



Higher education: making EU's universities ready for the future through deeper transnational cooperation

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Today, European society needs the contribution of universities and other higher education institutions more than ever. Europe is facing major challenges such as climate change, the digital transformation and aging population, at a time when it is hit by the biggest global health crisis in a century and its economic fall-out. Universities, and the entire higher education sector, have a unique position at the crossroads of education, research and innovation, in shaping sustainable and resilient economies, and in making the European Union greener, more inclusive and more digital.

The two [new initiatives](#) adopted today, a European strategy for universities and a Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation, will support universities in this endeavour.

Margaritis **Schinias**, Vice-President for Promoting the European Way of Life, said: *"European Universities of excellence and inclusiveness are both a condition and a foundation for our European Way of Life. They support open, democratic and fair societies as well as sustained growth, entrepreneurship, integration and employment. With our proposals today, we seek to take transnational cooperation in Higher Education to a new level. Shared values, more mobility, broader scope and synergies to build a genuinely European dimension in our Higher Education."*

Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya **Gabriel**, said: *"Today's proposals will benefit the entire higher education sector, first and foremost our students. They need modern transnational campuses with easy access to mobility abroad to allow for a truly European study path and experience. We stand ready to join forces with the Member States and higher education institutions across Europe. Together we can bring closer education, research and innovation in service to society. The European Universities alliances are paving the way; by mid-2024 the European budget will support up to 60 European Universities Alliances with more than 500 universities across Europe."*

The European strategy for universities

Europe is home to close to 5,000 higher education institutions, 17.5 million tertiary education students, 1.35 million people teaching in tertiary education and 1.17 million researchers. This strategy intends to support and enable all universities in Europe to adapt to changing conditions, to thrive and to contribute to Europe's resilience and recovery. It proposes a set of important actions, to support Europe's universities towards achieving four objectives:

- Strengthen the European dimension of higher education and research;
- Consolidate universities as lighthouses of our European way of life with supporting actions focusing on academic and research careers, quality and relevance for future-proof skills, diversity, inclusion, democratic practices, fundamental rights and academic values;
- Empower universities as key actors of change in the twin green and digital transition;
- Reinforce universities as drivers of EU's global role and leadership.

Building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation

The Commission proposal for a Council Recommendation aims to enable European higher education institutions to cooperate closer and deeper, to facilitate the implementation of joint transnational educational programmes and activities, pooling capacity and resources, or awarding joint degrees. It is an invitation to Member States to take action and create appropriate conditions at national level for enabling such closer and sustainable transnational cooperation, more effective implementation of joint educational and research activities and the [European Higher Education Area \(Bologna\) tools](#). It will facilitate the flow of knowledge and build a stronger link between education, research and innovative industrial communities. The objective is notably to support the provision of high-quality life-long learning opportunities for everyone with a focus on the most needed skills and competences

to face today's economic and societal demands.

Making it happen: four flagship initiatives

The European dimension in higher education and research will be boosted by four flagships initiatives by mid-2024:

- **Expand to 60 European Universities** with more than 500 higher education institutions by mid-2024, with an Erasmus+ indicative budget totalling €1.1 billion for 2021-2027. The aim is to develop and share a common long-term structural, sustainable and systemic cooperation on education, research and innovation, creating European inter-university campuses where students, staff and researchers from all parts of Europe can enjoy seamless mobility and create new knowledge together, across countries and disciplines.
- Work towards a **legal statute for alliances of higher education institutions** to allow them to pool resources, capacities and their strengths, with an Erasmus+ pilot as of 2022.
- Work towards a **joint European degree to recognise the value of transnational experiences** in the higher education qualification the students obtain and cut the red tape for delivering joint programmes.
- **Scale-up the European Student Card initiative** by deploying a unique European Student Identifier available to all mobile students in 2022 and to all students in universities in Europe by mid-2024, to facilitate mobility at all levels.

Next Steps

Coordination of efforts between the EU, Member States, regions, civil society and the higher education sector is key to make the **European strategy for universities** a reality. The Commission invites the Council, Member States and universities to discuss on this policy agenda and work jointly towards future-proof universities.

The **Commission proposal for a Council recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation** will be discussed with Member States. Once adopted by the Council, the Commission will support Member States and relevant partners in implementing this Council Recommendation.

Background

The Commission announced its intention to initiate the co-creation of a transformation agenda for higher education in its [Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#) and its Communication on a new European Research Area. The [Council Conclusions on the New European Research Area](#), adopted on 1 December 2020, stress "*that stronger synergies and interconnections between the ERA, the EHEA and the higher education related elements of the European Education Area (EEA), are to be developed*". In its [Resolution of 26 February 2021 on 'a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond \(2021-2030\)'](#), the Council has identified the establishment of an agenda for higher education transformation as a concrete action in the priority area of higher education.

The ERA Policy Agenda annexed to the Council Conclusions on the Future Governance of the European Research Area, adopted on 26 November 2021, support actions relevant for universities including a dedicated action on empowering higher education institutions to develop in line with the European Research Area and in synergy with the European Education Area.

For More Information

[Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities](#)

[Commission Proposal for a Council recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation](#)

[Communication on achieving a European Education Area by 2025](#)

[Communication on a new ERA for Research and Innovation](#)

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