually beneficial arrangement and show an appreciation for the value of conversational practice in language acquisition. These methods not only improve language proficiency but also foster cultural exchange and understanding.

Translation services are less common but are available in 18% of alliances with 13% developing the offer. This provision is critical for inclusivity, ensuring accessibility in communication and that non-native speakers are not disadvantaged and can fully

engage with alliance activities. To strengthen the translation sector in Europe and provide graduates with a broader vision of this discipline, Arqus launched a Multiple Master's Degree Programme in Translation, with embedded mobility of at least one semester in a partner university.

European Universities pool their resources to broaden and deepen language learning offers, as well as share their expertise both to foster multilingual approaches and to advance language education. For instance, EDUC offers language acquisition courses in each of the partner languages. Unite! established a Multilingual and Multicultural Training Centre, and also set up an inter-university expert team on Multiculturalism and Multilingualism to provide training and plan the integration of multilingualism into Unite! Joint Programmes. Eut+ Language Pool involves language experts from each partner contributing to make the alliance a multilingual entity. Tasks included for instance mapping of language courses, fostering research opportunities, sharing language expertise and developing pilot initiatives involving language learning and intercultural experiences. The Circle U. Multilingualism,  Interculturality Language Lab (CU.mil) is a dynamic hub dedicated to advance research in the fields of multilingualism and interculturality. Una Europa explores possibilities to develop innovative educational programmes promoting multilingualism, for instance using IT technology (including AI). EUTOPIA also has a notable example with its Multilingualism and Diversity Learning Community, as explained in Box 50.

### BOX 50. EXAMPLE: EUTOPIA MULTILINGUALISM AND DIVERSITY LEARNING COMMUNITY

**EUTOPIA MULTILINGUALISM AND DIVERSITY LEARNING COMMUNITY**

**EUTOPIA**

**↱ MULTILINGUALISM**

The EUTOPIA Multilingualism and Diversity community is made up of a group of experts from leading universities across Europe, bringing interdisciplinary learning to explore key issues of Multilingualism and Diversity. The community has organised activities such as the EUTOPIA Languages Week, with two editions so far, three Student Conferences on multilingualism, and an Autumn School on "Multilingualism in Brussels".

The EUTOPIA Multilingualism and Diversity community publishes its activities plan every year. The 2024/2025 programme includes the opportunity for students to gain a micro-credential certificate by completing two activities from the programme. Activities include Short Online Courses and a Student Conference, where students can earn credits by helping in the event organisation or presenting their work at the conference.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Multilingualism and Diversity Community page: **https://eutopia-university.eu/english-version/connected-learning-communities/multilingualism-and-diversity-1**

**Related policy goals:**

**↱ JOINT, FLEXIBLE AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, website, and interviews*

In addition to these educational activities, alliances are taking proactive measures to ensure that language learning is accessible and inclusive. Digital platforms play a crucial role here, with multiple alliances utilising them to create engaging and interactive language learning experiences. UNIVERSEH developed a co-creative online glossary, which is an interesting example of the innovative tools being used to promote multilingualism, as shown in Box 51.

## BOX 51. EXAMPLE: UNIVERSEH SPACE DICTIONARY AND UNIVERSAY APP

### UNIVERSEH SPACE DICTIONARY AND UNIVERSAY APP

**↑ MULTILINGUALISM**

**UNIVERSEH**

#### Space dictionary courses/ Co-creation of Dictionary of Space Concepts

Dictionary of Space Concepts (DSC) is an online dictionary dealing with terms and concepts related to space sciences. The DSC was published in spring 2022. It opens opportunities for all members of the UNIVERSEH Alliance and interested citizens to contribute to the content of the DSC. In the course "Terms and Concepts of Space", students learn how to write a dictionary article and later contribute several entries to the DSC. Students and other members of the UNIVERSEH Alliance, as well as citizens can also submit articles for the DSC online. Once submitted, the articles are reviewed by UNIVERSEH Alliance staff and, if necessary, edited before their publication in the dictionary.

**The Dictionary of Space Concepts**
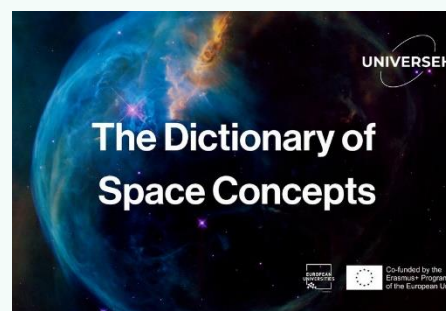
#### UniverSAY: an app for UNIVERSEH students to learn languages and connect

The UniverSAY app is a language-learning tool for all students, researchers and staff of the Alliance universities The app is free of charge and offers several activities that support language learning. With UniverSAY, students can:

- Get information about the Alliance itself and cultural aspects of the university partners.
- Use the platform to connect and learn languages with others in form of Language Cafés and eTandems.
- Learn vocabulary and expressions in all UNIVERSEH languages: French, German, English, Polish, and Swedish through quizzes.
- Find current and exclusive news and information on courses, workshops, events, language-learning tips, Summer and Winter Schools, mobility opportunities, etc.

#### Relevant links and sources:

**Collaborative Dictionary of Space Concepts:**
**https://edu.universeh.eu/enrol/index.php?id=67**

#### Related policy goals:

**↑ STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

**↑ SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Alliance's efforts to promote multilingualism can also be connected to their activities with external stakeholders and engage with societal actors. The example of FORTHEM presented in Box 52**Error! Reference source not found.** illustrates how this connection can happen.

## BOX 52. EXAMPLE: FORTHEM LAB

### FORTHEM LAB
🡕 **MULTILINGUALISM**

**FORTHEM Lab: Multilingualism in School and Higher Education**

The alliance has set up nine expert teams called 'FORTHEM Labs' on topics which reflect the alliance's areas of special expertise. Each Lab consists of representatives from at least three countries, involving university staff, students and public and/or private sector representatives. They are designed to provide the necessary framework for diverse, collaborative, flexible and dynamic learning environments.

One of the FORTTHEM Labs is dedicated to '**Multilingualism in School and Higher Education**' This Lab adopts a resource-based view of language resources and everyday multilingual practices, with a central focus on pedagogical practices and recommendations for primary, secondary and tertiary education (including vocational education). Partners include two associations, two academic institutions (besides FORTHEM partner HEIs), and ten schools and libraries**.** Outputs of the Lab include:

- A citizen science project on multilingualism in education;
- Schoolscape course about multilingual learning environments;
- Summer School "Multilingualism in schools: methods and strategies for teaching languages";
- A collaborative writing project entitled Multimodality of academic genres in multilingual education

**International Classrooms**

FORTHEM offered two thematically oriented **international classrooms** in spring 2022, in the format of an exchange semester abroad. Each FORTHEM partner university can nominate three to five students for the activity covered by Erasmus+ mobility funding:

- International Classroom on Language Sciences in the 21st Century: Perspectives on Multilingualism, Cognition, and Technology Studies
- **International Classroom on Form, Culture and Society in English Literary Studies**

**European Language Degree Staff Weeks**

FORTHEM hosted two **European Language Degree Staff Weeks** where experts from the FORTHEM Alliance gathered to identify and develop new directions of academic cooperation in the field of language, literature, and culture. Multilingualism and new initiatives in the field of language and culture, modular structure and learning outcomes, recognition of grades and competencies were among the topics presented and debated at the meetings.

**Relevant links and sources:**

FORTHEM Lab: **https://www.forthem-alliance.eu/get-involved/labs/multilingualism-in-school-higher-education-lab**

International classroom: **https://www.forthem-alliance.eu/news-detail/t/46355**

FORTHEM Language Staff Week: **https://www.forthem-alliance.eu/news-detail/t/47280**

**Related policy goals:**

🡕 **CHALLENGE-BASED APPROACHES**

🡕 **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Overall, alliances provide a promising set-up for promoting and fostering multilingualism. Bringing language teaching units of several HEIs from different linguistic and academic contexts together, and opening courses to the whole alliance community allows to greatly enhance and diversify the language learning offer of individual HEIs. By pooling expertise, developing policies, cultivating epistemic diversities and fostering intercultural curiosity and competences, alliances progressed to demonstrate their potential in becoming "a significant resource for maintaining language diversity in Europe"[421].

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[421] European Parliament, Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

## 6.3. Society and economy

**Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential**

**Participation in European Universities alliances provided HEIs with a structured and sustainable setting to collaborate with over 2200 associated partners both locally and transnationally, engaging other HEIs, companies, civil society, or national and regional authorities** – thereby embedding the alliances and their partner HEIs in their local communities and innovation ecosystems. **Companies are eager to engage with HEIs involved in an European Universities alliance.**

**The widened educational opportunities in European Universities alliances are contributing to bridging skills gaps** by equipping students with a range of key future-proof skills and competencies, increasing the relevance of the curricula and directly contributing to students' employability.

European Universities alliances are fulfilling their mission of becoming **testbeds for innovative education and challenge-based learning approaches,** providing opportunities and resources to tackle local challenges in a transnational and transdisciplinary setting joining forces with their diverse local, regional, national and European stakeholders and partners. Alliances contribute to innovation and are bridging different (regional) innovation ecosystems. They developed knowledge hubs, challenge-based approaches, hackathons, living labs, entrepreneurship support, and direct engagement with local authorities, etc.

The alliances also support **graduate employability** through skills analyses and participation in local strategies, as well as by offering joint alliance career services, while their enhanced collaboration with associated partners enhances the **internships and job offers** for alliances' students.

**The alliances created a more inclusive environment** for a broad range of target groups, including students and staff from disadvantaged backgrounds and underrepresented communities, refugees, etc., through reinforced joint Diversity, Equity and Inclusiveness strategies.

European Education Area

## Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

> **Alliances demonstrate commitment to fostering civic engagement** through the development of diverse initiatives such as service-learning activities, work-integrated learning approaches, lifelong learning opportunities, knowledge exchange platforms, dialogue events with citizens, volunteer programmes, and citizen science platforms and working groups. The alliances demonstrated also a strong commitment to supporting populations in need, notably those facing the consequences of the ongoing war of aggression of Russia in **Ukraine.**

The European Universities initiative relies on the conviction that "universities are key actors in Europe, able to address big societal challenges, become true engines of development for cities and regions and promote civic engagement"[422]. HEIs play an essential role in shaping "open, democratic, fair and sustainable societies as well as sustained growth, entrepreneurship and employment"[423]. Therefore, as part of the service to society mission of the HEIs, European Universities alliances engage with society and the economy to promote employability, problem-solving approaches, civic engagement, entrepreneurship, and societal impact[424]. Previous studies suggest that the European Universities initiative:

> "Successfully fosters collaboration between higher education institutions and other actors of the innovation ecosystem, especially through the creation of innovative academic/training models that bring students (and scholars) closer to the needs and challenges of local stakeholders"[425].

Some studies also highlight that "some of the biggest challenges of the alliances are related to finding effective ways to engage their associated partners"[426], since finding common ground among HEIs and external stakeholders requires effort to develop appropriate work strategies, prioritise tasks, and define expected outcomes. This

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[422] European Commission, *Factsheet - European Universities: A key pillar of the European Education Area,* 2020, p. 1, par. 2, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/factsheet-european-universities-a-key-pillar-of-the-european-education-area

[423] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Communication from the Commission on a European strategy for universities*, COM/2022/16 final, 2022, p. 5, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities

[424] Ibid.

[425] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

[426] Maassen, P., Stensaker, B. and Rosso, A., 'The European university alliances—an examination of organizational potentials and perils', *Higher Education*, Vol. 86, 2022, p. 956, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00951-4

section presents how European Universities alliances approach society and
the economy by zooming in on how they enhance graduate employability, consolidate
inclusive and more accessible learning environments, strengthen regional
engagement, and promote civic engagement.

## 6.3.1.   Graduate employability

The European Universities initiative aims to enable a balanced flow of talent across
Europe and across various sectors, and boost employability, including the
establishment and scaling up of start-ups and SMEs.[427]. This is aligned with the
European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, which emphasises that education and
training are essential for laying the groundwork for continuous learning, employability,
and social participation[428]. Likewise, the European Skills Agenda aims to eliminate
barriers to learning, fostering innovative and inclusive education, and providing
training for all, including the up- and re-skilling of talent, in order to contribute to
cultivating a culture of lifelong learning, promoting inter-sectoral cooperation, and
improving employability[429]. **The role of higher education, including the role of
the European Universities initiative, remains key in this context**. For higher
education, the European strategy for universities aims to empower institutions and
students and increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of the EU higher
education sector.

**Transnational mobility in higher education has a positive impact in lowering
unemployment rates**, increasing the likelihood of employment at home and abroad,
and enhancing chances of having an international career and jobs with higher
professional responsibilities[430]. A recent study[431] revealed that **attractive local study
opportunities and internationalisation of local higher education institutions
are in the top 3 of young people's reasons for staying in their home region
thereby limiting brain drain**.

The 2023 study The European Universities Initiative: First Lessons, Main Challenges
and Perspectives[432] emphasised the importance of enhancing graduate employability
as a key driver and objective of the European Universities alliances. Complementary,
the 2023 study on European Universities alliances within their territorial innovation
ecosystems[433] found that under the alliances' framework, HEIs were more likely to
analyse the skill gap between supply and demand in the local job markets, ensuring
that local students have the skills and competencies required by the local labour

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[427] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for Proposals: Partnerships for Excellence - European Universities -
ERASMUS-EDU-2023-EUR-UNIV*, 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-
tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-
univ_en.pdf

[428] European Commission: Secretariat-General, *European pillar of social rights*, Publications Office of the
European Union, 2017, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2792/95934

[429] European Commission, *European skills agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and
resilience,* 2020, https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/european-skills-agenda-
sustainable-competitiveness-social-fairness-and-resilience_en

[430] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F.,
Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and
perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023,
https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[431] European Commission, "Youth for reviving (stagnating) EU territories", 2023,
Toolkit_Youth4Reviving_stagnating_EUterritories.pdf

[432] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F.,
Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and
perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023,
https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[433] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European
universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the
European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

market, which is expected to result in better employability. The study revealed that many HEIs within the alliances had already analysed such gaps. **Alliances have integrated associated partners in these activities, particularly companies and the private sector, enabling them to shape curricula, enhancing their relevance.**

Most alliances acknowledge that the analysis of the impact on their graduates' employability and careers is in its early stage, as the initial cohorts of alliance graduates are beginning their professional careers. **Alliances are implementing a wide range of measures to enhance graduate employability, including collaboration with industry, establishment of joint career services, consolidation of graduate networks**, and others.

As illustrated by Figure 48, most alliances offer or implement courses and workshops to support graduate career development (71%). To a lesser extent, alliances have or are in the process of creating alumni networks (58%), providing career coaches or advisors (47%), organising career days (42%), establishing student buddy systems (42%), developing online career platforms (36%), and providing academic counsellors (34%). Alliances also mentioned implementing additional initiatives such as alumni ambassadors, mentoring programmes, early-career researchers support services, digital internship fairs, and harmonisation of alliance-level career services.

## FIGURE 48. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE OFFER CAREER INFORMATION AND TRAINING FOR STUDENTS?
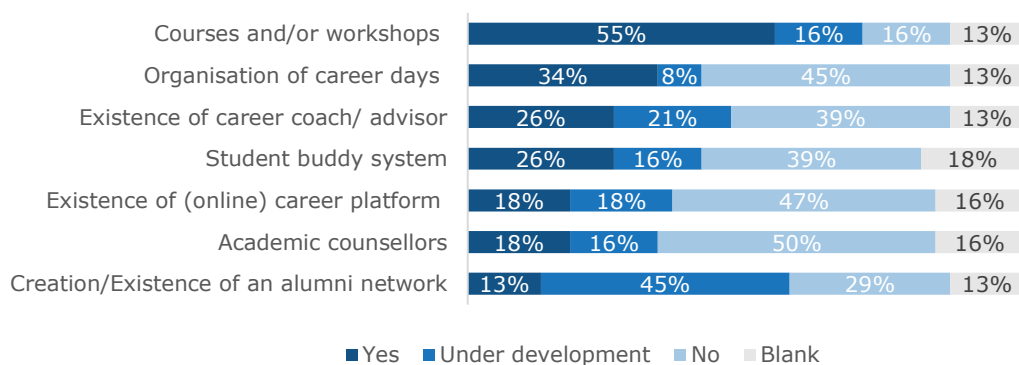


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

As an initial approach, European Universities alliances have joined forces with associated partners and external stakeholders to conduct market research which informs strategies for enhancing graduate employability. This approach helps **alliances align educational offers with market needs, increasing their relevance and fostering intersectoral collaboration with local and regional external stakeholders**. For example, EUniWell has consolidated an extensive network with over 100 associated partners, including regional authorities, cultural and educational institutions, research centres, science parks, hospitals and medical centres, NGOs, and businesses. Those associated partners contribute to understanding their regional ecosystems, identifying skill gaps and cooperation opportunities, and co-designing solutions to societal challenges. This allowed EUniWell to create tailored micro-credential courses to address those needs[434]. CHARM-EU implemented several

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[434] EUniWell, Integrated skills portfolio for pilot trainings developed and course portfolio developed, 2022, https://www.euniwell.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Downloads/_Research/H-D3.2_Integrated_Skills_070922_2nd_version_EC.pdf

external stakeholders' needs analyses to understand and address the requirements of
their external partners and identify opportunities for partnerships, internships, and
dissemination of micro-credits[435]. UNIVERSEH launched a survey for local stakeholders
to identify future competencies required in space-related domains. Additionally, the
alliance established collaboration with local high schools and stakeholders to ensure
that future required skills are being developed[436]. EU-CONEXUS has developed the EU-
CONEXUS Skills Map, which aims to define the needs of economic actors in education
and training with the collaboration of relevant public and private sector stakeholders
in Europe and worldwide (see Box 53).

### BOX 53. EXAMPLE: EU-CONEXUS SKILLS MAP

**EU-CONEXUS SKILLS MAP**

**GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY**

EU CONEXUS

The **EU-CONEXUS skills map** aims to adjust the curriculum to meet the market and societal demands.
It serves as a tool for determining skill gaps and future skill demands in collaboration with industry
partners and other relevant stakeholders. The skills map bridges the needs of stakeholders in urban coastal
environments and their requirements for higher education and vocational training. The ongoing
participation of the local business community allows to modify the study offer to meet the changing needs
continuously.
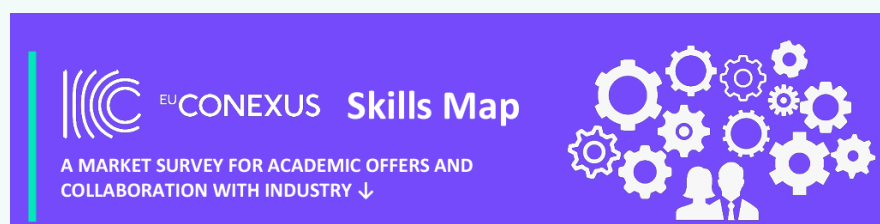


The skills map directly impacts tailoring academic offers, minor programmes, joint master's programmes,
Lifelong Learning courses, and the general education offer of the alliance. The alliance also used a skills
map to develop synergies between EU-CONEXUS and the industry sector to improve student employment
and promote innovation. This allows the alliance to develop activities for students, such as project-based
learning, mentoring activities, work placements and internships.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EU-CONEXUS Skills map: **https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/for-students/studies/skills-map/**

**Related policy goals:**

**JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND
INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND
REGIONAL COOPERATION**

EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**European Universities alliances are actively working to improve researchers'
career prospects and job market readiness by providing a range of support
services and initiatives**. For example, the RUN-EU Researcher Career Development
Training Programme[437] provides workshops and discussions to support researchers at
all stages of their career development and skills identification. Arqus established the

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[435] CHARM-EU, External stakeholders needs analysis n°3,
https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=zdtms8NPUUSC0uI5VkMCwx8yi58MrztOiMN3k7ba
OFVURVVRMVFTTlNQV043S0NCOFBRSjczQ0pMOC4u

[436] UNIVERSEH, Identification of future needs for student competences, 2021, https://universeh.eu/wp-
content/uploads/2023/02/D-3.2-Identification-of-future-needs-for-student-competences.pdf

[437] RUN-EU, 'Researcher Career Development Training Programme 2023', RUN-EU website, 2023, accessed
3 January 2025, https://run-eu.eu/2023/01/16/researcher-career-development-training-programme-
2023/#:~:text=RUN%2DEU%20PLUS%20is%20organising,inter%2Dsectoral%20and%20international%2
0mobility

Arqus Mentoring Programme[438] to enhance the employability of early-career researchers. This programme pairs experienced researchers from Arqus universities with PhD and postdoctoral candidates. ERUA Implemented a series of workshops for early-career researchers to foster intra-alliance research collaboration and career development (Box 54). The Circle U. Community of Practice for Early-Career Researchers (CU.ecr)[439] offers a range of support services, including networking, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration with colleagues from Circle U. to help early-career researchers develop their research interests.

## BOX 54. EXAMPLE: ERUA WORKSHOP FOR EARLY-CAREER RESEARCHERS

### ERUA WORKSHOPS FOR EARLY-CAREER RESEARCHERS
🡒 **GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY**

ERUA Workshops for early-career researchers are organised twice a year by the alliance Research Support Group and aim to foster research collaboration, interdisciplinary projects, and career development.

The objective is to lay the groundwork for the development of a think tank in ERUA. Early-career researchers will be at the core of this think tank in Social Sciences and Humanities, interplaying with natural and technical sciences and driving the development of alternative indicators.

ERUA Workshops for early-career researchers provide information, tools, opportunities, and concrete examples. Early-career researchers present their research ideas for research collaboration, exchange experiences, and receive feedback and coaching from senior researchers and research support staff.

Some of the ERUA workshops for early-career researchers developed include:

- Digitalisation of research and open science,
- Exploring pathways beyond academia: non-academic careers for social sciences, humanities, and arts after the thesis,
- Entrepreneurship in science & arts,
- Horizon Europe Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions Postdoctoral Fellowships: How to write a competitive proposal?
- Interdisciplinary research and engaging non-academic sectors,
- Participating in and creating scientific networks.

The workshops also provide early-career researchers with insights and practical guidance on how to pursue non-academic careers after completing their doctoral studies.

**Relevant links and sources:**

ERUA Early-Career Researchers: **https://erua-eui.eu/academic-staff/early-career-researchers/**

**Related policy goals:**
🡒 **KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews*

**Alliances have also developed certificate and mentoring programmes, online portals, and business competitions to support graduate employability**. For example, EC2U implemented the Career Plan Certificate[440], a joint self-learning programme to boost graduate students' future integration into the labour market. EELISA alliance created an Internships and Career Opportunities Portal[441], providing information on internships, apprenticeships, PhD positions, job offers at partner companies, and others within the alliance partner network. Similarly, EUNICE

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[438] Arqus, 'Mentoring Programme for Early-Stage Researchers', Arqus website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://arqus-alliance.eu/call/call-arqus-mentoring-programme-for-early-stage-researchers/

[439] Circle U*., 'Community of Practice for Early Career Reseachers (CU.ecr)', Circle U website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.circle-u.eu/about/platforms/ecr/

[440] EC2U, 'Career Plan Certificate', EC2U website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://ec2u.eu/for-students/careerhorizons/career-plan-certificate/

[441] EELISA, 'Internships and Career Opportunities', EELISA website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eelisa.eu/internships-job-postings-2/

implemented the Imagine Innovation Cup and EUNICE International Internships portals (see Box 55).

## BOX 55. EXAMPLE: EUNICE INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIP PORTAL AND INNOVATION CUP

### EUNICE INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIP PORTAL AND INNOVATION CUP

**GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY**

**International Internship Portal**

The EUNICE International Internship Portal (EIIP) allows students to choose internships and enterprises located in many countries and get in touch with a professional network of companies through open calls available all year. EUNICE EIIP offers internships to Alliance students at all levels of education. At the time of reporting, the EIIP counts 209 companies from each partner country and about 200 applications received from the students of the alliance. Project partners actively participate in the preparation of subsequent project applications, both in research and in teaching.

**Imagine Innovation Cup**

The EUNICE Imagine Innovation Cup is a contest for students to present their business ideas. Each university nominates one team for the finals. During the finals, the teams have a 10-minute presentation followed by a 10-minute Q&A session with a panel of judges. The winning team earns a special internship opportunity that allows them to visit EUNICE partner universities, where they can further improve and test their business idea in diverse European settings.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Imagine Innovation Cup: **https://eunice-university.eu/entrepreneurs-imagine-innovation-cup/**

EUNICE international Internships portal: **https://internships.eunice-university.eu/internship**

**Related policy goals:**

**SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

**STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**European Universities alliances are in the process of consolidating alliance-level approaches to career services and graduate networks**. Most alliances posited that they do not have consolidated data on graduates' careers due to the early stage of the initiative. The first cohorts of graduates of the alliances are recent and it is not possible to evaluate the impact of alliances on their career development yet. However, they expressed their intention to develop graduate tracking systems and provide career services and learning opportunities at the alliance level. Their main challenge is to create alliance-level approaches with useful information and networking opportunities catering for the large transnational student community. For example, the EUTOPIA alliance created the Student Career Ambassadors initiative[442]: Students work in synergy with career services to create a European network of jobs, internships, and apprenticeship offers. In the EDUC alliance, career services are working to create a joint approach to graduate services and launched their alumni network in 2023 (see Box 56).

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[442] EUTOPIA, 'Student Career Ambassadors', EUTOPIA website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eutopia-university.eu/english-version/student-career-ambassadors

## BOX 56. EXAMPLE: EDUC CAREER SERVICES AND ALUMNI NETWORK

**EDUC CAREER SERVICES AND ALUMNI NETWORK**

**European Digital UniverCity**

🡒 **GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY**

EDUC Alliance is currently consolidating its alliance-level approach to career services and alumni network. Career services offices in EDUC alliance partner institutions exchange practices through alliance-level workshops to harmonise the services offered to graduates aiming to support their employability. The common tools used by EDUC Alliance are:

- Workshops on CV, cover letter preparation, approaching companies, identifying job offers, job interview training, etc.;
- Online modules for job search offered on the Moodle platform and developed for different fields of study;
- Identification of expected skills through collaboration with recruiters to understand their expectations and labour market needs;
- Dissemination of information through job fairs;
- Development of corporate relations and networks with other alliances, organisations, alumni and corporate networks.

The EDUC Alliance established an alumni network in 2023. This initiative has been supported by the diverse career services of partners and emphasises career management. The network has an online platform, offering digital co-working, matchmaking opportunities and interactive learning options.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EDUC Report on the inter-office seminars: **https://www.educalliance.eu/storage/files/media/file/4/original.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

🡒 **KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**         🡒 **INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER**

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Alliances face several challenges related to graduate employability**. First, developing and implementing effective and coherent graduate tracking mechanisms at the alliance level that can produce data for tailoring graduate services and assessing the impact of alliances on graduates' careers. Second, allocating resources to develop and sustain comprehensive career services, tracking mechanisms, and networking opportunities effectively. Third, catering to the diverse needs of the alliances' transnational and multilingual graduate communities demands ensuring accessibility and inclusivity across different contexts and languages, as well as establishing, managing, sustaining, and leveraging external collaborations to understand market needs and create meaningful opportunities for graduate communities.

### 6.3.2.    Inclusive environment

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are key priorities of the European higher education agenda. The first principle under the European Pillar of Social Rights states that "everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training, and lifelong learning"[443]. This priority is further addressed by the European Strategy for Universities, which emphasises addressing underrepresentation among students,

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[443] European Commission: Secretariat-General, *European pillar of social rights*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2017, p.11, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2792/95934,

academic staff, and researchers of ethnic minorities with migration backgrounds,
disabilities, or from disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as gender gaps[444].

European Universities alliances are investing efforts into developing Diversity, equity,
and inclusion strategies as well as specific initiatives and/or support structures to foster
diversity and inclusion. As shown in Figure 49, **82% of alliances have either
developed or are working on the development of an alliance-level DEI
strategy.**

### FIGURE 49. HAS YOUR ALLIANCE DEVELOPED A SHARED DIVERSITY & INCLUSION STRATEGY?
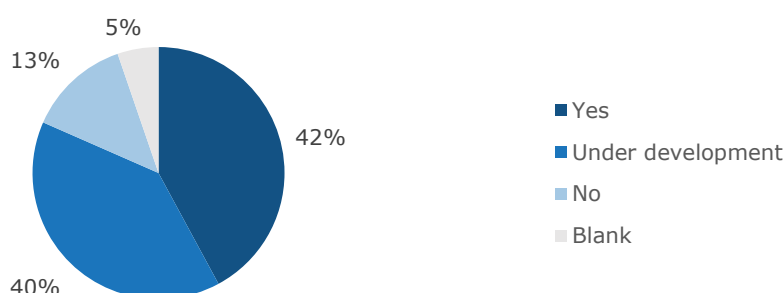


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data
covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

Interviews and monitoring framework data evidenced an overall positive perception of
the alliances' efforts on DEI:

> "The alliance provides a unique space to join forces and implement activities aimed at
> promoting access to higher education, reducing discrimination, and fostering diverse and
> inclusive communities" – Interview with alliance coordinator.

**Most alliances build upon existing DEI initiatives in partner institutions and
align them with alliance objectives. Hence, they pool existing research
results, experts, tools, and partnerships with diverse stakeholders to support
the development of joint DEI strategies.** With these resources, alliances define
governance models for these strategies and set indicators, activities, and data
collection mechanisms. For example, YUFE created an ambitious Diversity & Inclusivity
(D&I) strategy[445], setting the goal of becoming leaders in diversity and inclusivity, and
supporting the development of dedicated DEI offices in two partner institutions which
did not have them before joining the alliance. EUTOPIA alliance drafted the *EUTOPIA
Inclusion Manifesto*[446] which aims to put the principles of inclusion into practice at the
alliance level. The ECIU University developed a comprehensive gender equality,
diversity, and inclusion plan which builds on partner institutions' existing plans and
contains an action plan and governance model (see Box 57).

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[444] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Communication
from the Commission on a European strategy for universities*, COM/2022/16 final, 2022, p. 5,
https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-
universities
[445] YUFE, *YUFE Diversity and Inclusivity Strategy*, 11 April 2022, https://yufe.eu/wp-
content/uploads/2021/04/YUFE-Diversity-and-Inclusivity-Strategy.pdf
[446] EUTOPIA, 'EUTOPIA Inclusion Manifesto', EUTOPIA website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eutopia-
university.eu/english-version/inclusion/eutopia-more-inclusion-manifesto

## BOX 57. EXAMPLE: ECIU GENDER EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY

**ECIU GENDER EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY STRATEGY**

↱ **INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**

ECIU University adopted its first Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan, prioritising the topic across all its activities. Gender equality, inclusion, and diversity were integrated at the alliance level in teaching, research, and innovation, as well as all joint alliance initiatives. This plan is in line with ECIU University's 2030 vision, which aims to develop an open system of innovation and, hence, accessibility and inclusivity. It covers the ECIU University's objectives in specific development areas and includes an action plan, data collection and monitoring measures, and dedicated resources.

To execute the Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan, ECIU University sets aside time during board meetings to monitor the subject at the highest level and consolidate synergies. A gender equality expert committee comprising representatives from all partner universities is also in place at the ECIU University. Some areas have dedicated central supportive capacity (mobility lead, user lead, project managers, etc.), which act as contact points for the Secretary-General to implement and monitor the plan. The alliance also plans to appoint an equal opportunity coordinator.

**Relevant links and sources:**

ECIU makes diversity and equality a priority: **https://www.eciu.eu/news/eciu-makes-diversity-and-equality-a-priority**

**Related policy goals:**

↱ **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Alliances usually embed their DEI strategies/plans into broader approaches to DEI that include setting diverse mechanisms to execute and continuously enhance them. For example, EELISA developed a Gender equality and diversity plan[447] that set alliance-level indicators, established a Gender equality and diversity working group, and implemented awareness-raising and competence development activities. Ulysseus implemented the Special Needs Programme[448]. The alliance proposed the implementation of micro-actions[449] embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion principles at the alliance level to develop actions to facilitate students' higher education-to-work transition[450].

**Some alliances have created support units, such as offices, hubs, or academies, at the alliance level in charge of implementing their DEI strategies**. This approach requires coordination among partner institutions and (human) resources to oversee the implementation of actions, collect data, and develop reporting mechanisms. For this purpose, CHARM-EU created a joint DEI Office[451] to facilitate the implementation of inclusion practices at the alliance level. Arqus set up

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[447] EELISA, 'Gender equality and diversity', EELISA website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eelisa.eu/gender-equality-and-diversity/

[448] Ulysseus, 'Ulysseus Gender Equality Activities Programme Guide', Ulysseus website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://ulysseus.eu/resources-and-publications/gender-equality-activities-programme-guide/

[449] 'Micro-action' refers to small-scale initiatives or activities implemented to introduce participants to equality, diversity, and inclusion issues and contexts, encouraging them to become more assertive and proactive in promoting these values.

[450] Siri, A., Leone, C., and Bencivenga, R., 'Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategies Adopted in a European University Alliance to Facilitate the Higher Education-to-Work Transition', *Societies*, Vol. 12, No. 5, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/soc12050140

[451] CHARM-EU, 'An inclusive program', CHARM-EU website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.charm-eu.eu/masters/globalchallenges/inclusion

an Inclusion and Diversity Hub[452] to ensure diversity in culture and global outreach. Additionally, they created a Plurilingual and Intercultural Hub[453] to enhance the language skills of staff and students. UNIC established the Superdiversity Academy to promote diversity through activities such as seminars, engagement with schools, peer support, and dissemination of best practices (see Box 58).

## BOX 58. EXAMPLE: UNIC SUPERDIVERSITY ACADEMY

### UNIC SUPERDIVERSITY ACADEMY

⚐ INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT



The UNIC Superdiversity Academy involves students, researchers, and local stakeholders to co-create innovative pedagogical models for universities to become ''superdiversity-ready''. The term 'superdiversity' refers to the complex mixtures and intersectionalities of ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, social status, economic status, legal status, lifestyle, and many other aspects. By creating a model for inclusive higher education in Europe, the UNIC Superdiversity Academy aims to leverage the transformative potential of superdiversity in HEIs.

The UNIC Alliance builds on the fact that its HEIs are in post-industrial areas, with a strong presence of 'non-traditional' students. Through superdiversity and research into it, the alliance seeks to foster understanding and cooperation between diverse stakeholder groups across different fields.

The Superdiversity Academy organises superdiversity schools and seminars, engages with schools, facilitates of peer support, peer reviews UNIC universities, and stores learning and best-practice resources. The academy goes beyond providing information and actively engages with local stakeholders and partner HEIs.

### Relevant links and sources:

UNIC superdiversity academy: **https://unic.eu/en/superdiversity**

### Related policy goals:

⚐ INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

⚐ JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

The establishment of 'Well-being Offices' within alliance partner institutions by EUniWell mirrors the development of support units for DEI strategies. These intra-alliance offices manage student and staff well-being issues (Box 59). From an inter-alliance perspective, ENHANCE created a Diversity and Inclusion Hub[454] in 2022. This is a bottom-up and still-growing inter-alliance network comprising 20 European Universities alliances and coordinated by ENHANCE. The hub aims to learn from each other, share knowledge, foster inspirational and problem-solving approaches, and explore synergies. This initiative is a shift from competition to cooperation in higher education to address diversity and inclusion challenges.

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[452] Arqus, 'Inclusion', Arqus website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://arqus-alliance.eu/action-lines/widening-access-inclusion-diversity/

[453] Arqus, 'Arqus Plurilingual and Intercultural Hub', Arqus website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://arqus-alliance.eu/our-communities/arqus-plurilingual-and-intercultural-hub/

[454] Özkardes, M., 'Managing Intra-Alliance Collaboration Successfully: The Diversity and Inclusion Hub', ENAHNCE website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://enhanceuniversity.eu/managing-intra-alliance-collaboration-successfully-the-diversity-and-inclusion-hub/

## BOX 59. EXAMPLE: EUNIWELL WELL-BEING OFFICES

**EUNIWELL WELL-BEING OFFICES**

🔝 **INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**

euni well
European
University for
Well-Being

EUniWell established Well-Being Offices on each partner campus. These offices aim to listen to and address the well-being needs of students and staff and to provide access to various resources and tools to promote mental health, work-life balance, and campus social life, especially for students.

Well-Being Offices act as central hubs for information and support to students and staff. These hubs were designed to bring together existing support services, enhance them, and make them more visible. In the medium run, they aim to coordinate the exchange of best practices among partner HEIs and external organisations to create additional resources. Additionally, Well-Being Offices will develop measurement instruments, conduct systematic surveys, and develop academic studies.

Well-Being Offices implement inter- and transdisciplinary research on well-being and promote initiatives and policies related to topics such as eco-anxiety, depression, and mental distress. These offices support EUniWell's goal of becoming a leader in well-being in higher education and impacting how other institutions promote and implement individual and community well-being.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EUniWell 2030: Strategy Framework and Strategy Questions: **https://www.euniwell.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Downloads/Key_documents/EUniwell_NK 08.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

🔝 **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**　　🔝 **INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**

EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Alliances have implemented a wide variety of initiatives with a broad inclusion and diversity focus**. Some examples include the Annual Diversity & Gender Equality reports[455] by ENHANCE to capture its results, show progress, and promote its impact. Ulysseus developed a Gender Equality Activities Program Guide[456] to identify the state of play, define the gender equality plans, identify good practices, and set the activities to be promoted. ENLIGHT implemented the webinar series "Discussing Diversity, Inclusion, and Racism"[457] and summer/winter schools focused on equity and equality in education and medicine[458]. EUGLOH created the "Let's Talk"[459] series of monthly online events organised by different partner institutions where staff, students and experts discuss views on topics such as gender, work-life balance, sexual orientation, cultural differences, and others. Una EUROPA Una.Together programme is a seven-week online program where students seek solutions to challenges related to diversity and inclusion at the level of their universities.

**European Universities alliances have also defined specific target groups for DEI actions and developed a variety of targeted hands-on interventions to address their needs**. For example, CIVICA offers a range of activities and support to displaced, refugee and first-generation students (see Box 60). EUniWell[460] created a

[455] ENHANCE, 'Resources and Tools', ENHANCE website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://enhanceuniversity.eu/resources-and-tools/

[456] Ulysseus, 'Ulysseus Gender Equality Activities Programme Guide', Ulysseus website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://ulysseus.eu/resources-and-publications/gender-equality-activities-programme-guide/

[457] ENLIGHT, '6th Session ENLIGHT webinar series: discussing diversity, inclusion and racism (14 April)', ENLIGHT website, 13 March 2022, accessed 3 January 2025, https://enlight-eu.org/index.php/university-about-us/news-events/451-enlight-webinar-series-discussing-diversity-inclusion-and-racism-1st-session-21-october

[458] ENLIGHT, 'Equity and Equality in Education and Medicine', ENLIGHT website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://enlight-eu.org/index.php/students/courses/929-equity-and-equality

[459] EUGLOH, 'Let's Talk', EUGLOH website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.eugloh.eu/campus-life/insights/lets-talk-projects

[460] EUniWell, 'EUniWell Ukrainian Fellowship', EUniWell website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.euniwell.eu/what-we-offer/euniwell-ukrainian-fellowships

scholarship scheme and Arqus[461] has an action plan for Ukrainian refugees and scholars at risk. For underrepresented communities in higher education, ENGAGE.EU and Ulysseus implemented dedicated scholarships. Furthermore, the EUniWell School Ambassadors Programme[462] has worked to promote access to higher education among first-generation students in local schools. For women, EELISA created the Gender and Equality Working Group[463], Arqus implemented the *Quiero ser Ingeniera*[464] project to promote engineering studies among pre-university girls, and EC2U is reporting on Practices and measures taken/to be taken to ensure the mainstreaming of the gender dimension in R&I long-term strategies[465]. For students with special needs, Ulysseus is developing the Special Needs Programme[466] to ensure that curriculum, environments, documents, and communications are accessible. For staff and academics, INVEST[467] created opportunities for training on DEI for academic and administrative staff in partner universities, and UNA Europa[468] implemented the staff week on diversity and inclusion.

## BOX 60. EXAMPLE: CIVICA INCLUSION ACTIVITIES

### CIVICA INCLUSION ACTIVITIES

↗ **INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**

**CIVICA**

**CIVICA for All**
Information and support for displaced and refugee students

CIVICA collaborates with local high schools to provide students with a better understanding of what higher education has to offer. Target audiences include high schools in underprivileged areas in the cities of alliance partners. CIVICA students share their experiences with pupils in the classroom to promote access to higher education.

"CIVICA For All" platform has been set up to provide information on scholarships and opportunities in the higher education sector, including workshops, events, language learning and internships to displaced and refugee students and researchers. Platform users can also join "CIVICA for all" on my.civica.eu, where they can meet and connect with other refugee and displaced students in a safe space.

**Relevant links and sources:**
CIVICA activities for high schools promoting access to higher education: **https://www.civica.eu/areas-of-work/civic-engagement/access-to-higher-education/**
Policy Summer Institute (PSI): **https://www.google.com/policyfellowship/europe/**
CIVICA For All Platform: **https://www.civica.eu/civica-for-all/**

**Related policy goals:**

↗ **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

↗ **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

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[461] Arqus, 'Arqus works on an action plan for Ukrainian refugees and students and scholars at risk in collaboration with NaUKMA', Arqus website, 20 June 2023, accessed 3 January 2025, https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/world-refugee-day-2023/

[463] EELISA, 'Gender equality and diversity', EELISA website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eelisa.eu/gender-equality-and-diversity/

[464] Arqus, '11th February: a reminder of the crucial role of women and girls in science and technology', Arqus website, 11 February 2022, accessed 3 January 2025 https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/international-day-women-girls-science-2022/

[465] EC2U, 'First FOREU2 Report on 'practices and measures taken/to be taken to ensure the mainstreaming of the gender dimension in R&I long-term strategies', accessed 3 January 2025, https://ec2u.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/709/2023/10/D8.7-First-joint-FOREU2-report-on-Gender-Equality.pdf

[466] Ulysseus, *Radar Annual Report*, 2022, https://ulysseus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Radar-Annual-Report-2022-FINAL.pdf

[467] INVEST, 'Invest Fellow Programme', INVEST website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.invest-alliance.eu/en/Home/Texts?link=34-invest-fellow-programme

[468] UNA Europa, 'UNA Europa Staff Week 2023: Embrace Equity, Empower Inclusion', UNA Europa website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.una-europa.eu/opportunities/una-europa-staff-week#:~:text=Una%20Europa%20Staff%20Week%202023,16%20to%2020%20October%202023.

**Enhancing internationalisation to make it more inclusive and accessible to students facing physical mobility challenges is a shared concern among European Universities alliances.** For this purpose, Ulysseus launched the MOB4ALL project[469] to promote transnational mobility among students with special needs by building their capacity. Additionally, the alliance created the Elderlies' Internationalisation Programme[470], which offers courses to the elderly community. The Unite! alliance's IDEM project aims to ensure that students with disabilities, refugee students, and first-generation students have equal access and full participation in all mobility programmes offered by partner universities. Additionally, the EDUC Virtual Mobility & Exchange initiative[471] fosters collaboration among students and academics from different universities through the implementation of diverse education (online synchronous and asynchronous) and learning approaches (formal, non-formal, individual and group-based).

**Several key challenges to embedding DEI in European Universities alliances persist.** First, establishing unified approaches to DEI at the alliance level requires navigating and harmonising the complex landscape of existing national and institutional plans. This requires specifying governance strategies, establishing specific roles and responsibilities, and setting mechanisms for assessing and monitoring progress and impact at the alliance level. Second, adequate resourcing of DEI initiatives is essential for the sustainability of these efforts. Allocating and sustaining dedicated resources or mechanisms to plan, support, and assess a wide range of DEI initiatives across alliance partners remains challenging. Third, ensuring the full participation of diverse communities, encompassing individuals with cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and ability-based differences, among others, demands proactive efforts to remove barriers and create accessible alternatives within alliances, particularly in areas such as transnational mobility.

### 6.3.3. Regional and civic engagement

European Universities alliances are expected to "contribute to regional development and positively impact the local communities and ecosystems through education and training, research, and knowledge exchange, contributing to improvements in societal well-being"[472]. Alliances can consolidate the knowledge square[473] and foster knowledge-creating teams composed of students and academics, possibly together with researchers, entrepreneurs, companies, local and regional actors, and civil society actors, to address diverse societal challenges in an interdisciplinary way through challenge-based approaches, innovative learning and training, and living labs[474].

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[469] Ulysseus, 'Mob4All Landing page', Ulysseus website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://mob4all.ulysseus.eu/

[470] Ulysseus, *Radar Annual Report*, 2022, https://ulysseus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Radar-Annual-Report-2022-FINAL.pdf

[471] EDUC, 'Let's get internationally digital', EDUC website, 2 February 2024, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.educalliance.eu/news/lets-get-internationally-digital

[472] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for Proposals: Partnerships for Excellence - European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU-2023-EUR-UNIV,* 2023, p. 10, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-univ_en.pdf

[473] A concept understood as the junction of four core domains: education, research, innovation, and service to society. European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Communication from the European Commission on achieving the European Education Area by 2025*, COM(2020) 625 final, 30 September 2020, https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/eea-communication-sept2020_en.pdf

[474] Living Labs in universities enable students, staff and researchers to cooperate with other key stakeholders to solve societal challenges and encourage the application of knowledge to the real-world context, enhance the skills of those involved, increase connections between people, and provide more opportunities to connect with society. European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture,

Learners should have more opportunities to benefit from traineeships, be exposed to
start-ups, and engaged as actors of change in their community to impact society
around them positively[475].

**Alliances organise their activities around a wide diversity of themes relevant
to the society locally and regionally.** An analysis of the focus areas and vision
statements indicated by the alliances reveals 12 main topics of their activities. Figure
50 shows the number of alliances that mentioned each of the 12 themes in their focus
areas or vision statements. Several alliances mentioned more than one theme, and
therefore were counted more than once.

## FIGURE 50. MAIN THEMES OF ALLIANCES
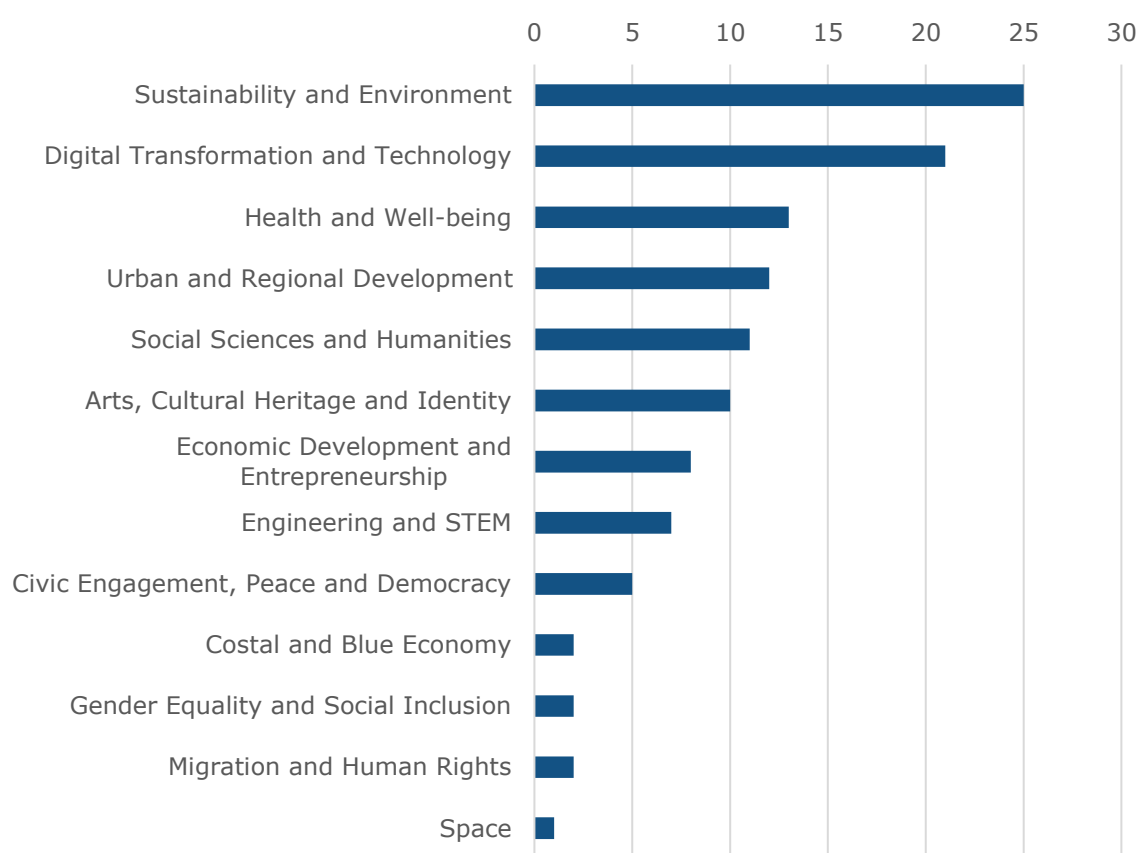


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the factsheets of the alliances selected in 2019 and 2020, published by
the European Commission.*

Earlier research findings indicated that HEIs perceive their **participation in European
Universities alliances as a positive experience that allows them to strengthen
their collaboration with the broader innovation ecosystem at both local and**

*Communication from the Commission on a European strategy for universities*, COM/2022/16 final, 2022, p.
1, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities

[475] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Communication
from the Commission on a European strategy for universities*, COM/2022/16 final, 2022, p. 5,
https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities

**international levels**[476]. Alliances are creating innovative academic and training models that bring students and scholars closer to the needs and challenges of local stakeholders and communities[477]. **Challenge-based approaches** have emerged as a trend for European Universities alliances to address societal challenges, such as those related to diversity and inclusiveness, social inequality, digitalisation, sustainability, and multilingualism[478]. An added value here is that alliances allow to engage international students from partner universities easily, link the challenges to and among diverse regional contexts, and add a transnational perspective to the proposed solutions[479].

To address local, regional and civic engagement effectively, most European Universities alliances are implementing joint strategies. Figure 51 shows that 82% of the alliances already have or are developing such strategies.

**FIGURE 51. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE A JOINT STRATEGY FOR LOCAL/REGIONAL/CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?**
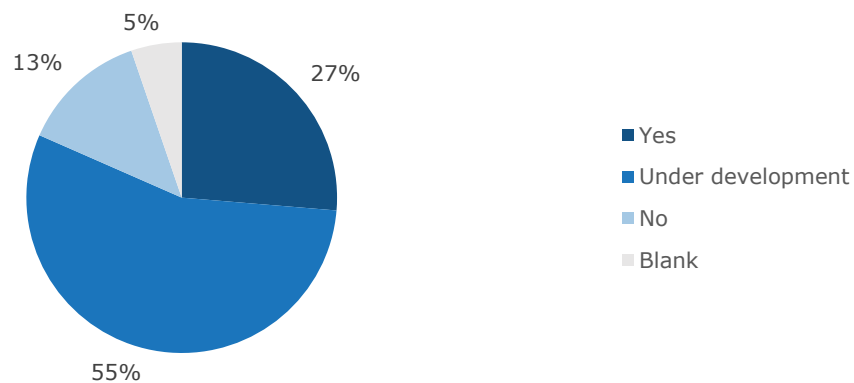


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

Strategies for local/regional and civic engagement generally place diverse levels of emphasis on engagement with industry/businesses, public organisations, civil society organisations, and/or citizens according to the mission of each alliance. This section presents the two separately.

### *Regional engagement*

Regional engagement addresses the work of European Universities alliances with the private sector, including businesses, industries, SMEs, and start-ups, as well as with local, regional, and national public authorities[480]. **European Universities alliances have built upon existing partnerships and created new ones to support actions such as challenge-based approaches to learning, teaching and**

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[476] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

[477] Ibid.

[478] Marques, M., and Graf, L., 2023.

[479] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[480] European Education Area, 'The European Universities alliances in action: Knowledge-creating teams', European Commission website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/about#KnowledgeTeams

**research, development of living labs, creation of entrepreneurship support mechanisms, and support to local and regional public sector organisations.**

**As highlighted by the Draghi Report on the Future of European Competitiveness[481], regional engagement is crucial to build strong ecosystems that connect local industries, governments, and academic institutions to foster innovation and competitiveness.** Higher education institutions play a central role by acting as hubs for collaboration, generating knowledge, and translating research into practical applications that address regional challenges and support economic growth.

A recent study[482] showed that **alliances are enhancing partnerships with public authorities, tackling local issues, and informing policymaking with the results of their work.** External stakeholders view the European-level visibility and the transnational approach to resolving challenges as an added value. The same study also highlighted that **companies are more eager to engage with HEIs when presented with wider collaboration opportunities within the framework of European Universities alliances.** However, another study[483] highlighted differences in managing knowledge transfer processes and the lack of financial frameworks at the national level as the main difficulties for engaging non-academic stakeholders.

**European Universities alliances demonstrate a robust commitment to regional engagement through multifaceted collaboration with private and public sector organisations**. As expressed in the monitoring framework:

> "Alliances provide excellent tools to further regional cooperation by including education in the existing research and innovation connections. Participation in the alliance creates special and favourable conditions for regional cooperation, especially via challenge-based learning activities" – *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

Most alliances have developed strategies to engage regional and local, business, and public associated partners. To implement strategies in education, research, innovation and service to society missions, **alliances are developing knowledge hubs, challenge-based approaches, hackathons, living labs, entrepreneurship support, and direct engagement with local authorities**. These initiatives are usually complementary and transversal, fostering innovative approaches for solving local and regional societal challenges. In addition, alliances are key testbeds for innovative approaches to regional engagement and challenge-based learning and bring it to a new level through collaboration with external partners.

**Several European Universities alliances set up channels to involve associated private and public sector partners in alliance governance**. For example, EC2U[484] holds a Plenary Council to discuss topics at the local ecosystem level. CHARM-EU[485] External Engagement Committee, composed of students, employers, and quality

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[481] Draghi, M., The future of European competitiveness: Part B | In-depth analysis and recommendations, September 2024, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961_en

[482] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

[483] European Commission: European Research Executive Agency, O'Neill, G. and Acheson, H., *Progress of University Alliance Projects – Projects funded under Horizon 2020 IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020 Call - Pilot I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/533035

[484] EC2U, 'What is EC2U? Plenary Council', EC2U website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://ec2u.eu/what-is-ec2u/

[485] CHARM-EU, 'External Advisory Committee', CHARM-EU website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.charm-eu.eu/external-advisory-committee

assurance agencies' representatives providing external feedback to the alliance. YUFE Townhall[486] and E³UDRES² Stakeholder Forum[487] annually gather HEIs, experts, policymakers, industry representatives, development agencies, and other HEIs to identify collaboration opportunities and co-create innovative ideas for supporting their regions (Box 61).

## BOX 61. EXAMPLE: E³UDRES² INITIATIVES FOR REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND CHALLENGE-BASED LEARNING

### E³UDRES² I-LIVING LABS
**REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

E³UDRES² has several different activities where students work to solve societal challenges. In those, over 100 regional challenges have already been solved by student teams in different formats. Some of these activities are:

**I-Living Labs**

E³UDRES² I-Living Labs integrate challenge-based learning into existing curricula or new joint programmes. Students tackle complex regional challenges in well-being, ageing, circular economy, and AI society through transdisciplinary collaboration with universities, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and citizens. Over several weeks, diverse student teams work on real-world problems, guided by educational entrepreneurs and stakeholders, to develop innovative, sustainable solutions.

**Bootcamps**

E³UDRES² Bootcamps, held annually in alliance partner regions, offer a five-day challenge-based learning experience. Students develop solutions for regional issues in an innovative environment, supported by mentors and local stakeholders. Participants gain knowledge in design thinking, business models, and soft skills like time management and intercultural collaboration, while contributing to the future of European regions.

**Hackathons**

E³UDRES² Hackathons are 36-48 hour events where participants brainstorm to solve real-life challenges faced by local businesses and institutions. Open to students, staff, and citizens, these events enhance problem-solving and organisational skills. Teams develop innovative ideas within a limited timeframe, benefiting from diverse, international perspectives and dynamic collaboration.

**Relevant links and sources:**

**I-Living Labs: https://eudres.eu/i-living-labs**

**Bootcamps: https://eudres.eu/bootcamp**

**Hackathon: https://eudres.eu/hackathon**

**Related policy goals:**

**STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**European Universities alliances have developed several initiatives with industry and businesses, the public sector, and civil society organisations**. As illustrated in Figure 52, **71% of alliances have implemented or are developing quadruple helix collaborations between academia, businesses, government, and civil society**. Some alliances are co-delivering education and research with academic, non-academic, and extra-academic (social and traditional enterprise) actors. Many alliances have established designated Labs for to foster transdisciplinary collaboration between academia and external stakeholders in research and innovation.

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[486]YUFE, 'YUFE Townhall 2023', YUFE website, 2023, accessed 3 January 2025,  https://yufe.eu/yufe-townhall-2023/

[487] E³UDRES², 'Connecting European Regions: First E³UDRES² Regional Stakeholders Forum took place at St. Pölten UAS', E³UDRES² website, 2022, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eudres.eu/news/first-eudres-regional-stakeholders-forum-took-place-in-austria

In service to society, actions such as regional academies and European dialogues, as implemented by ENLIGHT[488], support the identification and prioritisation of community challenges that the alliance addresses.

### FIGURE 52. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE INITIATIVES WITH QUADRUPLE HELIX COLLABORATION?
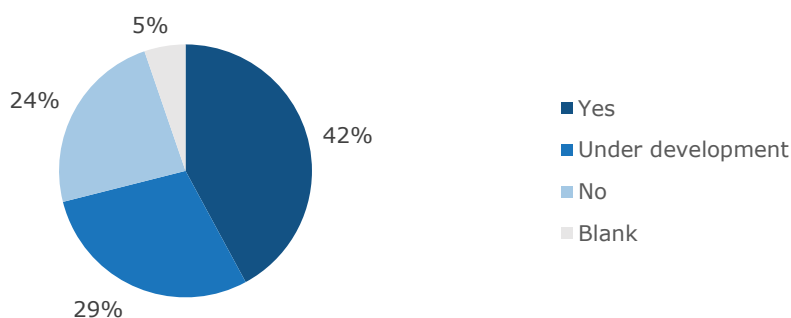


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

**A common approach of the European Universities alliances to regional engagement is challenge-based learning** as a strategy to generate mutual benefits for internal and external stakeholders. Many alliances provide **resources and teacher training to support the development of challenge-based or student-centred learning activities**, such as the Arqus MOOC on Challenge-Based Learning[489], the ECIU *Teamcher* concept[490], Aurora resources and courses for teaches[491] in student-centred and service learning, among many others. The ENLIGHT Alliance created a methodology embedded in the ENLIGHT Regional Academies to work with external partners and communities to identify and address local challenges. These challenges are published in the Community Challenge Database[492] and include, for example, improvement of air quality, digitalisation of public services, development of digital skills, and improvement of access to education and employment for refugees and ethnic minorities, among others.

Challenge-based learning is implemented in diverse formats. Some alliances organise challenge weeks/days like the EuroTeQ Collider[493]. The topics addressed by the Colliders are proposed collaboratively by professors, researchers, students, and industry partners. In 2023, EuroTeQ Colliders attracted 1,513 students and staff from partner HEIs and 104 local external stakeholders. Some alliances, like ENLIGHT, **allow students to complete their theses as start-up projects**[494]. Other alliances have implemented incubator models, like the Circle.U InCU.bator platform to foster challenge-based learning opportunities in collaboration with associated).

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[488] ENLIGHT, *Regional Academies*, https://enlight-eu.org/index.php/for-cities-communities/regional-academies

[489] Arqus, *Enroll for the new Arqus MOOC on Challenge-Based Learning!,* https://arqus-alliance.eu/news/enrol-for-the-new-arqus-mooc-on-challenge-based-learning/

[490] ECIU University, *The growing ECIU community of Teamchers, https://www.eciu.eu/news/the-growing-eciu-community-of-teamchers*

[491] Aurora, Support for teachers. https://aurora-universities.eu/support-for-teachers/

[492] ENLIGHT, *Community Challenges*, https://enlight-eu.org/index.php/for-cities-communities/community-challenges

[493] EuroTeQ, 'The EuroTeQ Collider', EuroTeQ website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://euroteq.eurotech-universities.eu/initiatives/the-euroteq-collider/

[494] Circle U., 'InCU.bator', Circle U website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.circle-u.eu/about/platforms/incubator/

## BOX 62. EXAMPLE: ENLIGHT REGIONAL ACADEMIES

### ENLIGHT REGIONAL ACADEMIES

**REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

ENL↗GHT

ENLIGHT Regional Academies play an active role in facilitating collaboration between the ENLIGHT alliance and external stakeholders within each partner HEI's community. Regional academies bring together students, researchers, local governments, entrepreneurs, community representatives, and non-profit organisations through regular meetings across the alliance and researchers in the European Dialogues networking events.

The primary objective of Regional Academies is to identify and address local challenges that align with ENLIGHT flagship domains. These challenges are published in the ENLIGHT Challenge Database and addressed through initiatives such as annual living labs, challenge-based courses, thesis projects, research projects, start-up ideas, and innovation initiatives, among others.



Sequence between Regional Academies and
European & Global Dialogues[495]

Regional Academies give input to the Think Tank core groups to define the complex dynamics behind the challenges as well as their trans-disciplinarity. At a higher level, the ENLIGHT European Dialogues gather Regional Academies and Think Tanks to establish dialogue with key stakeholders across Europe (cities, regions, NGOs, industry, other European Universities alliances and university networks). Additionally, the ENLIGHT Global Dialogues in key regions outside Europe (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa, South/ East Asia) develop student-driven and student-centred conferences focused on flagship challenges. Then, the alliance issues the ENLIGHT Global Citizenship Awards to the most innovative global dialogue student teams.

**Relevant links and sources:**

ENLIGHT Regional Academies: **https://enlight-eu.org/index.php/for-cities-communities/regional-academies/449-regional-academies**

**Related policy goals:**

**JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

**CHALLENGE-BASED APPROACHES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES
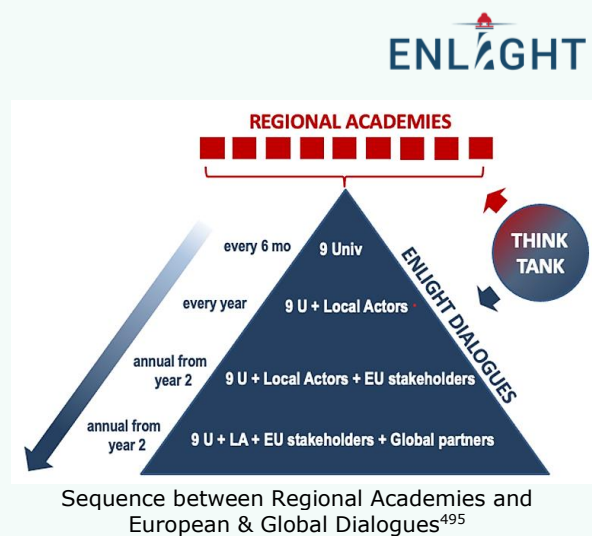
Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.

**Many alliances address EU digital and green transition priorities and United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through their challenge-based approaches, signalling their commitment to sustainability**. To name a couple of examples, ECIU University embedded the SDGs into four main topics they address through challenge-based approaches[496]: circular economy, energy and sustainability, resilient communities, and transport and mobility. Similarly, EPICUR integrated aims from the Green Deal, SDGs, and EU Skills Agenda to produce a challenge-based approach that fosters inter-institutional collaboration and engages external stakeholders through EPIChallenges (Box 64).

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[495] ENLIGHT, Mission Statement, ENLIGHT website, 2020, accessed 3 January 2025, https://enlight-eu.org/docs/enlight-mission-2020.pdf

[496] ECIU University, 'SDG/Domain', ECIU website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://engage.eciu.eu/topics/67699879-d13d-ed11-9db0-000d3aaae004/sdgdomain

## BOX 63. EXAMPLE: ECIU UNIVERSITY CHALLENGES AND LOCAL PARTNERSHIP ARENAS

### ECIU CHALLENGES AND LOCAL PARTNERSHIP ARENAS

⚐ REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

ECIU University implemented challenge-based learning as an educational model that engages learners, educators, and researchers in cooperation with cities and businesses to solve real-life challenges. This interdisciplinary approach allows students to gain significant learning experiences by applying their knowledge and skills to address complex problems.

To design the challenges, ECIU University established Local Partnership Arenas, which are fora employing multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary approaches to co-create socio-technical challenges. They serve to source, discuss, refine, and provide challenges for the ECIU University Challenge Platform.

The ECIU University uses three formats of challenge-based learning composed of four elements each: duration and workload (1-2 days to 3-6 months), level of engagement, level of investigation, and level of action. These are translated into ECTS that are awarded to students for completing challenges of different duration and/or complexity.

The Local Partnership Arenas of ECIU University have sourced over 160 cases for challenges that have been taken up by learners across Europe, working with more than 100 providers. Over 600 learners collaborated on approximately 120 real-life challenges in international cross-institutional teams, while more than 150 educators co-created ECIU University's learning opportunities. A Recognition Accord facilitates automatic recognition of the activities across the consortium's member institutions.
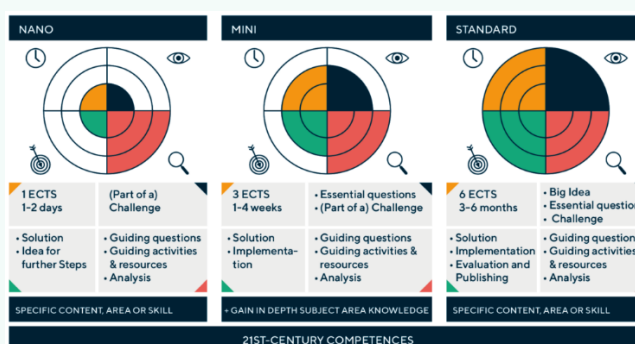


The challenges are led by ECIU Teamchers, more than 300 teachers and staff members who regularly exchange their experiences and recommendations for organising challenge-based learning at alliance-wide online roundtables.

### Relevant links and sources:

ECIU Challenge Platform: **https://engage.eciu.eu/browse?learningOppTypes=623140000**

O'Riordan, F. and Gormley, C., *Challenge Based Learning (CBL): Implementation Guide for those who Teach,* 2021, **https://www.utwente.nl/en/cbl/documents/dcu-futures-cbl-implementation-guide-for-those-who-teach.pdf**

ECIU Teachers: **https://www.eciu.eu/news/the-growing-eciu-community-of-teamchers**

### Related policy goals:

⚐ EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY

⚐ JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER

EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

## BOX 64. EXAMPLE: EPICUR EPICHALLENGES

### EPICUR EPICHALLENGES

#### REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The EPIChallenges are part of EPICUR's joint challenge-based research agenda that aims to address pressing societal issues such as sustainability, mobility, migration, identity, and transition of the public health system. EPICUR incentivises early-career researchers to address the EPIChallenges through co-creation with external stakeholders from a transdisciplinary perspective. Early-career researchers establish and join interdisciplinary thematic clusters (EPIClusters) and solve these challenges.

EPICUR created a three-step EPICUR Pathway to Research to support young scientists in their innovative, inter- and/or transdisciplinary research. Its goal is to empower early-career researchers in their scientific activity by establishing bottom-up cooperative networks of regional academic communities within EPICUR partner universities. The three steps to support development of EPIChallenges are:

**EPIChallenges**

**SUSTAINABILITY:** with a particular focus on climate change, energy and materials, contributions to this EPIChallenge should aim at finding solutions and roadmaps towards clean and affordable energy systems, sustainable ecosystem engagement, circular economies with reduced industrial pollution, smart building and transportation systems and more.

**MOBILITY, MIGRATION, IDENTITY:** Understanding that mobility and migration – forced and voluntary – are changing our societies as much as our collective / individual identities, this EPIChallenge invites research on such topics as refugee movements, poverty, disparity of economic and social status, virtual life, cultural change, interculturality, and multilingualism.

**PUBLIC HEALTH:** as both health systems and human behaviour undergo significant transformation as a response to Covid19, climate change induced diseases and other epidemics which cause financial and economic losses, interdisciplinary research must aid in developing resilient health sectors, societies, communities and even individuals.

- **EPICamps:** virtual interactive events for young scientists from diverse disciplines to matchmake and work on EPIChallenges;
- **EPICradles:** 3-month paid fellowships at a partner institution given to interdisciplinary teams working on EPIChallenges;
- **EPIClusters:** trans- and interdisciplinary challenge-oriented research formats that include external stakeholders to develop research and innovation.

This strategic approach engages both education and research activities towards tackling EPIChallenges. Additionally, it has strengthened EPICUR's joint lifelong learning centre, citizen science projects and platforms.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EPIChallenges: **https://epicur.edu.eu/research/presentation-research/**

**Related policy goals:**

#### JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

#### STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING AND INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGIES

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Some alliances have implemented challenge-based learning through hackathons that engage external experts and citizens.** Through E³UDRES² Hackathons[497], alliance contributes to solving regional challenges involving students, university staff, and citizens supported by experienced mentors and experts. Similarly, EUTOPIA Open Innovation Challenges[498] encourage students to collaborate with public and private partners to solve real-life challenges in a hackathon format. EUGLOH[499] developed a hackathon platform engaging participants in transdisciplinary co-design of solutions to societal challenges.

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[497] E³UDRES², Hackathons, E³UDRES² website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eudres.eu/hackathon

[498] EUTOPIA, 'The Open Innovation Challenge', EUTOPIA website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eutopia-university.eu/english-version/students/open-innovation-challenge

[499] EUGLOH, 'Hackathon Practices', EUGLOH website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.hackathonpractices.com/editions

**Several European Universities alliances established hubs to centralise collaboration, address regional challenges, and promote multi-stakeholder engagement**. For instance, Ulysseus has a network of eight Innovation Hubs[500] located at partner universities where all collaboration activities are concentrated in an innovation ecosystem, allowing to tackle regional challenges by an international community. Likewise, the SEA-EU SOCIETY HUB[501] acts as a platform for all alliance stakeholders to develop society-oriented activities. By integrating diverse activities, CIVIS Hubs provide multidisciplinary and multinational joint education, research, and innovation opportunities using shared infrastructure, digital platforms, and research teams (see Box 65).

## BOX 65. EXAMPLE: CIVIS INTERDISCIPLINARY HUBS

**CIVIS INTERDISCIPLINARY HUBS**

**REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT**



Five CIVIS interdisciplinary are linked with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Each hub offers study and research programmes focused on global societal challenges. Some of the educational offers include MOOCs, Master's programmes, blended intensive programmes, and summer schools. Hubs are cross- and interdisciplinary thematic research and education areas which structure the alliance.

The hubs focus on five themes: Climate, Environment and Energy; Society, Culture, Heritage; Health; Cities, Spaces and Mobilities; Digital and Technological Transformation. Each of them offers joint micro-programmes at bachelor's, master's, and PhD levels applying innovative pedagogies at CIVIS member universities and fosters multidisciplinary research projects. The Hubs provide students with new skills and knowledge, and support their entrepreneurial mindset to better tackle society's biggest challenges locally and globally.

**Relevant links and sources:**

CIVIS Hubs **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3cQrPIqpUVM**

**Related policy goals:**

**KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

**JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**European Universities alliances have implemented Living Labs to foster intersectoral collaboration in diverse ways, ranging from student-centred problem-solving to testing grounds for new learning and research approaches**. Arqus[502] uses Living Labs as an umbrella concept to set up communities and spaces to foster interdisciplinary and challenge-based approaches to tackle societal challenges. Ulysseus[503] uses Living Labs as places for full-scale testing of new services and tools for collaboration between local authorities, companies, associations, research laboratories, and other users. E³UDRES² created the I-Living Labs[504] as

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[500] Ulysseus, 'Innovation Hubs', Ulysseus website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://ulysseus.eu/innovation-hubs/

[501] SEA-EU, 'The SOCIETY Hub', SEA-EU website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://sea-eu.org/sea-eu-society-hub/

[502] Arqus, 'Arqus Living Labs', Arqus website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://arqus-alliance.eu/our-communities/arqus-living-labs/

[503] Ulysseus, 'Ulysseus European University opens its first Living Lab during the Summit in Nice', Ulysseus website, 22 March 2023, accessed 3 January 2025, https://ulysseus.eu/news/ulysseus-european-university-opens-its-first-living-lab-during-the-summit-in-nice/

[504] E³UDRES², 'I Living Labs', E³UDRES² website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eudres.eu/i-living-labs

curricular or extracurricular course units, where teams of students work on complex problems requiring solutions positively impacting the region. Similarly, INVEST[505] uses Living Labs as an opportunity for students to apply knowledge to concrete situations and develop innovative solutions with societal benefits. UNIC CityLabs are physical and virtual meeting points where students, citizens, academia, and city stakeholders work together to identify and solve societal challenges faced by post-industrial cities (see Box 66).

## BOX 66. EXAMPLE: UNIC CITYLABS

### UNIC CITYLABS
⌇ **REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT**



CityLabs are physical and virtual meeting points where students, citizens, academia and city stakeholders work together to identify and solve societal challenges. The process of CityLabs follows three main steps.

First societal challenges are identified locally. Then, they are solved at UNIC-wide co-creation events. Ultimately, local experts and administrators offer support and guidance to materialise developed solutions. This approach allows students, citizens, academia, and city stakeholders to work collaboratively on real-world challenges that post-industrial cities face. This both enhances students' learning experience and results in practical solutions that can be implemented in the cities. City Labs have notably enhanced engagement with municipalities, fostering stronger connections and yielding a meaningful impact on local communities. The Alliance hosted more 100 local CityLabs events, 48 Virtual events, and three hybrid International CityLabs Festivals in Oulu, Liège, and Bilbao.

**Relevant links and sources:**
UNIC CityLabs: **https://www.unic.eu/en/city-labs**

**Related policy goals:**

⌇ **ENGAGED RESEARCH**

⌇ **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Initiatives to support entrepreneurship also provide European Universities alliances with opportunities to engage with external stakeholders in the ideation, development, incubation, and growth strategies of entrepreneurial ideas**. For instance, EuroTech offers the EuroTech European Venture Programme[506], allowing entrepreneurs to explore multiple ecosystems and expand their businesses beyond borders. The programme includes thematic workshops, peer feedback, and networking opportunities with local start-ups, companies, public organisations, technology experts, business coaches, and venture capitalists. Arqus created the International Soft Landing for Young Entrepreneurs (ISLYE) Mobility Programme[507] offering international mobility opportunities between Arqus cities to student entrepreneurs and establishing partnerships between the universities' incubators and accelerators. With the Unfolds initiative[508], EELISA encourages students, academics, researchers, staff, and industry players to participate in the InnoHack contests, and

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[505] INVEST, 'Living Labs', INVEST website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.invest-alliance.eu/en/Home/Texts?link=7-living-labs

[506] EuroTech, 'European Venture Programme', EuroTech website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eurotech-universities.eu/funding/european-venture-programme/

[507] Arqus, 'ISLYE – International Soft Landing for Young Entrepreneurs', Arqus website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://arqus-alliance.eu/linking-local-ecosystems/islye-international-soft-landing-for-young-entrepreneurs/

[508] EELISA, 'EELISA Unfolds', EELISA website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eelisa.eu/eelisa-unfolds-2/

several entrepreneurship-oriented courses. Additionally, EELISA partnered with OECD and twelve other organisations to develop the "Stand By Youth" initiative, providing emergency support to businesses by creating a high-quality paid internship and apprenticeship scheme, and providing alliance students and recent graduates with job training opportunities. From an innovation perspective, ENGAGE.EU Inno-preneurship. Space is a physical and digital platform enabling students to collaborate with societal stakeholders and develop entrepreneurial ideas and practices that have a sustainable and inclusive impact on society (see Box 67).

## BOX 67. EXAMPLE: ENGAGE.EU INNOPRENEURSHIP

### ENGAGE.EU INNOPRENEURSHIP

**REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

The concept of Innopreneurship, innovation-based value creation for the society at large, is central to ENGAGE.EU. This approach combines entrepreneurship, innovation, and intrapreneurship as core components to provide the necessary motivations, behaviours, skills and competences to tackle societal challenges.

ENGAGE.EU has integrated innopreneurship into the ENGAGE.EU Innopreneurship Space, a platform that facilitates collaboration between students and societal stakeholders to develop innopreneurial ideas that have a positive impact on society. The platform provides access to tools, methodologies, and processes that empower innopreneurs to drive societal change. Additionally, ENGAGE.EU has organised innopreneurial expeditions during which students worked with international teams, experts, and mentors to co-create innovative solutions to real-world challenges brought by societal partners.

To support the implementation of the concept, ENGAGE.EU has established three co-creation labs:

- Class Lab enables innopreneurs to communicate remotely, share information and access specially designed tools.
- Co-Design Lab supports innopreneurs to work collaboratively prototyping their project ideas.
- Home Lab provides a repository space where innopreneurs can collect and share materials.



**Relevant links and sources:**

ENGAGE.EU, *The ENGAGE.EU Innopreneurial Mindset*, 2019: **https://engageuniversity.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/D86_Innopreneurial-Mindset.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

**JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**

**STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

*Source: Prepared PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**European Universities alliances have several specific actions to engage public authorities and local governments, aiming to embed alliances into the local ecosystems and seeking for potential collaborations**. Beyond city authorities, UNITA has implemented the UNITA Rural Mobility Programme, offering students internships at public and private sector organisations in rural towns and villages with fewer than 3,000 inhabitants. This innovative mobility initiative has allowed the alliance to contribute to rural communities in various countries, benefiting both students and local populations (see Box 68).

## BOX 68. EXAMPLE: UNITA RURAL MOBILITY PROGRAMME

### UNITA RURAL MOBILITY PROGRAMME

**REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

The UNITA Rural Mobility Programme is an international internship opportunity for students enrolled at one of UNITA's partner universities. The programme offers mobility opportunities to institutions, companies, and municipalities of rural communities in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Romania. The programme aims to bring highly qualified and motivated university students to organisations and companies working in rural areas linked to ecosystem needs. Its objective is to create new synergies in education, research, and entrepreneurship and to produce a positive impact on rural and mountainous areas across Europe.

Participating students get involved in different projects according to the profiles of the host organisations. The typical areas include tourism, agriculture, agronomy, social design, anthropology, service design, geography and spatial planning, development and cooperation, business management, documentation sciences, territorial animation, communication, and marketing. The programme fosters civic engagement by integrating rural area organisations with HEIs, creating new opportunities for students, helping combat depopulation, decreasing the average age of small municipalities, giving visibility to companies in rural areas, and fostering their growth.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Unita Rural Mobility Programme: **https://univ-unita.eu/Sites/unita/en/Pagina/mobility**

**Related policy goals:**

**STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**        **INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Alliances are also working with regional governments to establish EU-level development strategies. **By leveraging the participation of HEIs in local Smart Specialisation Strategies and regional development initiatives, alliances are expanding their efforts to provide an interregional perspective**. For this purpose, RUN-EU is implementing the European Zone for Interregional Development. This initiative involves regional governments of alliance partner institutions in EU-level cooperation for regional development (Box 69).

## BOX 69. EXAMPLE: RUN-EU EUROPEAN ZONE FOR INTERRREGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### EUROPEAN ZONE FOR INTERREGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

The RUN-EU implementation plan devised the creation of a European Zone for Interregional Development (EZ-ID) to drive innovation, support the implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies, and promote common European values and identity at the local and European levels. The EZ-ID initiative brings together RUN-EU partner institutions and their regional governments.

RUN-EU aims to increase the competitiveness of its HEIs and regions. For this purpose, the EZ-ID will be key to leverage the potential of the 76,000 students, 8,000 staff, and 97 research centres within the alliance. To achieve this goal, a Memorandum of Understanding was established between RUN-EU partner institutions and their regional governments, reflecting the role that European universities should play in regional development and leadership of local innovation ecosystems. This mechanism will help increase the competitiveness of RUN-EU's HEIs and regions.

**Relevant links and sources:**

RUN-EU PLUS Strategy for Innovation Report: **https://run-eu.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/30/2024/03/RUN-EU-PLUS-D6.4-Strategy-for-Innovation-Co-operation-1.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**To facilitate stakeholder engagement, alliance websites usually include a designated section listing relevant resources and engagement opportunities**. To mention just a few of many examples, EU-CONEXUS designed a university-industry platform[509] to connect stakeholders with students and graduates in a virtual space. Similarly, YUFE has website sections for policymakers and businesses[510], FORTHEM also invites companies or public sector organisations to get involved[511].

**European Universities alliances face various challenges in pursuing effective and sustainable regional engagement**. First, harmonising stakeholders' varied needs and priorities (businesses, public authorities, and civil society organisations) within diverse regional ecosystems in the alliance-level strategies remains challenging. Balancing these diverse demands in an alliance-level approach requires coordinated efforts to foster successful collaborative initiatives. Second, ensuring the long-term sustainability of partnerships is difficult despite the initial commitment due to factors such as leadership changes in the external stakeholders, shifting public priorities, and fluctuating resource availability of the stakeholders. Third, developing capacity-building mechanisms for regional engagement requires establishing dedicated resources, expertise, incentives, and support structures. In addition, communication barriers persist in culturally and linguistically diverse regions.

### *Civic engagement*

The concept of civic engagement emphasises the promotion of active citizenship "responding to the objective of the 'the public good' rather than solely to economic development" [512]. In this section, the study uses civic engagement to refer to the ways in which citizens participate in and contribute to the European Universities alliances. While regional engagement focuses on the cooperation of alliances with industries and businesses, the public sector, and civil society organisations, civic engagement focuses on the actions of alliances to engage with citizens. This section is closely connected with the sections looking into regional engagement, engaged education and research, open education and open science since these frames of action also offer opportunities for citizens to participate.

**Alliances demonstrate commitment to fostering civic engagement through various initiatives and structures**. They actively involve citizens in their activities, offering platforms for participation, dialogue events, and collaboration opportunities. In response to urgent societal needs, such as those arising from the conflict in Ukraine, **alliances have demonstrated solidarity and practical support for the affected populations**. **From citizen science projects to community challenges and volunteer programs, alliances engage with civil society to address local and global challenges.** Additionally, alliances promote lifelong learning opportunities, service-learning initiatives, and public lecture series, thus enriching academic and civil society experiences. Alliance coordinators underlined that the European Universities initiative provides a unique transnational venue and resources to enhance the third mission and societal engagement of their HEIs and the alliance as a whole.

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[509] EU-CONEXUS, 'University-Industry platform', EU-CONEXUS website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/industry-university-cooperation/
[510] YUFE, 'Government & Policy Makers', YUFE website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://yufe.eu/government-and-policy-makers/
[511] FORTHEM, 'Get involved: Private companies / Public organisations', FORTHEM website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.forthem-alliance.eu/get-involved
[512] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Farnell, T., *Community engagement in higher education – Trends, practices and policies – Analytical report*, Publications Office, 2020, p. 28, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/071482

Most European Universities alliances included the development of structures to support civic engagement in their strategies. As illustrated by Figure 53, **76% of the alliances have developed or are working on the establishment of specific departments, centres, Living Labs, testbeds, and other structures that foster the participation of civil society, along with other stakeholders**:

> "Citizens are part of the scope of our challenge-based actions and regional cooperation set-up. Several partners have organised local demo days to showcase the work of the alliance to a broader public and to enhance the participation of citizens and regional organisations" – *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

**Alliances also mentioned the development of service-learning activities, work-integrated learning approaches, lifelong learning opportunities, knowledge exchange platforms, dialogue events with citizens, volunteer programmes, and citizen science platforms and working groups**. A recent study[513] revealed that the alliances had planned various citizen science activities, such as "contributive activities where citizens gather data; Collaborative activities where citizens may also analyse or interpret data; Co-created activities where citizens can participate in all stages in the project lifecycle, from designing the research questions to analysing data"[514]. However, the study identified several main challenges regarding citizen and societal engagement, including addressing diverging national regulations, organisational set-ups, and assessment standards; balancing diverse levels of awareness and uptake among the alliance partners; addressing language barriers at both staff and public information levels; and developing sustainable actions and support mechanisms.

**FIGURE 53. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE SPECIFIC DEPARTMENTS, CENTRES, LIVING LABS, TESTBEDS, OR OTHER STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT?**
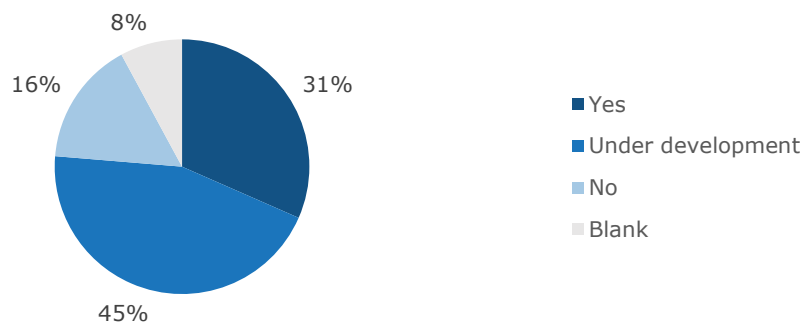


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

**Alliances have implemented volunteer programmes that allow students to engage in community activities**. For example, FORTHEM[515] offers volunteer opportunities on topics related to the prevention of gender violence and the promotion of the human rights of refugees. YUFE created the Community Volunteer Programme[516]

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[513] European Commission: European Research Executive Agency, O'Neill, G. and Acheson, H., *Progress of University Alliance Projects – Projects funded under Horizon 2020 IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020 Call - Pilot I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/533035executive
[514] Ibid, p. 35.
[515] FORTHEM, 'Civic Engagement and Project Management Practices', FORTHEM website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.forthem-alliance.eu/get-involved/students/civic-engagement-projects
[516] YUFE, 'Local Communities and Universities now closer than ever before', YUFE website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://yufe.eu/yufe/local-communities-and-universities-now-closer-than-ever-before/

to contribute to their local communities by advising on immigration, entrepreneurship and local development, water safety, health issues, and didactics.

To support students' commitment, the alliances have also created incentives to support the implementation of local/regional/civic engagement strategies. Figure 54 **shows that 66% of alliances are engaged in developing mechanisms to recognise community engagement within study programmes and alliance-level bodies.** 55% of the alliances are developing award schemes, and 55% are creating an alliance body or unit related to local and regional community engagement. An example is EU-CONEXUS Student Civic Engagement European Project[517] aimed to develop recognition mechanisms for the skills gained through civic engagement on a European scale, fostering critical skills, ethical values, and active citizenship, connecting academic learning with real-world societal impact[518].

### FIGURE 54. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR STAFF OR STUDENTS WHO PARTICIPATE IN REGIONAL ENGAGEMENT?
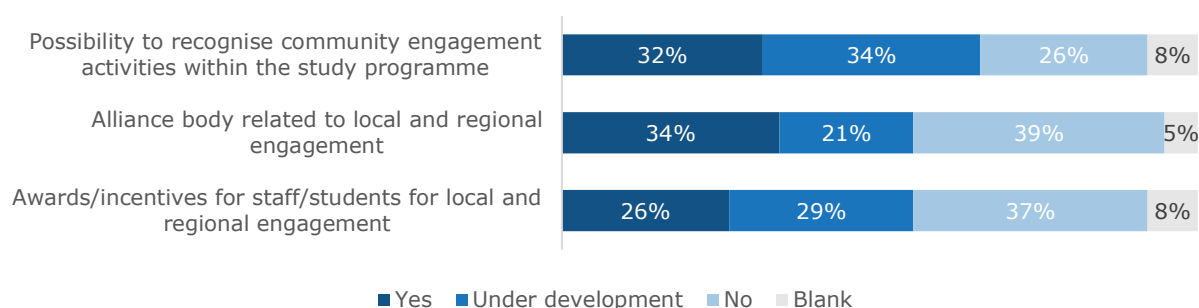
| | Yes | Under development | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Possibility to recognise community engagement activities within the study programme | 32% | 34% | 26% | 8% |
| Alliance body related to local and regional engagement | 34% | 21% | 39% | 5% |
| Awards/incentives for staff/students for local and regional engagement | 26% | 29% | 37% | 8% |

■ Yes ■ Under development ■ No ■ Blank

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

**European Universities alliances integrate citizens through diverse support structures for external engagement, and some of these approaches specifically focus on civil society engagement.** For example, CIVIS Open Labs[519] promote citizen involvement and participation to help find solutions to local challenges. Similarly, UNIC CITYLABS[520] promotes citizens' engagement in working with students, academics, and city stakeholders to identify and solve societal challenges in their cities. The E³UDRES² Community Challenges[521] platform allows anyone from the E³UDRES² regions, including individual citizens, to submit their challenges. Alliances also have created mechanisms to recognise participation in civic engagement activities; for example, UNIVERSEH awards certificates to recognise student participation in community activities. YUFE grants stars for community engagement and volunteering next to formal learning activities as part of its star system (Box 70)

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[517] EU-CONEXUS, 'EU-CONEXUS introduces the "Student Civic Engagement European Project" to representatives of the European Parliament and the European Commission', EU-CONEXUS website, 12 June 2023, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.eu-conexus.eu/en/2023/06/12/eu-conexus-introduces-the-student-civic-engagement-european-project-to-representatives-of-the-european-parliament-and-the-european-commission/
[518] Student Civic Engagement Project, *Civic Engagement in future European Universities Campuses,* https://www.eu-conexus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/IO2_WP-Civic-Engagement_FINAL-1rev.pdf
[519] CIVIS, 'Open Labs', CIVIS website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://civis.eu/en/engage/open-labs
[520] UNIC, 'CITYLABS', UNIC website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.unic.eu/en/city-labs
[521] E³UDRES², ,Challenges', E³UDRES² website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://eudres.eu/challenges

## BOX 70. EXAMPLE: YUFE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

### YUFE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

🢁 **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

YUFE has created a framework of initiatives that aim to promote student engagement with society, these initiatives include:

**YUFE@Home Initiative**

This initiative accommodates YUFE students and staff, where citizens, public organisations, and dormitories offer their spaces at partially or fully waived costs. Hosts contribute to relevant activities in exchange, fostering intergenerational and cross-cultural understanding and integration. The benefits for hosts may include language support, assistance with childcare or senior care, and household help.

**YUFE Community Volunteering Programme**

This programme enriches the social experiences of students, staff, and citizens by providing a unique resource for the cities. Volunteering activities are organised in collaboration with town halls, companies, and other stakeholders. Students are encouraged to participate in various volunteering activities beyond their field of study, using their knowledge, skills, and insights to help citizens in a mutually beneficial approach.

**YUFE Help Desks**

In this initiative, students answer citizens' questions within their field of study, providing first-level assistance in a wide variety of subjects under the scope of the YUFE focus areas (European identity and responsibilities in a global world, Citizens Well-being, Digital Societies or Sustainability). The Help Desks also serve as a platform to gather citizens' needs and challenges from the YUFE cities and regions. These help desks are supervised by university staff, who ensure the quality of the assistance provided. These help desks can be physical, virtual or a combination of both. They can also include online services and pop-up help desks at events in the cities.

**YUFE Civic Stars**

By attending any YUFE Civic Engagement Activity, students can earn a YUFE Civic Star as part of the YUFE Star System that rewards learners for participating in extra-curricular YUFE activities and reflecting on their learning goals. To receive a YUFE Civic Star, students must complete the mandatory training module tailored to the civic activities, participate in one civic activity (YUFE Help Desk, YUFE Community Volunteering or YUFE@Home), and develop a self-reflection on the implemented activity.

**Relevant links and sources:**

YUFE Co-Creation Agreement: **https://yufe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/YUFE_Co-CreationAgreement.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

🢁 **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**         🢁 **INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**European Universities alliances demonstrate a strong commitment to engaging and supporting populations in need, especially those facing the consequences of the war in Ukraine.** Most alliances developed support structures and collaboration initiatives with Ukrainian HEIs and the population. For example, 4EU+ created a joint *Response to the War in Ukraine*[522] to express solidarity and promote actions to support the Ukrainian people within the alliance. These actions include donation campaigns, psychological counselling services, facilitation of registration processes for Ukrainian students, and opening positions for visiting at-risk scholars. These actions have also been embedded into projects, such as the EXILES project, 'Reception of Refugee Children: A European Challenge Beyond Walls and Disciplines,' developed by ERUA. This project brings together diverse civil society

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[522] 4EU+, '4EU+ Responses to the war in Ukraine', 4EU+ website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://4euplus.eu/4EU-325.html

actors, academics, and students at the local and EU levels to work collaboratively on the challenges of integrating refugee children.

## BOX 71. EXAMPLE: ERUA EXILES PROJECT

### ERUA EXILES PROJECT

**⌁ CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

The EXILES project, 'Reception of Refugee Children: A European Challenge Beyond Walls and Disciplines,' is a key initiative for promoting community and civic engagement, developed by the ERUA alliance as part of the 'Innovative Joint Initiatives & Learning' action. The project encompasses lectures, collaborative activities with civil society organisations working with migrants, student group activities, and convivial interactions among students, educators, researchers and civil society representatives. The programme involved participants from ERUA universities with communities and civil society actors during a seminar programme, which included storytelling, art, and experiences shared by refugees and NGOs, as well as local visits to familiarise students with the town and its residents, both old and new.

The collaboration initiated by the project aimed to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of refugees and immigrants in Denmark, France, and Greece, including the political and legislative aspects. It also contributed to addressing the complex challenge of refugee children's integration. Additionally, the project sought to foster learning opportunities among students and encourage the formation of cross-border relationships.

**ERUA & MIGRATION**

**Exiles:** The reception of refugee children: a European challenge beyond walls and disciplines

ERUA fosters societal engagement through responsible research and innovation within alliances. They have developed a science shop model, connecting six local contact points through Future Labs funded by national sources. As part of this initiative, students collaborated with regional social actors in the field of migration at the regional level. Additionally, a new community in migration-connected universities with regional and national actors was established, one student was involved in European policy dialogue, two students/young researchers were involved in initiatives for climate change, and ten regional actors were engaged in the field of migration.

**Relevant links and sources:**

ERUA Exiles project: **https://erua-eui.eu/events-calendar/exiles-the-reception-of-refugee-children-a-european-challenge-beyond-walls-and-disciplines/**

**Related policy goals:**

**⌁ EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY**   **⌁ JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**European Universities alliances have developed diverse service-learning and continuing education opportunities open to the civil society**. EUniWell created the EUniWell Service-learning Working Group[523] to provide resources and support the integration of service learning into academic offerings across the alliance. Similarly, EuroTeQ[524] is working to pool the alliance's continuing education formats and integrate them into alliance structures and learning offer. ENGAGE.EU has implemented the Work Integrated Learning[525] initiative and practice-oriented learning activities designed for professionals to equip them with the tools they need to address societal challenges. The alliance offers these activities in a blended challenge-based format. The courses include Developing Sustainable Business Models, Design thinking, and

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[523] EUniWell, 'Areas of Work', EUniWell website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.euniwell.eu/what-we-do/areas-of-work

[524] EuroTeQ, 'Lifelong Learning', EuroTeQ website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://euroteq.eurotech-universities.eu/initiatives/lifelong-learning/

[525] ENGAGE.EU, 'Work Integrated Learning', ENGAGE.EU website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.engageuniversity.eu/work-integrated-learning/

Transformational leadership, among others. Aiming to enhance links between citizens, academia, and professionals/business, 4EU+ implemented the 4EU+ Lifelong learners & public[526]. This platform offers lifelong learning courses, Open Science introductory seminars, and MOOCs, all open to the public. Similarly, EURECA-PRO implemented RE-EURECA-PRO Pupils' University, aiming to make complex scientific topics accessible to young people (Box 72).

### BOX 72. EXAMPLE: RE-EURECA-PRO PUPILS' UNIVERSITY

**RE-EURECA-PRO PUPILS' UNIVERSITY**

🔹 **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

**EURECA-PRO**

RE-EURECA-PRO Pupils' University aims to make complex scientific topics accessible and exciting to secondary school students and their parents. This science service-learning activity facilitates access to and popularises complex scientific topics and encourages young people to pursue them.

The participants experience the scientific content by applying their knowledge practically within the framework of experiments and learning stories.

Some editions of Pupil's University have fostered the following activities:

- Searching for clues at Schwanenteich - We are detectives today: Sustainable methods in forensics at the Hochschule Mittweida, Germany.
- Sustainable ideas/solutions at the University of Petrosani, Romania.

RE-EURECA-PRO Pupils' University exemplifies the impactful role European universities can play in civic engagement. This initiative fosters science education, promotes the alliance educational offers, equips the next generation with the knowledge and enthusiasm to tackle future challenges, and embodies the essence of university-community collaboration.

**Relevant links and sources:**

RE-EURECA-PRO Pupils' University: **https://www.eurecapro.eu/pupils-university-hsmw/**

**Related policy goals:**

🔹 **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Alliances have developed platforms for citizen engagement, public lectures, and volunteer programmes to promote civic engagement**. Some alliances have created platforms for citizens to engage in citizen science projects, such as the Citizens´ UNIVERSEH Platform[527] or the ECIU University's Citizen Science Community Platform[528]. Other alliances have implemented open lecture series such as the CIVICA Public Lecture Series[529], which aims to strengthen citizens' knowledge base by sharing researchers' and experts' findings and interrogations on contemporary issues with a non-expert audience.

**Furthermore, many alliances create social media content to keep internal and external stakeholders and the broader society informed**. This content covers a wide range of topics, from scientific discussions to testimonials about the consolidation of the alliance, which are shared via podcasts, videos, or written content. Podcast is a popular content-creating strategy for harnessing the creativity of alliances. For

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[526] 4EU+, 'Lifelong learners & public', 4EU+ website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://4euplus.eu/4EU-489.html

[527] UNIVERSEH, 'Citizens Platform', UNIVERSEH website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://universeh.eu/research/citizens-platform/

[528] ECIU University, 'Citizen Science Community Platform', ECIU University website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.csinitiative.eu/

[529] CIVICA, 'Public Lecture Series Tours d'Europe', CIVICA website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.civica.eu/areas-of-work/civic-engagement/civica-public-lecture-series-tours-deurope/

example, the Arqus Knowledge Pills[530] podcast features 15- to 20-minute episodes with alliance researchers, while UNA Europa Podcast[531] offers first-hand insights and testimonials. CHARM-EU Podcasts delve into the details of innovative educational experiences within the alliance. FilmEU[532] has a YouTube channel offering videos, including interviews, research dissemination, testimonials, campaigns, and talks with experts. Similarly, EELISA has an active YouTube channel offering videos providing information about their activities, with highlights such as the promotional video "When technology, art & storytelling merge"[533], featuring computer scientist and multi-awarded animation artist Carmen Córdoba. Additionally, alliances produce regular newsletters to disseminate news, stories, and information about events and activities, such as the Circle U. Newsletter[534], UNITA research-focused newsletter Re-UNITA, and UNITA magazines[535].

**Alliances face challenges in fostering civic engagement** notably in relation with incorporating civic engagement into alliance strategies and plans related to regional engagement, research, and lifelong learning, implementing effective strategies to recognise and reward student contributions to civic engagement initiatives, developing and implementing staff development programmes to enhance the capacity of regional engagement support units to foster civic engagement, establishing mechanisms to sustain civic engagement activities, adopting accessible communication strategies to reach diverse citizen groups and encourage participation in alliance activities. The concept of European Universities alliances is not always well understood by local stakeholders, and they might struggle to understand their potential role in the partnerships[536]. Addressing these challenges is time- and resource-intensive and critical for alliances to maximise the impact of their civic engagement initiatives.

[530] Arqus, 'Arqus Knowledge Pills', Spotify website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://open.spotify.com/show/1iL3NsyKTvIEMKQyrdbP8H
[531] UNA Europa, 'UNA Europa Podcast', Spotify website, accessed 3 January 2025 https://open.spotify.com/show/7atvcHWoBS80uWoe5Hgpb1
[532] FilmEU (@FilmEU-University), 'FilmEU - European University - Film and Media Arts', YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/@FilmEU-University/featured
[533] EELISA European University, *EELISA promotional video: When technology, art & storytelling merge*, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CECmZx9hZss
[534] Circle U., 'Circle U. newsletter archive', Circle U website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://us7.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=c544109ce952e71ba1b939e1d&id=276849479b
[535] UNITA, 'Media', UNITA website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://univ-unita.eu/Sites/unita/en/Pagina/media
[536] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

## 6.4. Joint Research

### Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES
Erasmus+

**The European Universities initiative holds great potential for enhancing research and innovation capacity across Europe, fostering synergies between the European Research Area and the European (Higher) Education Area.**

With their inter-institutional cooperation based on an integrated long-term joint strategy for education with links to research and innovation, and service to society, **European Universities are very well equipped in breaking down silos between education, research and innovation**. Uncertainty regarding sustainability and long-term outlook into the funding for the research and innovation dimension of the alliances is currently hampering their potential to further develop across all their missions.

Long-term strategic cooperation in the alliances benefits all members of the alliances through the development of **long-term research agendas and plans, sharing or jointly developing resources, including research infrastructures, jointly acquired research funding, trans-disciplinary research projects and publications**. The widespread set-up of joint grant offices and research services across the alliances reinforces the **long-term strategic outlook and commitment to the collaboration** of the alliances. However, further reinforcing such research collaborations is time- and resource-intensive and entails further aligning concepts, priorities, procedures, and incentives across diverse institutions, as well as navigating differing national regulations and rules, which can be challenging.

The alliances are developing **researchers' and academics enhanced joint education and training opportunities**, as well as **attractive career development frameworks**, contributing to nurturing, attracting and retaining talent.

European Education Area

## Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

> The alliances promote **synergies among diverse transnational education, research and innovation ecosystems across Europe** and promote **knowledge and technology transfer**, linking researchers, academics and students with the **private sector ecosystem** and fostering external engagement of industry/businesses, the public sector, civil society organisations, and citizens. The structure of the alliances and the involvement of associated partners from various sectors facilitate knowledge and technology transfer, benefitting local and European innovation ecosystems.

> Alliances foster **socially engaged and open research and open education practices** by engaging societal partners in identifying current and future societal needs, working towards inclusive and sustainable solutions and implementing open science practices contributing to digital and green transitions at local level and to reinforcing local innovation ecosystems. The transnational, challenge-based, and transdisciplinary set-up of the alliances allows for the addressing of local challenges from a global perspective.

Under Erasmus+, the European Universities initiative allows the alliances to "develop and implement an **integrated long-term joint strategy for education with, where possible, links to research and innovation, and service to society**[537].

**Erasmus+ focuses on the funding of the related actions focusing on education and the related governance structures, allowing for the elaboration, where possible, of the links between education and research and innovation, including how research results and innovation will feed back into education**. This allows to foster further synergies between the European (Higher) Education Area and the European Research Area.

The integrated long-term joint strategy of the alliances for education with, where possible, links to research and innovation, and service to society opens the possibility for alliances to go a step further and enhance their institutionalised cooperation in research and innovation. This is confirmed by a study from the European Parliament that states that the European Universities alliances "cooperate mainly in the field of education. This is mainly due to the initiative's integration into Erasmus+, which essentially intends to intensify European cooperation in the field of education. In other

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[537] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for Proposals: Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU-2023-EUR-UNIV*, 2023, p.6, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-univ_en.pdf

areas (research, university-industry collaboration, and community engagement), the European Universities alliances are starting to strengthen cooperation"[538].

Therefore, before outlining some key research and innovation cooperation elements, including at the intersection with education, it is important to stress that when it comes to the **institutionalised cooperation in the field of research and innovation – i.e. the actual research and innovation dimension of the European Universities alliances – other funding sources were available to the alliances at the European level**.

For the European Universities alliances in the pilot phase, i.e. alliances selected under Erasmus+ in 2019 and 2020, targeted and earmarked support via the **Horizon 2020 Science with and for Society (SwafS**) aimed "to contribute to the research and innovation dimension of the European Universities"[539]. With the aim to develop a common research and innovation agenda and action plan for the alliance, the SwafS calls focused on strengthening human capital; sharing research infrastructures and other resources; reinforcing cooperation with non-academic actors; mainstreaming comprehensive Open Science practices; involving citizens, civil society and public/cities authorities in research and innovation; facilitating collaboration and clustering activities to share best practices on research and innovation. As a result, 39 out of the initial 41 alliances under the pilot phase received dedicated support of up to EUR 2 million for maximum 3 years under Horizon 2020 Science with and for Society calls, enabling them to develop their research and innovation dimension.

**The progress of the SwafS projects** supporting the European Universities alliances were assessed in O'Neill and Acheson 2023 and 2024[540,541]. These reports identified progress in mapping policies and practices for open science; collecting good practices and case studies on joint research agendas; and developing joint research action plans to implement common research and innovation agendas.

The main challenges identified in these studies were:

- Addressing the diversity of legal and financial frameworks at national levels.
- Bringing research and organisational cultures closer.
- Aligning concepts and priorities across institutions.
- Strengthening researchers' involvement in collaboration within the alliances.
- Investing in the development of common research and innovation agendas as a long-term task requiring time, resources, feedback gathering, iterative discussions, and eventual agreements within university alliances.

[538] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, p.44, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[539] European Commission, *Horizon Programme – Work Programme 2018-2020: 16. Science with and for Society*, p. 99, https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2018-2020/main/h2020-wp1820-swfs_en.pdf

[540] European Commission: European Research Executive Agency, O'Neill, G. and Acheson, H., *Progress of University Alliance Projects – Projects funded under Horizon 2020 IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020 Call - Pilot I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/533035

[541] European Commission: European Research Executive Agency, O'Neill, G. and Acheson, H., *Report on good practices from European University Alliances Projects (pilot II) – Projects funded under Horizon 2020 – IBA-SwafS-SUPPORT-2-2020 call*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/309549

Also, **a policy report assessed EU support for excellence from Horizon2020 through the European Universities Initiative**[542], concluding that the experience of the European University initiative shows the potential for transnational alliances to support the institutional transformation of HEIs in line with the European Research Area (ERA). Although impact has been uneven, the majority of HEIs participating in the alliances supported by Horizon 2020 report positive benefits in relation to at least one and very often multiple areas of institutional change. Support for institutional transformation is more often effective where it addresses multiples areas of changes within the ERA rather than a single one. In the transnational context, collaboration faces the challenges posed by different systems, legal and regulatory contexts, national policy objectives and language barriers. Moreover, it concluded that the potential for transformation has been weakened by the siloed nature of the two main funding streams (Erasmus+ and Horizon), and the different administrative rules and timescales associated with each: "funding the alliances from two separate instruments (Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020) with different requirements heightens the administrative burden at both the selection and implementation stages.". Other key challenges outlined by the same Report relate to the relatively short funding timescales and the uncertainty regarding continuity and sustainability of funding for the R&I work of the alliances. The same Report assessment confirmed that **"it is crucial to ensure that the R&I dimension remains part of the alliances' work**" and that "funding for the R&I dimension is a valuable impetus for a transformational process which builds on and further extends previous internationalisation in the higher education sector and helps HEIs to develop a strategic R&I approach*". The support for the HEIs is considered as "particularly valuable for smaller HEIs, those with less developed R&I capabilities and less experience in internationalisation and in particular, for those in widening countries." As well as for HEIs "with strong existing R&I capabilities".

Under the current EU budgetary period, the SwafS calls were not continued under **Horizon Europe**. Well-positioned to deliver on ERA priorities under Horizon Europe, some alliances were however successful in receiving funding from the **European Excellence Initiative** (EEI)[543]. Under the part on "Widening and ERA" of the Horizon Europe work programme, the calls on the **European Excellence Initiative** foresee a competitive call for cooperation in the field of R&I, open to all types of alliances, including but not limited to the European Universities alliances. A pilot call in 2022 funded nine projects with a total of EUR 18 million and included two European Universities alliances, Ingenium and E3UDRES2[544]. A 2023 call funded 12 projects with a total of EUR 54 million and included the following six alliances: EDUC, EU-Conexus, EURECA-PRO, Eutopia, Film-EU, and Unite![545]. Each project will receive between EUR 2 million and EUR 5 million for a 4-year operation. As a result, currently, less than 10 European Universities alliances receive support from Horizon Europe for the development of their institutionalised cooperation in the field of research and innovation. A new call of the European Excellence Initiative is expected to be launched later in 2025.

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[542] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Rampton, J. and O'Sullivan, F., *Towards a European Excellence Initiative – Policy report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/403191

[543] European Excellence Initiative, https://rea.ec.europa.eu/funding-and-grants/horizon-europe-widening-participation-and-spreading-excellence/european-excellence-initiative_en

[544] Cordis, EU research results, https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101071321 and https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101071317

[545] Funding & Tenders, *European Excellence Initiative (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-03-01)*, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/horizon-widera-2023-access-03-01?keywords=HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-03-01&closed=true

In addition, European Universities alliances are eligible to compete for other opportunities under Horizon Europe to fund their collaborative research and innovation activities, for example via the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology or via Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)** .

Several European Universities alliances have attracted funding from **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) EIT-HEI Initiative**, for example under call 1: EELISA, E³UDRES², EUt+, UNITA and YUFE and under call 2: FILM-EU)[546]. Several alliances actively engaged with the EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities and/or EIT projects, including through their partner higher education institutions, for example ENHANCE, EUt+, EuroTeQ, EELISA, ENLIGHT, and Una Europa.

Moreover, alliances successfully secured funding from various **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)** to strengthen doctoral education and postdoctoral training by fostering excellence and promoting innovative approaches. For instance, from MSCA COFUNDs for developing doctoral training (including for example CIVIS, EUTOPIA and UNA Europa, YUFE on top of Arqus, EELISA, EuroTeQ, UNITA)[547]. YUFE4Postdoc recruits, hosts and trains through novel methodologies more than 50 postdocs in various disciplines, supporting researchers' projects development related to urban opportunities and challenges within YUFE focus areas: sustainability, digital society, citizens wellbeing and European identity. The training programme fosters skills to engage with societal stakeholders for an effective open science and innovation mindset, including through involvement of city councils and business organisation in training development and in mentoring. EUTOPIA Science and Innovation Fellowships (SIF) programme aims to train 76 post-doctoral researchers over five years, focussing on developing entrepreneurial and innovation skills. UNITA doctoral programme on Cultural Heritage Outreach in Romance Languages trains high-quality international researchers, encouraging interdisciplinary and intersectoral research addressing various aspects of cultural heritage. In view equipping researchers with the necessary skills and transnational experience to foster excellence, CIVIS provides access to the CIVIS MSCA Supervisors Database to enable to identify supervisors across the alliance's institutions and thus facilitate collaboration between researchers and supervisors within the framework of the MSCA Postdoctoral Fellowships. Furthermore, alliances set up MSCA Doctoral Networks to train highly skilled doctoral candidates in key strategic areas, to also enhance their creativity and innovation capacities and boost their employability in the long-term. For instance, Unite! Energy Storage Doctoral Network brings together alliance's partners, corporations and institutions to develop technological solutions for more sustainable energy system. The project also contributes to foster interdisciplinarity and to nurture doctoral candidates' innovation and entrepreneurship skills. The Aurora Seizmic Doctoral Network is dedicated to scale social enterprises and to advance social entrepreneurship education.

Apart of the support for collaborative research and innovation activities, **pure research activities** are funded in the traditional way under Horizon Europe, for example through the European Research Council (ERC), supporting investigator-driven frontier research across all fields, based on scientific excellence.

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[546] EIT HEI Initiative, Projects Archive - EIT HEI Initiative
[547] European Commission, *Synergies between the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and Erasmus+ in the area of higher education,* https://marie-sklodowska-curie-actions.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021-11/NC0521265ENN.en_.pdf

The **below analysis** does not focus on the outcomes of the alliances' SwafS, European Excellence Initiative, EIT-HEI or MSCA projects, but instead **focuses on some key selected research and innovation activities** closely linked to the alliances' long-term joint strategy of education, also to prevent duplicating the scope of some of the afore study reports already undertaken. It **includes the findings of the monitoring framework on the alliances' approaches to research and innovation, socially engaged research, open science, and innovation and knowledge transfer**.

The research and innovation dimension of the alliances is in an early stage[548]. This development stage hinders a full analysis of the outcomes in the research and innovation dimension of the European Universities initiative.

### 6.4.1. Joint research activities

The main benefits of the European Universities initiative in research and innovation, as highlighted in interviews with alliance coordinators and in the Monitoring framework, are:

- With their institutional cooperation based on an **integrated long-term joint strategy for education with links to research and innovation, and service to society, European Universities are very well equipped to remove barriers and break down silos between education, research and innovation.** They realise major European added value by **implementing the framework conditions for building excellence in R&I** so as to mainstream good ERA policies and practices at the institutional level.

- Such long-term strategic cooperation at the inter-institutional level through the development of long-term agendas and plans benefits all members of the alliances by leveraging complementary education, research and innovation strengths and pooling together resources, equipment, and **infrastructures.** In turn, this creates an **attractive education, research and innovation environment, contributing to nurture, attract and retain European and global talent**. Poling resources is also increasing investment efficiency, including by enhancing access to existing infrastructures, or developing new joint facilities or services.

- **The alliances are developing enhanced frameworks for joint education and training opportunities, as well as researchers' and academics attractive career development** within the institutions of the alliances and across diverse ecosystems. This is especially important for early-career researchers, who can access a wide range of opportunities for training, collaboration, mobility, infrastructure, and mentoring, enhanced internationalisation opportunities and mainstreamed good practices at institutional level on doctoral training. In this context, the alliances can act as test beds for the piloting of the new frameworks for academic and research careers.

- **The alliances promote synergies among diverse transnational education, research and innovation ecosystems across Europe**, enhancing visibility and efficiency, and enabling the private sector access to knowledge, research results and talent pools in higher education institutions. **Strengthening the exchange and implementation of good practices across countries** through common strategies at the alliance level;

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[548] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

▸ **The alliances also support trans- and multi-disciplinarity and challenge-based approaches** in education and research and innovation to address key societal challenges, supported by diverse internal and external stakeholders within the alliances.

▸ **The alliances promote knowledge and technology transfer,** linking researchers, academics and students with the private sector ecosystem and enhancing approaches to foster external engagement of industry/businesses, the public sector, civil society organisations, and citizens. The alliances' private sector partners gained direct access to academic knowledge and resources and access to a pool of skilled talents from across Europe, directly responding to local needs, fostering a vibrant innovation ecosystem and enhancing employability, benefiting local communities and the economy.

▸ **The alliances enhanced support for open science and open education practices** leading to **injecting knowledge into society**, contributing to digital and green transitions at local level and to reinforcing local innovation ecosystems. With their 2200 associated partners, the alliances foster all-of-society approach towards education and research and innovation.

**Monitoring framework data shows that 92% of alliances have formulated or are developing joint research and innovation agendas**, as illustrated in Figure 55. According to the alliance coordinators interviewed for this study, developing such common agendas is a challenging task since each research unit and/or institution has an already established research and innovation collaboration culture. Hence, **consolidating new partnerships within the alliances requires long-term efforts in creating incentives, fostering networking, and building trust among alliance researchers**. The 2023 Report on the European Excellence Initiative concluded that the experience of alliances demonstrates the long timescales required for institutional transformation to fulfil its potential, given the inherent challenges involved. These include the need for commitment at levels to cultural and institutional transformation, as well as for longer-term, secure funding. "[549].

## FIGURE 55. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE STRATEGY INCLUDE A COMMON R&I AGENDA?
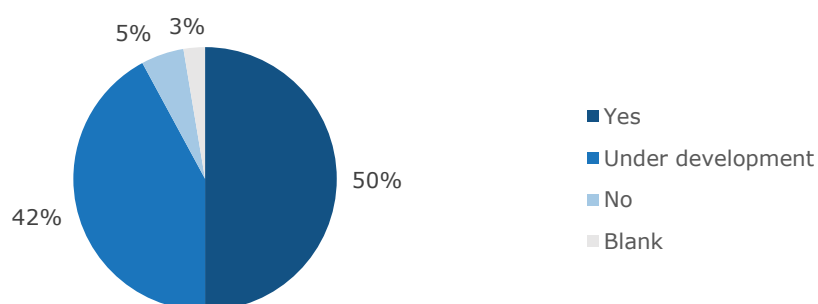


*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

To formulate joint research plans, alliances design roadmaps and strategies which define governance mechanisms, focus areas, objectives, and flagship initiatives, among other elements. For example, Arqus established a Board and a Strategic

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[549] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Rampton, J. and O'Sullivan, F., *Towards a European Excellence Initiative – Policy report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/403191

Roadmap for research and innovation[550]. It included research and innovation as one of the three pillars of the alliance along with education and service to society, defined joint actions, and worked to unify measures for research assessment. The UNA Europa Research and Innovation Strategy[551] defined research values, areas of action, and approaches for researchers' engagement, opening research, and data infrastructure to alliance partners. Similarly, CIVICA drafted its long-term research and innovation strategy by defining focus areas, detailing the planned activities and strategic objectives of key initiatives including workshops, hackathons, collaborative projects, mobility schemes, open science, international conferences, seminars, and excellence tours, and has developed two calls for joint research proposals (see Box 73).

## BOX 73. EXAMPLE: CIVICA RESEARCH

### CIVICA RESEARCH

**CIVICA**

#### 🡵 JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

CIVICA Research is a joint research and innovation strategy that aims to create an academic network of excellence in social sciences to tackle the world's most pressing issues. CIVICA Research allows researchers within the alliance to participate in joint scientific activities developed around the four focus areas of the alliance and access a wide array of events, infrastructure, and tools. CIVICA Research (i) defines and implements a shared research agenda with socially relevant outcomes, (ii) develops human capital and academic skills, (iii) develops shared research and innovation ecosystems, (iv) builds an ambitious Open Science action plan, and (v) explores joint research infrastructure, synergies, and common actions both and beyond CIVICA.

CIVICA Research was established in January 2021 with funding from Horizon 2020's SwafS call. It has fostered collaborative research opportunities, academic mobility, and training programmes. Over the past three years, CIVICA Research has driven institutional transformation and capacity building through its academic initiatives.

**Relevant links and sources:**

CIVICA Research: **https://www.civica.eu/civicaresearch/**

**Related policy goals:**

🡵 **CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**　　🡵 **EUROPEAN IDENTITY**

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Alliances can offer access to research and innovation services and facilities in three ways:

🡵 Granting access to existing services and facilities within specific partner HEIs
🡵 Developing joint-shared services and facilities
🡵 Combining both strategies.

According to Monitoring Framework data displayed in Figure 56, 87% of the alliances grant or are in the process of granting access to laboratories, research centres, and research support services to their partner HEIs. 76% have or are developing joint research services at the alliance level. 44% have or are developing joint research infrastructures. Furthermore, 42% grant or are planning to grant access to research journal subscriptions and databases. Alliance coordinators noted challenges in developing transnational joint infrastructure due to administrative and legal barriers or sharing library services and licences since they require institutional affiliations. The

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[550] Arqus, 'Arqus Research and Innovation (Arqus R.I.)', Arqus website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://arqus-alliance.eu/research/arqus-ri/
[551] UNA Europa, *UNA Europa Research & Innovation Strategy*, 20 November 2023, https://una-europa.imgix.net/resources/Una-Europa-Research-Innovation-Strategy.pdf

alliances agreed that a legal status for European Universities alliances could help overcome these barriers.

## FIGURE 56. STAFF OF ALLIANCE PARTNERS GET ACCESS TO:
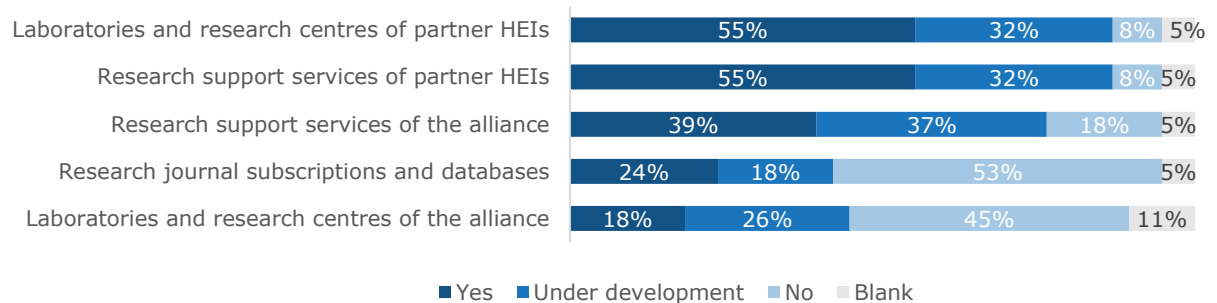
| | Yes | Under development | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Laboratories and research centres of partner HEIs | 55% | 32% | 8% | 5% |
| Research support services of partner HEIs | 55% | 32% | 8% | 5% |
| Research support services of the alliance | 39% | 37% | 18% | 5% |
| Research journal subscriptions and databases | 24% | 18% | 53% | 5% |
| Laboratories and research centres of the alliance | 18% | 26% | 45% | 11% |

■ Yes ■ Under development ■ No ■ Blank

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

**Establishing inter-alliance facilities allow alliances to bring together researchers, create inter-alliance synergies, and consolidate research and innovation on key alliance topics.** This is the case of EUT+ European Sustainability Science Lab. This alliance initiative is establishing a new inter-institutional lab that will bring together interdisciplinary research in sustainability to consolidate a European level research hub on the topic (Box 74).

## BOX 74. EUT+ EUROPEAN SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE LAB

### EUT+ EUROPEAN SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE LAB

🔷 **JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

EUT+ created the European Sustainability Science Lab (ESSLab+) to implement transdisciplinary research on sustainability that brings together stakeholders from civil society, engineering, and the natural and social sciences. This lab aims to produce knowledge on sustainability, transfer it to society, and explore new ways to conduct sustainability research.

ESSLab+ is a multinational, multi-campus, trans- and interdisciplinary research group that aims to become an established research institute within EUT+ over the next two years. Its governance comprises a General Assembly, a Board of Management, Working Groups, and Scientific Interest Groups, which are:

- Agriculture, food, and soil management,
- Water, soil, territorial approaches,
- Biotechnology, bioeconomy, circular economy and recycling processes,
- Health and well-being,
- Sustainable values in economics and human capital,
- New European Bauhaus,
- Renewable energies and smart energy systems, energy sufficiency.

This support unit will play a significant role in developing synergies, bringing alliance researchers together, connecting stakeholders, and establishing the foundation for impactful research within alliances and in the context of alliance partner institutions.

**Relevant links and sources:**

ESSLab+ Platform: **https://esslab.pubpub.org/**

**Related policy goals:**

🔷 **JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**　　　　🔷 **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Sharing alliance-level research services and facilities usually starts with mapping available facilities, equipment, and research groups within partners and developing central contact points for services**. For this purpose, EDUC created the online EDUC Catalogue of Research Infrastructures[552]. The SEA-EU Shared Infrastructure and Research Facilities online directory[553] includes 517 research groups and 116 shared infrastructures, and the EUTOPIA alliance developed a Research Infrastructure Comprehensive Guide as a tool to access, explore and leverage partners' research facilities. FORTHEM Alliance is developing a joint Innovation Services and Policy Office[554] to serve as a central contact point clustering strategic capacity building, joint transfer strategies, training for researchers, annual conferences, partnerships, and networking with regions and Brussels (see Box 75). Unite! created the Integrated Research and Innovation Services (IRIS)[555] to strengthen competencies, support joint research project applications, and promote collaborative research across its members. It comprises research support staff from various offices at each partner, including technology transfer officers, human resources managers, and research communication officers. Other alliances have set up similar joint research support offices.

## BOX 75. EXAMPLE: FORTHEM R&I SERVICES AND POLICY OFFICE

### FORTHEM RESEARCH AND INNOVATION SERVICES AND POLICY OFFICE

#### ⌁ JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The FORTHEM Research and Innovation Services and Policy Office is their central contact point for the information, questions, and services for research and innovation. The office aims to assist with research integration and liaising with policymakers. The objectives of the office are:
- To serve as a contact point for research managers from all partner universities;
- To provide targeted information on funding opportunities for joint projects;
- To connect existing structures within an alliance to upscale their professional performance;
- To foster collaboration and matchmaking in research and innovation.

In addition, the FIT FORTHEM Digital Platform supports the office by pooling alliances' data on research and innovation. It provides a mapping tool for research groups within the alliance, offers access to a catalogue of institutional repositories, collections, museums, cultural sites, and ancient books. The five tasks that the Research and Innovation Services and Policy Office performs are:
- Boosting services for supporting research, innovation, and technology activities;
- Providing strategic capacity building;
- Developing a Joint Transfer Strategy and training for researchers;
- Organising FORTHEM Annual Conferences;
- Networking with regions of alliance partner HEIs and Brussels.

The office also developed a centralised access point called FIT FORTHEM OpenAIRE Gateway, a repository with all open data within the alliance partner institutions. This portal offers access to 558,794 publications, 31,728 research datasets, 58 research software, and 21,815 other research products.

**Relevant links and sources:**

FORTHEM R&I Services and Policy Office: **https://www.forthem-alliance.eu/fit-forthem/forthem-ri-services-policy-office-3**, FIT FORTHEM Digital Platform: **https://fitforthem.unipa.it/** and FIT FORTHEM OpenAIRE Gateway: **https://forthem.openaire.eu/**

**Related policy goals:**

⌁ SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES          ⌁ JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

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[552] EDUC, 'Core facilities', EDUC website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://educ.openup.education/facilities
[553] SEA-EU, 'Research Potential Database and Shared Infrastructure Database for the SEA-EU Alliance', accessed 3 January 2025, https://research.sea-eu.ug.edu.pl/
[554] FORTHEM, 'FORTHEM Research and Innovation Services and Policy Office', accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.forthem-alliance.eu/fit-forthem/forthem-ri-services-policy-office-3
[555] Unite!, 'Unite! Research & Innovation Services', 3 January 2025, https://www.unite-university.eu/unite-staff/unite-s-research-innovation-services

Monitoring framework data shows that most alliances are developing initiatives to promote partner research collaboration. As illustrated in Figure 57, **92% of the alliances have or are developing platforms or activities to connect researchers from partner HEIs with similar interests. 74% of the alliances have or are implementing funding opportunities for joint research projects. 61% have and or are creating joint research support centres or units. Furthermore, 29% of the alliances implement services to support joint publications**.

### FIGURE 57. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE RESEARCH COLLABORATION WITH ALLIANCE PARTNERS?

| | Yes | Under development | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Platform or activity to connect researchers from partner HEIs with similar interests | 63% | 29% | 5% | 3% |
| Funding for joint research projects | 58% | 16% | 21% | 5% |
| Joint research support centre | 29% | 32% | 32% | 8% |
| Support for joint publications | 13% | 16% | 63% | 8% |

■Yes  ■Under development  ■No  ■Blank
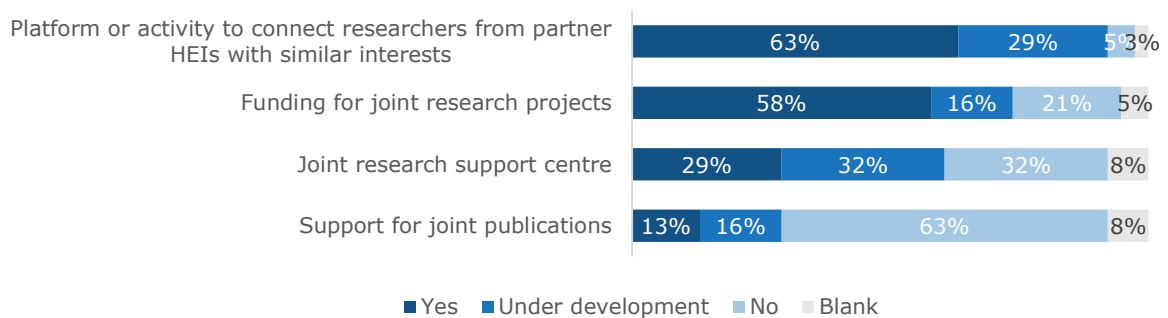
*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

**Alliances actively foster matchmaking activities and create seed funding opportunities for joint projects to promote research collaboration.** For matchmaking purposes, EUT+ established the EUT+ R&I Platform[556] to facilitate interactive exploration of research capacities and topics. The platform has a topic modelling tool that maps documents and publications to find overlaps among partners. EUGLOGH developed the EUGLOGH Research Matchmaking Workshops[557] to bring PhD students and researchers together and identify opportunities for joint grant applications. EUniWell[558] created a Seed Funding Programme to support innovative alliance-level projects enhancing well-being. Many other alliances have similar seed-funding initiatives for joint research or teaching projects, which are usually required to be developed by at least three partner HEIs. Similarly, Unite! conducted several inter- and intra-alliance thematic match-making events[559] (Box 76) and the Unite! Seed Fund[560] to stimulate and support bottom-up proposals developed by educators, researchers, and students for collaborative activities.

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[556] EUT+, 'EUT+ R&I Platform', accessed 3 January 2025, https://researchinformation.univ-tech.eu/#/dashboard

[557] EUGLOGH, 'EUGLOGH Seed Funding Programme', EUGLOH website, 3 January 2025, https://www.euniwell.eu/what-we-offer/seed-funding-programme

[558] EUniWell, 'The 6th EUniWell Seed Funding Call is now open!', EUniWell website, 18 January, 2024, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.euniwell.eu/news-events/article/the-6th-euniwell-seed-funding-call-is-now-open#:~:text=The%20EUniWell%20Seed%20Funding%20Programme,be%20distributed%20among%20project%20partners.

[559] Unite!, 'Unite! and UNA Europa join forces to come up with innovative solutions for the advancement of sustainable energy in Europe', Unite! Website, 6 February 2023, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.unite-university.eu/unitenews/unite-and-una-europa-join-forces-to-come-up-with-innovative-solutions-for-the-advancement-of-sustainable-energy-in-europe

[560] Unite!, 'Unite! Seed Fund virtual matchmaking', Unite! website, 16 January 2024, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.aalto.fi/en/events/unite-seed-fund-virtual-matchmaking#0-unite--seed-fund

## BOX 76. EXAMPLE: UNITE! MATCHMAKING EVENTS

### UNITE! MATCHMAKING EVENTS

**⤳ JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**
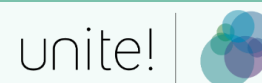
unite!

Unite! matchmaking events aim to foster meaningful collaboration and pave the way for creating new projects.

These events are open to the Unite! Community: teaching staff, teaching and learning units, researchers and research units, students, and student associations. During the virtual matchmaking events, Unite! academics meet potential partners in breakout rooms. The events cover three lines: Student Activities, Teaching and learning, and Research PhD.

**Inter-alliance matchmaking events**

Beyond the intra-alliance level, matchmaking events have brought together diverse alliances to establish synergies and develop concrete agendas to create new research projects and seek funding.

- **Matchmaking Una Unite!-Europa:** This event, which focused on sustainable energy, was implemented in January 2023 with a digital pre-matchmaking event and an in-person event at the Polish National Centre for Research and Development (Brussels Office). The event included researchers, research advisors, and representatives of both university alliances. Researchers set up their agendas to submit joint research proposals in the coming months and years.
- **Matchmaking Unite!-EELISA:** This in-person event, which focused on the green transition, was implemented in November 2023 at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya. Its goal was to form an international research consortium to submit proposals for Horizon Europe calls on climate, energy, mobility and food, bioeconomy, natural resources, agriculture, and the environment. The event also served to exchange good practices and get feedback from researchers on cooperative research subjects such as sharing research infrastructure or PhD studies.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Unite! meets EELISA**: https://www.unite-university.eu/unitenews/unite-meets-ellisa-matchmaking-event-about-green-transition**

Una Europa-Unite: **https://www.una-europa.eu/opportunities/una-europa-unite-sustainable-energy-matchmaking-event**

**Related policy goals:**

**⤳ JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Monitoring framework data shows that 74% of alliances have successfully submitted joint research applications for funding, as displayed in Figure 58. Alliance coordinators declared that:

> "Since the start of the alliance in 2019, more than 25 new joint research projects with European funding have been initiated in various research areas" – *Interview with alliance coordinator*.

> "More and more partner requests are arriving looking for one or more alliance partners for their ongoing proposals" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

Alliance coordinators highlighted SwafS, the European Excellence initiative, MSCA, and the EIT HEI initiative funded under the EU Research and Innovation Frameworks programmes among the successful applications.

## FIGURE 58. HAVE ALLIANCE PARTNERS SUCCESSFULLY SUBMITTED JOINT RESEARCH FUNDING APPLICATIONS?
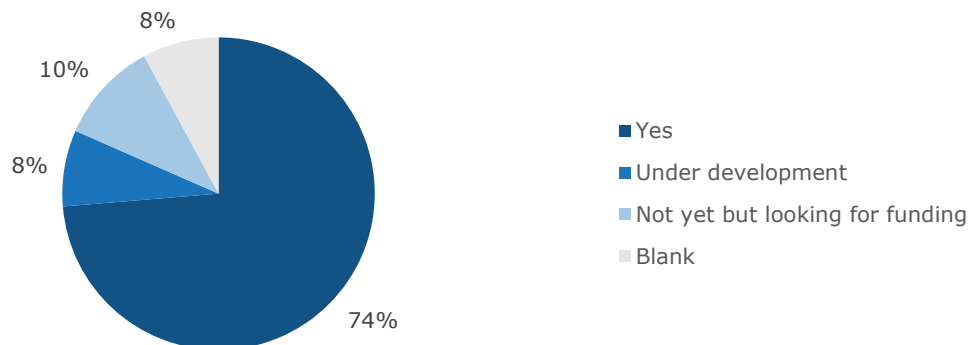


- Yes
- Under development
- Not yet but looking for funding
- Blank

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

**Alliance coordinators highlighted the interplay between joint education and research strategies as an added value that fosters further harmonisation within the alliance**:

> "The communities of researchers and professors involved in education initiatives are often motivated to develop research initiatives. The result is a positive and structuring flow from education to research within our alliance" – *Interview with alliance coordinator*.

**Alliances contribute to bringing education, research, and innovation closer, and bridge the gap between education and research**. As presented in Section 6.3.3, alliances have created several units and initiatives to embed challenge-based learning. Initiatives such as EuroTeQ Collider[561], EPIChallenges[562], and UNIC CityLabs[563], among others. These structures integrate teaching, learning, social engagement, research, and innovation to address societal challenges. However, the 2023 report on the Progress of SwafS projects concluded that further efforts to support interconnections between research, education, innovation, and collaboration are needed[564].

**Alliance coordinators highlighted the added value of practical approaches that combine education and research with regional challenges**:

> "Within the alliance's framework, partner institutions are combining theoretical approaches with practical relevance, involving practitioners across sectors in their teaching and research activities" – *Interview with alliance coordinator*.

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[561] EuroTeQ, 'The EuroTeQ Collider', EuroTeQ website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://euroteq.eurotech-universities.eu/initiatives/the-euroteq-collider/
[562] EPICUR, 'EPIChallenges', EPICUR website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://archive.epicur.education/research/
[563] UNIC, 'CityLabs', UNIC website, accessed 3 January 2025, https://www.unic.eu/en/city-labs
[564] European Commission, European Research Executive Agency, O'Neill, G., Acheson, H., P*rogress of University Alliance Projects – Projects funded under Horizon 2020 IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020 Call - Pilot I,* Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, p.30, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/533035

**European Universities alliances face the following challenges in consolidating their research dimension**:

- ▸ Establishing further research collaborations is time- and resource- intensive and entails further reinforcing trust and common ground among partners through further aligning research agendas, sharing good practices, pooling resources, knowledge and infrastructure, and developing common policies and strategies.
- ▸ Developing joint long-term visions on research and innovation among partners requires to align concepts, priorities, procedures, and incentives across diverse institutions.
- ▸ Addressing logistical and organisational challenges for shared services and facilities that often relate to differing national regulations and rules.
- ▸ Uncertainty regarding sustainability and long-term outlook into the funding for the research and innovation dimension of the alliances is currently hampering their potential to further develop across all their missions.

**The European Universities initiative holds great potential for enhancing research and innovation capacity across Europe, fostering synergies between the European Research Area and the European (Higher) Education Area**. Significant progress has been made in drafting joint long-term research agendas and mapping and gradually sharing resources and facilities, while a fully-fledged joint research dimension is still under development. On the other hand, it is a long-term task to materialise benefits related to long-term strategic cooperation, enhanced frameworks for researchers' career development, and increased exchange of good practices.

### 6.4.2. Engaged research

**Engaged research involves a wide range of approaches and methodologies that share a common interest in collaboration with societal partners**. As defined by Campus Engage, it aims to improve, understand, and investigate issues of public concern, including societal challenges and SDGs, and is conducted through the participation of societal partners[565]. Its foundations lay in the 2014 Rome Declaration on Responsible Research and Innovation in Europe[566], which called for stakeholders to work collaboratively to seek inclusive and sustainable solutions to societal challenges. European Universities alliances are called upon to work on addressing societal challenges; foster cooperation among students, academics, entrepreneurs, companies, local and regional actors, and civil society actors; and contribute to building a more sustainable future[567].

**Challenge-based approaches have played a key role in engaged research**. Marques and Graf[568] noted that challenge-based approaches **permeate teaching and learning, research, and service to society and help research to create social impact**. They also highlighted that the support to facilitate challenge-based

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[565] Campus Engage, *Engaged Research Framework,* 2022, https://www.campusengage.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Updated-Final-PBS10553-IUA-Engaged-Research-Framework-2022_V7.pdf
[566] Italian Presidency of the Council of the EU, *Rome Declaration on Responsible Research and Innovation in Europe*, 20 November 2014, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/rome-declaration-responsible-research-and-innovation-europe
[567] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for Proposals: Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU-2023-EUR-UNIV,* 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-univ_en.pdf
[568] Marques, M., and Graf, L., 'Pushing Boundaries: The European Universities Initiative as a Case of Transnational Institution Building', *Minerva*, Vol. 62, 2023, pp. 93-112., https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-023-09516-w

approaches is closely connected to establishing research facilities such as intellectual hubs, academies, research labs, topical platforms and/or expert/innovation centres.

**Several alliances have established interdisciplinary research groups, often with a feedback loop to education, to identify current societal needs and challenges**, which support the design of solutions with the participation of industry/businesses, the public sector, civil society organisations, and citizens (see Box 77 for an example). European Universities alliances are fostering socially engaged research that aligns with the principles of responsible research and innovation, aimed at addressing pressing societal challenges and contributing to SDGs.

## BOX 77. EXAMPLE: NEUROTECH[EU] 2040 RESEARCH GROUPS

### NEUROTECHEU 2040 RESEARCH GROUPS

**ENGAGED RESEARCH**

NeurotechEU aims to build a trans-European network of excellence in brain research and technologies by 2040. For this purpose, the alliance developed a think tank, Neurotech2040, to look into the future. Participants imagine the world and societal needs in 2040 to design the NeurotechEU programmes, research agenda, and innovative action plans that maximise the benefits of the developed technologies and interventions for the European economy and society at large. This practice brings together clinicians, pre-clinicians, teachers, and researchers to exchange their views, thoughts, visions, and experiences in a collaborative effort to predict the future.

There are eight Neurotech2040 research groups with representatives of all alliance partners. The groups regularly meet online to address cross-disciplinary cooperation between neuroscience and neurotechnology. The research groups are currently writing white papers that focus on identifying neuro-challenges in each of the following critical areas: health and healthcare, learning and education, biological and artificial intelligence, public and ethics, economy and ecology, smart cities, nutrition and cognition, and neurotechnology and big data.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Introducing Neurotech2040: **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VR35CRd3Tb0**

**Related policy goals:**

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

**SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Some European Universities alliances have aligned their research and innovation strategies, along with their educational strategies, with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals**. Socially engaged research and innovation can leverage universities' contributions to achieving the SDGs, as emphasised by the Horizon 2020 SwafS programme[569]. Through this alignment, alliances gain relevance and impact for their research mission. Several alliances have also developed support tools to promote the implementation of SDGs across member institutions. For example, Aurora created the Aurora SDG Research Dashboard, a digital tool that provides multilingual classification of research publications within the alliance related to SDGs (see Box 78).

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[569] European Commission, *Horizon 2020 - Work Programme 2018-2020: Science with and for Society,* https://www.sfi.ie/funding/international/european-research-area/horizon-2020/swafs/swaf-pdf-1.pdf

## BOX 78. EXAMPLE: AURORA SDG DASHBOARD

### AURORA SDG DASHBOARD

🔸 **ENGAGED RESEARCH**

The **Aurora SDG Research Dashboard** is a digital tool for university leadership, research managers, and policy advisory staff who seek research publications related to the SDGs. This dashboard shows how policymakers have used this research in their policy documents to tackle global, national or local challenges. The dashboard also indicates what researchers within Aurora have published papers that relate to the SDG Goals and SDG Targets.

An additional education dashboard maps Aurora's array of courses against the 17 SDGs.



The research dashboard uses bibliometric data and keywords to show research relevance to the SDGs and research contributions to societal challenges. The alliance uses PowerBI to transform this data into visually appealing graphics and images.

To expand the impacts of these dashboards beyond Aurora, the SDG classification service relates keywords and text fragments to one of the 17 SDGs, offering an SDG badge to other universities and organisations.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Aurora SDG Dashboard**: https://aurora-universities.eu/resource/sdg-research-dashboard/**

**Related policy goals:**

🔸 **JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**      🔸 **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Alliances are fostering science dissemination at the transnational level** through dynamic and creative approaches. They include capacity-building activities such as the EUniWell Science-to-Public Communication Workshops[570] that upskill researchers in the popularisation of science. E³UDRES² also implemented the Citizen Science Conference[571], which provides new citizen scientists with a comprehensive overview of the field. Alliances are also creating social media formats to disseminate science, like the Coffee Break with EUGLOH[572], a series of bi-weekly research videos on global health challenges.

At the local level, EUNICE developed initiatives such as the Invisible Unveiled[573], an itinerant exhibition exploring the intersections of science and art. UNITA organised the

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[570] EUniWell, 'EUniWell Science-to-Public Communication Workshops', EUniWell website, https://www.euniwell.eu/news-events/events/detail/euniwell-science-to-public-communication-workshops
[571] E³UDRES², 'E³UDRES² Citizen Science Conference', E³UDRES² website, accessed January 2025, https://eudres.eu/citizen-science-conference-2023
[572] EUGLOH, 'Coffee Break with EUGLOH: Research Videos', EUGLOH website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.eugloh.eu/news/coffee-break-with-eugloh/
[573] EUNICE, 'The Invisible Unveiled – An Exhibition On Scientific Beauty', EUNICE website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://eunice-university.eu/the-invisible-unveiled-an-exhibition-on-scientific-beauty/

U*Night – The UNITA European Researchers Night[574] to engage citizens in the recognition of research and its impact on daily life. SEA-EU introduced an original example of dissemination of science with the Oceanographic Campaign project. They embarked a team of approximately 100 researchers on a transnational maritime journey developing research and engaging journalists and citizens (See Box 79).

**BOX 79. EXAMPLE: SEA-EU OCEANOGRAPHIC CAMPAIGN**

## SEA-EU OCEANOGRAPHIC CAMPAIGN

**↰ CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

The SEA-EU Oceanographic Campaign is a scientific cruise that aims to strengthen partnerships, conduct oceanographic research, and promote oceanographic awareness along the western coast of Europe. Among the factors studied are air quality, gas accumulation, and the level of microplastics. This type of research had not been conducted on such a scale. The Oceanographic Campaign has developed two editions:

- 2022: Gdansk–Kiel–Brest–Cadiz.
- 2024: Gdansk–Kiel–Bergen-Bodø-Malmö.

SEA-EU uses the cruise in the 'R/V Oceanograf' vessel of the University of Gdansk. This is a specialised scientific research vessel with international navigation certificates that performs a wide range of measurements related to the marine environment. In addition to laboratories, there are observatories and seminar rooms.

R/V Oceanograf cruise: Gdańsk – Kiel – Brest – Cadiz, 2022 edition.

The cruise offers open events, exhibitions, and learning activities to showcase alliances in Marine Science. People have the opportunity to visit the 'R/V Oceanograf' and an exhibition with 29 panels about the SEA-EU Alliance, the ship and its expedition, the importance of ocean sustainability and the Coast for Kids project for children.

**Relevant links and sources:**

SEA-EU Oceanographic campaign: **https://barc.ug.edu.pl/**

**Related policy goals:**

**↰ OPEN SCIENCE**          **↰ SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**In summary, European Universities alliances are fostering socially engaged research that aligns with the principles of responsible research and innovation, aimed at addressing pressing societal challenges and contributing to SDGs by employing interdisciplinary research groups and engaging societal partners, identifying current and future societal needs, and actively working towards inclusive and sustainable solutions.** The European Universities initiative notably boosted the development of initiatives and strategies promoting engaged research by the participating HEIs, but it is still too early to assess their full impact and transformational potential.

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[574] UNITA, 'U*Night – The UNITA European Researchers Night', UNITA website, accessed 2 January 2025. https://univ-unita.eu/Sites/unita/en/Noticia/1079#:~:text=The%20activities%20will%20be%20conceived,translate%20critical%20issues%20into%20concrete

### 6.4.3. Open science

European Universities alliances are expected to promote open science, [575] a research
approach that emphasises open collaboration and sharing of knowledge, results, and
tools as early and widely as possible[576]. It is a policy priority for the European
Commission and the standard mode of operation under its research and innovation
funding programmes. Most higher education institutions across Europe rank as a high
priority the strategic importance of open science and have developed open science
policies. However, the implementation of those policies often lags the strategic
commitment[577].

**Alliances are taking proactive measures, including organising courses and
awards, establishing joint online repositories, and developing support
structures that foster open science, open education and open data practices**.
While it is early to assess the full transformational potential of these open science
activities, joint repositories have already contributed to increased visibility of
publications and research of alliance partner institutions.

Alliances have extensively discussed the role of open science in white papers, such is
the case for Unite! (*White paper: A New University Open Science and Innovation
Governance Model and Policy for a Sustainable World*)[578] and EU-CONEXUS (*Research
for Society: White paper on open science practice and barriers*)[579]. These papers
emphasise the need for coordinated efforts and infrastructure improvements and to
develop a comprehensive governance model focused on enhancing collaboration,
promoting research transparency, and aligning practices with sustainability goals to
transform universities into hubs of global scientific co-creation and knowledge transfer.
In this regard, Arqus created the Arqus Open Science Agenda[580], which is supported
by an Open Science Ambassador Network, Open Science Support Services and Open
Science policies and guidelines. Similarly, EDUC is implementing the EDUC-SHARE
project to introduce tools to enhance multidisciplinary, collaborative, and open
research (see Box 80).

To raise awareness and promote and implement open science practices, alliances also
offer courses and support services to students and staff. These courses and services
introduce open science and its ethical, legal, social, economic and research impacts.
Other alliances have established open science awards and dedicated teams for
mainstreaming open science practices. For example, ECIU implemented the Open
Science Course[581], ENLIGHT delivered its first Open Science Award[582], and EURECA-
PRO established the open access team (See Box 81).

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[575] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for Proposals: Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities -
ERASMUS-EDU-2023-EUR-UNIV,* 2023, httec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-
2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-univ_en.pdf
[576] European Commission, *Open Science: Open science in Horizon Europe,* rea.ec.europa.eu/open-
science_en
[577] Morais, R., Saenen, B., Garbuglia, F., Berghmans, S. and Gaillard, V., *From principles to practices: Open
Science at Europe's universities - 2020-2021 EUA Open Science Survey results*, European University
Association (EUA), 2021, www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/2021%20os%20survey%20report.pdf
[578] Unite!, Vicente-Saez, R., Rousi, A., Ribeiro, M. H., Lönneborg, R., Rovira Fernandez, A. et al., *Unite!
white paper. A new University open science and innovation governance model and policy for a sustainable
world (Version v1),* Unite! Alliance Publications, 2023 https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10639557
[579] EU-CONEXUS, *Research for Society: White paper on open science practice and barriers,* 2022,
https://www.eu-conexus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/D.-6.2-White-paper-on-open-science-
barriers_compressed.pdf
[580] Arqus, 'Open Science Agenda', Arqus website, accessed January 2025, https://arqus-
alliance.eu/research/arqus-ri/open-science/
[581] ECIU University, 'Open Science', ECIU website, accessed January 2025,
https://www.eciu.org/courses/open-science
[582] ENLIGHT, *ENLIGHT Open Science Award 2023,* https://enlight-eu.org/index.php/landing-research-and-
innovation/open-science/682-enlight-open-science-award-2023

## BOX 80. EXAMPLE: EDUC-SHARE PROJECT

### EDUC-SHARE PROJECT

**OPEN SCIENCE**

The **EDUC-SHARE project** aims to introduce tools to enhance multidisciplinary collaborative research at the EDUC through a joint research agenda and research support services. The project also is developing a long-term roadmap that addresses key global societal challenges. By promoting citizens' participation in identifying and solving current and future challenges using an open science-oriented approach, EDUC aims to enhance the impact of research.

EDUC-SHARE promotes European citizens' participation in identifying and solving current and future challenges with an open science-oriented approach. The project helps to identify barriers to citizen science at institutional, local, national and European levels. It is created around six axes composed of six focuses:

- Implementing a long-term research and innovation agenda to address societal challenges with a multidisciplinary approach;
- Developing and sharing of research infrastructure;
- Understanding the implications of citizen participation in science and its role in society;
- Reinforcing regional ecosystems and their connection;
- Sharing improvements related to ethics, equality, and improvements in young researchers' environment.;
- Developing training offers in 21st century skills for researchers and administrators.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EDUC SHARE project: **https://web.unica.it/unica/en/educ_progetto_educ_share.page**

**Related policy goals:**

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

## BOX 81. EXAMPLE: EURECA-PRO OPEN ACCESS TEAM

### EURECA-PRO OPEN ACCESS TEAM

**OPEN SCIENCE**

EURECA-PRO set up an Open Access Team that works on open science awareness events, joint publications, joint project submissions and the flow of research information to the EURECA-PRO study programmes. This team offers support with:

- Legal issues concerning publishing (e.g. clarification of copyright questions).
- Choice of appropriate journals.
- Publication process (Green Open Access) in the EURECA-PRO repository.

The Open Access team is now establishing a plan to integrate FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) into their data policy. Due to the open access/science approach of all EURECA-PRO consortium members, the developed content is made available globally, openly, and freely.

The active and direct exchange between science, society, and business is a pillar of the research strategy and is intended to strengthen the positive synergistic effects between the stakeholders involved. Through this exchange, potential problems can be recognised and addressed at an early stage. This offers an opportunity to integrate societal and economic challenges into research projects.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Report on the appraisal of the origin of interdisciplinary mindsets and collaboration modes: **https://www.eurecapro.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Report-WP3_D3.2-final.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

**SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

**CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Joint open-access digital repositories are supporting centralised efforts in disseminating research outputs and resources. Developing such repositories implies establishing joint licensing, ethics codes and advisory boards. These repositories centralise multilingual resources, such as conference papers, working papers, journal articles, books and chapters, textbooks, and teaching and seminar materials. An example of this type of platform is the EUt+ Academic Press platform (see Box 82).

**BOX 82. EXAMPLE: EUT+ ACADEMIC PRESS**

**EUT+ ACADEMIC PRESS**

🢅 **OPEN SCIENCE**

**EUt+ Academic Press is a free-to-read and publish open-access platform** including an online repository for all EUt+ publications. This project is consistent with the alliance's commitment to the principle that scholarships should be available to all without barriers or paywalls. It also offers authors a global readership and contributes to the dissemination of knowledge. Resources are licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial-No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). The platform is committed to Gold Open Access, free and permanent online access to a publication's version record.
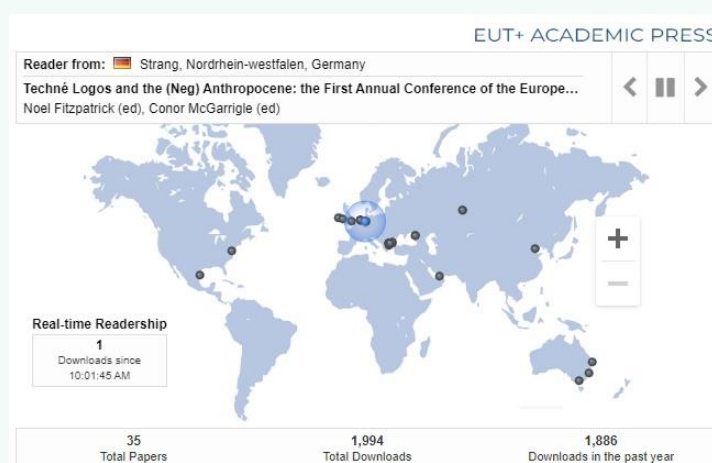


"Open access publishing is increasingly promoted as the preferred, or even the required mechanism, for publicly funded research and scholarly activities, as a means of reducing costs, broadening the availability of scholarship, and using innovative formats. The EUt+ Academic Press provides a platform for works that are attractive to commercial publishers, supports ground-breaking, innovative cross-disciplinary research, supports the Sciences, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and assists teaching activity by the inclusion of material such as open-access textbooks and educational resources." – John O'Connor, Strategic Lead, TU Dublin.

**Relevant links and sources:**
EUT+ Academic Press platform: **https://arrow.tudublin.ie/eutpress/**

**Related policy goals:**

🢅 **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**     🢅 **ENGAGED RESEARCH**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

Other initiatives in open science include the ERUA International Open Science Meet-Ups[583], a format held on Zoom that provides a space for exchange on open science-related topics. YUFE implemented the YUFERING project[584], aiming to mainstream

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[583] Universität Konstanz, 'Open Science Meet-Ups', Universität Konstanz website, accessed January 2025, https://www.uni-konstanz.de/en/international-office/partnerschaften-und-netzwerke/european-reform-university-alliance-erua/angebote/open-science-meet-ups/
[584] YUFE, 'Yufering', YUFE website, accessed January 2025, https://yufe.eu/yufering/

open science and citizen engagement across the European Research Area. Arqus implemented the Open Science Ambassadors Network[585], which selected its first cohort of ambassadors in 2023. Open science ambassadors work on strategies to foster the development of open science within the alliance. EUNICE created the Expertise Exchange Platform, a collaboration platform promoting the use of open science and open access (Box 83).

## BOX 83. EXAMPLE: EUNICE EXPERTISE EXCHANGE PLATFORM

### EXPERTISE EXCHANGE AND OPEN SCIENCE PLATFORM

**↗ OPEN SCIENCE**

**Expertise Exchange Platform**

This platform aims to facilitate engagement with experts from different organisations for strengthening ideation and innovation processes. This virtual board hosts ideas and solutions, and provides a space for brainstorming and debate, sharing resources, and seeking collaboration opportunities.

The platform supports three use cases: internal, external, and innovation use cases. The internal use cases support intra-institutional activities including idea collection, invention disclosures, internal process improvement, or other specific project campaigns. The external use cases support collaboration between universities and external actors, including limited access campaigns, external campaigns mediated by EUNICE, and community creation. The innovation use cases include incubation, case matching, and funding track matchmaking.

**Open Access Project Reports and Documents**

EUNICE also offers a repository of documents related to research, open science, and innovation. This repository includes:

- Partnerships with Industry Best Practices Report: 69 best practices through literature reviews, focusing on university-industry and university-third sector collaborations.
- Open Science Strategy: This report, based on a survey of seven representatives from EUNICE universities, outlines the current state of open science within the alliance and proposes a strategy for fostering open science.
- Action Plan for Research in Artificial Intelligence (AI): A strategic plan enabling EUNICE and other European University alliances to collaborate on innovative AI applications across various fields.
- Report on Brain Drain: Report addressing the long-term challenge of brain drain, focusing on the movement of highly skilled labour and its implications.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EUNICE Expertise Exchange Platform: **https://catalyst.uwasa.fi/**

Open Access Project Reports and Documents: **https://eunice-university.eu/research/portfolio/open-access-project-reports-and-documents/**

**Related policy goals:**

**↗ SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**　　**↗ JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Alliances are also integrating open education into their operations**. Open education is an umbrella term defining an approach to education, often leveraging digital technologies, which aims "to widen access and participation to everyone by removing barriers and making learning accessible, abundant, and customisable for all. It offers multiple ways of teaching and learning, building and sharing knowledge. It also provides a variety of access routes to formal and non-formal education"[586]. This

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[585] Arqus, 'Open Science Ambassador Network', Arqus website, accessed January 2025, https://arqus-alliance.eu/research/arqus-ri/open-science/open-science-ambassador-network/
[586] Inamorato dos Santos, A., Punie, Y., Castaño-Muñoz, J., *Opening up Education: A Support Framework for Higher Education Institutions*, JRC Science for Policy Report, EUR 27938, p.5, 2016, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2791/293408

concept extends beyond open educational resources and open research outputs. It encompasses leadership and strategic decisions, technological infrastructure, quality measures, pedagogical and research approaches, transdisciplinary collaboration, recognition of non-formal learning, and content dissemination.

European Universities alliances have embedded open education in their open science practices, developed within their research and innovation strategies. For example, Arqus embedded open education as one dimension of its open science framework[587]. Similarly, ENLIGHT embedded open education in its open science principles[588], which aim to encourage research and teaching staff to create and use open educational materials and support training opportunities to facilitate the understanding of open educational tools and methodologies. With a higher emphasis, Ulysseus set the strategic objective of strengthening open education and open science[589], making open education a key feature of the alliance's identity.

Key examples of developments in open education include the Open Education and Science Handbook describing the commitment and good practices toward open education and science created by Ulysseus. E³UDRES² implemented the Open Education Week International Workshop, an event promoted by the world association Open Education Consortium[590] to present the opportunities offered by open education and the results of its integration in all forms of education[591]. Additionally, EUniWell has developed an approach to open education supported by the Declaration on Open Education[592], adhering to global frameworks such as the Cape Town Open Education Declaration[593] and the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Educational Resources[594] (see Box 84).

Monitoring framework data and white papers published by EU-CONEXUS[595] and Unite![596] identify the following alliances' challenges in open science, open education and open data practices:

- Aligning policies within the alliances, considering different backgrounds and national regulations, as well as setting indicators to assess the impact of open science and education practices at the alliance level.
- Developing career benefits and incentives for researchers and educators since, in most cases, they do not get any credit for developing open science and education activities.

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[587] Arqus, 'What is Open Science?', Arqus website, accessed January 2025, https://arqus-alliance.eu/research/arqus-ri/open-science/

[588] ENLIGHT, 'Open Science Principles for the ENLIGHT European University Alliance', 2023, ENLIGHT website, accessed January 2025, https://enlight-eu.org/docs/enlight-os-2023.pdf

[589] Ulysseus, 'Ulysseus Action Plan', Ulysseus website, accessed January 2025,, https://ulysseus.eu/resources-and-publications/ulysseus-action-plan/

[590] Open Education Consortium, https://www.oeconsortium.org/about-oec/

[591] E³UDRES², '10th Edition of the International Workshop Open Education Week 2023 at UPT', 2023, E³UDRES² website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://eudres.eu/news/10th-edition-of-the-international-workshop-open-education-week-2023-at-upt

[592] EUniWell, *Declaration on Open Education*, 29 May 2021, https://www.euniwell.eu/fileadmin/Data_Collections/Deliverables/D2.4_Open_Education_Declaration.pdf

[593] *Cape Town Open Education Declaration*, 2017, https://www.capetowndeclaration.org/read/

[594] UNESCO, *Recommendation on Open Educational Resources (OER)*, 2019, https://www.unesco.org/en/legal-affairs/recommendation-open-educational-resources-oer

[595] EU-CONEXUS, *Research for Society: White paper on open science practice and barriers,* 2022, https://www.eu-conexus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/D.-6.2-White-paper-on-open-science-barriers_compressed.pdf

[596] Unite!, Vicente-Saez, R., Rousi, A., Ribeiro, M. H., Lönneborg, R., Rovira Fernandez, A. et al., *Unite! white paper. A new University open science and innovation governance model and policy for a sustainable world (Version v1),* Unite! Alliance Publications, 2023 https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10639557

⬥ Enhancing open science and education literacy and developing training on the required skills, protocols, data FAIR, data protection, data management, and available platforms.

⬥ Incorporating open science and education competencies in bachelor, master, and doctorate education.

⬥ Increasing availability of resources and transdisciplinary support services to promote open knowledge and its transfer.

⬥ Ensuring the long-term sustainability of open science and education practices, including funding, open data repositories, and training opportunities.

## BOX 84. EXAMPLE: EUNIWELL OPEN EDUCATION

### EUNIWELL OPEN EDUCATION

⬥ **OPEN SCIENCE**

**euni well** European University for Well-Being

The EUniWell alliance encourages open education through a broad approach that embraces open educational resources, explores open educational practices, and fosters a culture of openness. This commitment is outlined in the EUniWell Declaration on Open Education, a strategic document signed by all member institutions. This declaration reflects a deep belief in the power of openness to improve access, collaboration and educational outcomes. This commitment is reflected in the following initiatives:

- **EUniWell Open Education Working Group**: A key driver of open education within the EUniWell alliance. This collaborative group promotes open educational practices, facilitates the creation and sharing of open educational resources, and fosters a culture of openness among member institutions.

- **EUniWell Open Education Blog**: This is an online platform dedicated to sharing information and insights on open education within the EUniWell alliance. It serves as a valuable resource for faculty, researchers, and staff interested in learning more about open educational practices, accessing resources, and engaging in discussions on relevant topics[597].

- **International Staff Week on Open Education**: A week-long event that brought together educators, researchers, and staff from various countries to explore Open Education. The program included workshops, discussions, field trips, and virtual reality experiences focused on sharing best practices, creating synergies, and fostering collaboration in Open Education practices[598].

Furthermore, EUniWell makes the produced open educational resources visible at national and international level by providing the common repository OER.Pro[599] built by the alliance. These initiatives allow EUniWell to advance its commitment to open education and embed it across partner institutions.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EUniWell Open Education: **https://euniwell-open-education.univ-nantes.fr/about/**

**Related policy goals:**

⬥ **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**     ⬥ **JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**To overcome these barriers, it is crucial to define and communicate the benefits of open science and education to all stakeholders involved, including researchers, educators, educational/research institutions, governments, society and policymakers.**

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[597] EUniWell, 'EUniWell Open Education blog', EUniWell website, accessed January 2025, https://euniwell-open-education.univ-nantes.fr/

[598] EUniWell, 'International Staff Week on Open Education', EUniWell website, accessed January 2025, https://www.euniwell.eu/news-events/events/detail/international-staff-week-on-open-education

[599] EUniWell, 'OER.Pro', EUniWell website, accessed January 2025, https://www.euniwell.eu/what-we-offer/seed-funding-programme/projects-of-the-sixth-seed-funding-call-2024/oerpro

### 6.4.4.    Innovation and knowledge transfer

**European Universities alliances reinforce the transfer of technology and
capacities, support the development of creative innovations in the market,
and promote knowledge transfer with surrounding ecosystems**[600]. By
enhancing knowledge and technology transfer, alliances can contribute to establishing
and scaling up start-ups and SMEs across Europe. Innovation and knowledge transfer
are beneficial for both parties: companies and society can utilise the cutting-edge
technology developed by alliances, while alliances benefit from additional resources
and valuable partnerships. Additionally, the transnational dimension of alliances offers
great potential for international technology transfer and knowledge-sharing.

The development of the innovation and knowledge transfer dimension within European
Universities alliances is still in its early stages. Alliances are working towards creating
and aligning joint strategies and support mechanisms for innovation and knowledge
transfer. To achieve this, they are utilising funding from the SwafS coordination and
support action, the European Excellence initiative and EIT's HEI Initiative[601]. The latter
initiative was launched in 2021 and is playing an important role in consolidating
innovation within the alliances by supporting projects related to innovation and
entrepreneurship.  Some related alliances' innovation and knowledge transfer projects
are ongoing, and the outcomes are still to materialise. O'Neill and Acheson[602]
highlighted the significant resources and the long-term effort required to face the
challenge of harmonising processes and functions related to innovation and knowledge
transfer management, which need to be clearly defined and consistently applied within
diverse innovation ecosystems. The 2023 Progress report on SwafS projects
highlighted that some alliances are re-thinking transfer from an innovative and co-
creation perspective[603].

According to the Monitoring framework data, alliances strive to establish knowledge
transfer and innovation related structures and services, such as laboratories and
libraries, as well as access to previous research and innovation outputs. Additionally,
they aim to increase the number of joint project proposals and international grants
attracted. Another common objective is to facilitate and create new opportunities for
brain and knowledge circulation within alliances. Moreover, alliances are working
towards enhancing the quality of international innovation outputs and creating a
stronger impact by contributing to solving challenges in local ecosystems. Through
these actions, alliances aim to have a policy impact on each region of partner
institutions, aligning efforts at the international level to support innovation.

**European Universities alliances are establishing support mechanisms to
foster innovation and knowledge transfer**. They are harmonising existing
innovation services among partners. For example, EUTOPIA is developing the Grants,
Legal and Innovation Office[604], which promotes deeper synergies among partners'
research and innovation offices. Similarly, E³UDRES² partnered with the University
Industry Innovation Network (UIIN) to create the E³UDRES² Entrepreneurship and

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[600] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for Proposals: Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities -
ERASMUS-EDU-2023-EUR-UNIV,* 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-
tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-
univ_en.pdf
[601] EIT: HEI Initiative, 'Unlocking the potential of higher education institutions for innovation and
entrepreneurship'*,* EIT website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://eit-hei.eu/about/about-eit-hei-initiative/
[602] European Commission, European Research Executive Agency, O'Neill, G., Acheson, H., *Progress of
University Alliance Projects – Projects funded under Horizon 2020 IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020 Call - Pilot I,*
Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/533035
[603] Ibid.
[604] EUTOPIA, 'Grants, Legal and Innovation', EUTOPIA website, accessed 2 January 2025,
https://train.eutopia-university.eu/glenn-offices

Innovation Network for Smart and Sustainable European Regions (E.I.N.S) (see Box 85).

## BOX 85. EXAMPLE: E³UDRES² ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION NETWORK

### E³UDRES² ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND INNOVATION NETWORK

E³UDRES²

#### ⬏ INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

E³UDRES² created the Entrepreneurship and Innovation Network for Smart and Sustainable European Regions (E.I.N.S.). This network co-ideates new pathways for entrepreneurial universities, supports startups and established businesses, and facilitates intersectoral collaboration. E.I.N.S. empowers 'Ent-Re-Novators' (entrepreneurs, researchers, innovators), including young talent, experts, management, SMEs, local authorities, and engaged citizens. The project funds activities to deepen the collaboration within the E³UDRES² network, especially in entrepreneurial training and innovation. The network offers sources of inspiration, including chats, open lectures, testimonials, featured start-ups, and six E.I.N.S. Open Innovation Hubs.

E.I.N.S. emphasises the significance of smart and sustainable regions in driving bottom-up innovation, promoting European cultural identities, and maintaining a high quality of life. While global innovation is concentrated in urban areas, E.I.N.S. connects small, agile HEIs that support their regions. To enhance innovation capacity, E.I.N.S. defined four long-term strategic priorities:

**E.I.N.S.**
E³UDRES² Entrepreneurship and Innovation Network
for Smart and Sustainable European Regions
Supported by
eit RawMaterials · Co-funded by the European Union · EIT HEI Initiative

- Empowering and supporting 'Ent-Re-Novators' to bridge knowledge-triangle gaps;
- Enhancing entrepreneurial education for learner-driven innovation;
- Linking smart specialisation and open innovation to connect regional ecosystems with pan-European networks;
- Providing expertise and resources to turn ideas into value for smart and sustainable European regions.

### Relevant links and sources:

E.I.N.S. network: **https://eudres.eu/eins**

### Related policy goals:

⬏ KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ⬏ CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Alliances are promoting the development of sustainable alliance-level entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems**. This perspective aims to harmonise the interconnectedness of economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. This approach should generate benefits for all societal stakeholders and to support sustainable regional development. After coordinating strategies at alliance level, partner institutions implement them at the regional level with transnational support and a continuous exchange of experiences. For example, Through the EC2U Virtual Institutes[605], joint Institutes "without physical walls" hosting international inter-disciplinary teams of students, teachers, researchers, and innovators, the alliance fosters rapid integration of research results and/or innovation into education and delivers innovative solutions to local, national, European, and global

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[605] EC2U, 'Virtual Institutes – Staff', EC2U website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://ec2u.eu/virtual-institutes-staff/

challenges. Similarly, ENHANCE is implementing Sustainable Entrepreneurship & Innovation Ecosystems, described in detail in Box 86.

## BOX 86. EXAMPLE: ENHANCE SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

### ENHANCE SUSTAINABLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP & INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

**⌁ INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER**

ENHANCE alliance institutions have actively formed supporting environments for Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Innovation (SEI) by mapping and developing synergies among diverse related activities including educational programmes, research projects and labs, disclosures and technology transfer, incubators and accelerators, idea evaluation and development, start-up and venture formation support, financing and funding, general consultation, and networking, among others. For this purpose, ENHANCE is establishing an intra-university network on SEI to jointly understanding the type of support start-ups need for successful sustainable entrepreneurship.

ENHABCE has mapped existing courses related to entrepreneurship and sustainability at partner institutions and established the ENHANCE Certificate in sustainable entrepreneurship and innovation[606], a joint blended learning course on European aspects of SEI. The curriculum includes existing courses offered at partner universities and includes a joint summer school in sustainable entrepreneurship.

ENHANCE has delivered two Summer Schools on Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Innovation[607]. The key characteristics of the summer schools are:

- blended digital and in-person-week intensive training. Students are introduced to key topics on sustainability, entrepreneurship and innovation, with multiple stakeholders perspectives;
- Participation in the Summer School results in a certificate worth 6 to 7.5 ECTS credits depending on the credit system of each institutions;
- all Master's and PhD students of ENHANCE partner institutions can participate;
- Participation is free, and students get reimbursed for travel, accommodation and subsistence costs.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Enhance SEIs: **https://enhanceuniversity.eu/sustainable-entrepreneurship/**

**Related policy goals:**

**⌁ JOINT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES**     **⌁ KEY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Alliances are creating support structures to streamline cooperation, raise awareness, centralise resources, support knowledge transfer, and accelerate innovation**. RUN-EU has developed the Innovation Hubs[608]. These hubs are interregional networks that use academic expertise and shared infrastructures to develop interuniversity research, innovation, and regional stakeholder engagement to enhance the link between teaching, research, and innovation within RUN-EU. ERUA developed the Collaboratories[609], an initiative that ensures outreach, impact and collaboration through co-creation and transfer of knowledge. Ulysseus is developing

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[606] ENHANCE, *Certificate in Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 2022, https://enhanceuniversity.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/D5.7_ENHANCE-Certificate-in-Sustainable-Entrepreneurship-and-Innovation.pdf

[607] ENHANCE, 'Summer School in Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Innovation (SEI)', ENHANCE website, 2023, accessed 2 January 2025, https://enhanceuniversity.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ENHANCE-Summer-School-PM-2023-Final-2.pdf

[608] RUN-EU, 'Innovation Hubs', RUN-EU website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://run-eu.eu/innovation-hubs/

[609] ERUA, 'Collaboratories', EURA website, accessed 2 January 2025, https://erua-eui.eu/open-database-old/collaboratories-old/

joint Innovation Hubs at each partner to consolidate its innovation ecosystems across
Europe (Box 87).

**BOX 87 EXAMPLE: ULYSSEUS INNOVATION HUBS**

**ULYSSEUS INNOVATION HUBS**

🢒 **INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER**

Ulysseus Innovation Hubs are joint structures for collaboration, addressing research and development challenges shared in the region and cities within the alliances. The hubs connect the alliance and associated partners to foster close collaboration through a co-design approach, which fosters co-creation and multi-stakeholder and citizen engagement. The objectives of the Ulysseus Knowledge Hubs are:

- Design joint, challenge- and research-driven, transdisciplinary and inter-sectoral, flexible programmes, research and activities.
- Facilitate and promote entrepreneurship within the academic community to improve the number and success of startups created.
- Promote citizen engagement and the appropriation of European values.
- Offer scientific material conditions (technological platforms, data centres, etc.) to enhance attractivity and visibility.

Ulysseus has eight Innovation Hubs, one at each partner University. Every Hub has one joint research centre, one incubator for spin-offs, one living lab and one open class for liaison, brokerage and joint designing, fostering multistakeholder and citizen engagement.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Ulysseus Innovation Hubs: **https://ulysseus.eu/innovation-hubs/**

**Related policy goals:**

🢒 **REGIONAL AND ENGAGEMENT**          🢒 **ENGAGED RESEARCH**

civic

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**European Universities alliances face the following challenges in consolidating their innovation and knowledge-transfer frameworks**:

🢒 Fostering deeper cooperation between researchers, administrative support staff, and leadership within alliances to set common priorities, innovation management processes, effective communication channels, and mutual trust.

🢒 Ensuring long-term stable cooperation in innovation while developing high levels of commitment, leadership, and strategic changes at different institutions.

🢒 Securing continuous funding, particularly to support knowledge commercialisation, start-ups, and spin-offs.

🢒 Sharing and disseminating innovation outputs at the alliance level, which involves navigating intellectual property issues, commercialising innovations, and developing appropriate dissemination channels.

🢒 Managing alliance-level inter- and transdisciplinary innovation in topic-framed areas requiring alignment of diverse academic cultures and methodologies among partners.

**The development of joint support structures for innovation and knowledge transfer exemplifies alliances' commitment to centralise resources, promote opportunities, and create collaborative spaces for co-creation, incubation, acceleration, innovation and transfer to society. In addition, a combination of local, regional and transnational research and innovation ecosystems within each alliance gives them the potential to drive a unique culture of innovation, entrepreneurship, and multistakeholder engagement in Europe.**

## 6.5. Outcomes for the wider higher education system

### EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES
Erasmus+

### Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

- **Alliances are committed to the promotion of European values and identity** through mobility, numerous educational and civic engagement activities specifically related to European values, cultural diversity, democracy, active citizenship, equality, minority rights and empowerment. The alliances also integrated principles relevant to the green and digital transitions and sustainability into their education, research, innovation, and operational activities and joined forces to digitally connect their campuses.

- **The European Universities initiative contributes to enhancing the quality, performance, and global competitiveness of European higher education**. The alliance model is already proving to be a strategic tool for enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of partner institutions on a global scale, increasing international visibility, attracting international students - who find transnational education opportunities and joint degrees awarded by several European HEIs highly appealing, helping to improve international ranking positions and strengthening the European knowledge economy.

- **At the national level, the alliances have achieved considerable impact** in terms of positive effects on increased attractiveness, visibility and acknowledgement on a worldwide scale, economic, academic, and socio-cultural benefits, increased labour market relevance, skills strategies and graduates' employability and suitability to respond to territorial innovation ecosystems' needs. For the wider higher education systems, benefits extend to the quality in didactics and research, developing a culture of innovation and tools for effective management and administration. The initiative drives excellence and fosters inclusion, enabling an inclusive transformation of the sector across Europe, contributing to balanced mobility flows and consolidating brain circulation.

- **The alliances drove policy progress in the Member States**, facilitating transnational cooperation in higher education (e.g. accreditation of joint degrees, recognition of qualifications, seamless mobility) and solidly contributing to the European (Higher) Education Area, including boosting the Bologna Tools implementation. The initiative has a transformational potential and is positively impacting the sector as a whole, beyond the HEIs participating in the alliances.

European
Education Area

## EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES
Erasmus+

# Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

To further sustain these positive national trends, outcomes and impact of the alliances, **a majority of Member States implemented support measures for the European Universities alliances** ranging from co-funding (at the national or regional level) to non-monetary support such as formal working groups with ministries, informal discussion platforms or administrative and legal support with the application process.

To ensure sustainability and enable the European Universities initiative full transformational potential, Member States continued and active engagement to **remove any persisting barriers to transnational cooperation in higher education is essential.**

**At the EU level, alliances accelerated policy initiatives**, for example, advancing work towards the development of a **European Degree** and on a possible European **legal status for alliances of HEIs.** The European Universities initiative has created **political momentum** and brought higher education to the political agenda of the EU institutions and the Member States. Stakeholders recognise the capacity of the alliances to **enhance European competitiveness and its leadership** in education, science and technology based on their holistic, strategic, and long-term vision encompassing all the alliances' missions of education, research and innovation at the service of society. The initiative contributes to s**trengthening regional and higher education cohesion** in Europe by facilitating the participation of HEIs from all corners of regions across Europe, including in rural, remote areas and outermost regions, **bringing unprecedented opportunities to the doorsteps of their students in their home regions.**

**Alliances already set up a vibrant community for best practice sharing and dissemination and developed robust transferable models of cooperation** such as governance structures, legal cooperation arrangements, frameworks and roadmaps, inclusiveness and sustainability strategies, mobility models, and plans for pooling resources and facilities, among others, with a view to facilitating wider adoption beyond the alliances, in the broader higher education systems. **FOREUE4ALL Community of Practice** gathering all 65 alliances and higher education stakeholders could play a key role in ensuring good practices and experiences can be shared and disseminated, both among the alliances and with the broader European higher education sector.

European Education Area

European Universities alliances are expected to yield benefits for all relevant higher
education institutions, higher education systems, EU Member States, the broader
society and HEIs ecosystem[610]. Alliances should have a significant impact and serve as
critical contributors to the promotion of the European way of life. Moreover, they are
envisioned to increase the attractiveness and competitiveness of participating HEIs
globally by fostering deeper transnational cooperation. Additionally, European
Universities should promote European values, respect academic freedom, and
strengthen European identity for all learners, teachers, researchers, and staff, enabling
them to collaborate and co-create knowledge across different cultures, languages,
sectors, and academic disciplines. Ultimately, the alliances should aim to enhance the
excellence of higher education. A recent survey shows that the European Universities
initiative is indeed perceived by 43% of surveyed HEI representatives as having a
positive effect on the institutions' internationalisation activities, while only 1% see a
negative effect.[611]

### 6.5.1. Promotion of European values

The European Universities initiative aims to "Promote common European values as
enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and a strengthened European
identity **by bringing together a new generation of Europeans who are able to
cooperate and work within different European and global cultures, in different
languages, and across borders, sectors and academic disciplines**" [612].

**Higher education can support the anchoring of European values in society by
teaching and awareness-raising actions in the context of growing pressure
on diverse fundamental and democratic rights**[613]. The European values include
respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect
for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities[614]. These fully
align with the European Union's priorities: protecting citizens and freedoms,
developing a strong and vibrant economic base, building a climate-neutral, green, fair
and social Europe, and promoting European interests and values on the global stage[615].
Both are reflected in a cross-cutting manner in diverse initiatives in education,
research, and service to society throughout this report, but several initiatives
presented below stand out through their specific focus on values and priorities.

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[610] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for Proposals: Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities -
ERASMUS-EDU-2023-EUR-UNIV,* 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-
tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-
univ_en.pdf

[611] Rumbley, L., and Hoekstra-Selten, J., *EAIE Barometer: Internationalisation in Europe*, 2024,
https://www.eaie.org/knowledge/barometer.html

[612] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for Proposals: Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities -
ERASMUS-EDU-2023-EUR-UNIV,* 2023, p. 5, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-
tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-
univ_en.pdf

[613] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Communication
from the Commission on a European strategy for universities*, COM/2022/16 final, 2022, p. 5,
https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-
universities

[614] The Treaty on European Union, Article 2, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-
a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF

[615] European Union, *European Union priorities 2019-2024,* https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-
actions/eu-priorities/european-union-priorities-2019-2024_en

**European Universities alliances significantly contribute to European integration by fostering a common European identity and values, serving both as an educational and political strategy in the EU**[616]. They encourage the development of a shared identity and promote the idea of European citizenship through diverse mobility opportunities, playing a crucial role in the continent's integration[617]. Mobility, one of the core priorities of the alliances, discussed in Section 0, is thus a key factor contributing to the promotion of European values and identity.

> **❝ Students with mobility experience feel strongly connected to Europe** <…> *with a striking increase in their* **sense of belonging towards the EU***, underscoring the transformative power of mobility experiences and fostering a stronger sense of European citizenship and unity among participants.*
>
> **Erasmus Student Network Survey**[618]

**Multiple alliances have integrated the promotion of European values and identity into their learning offers** by creating joint degrees, modules, and other initiatives on these topics. For example, 4EU+ partner HEIs offer joint and shared courses specifically on topics related to European values. CIVICA created challenge-based learning activities that focus on European social challenges, EU policies and democracy. EPICUR offers the track on European Identities including 59 inter-disciplinary courses. Other alliances have created joint degrees on topics related to European values and identity, like Arqus joint Master's in European Studies and UNA Europa Joint Bachelor's in European Studies described in Box 88.

Aside from the educational offer, **alliances have also developed supporting activities focusing on the promotion of European values, democracy, active citizenship, equality, and minority rights and empowerment**. To name just a few of the many examples, ERUA organises a regular winter school on European Identities. The 2023 edition designed for Master's students focused on European migration from an interdisciplinary perspective, including an overview of the political, historical, economic and cultural framework of European integration. UNITA launched a European Identity and Citizenship award aimed at students completing three-year dissertations or postgraduate theses on the topic of European citizenship. CIVICA engages its students and the wider public in debates on political themes, including democracy, through its open lecture series, as well as initiatives promoting and facilitating access to higher education for potential students from minority or disadvantaged backgrounds. EDUC has established a Youth integration lab

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[616] Cino Pagliarello, M., 'Higher education in the single market between (trans)national integration and supranationalisation: exploring the European universities initiative', *Journal of European Integration,* Vol 44 Issue 1, pp. 149-164, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.2011266 and Gunn, A., *The European Universities Initiative: A Study of Alliance Formation in Higher Education*, In Curaj, A., Deca, L., and Pricopie, R. (eds) European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade, Springer, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5_2 and Jungblut, J., Maassen, P. and Elken, M., 'Quo Vadis EHEA: Balancing Structural Continuation and Political Variety', in: Curaj, A., Deca, L. and Pricopie, R. (eds) *European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade*. Springer, 2020, pp. 391–415, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5_25

[617] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[618] ESN, Buseyne, S., Dias, R., Gabriels, W., Kalinova, N., *Participation in Learning Mobility as a driving force to change the European Union: Breakout Report from the XV ESNsurvey*, 2024, https://www.esn.org/sites/default/files/news/participation_in_learning_mobility_as_a_driving_force_to_change_the_eu.pdf

empowering adolescents and young adults, including the most disadvantaged, to actively participate in society as responsible European citizens. FORTHEM organises annual Democracy Weeks at one of the partner universities to promote democratic values and active citizenship. EU-CONEXUS promotes responsible and active citizenship through its "University to School" Programme. Circle U. established a designated Knowledge Hub on democracy as presented in Box 89.

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## BOX 88. EXAMPLE: UNA EUROPA JOINT BACHELOR'S IN EUROPEAN STUDIES

### UNA EUROPA JOINT BACHELOR'S IN EUROPEAN STUDIES

**↗ EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY**

The UNA Europa Alliance created the **Joint Bachelor of Arts in European Studies (BAES)**, aiming to examine the fundamental aspects and values of the European Union as well as European states and societies. The programme implemented a multidisciplinary approach, offering research skills to analyse key issues related to Europe. Through extensive mobility opportunities, students experience, live, grow, and learn about Europe in international settings. Students have the opportunity to learn a new European language, in addition to English, study in two to three out of nine partners, have short-term mobility in winter schools, and can choose among seven fields of specialisation (law and criminology, politics and international relations, communication, education, gender, and sociology; business and economics; philosophy; history; and languages and culture).

During the BAES programme, students are supported and guided by a study career counsellor. The counsellor orients admission, reception at campuses, learning progress, study trajectory, well-being, administrative or practical matters, and career services.

The UNA Europa also offers a joint Doctoral Programme in Cultural Heritage (Una-Her-Doc). The programme offers academic and soft (transversal) skills development, supervision of doctoral candidates by professors from two UNA Europa partner universities, research stays at several UNA Europa partners, and joint structures for admission, selection, supervision, and assessment. Additionally, the alliance has developed lifelong learning certificates and micro-credentials in sustainability and data science aligned with the goals of green and digital transition.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Joint Bachelor of Arts in European Studies (BAES): **https://www.una-europa.eu/study/baes**

**Related policy goals:**

**↗ JOINT, FLEXIBLE, AND INNOVATIVE LEARNING OFFER**    **↗ STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

## BOX 89. EXAMPLE: CIRCLE U. DEMOCRACY HUB

### CIRCLE U. DEMOCRACY HUB

🏹 **EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY**

The Circle U. Knowledge Hubs are physical and virtual spaces for students and staff to co-create knowledge and solutions across disciplines with external stakeholders, and find new ways of working together. One of the three Knowledge Hubs is dedicated to Democracy.

The Knowledge Hub on Democracy aims to examine alarming trends in parts of Europe and the world, where democratic values are undermined and discarded, and develop strategies to strengthen democracy and civic engagement. Nine professors appointed to the hub as chairs liaise with students, staff and external stakeholders to co-create knowledge and solutions across disciplines, and to engage in policy development.

The knowledge hub organises events aimed at academics and wider society, including Democracy and Finance hybrid workshop at the University of Vienna, Evidence and Democracy in Times of Crisis summer school at the University of Oslo, and others.

**Relevant links and sources:**

CircleU. Democracy HUB: **https://www.circle-u.eu/about/platforms/knowledge-hubs/democracy/**

**Related policy goals:**

🏹 **REGIONAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Alliance mission statements often reflect major global challenges and core EU priorities, such as the digital and green transitions.** The potential of the European Universities initiative as an instrument to diffuse and foster adherence to European and global priorities like sustainability, digitalisation or inclusion has also been recognised in academic literature[619]. The vast scope of online activities offered by the alliances not limited to education, but also including interactive virtual campuses, community platforms or language cafes foster virtual collaboration, digitalisation, and internationalisation at home.

The alliances develop **climate and environmental literacy** of their students across all levels and disciplines, offer climate upskilling and reskilling opportunities through lifelong learning embedded in flexible learning modules such as micro-credentials, enhancing education through work on climate-relevant research activities. Alliances also inform the public at large through **community engagement** and contribute by creating knowledge for environmental-related policies.

Several **alliances have integrated principles based on green and digital transitions** into their education, research, innovation, and operational activities, and joined forces to digitally connect their campuses. A few examples cover the SEA-EU Observatory for Sustainable Blue Economy, aiming to monitor and measure the blue economy sustainability, contribute to policy making by fostering creation of sustainable jobs in this area, and by creating an active network of marine and maritime stakeholders across the regions, raising awareness of relevant professions and their appeal to young people, promoting circular economy and forming strategies for matching supply and demand for jobs. The CHARM-EU Joint Master's Degree in Global Challenges for Sustainability offers students opportunities to acquire advanced knowledge of sustainability by addressing societal challenges and work on the

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[619] Marques, M., and Graf, L., 'Pushing Boundaries: The European Universities Initiative as a Case of Transnational Institution Building', *Minerva*, Vol. 62, 2023, pp. 93-112., https://doi.org/10.1007/s11024-023-09516-w

Sustainable Development Goals and the European Green Deal in transdisciplinary and intercultural teams through innovative pedagogical approaches.

The EU-CONEXUS Marine Biotechnology Master's programme is centred around urbanised coastal areas and their challenges and needs for sustainable development, building on the complementary strengths of its partner institutions, and pursuing a holistic approach to education, research and service to society. EURECA-PRO offers a Master's degree programme on the circularity of products and systems at a technical-scientific level. It aims to develop students' competencies regarding resource efficiency, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and the development of sustainably usable and recyclable products. Una Europa micro-credential programme in Sustainability gives a holistic understanding of global sustainability challenges and how to address them, and offers a flexible way to supplement degrees from any discipline with research-based knowledge on sustainable development and skills.

ENLIGHT Sustainability Engagement Mission Statement defines the objectives of diverse alliance dimensions committing to the goals of digital and green transition. The alliance has implemented flagship initiatives, such as green campus offices and virtual or low-emission mobilities, as detailed further in Box 90. Several other alliances also promote green mobility by offering virtual mobility opportunities or providing subsidies for green travel.

### BOX 90. EXAMPLE: ENLIGHT SUSTAINABILITY ENGAGEMENT

**ENLIGHT SUSTAINABILITY ENGAGEMENT**

🍃 **EUROPEAN VALUES AND IDENTITY**

ENL**⚓**GHT

The ENLIGHT Sustainability Engagement mission statement aims to contribute to sustainable development and to lead sustainability, by example, with concrete actions in governance, education, and research. This initiative was endorsed by rectors of the ENLIGHT alliance HEIs in December 2021. This mission statement was operationalised in four main dimensions.

- Governance: Introducing an institutional culture of sustainability through the support of green offices and engagement of internal and external stakeholders.
- Research: Developing a common, sustainable Research and Innovation (R&I) action plan, an R&I Support Group, an R&I Observatory, and open science approaches aligned with their sustainability commitment.
- Education: Stimulating the integration of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into existing studies promotes the concept of global citizenship.
- Transfer: Implementing ENLIGHT Living Labs, ENLIGHT European and Global dialogues, and creating multi-faceted partnerships and networks to foster transparent and continuous collaboration
- Operations and facilities: Promoting sustainable mobility and embracing a circular economy.

ENLIGHT has established a network of Green Offices at all the partner institutions. The first goal and task of the offices is to jointly promote sustainable and green mobility to harmonise internationalisation with increasing environmental impact and to sustainably reduce the carbon footprint of travel. The alliance also strives to plan its events sustainably and, instead of printed programmes or goodie bags, donates to reforestation projects as part of a reforestation strategy.

**Relevant links and sources:**

ENLIGHT sustainability engagement statement: **https://enlight-eu.org/docs/2021-ENLIGHT-Sustainability-Engagement.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

🍃 **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**      🍃 **SHARED RESOURCES AND FACILITIES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

## 6.5.2.    Attractiveness and competitiveness

The European Universities initiative aims "To achieve the ambitious vision of an innovative, globally competitive and attractive European Education Area by 2025, in full synergy with the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area, by transforming the institutional cooperation between higher education institutions and bring it to the next level"[620] and "reach a substantial leap in quality, performance, attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education institutions, and contribute to the European knowledge economy, employment, creativity, culture and welfare"[621]. Although **it is early to evidence the full impact**, the alliance model is already proving to be a strategic tool for enhancing the quality, performance, attractiveness and competitiveness of partner institutions on a global scale.

Alliances offer a compelling model for European HEIs to **increase international visibility and attract international students and staff.** The collaborative nature of alliances, exemplified by joint publications and inter-institutional resources, holds the potential to **reshape international ranking positions of partner HEIs** – as testified by some alliance coordinators in interviews - and to strengthen the European knowledge economy. The collaborative nature of the initiative also **facilitates institutional cooperation beyond the sole European Universities context.** The initiative's impact is gradually materialising, providing a promising trajectory for the continued growth, innovation, and global influence of European higher education and beyond, building international profiles which are highly appealing for universities from outside the EU.

Recent research on the European Universities alliances recognises that the **initiative provides opportunities to achieve a critical mass and better compete globally through** pooling of resources[622,623,624] enabling efficiency gains. This was seconded by several alliance representatives interviewed for this study, emphasising that joining an alliance helped to boost the attractiveness and competitiveness of their institutions and programmes, both globally and in Europe.

The interviewees considered that European Universities alliances have the potential to contribute to **enhancing global visibility of EU universities**. In comparison with high-ranking HEIs in Asia, North America, and South America, European HEIs appear relatively small in size and benefit from joining forces within an alliance as a way to increase their international visibility and **attract and retain international students and talent globally**. The alliances already demonstrated that **access to several leading European universities rather than just one institution is highly**

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[620] Erasmus+ Programme, *Call for Proposals: Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities - ERASMUS-EDU-2023-EUR-UNIV,* 2023, p. 4, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2023/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2023-eur-univ_en.pdf

[621] European Education and Culture Executive Agency, *Online information session: EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES - Erasmus+ 2024 Call for Proposals, par. 4,* https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/news-events/events/online-information-session-european-universities-erasmus-2024-call-proposals-2023-11-10_en

[622] Lambrechts, A.A., Cavallaro, M. and Lepori, B., 'The European Universities initiative: between status hierarchies and inclusion'. *Higher Education,* Vol. 88, 2024, pp. 1227–1247, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01167-w

[623] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee,* European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[624] EUA, Claeys-Kulik, A., Jørgensen, T., Stöber, H., et al, *International strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative: Results of the EUA survey,* April 2020, https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/international-strategic-institutional-partnerships-and-the-european-universities-initiative.html

**appealing to students from outside the EU, which reflects in their increased number of applications**:

> "Meanwhile we see the added value <of the initiative> in attracting best students from all over the world. We have students from Australia who asked to be a part of European university because it is highly attractive for non-Europeans to not only study at one university, but to gain access to six universities with one enrolment. That is very attractive to applicants from the US and South America as well, and an important added value of a European University" – Interview with alliance coordinator.

Evidence also shows that **some joint alliance programmes specifically attract more international applications, endorsing the developments on the Blueprint for a European Degree**:

> "(…) the number of applications from international candidates at our university increased by 100% from last year. Membership in an alliance is also seen positively by national authorities and assessments as a best way to increase internationalisation of our institution" – *Interview with alliance coordinator*.

> "As a long-term goal, the alliance wants to also reach outside the European Union area. We want to be visible to American students, for example, and we have indeed been getting a lot of applications to our joint master's programme from outside of Europe as well, and we are very happy about that" – *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

An example of alliances aiming to boost visibility and attractiveness of European education offer in engineering is **EELISA, ENHANCE and EUT+ alliances developing and testing a general European engineer profile** defining a set of high-level technical and scientific competencies combined with environmental, social, and multicultural skills benefitting from the European context and fit for the competitive global market (see Box 91). Another illustrative example of European Universities alliance boosting international visibility and competitiveness is **FilmEU,** an alliance uniting film and media schools. Globally, film studies are dominated by a few big players, none of them based in Europe. Joining forces of several highly specialised universities and film institutes, public broadcasters, and art festivals as associated partners has **tangibly helped to attract international students and increase the visibility of European film and media industry**, as highlighted by the alliance staff in a focus group.

Joining forces in research and producing **joint publications as alliances is already helping partner HEIs to boost their international rankings**, although it is still too early to see the full impact. For example, a representative of one of the alliance partner HEI mentioned that joint publications significantly contributed to their institution climbing from a 401-500 position in 2018 to 201-250 in the 2023 Times Higher Education (THE) World University ranking[625].

Beyond raising the institutions' attractiveness for international students and staff, **European Universities developed a new paradigm where transnational collaboration is the norm** that largely benefits institutional cooperation worldwide. European Universities enable academic communities and institutional frameworks to operate in transnational settings, building international profiles which are highly appealing for universities from outside the EU.

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[625] Times Higher Education, 'Times Higher Education World University Ranking', accessed 2 January 2025, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings

**BOX 91. EXAMPLE: EELISA EUROPEAN ENGINEER PROFILE**

## EELISA EUROPEAN ENGINEER PROFILE

**↗ ATTRACTIVENESS AND COMPETITIVENESS**

EELISA alliance aims to develop a general European engineer profile encompassing both high-level technical and scientific core competencies and environmental, social and multicultural skills, taking benefits from the European context of diversity and mobility. Such profile would enable to address the new challenges of a global society, especially the green and digital transition, and the expectations of companies. It would also highlight the added value of European higher education in a global context.

The development of the profile encompassed a deep literature review, a survey of academic staff, students and external stakeholders, as well as interviews with senior managers of leading European companies.

The EELISA engineer profile can be described through four general pillars:

- High level of scientific, theoretical and digital skills as the backbone of the European engineer profile, involving core skills with a theory-based understanding of the basic sciences in each field of engineering.

- Addressing sustainability: European engineers need to understand how the techniques they develop are compatible with the planet's boundaries and that they should not generate irreversible situations, and to consider the entire life cycle of products and services they design and produce.

- Interculturalism: an engineer embracing the European project: adding both physical and virtual mobility to a degree programme facilitates understanding and incorporating soft skills on a personal level. Through exposure to different professors, university environments and cultures, students will gain awareness of different societal issues, ethical problems and cultural dispositions.

- Business and communication skills and critical thinking: practical and applied knowledge: students will be exposed to economic, organisational and managerial issues, requiring training related to communication skills, decision-making and independent learning (on the job) to better integrate the views of multiple stakeholders into their decision and creative processes, develop an independent mindset and critical judgment capacities.

**Relevant links and sources:**

EELISA European Engineer profile: **https://eelisa.eu/the-european-engineer/**

JEDI proje**ct**: **https://eelisa.eu/jedi/**

**Related policy goals:**

**↗ PROMOTION OF EUROPEAN VALUES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews*

### 6.5.3. Dissemination beyond partner HEIs

As outlined in the European strategy for universities, the European Universities initiative was set out to expand to at least 60 European Universities with more than 500 HEIs by mid-2024[626]. This goal has been reached in summer 2024 following the results of the 2024 Erasmus+ call for proposals, with 65 European Universities alliances active all across Europe with more than 570 higher education institutions of all types and sizes.

The expectation of the initiative is thus that their outcomes are disseminated "openly and effectively to a wide range of stakeholders during and after the EU funding period"[627]. As part of the Erasmus+ call for proposals, **alliances developed dissemination plans with strategies for sharing outcomes, experiences, and best practices**. These plans entail human and financial resources, as well as activities, tools, and communication channels, including the use of social media, to guarantee

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[626] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Communication from the Commission on a European strategy for universities*, COM/2022/16 final, 2022, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities

[627] Ibid, p. 20.

European Commission

wide and effective dissemination of results, outputs, and innovations generated by the European Universities, both during and after the EU funding period.

European Universities alliances have developed **transferable models of cooperation** such as governance structures, legal cooperation arrangements, frameworks and roadmaps, inclusiveness and sustainability strategies, mobility models, and plans for pooling resources and facilities, among others, **with a view to facilitate wider adoption**. These **toolkits are openly available** on their websites to facilitate transferability to other HEIs, alliances, or any other purpose, as illustrated by the example of CHARM-EU introduced in Box 92.

The dissemination of practices beyond partner institutions in the European Universities initiative is a key objective for alliances that are **actively involved in dissemination both within and outside their respective alliances**. The consolidation and dissemination of outcomes takes time, and the European Universities alliances have taken a proactive engagement and collaborative spirit in this regard.

ECIU has been proactively sharing its experience and expertise on development and implementation of micro-credentials, and Una Europa shared their mobility frameworks and models with other universities in Flanders, Belgium and developed a transferable model for a joint quality assurance system for European Universities alliances.

## BOX 92. EXAMPLE: GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF CHARM-EU

### GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF CHARM-EU

CHARM-EU

**DISSEMINATION BEYOND PARTNER HEIS**

CHARM-EU developed scalable toolkits and frameworks which can be adopted by other universities and universities alliances. CHARM-EU Toolkit includes the alliances' approaches to curriculum design, governance, inclusivity, mobility and teaching and learning.

Within the governance resources, the alliance published a **Handbook on CHARM-EU's innovative governance and management model**. The Handbook outlines CHARM-EU's values, mission and vision, as well as the procedures and policies that were created for the shared governance, the challenges and thinking related to each specific topic**.**

Other published documents related to CHARM-EU's governance include:

- CHARM-EU: White paper on the governance of European Universities: the case of CHARM-EU
- Governance Terms of Reference
- First steps towards an innovative governance and management model for a new type of alliance
- CHARM-EU Inclusivity Plan
- Forum on European Universities Governance
- CHARM-EU Vision and Mission (2019)

**Relevant links and sources:**

Handbook on governance and management: **https://charm-eu.eu/resource/handbook-on-governance-and-management/**

**Related policy goals:**

**JOINT GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, website, and interviews*

Although alliances are still consolidating and constantly develop new and update existing resources, they are already engaged in disseminating their achievements. As shown in Figure 59, **almost 90% of alliances are actively engaged in sharing practices and experiences** with university networks or organising outreach events. More than two-thirds of the alliances are actively publishing open-source educational and management materials.

**FIGURE 59. DOES YOUR ALLIANCE SHARE GOOD PRACTICES WITH OTHER HEIS OUTSIDE OF THE ALLIANCE?**

| | Yes | Under development | No | Blank |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Actively share practices and experiences in university networks outside of the alliance | 89% | 8% | | 3% |
| Organise outreach and dissemination events | 87% | 11% | | 3% |
| Publish open-source educational/management resources | 68% | 21% | 8% | 3% |

■Yes  ■Under development  ■No  ■Blank

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on the data collected in the first monitoring framework exercise. The data covers 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020.*

**The outcomes of alliances are often disseminated through university networks in which the partners participate**, also discussed in Section 5.1. Several alliances partner with (and originate from) the Coimbra group. The Guild and UNICA specifically help their members find partners if they are interested in joining or forming a European Universities alliance. Many of the university networks, such as EUA and LERU, have established designated working groups for the European Universities initiative, highlighting its significance, providing a platform for their members to exchange their experiences and disseminate good practices.

Additionally, dissemination is enabled through European and global partnerships with other HEIs. **The majority of alliances work together with other higher education institutions from in- and outside of the EU.**

For example, many alliances have opened their activities to **Ukrainian universities** to express their support and solidarity after the unprovoked Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In this context, the alliances are now working together with almost **35 higher education institutions from Ukraine that are associated partners**.

As of 2022, an in subsequent Erasmus+ European Universities calls, the initiative has opened **opportunities for higher education institutions from all Bologna Process countries to be associated to the** alliances.

It is important to note that the **eligible associated partners for the European Universities cover several types of organisations:**

▸ HEIs established in EU Member States or a third countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme, holding a valid ECHE Erasmus Charter for Higher Education.
▸ HEIs established in a third country not associated to the Erasmus+ programme that is part of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Process) or in a Western Balkans country not associated to the Erasmus+ programme.
▸ Public/private organisations from an EU Member State, third country associated to the Erasmus+ programme or from a Western Balkans country not associated to the Erasmus+ programme active in the field of education and training, research, and innovation or in the world of work.

In addition to the associated partners that are eligible in the context of the Erasmus+ European Universities calls for proposals, **such as the Western Balkans** (EUTOPIA), some alliances have **partners from overseas or focus on partnerships from a specific geographical area,** for example **African universities** (CIVIS – see Box 93, EUniWell, Una Europa) to craft new partnerships, contribute to international development, and achieve global outreach and outcome dissemination. CIVIS alliance has secured several funding grants together with some of their six African partner universities, while EUniWell developed a course focusing on global well-being with HEIs in Morocco, Kenya and South Africa. Una Europa set up a seed funding scheme for joint projects between the alliance and eight African partner universities from six countries. **Multiple other alliances seek ways to expand their partnerships beyond the EU as part of their internationalisation efforts[628] and advocate for possibilities to include non-EU HEIs, including Swiss and UK universities, in the European Universities alliances[629,630], indicating a widening relevance of the European Universities initiative**.

## BOX 93. EXAMPLE: CIVIS AFRICAN PARTNER UNIVERSITIES



### CIVIS AFRICAN PARTNER UNIVERSITIES

**DISSEMINATION BEYOND PARTNER HEIS**

CIVIS **global strategy spans over the Mediterranean zone and Africa**. In March 2022, CIVIS and its member universities signed a partnership agreement with six African universities:

- Makrerere University, Uganda
- Eduardo Mondlane University, Mozambique,
- Université Hassan II de Casablanca, Morocco,
- University of Sfax, Tunisia,
- Université Ceikh Anta Diop de Dakar, Senegal,
- University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

CIVIS launched an own seed-funding scheme for proposals submitted jointly with the African partner universities, and funds short- and long-term mobilities from 5 days to 6 months for staff and students going to Africa or coming to the EU. The partnership also resulted in joint and successful research project applications between CIVIS and their African partners.

**Relevant links and sources:**

CIVIS African partners: **https://civis.eu/en/get-informed/news/visits-to-civis-african-partner-universities-pave-the-way-for-next-steps-in-collaboration**

**Related policy goals:**

**ATTRACTIVENESS AND COMPETITIVENESS**      **REGIONAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, website, and interviews*

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[628] An inter-alliance event on internationalisation of European Universities alliances has been organised by CHARM-EU in September 2024, see: https://charm-eu.eu/event/internationalisation-of-european-universities-alliances-the-new-frontiers/

[629] Aurora Universities Network, *European Global Approach revisited – position paper by Aurora*, 2023, p. 6, https://aurora-universities.eu/new/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/AURORA-position-paper-on-EC-Global-Approach_210323_final.pdf

[630] LERU, *European Universities: no more lip service, time for action*, 12 May 2021, https://www.leru.org/news/european-universities-no-more-lip-service-time-for-action

**Alliances actively share their outcomes and good practices among themselves**
as well. Some develop transferrable toolkits or roadmaps for a development of a
European Universities alliance, as illustrated by an example of FilmEU in Box 94.

Furthermore, from the inception of the alliances, two networks, FOR-EU1 and FOR-EU2, brought together alliance coordinators, staff and experts to work on topics of common interest such as project management, European degrees, etc.

Building on the experience of FOR-EU1 and FOR-EU2, the inter-alliance collaboration will be further strengthened by the newly established **Community of Practice for European Universities FOREU4ALL,** supported by Erasmus+. FOREU4ALL **will bring together all 65 European Universities alliances, along with 5 European stakeholder organisations:** European Students' Union (ESU), Erasmus Student Network (ESN), European University Association (EUA), European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE), European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). They aim to foster a collaborative and supportive ecosystem where good practices and experiences can be shared and disseminated, both among the alliances themselves, and with the broader European higher education sector, enabling the alliances to collectively act as trailblazers fostering progress for the benefit of the entire higher education sector and society. In this respect, a cooperation with the Seal of Excellence holders[631] could further enhance the alliance's capacity as role model.

## BOX 94. EXAMPLE: FILMEU TOOLKIT

### FILMEU TOOLKIT

🢂 **DISSEMINATION BEYOND PARTNER HEIS**

The FilmEU Toolkit provides a comprehensive guide to the work and solutions created by FilmEU. It offers proposals to deepen cooperation between Higher Education Institutions, aiming to foster the emergence of a European Universities alliance.

Designed as an interactive and didactic tool, the toolkit encourages exploration and experimentation with various solutions and innovations developed throughout the alliance. It addresses several core needs, including integrating achievements from all Task Forces/work packages within FilmEU to design and pilot solutions that promote jointness essential for a European University. It presents key lessons in an attractive, transferable format to create guidelines for fostering intensive cooperation between higher education institutions. Additionally, it designs roadmaps for incorporating new partners into the existing alliance and creates an adaptable model for adding new activities and solutions.

The toolkit has two main objectives: explaining the constituent elements of a European University and how to operate them and allowing experimentation and playful exploration of the various dimensions of FilmEU. It covers six dimensions: Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Education, Research, Linkage to Society, Governance and Services.

**Relevant links and sources:**
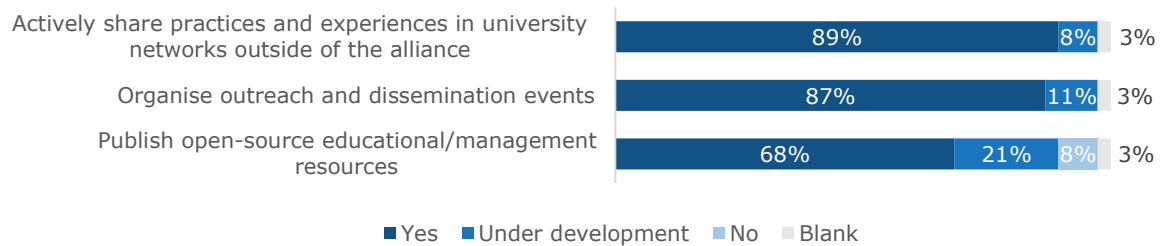
FilmEU Toolkit: **https://toolkit.filmeu.eu/**

**Related policy goals:**

🢂 **JOINT GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

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[631] EURASHE*, Statement on the Seal of Excellence awarded to Alliances within the European University Initiative,* October 4 2024, https://www.eurashe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Erasmus-Seal-of-Excellence-for-European-University-Alliances.pdf

In addition to networks uniting multiple alliances, **HEIs participating in the
European Universities initiative have established national networks in some
Member States**. These networks allow to **join forces for policy change at national
level and to exchange experiences**, challenges and good practices shared by the
HEIs in the same national context. For example, in Germany, HEIs of the European
Universities alliances are joined by the European University Networks (EUN)[632]
coordinated by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). In Romania, RO
European Universities[633] unites 21 HEIs belonging to alliances to tackle common
challenges relating to joint degrees, micro-credentials, research policies, co-tutorship
arrangements and legal entities at national level. The activities of the network resulted
in reviews of national legislation facilitating accreditation of joint degrees.

**Joint initiatives by several alliances are also becoming increasingly common.**
Clusters of alliances have joined forces under multiple other joint Erasmus+ projects,
including the **six pilots for a joint European degree (label) and four for the legal
status of alliances of higher education institutions**, completed in spring 2024.

Several alliances have also formed **collaborative networks based on their profiles
or shared interests**, like EU-CONEXUS and SEA-EU, both representing coastal
universities (see Box 95).

**BOX 95. EXAMPLE: EU-CONEXUS AND SEA-EU INTER-ALLIANCE
COOPERATION**



**EU-CONEXUS AND SEA-EU
INTER-ALLIANCE COOPERATION**

↱ **IMPACT BEYOND PARTNER HEIS**

EU-CONEXUS and SEA-EU have established an inter-alliance cooperation agreement in 2022. This
agreement aims to develop common policies for access to joint infrastructure and services, develop the
Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability Research Community, remote infrastructure for research and
innovation, design a SEA-EU long-term research plan, and disseminate to other European Universities.
Additionally, the agreement established an inter-alliance management committee in charge of managing
inter-alliance cooperation and a Mutual Learning System composed of a set of working groups to guarantee
mutual learning.

These types of agreements are providing an unprecedented opportunity for mutual support, co-creation,
and exchange of best practices. By establishing a framework for collaboration, alliances foster a synergistic
environment that ensures that collaboration remains dynamic and responsive to evolving needs in which
shared resources and expertise can be leveraged to achieve common goals.

**Relevant links and sources:**

Inter-alliance Cooperation Agreement: **https://www.eu-conexus.eu/wp-
content/uploads/2022/05/Inter-Alliance-Coop-Agreement_signed-and-scanned-1-1.pdf**

**Related policy goals:**

↱ **STUDENT AND STAFF MOBILITY**

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on alliance reports, websites, and interviews.*

**Students are also cooperating across the alliances**. Several European
Universities alliances have launched a grassroots initiative to empower students and
give them a say in the future of Europe. As a key outcome, the **European Student
Assembly (ESA)** has been set up[634]. It takes place once a year in spring at the
European Parliament in Strasbourg. It gathers a group of more than 200 talented

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[632] DAAD, 'European University Networks (EUN) – national initiative', DAAD website, accessed 2 January,
2025, https://www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/further-information-
on-daad-programmes/eun/
[633] UNITA, 'RO European Universities', Unita website, accessed 2 January 2025,
https://www.uvt.ro/en/unita/ro-european-universities/
[634] For more information see: https://www.eucvoices.eu/

students from several European Universities alliances across Europe to discuss about essential themes for the future of the European Union. The event is already at its 4th edition in 2025.

**The dissemination of practices beyond partner institutions in the European Universities initiative is a key objective for alliances** that are actively involved in dissemination both within and outside their respective alliances. They have made available **transferable models of cooperation, encompassing governance structures, legal arrangements, and mobility plans, to facilitate wider adoption**. The consolidation and dissemination of outcomes takes time, and the European Universities alliances have taken a proactive engagement and collaborative spirit in this regard.

### 6.5.4.    National-level outcomes and support schemes

Based on a **strong political mandate from the EU Leaders in 2017**, the European Universities initiative has been co-created by the European Commission, the Member States and European HEIs, aiming to yield significant results and transformation for higher education institutions and the whole sector at national levels.

In addition to positive effects on increased attractiveness, visibility and acknowledgement on a worldwide scale, **benefits are also highlighted in economic, academic, socio-cultural terms**[635]. More concretely, these concern for example **labour market relevance, skills strategies and graduate employability, and suitability to respond to territorial innovation ecosystems' needs[636], crisis response and management**[637].

The initiative **drives excellence and fosters inclusion** notably when it comes to the diversity of student, academic and non-academic communities taking part, and the diverse types of higher education institutions involved enabling an inclusive transformation of the sector across Europe. This goes hand in hand with the potential of European Universities to **contribute to balanced mobility flows and consolidate brain circulation**[638].

**Benefits for the higher education institutions beyond partner HEIs** extend to the quality in didactics and research, developing a culture of innovation, tools for effective management and administration, adaptability and enactment of the European Higher Education Area[639], including boosting the implementation of Bologna Tools.

The European Universities alliances provide a stable framework with long-term commitment to strategic transnational cooperation. Such context gives a wealth of **opportunities to leverage resources and infrastructures of alliance partner institutions** for knowledge sharing, best practice exchange and testing innovative

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[635] European Expert Network of Economics of Education Craciun, D., and Orosz, K., 'Taking Stock of the Costs and Benefits of Transnational Partnerships in Higher Education: What Do We Know So Far?', *EENEE Policy Briefs*, January 2019, https://eenee.eu/en/resources/library/taking-stock-of-the-costs-and-benefits-of-transnational-partnerships-in-higher-education-what-do-we-know-so-far/

[636] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

[637] Cino Pagliarello, M., 'Higher education in the single market between (trans)national integration and supranationalisation: exploring the European universities initiative', *Journal of European Integration,* Vol 44 Issue 1, pp. 149-164, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.2011266

[638] Boc, E. 'Brain drain in the EU: Local and regional public policies and good practices'. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 16 Issue 59, 2020, pp. 23–39 https://doi.org/10.24193/tras.59E.2

[639] Poszytek, P. and Budzanowska, A. (Eds.), *European Universities in Poland. Implementation of development strategy.* FRSE Publishing. Key Concepts Series, vol. 13. (2023). https://www.doi.org/10.47050/67587105

approaches with higher education institutions beyond the alliances' partners, as well as strengthening industry-academia cooperation.

HEIs reported that the **alliance context helped them to add value to national level discussions on educational policy developments**[640] **and drive legislative progress and reforms**. Moreover, the national HEIs participating in alliances form an important network able to **drive the transformation of the whole sector and enrich study offers across their territories**, possibly contributing to cohesively revive EU regions[641].

> " *Based on a survey among 15-29 year-olds, the top three reasons that young people had for leaving their home regions were: a lack of adequate employment opportunities (49 %), personal reasons (47 %) and a lack of adequate study opportunities (40 %). At the same time, the top two reasons why young people decided to stay in their home regions were: personal reasons (49 %), followed by the overall study opportunities (39 %). These figures show that* **better study opportunities, including opportunities for mobility, encourage young people to stay in their country**. *In regions either at risk or already in the 'talent development trap' (i.e. the difficulty to retain talent), young people identified more higher education institutions and more industry-academia cooperation among the most effective policy options to counter this trend.*
>
> **European Commission, study on 'Youth for reviving stagnating EU territories, 2024** [642]

### *National financial support increasing excellence and internationalisation of national HEIs involved in the alliances*

Overall, the **European Universities initiative has been received increasingly positively in the Member States**, even in those countries that initially flagged some concerns.

Based on our interviews with representatives of national ministries of education, **a large majority of the Member States are supportive of the European Universities initiative.** The reasons for endorsing the initiative include recognising its transformational potential for development, increasing excellence and international competitiveness of HEIs. The support was based on the rationale that the European Universities alliances can act as drivers and role models to test and explore new models of deeper transnational cooperation and innovative education that are expected to benefit the national higher education sectors as a whole. Countries also engaged in extensive analyses on the participation of their national higher education institutions in the European Universities initiative and evaluated the related outcomes, as reviewed in Section 4.4 Country-level studies: national perspectives into impact and national-level challenges4.

To further sustain these positive national trends, outcomes and impact of the alliances, **the majority of Member States implemented support measures for the European Universities alliances** ranging from co-funding (at national or regional

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[640] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

[641] European Commission. *Youth for reviving (stagnating) EU territories*. 2024. Publications Office of the European Union. https://doi.org/10.2776/10088

[642] European Commission. Youth for reviving (stagnating) EU territories. 2024. Publications Office of the European Union. https://doi.org/10.2776/10088

level) to non-monetary support such as formal working groups with the ministries, informal discussion platforms or administrative and legal support with the application process. These non-monetary support structures for the participating HEIs contribute to progressing policy dialogue in higher education and putting higher education at the forefront of political priorities at national level.

**The European Universities initiative is the first Erasmus+ initiative receiving additional high levels of national financial support in a large majority of Member States, which is deemed crucial for the success of the initiative**[643]. To untap the full transformational potential of the European Universities initiative, **this financial support of the Member States, as well as strategic support and dialogue and policy reforms** are crucial.

Furthermore, the support seems to gain traction at national level, with **more and more Member States establishing such supporting measures and schemes** – at the time most of the Member State representatives were interviewed (spring-autumn 2021), some stated that they are still developing co-funding schemes, and some of these are now already in place (for instance, in Belgium (Flanders), Cyprus, Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands).

Table 6 provides an overview of co-funding arrangements, non-monetary support measures and policy or legislative changes that were impacted by the European Universities initiative, showcasing a rich **diversity of approaches in the Member States**.

## TABLE 6. SUPPORT TO ALLIANCES BY MEMBER STATE

| MS | CO-FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS | OTHER SUPPORT MEASURES | POLICY/LEGISLATIVE CHANGES |
|---|---|---|---|
| AT | Initially, there was no designated co-funding scheme, some Erasmus+ budget was allocated to alliances on ad-hoc basis. For example, in 2021 alliance coordinating HEIs received EUR 375 000 and partners EUR 225 000 each. In 2022-24 additional funding was allocated to alliances through performance agreements, EUR 200 000 to coordinators and EUR 150 000 to partner institutions. | Support group established by the Federal ministry including EHEA representatives, science attaché in Brussels, HEI representatives. Support with dissemination and awareness-raising in annual national events. | Amendment of the University Act introducing more flexible approaches to joint and double degree programmes. |
| BE (WA) | EUR 500 000 annually for all participating HEIs (EUR 100 000 – 125 000 per institution), applying and not selected HEIs are also supported. | National working group with participating HEIs and the Ministry of Higher Education and the national Erasmus+ agency; Information sessions. | |
| BE (FL) | Five HEIs received a subsidy of EUR 4 800 000 in 2021-2024. Lump sums partly granted on the basis of student figures made available to both HEIs and university colleges participating in alliances. | National working group with participating HEIs and the ministry; Information fiches; Piloting EUniQ project. | European Universities initiative embedded in higher education internationalisation strategy, more flexibility introduced to language of instruction and student admission. |
| BG | EUR 480 000 for three HEIs selected in 2020. | Regular exchanges and information meetings; Help with preparing applications to non-participating HEIs. | |

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[643] Kanniainen, J., and Pekkola, E., 'Between harmonization and unification in the European higher education area: scenarios for the European university initiative', *Tertiary Education Management,* Vol. 29 2023, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-023-09131-0

| MS | CO-FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS | OTHER SUPPORT MEASURES | POLICY/LEGISLATIVE CHANGES |
|---|---|---|---|
| CY | 100 000 EUR for participating HEI in 2022. | National working group with participating HEIs and the ministry; Information sessions on application procedure. | Amendments to national qualifications framework allowing for three rather than typically four years bachelor's degrees via European Universities alliances, more flexibility introduced to language of instruction. |
| CZ | 75% of the alliance HEIs share of co-funding within the alliance budget. Funding is also provided to HEIs that received a Seal of Excellence but were not selected for Erasmus+ funding. | Promotion, information and support on application preparation. | European Universities initiative embedded in national HE internationalisation strategy. |
| DE | Up to EUR 750 000 per participating HEI until 2023, up to EUR 725 000 for 2023-27. Until 2023, EUR 450 000 was allocated to HEIs that were not selected, but received a Seal of Excellence and are planning to reapply. Complementary funding is possible at federal state level. | National working group with participating HEIs, regular policy dialogue at national level, regular roundtables organised by DAAD involving federal ministry, state ministries and alliance HEIs on administrative and regulatory barriers. Support in awareness-raising through DAAD. | Federal state level reforms facilitating recognition of short-term and virtual mobility, changes facilitating accreditation of joint degrees under discussion. |
| DK | Initially no co-funding was foreseen. HEIs were using their internationalisation budget. In 2024, EUR 535 600 were allocated to alliance HEIs to strengthen their research dimension. | Dialogue between ministry and HEIs; Information sessions prior to application submissions. | Changes to recognition of virtual mobility. |
| EE | No targeted national co-funding. | Dialogue between ministry and HEIs. | European Universities initiative embedded in national higher education internationalisation strategy. |
| EL | EUR 110 000 over a period of 3 years, covering the share of HEIs' co-funding of alliance budget. | Support with administrative matters in preparation of funding applications. | Legislation enhancing flexibility to European Universities alliance partners to implement joint educational programmes. |
| ES | EUR 280 000 for alliance coordinators, EUR 225 000 for participating HEIs, EUR 125 000 for non-selected HEIs, application preparation grants. Allocated together with Erasmus+ funding. | National working group with participating HEIs; Regular communication and information sessions. | Legal decree facilitating recognition and accreditation of joint programmes allowing for three rather than four-year bachelor's programmes by alliance partner HEIs, facilitating joint-diploma issuance and enhancing flexibility in international study program creation. Decree should progressively extend to cover all HEIs in transnational collaboration. |
| FI | One-off contribution of EUR 150 000 per HEI in 2019. | Information sessions | Bottom-up: more HEIs started applying the European approach to quality assurance of joint programmes. HEIs are working for change in regulations on diploma language policy and tuition fees. |
| FR | Same amount as granted by Erasmus+ for each participating | Bottom-up support on demand and ad hoc meeting | Exemptions for European Universities alliances made to |

| MS | CO-FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS | OTHER SUPPORT MEASURES | POLICY/LEGISLATIVE CHANGES |
|---|---|---|---|
| | HEI (up to. EUR 1 000 000 per alliance). EUR 100 000 000 foreseen in the national HE budget for a 10-year period for all French HEIs participating in European Universities alliances. Funding is also provided to HEIs that received a Seal of Excellence but were not selected for Erasmus+ funding. Complementary funding is possible at regional level. | with French representatives in the alliances | facilitate the accreditation of joint degrees, changes facilitating the issuing of joint degree diplomas in progress. |
| HR | EUR 100 000 per participating HEI for a period of 3 years. | National working group with participating HEIs; Regular meetings with HEIs. | Changes to facilitate accreditation of joint degrees, European Universities initiative embedded in national HE internationalisation strategy, the Ministry of Education created a national plan for removing barriers to European Universities alliances. |
| HU | Mandatory 20% of HEIs' co-funding covered (10 HEIs shared EUR 12 000 000 for a period of three years) | Working group on legal issues; knowledge-exchange events, consultations and legal support. | European Universities initiative embedded in national higher education internationalisation strategy, legal changes to facilitate accreditation of joint degrees in 2022. |
| IE | Co-funding of EUR 2 700 000 allocated in 2024[644]. EUR 3 100 000, or EUR 445 000 per alliance allocated in 2022.[645] | Support with applications and dissemination. Ministry of Education and the national Erasmus+ agency attend the national network. | European Universities initiative embedded in national higher education internationalisation strategy. |
| IT | EUR 225 000 for participating HEIs to cover staff, travel costs and individual support, support for applying HEIs | National support is coordinated by the Ministry of Universities and Research. | The initiative raised debates about the need to move from programme to institutional accreditation and about the need to change the national legislation requiring physical presence at exams. |
| LV | Co-funding covers 20% of HEIs' mandatory co-funding. | Regular meetings, consultations, legal assistance. | Amendment to the law on higher education facilitating the establishment of joint study programmes. |
| LT | EUR 500 000 were allocated for the first three HEIs of the 2019 call, EUR 1 900 000 to EUR 3 000 000 allocated to the five HEIs selected in 2020 from the Recovery and RRF later. Another EUR 13 500 000 from the RRF was approved for current and future alliance HEIs in 2022.[646] | National working group established by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry engages in awareness-raising and dissemination events. | The initiative was included in the government's programme and internationalisation priorities, application of the European approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes began along with discussions on micro-credentials and regulation of |

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[644] Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (Ireland), *Minister Harris announces additional funding for Universities to support their participation in EU partnerships*, 15 January 2024, https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/36756-minister-harris-announces-additional-funding-for-universities-to-support-their-participation-in-eu-partnerships/

[645] O'Shea, M., *Minister Harris welcomes €3.1 million funding for Irish Higher Education Institutions participating in European University alliances,* Higher education Authority, https://hea.ie/2022/02/04/minister-harris-welcomes-e3-1-million-funding-for-irish-higher-education-institutions-participating-in-european-university-alliances/

[646] Lithuanian Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, 18 November 2023, https://smsm.lrv.lt/lt/veiklos-sritys-1/smm-studijos/studiju-tarptautiskumas/jungtiniu-europos-universitetu-tinklu-iniciatyvos/

| MS | CO-FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS | OTHER SUPPORT MEASURES | POLICY/LEGISLATIVE CHANGES |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | interdisciplinary study programmes. |
| LU | No targeted co-funding. Integrated in the core funding for internationalisation of the only public university in the country. | Regular communication and advise. | |
| MT | No targeted co-funding. | Consultations. | |
| NL | EUR 250 000 per year for a period of 4 years from 2022. EUR 50 000 to support new applications. | No specific actions. | Changes to national accreditation procedure facilitating accreditation of joint degrees (relevance to European labour market considered equally as to the national one). |
| PL | Over PLN 14 000 000 for all participating universities (about EUR 150 000 per HEI to cover the 20% co-funding). Funding is also provided to HEIs that received a Seal of Excellence but were not selected for Erasmus+ funding. | Support is coordinated by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the national Erasmus + agency. Letters of support provided to applying HEIs. | |
| PT | EUR 14 750 annually in the form of PhD scholarships for alliance HEIs for four years. | Legal and administrative support, communication. | |
| RO | Lump sums of EUR 200 000 in 2019 and EUR 100 000 in 2020 plus a differentiated sum depending on HEI. EUR 709 000 were allocated to alliances in 2021, EUR 746 000 in 2022, ad EUR 1 146 486 in 2023. There are plans to use funds from RRF. | Support is coordinated by the Directorate for Financing of HEIs. Support in awareness-raising. | Better integration of European approach standards into legislation on accreditation of joint programmes and degrees. A section on the European Universities initiative and micro-credentials were included into the new law on education. |
| SE | EUR 43 000 lump sum grants by the Swedish Council for Higher Education in 2019 and 2020. | Support network coordinated by the Council for Higher Education. | Changes in progress regarding regulations for fee-paying students participating in short extra-curricular activities (micro-credentials). |
| SI | Funding is integrated in the HEIs' Development Pillar of financing, can cover both implementation and application of/for an alliance. | Informal meetings, support with application procedure. | Raised debates about national reforms in quality assurance of joint programmes and degrees, micro-credentials and online learning. |
| SK | Co-funding covers 20% of HEIs' mandatory co-funding. | No specific actions. | |

*Source: Prepared by PPMI based on interviews, Jongbloed, B, McGrath,C., de Boer,H., Grauardon, A (2023)[647], the report of the PLA on the financing of European Univerisities at national level[648], and Claeys-Kulik, A., Bennetot Pruvot, E., Estermann, T., Jørgensen, T (2022)[649], monitoring framework data covering 38 alliances selected in 2019 and 2020. Additional sources are indicated in footnotes.*

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[647] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Jongbloed, B., McGrath, C., Boer, H. et al., *Final report of the study on the state and effectiveness of national funding systems of higher education to support the European universities initiative. Volume I,* Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/885757
[648] European Commission, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Working Group on Higher Education., *Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on the financing of European Universities at national level,* Paris, October 17-18 2023, https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/core/api/front/document/110603/download.
[649] EUA, Claeys-Kulik, A., Bennetot Pruvot, E., Estermann, T., and Jørgensen, T., *The European Universities Initiative and system level reforms: Current challenges and considerations for the future*,

These various **national and regional co-funding mechanisms are instrumental in unfolding the full potential of the European Universities initiative** including by contributing to ensuring its sustainability[650]. They have been largely praised as offering significant opportunities and benefits, serving common priorities of internationalisation, educational offers, skills strategies, digitalisation, etc. Alignment of such mechanisms with alliances' needs allows for greater impact. Additionally, national or regional funding mechanisms setting grant allocation based on high quality Erasmus+ evaluation criteria and using dedicated reporting templates allow for a synergic approach and efficient use of resources.

**Substantial opportunities are available and still underutilised** through the Cohesion Policy funding and the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), where support for the alliances could drive advancement of the wider higher education sector. Some countries used the National Reform and Resilience Plan for enhancing digitalisation, modernisation and construction of infrastructure, highlighting the alliances' excellent position to address these due to their dynamic development and institutional capacities. Countries such as Romania and Germany also used ESF+ funding transfers into Erasmus+ to support mobilities of people with fewer opportunities, benefitting all HEIs including those in the European Universities alliances, thereby contributing to key strategic objectives of both programmes.

**National support measures may sometimes reveal complexities for the alliances,** for instance due to the **significant variations in commitment and co-funding support from Member States and regions**[651]. This is perceived as creating imbalances among the alliance partners and may result in uneven institutional capacities and development paces within an alliance, possibly hindering its overall advancement. As a concrete example, some institutions receiving co-funding were able to allocate more resources e.g. for mobility support offices, while other institutions dealt with limited resources which impeded a steady progress across the alliance. **The national financial support arrangements have different timelines and stricter allocation requirements**. For example, the national and EU funding periods do not always coincide, creating administrative burden through multiple proposal preparation and different reporting timelines. National co-funding is often linked to long-term financial planning, which sometimes is not fully compatible with a fast-changing higher education landscape and with the alliance HEIs needs. The **funding is also usually short-term,** which is rather difficult from the alliances' perspective when they aiming for sustainability. Furthermore, co-funding sometimes comes with strict conditions on allocation only allowing HEIs to use the funds for specific pre-agreed activities, or restraining their use for specific national purposes, thereby limiting the alliances opportunities to use these funds in the context of their ambitious transnational cooperation to the full extent. This sometimes impacts the effectiveness of co-funding within the alliance. To address these challenges, costly coordination is required from the side of the alliances, and effectiveness loss occurs when managing heterogeneous sources of funding. This different situation of the partner institutions poses risks for alliance cohesion. **Alliances suggest a more coherent approach to national/regional funding of their partner institutions**.

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2022,https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/briefing_eui%20impact%20on%20system%20level%20reforms.pdf
[650] Brooks, R. and Rensimer, L., 'The European Universities Initiative and European spatial imaginaries', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 2023, pp. 1–14, www.doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2023.2210515
[651] European Commission, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Working Group on Higher Education., *Peer Learning Activity (PLA) on the financing of European Universities at national level*, Paris, October 17-18 2023, p. 10, https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/core/api/front/document/110603/download

European Commission

### *Alliances drove extensive policy dialogue and ambitious reforms at national level*

**The European Universities initiative gave a strong push to multiple policy changes at national level across the EU** contributing to **progress towards the full implementation of Bologna tools** and **facilitating transnational collaboration in higher education**, positively impacting the sector as a whole beyond the HEIs participating in the European Universities initiative. This was confirmed by the European University Association[652], who argues that "the European Universities Initiative has been an important catalyst for policy discussions and, at least in some cases, for further reform to facilitate university cooperation across borders" They suggest that "a continuous, thorough assessment of regulatory development needs and potential solutions to address the identified barriers is necessary both at national and EU level, also with a view to avoiding overregulation".

> "From the institutional level, I would say most of the policies developed in the last few years are very strongly informed by, or (…) even aligned with the alliance's achievements or principles or policies." – *Interview with alliance coordinator*

**More changes facilitating accreditation of joint degrees, recognition of qualifications, and seamless mobility are still underway in the Member States**. Some of them can directly be attributed to the needs of the HEIs participating in the European Universities alliances, indicating that the European Universities initiative has a transformational potential benefitting both national and European higher education, creating a **positive policy drive**.

To ensure sustainability and enable the full transformational potential of the European Universities initiative, **Member States' continued and active engagement to remove any persisting barriers to transnational cooperation in higher education is essential**[653].

Member States like Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg and Malta that have made significant progress or fully implemented the Bologna tools indicated that their national policy frameworks were conducive for the European Universities initiative. Belgium (Flanders), Czechia, Estonia, Croatia, Hungary, and Ireland included the initiative into their strategic priorities embedding it into the strategies of internationalisation of higher education and research. For example, the new strategy of Czechia specifically encourages HEIs to join European Universities alliances[654].

In Member States such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, France, Lithuania, Romania, or Spain, the initiative gave a notable push to accelerate the implementation or encourage full application of Bologna tools, the implementation of European approach to Quality Assurance, accreditation of joint degrees and changes in related legislation.

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[652] European University Association, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[653] As also underlined by Brooks, R. and Rensimer, L., 'The European Universities Initiative and European spatial imaginaries', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 2023, pp. 1–14, www.doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2023.2210515

[654] Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, *Strategy for the internationalization of higher education for the period from 2021*, https://www.msmt.cz/uploads/odbor_30/DH/SZ/internationalisation_strategy_2021_.pdf

In Belgium-Flanders more flexibility was introduced into the regulations on language of instruction and student admission to better accommodate joint programmes.

In Cyprus, regulations on language of instruction were also relaxed to allow more courses to be taught in English and national qualifications framework was adjusted to allow for three-year bachelor's degrees.

In Greece and Spain, special decrees or laws for European Universities alliances were adopted facilitating transnational cooperation and accreditation of joint degrees. The Spanish Royal Decree 822/2021 allowed Spanish universities in European Universities alliances to offer three years' Bachelor's degrees, while the norm in Spain is four years[655]. Legal exemptions for accreditation of joint degrees were also made in France, Hungary and Romania.

In the Netherlands, the European Universities initiative accelerated the move to consider the relevance of a degree not only to the Dutch but also to the European labour market in the accreditation procedure.

In Finland, as a result of participation in the European Universities alliances, more HEIs started applying the European approach to quality assurance.

In Germany, changes in recognition of short term mobilities were implemented at federal level. In several other Member States, namely Bulgaria, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia and Sweden, similar policy changes are still underway or being considered.

See table 6 for an overview of examples of legislative development across Europe.

Looking at the wider higher education sector, several stakeholders ask for the **related regulatory developments to benefit the entire higher education sector**, and not only those institutions part of the European Universities initiative. They ask not to create a two-tier systems[656]. This not only for policy developments at national level, but also at EU-level.

### 6.5.5. EU-level outcomes

Few years after EU leaders called for their creation, 65 European Universities alliances have been established and span from East, West, North, South parts of Europe. They gather more than 570 HEIs of all types and sizes, which are the alma mater of about half of students in Europe now studying as part of a European Universities alliance.

As key flagship initiative of the European strategy for universities[657] and instrumental to deliver on the European Education Area[658], **the alliances embody what Enrico Letta refers to in his report on the future of the single market as the fifth**

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[655]   Ministerio de Universidades, *Real Decreto 822/2021, de 28 de septiembre, por el que se establece la organización de las enseñanzas universitarias y del procedimiento de aseguramiento de su calidad,* 2021, https://www.boe.es/buscar/doc.php?id=BOE-A-2021-15781

[656] European University Association, *The next leap forward for transnational cooperation - Supporting sustainability and impact within and beyond European Universities alliances*, 20 June 2024, https://www.eua.eu/publications/positions/the-next-leap-forward-for-transnational-cooperation.html

[657] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Communication from the Commission on a European strategy for universities*, COM/2022/16 final, 2022, p. 5, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities

[658] Council of the European Union, *Council conclusions on moving towards a vision of a European Education Area,* OJ C 195, 7 June 2018, p. 7–12, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018XG0607(01)

**freedom** for a new EU Single Market – **to learn, work together, research, innovate, share knowledge and capacity across borders**. Evidenced as a "catalyst for renewed integration" in European higher education[659] and as an effective "tool for promoting European identity based on a common sense of belonging through everyday practice"[660], the **European Universities initiative already represents a fundamental achievement for the European Union** of strengthened transnational cooperation in higher education, bringing Europeans closer together, as an undeniable **symbol of unity**.

The EU-level stakeholders interviewed for this study are overall positively inclined towards the European Universities initiative and have been supportive of its launch. This corroborates findings from previous studies noting a wide embracement of the European Universities policy initiative for a large variety of stakeholder groups[661]. Stakeholders highlighted current and potential future contribution of the European Universities initiative at the EU level. *More specific information on the European and national level higher education stakeholders positions on the initiative can be found under section 4 of the present Report.*

**The European Universities initiative led to several tangible EU-level developments and initiatives in higher education, instigating systemic reforms**. It triggered and has been a testbed for the **Blueprint for a European degree** and is paving the way for the work on a possible **legal status for alliances of higher education institutions**. Also the latest developments linked to a possible **European quality assurance and recognition system, sustainable and attractive careers and micro-credentials** are heavily inspired by the work of the European Universities alliances. At the same time, it is important to stress that all these European policy developments are not restricted to the European Universities alliance only, but are open to the wider European higher education sector cooperation across borders.

The feasibility of a European degree has been initially assessed in a designated study,[662] and 21 European Universities alliances with almost 200 associated partners have jointly developed and tested their approaches under ten Erasmus+ pilot projects. Six of them focused on the joint European degree, and four on the European legal status for alliances of HEIs[663]. A Commission Report[664] outlines the findings of these projects, constituting a key piece of evidence for the further work on the European Degree and the legal status. These collaborations will not only lead to new EU policy

[659] Cino Pagliarello, M., 'Higher education in the single market between (trans)national integration and supranationalisation: exploring the European universities initiative', *Journal of European Integration,* Vol 44 Issue 1, pp. 149-164, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.2011266

[660] Frame, A., and Curyło, B., 'Bringing Erasmus home: the European universities initiative as an example of 'Everyday Europeanhood'', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2022.2134986

[661] Brooks, R. and Rensimer, L., 'The European Universities Initiative and European spatial imaginaries', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 2023, pp. 1–14, www.doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2023.2210515

[662] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Burneikaitė, G., Pocius, D., Potapova, E. et al., *The road towards a possible joint European degree – Identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches – Final report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/945147

[663] European Education Area, *Selected Projects Pilot Call Joint European Degree Label,* 2023, https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-01/Selected_projects_pilot_call_joint_European_degree_label.pdf

[664] European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture. *Commission Staff Working Document: Report on the final outcomes of the Eramus+ policy experimentation projects: European degree (label) and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments*, December 2024, https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVIII/EU/7446/imfname_11441548.pdf

developments in higher education, but also present unprecedented examples of inter-alliance collaboration.

**The European Universities initiative has created political momentum and brought higher education to the political agenda of the EU institutions and the Member States**. This salience helps to **boost the implementation of Bologna tools** and contributes to delivering the European Education Area, in synergy with the European Higher Education Area. Stakeholders consider the initiative as a significant driver for the Bologna Process through, for example, the mutual recognition of degrees and the removal of barriers to mobility. European Universities alliances have already demonstrated concrete added value to the participating higher education institutions as well as their communities of students, academics, researchers, and staff.

**Stakeholders also recognise the capacity of the alliances to enhance European competitiveness and its leadership in education, science and technology** based on their holistic, strategic, and long-term vision encompassing all the alliances missions of education, research and innovation at the service of society. Stakeholders found that the alliances have become a key part of the wider spectrum of cooperation, notably by creating new opportunities for institutions, staff and students, enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, increasing the attractiveness, visibility and international standing of the university, boosting student and staff mobility, strengthening the links between different university missions, developing a more strategic approach towards international collaboration, and helping to build Europe and foster European integration and cohesion. The European Universities context is a real enabler for reaching a greater strategic impact, contributing effectively to key political priorities of the EU, for example to address the green and digital transitions by equipping academic communities with necessary skills or by their progress to increase employability[665].

**The European Universities initiative has the potential to transform the nature of transnational cooperation in European higher education through its strategic and long-term** rather than project-based **outlook**, enabling the creation of deep, stable and sustainable collaboration structures between HEIs. Such enhanced cooperation not only allows to develop shared identities, mutual trust and sense of community, but also enables to pool expertise, knowledge, resources, including expensive equipment, and to **combine complementary strengths not available at any single institution.** These advantages in terms of efficiency gains represent a big competitive advantage for universities, "making possible what might otherwise remain beyond their reach"[666].

**The initiative contributes to strengthening regional and higher education cohesion in Europe** by facilitating the participation of HEIs from all corners and regions across Europe, including in rural, remote areas and outermost regions, bringing unprecedented opportunities at the doorsteps of their students in their home regions. The alliances provide students and lifelong learners in and regions of Europe with **access to a richer education offer**, in cooperation with research departments and businesses. This allows graduates to develop a broader, future-oriented set of skills and competences including in key fields for Europe's competitiveness and strategic autonomy such as STEM, AI, clean technologies, energy, health, etc. Solidly anchored in the regions and territories, through a network of over 2200 associated

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[665] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

[666] Research Infrastructure, Eutopia, https://eutopia-university.eu/english-version/research/research-infrastructures

European Commission

partners, the alliances offer regions enhanced opportunities to benefit from internationalisation and enhanced innovation capacities for their territories that possibly align with their own strategies, as well as from closer interconnectedness with other regions with similar characteristics, enabling to jointly address common challenges and driving regional cohesion. In this context, **the alliances emerge as drivers for balanced mobility flows and talent circulation** offering unique study opportunities to get a high-level degree by combining studies in several European countries.

Furthermore, **the European Universities initiative brings disruptive innovation in higher education** through transnational cooperation by consolidating discourses on transnational higher education and providing a "testbed" as well as the necessary funding to pilot innovative initiatives. These include but are not limited to pedagogical innovation through internationalisation, multilingual practices, inter- and trans-disciplinarity and challenge-based approaches improving the quality of teaching and learning encompassing plural perspectives, adoption of innovative tools such as micro-credentials, digital learning, or open science and education. These developments increase the quality and scope of learning opportunities to European students as well as the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education as a whole.

**The European Universities played a significant role to contribute to EU support efforts for Ukraine so far.** European Universities alliances have partnered with close to 35 Ukrainian higher education institutions, as a strong commitment to rebuilding the Ukrainian higher education sector and to integrating Ukrainian HEIs into the European higher education area. In addition, Member States such as Poland provided specific financial support for the Polish HEIs part of the European Universities alliances to cooperate with Ukrainian universities, in synergy with their alliance activities. This aimed to support supranational cooperation to enable gradual integration of Ukrainian HEIs to EU standards and principles, in view of preventing brain drain, and adequately assist Ukrainian academic community after the war.

# 7. Benefits of cooperation within European Universities alliances

*The establishment and operation of European Universities alliances represents a transformative step in the landscape of higher education, fostering unparalleled levels of transnational institutional cooperation and synergy among member institutions.*

*Students benefit from enriched educational experiences, bolstered by innovative pedagogies and increased mobility opportunities, and gain important skills and competencies by solving global challenges, increasing their employability.*

*For partner HEIs, the alliances have proven instrumental in enhancing sustainability, innovation, institutional learning, regional and international standing, whilst offering a stable framework for long-term collaboration.*

*Staff members gain from increased mobility, the exchange of best practices and expanded professional networks, facilitating personal and institutional development.*

*The broader national higher education systems benefit from the alliances' catalysing role for driving policy changes and changes reducing barriers for transnational cooperation in higher education.*

*Alliances significantly benefit external stakeholders and the broader society by enhancing regional and civic engagement, supporting the development of societal challenges anchored in local needs, reinforcing the cooperation with associated partners in local ecosystems*

European Commission

## 7.1. Added value for students

**Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential**

- The 65 European Universities alliances are the **alma mater of about half of students in Europe** who are now studying as part of a European Universities alliance.

- The **opportunities available for students are significantly multiplied** when their higher education institution is part of a European Universities alliance.

- Students benefit from **European inter-university campuses accessing broad educational offering across all partner institutions**, encompassing student-, challenge-, and research-based, and inter-/trans-disciplinary transnational learning.

- **Students benefit from diverse and inclusive mobility and internationalisation opportunities**. The alliances have pioneered innovative frameworks for students facilitating long-term physical mobility through multilateral agreements, as well as multiple novel mobility formats, including short-term, virtual and blended (for example, the Blended Intensive Programmes). Diverse support measures, including financial, **made mobility more inclusive and accessible**, broadening the target groups, while also integrating efforts towards sustainability.

- Data collected under the present report outlines, since 2019, a **400% increase of intra-alliance students' mobility** in relative terms, despite persistent challenges to reach the 50% intra-alliance mobility targets in absolute numbers with regard to the total student population of the partner HEIs.

- **The alliances stimulate a balanced mobility flows and consolidate brain and talent circulation** linked to these rich and attractive transnational educational offering and mobility opportunities in local higher education institutions.

European Education Area

## EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES

Erasmus+

## Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

These widened educational opportunities, available in all parts of Europe, on the doorsteps of their students in their home regions, have contributed to **equipping students with a range of key future-proof skills and competencies**, including critical thinking, interdisciplinary knowledge, and entrepreneurial, creative, and transversal skills, **increasing their personal fulfilment and the relevance of the curricula and directly contributing to increasing students' employability.**

**The students' exposure to innovation and real-life challenges in the alliances' challenge-based educational offering** - through learning/living labs, incubators, short programmes, specialisations, quadruple helix collaborations, knowledge centres, hubs, direct work with start-ups and local businesses through traineeships/ work placements/ internships, etc, has **enhanced future proof-skills and competencies, as well as soft skills** such as self-directed learning, critical thinking, inter-institutional teamwork, real-world relevance, and internal and external stakeholder engagement.

The initiative is also fostering the **democratic representation of students within the alliances' governance**, as well as fosters inclusivity and diversity. Data gathered in the context of this study shows that **students are involved in the governance of 95% of alliances with 63% having full voting rights.**

European Education Area

Together, the **65 alliances are the alma mater of about half of students in Europe who are now studying as part of a European Universities alliance**. This is also the case at the level of Member States, for example in Sweden the initiative gathers more than half of the Swedish higher education institutions, where over 75% per cent of all students in Sweden are studying. Likewise, in Poland, almost 40% of the higher education institutions are partners within an alliance.

*Combined, the partner universities involved in European Universities alliances involve over* **11 million students**. *With that,* **about half of students in Europe** *are now studying as part of a European Universities alliance.*

*- Monitoring framework data*

### *More embedded mobility and increased internationalisation opportunities*

One of the core objectives of the European Universities alliances is to increase student mobility, with a mobility target to involve at least half of all students in each alliance, prompting "a much higher level of interaction than has hitherto been achieved through a bilateral or multilateral collaboration" (p.25)[667].

Data under the present report outlines, since 2019, a **400% increase of intra-alliance students' mobility**, and a **200% increase in staff mobility (see** Figure 31 **and** Figure 38**)**.

**Alliances facilitate richer, more diverse and multicultural internationalisation experiences for their students.** The transnational education offered through the mobility opportunities is crucial in preparing students for a globalised world. **By studying in different countries and universities, students gain exposure to various cultural and academic perspectives, enhancing their intercultural competences and adaptability.** This experience is invaluable in fostering a more **inclusive and globally aware mindset**, essential skills in today's interconnected world.

> "The possibility of designing, testing and piloting joint innovative mobility opportunities and pedagogical practices at the alliance level, positively impacts the international and experiential exposure of the students at all study levels". - *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**Alliances significantly contribute to breaking down barriers traditionally associated with student mobility, such as difficulties in recognising credits obtained in mobility periods, lack of funding, insufficient language proficiency, and difficulty finding HEIs to host students**.

To meet the ambitious mobility target set for alliances, **the alliances are pioneering innovative mobility formats** facilitating long-term physical mobility through multilateral agreements, as well as multiple novel mobility formats including **short-term, virtual and blended** (for example the Blended Intensive Programmes), for students, academics, staff, and researchers.

**Diverse support measures, including financial, significantly enhanced accessibility, inclusivity, equity, broadening the target groups, and boosting sustainability of mobility opportunities for students**:

> "The other thing which we stress on is to allow students to have not just one type of mobility, which was in the past - if you wanted to go abroad, as a student, you were forced to stay there at least one semester. We propose short-term mobility alongside or instead" - *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

**Alliances also contribute to addressing students' linguistic challenges**, **fundamental to increasing mobility**, fostering integration in a transnational context, and fostering personal and professional growth, enabling students to navigate and contribute to diverse multicultural settings effectively.

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[667] Gunn, A., 'The European Universities Initiative: A Study of Alliance Formation in Higher Education', In Curaj, A., Deca, L., and Pricopie, R. (Eds.) *European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade*, Springer, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5_2

### *A wider pool of learning opportunities, through the participation in European inter-university campus*

**The opportunities available for students are significantly multiplied when their higher education institution is a part of a European Universities alliance.**

> "The amount of institutional support for collaborative courses would not have been possible outside of a European university alliance". *Interview with alliance coordinator*

**Participation in European Universities alliances significantly enriches the academic landscape for students by vastly expanding the pool of learning opportunities available** to them. When universities join alliances, they often make their existing learning offers available to students across the alliance, or jointly develop mew programmes, all made available under the **European inter-university campuses**. They offer **student-, challenge-, and research-based, and inter-/trans-disciplinary transnational learning**.

At the time of data collection for the present report, the **alliances had collectively set up more than 600 joint study programmes and courses at all levels**.

> *The alliances had collectively set up more than **600 joint study programmes and courses** at all levels, including around 160 joint degree programmes. They also launched more than **430 short courses leading to micro-credentials**.*
>
> *- Monitoring framework data (data collected in second half of 2023)*

The **diversity of alliance partners**—stemming from differences in academic fields, educational practices and research focus — **further broadens student's academic options**:

> "Our students, particularly those from smaller faculties, or with fewer opportunities can have access to more diverse courses and learning and training opportunities abroad" - *Interview with alliance coordinator*

**Alliances open new possibilities for flexible learning options that would not exist outside of such collaborative frameworks (see** Figure 42**)**. They often develop **shared courses, micro-credentials, summer schools,** and other **short-term programmes across partners,** which can later be seamlessly **integrated into students' regular curricula at their home universities**. Such flexibility is instrumental in **making higher education more accessible and tailored to the diverse needs** and interests of a broad student body.

> "Learners can choose flexibly from a larger pool of learning opportunities, different in nature, educational setting, culture and sometimes language". *Interview with alliance coordinator*

> **"**Belonging to an alliance also opens up flexible learning options that wouldn't exist otherwise". *Interview with alliance coordinator*

> "The formats of shared courses, summer schools and other short-term programmes are developed across partners with a clear concept, coherence and sustainable structures and processes in place which would not have been developed without the alliance". *Interview with alliance coordinator*

Additionally, **students have access to the shared resources of partner universities, including libraries, laboratories, and online learning platforms**, significantly enhancing their educational resources and support systems.

While **accreditation of joint degrees remains challenging due to persisting barriers in national legislation, the multitude of existing and new joint learning activities combined with new flexible learning pathways has proved to be highly impactful in expanding and innovating the learning offer of the partner** institutions.

### *Unprecedented opportunities to develop skills and competencies increasing students' employability and tackling global challenges*

**European Universities alliances are at the forefront of equipping students with the skills and competencies necessary to navigate the complexities of the 21st century and address global challenges,** including critical thinking, interdisciplinary knowledge, and entrepreneurial, creative, and transversal skills (see Figure 44).

**Alliances strive to increase the relevance of the curricula** for the jobs and society of tomorrow**,** thereby increasing personal fulfilment and **enhancing students' employability**. This is key in ensuring that learning outcomes meet job markets' and societal needs. They are **actively involved in bridging the gap between the competencies provided by the education system and those demanded by the local job market**. Esparza Masana and Woolford found that alliances are more likely to analyse the skill gap in local job markets and adapt their learning offer accordingly[668]. Alliances built their educational offer by accounting for the skills gap between supply and demand in local job markets, ensuring that students have the skills and competencies required, expected to result in enhancing graduate employability**. Alliances have integrated associated partners** in these activities, in particular **companies and the private sector, enabling them to contribute to the curricula and courses development based on market research exercises, many of them being directly associated to the governance structures of the alliances**. **These collaborations provide students with relevant and practical insights, enhancing their readiness for the professional world.**

**Another significant benefit resides in the challenge-based approaches adopted by many alliances.** This pedagogical method involves students working together in trans- and inter-disciplinary teams to tackle real-world social challenges, in cooperation with their peers, academics, researchers, private partners, civil society, regional actors, etc.

**Challenge-based approaches strengthened the links between academia, business, and society**. The challenges students work on are often linked to the universities' ecosystems, ensuring that the problems are relevant and impactful for their communities. By engaging in such projects, students not only apply their theoretical knowledge in practical settings but also develop **critical skills such as teamwork, problem-solving, and project management**. **This approach enhances learning outcomes and prepares students to contribute effectively to society**. By integrating these innovative pedagogies into their curricula, the alliances are addressing the immediate needs of the labour market and preparing students to be leaders in addressing global challenges and driving sustainable

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[668] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

development. **This holistic approach ensures that graduates are versatile, resilient, and ready to thrive in a rapidly changing world.**

Furthermore, students are afforded a plethora of opportunities to develop **entrepreneurial skills, gain practical insights from industry-aligned courses, and benefit from innovative pedagogies. Entrepreneurial skills are increasingly recognised as essential for driving innovation and contributing to economic growth**. In response to this need, the alliances have introduced a significant number of **entrepreneurship-related courses to foster entrepreneurial thinking and prepare them for the dynamic demands of the modern workforce**.

Additionally, the alliances place a strong emphasis on the development of **green and digital skills**, ensuring that students are well-equipped to navigate and contribute to the evolving landscape of sustainable and technology-driven industries.

### *Enhancing civic engagement, commitment towards European values, including academic values, and democracy*

**The alliances reinforce commitment toward European values, including academic values and democracy through activities preparing learners and the wider society for active citizenship, informing about the importance of the democratic process and of participating in it, connecting learning with the social reality outside the classroom, and nurturing skills needed for civic engagement**, **building greater trust in democratic institutions, raising interpersonal trust, and tolerance for diversity.**

They strived to raise the quality and further **diffuse knowledge into the society**, inform citizens and promote the **credibility and value of science** and of the rigorous scientific processes involved in knowledge generation.

Higher education institutions are key actors in Europe for promoting citizenship, civic active engagement, and supporting democracy and values, including academic values. The alliances have a key role to play in preserving and advancing free thinking, critical inquiry, and civil discourse across our societies, promoting the engagement of the academics with their communities. They prepared students for **active citizenship** in democratic societies. Added value for the students is also recognised by studies from National Students Unions[669] that welcome the opportunities offered by the alliances and consider that the initiative has been one of the most important ways for the EU to promote higher education policy objectives.

The alliances also engaged in **social innovation** and knowledge transfer with their ecosystems and regions, and setup governance practices that foster regional engagement and emphasise regional cohesion and collaboration.

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[669] SYL: National Union of University Students in Finland, *Students' Europe – SYL's vision for EU engagement 2023–2025*, 2023 https://syl.fi/app/uploads/2023/01/Students-Europe.pdf

## 7.2  Benefits for partner higher education institutions

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES** Erasmus+

**Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential**

The European Universities initiative promoted a **deeper level of collaboration between partners**, far surpassing traditional collaborative arrangements and existing models. Rather than focusing on a specific topic or aspect, alliances focus on **deep institutional-level transnational cooperation and integration at all levels**.

The alliances have **stimulated the internationalisation of partner universities as a whole**, with the collaboration of a wide variety of departments and staff.

The alliances combined complementary strengths not available at any single partner institution. The **strategic pooling of resources** within the alliances fortifies their competitive edge and amplifies the attractiveness of their educational and research programmes.

Pooling strengths led to the **alliance's enhanced capabilities and raised excellence and innovation levels in partner institutions**, contributing to enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education and reducing overall fragmentation both in education and in research and innovation. **Pooling resources also expanded educational offerings to a wider range of students, staff and institutions, raised quality standard**s across all participating universities as well as contributed to raising efficiency gains and economies of scale.

The European Universities alliances have been instrumental in **enhancing the visibility and reputation of partner HEIs**, both on a national and international scale, notably by contributing to improving international ranking positions, reinforced joint publications, and a stronger appeal for international talent through transnational education opportunities and joint degrees in the partner institutions.

European
Education Area

## Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

- The alliances have set up **innovative and inclusive governance structures, showcasing commitment towards a long-term sustainability perspectiv**e beyond project-based approaches, engaging academic leadership, students and staff of partner institutions, also involving the associated partners at local, European and global levels from public and private sectors
  - 90% of the alliances' governance structures comprise a Student Board
  - To date, **fourteen alliances further formalised their collaboration through a legal entity**.

- The European Universities initiative has profoundly impacted the pedagogical landscape within partner institutions, fostering an environment conducive to innovation and the rapid implementation of **student-centred and challenge-based learning approaches**, entailing enhanced flexible learning pathways

- The alliances contributed to breaking silos between their partner institutions missions for education, research and innovation, at the service of society.

### *Provide a stable framework for deep, long-term strategic cooperation at institutional level*

**The European Universities initiative promoted a deeper level of collaboration between partners, far surpassing traditional collaborative arrangements and existing models. Rather than focusing on a specific topic or aspect, alliances focus on deep institutional level transnational cooperation and integration at all levels** of their partner HEIs:

> "It is a cooperation that is, in its scope, unprecedented. There are, of course, standard models of transnational cooperation <…> however, these are all limited by being focused on the specific task. The alliance transcends this model. <...> Instead of focusing on a particular result or deliverable, it addresses the cooperation on a more essential level, by focusing on the integration of structural features of each partner institution" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance*

> "Whereas certain principles may not have been new, the scale and intensity of the endeavour were not experienced before". – *Interview with an alliance coordinator*

**Alliances have stimulated the internationalisation of partner universities as a whole, with collaboration of a wide variety of departments and staff**[670]. To meet the ambitious goals of the initiative, partner HEIs are creating structures that support cooperation and overcome institutional barriers that hinder their joint activities.

**The alliances have setup innovative and inclusive governance structures, showcasing commitment towards a long-term sustainability perspective, beyond project-based approaches**, **engaging academic leadership, students and staff** of partner institutions, also involving the **associated partners at local, European and global levels from public and private sectors**. Such in depth and long-term joint governance structures are a **shift change compared to past cooperation models**, signalling the alliances' deep commitment and comprehensive structural cooperation between the partner institutions, supported by their joint long-term strategies and visions. Although there is still room for further progress, already **90% of the alliances' governance structures comprise a Student Board,** enabling the partner institutions to offer students a democratic representation of their voice in the decision-making processes of the alliance.

> "The alliance has come to inform the debates about any future developments of the governance structures as well as the more general organisational structure of their universities". – *Interview with an alliance coordinator*

The alliances also developed **joint quality assurance strategies**, set up **joint services, management tools**, signalling their commitment to the excellence of co-created educational activities.

**Joining an alliance has often been a push to develop a robust diversity and inclusiveness strategy** and monitoring mechanisms for their institution and placed this up in the list of priorities of partner institutions.

### *Increased visibility and reputation*

**The European Universities alliances have been instrumental in enhancing the visibility and reputation of partner HEIs, both on a national and international scale**, notably by contributing to **improving international ranking positions**, reinforced joint publications, and a **stronger appeal for international talent** through transnational education opportunities and joint degrees in the partner institutions.

**The strategic pooling of resources within the alliances fortifies their competitive edge and amplifies the attractiveness of their educational and research programmes**. This increased added visibility also allowed institutions to forge new collaborations on a global scale and disseminate their outcomes to partner institutions across continents, contributing to the global visibility and reputation of EU higher education.

> "Partners have gained in national, European and non-European visibility" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

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[670] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

> "New collaboration opportunities emerged due to the visibility and profile of the alliance"
> - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

> "Participation in a European Universities alliance gives each individual partner university greater relevance at national and international level" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

### *Efficiency and quality gains from sharing resources and infrastructure*

**The alliances combined complementary strengths not available at any single partner institution. Pooling strengths led to the alliances enhanced capabilities and raised excellence and innovation levels** in partner institutions, contributing to **enhancing attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education. Pooling resources also expanded educational offerings to a wider range of students, staff and institutions through the alliances.**

**By pooling together financial, human, digital, and physical assets,** including high-cost equipment, as well as partners' expertise, knowledge, **resources and data, alliances enhance the collective capacity of their partners to deliver high-quality educational activities and efficient joint services** such as student, career, research services, seed funding, virtual campuses, collaboration and community building, reinforcing further integration of the inter-university campuses and interoperability**.** Evidence from interviews and monitoring data highlights that initiatives such as sharing existing facilities or creating joint services have contributed to **raising efficiency gains and reducing operating costs through economies of scale, while raising quality standards across all participating universities.** Higher education institutions and Member States considered they have obtained a **better value for money for investments in higher education** considering efficiency of spending as well as the broader reach out in terms of students and staff and enhanced quality and richness of the educational offerings at all levels.

> "Collaborative endeavours are now backed by shared structures, systems, and regulatory norms in partner institutions" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

**Establishing a legal entity can further enhance these efficiencies.** It enables **streamlined resource management and simplifies the coordination of joint efforts,** boosting the operational efficiency of the alliance. This reduces administrative complexity and ensures a more impactful and sustainable approach to achieving shared goals. The sustainability and evolution of alliances' governance structures show that the **alliances have evolved out of a project-based mindset towards projecting their institutions into a long-term cooperation, with to date, fourteen alliances further formalising their collaboration through a legal entity**, allowing for an ever more sustainable cooperation, including through joint educational activities and easier management, distribution and acquisition of joint resources. Several other European Universities are considering the set-up of the legal entity for their alliances. Many alliances would welcome an improved EU-level solution of a legal entity for alliances of HEIs to facilitate their collaboration and to gain in efficiency.

## *A powerhouse for promoting a culture of innovation in partner universities through exchanges of good practices, experimentation and mutual learning between partners*

**The alliances' collaborative model promotes the exchange of good practices and ensures that the benefits extend broadly to students and staff alike.**

*"Participation in the alliance gives a common focus to the entire community. Up until now, even though there was some internationalisation alignment, schools and departments of the university had their own internationalisation strategies. With the alliance, it becomes easier to join forces towards a common goal".* Monitoring framework data

**The European Universities initiative has profoundly impacted the pedagogical landscape within partner institutions, fostering an environment conducive to innovation and the rapid implementation of student-centred learning approaches.** This transformation is attributed to the initiative's clear mandate to promote innovative pedagogies, **offering a fertile ground for experimentation, enabling partners to test new teaching methods, learn from the outcomes, and adapt these practices to their local contexts.**

As a result, **alliances have become pivotal in accelerating the adoption and mainstreaming of innovative educational practices across partner universities**. Many interviewed alliance representatives underlined that while innovative pedagogies and student-centred learning approaches were already applied in partner universities before joining an alliance, the initiative notably accelerated the implementation and spread of these practices.

**The alliances pioneered student-centred flexible learning pathways** by enabling their partners to develop a coherent and sustainable offer of flexible non-degree learning opportunities and/or opening up part of their learning offer to the students of their partner universities. The flexible learning opportunities are in most cases automatically recognised. Some are leading to **micro-credentials**, that students can access as independent modules. Most of these flexible learning opportunities can be integrated with students' regular curriculum at home universities. The joint non-degree educational offer developed by the alliances has significantly increased and became more innovative. The alliances open up their partners' learnings offer, develop joint courses, offer short challenge-based learning and mobility opportunities, summer and winter schools, workshops and training, including micro-credentials, enriching their available offerings of flexible learning pathways, also building on existing partners curricula.

Such **flexible learning pathways allow students to gain specific skills and competencies in a flexible manner, tailored to their needs and those of a changing job market.** These flexible learning offers would likely not be available to such broad groups of students without the European Universities alliances which are creating sustainable grounds for cooperation, including regarding funding.

**The learning offer of partner institutions became more diverse and more accessible** to a broader spectrum of students, fostering lifelong learning, recognising non-traditional learning experiences, and facilitating access to internationalisation exposure.

**The European Universities alliances have been fostering a rich environment for the exchange of best practices and mutual learning among partner HEIs**. The opportunity to share experiences and best practices with alliance partners enriches

the debates and decision-making processes related to the future development of these institutions:

> "The possibility of exchanging experiences and best practices with other partners from the alliance has come to inform the debates about any future developments of the governance structures as well as the more general organisational structure of their universities" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

> "Only a limited number of partners had experience with open programs, open curricula, challenge-based courses, and multilateral mobility. Through their participation in the alliance, they are constantly confronted with new educational methods" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

**By fostering deeper institutional level cooperation, the alliances enhance the educational capabilities of partner institutions and promote a culture of innovation and continuous improvement.**

**The alliances reinforced commitment toward European values, including academic values and democracy, and supported societal and civic engagement by embedding these goals in their activities,** diffusing knowledge into the society (open education) inform citizens and promote the credibility and value of science and of the rigorous scientific processes involved in knowledge generation (open science). The alliances setup numerous activities in their learning offers preparing learners and the wider society for active citizenship, informing about the importance of the democratic process and of participating in it, connecting learning with the social reality outside the classroom, and nurturing skills needed for civic engagement, including multilingualism, interculturality, etc. The alliances structured their operations to embody democratic and inclusive governance principles, leveraging their educational platforms to instil a sense of European citizenship and to foster the appreciation of diversity and unity, for example by recognising and rewarding the civic and community engagement within study programmes. **This led to enhancing civic engagement of their students,** building greater trust in democratic institutions, raising interpersonal trust, and tolerance for diversity.

### *Driving policy progress at EU and national/regional levels, for the benefit of the entire higher education system*

**The alliances transformational impact at EU level has been broadly acknowledged by higher education stakeholders who strongly support the initiative as a distinctive feature of Europe's higher education landscape** that is harnessing institutions' capabilities, optimising resources and capacities availability, eliminating cooperation barriers, and maximising opportunities for European students, academics, staff and researchers[671,672].

**The alliances drove policy progress at EU level, acting as pioneers in developing and testing innovative approaches to long-term structural and systemic cooperation in education, research, and innovation across Europe[673].**

The work of the alliances has been instrumental in relation to the Erasmus+ pilot experimentation projects that have informed the Commission proposal for **Blueprint for a European Degree**, as well as advanced work on quality assurance and recognition, sustainable and attractive careers of academic staff, and the analysis of

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[671] European University Association, 20 June 2024.
[672] European University Foundation, *Position paper on the European Universities initiative*, April 2018, https://uni-foundation.eu/uploads/2018_Position%20Paper%20on%20European%20Universities.pdf
[673] CESAER, 2 July 2024.

institutionalised cooperation instruments such as a possible European **legal status** for alliances of higher education institutions.

Stakeholders and literature agree that the alliances have **boosted the implementation of the Bologna Process tools** and put a spotlight on the remaining challenges in relation to their implementation.

**The formation of European Universities alliances significantly enhanced partner HEIs' capacity to help progress policymaking at national and regional levels, for the benefit of the higher education system as a whole.** By uniting a diverse group of institutions across Europe, the alliances have become important players in the European Higher Education Area for policy development and legislative progress.

**Through their collective action, European Universities alliances provide a powerful platform for partner HEIs to contribute to higher education policies at multiple levels.** This enhanced leverage is crucial for driving forward the changes needed to create a **more integrated, innovative, and inclusive higher education system across Europe.**

> "The alliance is a very specific and unique actor in EHEA, one that represents several higher education institutions from several European countries that all ultimately seek the same goal. The possibility to coordinate the activities directed on national levels as well as on the European scale is therefore a unique one" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

The collaborative strength of the alliances amplifies their voices, ensuring that the collective interests and perspectives of member institutions are heard in policy-making circles, creating a **policy drive for removing barriers to transnational cooperation, beneficial for the higher education system as a whole:**

> "Partners have gained in national, European and non-European visibility and in their capacity to contribute to policies and regulations at all levels (regional, national and European)" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

> "The alliance provides additional value through the possibility of cross-European policy synchronisation where we identify and break down challenges for collaboration and mobility" - *Monitoring framework response provided by an alliance.*

### *Breaking silos between education, research and innovation*

With the support some of the alliances received under Horizon Europe and/or Horizon 2020 to develop their institutional cooperation in the field of research and innovation, **the alliances worked towards aligning their partner institutions research strategies, in full coherence with their educational strategies,** by mapping existing research facilities, offering mutualised access to infrastructure, establishing joint research services to facilitate researchers' mobility and cooperation, working towards joint funding applications, stimulating and facilitating researcher mobility and attractive careers for young people, and developing practices and activities promoting open science.

**This led to breaking silos between education, research and innovation,** implementing the framework conditions for building excellence in R&I, so as to mainstream good European Research Area policies and practices at institutional level.

**Pooling resources contributed to reducing fragmentation of European education and research and innovation sectors,** increased efficiency of public

spending in research and innovation capabilities, supported excellence in education and research, as well as a more balanced brain circulation and increased talent attractiveness.

**A strengthened cooperation with the private sector and the innovation ecosystem within the alliances** contributed to the deployment of technological advancements in all EU territories.

## 7.3.     Benefits for staff



By broadening access to professional development through enhanced mobility, internationalisation, and networking opportunities, and fostering cross-border collaborations, **the alliances largely enriched the professional landscapes for staff,** laying the groundwork for a more interconnected and inclusive European Education Area.

**Staff at European Universities alliances are benefitting from a larger pool of professional development and networking opportunities that stem from sharing resources and services between partners.**

**Many alliances offer teaching training and provide specific funds to support teachers in jointly developing innovative educational ideas**. These initiatives

reflect a widespread commitment to pedagogical excellence, **equipping educators
with cutting-edge methods and tools** to enrich their teaching practices:

> "Teachers benefit from the exchange on learning practices, new methods, and so on. <…>
> They are really excited also about this opportunity to have a framework to work with other
> lecturers in the same disciplines or in complementary, interdisciplinary contexts" -
> *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

Craciun et al. highlight that staff trainings about challenge-based learning are
particularly present in alliances[674]. Beyond teaching methodologies, almost half of the
alliances offer professional development opportunities for their staff, reflecting a
commitment to continuous learning.

The alliances also place a strong emphasis on **networking opportunities to
enhance collaboration in education and research**. Initiatives such as
**matchmaking** activities and the creation of **seed funding opportunities** are
specifically designed to foster collaboration across institutions. These efforts not only
facilitate partnerships but also encourage the sharing of knowledge and resources,
thereby enriching the professional experiences of staff members:

> "We see that our academics can find new partners for research and teaching within an
> existing partnership that can provide them with support <…> and shared infrastructure"
> *- Interview with alliance coordinator.*

Through these concerted efforts, European Universities alliances are providing
academic and non-academic staff with unparalleled opportunities for professional
development and networking. By investing in the continuous growth of their staff, the
alliances are enhancing individual career trajectories and contribute to the overall
excellence and innovation within European higher education.

**European Universities alliances play a pivotal role in promoting mobility and
fostering exchanges among staff, significantly enhancing the
internationalisation of higher education**.

**Academic and non-academic staff are offered varied opportunities including
Blended Intensive Programmes, staff exchanges, staff weeks, joint
professional training programmes and job shadowing placements.** Through
this comprehensive suite of initiatives, **alliances have opened new avenues for the
development of linguistic and intercultural skills, reducing barriers for staff
mobility**:

> "We started with increasing the number of additional courses for staff. Language courses,
> obviously, but also courses on intercultural behaviour, and information about the other
> partner countries and the other partner universities" - *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

The strong mobility agreements between partners also facilitate international
collaboration, making it easier for staff to identify mobility opportunities and the
support offered to these activities:

> "It creates the framework to make researchers more aware where they can go
> internationally, and that they will be supported" - *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

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[674] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F.,
Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and
perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023,
https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

**Importantly, European Universities alliances have expanded the scope of international collaboration to include groups traditionally excluded from such activities, notably administrative and professional service staff. For many, participation in an alliance represents their first experience of international cooperation.** This expanded network fosters a rich exchange of perspectives and practices, offering employees in diverse fields the opportunity to engage with peers from various countries and explore new applications of their work within a European context:

> "Our administrative staff can adapt policies, processes and practices in response to the latest EU policies in cooperation with universities across Europe, sharing ideas, good practices and knowledge" - *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

> "Impacts that extend beyond the units and departments typically associated with internationalisation, such as Academic Affairs Departments and Mobility Offices". *Monitoring framework*

> "The alliance created networks, not only among researchers but also among administrative and professional service staff, who may have limited involvement in European projects and initiatives". *Monitoring framework*

> "Our alliance also contributes to the internationalisation of services and staff that were not previously impacted. This enables partners to embed European cooperation into not only their academic structures but also their administrative structures". *Monitoring framework*

> "For the first time, employees in the most diverse fields had the opportunity to get in contact with peers from several different countries and get new perspectives on their profession". *Monitoring framework*

European Commission

## 7.4.    Benefits for broader higher education systems

### EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES
Erasmus+

### Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential

- The initiative has a transformational potential and is positively impacting the sector as a whole, beyond the HEIs participating in the alliances.

- **At national level, the alliances have achieved considerable positive impact** on increased attractiveness, visibility and acknowledgement on a worldwide scale, economic, academic, socio-cultural benefits, increased labour market relevance, skills strategies and graduates' employability, suitability to respond to territorial innovation ecosystems' needs.

- For the wider higher education systems, benefits also extend to the **quality in education, didactics and research, developing a culture of innovation, tools for effective governance and management**. The initiative drives excellence and fosters inclusion enabling an inclusive transformation of the sector across Europe, contributing to balanced mobility flows and brain circulation.

- **The alliances drove policy progress and legislative changes in the Member States,** facilitating transnational cooperation in higher education (e.g. accreditation of joint degrees, recognition of qualifications, seamless mobility) and contributing to the European (Higher) Education Area, including boosting the Bologna Tools implementation. **The alliances also drove policy progress at EU levels**, acting as pioneers in developing and testing innovative approaches to long-term structural and systemic cooperation across all the alliances' missions, such as the Blueprint for a European Degree, with benefits for the wider higher education sector.

- To further sustain these positive national trends, outcomes and impact of the alliances, **a majority of Member States implemented support measures for the European Universities alliances** ranging from co-funding (at national or regional level) to non-monetary support such as formal working groups with the ministries, informal discussion platforms or administrative and legal support with the application process.

- To ensure sustainability and enable the European Universities initiative full transformational potential, Member States continued and active engagement to remove any persisting barriers to transnational cooperation in higher education is essential.

European Education Area

*For further details, please see section 6.5 Outcomes for the wider higher education system.*

Positive effects range from **increased attractiveness, visibility and acknowledgement on a worldwide scale**, as well as **economic, academic, socio-cultural**[675], concerning for example **labour market relevance, skills strategies and graduates' employability, responsiveness to territorial innovation and local ecosystems' needs[676], crisis response and management**[677].

The initiative **drives excellence and fosters inclusion** notably when it comes to the **diversity of student, academic and non-academic communities** taking part, and the **diverse types of higher education institutions involved** enabling an inclusive transformation of the sector across Europe. This goes hand in hand with the **potential of European Universities to contribute to balanced mobility flows and consolidate brain circulation**[678].

For the **higher education institutions beyond partner HEIs**, benefits also extend to the **quality in didactics, education and research, developing a culture of innovation, tools for effective management and administration, fostering the European Higher Education Area**[679] and **boosting the Bologna Tools implementation**. By advocating for and facilitating the wider adoption of Bologna tools, the alliances have helped reduce barriers for collaboration, **making higher education more accessible and cohesive across Europe:**

> *"The alliance has served as a catalyst for the realisation of many individual institutional ambitions, which are very much aligned to those of the alliance".* Interview with an alliance coordinator

> "And if we wouldn't have these European University alliances, I think we would have another 10 years of the Bologna process without any substantial step forward. I think this was an important catalyser." - *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

> "The success of the alliances will also pave the way for other universities, with their international cooperation. If the national law changes in favour of, for example, recognition of mobility, each university can benefit, regardless of being in an alliance" - *Interview with stakeholder.*

> "I think alliances are the icebreakers and are taking the lead. But it's for the benefit of the wider community" - *Interview with alliance coordinator.*

[675] European Expert Network of Economics of Education Craciun, D., and Orosz, K., 'Taking Stock of the Costs and Benefits of Transnational Partnerships in Higher Education: What Do We Know So Far?'*, EENEE Policy Briefs*, January 2019, https://eenee.eu/en/resources/library/taking-stock-of-the-costs-and-benefits-of-transnational-partnerships-in-higher-education-what-do-we-know-so-far/

[676] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

[677] Cino Pagliarello, M., 'Higher education in the single market between (trans)national integration and supranationalisation: exploring the European universities initiative', *Journal of European Integration,* Vol 44 Issue 1, pp. 149-164, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.2011266

[678] Boc, E. 'Brain drain in the EU: Local and regional public policies and good practices'. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, Vol. 16 Issue 59, 2020, pp. 23–39 https://doi.org/10.24193/tras.59E.2

[679] Poszytek, P. and Budzanowska, A. (Eds.), *European Universities in Poland. Implementation of development strategy.* FRSE Publishing. Key Concepts Series, vol. 13. (2023). https://www.doi.org/10.47050/67587105

The national HEIs participating in alliances form an important network able to **drive the transformation of the whole sector and enrich study offers across their territories**, possibly contributing to cohesively revive EU regions[680].

> 66 *Based on a survey among 15-29 year-olds, the top three reasons that young people had for leaving their home regions were: a lack of adequate employment opportunities (49 %), personal reasons (47 %) and a lack of adequate study opportunities (40 %). At the same time, the top two reasons why young people decided to stay in their home regions were: personal reasons (49 %), followed by the overall study opportunities (39 %). These figures show that **better study opportunities, including opportunities for mobility, encourage young people to stay in their country**. In regions either at risk or already in the 'talent development trap' (i.e. the difficulty to retain talent), young people identified more higher education institutions and more industry-academia cooperation among the most effective policy options to counter this trend.*
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> **European Commission, study on 'Youth for reviving stagnating EU territories, 2024** [681]

**Universities reported that the alliance context helped them adding value to national level discussions on educational policy developments[682] and driving progress**.

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[680] European Commission. *Youth for reviving (stagnating) EU territories*. 2024. Publications Office of the European Union. https://doi.org/10.2776/10088
[681] European Commission. Youth for reviving (stagnating) EU territories. 2024. Publications Office of the European Union. https://doi.org/10.2776/10088
[682] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

## 7.5. Benefits for external stakeholders and the wider society



EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES
Erasmus+

**Key Outcomes and Transformational Potential**

> Within their educational offer, for example, through challenge-based approaches, **alliances work closely with industry, public organisations, and civil society to meet the demands of the local job market and ensure students are equipped with relevant skills.**

> **European Universities alliances contribute to bridging the gap between higher education and the wider community needs.** To promote civic engagement, students, the academic community, civil society and other stakeholders work together to address public concerns and promote the quality of the community building.

> European Universities alliances are expected to significantly contribute to European integration by **fostering a common European identity and values**, serving both as an educational and political strategy in the EU.

European Education Area

### *Joining forces with associated partners and civil society organisations in solving societal challenges*

**European Universities alliances contribute to bridging the gap between higher education and the wider community needs through enhanced regional and civic engagement.** According to Esparza Masana and Woolford, **companies seem more eager to engage with HEIs within the collaboration framework of European Universities alliances as compared to individual partners**[683].

**Within their educational offer, alliances work closely with industry, public organisations, and civil society, to meet the demands of the local job market and ensure students are equipped with relevant skills**. This close connection provides **important opportunities for businesses to have direct contact with future graduates and find skilled talents from across Europe**. This direct response to local needs fosters a vibrant innovation ecosystem and enhances employability, benefiting not just students but the local community and economy.

Moreover, by adopting **challenge-based approaches,** alliances address local and regional issues by collaborating with external stakeholders who outline their needs and challenges. These challenge-based approaches bring together students, academics,

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[683] European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Esparza Masana, R. and Woolford, J., *European universities and knowledge alliances within their territorial innovation ecosystems*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/429140

researchers and the local stakeholders, businesses, policy makers, civil society to develop interdisciplinary solutions. This approach offers stakeholders innovative insights and **knowledge-driven resolutions to societal problems**. In turn, **private sector stakeholders also get opportunities to contribute to shaping the educational offer** to better respond to their needs.

Similarly, **civil** society actors can also be involved with European Universities to promote civic engagement, **allowing students, the academic community, civil society and other stakeholders to work together to address public concerns and promote the quality of the community building**. Such civic activation can be done for example through challenge-based activities like hackathons and living labs, or through traineeships, volunteering or fieldwork.

### *Catalysing policy changes for European integration*

The alliances collectively contribute to a more integrated, accessible, and diverse European higher education landscape, demonstrating the transformative power of collaboration beyond the confines of individual institutions.

**European Universities alliances are expected to significantly contribute to European integration by fostering a common European identity and values, serving both as an educational and political strategy in the EU**[684]. They encourage the development of a shared identity and promote the idea of European citizenship through diverse mobility opportunities, playing a crucial role in the continent's integration[685].

Moreover, **alliances are expected to serve as a source of inspiration and role models to other HEIs, disseminating good practices and results**[686]. In that sense, they have developed transferable models of cooperation such as governance structures, legal cooperation arrangements, frameworks and roadmaps, inclusiveness and sustainability strategies, mobility models, and plans for pooling resources and facilities, among others. These models, strategies, toolkits, and practices are often openly available on their websites to facilitate transferability to other HEIs.

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[684] Cino Pagliarello, M., 'Higher education in the single market between (trans)national integration and supranationalisation: exploring the European universities initiative', *Journal of European Integration,* Vol 44 Issue 1, pp. 149-164, 2022, https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2021.2011266 and Gunn, A., *The European Universities Initiative: A Study of Alliance Formation in Higher Education*, In Curaj, A., Deca, L., and Pricopie, R. (eds) European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade, Springer, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5_2 and Jungblut, J., Maassen, P. and Elken, M., 'Quo Vadis EHEA: Balancing Structural Continuation and Political Variety', in: Curaj, A., Deca, L. and Pricopie, R. (eds) *European Higher Education Area: Challenges for a New Decade*. Springer, 2020, pp. 391–415, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-56316-5_25

[685] European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

[686] Marques, M., and Graf, L., 2023.

# 8. Main challenges faced by the alliances

*When implementing their ambitious long-term strategies, the alliances revealed stringent challenges, at institutional, regional/national or European level. These challenges are of relevance not only for the alliances' partners, but also encountered by the vast majority higher education institutions when cooperating at transnational level, also beyond the European Universities alliances. The depth and scale of the cooperation within the alliances revealed these challenges in a more acute manner. Key elements where progress is still needed mainly concern:*

- *legal and administrative barriers hampering the development of joint educational activities at all levels, including joint degrees, quality assurance and recognition and flexible learning pathways*
- *scaling-up the outreach of the alliances to the majority of the students' population, engaging all faculties and departments of the partner institutions*
- *difficulties in reaching the long-term mobility target of 50% student mobility*
- *project-based funding not aligned with the alliances long-term strategic vision, and insufficient synergies between different funding streams*
- *Remaining barriers in sharing and pooling joint resources*
- *achieving full interoperability of digital and IT infrastructures, enabling progress towards the inter-university campuses offering seamless access to the learning offer across all partner institutions*
- *further enhancing democratic students' representation in the alliances' governance structures*
- *further enhancing accessibility to the alliances' activities for students with fewer opportunities and from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds*
- *insufficient time for and valorisation of staff engagement in the alliances' activities, including in relation to career progression.*

*These obstacles come at a cost – they hinder integrated cooperation across the alliances' missions and across borders, bind resources and put a break on exchanges, synergies, creativity and innovation, at the expense of the excellence and attractiveness of the EU's higher education sector as a whole. Solving these challenges could trigger progress for the entire higher education sector. At the same time, these challenges allowed to enhance dialogue between higher education institutions, the alliances and the national authorities, thereby putting these challenges on the top of the priorities in higher education institutions, Member States and at European level, driving institutional change and legislative progress in seeking common solutions and alleviating barriers to transnational cooperation.*

*While progress in solving these challenges has been made at institutional, national and European levels, further actions and close collaboration between the three levels are needed to realise deeper and more ambitious cooperation within alliances of higher education institutions, acting as trailblazers for the whole European higher education system. An enabling environment at all levels is needed - at the higher education institutions, at regional/national and at European level.*

This section highlights the main challenges European Universities alliances have been facing that have been identified throughout this report, notably in relation to the wider European higher education system and obstacles to seamless transnational cooperation in higher education.

## 8.1. Navigating legal and administrative barriers for seamless transnational joint educational activities

In terms of division of competencies, it is useful to recall that, according to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the EU can only intervene to support, coordinate or complement the action of its Member States in the field of education. Member States have the prerogative to decide on the content of teaching and on the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity. The European Union can contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States in the area of higher education[687].

Higher education institutions are thus firmly embedded within national policies and legislation for higher education. This results in a vastly diverse higher education landscape across the Member States with differing cultures, legislations and regulatory frameworks that the European Universities alliances must navigate. HEIs are, for example, bound by their national frameworks for financing, infrastructure, accreditation, quality assurance and employment aspects, etc. When combining these different national rules, the mix of regulations de facto prevents efficient transnational joint educational activities. This is valid in the context of the alliances, but also for other types of cooperation settings in higher education.

Notwithstanding, progress in this area has been achieved in several Member States, , as well as those achieved through the Bologna Process, according to a survey conducted by the European University Association, 68% of higher education institutions still perceive legal obstacles as a key challenge to deeper cooperation in the European Universities initiative, and 59% cite administrative obstacles to deeper cooperation due to different institutional structures and processes[688].

**The main challenges the alliances face relate to obstacles in the regulatory environment around transnational cooperation of higher education institutions and joint education provision.** These incompatibilities of the regulatory frameworks, including the uneven implementation of Bologna tools, are complicating transnational joint education provision, raise difficulties in establishing and accrediting joint programmes, mobility, pooling of resources across borders, and financial sustainability of collaboration[689]. The more partners are involved in such transnational initiatives, the more complex the process becomes.

As a key example - as a result of the incompatibilities between national higher education systems -, joint degrees are often awarded only by some, and not by all alliance partners as they take a long time and significant effort to accredit. The

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[687] Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2012/C 326/01 (OJ C/326, 26.10.2012, p. 47-390), Art 6, Art 165, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012E%2FTXT

[688] The future of the European Universities initiative: the sector's perspective, European University Association, 2020

[689] HEInnovate, Jongbloed, B., *Innovation in teaching and learning through internationalisation: Initiatives by the ECIU and EPICUR European University Alliances*, February 2023, https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/303153985/HEInnovate_Comparative_case_study_Internationalisation_1_.pdf

alliances are hence forced to opt for the "lowest denominator". In certain cases, this means that a single country can limit transnational cooperation opportunities between all alliance partners by making it very challenging to set up a joint programme and to award a joint degree at all levels (Bachelor's, Master's, Doctorate). This leads to missed opportunities preventing the alliance to go as far as they would wish for implementing their joint long-term vision, preventing access to joint programmes for thousands of students despite the initial enthusiasm of alliance partners.

**The main challenges** include inter alia:

- Uneven implementation of automatic mutual recognition of qualifications and study periods abroad across national educational systems (including for the novel blended and virtual mobility formats);
- Uneven implementation of the Bologna Process tools for quality assurance, including limited use of the existing European Approach for the Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes;
- Differences in degree structures, durations, grading practices, academic calendars, examination regulations, etc.;
- Differences in allocation of ECTS credits for a cycle;
- Differing legal frameworks for assessment of disciplinary fields and professions that further complicate integration or establishment of joint initiatives and hamper the development of inter/multi/transdisciplinary programmes;
- Differing requirements for issuing diplomas (format, signatures, language, logo, paper);
- Restrictions on language of instruction (e.g. not allowing to offer programmes or courses in other than the national language);
- Differences in laws and rules governing employment and working conditions for teaching staff;
- Different student assessment procedures;
- Different regulations governing internships and other forms of practical training as part of a study programme;

**These challenges and incompatibilities have existed before the inception of the European Universities initiative, with acute impact as well in other transnational cooperation actions** such as Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Degree, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology Masters, or other types of universities partnerships. The needs of the alliances in view of the depth and scope of their cooperation with a long-term strategic vision and a large number of partners (9 on average) have again brought them to the fore of the political agenda at EU and at national/regional levels.

The alliances have persistently signalled loss of time and high costs related to trying to overcome obstacles in the respective national legislation, leading to longer time to set joint programmes and to a lesser number of such joint programmes overall. **The alliances and European higher education stakeholders are calling for urgent action to cut red tape** and simplify the development and delivery of joint degree programmes.

Some of these challenges have already made the object of policy dialogue, reforms, recommendations and various initiatives both at European and at national levels, many of them thanks to the work and activities of the alliance partners. **This led to recent progress in several Member States** where legislative and policy reforms facilitating transnational cooperation in higher education were passed. These reforms relate to,

for example, simplified processes for establishing joint educational programmes i.e. moving from a programme- to an institutional-based external quality assurance approach, defining the number of required ECTS, language of instruction, proportion of digital learning, etc. See section 6.5.4 for more details.

**At EU level, further action has been taken or is underway**, for example with the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[690] and the Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability[691]. Also, the European Commission proposed out a **Blueprint for a joint European Degree,** which has been piloted with the involvement of several alliances in six Erasmus+ projects[692]. The Blueprint for a European Degree, including the work towards a European quality assurance and recognition system proposed by the European Commission, is a **pivotal step towards addressing the incompatibilities**.

## 8.2. Further efforts are needed to reach the long-term target of 50% student mobility

During the first years of the pilot phase, joint mobility initiatives and structures to coordinate it have been put in place by the alliances and **mobility numbers have been rising significantly in relative terms**. The alliances made significant progress in boosting intra-alliance mobility figures (**over 400% increase since 2019**. However, **absolute mobility figures are still lagging behind** reaching the long-term objective of 50% intra-alliance student mobility.

This is partially due to the **COVID-19 pandemic** which blocked mobilities and brought uncertainty for a long period. Nevertheless, the pandemic accelerated the implementation of innovative virtual mobility formats. Moreover, alliances encountered difficulties during the set-up phase, which entailed a learning process and progressively building mutual trust between partners, also when it comes to envisaging mobility within the alliance's European inter-university campuses. In this context, following the pilot phase, the European Universities are in the process of intensifying their efforts to **deepen and mainstream their activities, reaching out to more students**; these efforts need to be continued. They are doing so by **opening up** a larger part of the alliance's and partner institution's **learning offer to students from all the different partner institutions**, through **seamless and embedded mobility opportunities, be it in flexible learning pathways or innovative joint programmes**.

Mobility has also been hampered by the **diversity of approaches undertaken by the different partner institutions or allowed by regional/national legislation**, notably with regard to the degree of flexibility allowed when it comes to the variety of courses and their recognition, or the share of mobility required within a semester. Challenges in relation to defining and recognising innovative mobility formats (short-term, virtual, blended mobilities) in the national or regional legislative contexts were also raised by the alliances.

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[690] Council of the European Union, *Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation*, OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, p. 1–8, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32022H0413%2801%29
[691] *Council Recommendation of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, Official Journal of the European Union, 2022/C 243/02*, 27.06.2022, CELEX: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(02)
[692] Report on the final outcomes of the Erasmus + policy experimentation projects: European degree (label) and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, 2024

Lastly, alliances have reported constraints when it comes to **available funding for mobilities** within the alliance. The traditional Erasmus+ mobility funding combined with the funds in the alliances' European Universities grant for many alliances did not allow to cover the demand for mobilities. Growing funding needs to cater for the mobilities within the alliances' European inter-university campuses may mean that funding remains insufficient to meet the demands of alliance partners, potentially **impacting** in several cases also **other mobility cooperation with HEIs from outside the alliance**. This raises a question on how to reconcile traditional mobility formats under Erasmus+ and specific mobility within the alliances. To mitigate this mobility funding challenge, many alliances are asking for **increased mobility funding**, be it from Erasmus+ or national funding sources, as well as for **more flexibility in the use of the funds**. Also, some alliance coordinators plead for a new dedicated Erasmus+ funding action to support embedded and seamless mobility opportunities in alliances of higher education institutions pursuing deeper transnational cooperation as part of a joint long-term strategy.

Several alliances have also been calling for a **clearer definition of the 50% mobility target.** While the European Commission has given alliances the autonomy to determine what constitutes a valid mobility trajectory in line with their joint long-term strategy, including virtual, blended, physical as well as short-, medium- and long-term mobility, alliances reported uncertainty about what can be considered meaningful mobility, especially with regard to virtual and blended mobilities and exposure to internationalisation activities. Some alliances are calling for a broader definition of mobility encompassing broader internationalisation exposure opportunities. Such broader definition would enable a more inclusive approach, allowing more students to be exposed to internationalisation, complementary to the physical, virtual and blended mobilities.

**The work of the alliances also led to multiplication of the implementation of innovative mobility formats** such as virtual mobility initiatives or blended intensive programmes combining blended and short-term physical mobility. These innovative approaches also contributed to increases in the relative number of students benefiting from mobilities and contributed to setting up of inter-university campuses, facilitating access to educational offer across the alliances' partners. These results and intra-alliance student mobility figures can be further reinforced by continuing to encourage and monitor the uptake of the European Student Card Initiative components by alliance partners.

## 8.3.    Towards a more efficient pooling of resources

Recent research[693] on the European Universities initiative recognises that it provides opportunities to achieve critical mass and better compete globally through pooling resources, enabling efficiency gains. The constantly and rapidly evolving societies also drive change in higher education provision and cooperation, hence, some alliances felt the need to explore options for new instruments that are more adapted to the size and scale of their ambitious cooperation. The alliances also need their deeper transnational cooperation to be recognised from a legal perspective to facilitate cooperation, joint activities and common strategic decisions.

Deeper cooperation is enhanced through opportunities to share capacity among higher education institutions allowing to organise joint activities, maximise access to and the utilisation of available resources and infrastructure, thereby increasing efficiency. This

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[693] Lambrechts, A.A., Cavallaro, M. and Lepori, B., 'The European Universities initiative: between status hierarchies and inclusion'. *Higher Education,* Vol. 88, 2024, pp. 1227–1247, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01167-w

is the essence of the alliances' cooperation model. However, the alliances reported **persistent challenges related to pooling of resources impacting the effective, efficient and impactful collaboration**[694]:

🔹 Sharing resources and facilities is often constrained by legal and administrative regulations and practices at both HEI and national levels;

🔹 Standardised tools, data formats and services would need to be further supported to enable progress towards the inter-university campuses. This can be achieved by increasing the uptake of the European Student Card Initiative (ESCI), particularly by joining the Erasmus Without Paper network, enabling the completion of multi-lateral inter-institutional agreements and learning agreements through the Erasmus Without Paper network and encouraging the uptake of digital European Student Cards (both through issuing European Student Cards and through recognising these cards). This will facilitate the digital administration of student mobility and access for incoming students to the same services as local students with their existing student cards, reducing administrative costs.

🔹 Difficulties to advance towards full interoperability and deploy and develop joint infrastructures due to challenges mainly in relation to tight digitisation schedules, resource constraints and the uncertainty of budget availability to allow for long-term planning, the need to standardise business processes between institutions within an alliance, the diversity of standards and tools available and the different regulatory frameworks in each country. In this regard, a higher education interoperability workgroup involving higher education experts including from the European Universities alliances is ongoing under the European Commission European Digital Education Hub[695], aiming to enable interoperable virtual learning environments through the development of a European Higher Education Interoperability Framework. The Framework aims to foster a more collaborative and innovative higher education ecosystem, improve educational services, and create a seamless experience for learners and educators.

🔹 Sharing human resources or employing designated alliance staff is complicated by differences in national labour laws, salary levels and the lack of efficient instruments enabling cross-border cooperation including when it comes to recruitment, such as a legal status for alliances of HEIs.

Some of these challenges could be addressed by facilitating and institutionalising collaboration through a **voluntary legal status for alliances of higher education institutions**, which has recently been piloted by four Erasmus+ projects[696]. **Currently at least 14 alliances have set up a legal entity under national laws[697]** including 4EU+, AURORA, Circle U, CIVIS, ECIU, EU-CONEXUS, EUNICE, EUniWell, FilmEU, UNA EUROPA, UNITA, EUTOPIA, E3UDRES2 and YUFE. They aim to streamline and facilitate collaboration and pooling of resources. In all these cases, the alliances reported administrative and operational advantages as decisive factors for setting up a legal

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[694] Berger, F., Galati, N., and Witteler, S., 'Making Interoperablity Work: Challenges and Solutions for an Interoperable Higher Education System', Hochschulforum Digitalisierung, No.72, September 2023, https://hochschulforumdigitalisierung.de/sites/default/files/dateien/HFD_report_no.72_Making_interopera bility_work.pdf

[695] European Higher Education Interoperability - European Education Area

[696] Four projects involving 67 organisations from 20 different countries, gathering higher education institutions, national and regional authorities, alliances of higher education institutions, and university associations.

[697] For example: non-profit association under Belgian law, international non-profit association under Belgian law, foundation under Dutch law, registered association under German law, and registered association under Austrian law.

entity with a legal identity, demonstrating that the European Universities clearly recognise the added value of creating a legal status for their alliances.

However, the findings from the Commission Report on the final outcomes of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects on the institutionalised EU cooperation instruments[698], building on the work of four Erasmus+ pilot projects, reveal that **both national and EU level instruments explored have their shortcomings**, being insufficient for addressing the complexities of transnational cooperation or not fully adapted to address the needs of academic cooperation in transnational higher education. The Report findings recommend the **setup of a fit-for-purpose EU level institutionalised cooperation instrument responding to the alliances' needs** that is voluntary, flexible and adaptable.

## 8.4. A plea for long-term financial sustainability of the alliances, with support across all their missions

**Financial sustainability is a key concern for the majority of the alliances**. 84% of institutions participating in the European Universities initiative indicated a need to provide additional resources for the development and implementation of their alliance[699]. A recent study indicates that the financial sustainability of the alliances in the future **will continue to depend heavily on EU grants and national contributions**[700].

The **Erasmus+ programme 2021-27 responded to this need by securing higher and more sustainable i.e. EUR 1,2 Bn for the European Universities**, majorly increasing the programme support compared to the pilot phase and offering a sustainable funding perspective for the funded alliances with a funding horizon bridging the gap with the next EU financial programming period 2028-2034. The Erasmus+ individual grant level per alliance has almost tripled compared to the pilot phase of the initiative, with up to EUR 14.4 million per alliance for a 4-year funding period.

However, in view of the ambition and depth of the cooperation and the labour- and resource-intensive scaling-up of their activities, the **financial needs of the alliances remain substantial**, matching their expected results and transformational potential for the higher education sector as a whole.

**Synergies between European funding schemes and with regional and national funding are essential for the financial sustainability of the alliances**, as well as **contributions from at national and regional levels.**

**The main challenges related to long-term sustainable and comprehensive funding** entail:

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[698] European Commission, *Staff Working Document: Report on the final outcomes of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects: European degree (label) and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments*, SWD(2024) 191, 19 December 2024, https://www.parlament.gv.at/dokument/XXVIII/EU/7446/imfname_11441548.pdf

[699] European University Association, Claeys-Kulik, A., Jørgensen, T., Stöber, H., et al, *International strategic institutional partnerships and the European Universities Initiative: Results of the EUA survey,* April 2020, https://www.eua.eu/publications/reports/international-strategic-institutional-partnerships-and-the-european-universities-initiative.html

[700] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Jongbloed, B., McGrath, C., Boer, H. and Gayardon, A., *Final report of the study on the state and effectiveness of national funding systems of higher education to support the European universities initiative . Volume I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/885757

- Discrepancy between the alliances high ambition and **long-term strategic vision** across all their missions aiming to transform European higher education, and the relatively **short-term, project-based approach of their funding**[701].
- On top the education and governance dimension funded by Erasmus+, the needed **support for the alliances to develop across all their missions – i.e. in the field of research and innovation** as outlined by high-level reports and higher education stakeholders[702,703], is currently not fully available, leading to untapped potential for leveraging the alliances' unique structural setting, strategic for breaking down silos between education, research and innovation, and for enhancing the cooperation with the private sector.
- Synergetic access to other EU funding sources for the alliances to develop across their missions and support their diverse dimensions is hampered by **high complexity of the EU funding landscape** leading to administrative burden (i.e. multiple applications and reporting processes, incompatible timelines) and unpredictability. This results in an uneven and uncertain access to complementary funding, thereby diluting the alliances focus on their core activities.
- **The full cost of the alliance's activities exceeds the combined support from EU and national sources**[704], the difference being covered by HEIs own resources, reflecting the high ambition and commitment of the alliances, as well as the strategic importance they attach to their participation in an alliance. Increased visibility of the substantial investments made by partners in their alliance is needed in relation to their sustainability analysis. Developing own funding mechanisms and jointly attracting external co-funding is highly time- and resource-intensive.
- A key positive development is that currently the majority of Member States provide financial support for their national HEIs that are part of a European Universities alliance in different forms and amounts. This demonstrates the key strategic importance they attach to the alliances for the transformation of their national higher education systems. However, these **national co-funding arrangements are heterogenous** in scale, modalities and timeline and lead to uncertainty, loss of efficiency, and an uneven level playing field in relation to national funding sources within an alliance. Moreover, restrictions in relation to the allocation of this national funding, allowing to spend it only on specific activities within the granting Member State rather than at alliance level, lead to financial inequality between alliance partners. These different situations of the partner institutions in regard to the national funding they receive impact their capacity to contribute to joint activities pose a risk in terms of alliance cohesion.

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[701] ESUs position on European Universities Initiative, 2024, ESUs position on the European Universities Initiative - European Students' Union

[702] Letta, E., *Much more than a market – Speed, Security, Solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, April, 2024 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf

[703] European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, *Align, act, accelerate – Research, technology and innovation to boost European competitiveness*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/9106236; Letta, E., *Much more than a market – Speed, Security, Solidarity: Empowering the Single Market to deliver a sustainable future and prosperity for all EU Citizens*, April, 2024 https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf; Stakeholders views are further discussed under Section 4.2 of this Report.

[704] European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Jongbloed, B., McGrath, C., Boer, H. and Gayardon, A., *Final report of the study on the state and effectiveness of national funding systems of higher education to support the European universities initiative . Volume I*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/885757

In this context, the European Commission is working on the development of **an investment pathway for European Universities alliances for the 2028-2034 programming period.** Its aim is to provide long-term comprehensive funding approach for the alliances, complementing the core educational dimension funded under Erasmus+ with support across all alliances' other missions, including research and innovation, seeking synergies with different EU instruments, as well as with national and regional funding. This work has been welcomed by the alliances in a joint position paper[705] and discussed in individual position papers of diverse alliances[706]. **The alliances advocate for a long-term holistic financially sustainable future and deeper transnational cooperation, complementing the education and governance dimension with support across all their missions, including on research, innovation, at the service of society.**

Additionally, they call for facilitated opportunities for **combining resources at EU level, as well as synergies with funding at national/regional levels** needed to drive the development of the initiative, i.e. creation synergies between Erasmus+ funding and for example Horizon Europe, Digital Europe, Cohesion Policy Funds, RRF, Member State funding.

**The alliances' objectives in this regard are supported by several higher education stakeholders, and beyond, by the European Parliament and the European Committee of the Regions[707], as well as the Member States** (see section 4 for more detailed information). The Council Conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe invite the Commission and the Member States to support alliances of higher education institutions such as the European Universities "*to reach their full potential by addressing the financial costs of transnational cooperation to cover all their missions in the longer term*" and take "*steps (…) to move towards a more sustainable, holistic and integrated EU funding perspective.*"

Several European higher education stakeholders, as further discussed in Section 4.2 of this Report, call for continued and **comprehensive financial support for the alliances across all their missions** to achieve their full potential and spur benefits to the entire higher education sector in Europe, continuing to create innovative environments for education and research cooperation across borders. Some voices also call for a **longer time span for the EU level funding**, possibly aligned with the **7 years** duration of the EU Multiannual Financial Framework.

> " *The Commission and the Member States are invited to support alliances of higher* *education institutions such as the European Universities "to reach their full*

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[705] European Universities Alliances, *European Universities alliances fully committed to making the initiative a success in a long term*, 2023, https://www.eugloh.de/news/eugloh-news/an-investment-pathway-for-the-european-universities-initiative-post-2027/JointFOREUstatement_InvestmentPathway_clean.pdf

[706] Positions papers on the investment pathways include CIVIS (https://civis.eu/storage/files/investment-pathway-for-eui-contribution-by-civis.pdf), ENHANCE (https://enhanceuniversity.eu/a-sustainable-funding-pathway-for-european-university-alliances/), ECIU (https://assets-global.website-files.com/551e54eb6a58b73c12c54a18/6515c9d1476359fdca66f328_ECIU%20input%20investment%20pathway%20European%20University%20Alliances.pdf), and EUGLOH (https://www.eugloh.de/news/eugloh-news/an-investment-pathway-for-the-european-universities-initiative-post-2027), among others.

[707] European Committee of the Regions, *Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Recommendations for the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (FP10)*, OJ C, C/2024/7065, 04 December 2024, http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/7065/oj; European Parliament: Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the Union, Craciun, D., Kaiser, F., Kottmann, A., Meulen, B. et al., *The European universities initiative – First lessons, main challenges and perspectives – Research for CULT Committee*, European Parliament, 2023 https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2861/160992

*potential by addressing the financial costs of transnational cooperation to cover all their missions in the longer term" and take "steps (…) to move towards a more sustainable, holistic and integrated EU funding perspective."*

**Council Conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe**

## 8.5. Enhancing student and staff participation, inclusiveness and students' democratic participation in the alliances'

The European Universities are in the process of intensifying their efforts to **deepen and mainstream their activities, reaching out to more students and staff members**; these efforts need to be continued, engaging all faculties and departments of the partner institutions, in an unprecedented scale and scope.

The study findings, corroborated by EU students' organisations recommendations, also outline that the European Universities initiative is fostering the **representation of students within the alliances' governance** and decision-making processes. Over 90% of the alliances' governance structures comprise a Students Board, with 63% having full voting rights. Most alliances have established transnational diversity and inclusion/gender inclusion/social inclusion plans, codes of conduct, strategies, support staff, and offices. Some HEIs report that their participation in an alliance also pushed the diversity and inclusion matters to the top of the institutional agendas.

Despite these achievements, the alliances did not fully reach their potential yet, and more efforts are still needed, notably in relation to:

- **Reaching out to and engaging the majority of student population and all faculties and departments** of the partner institutions in the alliances' activities. Scalability is key to ensure the alliances deploy their full potential and benefit the largest possible student and staff bodies across their partners and beyond.
- Tackling stringent and persistent issues regarding **equal access to education** for people with fewer opportunities, from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds; improving access to **student housing**; addressing the issue of costs of living and subsequent **student precarity,** as well as **student well-being**, including mental health. Although these challenges stem already from the individual partner universities, these issues are also pertinent at the level of the alliance when cooperating across borders.
- The **democratic selection** and **integration of student representatives** into the governance structures of the alliances with decision-making roles is not yet systematic within the alliances.
- **Lack of sufficient recognition and reward mechanisms** for student and staff participation in alliance activities including monetary and non-monetary incentives counting towards the respective degree or contributing to career progression. The engagement of academic staff in transnational cooperation must be recognised, which requires making academic career pathways less linear and more flexible to accommodate and value different academic roles, including work devoted to transnational cooperation in higher education.

All these obstacles come at a cost – they hinder integrated cooperation across the alliances' missions and across borders, bind resources and put a break on exchanges,

synergies, creativity and innovation, at the expense of the excellence and attractiveness of the EU's higher education sector as a whole.

All these challenges, while more visible in the context of the European Universities alliances, impact other formats of transnational cooperation in European higher education.

While progress in solving these challenges has been made at institutional, national and European levels, further actions and close collaboration between the three levels are needed to realise deeper and more ambitious cooperation of alliances of higher education institutions, acting as trailblazers for the whole European higher education system. **Solving these challenges for the European Universities alliances will trigger progress for the entire higher education sector.** To realise deeper and more ambitious cooperation, alliances of higher education institutions need an enabling environment at all levels - at their institutions, at national and at European level.

# 9. Policy orientations – reaching the full potential of the European Universities initiative

*The European Universities initiative has demonstrated clear progress and entails a strong transformational potential. Now further efforts are needed to upscale the alliances' outreach and activities to entirely match their capabilities.*

*The long-term success of the initiative calls for intensified efforts for the upcoming phase of the European Universities initiative. To materialise even further the significant potential demonstrated by the European Universities, the alliances now need to accelerate progress of their action by mainstreaming and further deepening their activities, scaling-up their opportunities and reinforcing their outreach, both within and outside the alliances. The Commission and Member States have a crucial role to play in further supporting the initiative in reaching its full potential, notably through funding and policy support.*

## 9.1 Policy orientations for the European Universities alliances

### Deepen and mainstream alliances activities to reach out to more students and staff

To enable the European Universities initiative to deliver its benefits to a **majority of students and staff bodies across partner institutions,** its activities would greatly benefit from being **mainstreamed and scaled-up across all faculties and departments**.

For this to happen, the present study identifies **several key factors for success**, notably:

- **Align the strategies of the partner higher education institutions and the one of their alliance.** Partner higher education institutions are recommended to consider the alliances as an integral part of their institutional DNAs. This is crucial to ensure the long-term sustainability of the alliances, ensuring that all partners share the same vision and progress in accordance to it across all the alliances' missions, reinforcing opportunities for transformation and outreach to more student and staff members across all faculties and departments. **The key is a strong leadership** in the partner higher education institutions, actively involved in steering the alliance, as well as the **full involvement of all deans, faculties and academic staff,** ensuring **high level of commitment** across partner institutions. Dedicated **support for leadership and governance capacity** is needed as the new ways of working together in European Universities alliances requires new skillsets from the people involved.

- Increase efforts in **raising awareness** among students and staff about the activities and benefits of participation in the alliance, for example, through **reinforced communication**, including through welcome and information packages distributed to all new and existing students and staff members of the partner institutions, through reinforced visibility of the alliances on the corporate websites of the partner institutions, through student ambassador systems, community building and engagement strategies and opportunities.

- **Connect more and more faculties and departments to the work of the alliance, involving the different layers of academic staff.** For this purpose, striving to constantly raise awareness through communication and by mobilising existing connections is key. Setting up transdisciplinary activities can also be a powerful enabler for raising interest and involvement in the alliances' activities across faculties and departments. The role of leadership, including at faculty level, as well as the different layers of staff members is pivotal.

- **Incentivise student and staff participation and involvement in alliance activities.** It is essential to **develop robust recognition structures for this engagement**. It should be accounted for towards degree obtention and/or career progression. For example, students would benefit from credits or other types of rewards or recognition such as certificates for the activities under the alliances that should be ideally accounted for as curricular activities towards their degree. Staff would need valorisation of transnational cooperation activities in their career progression, for instance, with more dedicated time, recognition of the alliance related work in staff job descriptions, contracts, and appraisal/promotion exercises, ensuring their commitment and continued enthusiasm in the long run.

- Reinforce **students's decision-making role in the alliances' governance** through a democratic selection of representatives. This is crucial for shaping the alliances' successful development and implementation. Support to ensure continuity of student's bodies in the long run is necessary for the sustainability of the alliances.

- **Ensuring sufficient dedicated staff can work on the development of the alliance,** including management, monitoring and implementation to ensure institutionalisation, continuity and maintain motivation. This work of the dedicated staff needs to be **complemented with the involvement of a wider set of the academics, researchers and other staff members** to make the European Universities a reality for more students and staff members. This combination of dedicated alliance staff and wider staff body is key to ensure staff ownership and enable fully fledged European universities. Without the involvement of the wider staff community, an alliance cannot be sustainable.

- **Exploit the different funding streams** available, both at EU and national level.

### *Make mobility and internationalisation opportunities the norm*

The objective is that **mobility (physical, virtual and blended, long-term and short term) becomes the norm**, with more mobility opportunities for students and staff **embedded across all curricula, thereby enhancing accessibility of mobility opportunities**.

Harnessing the **innovative approaches to mobility** developed so far and **leveraging the joint mobility strategies and support services** already deployed, there is huge potential to **scale up** strategies for mobility and generalise embedded mobility opportunities within flexible learning pathways, curricula, joint programmes, life-long learning opportunities and career pathways, thereby enabling to multiply students and staff numbers benefiting from transnational mobility activities.

For example, **key incentives** for mobility are the further opening up of a larger part
of the learning offer from the partner higher education institutions to students from all
partners, as well as the leveraging of innovative mobility formats (both physical,
blended and virtual, and short-, median and long-term), as for example demonstrated
by the numerous blended intensive programmes (BIPs) that have benefitted both
students and staff members. Also the development or upscaling of support structures
and measures facilitating mobility experiences is crucial. Dedicated mobility strategies
and shared mobility offices, ensuring automatic recognition of mobility period and the
use of multi-lateral interinstitutional agreements for mobility are some good practice
examples. Measures motivating students or staff to participate in mobilities are also
recommended, for instance through funding, pedagogical and/or language training,
more flexible learning pathways, recognition, and improved use of ECTS, shared
mobility/student services and offices, facilitated student registration at partner
institutions and the adoption of the European Student Card Initiative by alliances to
deepen integration of alliance partners. For staff mobility, the recognition of mobility
activities in working time and career progression can also be beneficial.

**The alliances have a huge potential and can act as laboratories for developing
innovative mobility approaches and mechanisms that now need to be further
upscaled and expanded at the level of the alliances, and beyond in the broader**
higher education system.

*Elevate the European inter-university campuses at the heart of a student-
centred learning experience across all partner institutions*

**Progress towards finalisation of inter-university campuses integration
including through more embedded mobility opportunities, the launch of more
joint degree programmes and flexible learning pathways** to continue leveraging
the richness and diversity of all partners educational offerings. For this, the pooling of
resources is a key enabler, allowing for further efficiency gains. It is important that
alliances:

- Foster the implementation of **joint programmes** and more **flexible
learning pathways**, including through **joint micro-credentials** as key
elements of the educational offering for enhancing flexibility and inclusion.
The further opening up of a larger part of the learning offer from the partner
higher education institutions to students from all partners is key in this
respect.
- Integrate more **innovative pedagogies** based on challenge-based and
inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches in all study paths; and that
education is linked where possible to research and innovation, by ensuring
research results and innovation feedback into education and students are
exposed to research and innovation. **Collaboration with societal partners**
improves the market recognition and relevance of joint learning activities.
- **Continue work towards the sharing of resources, including on
digitalisation and increased interoperability**. This links for example to
joint course catalogues, joint enrolment of students for joint educational
activities and shared learning management systems.
- **Ensure the implementation of the European Student Card Initiative
(ESCI)**

### Be an inspiring role model for the wider higher education sector across all university missions

**Engaging further with the broader higher education system and strengthen the cooperation with the public and private sector and innovation ecosystems** would foster the trailblazer role of the alliances, benefitting the broader European higher education community. The newly established **Community of Practice FOREU4ALL** will have a key role to play in this regard. Key success factors in this regard would be for the alliances to:

- **Deepen cooperation** based on their integrated joint long-term strategy for pursuing a high level of **systemic, structural and sustainable** institutional cooperation at all levels of the involved institutions, **across all missions**, and across different areas of activity, **building on complementary strengths of the partner institutions.**

- Continue **developing transferrable open-access resources** such as toolkits, blueprints and roadmaps that could be adopted by other higher education institutions or alliances, to facilitate dissemination of outcomes and increase impact on the wider higher education system.

- Continue engaging in **regular dialogue and exchange with the broader national higher education systems**, as well as ministries and other government stakeholders to share experiences and induce regulatory reform where appropriate for the benefit of the wider higher education sector.

- Continue **playing a leading role in European policy development**s, by participating in policy experimentations and policy dialogues, such as was the case for the policy experimentation on the European degree (label) and institutionalised cooperation instruments for alliances of higher education institutions.

- **Deepen cooperation with the private sector** to reinforce the relevance of education and skills for society and the labour market needs and for supporting green and digital transitions, driving Europe's competitiveness and social cohesion.

- Become even more **inclusive** and **engage** more with their **communities**.

## 9.2 Policy orientations for the Member States

### Supporting the consolidation and further development of the alliances through national financial support

**The Member States are invited to consider continuing the financial support and incentives in the national envelopes of the higher education institutions that are partners in the alliances**, including through co-funding, embedding the European Universities initiative in national internationalisation strategies, and supporting and incentivising higher education institutions to join alliances. The present study findings confirmed that monetary incentives at national level significantly contribute to consolidating and further developing alliance activities and are crucial to their financial long-term sustainability. This builds on the unicum of the European Universities alliances whereby a large majority of Member States currently provides support to the initiative, demonstrating their strategic importance for the national higher education systems.

At the same time, to accommodate the **system-specific conditions and restrictions on the use of the national financing, to avoid a loss of efficiency and effectiveness** when managing the different national-level sources and to create a level-playing field for all institutions involved in the alliances, it is suggested that

Member States work together towards a **more coherent approach to national/regional funding of their partner institutions part of the alliances**. It is suggested to do so in close consultation with the European Universities alliances. The policy experimentation project funded by Erasmus+ on national/regional support to European Universities alliances, due to start in the first half 2025 and led by a group of Member States, provides unique opportunities in this respect. This not only when it comes to funding of alliances, but also in view of driving policy progress in Member States.

### *Drive policy progress in Member States for the benefit of the entire higher education system*

While significant progress has been made, **Member States are invited to consider continuing advancing national reforms aiming at removing legal and administrative barriers to deeper transnational cooperation**, notably in terms of:

- **Facilitating continued regular policy dialogue** in national higher education systems enabling constructive exchanges between alliances, the broader national higher education systems, ministries and government stakeholders.
- **Facilitating the provision of joint, innovative, flexible interdisciplinary and transnational education offerings and the pooling of resources by removing remaining hurdles**, for example linked to accreditation of joint programmes at national level, flexible learning pathways, the recognition of innovative mobility formats (virtual, blended, short-term), of non-formal learning activities and community engagement.
- **Ensuring full implementation and use of the instruments under the Bologna Process.**
- **Pursuing work at national level to strive for full implementation of the Council Recommendations** on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, and on attractive and sustainable academic careers. This links also to the **Council Conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions** for the future of Europe, with concrete invitations to Member States.
- Continuing to **work close together with the European Commission and the higher education sector** on the **Blueprint for a European Degree**, towards a **European quality assurance and recognition system** and towards a **possible European legal status for alliances** of higher education institutions.

The benefits of policy progress would need to benefit the wider higher education sector wishing to cooperation across border, and should not be limited to the European Universities alliances only.

As a necessary condition for deeper transnational cooperation, Member States are invited to fully respect **fundamental academic values** and provide support where needed to their higher education institutions for upholding them.

## 9.3 Policy orientations for the European Commission

*Provide unwavering financial support to the European Universities initiative to reach its full potential across all missions*

The Commission is invited to **sustain the European Universities initiative to unfold its full transformational potential by securing sustainable financial support for the initiative, leveraging synergies potential with other EU funds as well as with national and regional funding** to enable the continuation of the development and delivery of the shared long-term strategies of the European Universities**.** The European Commission is invited to:

- Develop an **investment pathway** for European Universities alliances, **providing long-term comprehensive funding approach for the alliances, complementing the core educational dimension funded under Erasmus+ with support across all alliances' other missions, including research and innovation, seeking synergies with different EU instruments, as well as with national and regional funding.**
- **This includes ensuring long-term funding through Erasmus+ calls** potentially looking into options for going beyond the usual project life-cycle of 4 years, for example by possibly aligning the funding with the MFF 7-year period
- **Place synergetic approaches at the heart of the next generation of EU funding programmes**, with a view of achieving further administrative simplification for joint use of EU funding and increasing efficiency of public investment in higher education.
- **Seek for synergies with national and regional funding, by facilitating the exchange of best practice and policy experimentations** between Member States with a view of **achieving a level playing field of the national support**, building on the unprecedented support received at national level for the national higher education institutions partners in an alliance across almost all Member States.

*Sustain the key role of the European Universities initiative to push boundaries for transnational cooperation in higher education*

**The Commission is invited to continue supporting the alliances' engagement and key role for developing EU-level solutions to facilitate transnational collaboration in higher education**. The blueprint towards a European degree, proposed by the European Commission following the experiences from the sector, is a key enabler for European Universities alliances to deliver more joint degree programmes, through a simplified process based on co-created European criteria. The alliances are also key in supporting Member States work for removing the remaining barriers in the national legislations for seamless transnational cooperation. In this context, the European Commission is invited to continue proposing and developing ambitious policies promoting deeper transnational cooperation for the benefit of all:

- Facilitate policy developments, in close cooperation with the Member States and higher education sector, **towards the development of a European degree (label)**. Offer targeted support to incentivise universities to design, set up and offer joint degree programmes in compliance with the European criteria, in cooperation with national and regional authorities, and economic and social partners; and offer targeted support for students taking part in these programmes.

- Continue the dialogue with Member States in the Council on **a European
quality assurance and recognition system.**
- Incentivise the dialogue with Member States and higher education institutions
to support **all-encompassing inclusivity frameworks tackling persistent
issues notably regarding equal access to education** for all in the alliances,
including in regard to affordable students' housing, tackling students' precarity
and enhancing well-being, including mental health.
- Work towards the development of a possible EU level institutional cooperation
instruments, such as a **legal status for alliances of higher education
institutions**.

The Commission is also invited to **use its policy and funding instruments to create
an enabling environment for the European Universities alliances**. This includes
inter alia the below elements:

- **Support seamless and embedded mobility opportunities to enable the
full operationalisation of the European inter-university campuses
through an enabling Erasmus+ framework and by further encouraging
and evaluating the implementation of the European Student Card
Initiative components** by alliances. The European Student Card initiative is
invited to address the specific opportunities and challenges encountered by
them to ensure their uptake, such as the need for digital multilateral inter-
institutional agreements to be supported by the Erasmus Without Paper
network and the potential of digital European Student Cards to facilitate access
to on-campus student services for incoming students.
- **Support higher education institutions' leadership development** through
support for leadership development programmes aiming to ensure that leaders
are equipped with the knowledge, skills and competences needed to lead their
institutions, when navigating the new level of intensity and scope of higher
education cooperation within the alliances.

As a necessary condition for deeper transnational cooperation, the Commission is
moreover invited to support Member States and higher education institutions in
upholding **fundamental academic values**.

### *Continue supporting the European Universities initiative as role model for the wider higher education sector*

The Commission is invited to continue supporting a **Community of practice for
European Universities alliances** to create a collaborative and supportive
environment where European Universities alliances can come together to share good
practices and experiences within the community of European Universities alliances, as
well as for the benefit of the wider higher education sector.

### *Continue dialogue and sustain robust cooperation settings with the Member States*

**The Commission is invited to continue supporting the Member States in their
efforts to remove remaining legal and administrative barriers to seamless
transnational cooperation in higher education:**

- **Support the implementation of Council Recommendations** on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, the Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability, the Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable academic careers, the Blueprint for a European Degree, the work towards a European quality assurance and recognition system and towards a possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions and towards the further development of the European Student Card initiative, with the help of the Erasmus+ programme and further policy developments where need be.

- **Support the implementation of the Bologna tools**, including the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Higher Education, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), and the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, and help deepen them where appropriate.

- The Commission has a key role in **facilitating and fostering exchanges and dialogue between Member States**, including through support for policy experimentation activities under Erasmus+, facilitating policy dialogue and peer learning activities among Member States to streamline adapting or development of related legislation and administrative rules to facilitate transnational higher education cooperation.

# 10.  Conclusions and way forward

*Only five years after its establishment, the European Universities initiative has demonstrated key strategic transformational potential continuously pushing boundaries. Despite challenges encountered in their implementation, European Universities exhibit clear potential in transforming how higher education institutions work, collaborate, teach and learn, do research, and have clearly acted as role models for the entire higher education sector. The alliances developed a real culture of innovation in transnational cooperation, deeply anchored in their communities and contributing to solve societal challenges, while upholding European values.*

*By bringing universities from North, South, East and West closer together, the European Universities initiative has the potential to bring Europeans closer together, and better understand each other. The alliances bring together a new generation of Europeans to study and work in different European countries, in different languages, and across sectors and academic disciplines. This is key to maintain peace in Europe, in a world that is more and more polarised, and in a more and more complex geopolitical world.*

*The key added-value of European Universities alliances is also their capacity to provide students access to a richer education offer and allow students to develop a broader, future-oriented set of skills and competences across their inter-university campus, where students can get access to courses available at each participating institution, be it physical, blended or online. A big competitive advantage for universities in an alliance is that they can pool their expertise, knowledge, and resources, including expensive equipment, and to combine complementary strengths not available at any single institution, to provide graduates and lifelong learners with strategic skills for their future, including in the field of STEM and strategic sectors.*

*Further efforts are needed to up-scale the alliances' outreach and activities to match their full capabilities in terms of reaching out to much more students, staff and faculties, developing across all their missions of education, research and innovation at the service of society, and fully engaging in their trailblazer role in the national higher education systems. It takes time to build a European University. The first alliances started just five years ago and others are only in the starting blocks.*

*To achieve their ambitious goals, the alliances need further support both in terms of policy and funding. Concerted action is needed from all sides to continue making the European Universities initiative a success in the long-term. The alliances, Member States and the European Commission need to join forces.*

*In this context, the Commission is working with the Member States, the alliances, the European higher education stakeholders and the students towards an investment pathway aiming to offer a long-term comprehensive funding approach for the European Universities alliances for the financial programming period 2028-2034, complementing the core educational dimension funded under Erasmus+ with support across all alliances' other missions, seeking synergies with different EU instruments, as well as with national and regional funding.*

The European Universities alliances have **unprecedented scope and depth of their transnational cooperation**, conciliating **excellence and inclusion**, within **joint long-term strategies** that ensure a **continuum between all universities' missions in education, research and innovation, at the service of society**. They have set up **joint governance structures and support services**, closely involving students and staff members, enabling the alliances to capitalise on their potential to enhance efficiency of public investment in higher education by pooling resources, building on their partners strengths, including for expensive equipment and joint support services. This led to efficiency gains and reduced operating costs through economies of scale, while reducing fragmentation and disparities across European regions and territories.

**About half of the students in Europe are now studying in a higher education institutions part of a European Universities alliance**. The opportunities available to students are significantly multiplied when their higher education institution is a part of an alliance. The alliances offer cutting-edge trans- and inter-disciplinary education opportunities with embedded mobility - with a **400% increase of intra-alliance students' mobility since 2019** - student-centred and challenge-based joint educational programmes, some leading to joint degrees, flexible learning pathways, micro-credentials, for example in key strategic domains such as STEM or European studies and democracy. These embedded mobility opportunities contribute to **balanced knowledge flows and talent attraction** to and circulation across Europe. **Higher education institutions consider that their participation in European Universities alliances boosts their international visibility, attractiveness and competitiveness** by a stronger appeal for European and international talent and more attractive academic and research careers.

The alliances give their students, academics and researchers access to their extended network of **over 2200 associated partners from 43 countries all across the EU and beyond**. This allows those students, academics and researchers to further foster innovation in regions and cities, contributing to job creation and competitive local economies, balanced brain and talent mobility, while interconnecting the ecosystems of the partner universities in different countries. The alliances have also demonstrated a **transformational impact at EU and national levels**, for instance by acting as catalysts for **accelerating national reforms** as well as by driving progress at EU level for example by pioneering the **development of a European Degree** and a possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions.

**Looking towards the future, tackling Europe's skills and talent shortages**, including in key strategic sectors, can only be achieved by raising excellence and capacity levels in all types of higher education institutions, all across Europe and by reinforcing the cooperation between higher education institutions, and with the private sector and innovation ecosystems. The **European Universities alliances are robust enablers instrumental** to close the skills gaps and activate a critical mass of talent all-across Europe, to **stimulate competitiveness** and **EU strategic autonomy**. They do are building excellence by pooling resources, infrastructure, talent and support services, offering jointly what single universities would not be able to offer alone.

The alliances have testified that it takes time to build a European University. The first alliances started just five years ago and others are only in the starting blocks.

**While it is clear that the alliances have demonstrated transformational potential, further efforts are needed to up-scale their outreach and activities to entirely match their capabilities** in terms of reaching out to much more students, staff and faculties across their partner institutions, developing across all their missions

European Commission

of education, research and innovation at the service of society, and fully engaging in their trailblazer role in the national higher education systems. **To achieve their ambitious goals, the alliances need further support both in terms of policy and funding.**

Building on the achievements of the alliances and accounting for their future needs, **the Commission remains highly committed to strengthen this flagship initiative, supporting higher education institutions that are hole for half of Europe's students. The Political Guidelines President von der Leyen outline the objective to strengthen the University alliances.**

> 66 *(…) it also means attracting new talents and retaining the best and brightest minds here in Europe. To do this, I want to strengthen the collaboration between research departments, higher education and business – notably by strengthening our University Alliances.*
>
> **President von der Leyen Political Guidelines**

**In terms of policy**, **the Commission is supporting Member States to pursue work at national level continue to strive for full implementation of the Council Recommendations supporting transnational cooperation in higher education**, notably the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, the Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials, the Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable academic careers. The Commission is working together with Member States and stakeholders on the Blueprint for a European Degree, towards a European quality assurance and recognition system and towards a possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions. It is promoting the further development of the European Student Card initiative, and the full implementation of the Bologna Process tools.

**In terms of funding, President's von der Leyen Political Guidelines are translated in the mission letters** of both Executive Vice President designate Minzatu and Commissioner-designate Zaharieva, offering a political impetus to support and strengthen the European Universities alliances, across all their missions.

**Member States and several European level key higher education stakeholders, including EU level students' unions, are highly supportive of a strengthened European Universities initiative** supporting all the alliances' missions. These stakeholders' positions resonate with the recent **high-level reports of Enrico Letta**[708] **Mario Draghi and Manuel Heitor** who acknowledge the **key role of the alliances for the attractiveness of the European higher education systems and for EU competitiveness overall**. The Enrico Letta's report on the future of the Single Market describes **initiative as central for achieving the fifth freedom** of education and research in the European Single Market. The Commission Expert Group 'Align, Act, Accelerate' (Manuel **Heitor Report) recognises the value of the alliances** and suggests strengthening them, promoting Letta's fifth freedom through **student and researcher mobility**. While the **Draghi Report** recognises the importance of the initiative for **attracting global talent** in the EU.

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[708] Letta, E., April 2024.

> ❝ *A leap to EUR 10 million annually for each alliance, culminating in 600 million euros per year across the current spectrum of [over] 60 alliances, could significantly amplify the development of joint programs across a wider array of disciplines. Such an investment, with Erasmus+ shouldering two-thirds of this augmented funding, complemented by an array of EU programs, embodies a strategic integration of European, national, and regional resources.*
>
> **Enrico Letta report "More than a market"**

In terms of funding, these **high-level reports call for sustained support of the alliances under the next Multiannual Financial Framework**. The **Letta Report** pleads for increased, sustainable funding support for the alliances and for improved synergies, "*A leap to € 10 million annually for each alliance, culminating in 600 million euros per year across the current spectrum of 60 alliances (…) with Erasmus+ shouldering two-thirds of* [an] *augmented funding, complemented by an array of EU programs, embodies a strategic integration of European, national, and regional resources*". The **Draghi Report** also suggests leveraging European Universities alliances with funding under the next EU Framework Programme for research and innovation to attain critical mass of talent in the Union. The **Heitor Report** outlines the importance of financially supporting the alliances across all their missions and offer a longer time perspective.

> ❝ *Securing sustainable financial support across all university missions is vital to unlock the transformative potential of these alliances.*
>
> **Commission Expert Group on the Interim Evaluation of Horizon Europe, coordinated by Manuel Heitor**

In this context, **the Commission is working with the Member States, the alliances, the European higher education stakeholders and the students towards an investment pathway aiming to offer a long-term comprehensive funding approach for the European Universities alliances for the financial programming period 2028-2034, complementing the core educational dimension funded under Erasmus+ with support across all alliances' other missions, seeking synergies with different EU instruments, as well as with national and regional funding.**

The unique structural setting of the alliances – joint long-term institutional strategic cooperation across all missions – is strategic for **breaking down silos between education, research and innovation missions**. It is thus important to support the alliances across all their missions to **realise the alliances' impact and transformational potential.** For this, **complementarity, coherence and efficiency of EU investment is paramount.**

**Only EU level funding can leverage benefits surpassing what could be achieved by individual Member States or organisations alone**, mobilising critical mass of funding, resources and infrastructures, creates a positive dynamic around societal challenges and objectives going beyond organisational, regional and national boundaries, triggering EU added value and impact.

Without Erasmus+ as main funding source, the European Universities initiative will not be able to deploy its full potential in future, considering the uneven and limited national/regional funding sources available for transnational cooperation at the scale prompted by the alliances.

**Synergies between various sources of EU level funding, and leveraging national and regional funding**, are necessary for efficiency gains across all the missions.

For the alliances ambition to materialise, a new conducive framework is needed under the next Multi-annual Financial Framework, allowing for a real synergetic approach between EU programmes and funds, entailing a real simplification for higher education institutions and bringing efficiency gains.

To achieve their ambitious goals, the alliances need further support both in terms of policy and funding. **Concerted action and support are needed from all sides to continue making the European Universities initiative a success in the long-term. The alliances, Member States and the European Commission need to join forces to fully exploit its transformation potential.**

# Annex: Monitoring framework questionnaire

The study developed a monitoring framework to assess the progress and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative. Based on consultations with alliance representatives, representatives of stakeholder associations, Member States, and the European Commission (DG EAC), the following overarching principles were agreed upon for the monitoring framework:

> Evaluate the progress of the European Universities initiative as a whole, in line with its policy objectives, as set down in the related Erasmus+ calls for proposals. While data will be collected at the alliance level, with the exception of good practice cases, it will be presented in an aggregated manner only. The framework will not evaluate individual alliances.

> Respect the diversity of the European Universities alliances. For that reason, alliances are asked to provide data where possible and explain if/why certain criteria are not relevant for them.

> Include both qualitative and quantitative criteria allowing to contextualise significant outcomes that are difficult to quantify.

> Develop a longitudinal approach to assess the outcomes and transformational potential of the initiative over time; this is not supposed to be a one-off exercise.

Note that for study, data from the monitoring framework was collected in the second half of 2023, offering a snapshot of the alliances' achievements at a certain moment in their development, without prejudice of the consideration of their progress achieved since then.

## Overall perspective

| **1. What are the key achievements of your alliance that you are most proud of?** |
| --- |
| (open question) |

| **2. What are the main lessons learnt within your alliance after your first years of operation?** |
| --- |
| (open question) |

| **3. What are the main challenges you face in your cooperation as a European Universities alliance?** |
| --- |
| (open question) |

## Impact on the wider higher education system

**4a. How has your European Universities alliance provided added value to (1) Alliance partner institutions and their constituencies (academic and administrative staff and students), and (2) the wider higher education sector in promoting European values and in strengthening European Identity (as compared to what you could have done outside such an alliance)?**

(open question)

**4b. What makes your European Universities alliance unique in promoting European values and in strengthening European Identity, as compared to other models of cooperation?**

(open question)

**4c. What more do you expect from your cooperation in the future regarding the promotion of European values and strengthening European Identity?**

(open question)

**5a. How has your European Universities alliance provided added value to (1) alliance partner institutions, and (2) the wider higher education sector in increasing quality, performance, attractiveness, and international competitiveness of the European higher education sector?**

(open question)

**5b. What makes your European Universities alliance unique in increasing quality, performance, attractiveness, and international competitiveness, as compared to other models of cooperation?**

(open question)

**5c. What additional impact do you expect on increasing quality, performance, attractiveness, and international competitiveness from this deeper cooperation model in the future?**

(open question)

**6. Has your alliance, or members acting in the interest of the alliance, contributed to policy reforms at national and/or European levels? How? Does it plan to contribute in the future? Please name and shortly describe the most prominent (expected) reforms and changes naming the countries.**

(open question)

**7. Does your alliance share good practices with other HEIs outside of the alliance? How?  Please select all that apply:**

| Organise outreach and dissemination events | Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|---|

| Publish open-source educational/management resources | Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| Actively share practices and experiences in university networks outside of the alliance | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely: | (open question) | | |
| If you wish, please name and shortly describe the most prominent ones: | (open question) | | |

## Alliance Governance and Cooperation

**8a). How does your European Universities alliance provide added value to your partner institutions, as compared to what you could have done outside such an alliance/did before forming an alliance, when it comes to:**

**Your joint long-term strategy for education, with, where possible, links to research and innovation, and service to society**

(open question)

**Governance and management structures**

(open question)

**Sharing resources and facilities**

(open question)

**Quality assurance and data management**

(open question)

**Any other relevant aspect**

(open question)

**8b. What makes your European Universities alliance unique from this point of view, as compared to other models of cooperation?**

(open question)

**8c. What additional impact do you expect from this deeper cooperation model in the future?**

(open question)

**9a. Has your alliance adopted and is implementing an integrated long-term joint strategy for education, with, where possible, links to research and innovation, and service to society, that is responsive to key societal challenges, while remaining committed to inclusion and excellence?**

| Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|

**9b. Are the institutional strategies of alliance members aligned with the strategy of the alliance?**

| Yes | Alignment in progress | No |
|---|---|---|

| 10a. Does your alliance have a legal status? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | No |
| 10.b If yes or under development, what type of entity is it and which country is it/will it be established in? | (open question) | |

| 11. a) Does your alliance have joint governance and management structures? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | No |
| **11. b) Which ones?** | | |
| Board of Rectors/Governing board | Yes | Under development | No |
| Management committee | Yes | Under development | No |
| Coordinating office/Secretariat-General | Yes | Under development | No |
| Academic Council | Yes | Under development | No |
| Research Council | Yes | Under development | No |
| Student Board | Yes | Under development | No |
| External Advisory Board | Yes | Under development | No |
| Support offices in each partner higher education institution | Yes | Under development | No |
| Academic Senate | Yes | Under development | No |
| Quality Assurance body | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

| 12. a) Are students involved in the governance of your alliance? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Channels or structures for their involvement are being set up | No |
| 12b. Please list the governance bodies involving students | (open question) | |
| **12. c) Which role do students have in these governance bodies?** | | |
| Invited to specific meetings | Yes | No |
| Permanent observer with speaking rights/advisory | Yes | No |
| Voting on some matters | Yes | No |
| Full voting rights | Yes | No |
| Other, namely | (open question) | |

| 12. d) Does your alliance have an established student association/board? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | No |
| **12. e) If yes, how are the student representatives selected?** | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Delegated from representative student associations | Yes | No |
| Elected directly to this body | Yes | No |
| Appointed by alliance management, etc. | Yes | No |
| Other, namely | (open question) | |

**13. a) Are external stakeholders (associated partners, businesses, society etc.) involved in the governance of your alliance?**

| Yes | Channels or structures for their involvement are being set up | No |
|---|---|---|

**13. b) If yes or under development, please indicate the categories of stakeholders involved:**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| NGOs | Yes | Channels or structures for their involvement are being set up | No |
| Local authorities | Yes | Channels or structures for their involvement are being set up | No |
| Regional authorities | Yes | Channels or structures for their involvement are being set up | No |
| National authorities | Yes | Channels or structures for their involvement are being set up | No |
| For-profit enterprises | Yes | Channels or structures for their involvement are being set up | No |
| Not-for-profit foundations | Yes | Channels or structures for their involvement are being set up | No |
| Social economy | Yes | Channels or structures for their involvement are being set up | No |
| Other, namely | (open question) | | |

**13. c) Which role do they have in these governance bodies?**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Invited to specific meetings | Yes | No |
| Permanent observer with speaking rights/advisory | Yes | No |
| Voting on some matters | Yes | No |
| Full voting rights | Yes | No |
| Other, namely | (open question) | |

**14a. What is the % of faculties/departments of each partner institution taking an active part in alliance's activities (e.g. joint modules, joint programmes, joint education activities, winter/summer schools, etc) out of the total number of faculties/departments at each partner institution?**

| Institution | % |
|---|---|
| (open question) | (open question) |

| (open question) | (open question) |
|---|---|
| (open question) | (open question) |
| (open question) | (open question) |
| (open question) | (open question) |
| (open question) | (open question) |
| (open question) | (open question) |
| (open question) | (open question) |
| (open question) | (open question) |
| (open question) | (open question) |
| (open question) | (open question) |
| (open question) | (open question) |
| 14b. How do you see the evolution in the coming years? | (open question) |

| 15. a) Does your alliance have self-funding mechanisms/resources? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | No |

| 15. b) What form does this own funding mechanism/resources take? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Own contribution by partner universities | Yes | Under development | No |
| Tuition fees | Yes | Under development | No |
| Consultancy services | Yes | Under development | No |
| Renting out spaces | Yes | Under development | No |
| Other, namely | (open question) | | |

| 15. c) What percentage of the alliance's budget do these self-funding mechanisms/resources cover? (approximately) |
|---|
| (open question) |

| 16. a) Has your alliance attracted external funding? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | In progress | No |

| 16. b) If yes, please specify the funding source(s): | | |
|---|---|---|
| Other European funding from | | |
| Other Erasmus+ sources (e.g. for mobility of other cooperation projects) | Yes | In progress | No |
| The EIT HEI initiative | Yes | In progress | No |
| Horizon 2020 (e.g. SwafS call) | Yes | In progress | No |
| Horizon Europe (e.g. MSCA, European Excellence initiative) | Yes | In progress | No |
| Digital Europe | Yes | In progress | No |
| Cohesion policy (e.g. ERDF, ESF+) | Yes | In progress | No |

| Invest EU | Yes | In progress | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| The recovery and resilience facility | Yes | In progress | No |
| Other | Yes | In progress | No |
| National/regional funding | Yes | In progress | No |
| Private funding | Yes | In progress | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

**16. c) What percentage of the alliance's budget do these external mechanisms/resources cover? (approximately)**

(open question)

**17. a) Does your alliance have a joint quality assurance strategy?**

| Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

**17. b) What are the quality assurance instruments/tools used at the alliance level?**

| Joint quality assurance plan of the education provision | Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| Quality assurance board | Yes | Under development | No |
| Centralised quality assurance office | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

**18. a) Does your alliance have a joint data governance or management strategy?**

| Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

**18. b) Please specify what the strategy and practices entail:**

| Shared policies or frameworks for sharing institutional data from partner higher education institutions: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Management data | Yes | Under development | No |
| Education data sets | Yes | Under development | No |
| Research data sets | Yes | Under development | No |
| Student and staff data (in accordance with GDPR) | Yes | Under development | No |
| A joint institutional data repository at the alliance level | Yes | Under development | No |
| Staff hired by the alliance for institutional research/data management | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

## 19a. Does your alliance's strategy include the sharing of resources and facilities?

| Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|

## 19b. What are the joint services/offices created by your alliance?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Internationalisation offices | Yes | Under development | No |
| Libraries | Yes | Under development | No |
| Student advising/learning support | Yes | Under development | No |
| Career services | Yes | Under development | No |
| Teacher academies | Yes | Under development | No |
| Support for pedagogical innovation | Yes | Under development | No |
| Research office | Yes | Under development | No |
| Shared student register | Yes | Under development | No |
| Student housing | Yes | Under development | No |
| Psychological support services | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

## 19c. Has your alliance implemented the following shared digital infrastructures?

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Digital campus | Yes | Under development | No |
| Joint course catalogue | Yes | Under development | No |
| Joint student data management system | Yes | Under development | No |
| Shared cloud infrastructure | Yes | Under development | No |
| Shared platforms for course provision/management | Yes | Under development | No |
| Joint student application, admission, and management system | Yes | Under development | No |
| Joint student engagement survey and feedback systems | Yes | Under development | No |
| Collaborative digital spaces for joint student activities | Yes | Under development | No |
| Shared administrative platforms including issuing of digital credentials, guidance for recognition etc. | Yes | Under development | No |
| Shared list of recognition decisions | Yes | Under development | No |
| Shared journal subscriptions | Yes | Under development | No |
| Shared library access | Yes | Under development | No |
| Shared software licences | Yes | Under development | No |
| Joint virtual labs | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

| If you wish, please describe the main shared IT structures | (open question) |
|---|---|

### Joint Education Provision and Mobility

*Note: data on student and staff mobility was gathered from the progress and final report of the pilots projects, to avoid duplication of data gathering.*

**20. What is the progress of your alliance towards the establishment of a European inter-university campus? (elaborate, where appropriate, on both physical and digital formats)**

(open question)

**21. What novelties have you introduced in your learning offer that did not exist before?**

(open question)

**22. What is the progress of your alliance towards ensuring seamless and embedded mobility for students?**

(open question)

**23. What novelties have you introduced in your mobility offer that did not exist before?**

(open question)

**24. How do you see the evolution of the mobility opportunities offered to students in your alliance in the coming years to reach 50% in the mid/long term?**

(open question)

**25. How does your European university alliance provide added value to your partner institutions as compared to what you could have done outside such an alliance/what you have done before forming the alliance, when it comes to:**

**a) Joint, flexible and innovative learning offer**

(open question)

**b) Key skills development**

(open question)

**c) Life-long learning**

(open question)

**d) Multilingualism**

(open question)

**e) And any other relevant aspect**

(open question)

**26. What makes your European Universities alliance unique from this point of view, as compared to other models of cooperation? What additional impact do you expect in the future?**

(open question)

| 27a. Does your alliance have a joint mobility strategy for students? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | No |

| 27b. What initiatives has your alliance implemented/plans to implement to support the mobility of students between different alliance partners? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Joint course catalogue open to all students of the alliance | Yes | Under development | No |
| Physical mobility embedded in joint educational programmes/activities | Yes | Under development | No |
| Physical mobility embedded in the learning offer of the individual partner higher education institutions | Yes | Under development | No |
| Virtual mobility embedded in curricula and/or education programmes | Yes | Under development | No |
| Micro-credentials | Yes | Under development | No |
| Organisation of joint blended intensive programmes | Yes | Under development | No |
| Hybrid mobilities | Yes | Under development | No |
| Internship opportunities involving mobility | Yes | Under development | No |
| Organisation of short-term mobility events | Yes | Under development | No |
| Organisation of Summer/Winter schools | Yes | Under development | No |
| Projects fostering capacity building to enhance mobility | Yes | Under development | No |
| Mobility Cooperation frameworks between alliance members (beyond Erasmus) | Yes | Under development | No |
| Robust mechanisms for automatic mutual recognition of higher education qualifications and learning outcomes abroad | Yes | Under development | No |
| Establishing joint mobility services | Yes | Under development | No |
| Financial support for intra-alliance mobility (beyond Erasmus) | Yes | Under development | No |
| Implementation of Erasmus without paper | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |
| Please name and shortly describe the most prominent ones: | (open question) | | |

| 28a. Does your alliance have a joint strategy for staff mobility? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | No |

| 28b. What initiatives has your alliance implemented and intends to implement in the future to boost the mobility of staff between the members of the alliance? |
|---|

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Job shadowing placements | Yes | Under developm ent | No |
| Staff weeks | Yes | Under developm ent | No |
| Teaching staff exchanges (joint courses, summer schools) | Yes | Under developm ent | No |
| Joint professional training programmes | Yes | Under developm ent | No |
| Financial incentives for staff mobility | Yes | Under developm ent | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |
| Please name and shortly describe the most prominent ones: | (open question) | | |

| **29. Has your alliance implemented automatic recognition of ECTS credits for:** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students undertaking their mobility at a partner institution within the alliance? | Yes | Under development | No |
| Students undertaking their mobility at any institution beyond the alliance? | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

| **30a). Do alliance partner institutions allow alliance students to access their online campus resources?** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Only during mobility periods | Yes | Under development | No |
| Full access to all partner online resources at any time | Yes | Under development | No |
| Access to online resources only among some of the partners | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

| **30b). Do alliance partner institutions allow alliance students to access their physical campus resources?** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Only during mobility periods | Yes | Under development | N o |
| Full access to all partner resources at any time | Yes | Under development | N o |
| Access to resources only among some of the partners | Yes | Under development | N o |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

| **31. Which new initiatives have you created to offer joint flexible learning pathways for your students?** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| New Joint study programmes (joint degrees, double degrees, etc) with flexible curricula | Yes | Under development | N o |
| Adaptation of existing programmes with possibility to include partner universities' courses into the existing students' curriculum | Yes | Under development | N o |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

**32. Please list the number of joint study programmes created by the alliance including the degree type (joint degree, double degree, other), level of study (Bachelor, Master or PhD), number of alliance partners involved\*, and the number of students enrolled per year.**

**\*Consider joint study programmes that involve at least two alliance partner institutions**

(open question)

**33. Please list the number of joint courses (regular semester courses ) created by the alliance including the number of ECTS, level of study (Bachelor, Master or PhD), number of alliance partners involved\*, and the number of students enrolled per year. Please, consider only joint courses that are not part of the joint study programmes mentioned above.**

**\*Consider joint courses that involve at least two alliance partner institutions**

(open question)

**34. Please list the number of other joint educational activities offered by the alliance, the number of alliance partners involved\*, and , where possible, the number of students enrolled per year.**

**\*Consider joint educational activities that involve at least two alliance partner institutions**

| | |
|---|---|
| Short courses leading to micro-credentials | (open question) |
| Summer/winter schools | (open question) |
| Massive Open Online Course (MOOCs) | (open question) |
| Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) | (open question) |
| Challenges (short courses with challenge-based learning) | (open question) |
| Work-based courses | (open question) |
| Courses created in collaboration with non-academic external stakeholders (industry, governmental institutions, NGOs, etc.) | (open question) |
| Student incubators | (open question) |
| Research-based courses | (open question) |

| Entrepreneurship-related courses | (open question) |
|---|---|
| Others, namely | (open question) |

## 35. Do partner institutions in your alliance allow students from across the alliance to register for regular courses?
## Please, explain if you wish so.

| Yes, most courses are open to all alliance students to enrol | Yes, some selected courses are open to all alliance students to enrol | No, only joint courses and courses within joint programmes are open to alliance students |
|---|---|---|
| Other, namely | (open question) | |

## 36. Does your alliance have any joint pedagogical training or support services for pedagogical innovations?

| Teaching training workshops (if you wish, indicate the number of workshops and participants) | Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| Teaching certification (if you wish, indicate the number academics involved) | Yes | Under development | No |
| Teaching support centre | Yes | Under development | No |
| Joint student support services | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

## 37. Does your alliance have any incentives for innovative pedagogies?
## Please select all that apply

| Toolkits and materials that support the implementation of these pedagogies | Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| Awards/recognition for teaching staff that implements innovative pedagogies | Yes | Under development | No |
| Funds to develop innovative pedagogical ideas | Yes | Under development | No |
| Professional development courses for instructors | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |
| If you wish, please name and shortly describe the most prominent ones: | (open question) | | |

| 38. To what extent do joint alliance programmes, courses and educational activities support the development of the following competencies and skills: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Entrepreneurial skills | Yes, integrated into existing courses | Yes, as separate courses or training sessions | No |
| Problem-solving skills | Yes, integrated into existing courses | Yes, as separate courses or training sessions | No |
| Intercultural skills | Yes, integrated into existing courses | Yes, as separate courses or training sessions | No |
| Green skills | Yes, integrated into existing courses | Yes, as separate courses or training sessions | No |
| Digital skills | Yes, integrated into existing courses | Yes, as separate courses or training sessions | No |
| Democratic competencies/citizenship | Yes, integrated into existing courses | Yes, as separate courses or training sessions | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |
| If you wish, please name and shortly describe the most prominent ones: | (open question) | | |

| 39a. Does your alliance have a joint lifelong learning strategy/plan? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | No |

| 39b. Which initiatives to support lifelong learning has your alliance implemented? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Creating MOOCs | Yes | Under development | No |
| Implementing micro-credentials | Yes | Under development | No |
| Professional development for university staff (new technologies, etc.) | Yes | Under development | No |
| Open courses on labour market relevant skills | Yes | Under development | No |
| Flexible learning pathways for adult learners | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

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| If you wish, please name and shortly describe the most prominent ones: | (open question) |
|---|---|

| 40a. Does your alliance have a joint multilingualism plan/strategy? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | No |

| 40b.  Does your alliance have any of the following activities to foster multilingualism? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Language courses | Yes | Under development | No |
| Language cafes | Yes | Under development | No |
| Language tandems (pairing students with native speakers) | Yes | Under development | No |
| Translation services | Yes | Under development | No |
| Multilingual course offer | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |
| If you wish, please name, and shortly describe the most prominent ones: | (open question) | | |

## Society and Economy

| 41a. How does your European university alliance provide added value to your partner institutions as compared to what you could have done outside such an alliance/did before forming the alliance, when it comes to: |
|---|
| **A challenge-based approach** |
| (open question) |
| **Civic engagement** |
| (open question) |
| **Regional cooperation** |
| (open question) |
| **Inclusion and diversity of the student population** |
| (open question) |
| **Graduate employability** |
| (open question) |
| **And any other relevant aspect** |
| (open question) |

| 41b. What makes your European Universities alliance unique from this point of view, as compared to other models of cooperation? |
|---|
| (open question) |

**41c. What additional impact do you expect from this deeper cooperation model in the future?**

(open question)

**42. Does your alliance have a joint strategy for local/regional/civic engagement?**

| Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|

**43. Does your alliance have specific support structures or incentives for staff or students that participate in local and regional engagement activities?**

| Alliance body related to local and regional engagement activities | Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|---|
| Awards/incentives for staff/students for local and regional engagement activities (please specify) | Yes | Under development | No |
| Possibility to recognise community engagement activities within the study programme | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

**44. Does your alliance have specific departments, centres, living labs, testbeds, or other structures/spaces set up to support citizen engagement?**

| Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|
| If yes, please specify: | (open question) | |

**45. What activities does your alliance implement to mainstream training and understanding of and delivering on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across your learning offer in all fields and levels?**
**Please name and shortly describe the most prominent ones**

(open question)

**46. Does your alliance currently have initiatives* with quadruple helix collaboration (academia, policy, industry, and society)?**

**\*only include projects that involve more than one of alliance's partner institutions**

| Yes | Under development | No |
|---|---|---|
| If you wish, please name and shortly describe the most prominent ones: | (open question) | |

| 47. Has your alliance developed a shared alliance diversity & inclusiveness strategy? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | No |
| If you wish, indicate what are its main objectives and target groups: | (open question) | |

| 48. Does your alliance offer career information and training for students? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Courses and/or workshops | Yes | Under development | No |
| Organisation of career days | Yes | Under development | No |
| Existence of career coach/ advisor/mentor for career guidance | Yes | Under development | No |
| Existence of (online) career platform | Yes | Under development | No |
| Creation/Existence of an alumni network | Yes | Under development | No |
| Student buddy system | Yes | Under development | No |
| Academic counsellors | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

### Research and innovation

| 49a. How does your European universities alliance provide added value to your partner institutions as compared to what you could have done outside such an alliance/did before forming the alliance when it comes to joint R&I activities, including innovation and knowledge transfer? |
|---|
| (open question) |

| 49b. What makes your European Universities alliance unique in its R&I efforts, as compared to other models of cooperation? |
|---|
| (open question) |

| 49c. What additional impact do you expect from this deeper cooperation in the future? |
|---|
| (open question) |

| 50. Does your alliance strategy include a common research and innovation agenda? | | |
|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | No |

| 51a. Does your alliance foresee joint structures for research and innovation? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | Not yet but looking for funding | Not interested |

| 51b. Does the staff of alliance partners get access to: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Research journal subscriptions and databases | Yes | Under development | No |
| Research support services | | | |
| of the partner institutions | Yes | Under development | No |
| of the alliance | Yes | Under development | No |
| Laboratories and research centres | | | |
| of the partner institutions | Yes | Under development | No |
| of the alliance | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |

| 52. Does your alliance have any of the following initiatives to promote research collaboration with alliance partners? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Platform or activity to connect researchers from partner HEIs with similar interests | Yes | Under development | No |
| Joint research support centre | Yes | Under development | No |
| Funding for joint research projects | Yes | Under development | No |
| Support for joint publications (editorial, translation or publishing fees) | Yes | Under development | No |
| Others, namely | (open question) | | |
| If you wish, please name and shortly describe the most prominent ones: | (open question) | | |

| 53. Have partners within your alliance successfully submitted joint* research funding applications?<br><br>*Only include initiatives that involve more than one of the alliance partner universities | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Yes | Under development | Not yet but looking for funding | Not interested |
| If you wish so, please explain: | (open question) | | |

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