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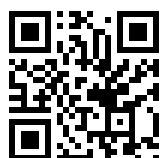
Requested by the CULT Committee



The European Universities Initiative: first lessons, main challenges and perspectives



Culture and Education



RESEARCH FOR CULT COMMITTEE

The European Universities Initiative: first lessons, main challenges and perspectives

Abstract

In 2019 the European Universities Initiative started. Since then, 44 European Universities alliances were created, with 340 participating higher education institutions. This study evaluates the selection procedures and assesses the experiences of the first years. It also drafts three scenarios to map future developments. Recommendations to the EP aim to strengthen the sustainability of the EUAs, create better regulatory conditions and improve the learning processes.

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education.

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LINGUISTIC VERSIONS

Original: EN

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To contact the Policy Department or to subscribe to updates on our work for the CULT Committee please write to: Poldep-cohesion@ep.europa.eu

Manuscript completed in January 2023

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This document is available on the internet in summary with option to download the full text at: bit.ly/3XF2KUX

This document is available on the internet at:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU\(2023\)733105](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document.html?reference=IPOL_STU(2023)733105)

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Please use the following reference to cite this study:

Craciun, D, Kaiser, F, Kottmann, A and Van der Meulen, B, 2023, Research for CULT Committee –The European Universities Initiative, first lessons, main challenges and perspectives, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels

Please use the following reference for in-text citations:

Craciun, Kaiser, Kottman and Van der Meulen (2023)

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------------|---|
| ACA | Academic Cooperation Association |
| AIEA | Association of International Education Administrators |
| CORDIS | The Community Research and Development Information Service |
| CULT | Committee on Culture and Education |
| DAAD | German Academic Exchange Service |
| DEQAR | The Database of External Quality Assurance Results |
| DG EAC | Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture |
| EAIE | European Association for International Education |
| EEA | European Education Area |
| EENEE | European Expert Network on Economics of Education |
| EHEA | European Higher Education Area |
| ERA | European Research Area |
| EC | European Commission |
| ECHE | Erasmus Charter for Higher Education |
| EIT | European Institute for Innovation and Technology |
| EP | European Parliament |
| ESN | Erasmus Student Network |
| ESU | European Students' Union |
| ETER | The European Tertiary Education Register |
| EU | European Union |
| EUA | European University Association |
| EUAs | European Universities alliances |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| EUI | European Universities Initiative |
| EURASHE | European Association of Institutions in Higher Education |
| HEI | Higher Education Institution |
| IAU | International Association of Universities |
| ISCED | International Standard Classification of Education |
| JRC | Joint Research Center |
| Nuffic | The Dutch Organisation for Internationalisation in Education |
| SLR | Systematic literature review |
| SWOT | Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY FINDINGS

- The selection process complies with the Erasmus+ objectives. EUAs with experienced HEIs in transnational cooperation were more likely to be selected, due to the objective of the EUI to develop innovative models of transnational cooperation at the institutional level.
- The criterion of including HEIs from at least three EU countries effectively addresses the importance of fair participation, ensures the geographical balance, and makes the EUI an important instrument for European integration.
- The current model of operation of the alliances is unsustainable and the alliances face serious obstacles in realising the ambitions of the EUI.
- The EUAs are perceived as an opportunity to innovate education, increase the attractiveness and quality of educational offers, and improve transnational collaboration.
- To realise the EUIs' ambitions, more coordination is needed to develop a coherent regulatory framework for the EUAs activities in higher education, research, innovation and community engagement.

The study assesses the European Universities Initiative (EUI) and the European Universities alliances (EUAs). Its results aim to support the European Parliament (EP) in:

- supervising and assessing the European Commission's (EC) existing work on the EUI and planned interventions;
- making evidence-informed decisions in its role as co-legislator with the Council of the European Union;
- assessing the degree to which the EUI supports the EP Resolution on the European Education Area (EEA) (2021) that calls for intensified collaboration and the use of synergies between the EEA, the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area.

The EUI started in the autumn of 2019. The first EUAs had to delay the activities in their initial phase because of the Covid-19 restrictions. Therefore, the EUI is still in its initial phase and the EUAs could not unfold as planned.

The main results of our assessment of *the selection process* are:

- The selection process initially favoured older, larger, comprehensive universities because these institutions had experience in managing international collaborations and could comply with the list of criteria and expected impacts.
- The selection process complies with the Erasmus+ objectives. The EUI is a policy measure aimed at developing an innovative model of transnational cooperation at the institutional level. To fulfil this objective, participating Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) need to have the relevant operational capacity and resources.

- However, experts foresee that future alliances need to specialise in order to successfully engage their staff, attract sufficient funding for financial stability, and realise intended impacts.
- The mandatory criterion of including HEIs from at least three EU countries enabled the inclusion of all European regions. The criterion effectively addresses the importance of fair participation, ensures the geographical balance, and makes the EUI an important instrument for European integration.

The main results of our assessment of the main *benefits and challenges of current alliances* are:

- It is too early to assess the impact of the EUI at the level of national higher education systems and of the EEA. Early experiences indicate that EUAs strive to further European cohesion, increase social engagement, and respond to labour market needs.
- HEIs within EUAs perceive participation as an opportunity to innovate education, increase the attractiveness and quality of their educational offers, and improve transnational collaboration. Activities foster mutual learning, sharing best practices and experiencing new educational approaches.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has forced EUAs to develop new forms of blended mobility. These new forms are more inclusive, fit better to regular programmes and thus attract a larger student population.
- The current model of operation of the alliances is unsustainable. The funding from the EUI does not cover actual transaction costs and the options to use other funds are unclear. Transaction costs are unnecessarily high due to incompatible regulatory frameworks.
- The alliances face serious obstacles in realising the ambitions of the EUI. The challenges include finding an appropriate governance structure, ensuring long-term funding, having clarity about awarding credits and degrees, and removing the legal and administrative barriers.

To assess the *future development* of the EUI, we created three scenarios that reflect the main driving forces behind the shaping of higher education in Europe: the Bologna Process, the development of the EEA, and innovations in learning and teaching. For each driving force, we developed a scenario of the future development of the EUI. Scenarios were assessed by an expert panel. The main results of the scenarios exercise are:

- The number of alliances will likely grow. If that happens, the EC should consider further specifying how the EUI shapes the EEA.
- The current disjointed approach to addressing regulatory issues threatens to result in piecemeal, suboptimal solutions that still generate high transaction costs.
- If the EUAs consolidate they could function as innovation spaces and testing grounds in higher education, as well as a proper organisational form to offer flexible and student-centred learning. However, experts fear that the current formations are too complex, take too long to consolidate, and are too focused on other policy aims to serve as a role model.
- For EUAs to realise impacts beyond higher education, connections between the EEA, the ERA and other EU policies need to be strengthened.
- The EUI will likely further integrate higher education in the EEA. Experts indicated that it also holds broader opportunities for international collaboration beyond the EU.

Based upon these results we recommend the EP, in its dialogue with the EC, to:

- assess the opportunities to improve the financial position of EUAs;
- urge the EC to coordinate better the development of the regulatory framework for EUAs;

- reconsider the long list of selection criteria and expected impacts;
- emphasise the need to maintain benefits and monitor progress.

The in-depth analysis of the HEIs involved in EUAs used data from three European higher education databases. The process also included reviews of relevant scholarly literature, three focus groups assessing the experiences of the EUAs, and a workshop that discussed scenarios on development paths for European higher education, the EUI, and EUAs. Due to data protection rules, data was only available on selected EUAs and their members, not on HEIs that applied but were not selected.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context and aims

The European Universities Initiative (EUI) is a flagship initiative for higher education development embodying an old but persistent idea: the advent of European universities (Corbett, 2005). In 2019, the EC published the first call for higher education institutions to create alliances as part of the European Universities Initiative. Since then, three more calls for proposals have been released to extend and strengthen the EUI with new members. The European Universities alliances (EUAs) are described as ‘transnational alliances that will become the universities of the future, promoting European values and identity, and revolutionising the quality and competitiveness of European higher education’ (European Commission, 2022a).

With the EUI, the EC launched an important instrument to strengthen the European identity and promote a truly integrated and globally competitive European Education Area (EEA). In the new EC Communication on ‘a new strategy for universities’ (European Commission, 2022b) and the Council recommendation ‘for building bridges for effective higher education cooperation’ (European Commission, 2022c), the EUI features prominently as one of the four flagship initiatives. Together with joint European degrees, a legal status for European Universities alliances, and a European Student Card, the EUI represents a central component for the framework for European cooperation in the higher education sector.

For the present study, the European Parliament (EP) requested an initial assessment of the EUI. Specifically, the Terms of Reference of the EP tender ask to:

- evaluate the selection criteria and procedures of the EUI;
- assess existing alliances in terms of the benefits they bring and challenges they face in the areas of governance, funding, benefits for students, levels of collaboration, and the European added value;
- assess the future development of the EUAs, specifically against the background of the new EC strategy for universities and the Council recommendation on higher education cooperation.

Overall, the study provides a robust initial assessment of the EUI. In turn, this assessment can assist the EP to (1) effectively supervise the EC’s existing work on the EUI and assess its planned interventions constructively, (2) make evidence-informed decisions in its role as co-legislator with the Council of the European Union, and (3) assess the degree to which the EUI is supporting the EP Resolution on the EEA (2021) that calls for intensified collaboration and the use of synergies between the EEA, the European Research Area (ERA) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

1.2. The European Universities Initiative as a policy instrument

The conclusions of the 2017 Gothenburg Social Summit – that saw the emergence of the idea of a European Education Area – highlight the importance of education and culture for building inclusive and cohesive societies and increasing the competitiveness of Europe. Several initiatives are envisioned to achieve these goals, including the commitment to encourage the emergence of ‘European Universities’. In response to this call and in consultation with higher education institutions, student organisations, and Member States, the EC launched the European Universities Initiative. The EUI aims to remove obstacles to effective and deeper transnational cooperation between HEIs and support diverse models of collaboration between institutions.

Since the launch of the initiative, three calls for proposals have been completed.¹ Table 1.1 shows when the completed EUI calls for proposals were issued and the results of the selection. Currently, 44 university alliances operate under the initiative, with 340 participating institutions from 27 EU Member States plus Iceland, Norway, Serbia, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. All the alliances selected in the first cohort handed in proposals for continuing their cooperation (third call, Topic 1) and all but one were successful.² The alliances include a wide range of institutions: from research-intensive universities to universities of applied sciences, from technical universities to universities of fine arts, and from comprehensive to specialised universities. They span the full range of university missions, including innovation in teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.³

Table 1.1: EUI calls for proposals and results

| Call for proposals | Number of EUAs selected | Number of HEIs involved | Number of EU Member States involved |
|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| October 2018 | 17 | 114 | 24 |
| November 2019 | 24 | 165 | 26 |
| November 2021 | Topic 1: 16 Topic 2: 4 | Topic 1: 140 Topic 2: 35 | Topic 1: 25 Topic 2: 17 |

Source: European Commission (2022)

Notes: Topic 1: Intensification of prior deep institutional transnational cooperation.

Topic 2: Development of new deep institutional transnational cooperation.

Still, what are 'European Universities'? According to the EC (2020), European Universities should have the following characteristics:

- consist of bottom-up networks bringing together at least three HEIs from three different countries (Member States or Erasmus+ programme countries);
- develop joint long-term institutional strategies for top-quality education, research and innovation and contribute to the emergence of 'European degrees' recognised throughout Europe;
- base their activities on a multidisciplinary approach, with a strong focus on the major challenges of our times (e.g. climate change, democracy, health, big data, migration) and give students the possibility to design their own educational paths;
- encourage practical experience to foster an entrepreneurial mindset and develop civic engagement;
- support mobility as a standard feature of higher education, with at least 50 % of students benefiting from physical, virtual or blended mobility;
- have a student body that reflects 'the diversity of the population (in terms of social, economic and cultural aspects), including lifelong learners, part-time, and non-traditional students';

¹ A fourth call was released in October 2022. HEIs are expected to submit their proposals for the EUI in January 2023 with the results expected later in the same year.

² The third call aimed at funding alliances from the first call and extending them (31 HEIs were added to existing alliances). At the same time, seven HEIs previously in an alliance stepped out in 2022 and one EUA consisting of four HEIs from the first wave was not refunded.

³ Community engagement is understood in the broad sense to include broader related objectives such as social inclusion, entrepreneurship, and promoting European common values.

- cooperate with the European Institute for Innovation and Technology (EIT) ‘to bring together leading organisations from business, education and research ... to develop innovative teaching and learning, train the next generation of innovators, and accompany the transition of higher education institutions to more entrepreneurial organisations’.

European Universities are expected to act as models of good practice and increase the quality, international competitiveness, and attractiveness of European higher education. At the same time, community engagement and societal impact remain central to the idea of European Universities. Specifically, they are expected to ‘also contribute to the sustainable economic development of the regions where they are located, as their students will work closely with companies, municipal authorities, academics and researchers to find solutions to the challenges their regions are facing’ (European Commission, 2019).

At the European level, the new strategy for universities (European Commission, 2022b) and the Council recommendation on transnational cooperation in higher education (European Commission, 2022c) highlight a vision for higher education and research with a ‘genuinely European dimension’. The new strategy for universities aims to strengthen the European dimension in higher education and research, support universities as lighthouses of the European way of life, empower universities as actors of change in the twin green and digital transitions, and reinforce the function of universities as drivers of EU’s global role and leadership. The Council recommendation focuses on removing the most significant structural and operational barriers to transnational cooperation faced by higher education institutions in terms of governance, funding, and levels of collaboration. To alleviate these challenges, the EC proposes to:

- achieve a legal statute for EUAs so that alliances can overcome challenges related to funding and governance by pooling their resources and capacities;
- establish a joint European degree awarded at the national level to alleviate the administrative burdens that HEIs face in setting up and delivering joint programmes;
- broaden the use of the European Student Card to all mobile higher education students in Europe to encourage and facilitate mobility.

The EUAs are considered central for realising these policy goals and represent a testing ground for institution-wide transnational cooperation. It is expected that tackling these complex challenges will in turn help to build deeper, more sustainable and more effective transnational alliances between universities. Still, the EUI is part of a broad mix of policy interventions in higher education. To what extent it can achieve its goals will depend on how the EUI interacts with other national, European and regional policies.

Against this backdrop, the EUI can be conceptualised as a policy instrument to bring about the transformation of higher education institutions across the EEA, the ERA and the EHEA. Policy instruments are governing tools that link policy formulation and implementation with the intention to achieve policy targets (Ali, 2013). As a policy instrument, the EUI aims to institutionalise and streamline transnational cooperation in higher education, to remove barriers to collaboration, bring about desired benefits, and ultimately achieve the higher education sector aims of the EEA. Current concerns related to the EUI mostly cover the sustainability of the policy (ACA, 2021; Andrée, 2021; Bruque, 2021). This makes the monitoring and impact assessment of the EUI an important component of policy sustainability and highlights the significance of this study.

1.3. Transnational collaborative partnerships in higher education

Transnational collaboration between universities can take many forms. Such international institutional arrangements can differ according to the number of participants (bilateral, multilateral), the temporal scope (short-term, indefinite), and the scope of activities they carry out (thematic/disciplinary, institutional) (Beerkens, 2002). Transnational cooperation between institutions can include a plethora of activities such as exchanging staff and students, developing teaching and curricula, setting up joint degree programmes, building teaching and research capacity through professional development of staff, exchanging knowledge, sharing resources, and collaborating on joint publications.

1.3.1. Definition and Trends

EUAs are in fact transnational collaborative partnerships in higher education. Transnational collaboration is 'a lasting relationship between two or more higher education institutions (HEIs) from different countries to achieve a shared goal or set of goals, where the HEIs remain legally independent, share benefits and management control over the performance of assigned tasks and make contributions in the education, research and third mission domain' (Todeva, 2005). This definition helps to demarcate the type of transnational partnership European Universities alliances engage in: they include multiple members, which cooperate on an equitable basis across national borders on a variety of activities (e.g. education, research and innovation) for an indefinite period (Beerkens and Derwende, 2007).

Before the start of the European Universities Initiative, DG EAC and JRC surveyed and mapped existing transnational collaborative partnerships involving European HEIs (Karvounaraki, Subramaniam et al., 2018). The survey looked at the characteristics, activities, drivers, advantages, and barriers of transnational institutional arrangements. This mapping exercise revealed several European trends when it comes to transnational cooperation in higher education, that were later confirmed by a survey done by the European University Association (Claeys-Kulik, Jørgensen et al., 2020).

- *History.* Transnational collaborative partnerships are a recent development. Half of such institutional arrangements have been established in the last decade and there has been an increase in such partnerships over the last few years, 'which might also be due to the European Universities Initiative' (Claeys-Kulik, Jørgensen et al., 2020) .
- *Geographical spread.* All the member countries of the European Union participate in transnational partnerships. Large EU Member States participate in more partnerships than small Member States. However, in relation to the number of higher education institutions and to students per country, small countries have more partnerships.
- *Size.* Partnerships vary in size from 2 to 16 members (sometimes even more). Most of such networks have, nevertheless, up to nine institutional members.
- *Institutional types.* All major types of institutions take part in such international arrangements (e.g. comprehensive universities, technical universities, public research organisations, and private enterprises). However, most international strategic partnerships are concluded with other HEIs similar in profile (90 %), followed by partnerships with HEIs with different but complementary profiles (37 %).
- *Level of cooperation.* Most partnerships are not taking place at the institutional level but rather at the departmental or faculty level.
- *Areas of cooperation.* Transnational collaborative partnerships pursue multiple goals. These are predominantly related to providing education, conducting joint research, pursuing innovation, and societal outreach.

- *Regional focus.* The most important region for transnational cooperation of European universities is the European Union (96 % of institutions put the EU first), followed by North America (45 %) and China (36 %).
- *Frameworks for collaboration.* Most HEIs use EU frameworks to collaborate with their international partners. By far, the most popular are Erasmus+ student and staff mobility (99 % of HEIs in sample reported using it), Horizon2020 collaborative research projects (84 %) and Erasmus+ cooperation projects (83 %). By comparison, only 56 % of HEIs in sample used national programmes for research collaboration and/or mobility as a framework for transnational cooperation.
- *Drivers and objectives.* Between 85 % and 95 % of HEIs cited the main drivers and/or objectives for transnational collaborative partnerships as: common/similar topics and interests, developing students' new skills, increasing access to EU/international funding, enhancing students' employability, existing contacts between staff members, increasing the quality and relevance of the educational offer, strong leadership and common vision, mobility of students, promoting links between higher education and research, and promoting synergies in education among partners.

1.3.2. Benefits of Transnational Partnerships between Higher Education Institutions

Transnational partnerships between higher education institutions are thought to offer a wide array of benefits. The ten most frequently reported benefits of transnational partnerships, in comparison with national partnerships or no partnerships at all, are: improved internationalisation, improved student skills, improved and diversified educational offerings, increased mobility of students and staff, improved students' employability, increased numbers of foreign students, increased level of scientific excellence, more interdisciplinary research, improved capacity of teaching staff, and improved research skills (Karvounaraki, Subramaniam et al., 2018).

While these self-reported benefits still need to be empirically documented, there is substantial evidence of a 'positive links between transnational cooperation in higher education and various economic and non-economic benefits' (Craciun and Orosz, 2018). Figure 1.1 summarises the findings of a systematic literature review carried out by Craciun and Orosz (2018) identifying existing quantitative research that positively links transnational cooperation in higher education with economic and non-economic outcomes at the individual, institutional and regional/national level.

Figure 1.1: Benefits of transnational cooperation in higher education

| Regional/national benefits | Institutional benefits | Individual benefits |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More and better patents • Economies of scale • Positive attitudes towards open borders and democracy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthened research and teaching capacity • More and better scientific output • Attractiveness to foreign academics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher likelihood of employment at home and abroad • Better foreign language proficiency • Increased mobility • More and better publications |

Source: Extracted from the systematic literature review conducted by Craciun and Orosz (2018)

The 2021 release of U-Multirank also shows that international cooperation between HEIs is key to strategic success, with universities that have set up such institutional arrangements performing better than those that have not. The novel U-Multirank Cooperation Index shows that international cooperation has positive effects on multiple performance dimensions (U-Multirank, 2021). HEIs that cooperate more are performing better in terms of:

- students graduating on time, as shown by 82 % of MA students of highly cooperative HEIs graduating on time compared to 73 % at other HEIs;
- graduates setting up companies, indicated by 32 companies per 1000 graduates at highly cooperative HEIs compared to 17 per 1000 graduates at other HEIs;
- research output, measured by the size-normalised publication output of highly competitive HEIs that is almost double of other HEIs.

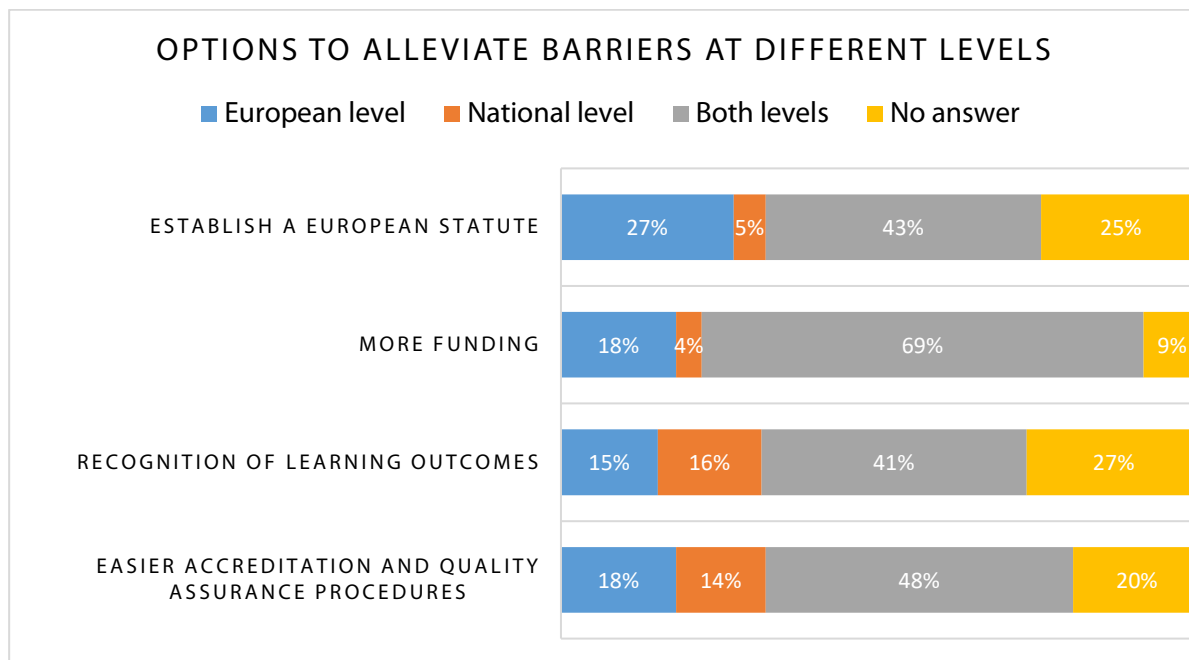
If transnational cooperation in higher education brings about so many benefits, why aren't more universities setting up such partnerships? Even though there is little research on the costs associated with transnational partnerships (Craciun and Orosz, 2018), HEIs face considerable challenges and barriers to cooperation. These will be discussed next.

1.3.3. Barriers and challenges to transnational partnerships between higher education institutions

Transnational institutional partnerships do not only incur benefits, but also barriers and challenges. Compared to national partnerships, they tend to lack sustainable funding, face administrative and legal barriers, struggle with complex funding instruments, lack resources to respond to multiple calls a year and to incentivise the university staff involved, lack common accreditation standards, and struggle working with different academic calendars or supporting student visas (Karvounaraki, Subramaniam et al., 2018). To alleviate such barriers in establishing transnational partnerships, HEIs suggest that both European and national levels should help to make accreditation and quality assurance procedures easier, simplify the recognition of prior learning outcomes, provide more funding, and establish a European statute on mapping transnational partnerships (see Figure 1.2) (Karvounaraki, Subramaniam et al., 2018).

Even if such barriers to transnational cooperation are removed, qualitative studies suggest that some important challenges remain. The two core challenges are: 'building symmetric relationships between partners and negotiating different viewpoints in terms of goals, pedagogy and quality of higher education in a manner that produces optimal outcomes for all parties involved' (Craciun and Orosz, 2018). The setup of the European Universities Initiative has the potential to overcome such challenges because it provides external funding to potentially set up symmetric relationships between members (avoiding a dynamic where some alliance members are funders and others are funded) and requires partners to propose a joint long-term strategy for the alliance as part of the application criteria (encouraging alliance members to negotiate different viewpoints in advance).

Figure 1.2: Responsibility for alleviating barriers to transnational cooperation according to HEIs



Source: Karvounaraki et al. (2018)

1.3.4. Factors influencing collaborative outcomes of transnational university alliances

Transnational university alliances aim to provide benefits to their members that exceed the costs of membership. But what are the factors that shape the capacity of such university alliances to create collaborative advantages for their members? By collaborative advantage, we understand the creation of ‘opportunities for mutual advance, mutual learning, and positive organisational transformations’ (Gunn and Mintrom, 2013). The collaborative advantages that a HEI receives from being involved in an alliance, will depend on institutional factors such as the institution’s history, context, leadership, and capacity to absorb relevant knowledge. However, Gunn and Mintrom (2013) identified five core factors that will influence the net benefits of engaging in cross-border institutional networks, which in turn influence the long-term sustainability of the alliance as a whole.

- *The alliance’s strategic intent:* Alliances must have a clear rationale that aims to deliver benefits that individual members would be incapable of obtaining on their own or through other simpler institutional arrangements.
- *The comparative status of member universities:* The member composition should reflect the alliance’s strategic intent and manifest a commitment to the advancement of all members towards achieving that goal.
- *The opportunities created for mutual learning among members:* Alliances must create avenues for stakeholders (students, faculty, staff, leader, and management) to make connections that they could not have made otherwise, so they can engage in mutual learning and knowledge-generating activities. In fact, ‘[a]s long as these opportunities for mutual learning and the successes they produce are well-documented, the rewards of alliance will be clear and commitments to membership will increase in their strength’ (Gunn and Mintrom, 2013).
- *The salience of the alliance inside member universities:* 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.

- *The on-going relevance of the alliance and its capacity for change:* In the long run, alliances must remain relevant and respond to the evolving needs of their members. In turn, this means that alliances have to continuously change to achieve collectively desired goals. Frequent communication between the alliance leadership and member universities represents the hallmark of a well-managed alliance. Thus, impactful alliances adapt to their changing environment, but also facilitate transformations of their context: ‘Over time, it is common to see changes in technology, changes in relevant national policy settings, changes in global norms, and geopolitical shifts. Indeed, in some instances, we should expect the actions of global university alliances to precipitate such changes’ (Gunn and Mintrom, 2013).

1.4. Overview and methodology

To meet the research objectives of the study, we employ a mixed-methods approach that extensively uses existing data and research combined with novel insights from stakeholders and higher education experts. To meet the aims and objectives outlined above, the study provides the following results.

- *Assessment of selection criteria and procedures:* The study assesses how representative the current selection of universities is for the overall population of higher education institutions in the EEA. The study uses the ETER, U-Multirank, and Erasmus+ datasets to provide insights into the makeup of selected alliance members by considering their general profile (age, size, scope of activities, research orientation) and performance (teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer, international orientation). The analysis aims to reveal any eventual bias introduced by the selection criteria and procedures, and to help the EP understand whether these criteria and procedures are fit for purpose.
- *Assessment of existing EUAs:* The study assesses challenges facing existing university alliances and the added value these alliances bring to different higher education stakeholders. Specific attention is given to studies on the governance, funding, student benefits, levels of collaboration and European added value of EUAs. To achieve this aim, the study reviews existing evidence from academic and grey literature on EUAs by using a systematic literature review methodology. Considering the novelty of the initiative, the body of literature on the topic is limited. To account for this limitation, the study also uses focus groups to collect stakeholder perspectives on the benefits and challenges of EUAs and uses existing datasets to capture the results achieved by EUAs. The analysis reveals early warning/early opportunity signs that can help the EP understand the externalities (both positive and negative) of the EUI.
- *Assessment of the future of EUAs:* The study assesses opportunities and threats related to possible scenarios on the future of EUAs, based on analysis of policy visions, stakeholder expectations and expert input. Transition studies have shown that innovations, such as the EUI, and related actor strategies and policies can create path dependencies, which in turn can become irreversible. Starting from EUAs’ stated missions, the EC communications outlining its vision for the EEA, and forecast studies on the future of the EEA, the ERA and the EHEA, the study develops and outlines three scenarios for the EEA and related pathways for EUAs. Higher education experts presented with these emergent pathways were asked to assess strategic opportunities and threats that these scenarios entail for different stakeholders (students and staff, universities, governments, higher education systems) on different key issues (funding, governance, social inclusion, quality). The analysis reveals path dependencies inherent in different scenarios, that can help the EP understand the future direction of the EUI and anticipate opportunities and risks associated with them.

Finally, based on the above findings, the study integrates the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats uncovered in the evaluation of selection criteria and procedures, the assessment of benefits and challenges of EUAs, and the path dependencies created by the EUJ.

2. EVALUATION OF SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCEDURES

KEY FINDINGS

- The selection criteria of the consecutive calls have not changed substantially, but the profiles of selected alliances have changed. Most likely, self-selection driven by perceived chances of being selected had an impact.
- Tight deadlines and demanding administrative procedures affected the selection process of the first call. A less challenging procedure in the second and third call attracted a more diverse body of HEIs to engage in an EUA proposal.
- As intended, the geographical diversity criteria improved the geographical diversity of the EUAs.
- Prior participation in transnational networks has a positive impact on the chances of participating in an EUA.
- Large HEIs that are comprehensive and are located in the south and north of Europe have a better chance of participating in an EUA than small, specialised HEIs, from western and central/east Europe.

2.1. Context and aims

This chapter assesses the selection criteria and procedures for the three calls for proposals of the European Universities Initiative. The assessment consists of two parts. In the first part, the selection criteria (eligibility and award criteria) are described and compared between the three calls (see Section 2.2). The second part considers the selection criteria effect on the composition of the EUAs selected (see Section 2.3). Since data on rejected applications are not available, a comprehensive evaluation of the selection criteria is not possible. Available data allow for analysing how representative the current selection of institutions are of the overall population of HEIs in the EEA. The chapter concludes by evaluating the selection criteria and procedures based on the data analysed and the insights gathered from existing literature on the EUI and focus groups (see Section 2.4).

2.2. Criteria and procedures used in the EUI calls for proposals

The European Universities Initiative intends to set up transnational alliances between universities to achieve the aims of the EEA and the ERA: ‘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’. (Council of the European Union, 2021) To encourage universities to become part of such institutional arrangements, the EC has developed a funding scheme and has published four calls for proposals in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022.⁴

In brief, the criteria for participation in the European Universities Initiative are that the alliance:

⁴ The report focuses on the results of the first three calls of proposals as they have been concluded. The fourth call for proposals has been published on the 30 September 2022 and the results will only be available in 2023. For more information see: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/news/opening-of-2023-erasmus-european-universities-call-comes-with-record-budget>

1. Includes at least three HEIs from three EU Member States or third countries associated to the Erasmus+ Programme;
2. Includes cooperating partners that come from different parts of Europe;
3. Has stable and sufficient financial resources to implement the projects and are not in a condition that excludes them from receiving EU funding (such as bankruptcy, breach of tax regulations, commitment of fraud, corruption or other);
4. Has a joint long-term strategy for education with, where possible, links to research and innovation to drive systemic, structural and sustainable impact at all levels of their institutions;
5. Creates a European inter-university 'campus' where,
 - students and research staff enjoy seamless mobility (physical, virtual or blended) to study, train, teach, do research, work or share services at cooperating partner institutions;
 - transdisciplinary and transnational teams of students, academics, and external stakeholders tackle big issues facing Europe (such as climate protection, digitalisation, health, democracy, migration, security);
 - students can design their own flexible curricula, leading to a European degree;
 - practical and/or work-based experience is provided to foster an entrepreneurial mindset and develop civic engagement;
 - the student body reflects the social, economic and cultural diversity of the population. (European Commission, 2020).
6. Has a broader impact by acting as a role model and creating best practices for other higher education institutes, promoting European values, act as change agent in the green and digital transitions, boost excellence and contribute to regional development.

The calls have two types of criteria: eligibility criteria and award criteria.

The *eligibility criteria* for the first two calls allow applications from any higher education institution holding a valid Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). In addition, any public/private organisation active in the field of education and training, research and innovation or in the world of work can join the alliance as an associated partner. The third call broadened the eligibility criteria to include legal entities (public or private bodies) established in EU Member States (including overseas countries and territories), non-EU countries associated with the Erasmus+ Programme (including EEA countries), and countries negotiating for an association agreement to the Erasmus+ programme where that agreement enters into force before the grant signature.

All three calls for proposals outline the same key cooperation principles or *award criteria*.

- *Geographical balance*: Alliance members should represent different parts of Europe and have at least three HEIs from three different EU Member States or other Erasmus programme countries.
- *Relevance*: The proposal should address and progress towards the long-term vision of the action and indicate the extent to which the added value generated through its transnationality, in particular for students, contributes to regional development. For example, describe how the involvement of the alliance's members in the development and implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies will benefit other higher education institutions, mainly of the European Union, but also beyond, by driving excellence.
- *Quality of the proposal and implementation*: This covers issues related to the consistency between aims and actions and focus on the EUI ambition (education innovation, student and staff mobility, engagement with stakeholders, diversity and quality assurance).

- *Quality of the cooperation arrangements:* This includes the structure and governance structure of the alliance, the complementarity of partners and reduction of administrative barriers.
- *Sustainability and dissemination:* A long-term strategy (including financial aspects) should serve as a role model with a clear dissemination plan and use open science.

Based on these general criteria, the EC selected 41 transnational university alliances after the first two calls for proposals involving 279 higher education institutions from 27 EU Member States and Iceland, Serbia, Norway, Turkey, and the UK.

Compared to the previous calls for proposals, the 2021 call brought some new developments in terms of which alliances can be funded and how the funding occurs.

- *Eligibility criteria:* Entities in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) not associated with the Erasmus+ programme can become associated partners in an alliance (without EU funding).
- *Funding:* Funding is for a four-year period and is linked to the number of HEIs in the proposed alliance.
- *Award criteria:* The criteria for the two sections (topics) of the third call differ slightly. The criteria generally resembled the award criteria for the first and second call but were organised differently. The main categories are relevance, quality (comprising the quality of the proposal and the quality of the cooperation arrangements as well as the geographical balance), and impact (comprising sustainability and dissemination). They focused more on long-term vision (in relevance) and long-term strategy (in project design and implementation).
- *Objective:* In principle, the award criteria are similar to the ones for the first and second call, but primarily focused on continuing and intensifying the existing alliances. The criteria were applied differently from the previous calls: one alliance has not been selected for continuation. The new criteria and (funding) arrangements have also led existing alliances to increase the number of full members. The change in status of one country (UK) has also led to the 'demotion' of a few members from full members to associate members.

The full list of criteria for the 2022 call, for both the new alliances and the existing ones is included in Annex 1.

Formal criteria have not changed much between the different calls, but self-selection appears to have had an impact on the composition of the alliances. Experts and practitioners in the focus groups report self-selection was an important driver for forming the alliances of the first and second call, but not so prominent in the third call. This is also reflected in the different profiles of the funded alliances. The third call, however, resulted in selecting four new alliances with a different profile than the ones selected in the first two calls.

With regard to self-selection, experts in the focus groups stated, that one reason to engage in an alliance was the perceived chances of being selected. Each HEI has a unique view on whether the benefits of participation outweigh the costs of writing a proposal, the uncertainty of selection, and the cost of implementing the actions proposed. The first call was developed in a context, that initially focused on a very limited number of alliances, comprising excellent research universities of Europe. This flagship approach evolved into a more 'open' call, but the very tight deadlines and extensive administrative burdens had a negative impact on the perceptions of the success of the extended group of eligible HEIs.

Participants in the focus groups also noted, that the long lists of criteria to be fulfilled and checkboxes to be ticked has a counterproductive effect on the intent to develop a diverse European landscape of excellent yet inclusive HEIs. There is no incentive for HEIs and EUAs to create a distinct profile (both

activities and performance), as the EU wants the applicant to contribute to all of the EU higher education and other policy objectives: they must be excellent and inclusive, international and regionally engaged, high profile in research and highly engaged in innovative teaching and learning, and contribute to the digital and green transition.

These expert views are corroborated by a member survey conducted by the European Universities Association (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020) that covered 219 HEIs from 34 EHEA countries and investigated the reasons why universities did not participate in the call for proposals issued by the Commission. Their findings showed that the top five motivations for not participating had to do with a lack of resources and difficulties in finding partners for setting up an alliance. The most frequently cited reason for not participating was the short timeframe for application, which meant that institutions had only four months between the issue of the call for proposals and the deadline. Other reasons mentioned refer to lacking necessary resources like staff and infrastructure, financial resources for co-funding, and staff capacity.

The same survey shows that most institutions that answered the EUI call for proposals received some type of external support for their application. They reported external support consisting of information sessions and training organised by the European Commission, by the institution's own country, or by a country of a partner in the alliance. Some institutions also received some extra funding from national governments to develop the application or to (partly) cover the costs related to setting up the network after a successful bid (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020).

2.3. Description of the European Universities alliances selected

2.3.1. General characteristics

This section describes HEIs that participate in EUAs (for data sources see Annex 2). The analysis aims to reveal if and to what extent the sample of the participating HEIs differs from the overall population of HEIs in Europe. The analysis will focus on the geographical balance, the balance between larger- and smaller-sized HEIs, and the balance between the disciplines represented in the EUAs. To get a more specific insight in the HEIs that form the EUAs, the analysis includes further characteristics of HEIs, such as their performance in research, teaching and learning or knowledge transfer.

In this context, several comparisons will be done. The baseline for comparison is the overall population of HEIs in Europe, compiled with the help of the ETER database. From this database, we drew four distinctive samples. Each sample refers to one of the calls for the EUI/EUAs. Call 1 stands for the HEIs selected in the first call from 2019 and Call 2 for those from the second call from 2020. For the 2021 call, we created two samples. Call 3 includes the HEIs that are new participants in the already existing EUAs. Call 4 represents all HEIs that participate in the four new EUAs that have been selected in the third call. We only included the full partners of the EUAs in the sampling, and not the associated partners. All these samples will be compared to the overall population, and among themselves. In addition, we will also compare the EUAs for a few selected indicators. Finally, we compare the selection of HEIs from the first two calls, and differences between the alliances. The comparison uses a set of general HEI characteristics: institutional age, number of enrolled students, scope of educational activities, and research orientation.

2.3.2. Geographical balance

In all three calls for the EUAs, the geographical spread of the proposed alliances is an important eligibility and award criterion. In terms of eligibility, applications must propose an EUA that has at least three institutions from the Member States and associated countries. As an award criterion, EUAs are

requested to achieve a wide geographical coverage, i.e. they should preferably include HEIs from all European regions. Also, in their applications, the EUAs must demonstrate how their geographical spread links to the ambitions of the European Universities Initiative.

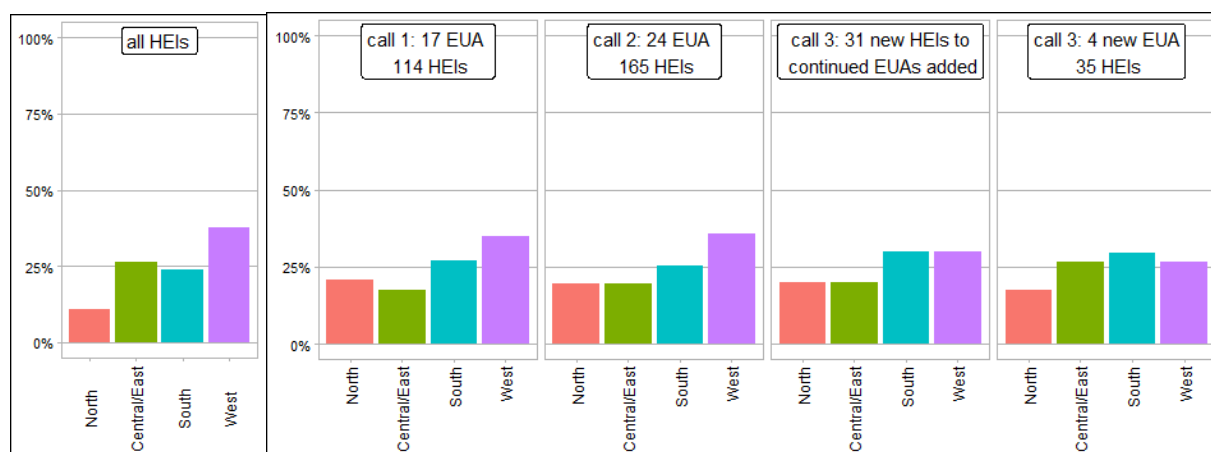
These four European regions include the following Member States and associated countries (in brackets):

- *North*: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Sweden (Iceland, Norway);
- *Centre/East*: Bulgaria, Czechia, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine);
- *South*: Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain (Holy See, San Marino, Turkey);
- *West*: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands (Andorra, Switzerland, United Kingdom).

Of the overall population of HEIs, almost 40% of European HEIs come from the West region. The Central/East and South region each have around 25% of the HEIs. A little more than 10% come from the North region.

The sample of HEIs selected in the first call shows that relatively more HEIs from the South and the North regions participate in EUAs than HEIs from the West and Center/East region. The outcomes for the three other calls differ slightly, but here too the overrepresentation of institutions from the North and South is visible.

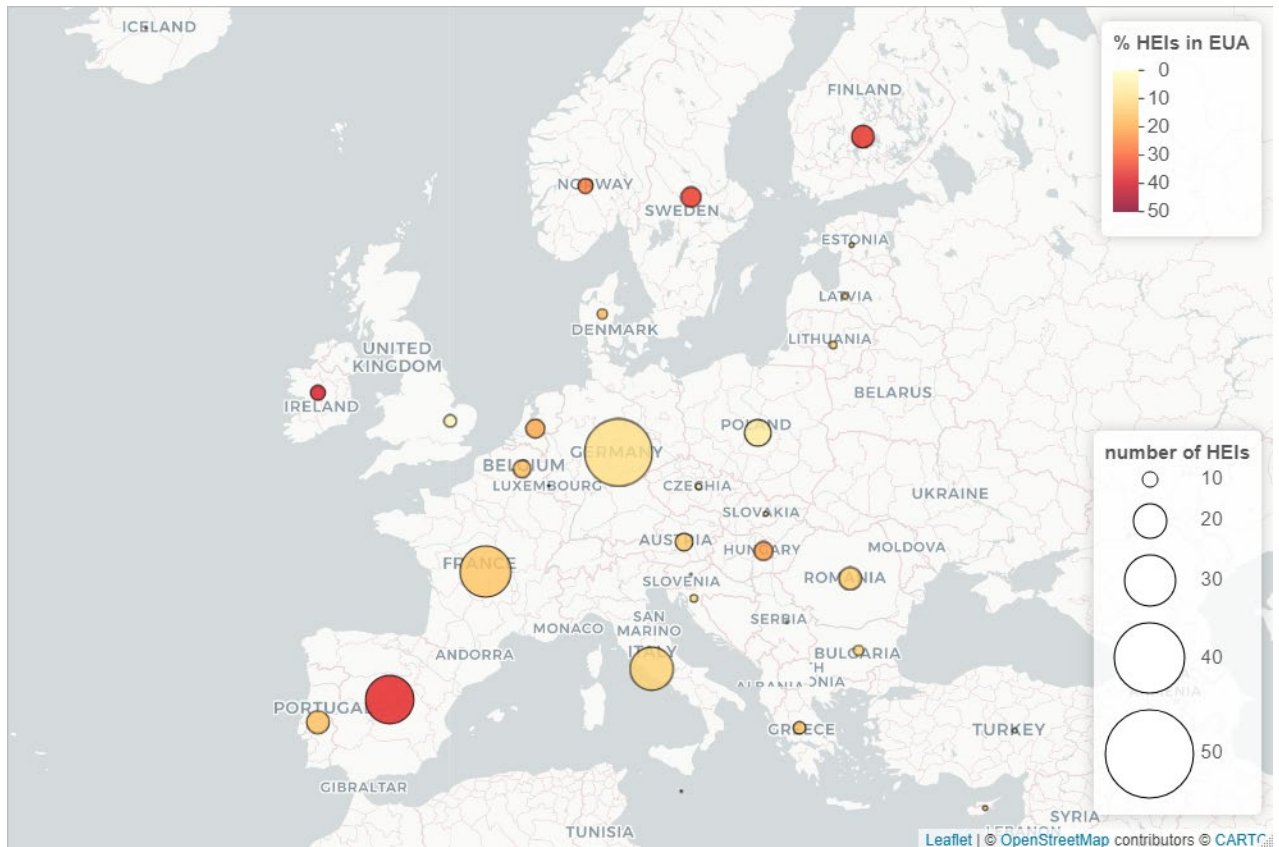
Figure 2.1: Location of HEIs by region, %



Source: ETER database; Authors' calculation

We also looked at the extent to which Member States participate, i.e. the percentage of HEIs of a Member State that participate in an EUA. From the results, it is clear that a high absolute number of participating institutions does not stand for widespread participation of the HEIs in EUAs in that country. Figure 2.2 shows, for example, that in Spain a substantial number of HEIs participate, and that the participation in an EUA is a widespread phenomenon, that includes around 40 % of all Spanish higher education institutions. However, Member States, such as Germany, with a large higher education system might have a comparatively high number of HEIs that participate, but these only represent a small percentage of all HEIs in the country.

Figure 2.2: Absolute and relative number of HEIs in an EUA by country

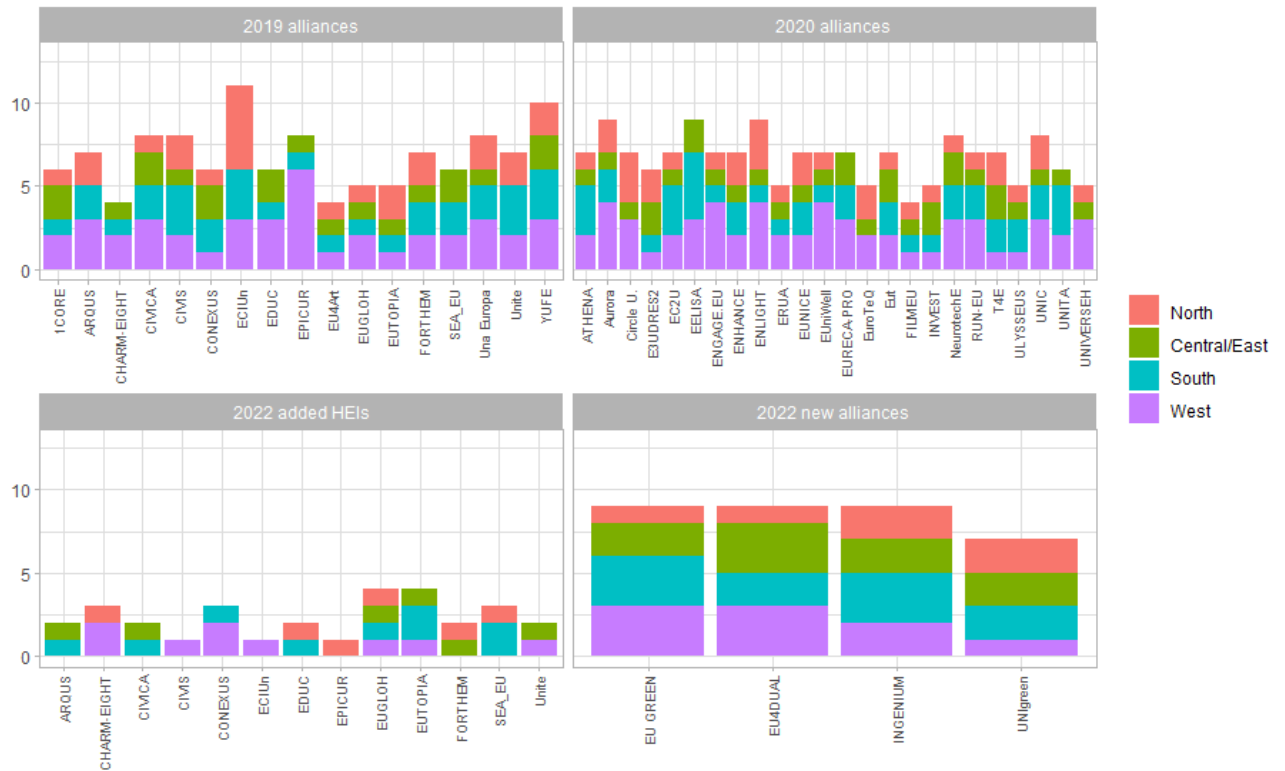


Source: ETER database, Authors' calculations.

Note: The size of the circle indicates the absolute number of HEIs in an EUA. The colour of the circles indicates the percentage of HEIs in an EUA in the country.

Most of the alliances include all four European regions. In the first call, six alliances had members from three regions. Most of them did not have a member from the Northern region (see Figure 2.3). In the second call, five alliances had partners from three regions. In the third call, all new alliances in the third call have members from four regions. Some existing alliances added partners from the missing regions in that third call.

Figure 2.3: Composition of the EUAs by region and call, absolute numbers of HEIs



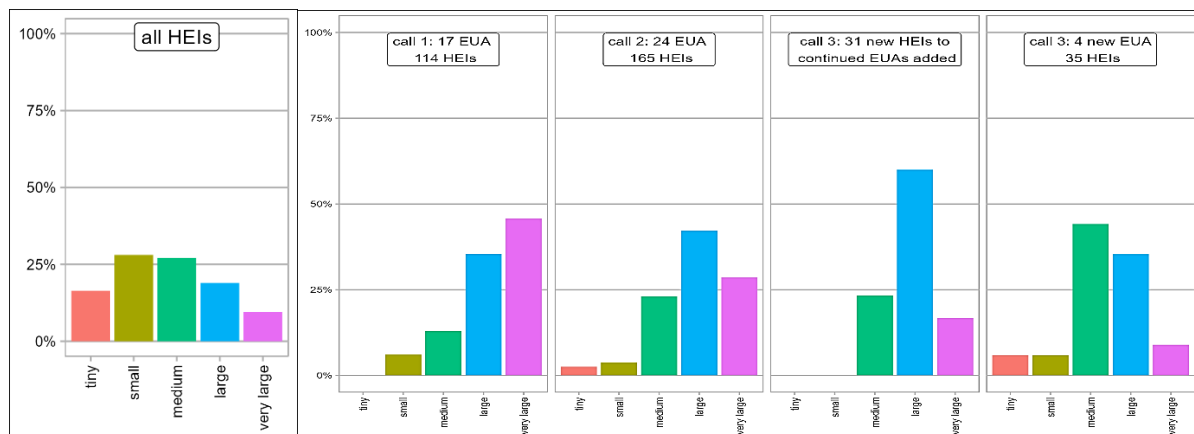
Source: ETER database, Authors' calculation

2.3.3. Size

To measure the size of a HEI we looked at the number of enrolled students. We assigned each HEI of the overall population of HEIs to one of five categories:

- Tiny HEIs: less than 500 students;
- Small HEIs: 500 – 2 500 students;
- Medium HEIs: 2 500 – 10 000 students;
- Large HEIs: 10 000 – 25 000 students;
- Very large HEIs: more than 25 000 students.

Figure 2.4: Size of HEIs, %



Source: ETER database; Authors' calculations.

For all three calls, we find that large and very large HEIs are more likely to participate in an EUA compared to the other three categories (see Figure 2.4). While the percentage of very large HEIs decreases significantly in later calls, the participation of large HEIs even increases. Small and medium-sized HEIs that make up most of the overall population of HEIs, do hardly take part in the selected EUAs. Call 1 resulted in 10 out of 17 alliances with HEIs that differ in institutional size. Of the other seven, four alliances comprised predominantly very large HEIs, two predominantly large HEIs, and one did include mostly medium-sized HEIs. Call 2 resulted in five alliances with similarly sized HEIs: two with predominantly very large HEIs, two with large HEIs, and one with mainly medium-sized HEIs.

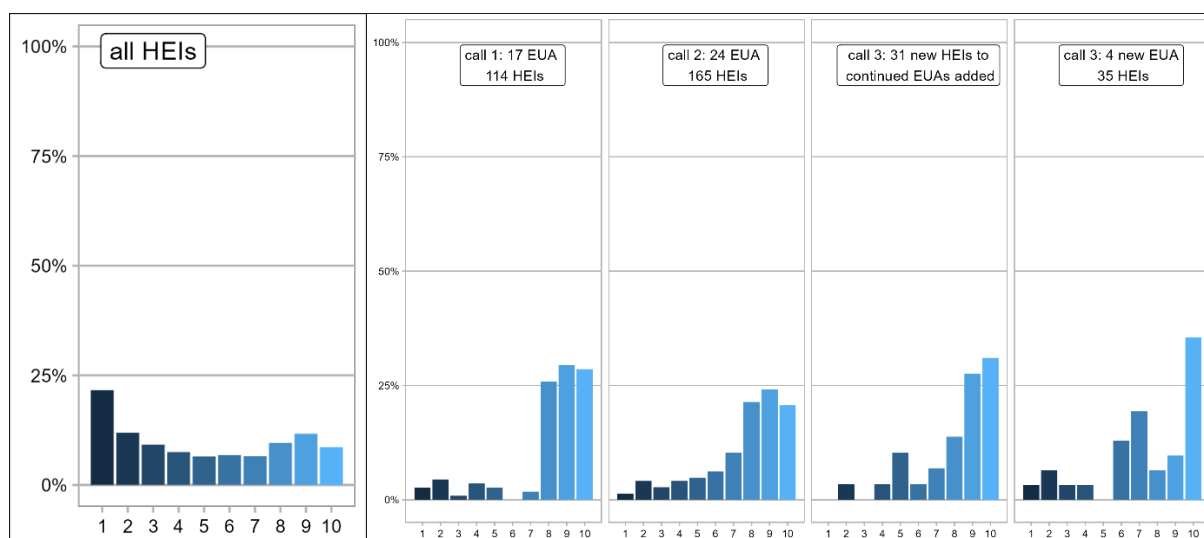
2.3.4. Disciplinary balance

We used three indicators to measure to what extent disciplines are represented in the HEIs participating in the EUAs.

The first indicator is the number of fields of study, in which students are enrolled. The indicator represents the scope of the institution’s educational activities. In a second step, we also analysed how strongly disciplines are represented in the EUAs and determined the total number of enrolled students in each of the disciplinary fields within an alliance.

Results for the number of fields of study clearly reflect that the alliances are dominated by comprehensive HEIs (see Figure 2.5). From the first call, around 80 % of the HEIs provide programs in at least eight fields of study. Also, for the other calls, we find that the share of comprehensive HEIs (that offer programs in at least eight fields of study) is considerably higher than in the overall population of HEIs. Specialised HEIs that offer programs in less than three fields of study, which are the majority of HEIs in Europe, are hardly participating in the EUAs.

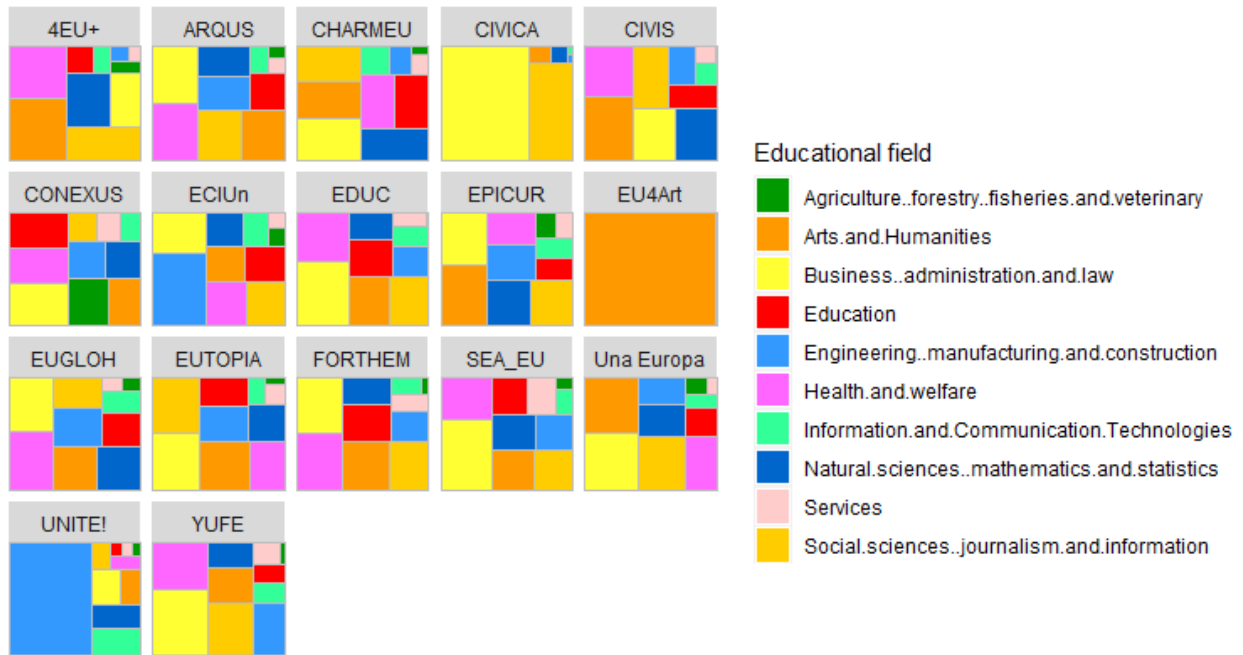
Figure 2.5: Number of fields of study in which students are enrolled, %



Source: ETER Database; Authors’ calculations.

Looking at the composition of an EUA in terms of how many fields of study they could offer and how many students participate, we find that the majority of the EUAs from the first call covers all fields of study (see Figure 2.6). From this call, CIVICA, Unite and EU4Art are exceptions: CIVICA specialises in the social sciences and business and management studies, Unite in Engineering, and EU4Art covers only the arts and humanities.

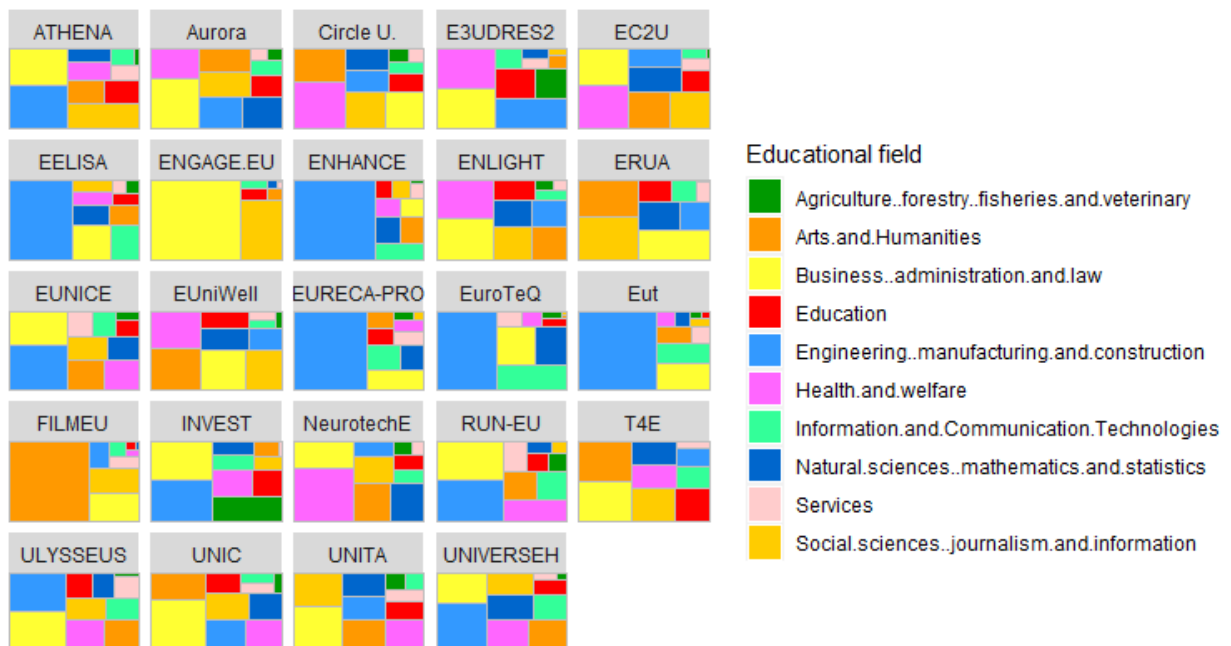
Figure 2.6: Disciplinary focus: distribution of students by educational field; Call 1



Source: ETER database ; Authors' calculations.

Note: The size of the coloured squares represents the percentage of students enrolled in each educational field.

Figure 2.7: Disciplinary focus: distribution of students by educational field; Call 2

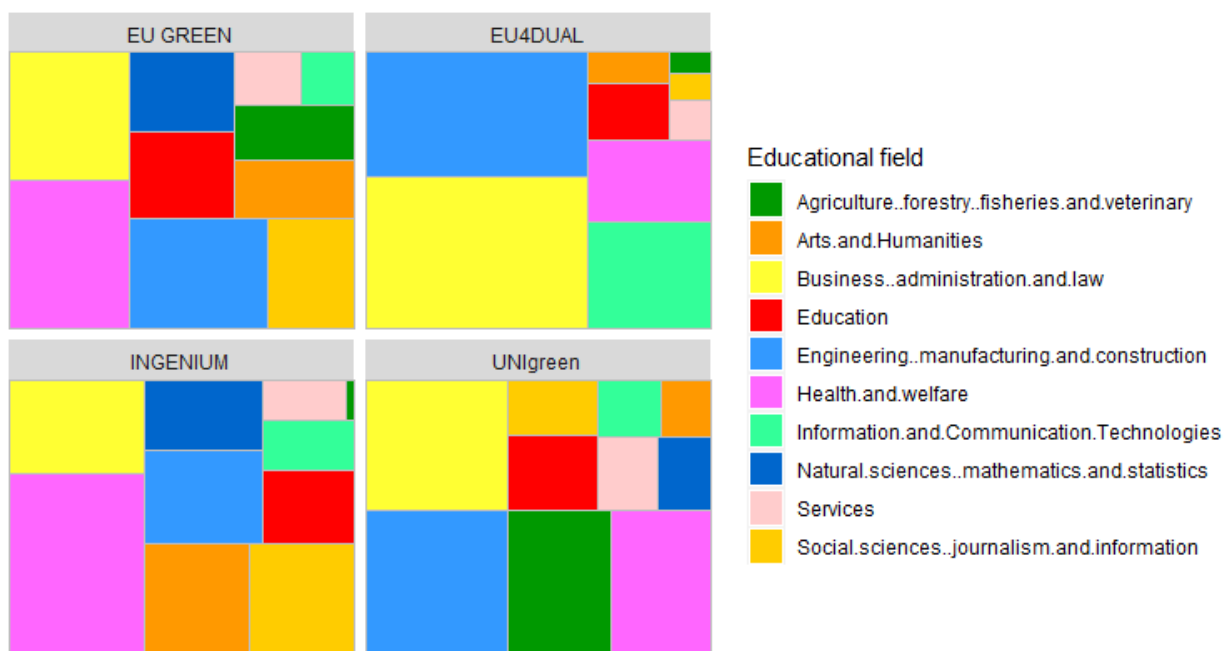


Source: ETER database ; Authors' calculations.

Note: The size of the coloured squares represents the percentage of students enrolled in each educational field.

Also, for the second call we find that most EUAs offer programs in all fields of study (see Figure 2.7). A difference to the first call is that five alliances have a strong focus on engineering (EELISA, ENHANCE, EURECA-PRO, EuroTeQ, Eut) and five other alliances focus on engineering and ‘business administration and law’ (ATHENA, EUNICE, INVEST, RUN-EU, ULYSSEUS, UNIVERSEH). Other alliances with a strong focus on one discipline are ENGAGE.EU, dominated by business studies, and FILMEU, which has a strong emphasis on the arts and humanities. Of the new alliances selected in the third call, three have a comprehensive scope similar to most alliances selected in the first two calls, and one has a focus on engineering and ‘business, administration and law’ (see Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8: Disciplinary focus: distribution of students by educational field; Call 3, Topic 2: new alliances



Source: ETER database; Authors' calculations.

Note: The size of the coloured squares represents the percentage of students enrolled in each educational field.

The results for these indicators for the disciplinary coverage of the EUI give a first insight in some HEIs attracted to the European Universities Initiative. We can only report on the HEIs selected for the initiative and not on the unsuccessful applicants. It seems that the initiative in the first and second call primarily attracted large and comprehensive HEIs. This resulted in a high share of alliances with comprehensive fields of study. The second call established also more specialised alliances, especially in the engineering and management sciences. Still, these alliances also included mostly HEIs with a comprehensive offer of fields of study. The first three calls resulted in only a few alliances of specialised HEIs, i.e. offering programs in less than four fields of study.

2.3.5. Drivers for establishment of and participation in an EUA

While the results in Section 2.3.1 show what type of HEIs has been attracted by the European Universities Initiative, it remains unclear, why the current set of alliances has been evolving, i.e. why some HEIs agreed to collaborate and establish an EUA. The literature often answers the questions what factors drive HEIs into transnational collaborations by referring to the expected benefits to the

institutions. The mapping report of the JRC distinguishes four categories of drivers for participation of higher education institutions in transnational partnerships (Karvounaraki et al., 2018, p. 7):

- *Academic*: e.g. an interest in including an international dimension into education, research and innovation;
- *Economic*: e.g. an interest in increasing revenues or the availability of infrastructure;
- *Political*: e.g. strengthening European identity;
- *Social and cultural factors*: e.g. supporting citizenship development.

Expected benefits have proven to be strong drivers for transnational collaborations in which participants have information on the costs and potential outcomes of working together. The European Universities alliances, however, are a new instrument for multi-institutional transnational collaboration, for which the HEIs have no information available. Because the European initiative applies a bottom-up approach that leaves it to the HEIs to fill in or enact the idea of the EUA (Cino Pagliarello, 2022), HEIs have difficulties in foreseeing benefits related to the EUAs. Rather, HEIs can also expect large transaction costs when establishing EUAs because they must agree on shared objectives in education, research and innovation, and create shared governance structures that assure the day-to-day functioning and the sustainability of the alliance. In the following, we assume that only HEIs with sufficient resources and management capacity to meet the additional challenges wanted to participate in an EUA.

This assumption is supported by our findings on the size and disciplinary balance of participating HEIs. These institutions' larger size and broad scope of fields of study can indicate a greater availability of resources and managerial capacity, which makes it easier to engage in establishing an EUA. The strong representation of large, slightly older, and research-oriented HEIs in EUAs can therefore be partly explained by the fact that they have more capacity to develop the new structures.

Regarding the question why specific HEIs team up as an EUA, the recent analyses of Lambrechts and Cavallaro (2022) point to three drivers that underlie this process: looking for similarity; looking for complementarity; and looking for 'familiar' partners. Given the high transaction costs that can arise with the establishment of EUAs, working with already known and trusted partners is a way to reduce uncertainties and costs. Therefore, it is plausible that when looking for partners for a 'new' alliance, HEIs prefer institutions they already cooperate with and with which they already have a trust-based relationship.

A systematic literature review on transnational cooperative partnerships between HEIs found that building symmetric relationships and negotiating different viewpoints are the biggest challenges faced when setting up such institutional arrangements (Craciun and Orosz, 2019). Thus, the assumption is that HEIs that already have collaborated in established transnational partnerships or networks are more likely to find each other when composing a new alliance. Since they know each other and have worked together, it is also assumed that it will take less effort to write a good application for such HEIs than for HEIs that have not previously cooperated.

To check whether these assumptions make sense, we look at the relationships of participating HEIs from several angles. We first look at the international orientation of the HEIs. And their scores on an (international) cooperation index, developed by U-Multirank. Previous engagement and cooperation will be addressed in comparing HEIs on two new indicators. The final perspective in this is the comparison of student and staff mobility, using the Erasmus+ data.

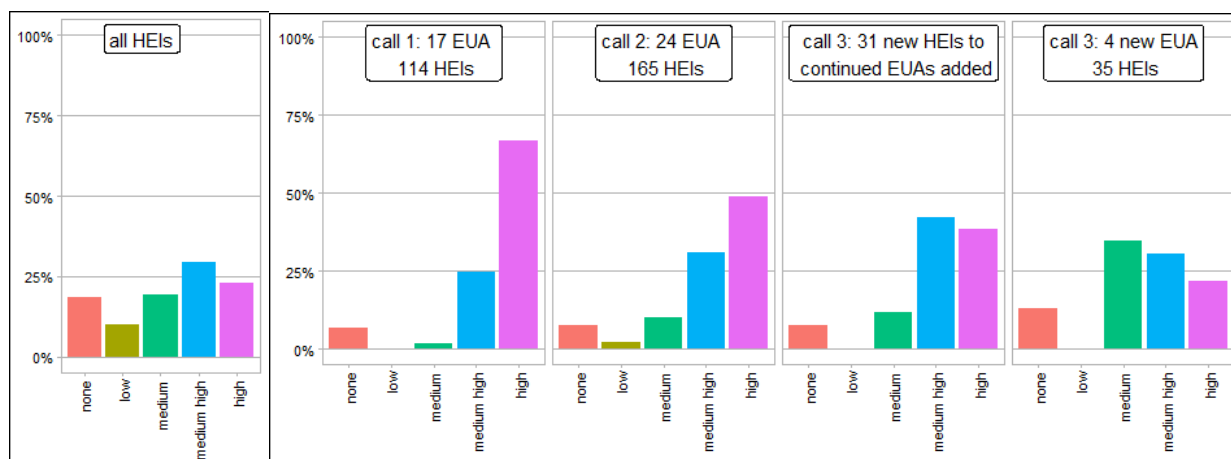
2.3.6. Prior experience with cooperation

Setting up and participating in an EUA requires considerable transaction costs. We assume that HEIs with more experience in cooperation are more likely to join a EUA. To analyse the cooperation experience, we use the U-Multirank Cooperation Index. The U-Multirank Cooperation Index is a composite indicator based on the scores that institutions achieve for cooperation activities with external actors. These external actors are either other higher education institutions, business and industry or other societal and governmental organisations. In addition, cooperative engagements can take place at a regional, national or international level.

Scoring high on this indicator suggests that the HEI is well prepared to engage in a cooperation. For this analysis, five categories of the level of cooperation have been created:

- None: no cooperation
- Low: between 0 and 0.35 (0.5 times the median score)
- Medium: between 0.35 and 0.7 (median score)
- Medium high: between 0.7 and 1.04
- High: higher than 1.04 (1.5 times the median score)

Figure 2.9: Level of cooperation of HEIs



Source: U-Multirank database; Authors' calculations.

The U-Multirank Cooperation Index analysis indicates that HEIs that participate in an EUA score on average better than the general HEI population (0.98 versus 0.60). Figure 2.9 shows that the proportion of HEIs in the 'high' category is for all calls, except for the new 2022 EUAs, higher than the proportion in general. In the new alliances the proportion of medium cooperating HEIs is larger than in general.

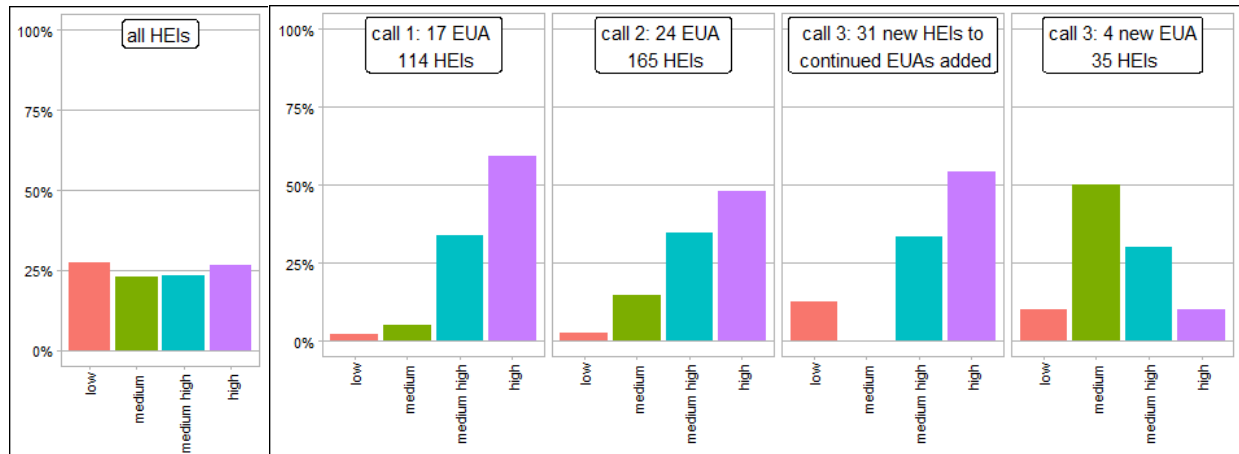
2.3.7. International orientation

A key cooperation principle outlined in the criteria for selection is that alliances must develop a European inter-university 'campus' where students and staff enjoy seamless mobility to study, teach and do research. For this reason, we expect that HEIs that already attract international degree-seeking students and cooperate internationally in research, are more likely to join EUAs than other HEIs.

To compare the international orientation of the selected HEIs against other HEIs, we use two indicators from the U-Multirank database: international co-publications and international student body. A higher score on international study body indicates that a HEI is more internationally oriented in teaching and

learning than a HEI with a lower score. Likewise, a higher score on international co-publications indicates that a HEI is more internationally oriented in research.

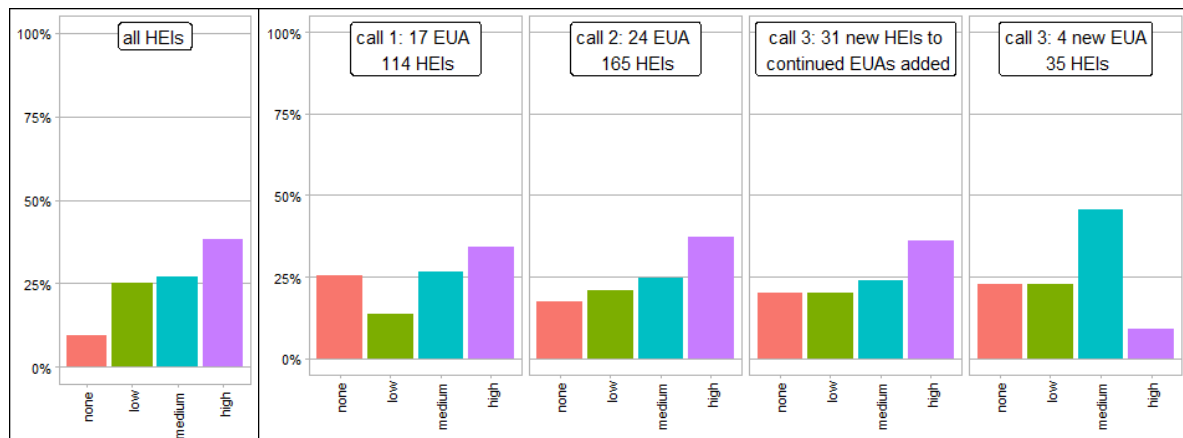
Figure 2.10: International co-publications of HEIs



Source: U-Multirank database; Authors' calculations.

Notes: The bars show the percentage of the HEIs in U-Multirank (overall and in the EUAs by call) in the categories specified. Low: less than 35.3, medium: 35.3 – 47; medium high: 47 – 58.8; high: higher than 58.8.

Figure 2.11: International student body of HEIs that are in a EUA



Source: U-Multirank database; Authors' calculations.

Notes: The bars show the percentage of the HEIs in U-Multirank (overall and in the EUAs by call) in the categories specified. None = 0; Low: less than 3.25 %, medium: 3.25 % – 9.76; high: higher than 9.76 %.

Figure 2.10 and Figure 2.11 compare the international orientation of institutions participating in an EUA with the international orientation performance of all institutions in the U-Multirank dataset. As regards international co-publications, the difference between EUAs and other HEIs is statistically significant (58.6 versus 45). For the international student body, the results of the comparison are inconclusive.

2.3.8. Prior engagement in international networks

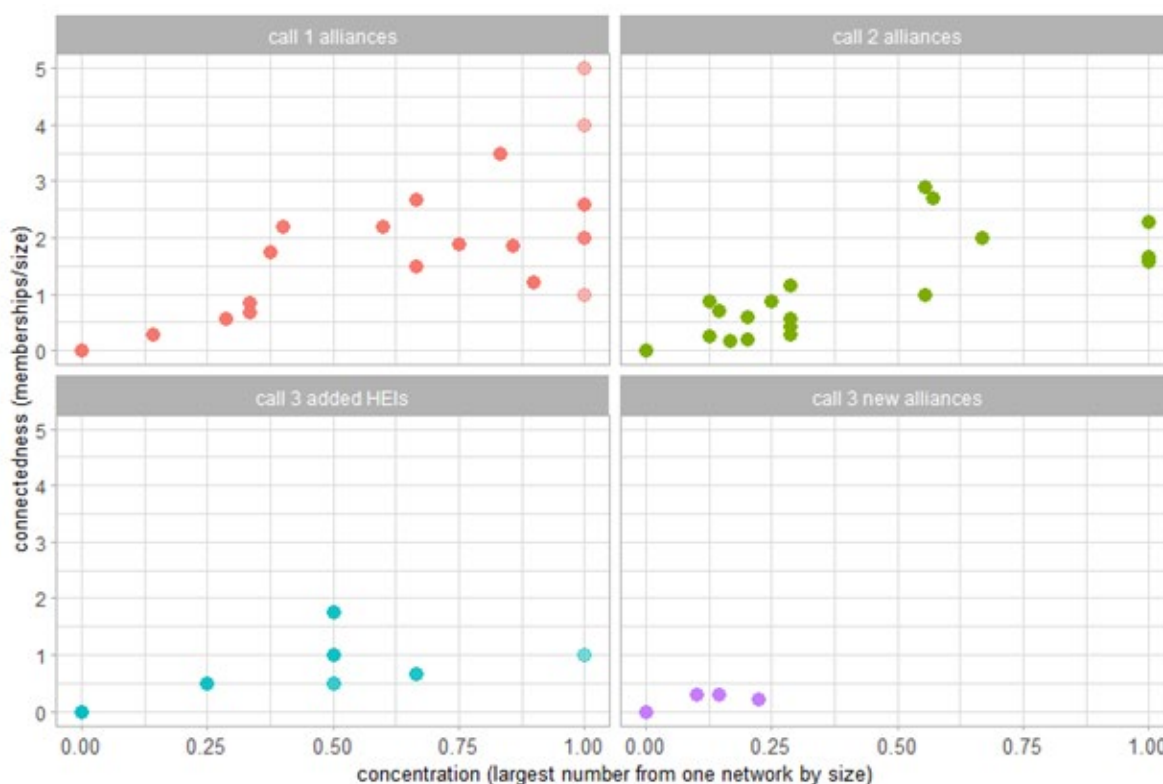
'Ideas do not come out of the blue' (Corbett, 2005, p.8), neither do European Universities alliances. There is already a growing consensus among scholars that alliance formation in the EUI is based on 'pre-existing higher education and research partnerships, while at the same time experimenting to foster a diversity of institutional forms to achieve the ambitious goal of creating 'European Universities'' (Charret and Chankseliani, 2022). Such pre-existing ties include networks as diverse as the League of

European Research Universities (LERU), the Coimbra Group, the Conference of European Schools for Advanced Engineering Education and Research (CESAER), the Global Public Policy Network (GPPN), but also previous Erasmus+ and Horizon2020 cooperation partners or existing university-wide transnational partnerships like ECIU which was founded in 1997 (Huisman, de Boer et al., 2020; Gunn, 2020; Charret and Chankseliani, 2022).

We created a provisional list of international university networks and listed the involvement of the HEIs within the selected EUAs in these networks (see Annex 3). Figure 2.12 provides a comparison between the EUAs selected in terms of their prior engagement in international networks using an indicator for connectedness (i.e. of how many networks the HEIs within the alliance were a member of) and the one for concentration (i.e. the percentage of HEIs within the alliance that were a member of the network with most members in the alliance).

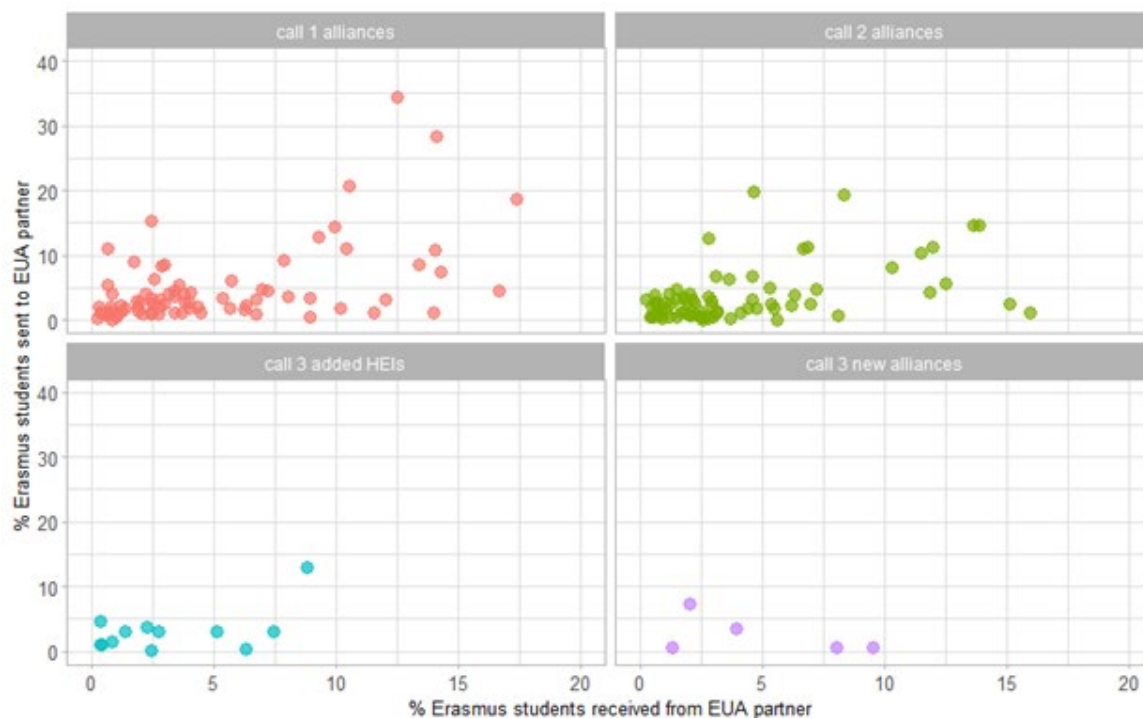
Both indicators show that the first call alliances were on average more engaged in international networks than second- and third-call alliances. The alliance members from Call 1 have more experience in engaging in international university networks. Furthermore, more alliances have a membership that comes fully or in majority from only one such network.

Figure 2.12: Prior engagement of EUA members in international networks



Source: Expert consultation and websites; Authors' calculations.

A fourth indicator we used to assess the prior experiences of members in an EUA, is the extent to which they were already exchanging students within the Erasmus+ programme (see Figure 2.13). In the first two calls the alliances selected had more prior Erasmus student mobility between the alliances partners than those selected in the third call. The Erasmus database has also information on staff mobility, but the data is not complete enough to draw conclusions regarding the impact of previous cooperation in staff exchange and the chances of participating in (the same) alliance.

Figure 2.13: Erasmus + student mobility: students sent to and received from EUA partners

Source: Erasmus+ database; Authors' calculations

2.4. Evaluation of the selection criteria

Concerning the geographical balance, the EUI has reached out to all Member States, i.e. we found a balanced representation of the European regions within most of the alliances. While this is a positive outcome of the selection criterion, the actual composition of the sample of selected HEIs also indicates that the selection criterion limits the possibilities for EUAs to invite members who might be an asset to their alliance. This geographical criteria restrict the participation of HEIs from a Member State already represented, as well as the cooperation with matching HEIs from countries not included in list of eligible countries.

The strong focus of the EUI on Europe is also discussed in the literature. Since its inception, the EUI has been infused by a "European" leitmotiv of European integration' (Cino Pagliarello, 2022, p.156). While some countries beyond the EU Member States are part of the initiative (e.g. Norway, UK, Turkey, Serbia, Iceland) by having higher education institutions in alliances as associated members, this is more of an exception than a rule and serves to heighten the 'sense of "Europeanness"' (Cino Pagliarello, 2022; Gunn, 2020). The literature suggests that the 'hyper-concentration of European institutions can become a weak point in the initiative' (Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022, p.7). The argument is twofold.

First, adding high quality institutions from outside the EU geopolitical space can bring benefits to all stakeholders (Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022). This argument brings to the fore the tensions between the competing aims of inclusiveness and excellence that the EUI embodies (Gunn, 2020). On the one hand, diversifying alliance membership by including higher education institutions from a variety of regions with different economic realities can help 'reduce regional asymmetries'

(Calderon, 2021, p.396) and make the initiative more inclusive. On the other hand, focusing on including in the EUI those 'countries [that] have universities ranked among the 100 best in the world' (Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022, p.7) would tilt the initiative in the direction of excellence.

Second, like 'with every large-scale transformation programme, attention needs to be paid to the opportunity costs and existing alternatives' (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021, p.22). In other words, while the strong focus on Europe might not be detrimental if the EUAs are just one form of transnational cooperation partnerships among others, it becomes problematic if its ambitious objectives are so resource intensive that other forms of cooperation fall by the wayside.

Even if the initiative is to preserve its focus on Europe, the same concerns are valid with respect to the type of EU regions represented in the current selection of EUAs (e.g. NUTS 2 regional representation). If the EUI is to continue to 'strike a balance between quality and excellence, on the one hand, and inclusive and equitable geographic coverage on the other' (Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022, p.21), then this concern should be reflected in the vision of the EUI promoted by the European Commission and the selection criteria and procedures for the funding calls. For now, the EUAs are 'characterised by heterogenous actors' constellations, which include high ranking and elite universities and many regional and smaller universities, thus providing much broader participation in European higher education initiatives' (Cino Pagliarello, 2022, p.157).

The above results also show that large, research-oriented and old HEIs with an extensive educational offer and a strong background or longstanding experience in international cooperation primarily participate in the EUI. Also, HEIs that were already part of a pre-existing network were more frequently in an alliance. Due to a lack of data on the applying but non-selected alliances, we cannot state if the selection criteria have caused this bias. We can only assume that the selection criteria must have addressed this type of HEI more strongly than HEIs with different characteristics. These HEIs could have judged their capacity, networks and resources as insufficient for planning and writing a project proposal or implementing an alliance if selected. A member survey conducted by the European Universities Association (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020) corroborates this assumption.

Strong factors in forming the alliances, according to our results, were similar institutional profiles and pre-existing networks. Leaders of European alliances in our focus groups confirm this finding. In addition, similarity of partners matters as well in forming an alliance. Similarity, however, does not always point to sameness in the disciplinary profile or in the research orientation. Leaders from ARQUS, an alliance that maps partly on the Coimbra Group, felt it was important that the partners had similar values and goals with regard to social inclusion, sustainability, or other societal challenges.

For other alliances, particularly those that did not build on a pre-existing network, the disciplinary profile of the institution was an important criterion in their building phase. In the focus groups, participants reported that they have been applying a disciplinary-oriented search and have deliberately contacted and chosen institutions with a similar disciplinary profile. For the EUGLOH alliance, it was important to find comprehensive research universities with strong medical profiles. The latter criterion addressed the challenges that EUGLOH selected for its work programme. Leaders from EUAs that had re-applied, mentioned that they applied similar search strategies when they added new partners in the second round.

Overall, it can be concluded that the selection criteria have contributed to the fact that the EUI is currently essentially made up of higher education institutions that can be described as excellent. An upcoming research paper by Lambrechts, Lepori and Cavallaro (2022) supports this statement. According to their results, most HEIs in EUAs are among the top 500 of international rankings.

In the focus groups, we discussed with policymakers if the EUI, while targeting excellent HEIs, also provides opportunities for all types of HEIs and if the EUI is inclusive. When discussing this issue, the experts first pointed out that excellence has vastly different meanings within the different communities involved in the EUI/EUA, i.e. among academics, policymakers, institutional management, and other groups of stakeholders. Besides research, the excellence criteria also address educational practices (being a frontrunner in educational innovation) and advanced management/governance models.

From their point of view, the strong orientation towards a rich understanding of excellence was not a downside of the EUI but would link well with the Erasmus+ logic. According to this logic, one could expect that 'flagship universities' would be more likely to design transferable patterns of transnational collaboration in higher education. Developing these patterns and clearly showing the benefits of European universities could also attract HEIs that did not apply in the first rounds – in case the EUI continues in the coming years.

In addition, participants in the focus groups pointed out that the self-selection of HEIs, whether they participated or not, was not only driven by the resources and capacity they could bring in but also by the huge expectations and requirements that were related to the work programme or the operational capacity that was expected from the participants who have to be frontrunners in several areas.

One of the experts who participated in the evaluation of EUA proposals summarised this view as follows:

I think there was a self-selection undertaken by the institutions based on their perception that this was going to be for flagship institutions, that it was for institutions that had the capacity to answer all of those checkboxes, because that is exactly what I felt about the call as well. So, I think the initial readiness and willingness of institutions had more to do with ... their own perceptions of what was expected and their capacity of what they could do, rather than the selection criteria themselves. (Expert consulting HEIs applying for the EUI)

After evaluating whether the selection and award criteria create a fair chance for all HEIs to participate, we conclude that, at present, this is not yet the case. The current engagement of more resourceful and advanced HEIs helps the EUI objectives of developing models for multi-institutional international cooperation. This can reduce transaction costs for other HEIs when establishing collaborations that build on the existing EUI or when applying for an EUA.

2.4.1. Disentangle the impacts of different factors

In the previous sections we analysed for several institutional characteristics separately whether the selection criteria favoured some HEIs over others. It might be that these institutional characteristics are so much interdependent, that only one or two of them really matters for the outcomes of the selection process. For instance, if the selection criteria would favour comprehensive HEIs above specialised HEIs, and comprehensive are in general larger than specialised HEIs, a separate analysis of the impact of size would show that larger HEIs are favoured – even if nor the criteria, nor the in the selection process size would have been taken into account.

In order to see whether this effect occurred in the previous sections, and so disentangle the impact of the different institutional characteristics, we conducted a logistic regression. Such an analysis indicates how strong each institutional characteristic determined the selection of the EUAs, independent from the others. For details on how we did the analysis see Annex 6.

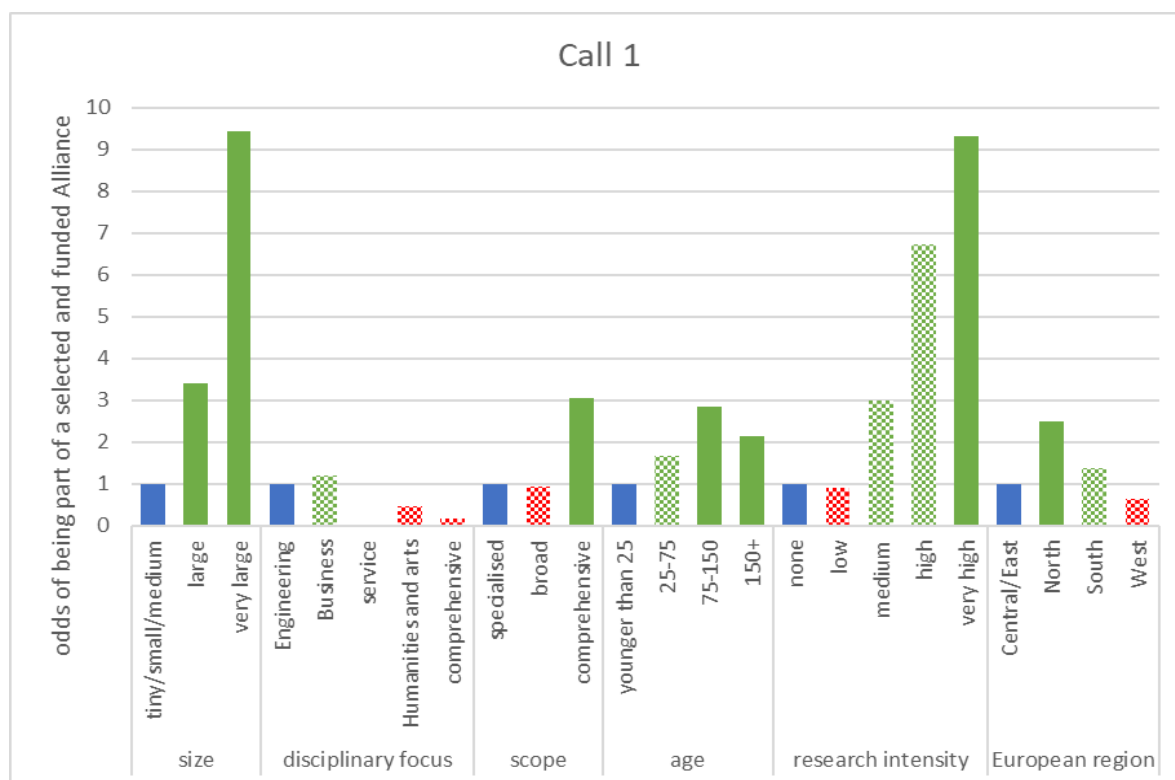
The analysis was done separately for the first and the second call. While the analysis for the first call included all HEIs listed in ETER, the analysis of the second call excluded the HEIs that were selected in the first call. For the third call, the number of new alliances is too small to conduct the analysis.

The analysis for the first call shows that in that call five independent institutional characteristics seem to have had an impact on the outcomes of the call. (Figure 2.13)

- Large and especially very large HEIs were more likely to be part of a selected and funded alliance.
- Comprehensive HEIs that offer programs in more than eight disciplinary fields, were more likely to be part of a EUA than broad and specialised institutions that offer programs in less disciplinary fields.
- Institutions older than 75 years were more likely to be member of a selected EUA than younger ones.
- Very intensive research universities were more likely to be part of a selected and funded alliance.
- HEIs from the North region were more likely to be part of an EUA.

Only for disciplinary focus, that is the distribution of students over the programs in different disciplinary fields, we did not find that it mattered independently from the other institutional characteristics.

Figure 2.14: Likelihood of being part of a selected and funded alliance, given a number of institutional characteristics, Call 1



Source: ETER database; Authors' calculations

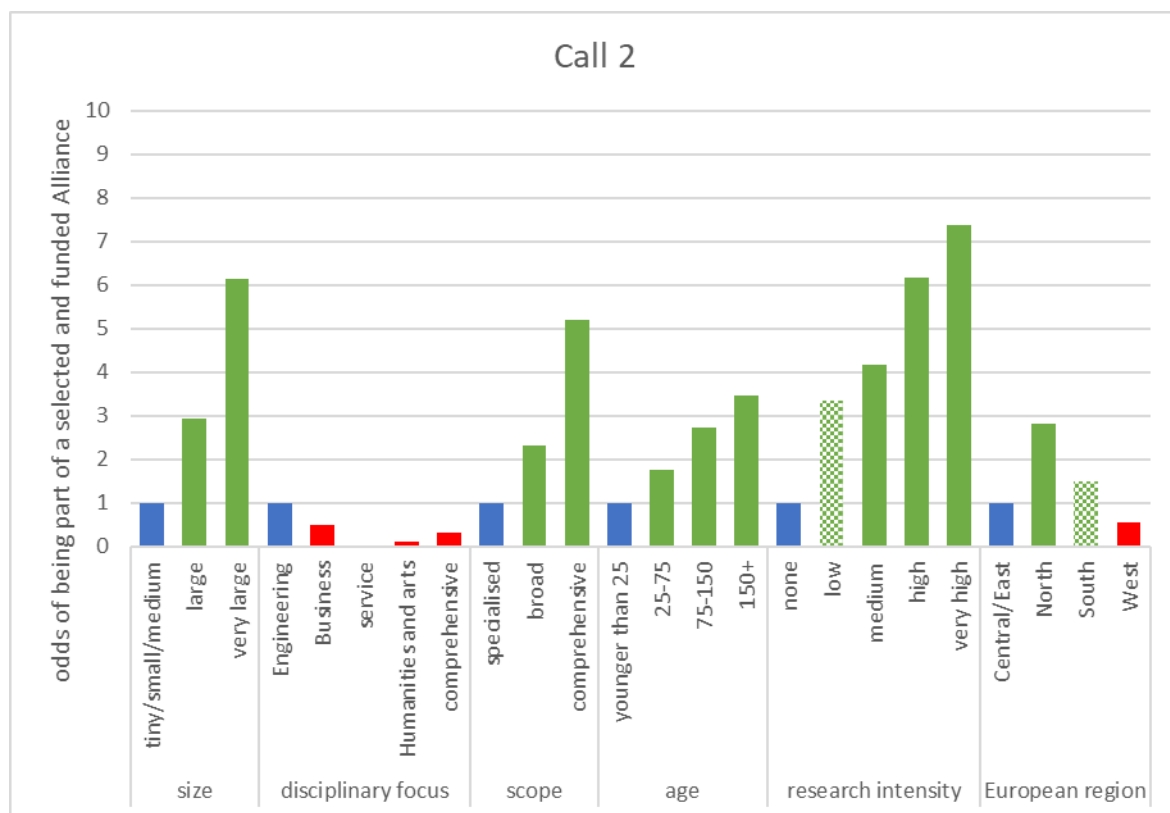
Notes: the blue bars are the reference categories for each factor, the green bars indicate that the odds of being part of a selected and funded alliance are higher than the reference category; the red bars indicate that the odds of being part of a selected and funded Alliance are lower than the reference category; the shading indicates that the results are statistically not significant different from the reference category.

For the second call, we find some different results. (Figure 2.14) Still the (very) large HEIs, and HEIs from the North region were more likely to be part of selected and funded alliance. For other characteristics, we find a different pattern.

- Disciplinary focus did matter in the second call, and specifically HEIs with relatively more students in engineering programs were more likely to be part of a selected and funded alliance.
- Both comprehensive HEIs and broad HEIs were more likely to be in the selected and funded alliances than the specialised HEIs.
- The older the HEI was, the more likely it was a member of a selected and funded alliance.
- The more research intensive the HEI was, the more likely it was a member of a selected and funded alliance.
- HEIs from the West region were less likely to be a member of a selected and funded alliance.

Overall, the regression analysis shows that for five institutional characteristics we can conclude that they independently did have an impact in the selection processes in the first and section call.

Figure 2.15: Likelihood of being part of a selected and funded Alliance, given a number of institutional characteristics, Call 2



Source: ETER database; Authors' calculations

Notes: the blue bars are the reference categories for each factor, the green bars indicate that the odds of being part of a selected and funded alliance are higher than the reference category; the red bars indicate that the odds of being part of a selected and funded Alliance are lower than the reference category; the shading indicates that the results are statistically not significantly different from the reference category.

3. ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES

KEY FINDINGS

- It is too early to assess the impact of the EUI at the level of national higher education systems or the European Education Area. HEIs participating in EUAs expect to further European integration and cohesion, increase the social engagement of higher education, and make higher education more responsive to labour market needs.
- HEIs perceive their participation in an EUA as an opportunity to increase the attractiveness and quality of their educational offerings and improve their ability to engage in transnational collaboration. Important mechanisms for achieving these goals are mutual learning, sharing best practices, and involvement in new educational approaches.
- The Covid-19 pandemic led to a variety of new forms of blended mobility. These forms are beneficial to a larger group of students than the traditional mobility models. Student learning also seems to have benefited from the challenge-based learning approach that alliances implement in their teaching activities.
- The current operation model of the EUAs is unsustainable. This is due to high coordination costs not covered by the EUI funds, uncertainty about the continuation of the EUI, and the lack of regulatory and legal frameworks that match the EUI aspirations.
- At the institutional level, alliances still face national differences in implementing the bachelor and master structure and the inclusive management of linguistic diversity and multilingualism.

3.1. Context and aims

This chapter provides an initial assessment of existing European Universities alliances. The analysis of alliances is based on a systematic literature review of grey and academic publications and focus groups with relevant EUI stakeholders. On average, EUAs have been in operation for only a couple of years. As such, evidence on the topic is limited and mostly self-reported. Still, emerging insights into the EUI provide a rough first assessment of how the alliances are faring and how they are impacting the higher education landscape in Europe. The findings of this chapter were validated through an interview with the representative of the FOR-EU2, a network of the EUAs selected in the second EUI call for applications.

The analysis comprises:

- an assessment of the benefits of transnational cooperation happening through the EUI for individuals, institutions/alliances, nation states/regions (see Section 3.2)
- an assessment of the challenges to transnational cooperation encountered by European Universities alliances (see Section 3.3)

The assessment provided in this chapter draws on the synthesis of two independent data sources:

(1) a systematic literature review of academic and grey literature collected through controlled key word searches of relevant databases (e.g. ERIC, Scopus, Google Scholar), higher education journals scouring using the INCHER database, and organisational checking of publications from pertinent international associations doing or commissioning research on the EUI or internationalisation (e.g. DG EAC, JRC, EENEE, EURASHE, Nuffic, EAIE, ACA, DAAD, British Council, Campus France, IAU, AIEA, EUA, ESU, ESN,

Eurostudent, Coimbra Group). See Annex 4 for details on the methodology of the systematic literature review.

(2) three thematic focus groups with relevant stakeholders: students and academic staff, higher education representatives (presidents and coordinators of EUAs), and policy experts. The stakeholder focus groups provide insights into the EUAs that go beyond the current state of the art. See Annex 5 for details on the methodology of the focus groups.

The findings from the systematic literature review and focus groups were triangulated to ensure validity. This chapter focuses on mapping of emerging evidence from different sources in an integrated manner that can inform evidence-based policymaking. Yet, it should be remembered that the findings of this chapter highlight *potential* benefits and emerging challenges of the EUI. The actual long-term benefits and challenges of the EUAs will depend on how the alliances develop beyond the pilot phase and how supportive European and national policy will be in ensuring their sustainability.

3.2. Benefits of cooperation

In general, many benefits are expected to accrue from participating in transnational cooperation partnerships (Craciun and Orosz, 2018). In that sense, the EUI and the transnational partnerships between higher education institutions it seeks to develop are no different. Stakeholders expect European Universities alliances to bring about a variety of benefits for individuals (students, administrative staff and academic staff), higher education institutions, the regions and Member States that host these alliances. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the benefits expected at different levels of analysis, based on the synthesised findings of the systematic literature review and focus groups.

Table 3.1: Benefits of European Universities alliances

| | European and national level | Institutional level | Individual level |
|-----------------|--|--|---|
| BENEFITS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting European integration and cohesion • Social engagement • Increasing relevance of higher education to the labour market • Eliminating transnational cooperation obstacles • Integration of higher education systems beyond the Bologna Process • Strengthen transnational strategic institutional partnerships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased institutional visibility and reputation • Attractiveness to foreign academics • Development of strategic approaches to transnational partnerships • Increased institutional resilience in times of crisis • Development and sharing of good practices • Improved offer, quality and innovativeness of teaching and learning • Strengthened connections between research, teaching, and innovation • Sustainable education • Improved quality of research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased rates of (blended) student and staff mobility • Skill development • Engagement with societal challenges |

Source: developed by the authors based on the findings of the focus groups and systematic literature review (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020; Cino Pagliarello, 2022; Andone et al., 2022; Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022; De Stefani and Han, 2022; Calderon, 2021 ; European Commission, 2020 ; Gunnarson and Swarts, 2021; Escudeiro et al., 2020; Feiel et al., 2021)

3.2.1. European and national level benefits

At the macro level, emerging evidence suggests that EUAs will have a positive impact at the local, national, regional, and European level in a variety of areas.

The literature suggests that the EUI and the emerging EUAs have a European added value in supporting European integration and cohesion (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020; Cino Pagliarello, 2022). In that sense, the EUI is 'also a political strategy that implies a Europeanisation not only of policies but also of policy processes and beliefs supposed to act as catalysts in advancing market integration' (Cino Pagliarello, 2022, p.158). EUAs are expected to play an important role in the development of the EU by promoting a common identity through a set of common values. This understanding was echoed in the focus groups, where stakeholders argued that the various mobility opportunities (virtual, physical, blended) help to institutionalise the idea of European citizenship.

Another advantage of the EUI is that it fosters the social engagement of higher education (Andone et al., 2022; Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022; De Stefani and Han, 2022). The EUI is thought to originate from Civic Universities (Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022), a type of universities that pursue a 'scholarship of engagement' (Boyer, 1996) with societal challenges. These societal challenges can be global, like the ones ascertained by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but also pressing national, regional or local problems.

Analysing the initiatives of five EUAs using expert judgements, Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador (2022) identify a number of good practices that those alliances they studied – CONEXUS, YUFE, EELISA, CIVIS, ARQUS – have already implemented. The assessment of good practices is done against criteria of replicability, innovation, sustainability and effectiveness, and 'favours those that balance all of the evaluation criteria, with the European Student Card, alliance communities, and Open Labs, followed by common grades, Smart Campus, and internal academies for students and staff being the ones with the highest scores' (Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022, p.21). Another study suggests that the I-Living-Lab⁵ developed by E³UDRES², supports the development of smart and sustainable regions by engaging with local community and industry to provide solutions to local challenges. (Andone et al., 2022, not paged). The focus groups also supported this finding, suggesting that collaborating with international students in these challenge-based learning settings brings in new perspectives for solving local problems. Also, challenge-based learning was mentioned as a method to embed the university in the local context by making linkages to regional industries and other stakeholders.

The EUI is also said to increase the relevance of higher education to the labour market (Cino Pagliarello, 2022). The design of the initiative and its focus on 'mobility – as one of the core freedoms of the single market – and on investment in industry, technology and innovation in order to address a more complex and more competitive knowledge-based economy' (Cino Pagliarello, 2022, p.158) highlights the economic dimension of the policy. The ambitious goal of reaching 50 % student and staff mobility within the alliances, the focus on graduates' skill development, the involvement of employers in education provision (e.g. through micro-credentials, challenge-based learning, internship opportunities), the future development of joint European Degrees 'are all strategies that are explicitly anchored to the goals of the single market in facilitating cross-border service provision' (Cino Pagliarello, 2022, p.158). According to the focus groups, agreements between member institutions facilitate seamless mobility. EUAs report they can include staff and students in these programmes, that

⁵ 'I' stands for inspiring, innovative, intercultural, international, interdisciplinary, intersectoral, inclusive, and intense.

would otherwise not have been (internationally) mobile through other projects like Erasmus+. This is because the flexibility of short-term and virtual mobility proposed by EUAs attracts students with different profiles. Increased mobility, in turn, can lead to improved labour market outcomes (Craciun, Orosz and Proteasa, 2019). Prior literature has shown that international mobility leads to labour market advantages such as lower unemployment rates (European Commission, 2014, 2016; Di Pietro, 2019; Schnepf and Hombres, 2018), higher wages (Rodrigues, 2013; Varghese, 2008), increased chances of having an international career (Parey and Waldinger, 2011; Di Pietro, 2012; Rodrigues, 2013; Teichler and Janson, 2007; Varghese, 2008) or a job with higher professional responsibilities (Bracht et al., 2006; Schnepf and Hombres, 2018; European Commission, 2016).

Finally, the EUAs are an instrument for furthering integration of higher education systems in Europe beyond what was achieved through the Bologna Process (Cino Pagliarello, 2022; Gunn, 2020), and strengthening transnational strategic partnerships (Cino Pagliarello, 2022; Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022). By involving various stakeholders in transnational dialogue and policy exchange on higher education, the EUI is thought to improve 'the organisational capacity at the supranational level in a policy field that cannot be implemented through the traditional community method' (Cino Pagliarello, 2022, p.158) and becomes 'a new regional scheme within this context of heightened collaboration' (Gunn, 2020, p.13). In turn, the exchange of best practices helps to 'strengthen strategic partnerships between higher education institutions throughout the EU' (Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022, p. 21).

3.2.2. Institutional level benefits

At the meso level, emerging evidence suggests that EUAs expect to have a positive impact on member institutions in a variety of areas. These expected benefits might explain the strong interest of universities to participate in the EUI. According to a survey by the European Universities Association covering 219 HEIs from 34 EHEA countries, 59 % of respondents reported that they are already participating in the EUI funding calls, 27 % were planning to do so in the next calls, and only 13 % reported not to have any intentions of participating in the future (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020).

The same survey also investigated what benefits universities expect from participating in transnational university alliances. Most respondents expect that being part of EUAs will be very important in increasing their institutional visibility and reputation (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020; Calderon, 2021) and improving the attractiveness of the HEI to students and staff (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020). The focus group findings supported these expectations regarding the added value of EUAs. The participants suggested that being part of an EUA gave them access to the global networks of their alliance partners and increased the visibility and attractiveness of their institutions allowing them to attract new staff. In addition, research shows that coupled with having resources, institutions engaged in university networks (including EUAs) 'are more likely to exercise greater influence in shaping policy directions within their systems, regions and spheres of academic endeavours' (Calderon, 2021, p.396). Anecdotal examples show that in some cases EUAs have already been able to influence national policy changes. An example is the introduction of joint degrees in Romania which previously had not been allowed.

Another benefit expected by most institutions in the EUA survey is the development of strategic approaches to transnational partnerships by eliminating obstacles for international exchange and cooperation and strengthening existing partnerships (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020; European Commission, 2020). The focus groups also support this finding. Participants suggested that the alliances created a safe and trusted space for collaboration. The ambitious goals of the initiative and of the long-term strategy developed by the alliances, encouraged the internationalisation of the whole university by stimulating the collaboration of a wide variety of departments and staff. Participants reported that

alliances of the first pilot call are now moving away from 'being a project' into a consolidation phase. Regarding the relationship developed with alliance members, most presidents and coordinators of EUAs reported that they achieved a certain overlap with regards to the alignment and integration of the members' institutional and EUA strategies. In addition, members report building on the experiences of the EUAs and using them to support institutional transformation.

A survey done by the European Commission (2020) on the impact of Covid-19 on EUAs, indicates that being part of an alliance increases institutional resilience in times of crisis. This is done for instance by developing and sharing good practices and measures (Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022; European Commission, 2020). Of the 93 survey respondents covering 25 countries and each of the 17 first-wave alliances, more than 60 % believe that being part of an EUA has helped their institutions in addressing the problems brought about by the pandemic and almost 80 % of institutions reported to have shared good practices and measures (European Commission, 2020). There are many illustrations of what alliances have done to weather the effects of Covid-19 including 'brainstorming on common challenges, sharing good practices and solutions, pooling together IT tools for distance learning and sharing online resources, maximising the online courses on offer to all their students and keeping the international links, creating a joint environment for sharing online teaching and good practices related to online teaching and virtual mobility, engaging students from the different universities in finding solutions to pandemic related challenges, organising virtual/blended mobility for the next academic semester' (European Commission, 2020, not paged).

Existing research suggests that EUAs also lead to an improved offer, quality and innovativeness of teaching and learning (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020; Andone et al., 2022; European Commission, 2020; Gunnarson and Swarts, 2021; De Stefani and Han, 2022) and strengthening the connections between research, teaching and innovation (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020). The most significant innovations in teaching and learning pushed by EUAs is challenge-based learning (CBL) and micro-modules/micro-credentials.

CBL refers to an 'approach where students work with academics, researchers, companies, cities and regions from different countries and disciplines to address big societal challenges' (European Commission, 2020, not paged). From the focus groups we found that EUAs accelerated the take-up and use of CBL methodologies in partner institutions. In some cases, a whole new set of teaching and learning methodologies related to CBL such as service learning or virtual/living labs were implemented. By exchanging knowledge and practices among alliance members about CBL the competence-building of staff is supported. Such competences are 'a key component in all types of education, and also when it comes to CBL' (Gunnarson and Swarts, 2021, p.113). From the focus groups, we gleaned that trainings are provided by educational professionals to support teachers in using CBL methodologies and regular meetings are organised to discuss 'hot topics' around CBL.

According to the focus groups, first-generation alliances have already set up degree programmes and this process has been complex and time-consuming. To supply a more flexible educational offer, alliances are now creating structures that allow them to react more spontaneously to requests and ideas for education. Also, their focus has shifted to other, shorter forms of education, such as summer schools, micro-credentials, or short-term courses. Micro-credentials refer to short course developed by higher education institutions 'in cooperation with companies, regions and cities (...) to equip the European workforce with 'just-in-time' skills that are essential (...) allowing anyone to up-skill and re-skill at any stage of their career' (European Commission, 2020, not paged). Our focus groups revealed that some alliances already implemented such learning opportunities, and they were well received by participants who for instance learned the skills needed for participating in CBL. These micro-modules

do not yet yield stand-alone certificates, but enrolled students can earn ECTS credits from participating in these courses.

A particular focus of EUAs when it comes to developing CBL and micro-modules appears to be sustainable education (Escudeiro et al., 2020; Feiel et al., 2021; Andone et al., 2022; De Stefani and Han, 2022). This topic is relevant for all students irrespective of their location and allows them to engage with grand societal challenges. According to the focus groups, the challenge-based learning approach is generally more likely to attract an interdisciplinary group of students (ranging from STEM to social sciences) which in turn provides a way forward towards tackling challenges such as sustainability. Another illustration comes from the ATHENA alliance who share their approach to sustainable education through activities like 'blended mobility, competence clusters, remote labs and assistive technology' (Escudeiro et al., 2020, p.552). In the same vein, the EURECA-PRO alliance has as its main goal to become a 'European core excellence hub for responsible consumption and production' (Feiel et al., 2021) and has already successfully organised more than a dozen lecture series and held a summer school on the topic.

The EUA coordinators and presidents participating in the focus group stated that their alliances are mostly concentrating on the education mission of their alliances. This orientation is in part related to the nature of the Erasmus+ funding that directs alliances towards educational activities. Funding for research mostly comes from the Horizon programme but it is not considered high enough to strengthen the research mission of the alliances. Still, higher education institutions also expect that being part of the EUA will also help to improve the quality of their research (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020). Regarding the level of research collaboration, it was clear to focus group participants that these relationships often start at the individual researcher level but are hardly if ever stimulated by the institutional level. A way in which alliances try to stimulate research collaboration is by mapping existing research connections within the alliances (see Torres-Salinas, Aroca and Arroyo-Machado, 2020) with the aim of building upon these networks and organising match-making events for researchers. Additionally, some of the Erasmus+ funding is used for research on the effects and impacts of the alliances.

3.2.3. Individual level benefits

At the micro level, emerging evidence suggests that EUAs provide benefits for students and staff in the areas of mobility, skill development and social engagement.

In line with the objectives of the initiative, the alliances are supposed to bring about individual benefits for students and staff through increased rates of (blended) mobility (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020; European Commission, 2020; Escudeiro et al., 2020). According to focus group participants, on the one hand, the pandemic hindered short-term physical mobility in the first two generations of alliances. On the other hand, the pandemic accelerated the implementation of online or virtual mobility. Alliances reported to have experienced a steep increase in mobility forms and innovations as a result. Focus group participants mentioned that all types of mobility were established within their alliances, e.g. physical, virtual, and hybrid mobility.

The existing body of literature confirms this observation. For example, in the Arqus alliance students and staff could participate among others in an inter-university CBL course on the climate crisis (De Stefani and Han, 2022), a virtual language café where students from the alliance could practice their foreign language skills, or an Alliance Academy that 'offers a wide range of face-to-face, blended, and virtual shared opportunities for student learning, doctoral education, staff development, social outreach, and certification' (Arnaldo Valdes and Gomez Comendador, 2022, p.16). That Covid-19 seems to have accelerated plans towards developing a virtual inter-university campus that facilitates virtual

mobility, was also confirmed by the survey of EUAs carried out by the European Commission (2020): 85 % of institutions planned to move faster towards this objective (European Commission, 2020). Most universities were also encouraged by the pandemic to pool their online courses and MOOCs or create course repositories accessible to all their communities (European Commission, 2020).

The participants of the focus groups reported that seamless mobility brings about more gains for students and staff in that they learn about and experience different cultures, enjoy diversity in the classroom (age, gender, nationality, discipline, etc.), have access to a wider variety of courses and internships, and experience how it is to work professionally in an international team. In this context, CBL is seen as a natural lever that brings together knowledge and experience from diverse cultures. For students, mobility is not seen as a burden for their curriculum as students are free to choose if they want to be (internationally) mobile. One staff member explained:

You don't have to take this kind of seamless mobility options in your curriculum, but you can. So, there is like 'everything goes', but nothing 'has to be' for students. So, this is like an add-on of flexibility of students.

Focus group participants mentioned a variety of factors enabling these mobility benefits of students. These had to do with agreements between the participating universities that regulated the application, enrolment, and funding of students for different forms of mobility. Structured institutional collaborations, the openness of members to test all forms of mobility, and the willingness of academic staff to develop and share best practices further helped to ensure that students had the opportunity to move without barriers.

Concerning the inclusiveness of the EUAs, the focus groups made it clear that the proliferation of different forms of mobility enables them to attract students with different profiles. All participants reported that EUAs provide new and innovative mobility options that appeal to students, who would not have enrolled in more traditional mobility programmes. Despite this, the target of 50 % student mobility within the alliances is perceived by coordinators and presidents of EUAs as difficult to achieve. In addition, it is not yet clear to what extent the EUAs are inclusive regarding the profiles of students. All in all, the different forms of mobility and the varied educational offer that puts students at the centre of the learning experience aims to promote skill development and engagement with societal challenges (Andone et al., 2022; Gunnarson and Swartz, 2021; De Stefani and Han, 2022).

These benefits do not relate exclusively to student learning and engagement, but also to staff (Gunnarsson and Swartz, 2021). A direct example of staff skill development are the 'train-the-trainers' seminars included in CBL courses which by design focus on grand societal challenges (De Stefani and Han, 2022). In turn, according to the focus groups, collaborating on such complex issues pushes academic staff from different disciplines to work together in the classroom. Yet, participants found it difficult to report if and how much faculty appreciates the interdisciplinary setting. This was explained by the current focus on evaluation student satisfaction levels with teaching and learning innovations and by the fact that teachers who choose to be involved in such interdisciplinary activities are biased.

Focus group participants identified CBL to be closest to real-world settings and therefore create a special experience for students. Compared to more traditional forms of mobility, CBL-based exchanges stand out to them with regards to interdisciplinarity, cultural diversity and the use of innovative teaching methods. Interdisciplinarity, for example, was seen as an important element in preparing students well for the 'dynamic world we live in'. Still, it was also considered a challenge as it makes specialisation in an area more difficult. Cultural diversity was also perceived positively by focus group participants as it stimulated students to learn and engage more with each other, compared to more homogenous student populations. Teamwork seemed easier in these settings as well. These

observations were said to also hold for the pandemic as students made online appointments to get to know each other.

This observation is in line with studies assessing CBL programmes. For example, students taking part in an inter-university CBL course by the Arqus alliance on climate change, perceived the possibility to tackle societal challenges provided through the course very positively (De Stefani and Han, 2022). As such, even though ‘the activities at each university addressed climate risk issues at the local level, the students were clearly aware of the links between local issues and ‘grand challenges’ that affect global society’ (De Stefani and Han, 2022, p.10). In addition, students also positively evaluated the interdisciplinarity of CBL as it encouraged them to use their disciplinary knowledge, but also challenged them with new material pointing to the limits of their discipline (De Stefani and Han, 2022). Most students also appreciated engaging with stakeholders outside of academia (e.g. NGOs, local authorities), liked the opportunity to work in English, even though it is not an official language at any of the universities in the alliance, and felt they improved their applied research, teamwork and interpersonal skills due to the course (De Stefani and Han, 2022). Similar findings emerge from an experience with I-Living-Labs, where students and other stakeholders benefited from the novel learning experience in ‘understanding existing challenges in their respective areas, finding solutions based on the design thinking process and also developing future skills while working in an international environment’ (Andone et al., 2022).

Overall, emerging evidence suggests that EUAs are expected to bring a lot of benefits not only for the member institutions and their communities, but also for a wider variety of stakeholders at the local, national and regional level. With some exceptions, much of the existing evidence is based on self-reported measures, which given the general excitement for the European Universities Initiative might bias the findings. In order to frame these emerging insights on the benefits of EUAs, it is important to also look at the challenges alliances face in achieving the ambitious goals they proposed in order to be selected into the initiative. The next section explores the challenges to transnational cooperation faced by EUAs.

3.3. Challenges of cooperation

Transnational cooperation of the comprehensive type envisioned by the European Universities Initiative comes with many challenges for higher education institutions. The most significant challenges faced by EUAs are in funding, governance and policy related areas. Table 3.2 provides an overview of these challenges extracted from existing literature on the alliances.

Table 3.2: Challenges of European Universities alliances

| CHALLENGES | INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL |
|-------------------|---|
| FUNDING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring funding sustainability • Need for additional (co-)funding for development and implementation of partnership • Different levels of funding support from public sources |
| GOVERNANCE | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to adapt cooperation plans due to the Covid-19 pandemic • Complex governance structure • Diverse institutional leadership structures and cycle lengths • Negotiating different viewpoints |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| POLICY | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty about the future developments of the EUI • Legal and regulatory barriers • Incompatibility of national qualification frameworks • Heterogenous structure of B.A. and M.A. programmes in different countries • Maintaining linguistic diversity and multilingualism |
|---------------|--|

Source: developed by the Authors based on the findings from the focus groups and the systematic literature review (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020; Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021; Jongbloed et al., forthcoming; Charret and Chankseliani, 2022 ; European Commission, 2020; De Stefani and Han; 2022 ; Feiel et al., 2021; Gunnarson and Swartz, 2021 ; Pappa, Prummer and Pittich, 2021 ; Dafouz, 2021; Druvietė, 2020)

3.3.1. Funding

Funding is considered one of the major challenges for alliances in achieving their long-term objectives. Already in 2020, a member survey done by EUA found that the top three challenges universities face in participating in the EUI, are related to funding: needing to provide additional other resources to support the development and implementation of the alliances, making the alliances sustainable in the long-term and the needing to provide a considerable amount of co-funding to be part of the initiative (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020). Findings from the systematic literature review and the focus groups support this claim. EUAs still face several obstacles related to funding.

Alliances struggle to ensure funding sustainability in the long-term (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020; Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021; Jongbloed et al., forthcoming; Charret and Chankseliani, 2022). This is partly due to the project based nature of the funding provided through the EUI, but also because funding from other sources is unpredictable, both regarding availability and amounts. ‘The uncertainty around access to funds and the amount of financial stimulus need to be given due attention when considering alliance sustainability’ (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021, p.19).

There are three main sources of funding that alliances depend on:

- from the European Commission through Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020,
- from the national/state level of alliance members through direct and indirect public funding, and
- from the alliance member’s themselves through co-funding (minimum 20 % of the budget submitted in the EUI applications has to be guaranteed by alliance members themselves) and external funding from the private sector or other competitive calls (non)-targeted to the EUI.

At the European level, EUI funding was allotted for a three-year period for the first two generations of alliances and extended to four years in subsequent calls (subject to a successful reapplication). However, the ambitions of the EUI and EUAs have larger time horizons. The long-term strategies for transnational cooperation and mission statements of alliances cannot be achieved in this short timeframe. Across the board, experts in the focus groups evaluated the European share in the funding of the EUAs as too low. One EUA coordinator pointed out that the European funding only covers around 10 % of the actual costs. This might be a low estimate and depends on the ambitions of the alliances, but in general stakeholders agree that EU funding covers just a fraction of the costs. All other funding, the alliances must secure from other sources (e.g. national/state level public funding, third party funding, institutional resources). Thus, alliances need additional (co-)funding for the development and implementation of their partnerships (Claeys-Kulik et al., 2020). HEIs see this as a major challenge.

At the national/state level, institutions have no guarantees that they will receive either direct or indirect public resources to support the implementation of EUA objectives. When they do, alliance members

may receive different levels of support from public sources (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021; Jongbloed et al., forthcoming), which promotes an uneven playing field both between and within alliances. Research that maps the Member State financial support for higher education institutions within EUAs, shows a great diversity in the ways that national governments contribute financially – directly or indirectly – to their country’s alliance members (Jongbloed et al., forthcoming). At the time of that study, some EU Member States provided no additional financial support (e.g. Netherlands, Malta). Other Member States provided direct support only, for instance through targeted funds or one-off contributions (e.g. Bulgaria, Greece, France, Portugal). Yet other Member States provided indirect financial support only, for instance through performance-based funding that rewards internationalisation (e.g. Denmark, Estonia, Ireland). Finally, some Member States provide both direct and indirect financial support (e.g. Austria, Spain, Finland, Croatia, Latvia, Romania). This mapping (Jongbloed et al., forthcoming) provides a valuable and comprehensive picture of national financial support for the EUI, but it is itself static and institutions do not know whether national level support will continue in the future and what form it will take. Participants in the focus groups also picked up on this issue. One EUA coordinator stated: ‘Now we need long-term funding. We need Member States commitment, we need funding that delivers on all university missions.’

At the institutional level, alliances do not know whether they will receive continued support from members which go through leadership changes (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021), whether they will be able to attract funding from other sources such as the private sector or if they will be successful in securing funding from other competitive calls. This implies that alliances have to navigate a complex funding landscape, mixing and matching funding instruments to achieve their goals. To secure financial stability after EU funding has stopped, alliances have been encouraged to develop sustainable business models. Most experts in the focus groups have been negative about this statement. One participant explained that the idea of a business model for HEIs does not align well with the basic values of inclusive and open education of the Bologna Declaration.

The funding situation faced by EUAs promotes uncertainty, which in turn threatens the sustainability of alliances. On the other hand, as the focus groups revealed, the actual costs of EUAs are unknown. In fact, there is little known about the costs of transnational cooperation between higher education institutions in general, and quantitative studies calculating the costs are lacking (Craciun and Orosz, 2018). So far, EUAs themselves are the only ones who could shed some light on investments into implementing alliance objectives. Yet, insights from the focus groups suggested that they do not have a clear insight either into the actual costs or their future development.

3.3.2. Governance

Governance is also a key challenge faced by EUAs that threatens their long-term sustainability. Navigating this challenge has been made additionally hard due to the need to adapt cooperation plans because of the Covid-19 pandemic (European Commission, 2020; De Stefani and Han, 2022). This has, for example, required alliances to accelerate the development of infrastructure for virtual mobility and the pooling of education resources between alliance members (European Commission, 2020; Ivanciu et al., 2021).

EUAs have been described as ‘format builders’ and expected to innovate their traditional governance structures beyond the project management infrastructure that is needed for the three-year pilot phase of the project (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021). Due to the freedom of developing fit-for-purpose governance arrangements in a bottom-up way, complex governance structures have emerged (Feiel et al., 2021; Gunnarson and Swartz, 2021; Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021; Charret and Chankseliani, 2022).

For instance, when discussing the implementation of a teaching and learning innovation in the ECIU alliance, Gunnarson and Swartz (2021) touch upon the complexity of organising and implementing the activities of the alliance: 'The implementation of the ECIU university is a complex task with many persons and functions involved. The ECIU university project is led by the University of Twente, and the project is organised in nine work packages (WPs). The leadership for each WP is distributed among the participating universities. The management at each participating university depends on the internal organisation' (p.107). Within the Linköping University (LiU), the innovation is proposed to include:

...a working group consisting of the representatives in the different WPs on European level, a steering group with representatives from the highest LiU management level, students, administrative staff, etc. In addition, there are sub-groups for special tasks, and since LiU is responsible for WP5 about Challenge-based innovation there is a sub-group handling various topics related to this WP. Furthermore, there is a sub-group discussing the creation of an Innovation and Education Lab (IEL), which will be connected to the pedagogical unit of the university. (Gunnarson and Swartz, p.107)

The illustration above makes it easy to see how fast complex governance structures can emerge. It also means that when innovations diffuse to other institutions in the alliance, they will face different organisational realities. This example is far from singular. An analysis of evolving governance models of EUAs found that implementation by '[t]hematic working groups and cascading cluster structures reaching deep into the member institutions' (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021, p.18) have been emulated by many EUAs. Despite this complexity, experts also suggested that the original governance models developed by alliances, did not embrace the participation of staff and students in a satisfying manner. According to them, most governance models only now become more democratic and involve staff/student representatives after an intervention of the European Commission. Usually, governance structures include bodies for student representatives with consultative powers. Only in some cases do these bodies have voting rights. For students, this participation provides many learning opportunities, when becoming familiar with how student participation is organised in other institutions and countries. Still, mostly overachieving students participate.

From the focus groups we also gathered that participants valued the bottom-up process for developing governance structure for transnational collaboration as a good approach for the EUAs. Foremost, experts saw this approach as a lever to create ownership of the alliances among member institutions. Nonetheless, experts pointed out a few critical points related to governance issues. For instance, in their proposals, EUAs developed governance models that represent a project logic. This is evident from the illustration presented above for the ECIU alliance. For achieving the long-term vision of alliances, this project logic needs to be transformed in an institutional logic. A lack of long-term funding makes it difficult to realise this move, as the alliances constantly need to 'shoot for projects' to secure their funding.

In the current constellation, governance complexity and alliance sustainability become two competing logics that need to be balanced. Alliances are aware that 'a solid governance structure is the key success factor to a functioning institution' (Feiel et al., 2021, not paged). To balance sustainability and complexity some alliances like EURECA-PRO have proceeded to develop both short-term and long-term governance structures: 'The long-term plan foresees a four-phase development plan until 2040 when the vision is complete intertwining of all participating institutions to become a supra-institution' (Feiel et al., 2021, not paged).

The realities on the ground make it difficult to achieve these long-term integration plans. Experts from the focus groups found that EUAs are not yet well embedded in their host institutions. Generally, only

parts of the institution are involved in the alliances. Further, alliances were mostly initiated by presidents/rectors that already left office or will do so soon. This detachment from initiators increases the need to institutionalise governance structures beyond the project management mode.

The diverse institutional leadership structures and cycle lengths were found to be a governance challenge also in the literature (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021). This is because 'the senior leadership teams of the institutions involved (...) have often been a driving force for their further development' (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021, p.19). Further, experts suggested that the simultaneous transformation of the host institutions makes it difficult to embed EUAs. Linking the EUAs with evolving institutional requirements is challenging and efficiency and effectiveness of decision structures are hard to achieve. It is especially challenging in evolving and diverse institutional and policy contexts that requires alliance members to continuously negotiate different viewpoints (Feiel et al., 2021; Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021) in addition to having diverse initial rationales for joining the initiative (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021).

Regarding sharing of best practices in governance, some experts from the focus groups found that there is too little exchange concerning governance models of current EUAs. Representatives of EUAs opposed this perception and indicated that EUAs from the first two calls have established informal networks that facilitate exchange among them (e.g. FOR-EU1 and FOR-EU2). Governance is a regular topic discussed in these networks. Yet, EUAs are confronted with expanding policy expectations (e.g. legal statute, European degrees and quality assurance procedures) which put additional pressure on the governance structures of these alliances.

3.3.3. Policy

Alliances must also deal with numerous challenges related to policy uncertainty and incongruity which pose barriers for transnational cooperation. To begin with, there is uncertainty about the future development of the EUI (Charret and Chankseliani, 2022). Even through 'the European institutions, the alliance coordinators, and participating HEIs hope to pursue this adventure beyond the temporality of the first pilot phases, it is still unclear what is to come' (Charret and Chankseliani, 2022, not paged). The policy uncertainty is at odds with the ambitions of the EUI to be a large-scale transformation project for the European Education Area. This is because 'establishing deep long-term collaboration structures requires significant resources and enduring commitment at all levels' (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021, p.22), while policy uncertainty shifts the opportunity costs to the institutional level.

In addition, transnational cooperation is made difficult by legal, regulatory and administrative barriers (Estermann, Bennetot Pruvot and Stoyanova, 2021; Charret and Chankseliani, 2022) due to incongruities existing between Member States. On the one hand, deepening transnational cooperation brings to the fore past obstacles that the Bologna Process already tried to address. For instance, when designing new educational joint programmes or setting up blended mobility programmes, EUAs face problems because of the incompatibility of national qualification frameworks or the heterogenous structure of B.A. and M.A. programmes in different countries (Pappa, Prummer and Pittich, 2021). These incongruities between Member States turned out to be significant when, for instance, the EuroTeQ alliance tried to set up a common European engineering programme (Pappa, Prummer and Pittich, 2021).

On the other hand, EUI proposed innovations in higher education further challenge EUAs. For example, when it comes to developing micro-credentials. The focus groups participants reported that while some EUAs have already implemented a number of micro-credentials, others struggle with the concept. This is due to the different understandings of the terminology and different national accreditation regulations. According to participants, the support offered by the European Commission

did not help them to overcome these barriers and problems got more complex during the discussion. Currently, micro-credentials are frequently offered as extra-curricular activities for which participants can get ECTS credits, but not certificates. In general, EUAs would like to have more clarity about micro-credentials. So far, a degree based on micro-credentials has not been established. Participants also reported that current degrees do not accommodate interdisciplinarity well (a signature of CBL learning and stackable micro-credentials) as several legal issues stand in the way.

Finally, the literature suggests that using English, the lingua franca of internationalisation, helps to overcome cooperation barriers. As a result, maintaining linguistic diversity and multilingualism becomes challenging (Dafouz, 2021; Druviete, 2020). Content analysis research revealed that multilingualism 'is given different degrees of visibility' in EUA communications 'ranging from a clear quantitative and qualitative presence in the project proposal presented for the EU Commission call, to a decreasing presence in the research interview, and total absence on the website information' (Dafouz, 2021, p.11). This discrepancy suggests that alliances are aware of the EU policies on maintaining linguistic diversity and the importance this aspect is given in EU funding calls and play by the 'rules of the game' (Dafouz, 2021). Yet, the absence of these terms in other types of documents suggest that 'the efficiency principle is prioritised over the identity one' (Dafouz, 2021). Giving priority to English helps with knowledge dissemination, but also restricts the development of other languages (Druviete, 2020). There are alliances which are mindful of this trade-off. For instance, the UNITA alliance promotes inter-comprehension between Romance languages (e.g. French, Italian, Spanish, Romanian, and Portuguese). Inter-comprehension is a language acquisition method that helps native speakers of neighbouring languages to learn foreign languages from the same family rapidly.⁶ Such examples show that alliances have the potential to 'become a significant resource for maintaining language diversity in Europe' (Druviete, 2020, p.27)

Overall, the various challenges faced by EUAs were presented separately to highlight their complexity. Yet, they are not isolated. The challenges intertwine and may deter alliances from fully realising the benefits of cooperative partnerships, and ultimately the EUI from achieving its objectives. For instance, when it comes to seamless mobility, focus group participants suggested that there are several barriers. First, the lack of sufficient funding and rigid rules on how the money can be spent are seen as a major problem in this area. Linked to physical mobility, this means that students end up having to pay fees or travel costs, which then disadvantages students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Second, the differences in academic calendars of partner universities stand in the way of seamless mobility. Overlaps between the start and end of semesters between countries lead to study continuation problems for students. Finally, travel reimbursement regulations stand in the way of green mobility (e.g. by encouraging the purchase of cheap flight tickets at the detriment of greener forms of travel such as the train or bus which are more environmentally friendly).

⁶ See the UNITA alliance website for mote details: <https://univ-unita.eu/>

4. THE FUTURE OF EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES

KEY FINDINGS

- The EUI is an opportunity for the EC and Member States to create more favourable conditions for European collaborations. Preferably, this results in a coherent regulatory framework for higher education, research and innovation.
- A development of a coherent regulatory framework will be more likely if driven by policies that shape the EEA and less likely if left to the Bologna Process or spontaneous innovations in learning and teaching.
- Experts foresee a growth in the number of collaborations and alliances, due to the possible benefits for HEIs. If so, the EC can further specify the function of the EUI according to its opportunities to shape the EEA.
- The EUI creates opportunities for alliance partners to implement new educational approaches. However, in a more extreme scenario of fast transitions in teaching and learning, experts doubt whether an EUA is the appropriate organisational form. They fear an EUA is too complex, too lengthy, and too focused on political aims, and thus unable to respond timely to changing student and labour market needs.
- Current alliances focus on the EEA and more specifically the EU and its Member States. For the global attractiveness of European HE, experts suggest opening participation to non-EU countries, such as those specialised in global issues, or alliances that may help strengthen HEIs in border countries of Europe.

4.1. Context and aims

This chapter aims to assess the future of the European Universities alliances regarding the key issues they face. It considers the emerging paths related to the development of the European Education Area, the European Higher Education Area, the European Research Area, and other possible driving forces for higher education in Europe. The chapter will answer the following questions:

1. What pathways are emerging for the future development of higher education in Europe and specifically the European Universities alliances?
2. What are the opportunities and threats of European Universities alliances in relation to these future developments?

We use methodologies from the fields of future studies and technology assessment, which are based upon key dynamics in potential transformational innovations (Konrad, 2019). These methodologies assume that future developments are shaped by:

- the promises and expectations of key stakeholders;
- new technological and social innovations within niches of the (higher education) system;
- emerging innovation pathways;
- stagnation.

The chapter is based on:

- the previous chapters' analyses that identified expectations, promises and new innovations and gave early indications of emerging pathways that probably will shape future strategies and developments;
- an analysis of vision documents and scenarios on higher education in Europe that reveal driving forces;
- an expert meeting discussing initial scenarios for higher education in Europe and identifying opportunities and threats for the European Universities alliances and its stakeholders.

The chapter consists of two parts. The first part presents early indicators, key issues and driving forces for the development of the European Universities alliances. The second part presents three scenarios based on these driving forces and discusses the consequences for the alliances and their stakeholders.

4.2. Driving forces, early indicators and key issues

To draw scenarios for the EUAs, we assume that they will be shaped by the forces that generally affect higher education, by stakeholder expectations, and by ways that stakeholders respond to the benefits and challenges of the initial phase of the alliances.

For future developments, the following findings are important:

- The expected impact of the EUAs is unclear. In the preparation phase of the EUI policy instrument, both excellence and inclusion were discussed and included in the award criteria. In addition, the award criteria list impacts that range from innovation in teaching and learning, contribution to European integration, advance digital and green transitions, and to support for regional ecosystems and local communities.
- Developments in collaborations had a path dependency as forecasted by the scholarly literature. Alliances were more likely to include larger, comprehensive HEIs with sufficient capacity and experience in university collaborations and mutual exchange of students.
- The stakeholders had differing ambitions for developing their activities and the scope of the alliance. Some stakeholders expect that their EUA would continue to mainly focus on teaching and learning activities as an add-on for students to the regular bachelor and master programmes. Others foresee developing joint programmes that result in a European degree and extending the alliance activities to research and innovation. Press coverage of the EUI suggests that at least one of the alliances even aims to fully merge the member institutions into one European University (Upton, 2022).
- The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic at the start of the alliances led to a new form of mobility. While the alliances had expected to organise student and staff mobility in something like the Erasmus+ program, the pandemic forced them to develop different forms of virtual mobility. These forms seemed more inclusive, reaching a larger group of students, and more easily combined with regular teaching programmes. The focus group participants expected the virtual mobility to remain even after the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Institutional leadership and non-academic staff of HEIs are more involved in the alliances than in other university collaborations, which are often initiated and led by academic staff. As a result, the institution has a stronger commitment to the alliances, which increases the likelihood they will persist.
- At the same time, stakeholders in the focus groups considered the current mode of operation as unsustainable. Without changes in the operational conditions of the alliances, it would be difficult or even impossible to continue the alliances in the long-term. Stakeholders identified

key issues as improving funding conditions, quality assurance of education activities, possibilities to award credentials or degrees to students, the governance structure and the legal status of the alliances.

To identify driving forces, we did a literature search for vision documents with combinations of the keywords 'future', 'scenarios', 'higher education', 'Europe', and 'European Higher Education Area'. This search on Google Scholar and webpages of higher education stakeholders resulted in 52 documents that included scientific literature, vision documents, and policy reports. Title and abstract analysis indicate the following five driving forces:

- digitalisation of higher education through platforms for teaching and learning and digital applications based on artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and blockchain to enhance teaching and improve the effectiveness of higher education (Kergel, Heidkamp et al., 2018, Viberg, Hatakka et al., 2018, Komljenovic, 2022);
- development of new didactic and organisational forms for higher education aimed at more focus on future skills, flexible learning paths, blended learning, and individual learning trajectories (Castro, 2019, Ehlers and Kellermann, 2019, Ehlers, 2020, Martin and Godonoga, 2020);
- implementation of the Bologna Process by key actors such as Member States and higher education agencies. Analysis shows that the implementation results in patterns of convergence *and* divergence of higher education systems (Vögtle, 2019, Ala-Vähälä, 2020);
- development of the European Education Area for higher education, the Erasmus+ programme and European and international collaborations between universities (Karvounaraki, Subramaniam et al., 2018, Van Mol, 2018, Huisman, de Boer et al., 2020);
- the long-term impacts of Covid-19 on higher education (Garcia-Morales, Garrido-Moreno et al., 2021) resulting from the pandemic causing an abrupt shift towards online teaching and learning and developing virtual mobility.

4.3. Scenario development

To develop the scenarios below, we clustered the early signals, key issues and trends into two driving forces. One force covered the policy developments, and the other one encompasses the developments on teaching and learning.

The driving force 'policy' includes the higher education policies of the European Commission and those of the Member States, including regional governments, as well as their policies in related areas. The key uncertainties connected to this driving force are:

- How strong will the role of the European Commission be in higher education policy? The EUI and the related European strategy for universities, as well as the responses of Member States and HEIs suggest a dynamic in which the Commission gradually gains a stronger role. Still, there are also indications that national and regional governments responsible for higher education in Member States will hold the Commission strictly to the subsidiarity principle.
- Will the Bologna Process result in further convergence of national higher education systems within the EHEA? Most original aims of the Bologna Process have been realised by the three-cycle higher education system, the mutual recognition of qualifications, and the advance in quality assurance systems. The success of intergovernmental governance on more recent agenda issues like academic governance, academic freedom, and inclusion remains uncertain.

- Will the Member States and the European Commission create appropriate policy instruments to facilitate the EUAs? The EUAs face a set of issues that require co-governance of Member States and the European Commission.

A key issue is that the co-development of the European Education Area and the European Higher Education Area, is shaped by two overlapping forms of international governance. One is the Bologna Process, a voluntary mechanism launched by the Bologna Declaration of 1999. The declaration has been signed by 49 countries agreeing to adopt reforms of higher education based on common key values. Through this process, countries, institutions and stakeholders within the European Higher Education Area continuously adapt their higher education systems, making them more compatible and strengthening their quality assurance mechanisms.

The other governance process involves the initiatives of the European Commission to shape the European Education Area. The subsidiarity principle restricts the Commission to a mainly facilitative role in higher education. Its main instrument is the Erasmus+ programme supporting the mobility of students and staff. At the same time, the European Universities Initiative goes beyond higher education and reaches out to areas like research and innovation, the labour market, and strategies for digital and green transitions. On some of these topics, the Commission has a stronger policy role. Therefore, these EU policies, and especially the development of the European Research Area supported by the Horizon Europe programme, may also shape the future of the alliances.

The policy driving force also includes the responses of the Member States and the extent to which they support the development of the alliances and create favourable conditions for their activities. The overall perceptions towards European integration within the Member States is an important factor. Currently, the Erasmus+ programme has high support. Member States may consider the European Education Area as an opportunity to further strengthen their higher education system and to make their higher education institutions more attractive to students. But they may also see their national and regional identity threatened by support for staff and student mobility away from their home country.

The second driving force, innovation in teaching and learning, concurs with the idea of a disruption or full transformation of current higher education. It includes digital developments to improve teaching and learning such as virtual reality for training professional skills as well as platforms for organising blended learning or digital tools that could manage education more effectively and flexibly, such as blockchain technologies to register student credits. Also, new educational approaches include challenge-based learning, lifelong learning and skill-focused learning, that are enabled by the opportunities of the new technologies. Other innovations respond to changing needs in the labour market, and pressures from students and external stakeholders to increase the relevance of higher education for realising the Sustainable Development Goals.

The key uncertainty underlying this driving force is which expectation will be dominant in shaping the future of teaching and learning. Expectations of key actors overlap but are not similar. At least three different expectations can be distinguished, with different future outcomes. (Komljenovic, 2022) They are:

- The expectation that through digitalisation and new approaches to teaching and learning, higher education becomes more effective and more efficient. The developments support marketisation of higher education and a larger role of for-profit organisations in providing higher education.
- The expectation that higher education will play a key role in addressing the Sustainable Development Goals. New educational approaches such as CBL will make higher education

more responsible, inclusive, sustainable, civic, and transdisciplinary. The developments emphasise the public responsibilities of higher education institutes.

- The expectation that higher education institutes contribute to the competitive position of countries and regions. Through new educational tools and approaches students can acquire better skills in innovation development and entrepreneurship, and innovative HEIs can better respond to lifelong learning needs of the labour market.

We combined different elements of these two main driving forces to develop three scenarios. The first one, which we call Scenario Orange, emphasises the force of the Bologna Process and the role of the national governments in shaping the EHEA and the future conditions for the alliances. In the second scenario, the Scenario Pink, we foresee a stronger role of the European Commission, implementation of its current strategy for universities, followed by a second phase extending the strategy to further shape the European Education Area. The third one, the Scenario Blue, concurs with the idea of a disruption or full transformation of the current higher education, creating a new academic model (Damme, 2022) to which higher education institutions need to adapt.

We also have considered a null scenario in which the European Universities alliances do not survive because the Commission and Member States do not create a facilitative, regulative framework for the alliances. In such a scenario HEIs within EUAs must conclude that the transaction costs exceed the benefits. While we consider this scenario as realistic as the other three, we have not developed it further. The current initiative is too premature to assess the consequences of this null scenario.

The next sections present the three scenarios, including the implications of each scenario for the alliances, as formulated in the expert session. To avoid unnecessary biases in the interpretation of the scenarios, we gave them neutral titles.

4.4. Scenario ORANGE

Looking backwards in 2030, we see that implementing the 'European Strategy for Universities' made universities throughout Europe eager to institutionalise collaboration, copying the alliances in one way or another. Being or becoming a 'European Universities alliance' however, remained restricted to those networks that were successful in the selection process initiated by the European Commission. Other networks depended on national support, which in 2030 is very uneven.

Universities and their national representative bodies favoured more collaboration and pushed their national government to allow the Commission to increase its support and remove obstacles. However, most Member States were reluctant to give the Commission more influence on higher education. They emphasised that the main role of the Commission is and must only be facilitative, and not directive. After national elections, some Member States even tried to limit the role of the Commission, to regain control over their higher education.

In the early 2020s the international collaborations were also perceived as an instrument that could bridge the innovation gap between Member States in the West and North versus Central/East and South. Yet the gap grew and, in some countries, politicians framed the Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programme as an instrument for brain drain towards the richer Member States.

In other countries, politicians supported universities to collaborate in an EUA or in any other university network. In some of the geographically large Member States, governments even copied the alliance model for own purposes. They used the policy idea to create collaborations between remote universities within disadvantaged regions, through virtual mobility, various digital teaching and learning activities and joint administration of their education programmes. As a result, regional

universities could operate more efficiently and strengthen the socio-economic development of their region.

Because of these different responses, the soft diplomacy of the Bologna Process was needed to create (draft) frameworks for regulation of new educational approaches, such as micro-credentials, virtual mobility, lifelong learning and the use of digital tools in assessments. Existing working groups developed proposals for quality assurance and accreditation of cross-border higher education programmes. A special Bologna working group was created for intergovernmental regulations for governance and funding of higher education alliances. As a result national and regional governments responsible for higher education got a much stronger role in the developments of these alliances.

Impact of Scenario Orange on the alliances

Under this scenario, it is likely that all kinds of alliances develop, as countries within the Bologna Process have created the conditions for doing this. The scenario indicates that some governments have copied the idea of the university alliances to support their own regional policies, which suggests alliances are becoming more usual in this scenario.

Experts assessing the scenario raised the question whether it is really possible for the alliances to move from cooperation to institutionalisation. It would require at least some kind of legal status for the alliances to really institutionalise. They saw two possibilities under this scenario for institutionalisation. The two options are not mutually exclusive.

- The first option the expert panel suggested, is establishing European universities by intergovernmental treaty, following the example of the current European University Institute in Florence. Such treaties would build upon the regulative framework developed by the Bologna Process that this scenario foresees, and they can use the flexibility that such treaties have. The governments involved in the treaty can adapt the regulations to the specific aims and mission of the alliance.
- The second option is that the European Commission creates a legal statute for a European University, to facilitate these intergovernmental treaties. This would follow the example of the European Research Infrastructure Consortia (ERICs).

These options have clear implications for the governance of an alliance, as they require much more involvement of national governments in the governance of the university. It is uncertain whether universities will accept such influence.

However, there is a benefit for students. Due to the involvement of the Bologna Process, the alliances will probably be able to award their graduates a recognizable qualification at European level. Such qualification might increase their chances on the labour market.

The Scenario Orange foresees a continuation of the European Universities Initiative. According to experts, the role of the EUI in this scenario could be to subsidise the coordination costs of developing an alliance into a European University established by an intergovernmental treaty.

4.5. Scenario PINK

The European strategy for universities that the Commission initiated ten years ago, has been quite successful. In 2024, students welcomed the European student card, which facilitates the administration of micro-credentials and acquired skills throughout the European Education Area (EEA). They also enjoyed the reduced prices in public transport, in museums and at festivals and other real life social events, appreciated again after the Covid-19 pandemic.

The European Universities alliances have indeed become a pillar of the EEA. The EUAs became more durable, especially when the Commission created a special legal status making it easier for the alliances to employ staff and to combine different funding streams. Their funding sources are diverse, mostly project based and include Erasmus+ subsidies, research project funding, income from public-private and public-public partnerships, national institutional funding, and student fees.

The creation of a 'European degree' was much more difficult than defining the legal status. The European degree could only be realised after several experiments of alliances in cooperation with the quality assurance agencies and adopting results of a Bologna working group on transnational degrees. Stepwise, Member States included such European degrees in their funding models to match increasing European funding for collaboration in higher education.

In 2026, the Commission announced its second Strategy for European Universities. In that strategy, it made stronger connections between the Erasmus+ programme and the Horizon Europe programme. The latter programme placed a high priority on new educational approaches serving as alternatives to traditional mechanisms for translating research and innovation results into the economy. Likewise, the European programmes for green and digital transitions stimulated education activities in research and innovation projects and improved their long-time impact.

Universities and their organisations, and the Member States welcomed these new funding opportunities for higher education. They considered the extra European funding as an opportunity to share the costs of innovating higher education. Governments stimulated their national HEIs to participate in European higher education collaborations through national funding. In response universities created more new alliances, hoping to reduce coordination costs of the collaborations and increase their chance of success in Europe. Especially successful were universities and university collaborations with a strong track record in influencing regional economies and using digital opportunities to realise sustainable benefits.

Impact of Scenario Pink on the alliances

Experts assessing the scenario see proliferation of alliances as the main consequence of this scenario. The lower thresholds encourage universities to simply try and build an alliance and thus more easily achieve a European Universities alliance status.

The proliferation of alliances may have several implications.

- If many universities enter an alliance, the alliance itself is not so much an unusual asset towards students and other stakeholders. They will rather consider it as a requirement. Universities that cannot offer transnational experiences and opportunities to students and stakeholders are at a disadvantage.
- In a situation of alliances proliferation and targeted funding, more specialised alliances will probably have a competitive advantage. Participation in a specialised alliance would give them better access to European funding and increase their ability to make real impacts.
- Alliances currently depend strongly on commitment from the institutional leadership. A better fit between the institutional agendas of the partners and the alliance would make it more likely that students and staff will engage more in the alliance activities and can realise European added value beyond the mobility experience.
- Proliferation may also raise the serious issue of differentiation within the alliances. With increasing European funding, Member States need to increase institutional funding as well to allow their HEIs to participate. This might put budget pressures on economically

disadvantaged Member States. In other words, the opportunities to participate in an alliance may vary considerably and even fluctuate with economic and political changes in a country.

- If alliances proliferate, mobility may increasingly become a habit even for first-generation students and students from underprivileged groups. This is positive, and implies increased inclusion, not only in terms of regions or institutions, but also for students.

Note that this scenario will require increased resources, also in support schemes for students.

For the European Universities Initiative, the developments foreseen under this scenario may have three consequences. First, the delicate balance between excellence and inclusion goals of the policy instrument may shift towards the inclusion goal, to counterbalance the financial limits of HEIs from economic disadvantaged Member States. Second, as a policy instrument, it only becomes relevant by opening up to a larger number of alliances. Thirdly, while the coordination costs of an alliance itself will reduce, the overall coordination costs for the activities will increase. In this scenario, a mix of EU and national funding is needed to cover these extra costs.

4.6. Scenario BLUE

In 2030, when experts look back, they will point to the Covid-19 crisis and the national support programmes for digital higher education as the real beginning of the transition towards ‘a new academic model’ in Europe. This inclusive model emphasises skills, not qualifications or credentials, and focuses on lifelong learning instead of four-year programmes for young adults. The transition came with many new educational approaches, based on combinations of digital learning platforms, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and other educational technologies.

The transition, also pushed by major changes in the labour market, required universities to redesign curricula and learning trajectories. However, many universities still have some traditional programmes. Some universities even have made it a brand that they operate as a traditional university. This is a risky strategy, based on traditional reputations and the ability of students to pay high tuition fees. The strategy’s success also depends on national governments and their willingness to support these universities.

The uncertainties about the new academic model and the new technologies created opportunities for new entrants and diversification of existing higher education institutions. Initially the new entrants tended to focus on higher education courses that can be offered at low costs – making optimal use of virtual learning platforms. By 2030, the most successful new entrants start to enter markets that the public universities considered as ‘safe territory’ – such as exclusive courses and trainings at Master and PhD level, taught by Europe’s best researchers, innovators and thought leaders.

As a result, the landscape for higher education in Europe has changed slowly. Many for-profit forms of higher education have developed next to the public higher education institutions. Educational technology firms have acquired a strong position and provide new learning technologies with branded content. Many have their home base in the US or Asian countries.

Most regulations and funding schemes for higher education were unfit for the new educational approaches and for the new higher education landscape. Member States and higher education agencies jointly tried to develop new regulations via the Bologna Process. But this failed as some governments saw this as an opportunity to protect the existing universities, while others supported new entrants in the hope that they would push public universities to be more innovative. Often governments were forced to extinguish sudden political fires with ad hoc implementation of new rules.

Still the Erasmus+ programme is thriving, with a strong focus on public education institutions and on new higher education approaches that support an inclusive society, sustainability and the European heritage.

Impact of Scenario Blue on the alliances

On first sight, the scenario reflects the aims of the European Universities Initiative. According to experts, the main opportunity of this scenario is that it is very student-centred. It also makes the HEIs more responsive to the labour market needs. Labour market needs are already a driving force for the development of many higher education institutions, especially universities of applied sciences. Fast changing institutions that can provide tailor-made and hands-on curricula to new target groups will benefit. Furthermore, like the universities of applied sciences, traditional research universities will become more labour market driven and more lifelong learning oriented.

To realise the transition and remain successful, HEIs need to set up multiple co-operations between higher education institutions or between higher education institutions and companies and other stakeholders. The experts question, however, whether the current university alliances are the right form of cooperation for a transition as described briefly in this scenario. The alliances may be too large, too strict, too much governed by external needs. The European Universities Initiative seeks to stimulate HEIs to develop new educational approaches. But most current alliances consist of larger comprehensive universities not well known for their flexibility. It is unclear whether their academic staff is willing to adopt the changes foreseen in this scenario.

When the transition progresses, the alliances as stimulated by the European Universities Initiative, may become a better chance for relatively new HEIs. They may use it to raise their credibility, to develop an academic model for their teaching and learning, and to address new target groups. Their staff might also be more willing to capture the benefits promised by the educational technology companies. These HEIs could use the new technologies to enable academic staff reducing the workload and rebalancing tasks related to teaching, learning, research and outreach.

According to experts, this scenario will have at least a period of diversification. This diversification could result in fragmentation. Another threat is that the private companies' strong role and focus on individual student needs could reduce the role of the public institutes and the steering role of governments. Some governments may decide to strengthen such market forces in higher education and reduce their own investments in higher education.

The strategic challenge for governments that adhere to higher education as a public good is to strengthen the position of the public HEIs in this scenario. The European Universities Initiative could be instrumental for this and, in that case, would need greater emphasis on the moral and public functions of higher education.

4.7. Emerging futures in transnational cooperation: opportunities and threats

The European Universities Initiative is a relative new policy instrument, with broad ambitions and a focus on creating alliances between universities for cooperation in teaching and learning. The related policy vision of the Commission, as reflected in its strategy for universities in Europe and in the selection criteria for alliance initiatives, gives a much longer list of objectives and impacts. Consequently, the options for the future development are broad. In the scenarios, we focused on two main driving forces for the alliances: the political forces and the developments in teaching and learning. Nevertheless, if we assume that the idea of European Universities alliances will continue after the current experimental

phase, and if we ignore the null option in which the instrument vanishes, the scenarios reveal several opportunities and threats.

4.7.1. Scope of the EUI as policy instrument

The first opportunity is the size of the initiative. With 340 participating institutions in 44 alliances, the initiative is still small compared to the overall size of the European Education Area. However, in all three scenarios, other HEIs have good reasons to set up and join an alliance. This means that there are opportunities to further develop the European Universities Initiative.

The direction of that development though is different for each scenario. In the Scenarios Orange and Blue, the EUI as a policy instrument facilitates developments set in motion by other actors. In Scenario Orange, the universities and Member States are the leaders. In this scenario, the EUI mainly functions as a support to HEIs and governments in creating European Universities under intergovernmental treaty. As a policy instrument, it can remain selective by concentrating on those alliances with real commitment from the involved Member States and HEIs and who have the wealth to become a successful European University.

In Scenario Blue, HEIs need to enter alliances to increase their capacity to respond to the opportunities and challenges of the transition of teaching and learning in higher education. In this scenario, with increased need to safeguard the public value of higher education for Europe, the EUI could become a key instrument to strengthen the position of innovative public HEIs.

Many alliances will also be formed in Scenario Pink. They would probably apply for a recognition as European Universities alliance. There is not much reason in this scenario to keep the instrument selective. Instead it would be better to emphasise the opportunities of alliances to strengthen inclusion at the European level.

4.7.2. Regulatory framework and funding

In each scenario, the alliances have an urgent need to develop the regulatory framework and funding conditions, otherwise they will not be sustainable. Alliances face coordination costs, which increase when they must operate in a context of non-transparent funding schemes and diverging regulations.

While the Bologna Process and the Erasmus+ programme has led to convergence of government policies and regulations and institutional strategies that facilitate mobility and collaboration in higher education, the initiation of the European Universities alliances shows that there is still much to gain. Each scenario shows that such frameworks are needed, though maybe less in the Scenario Blue than in the Scenarios Orange and Pink. But even under the Scenario Blue, flexible learning trajectories and other student-centred educational approaches will require some sort of cross-border organisation of higher education.

The threat is probably not so much that the initiative fades away. Current discussions and activities about improving the conditions for the alliances tend to focus on specific aspects of the regulatory framework and legal status. This may result in piecemeal solutions that together are suboptimal. The focus on single issues ignores that with the further institutionalisation of European Universities in whatever form, the European Education Area becomes more important and needs a broader, coherent legislative framework for research and higher education which includes issues such as a European degree, good governance, academic freedom and research integrity.

To realise such coherent framework, there is a clear difference between Scenario Pink and the Scenarios Orange and Blue. In the latter scenarios the European Commission has little leverage to realise such a coherent legislative framework. In Scenario Orange, it may continue to support the Bologna Process

and hope that governments will agree on some sort of framework. Intergovernmental treaties will give national governments a role in the governance of the European universities that is uncommon in many Member States. In the Scenario Blue, the Bologna Process fails to create such a framework and it is unclear whether the transition dynamics provide space for creating one by the Commission in shaping the European Education Area.

Scenario Pink, on the contrary, is based on the dynamics of shaping the European Education Area and emphasises the interrelated higher education policy strategies of the Commission, the universities, higher education agencies and the Member States. It uses the connection between higher education, research and innovation policies to give the Commission more leverage to shape the EEA and provide sustainable conditions for the alliances. Whether this will result in a coherent framework is not certain, therefore there are still too many unknowns. However, the prospects for it are much better than in the other two scenarios.

4.7.3. New approaches in higher education

The European Universities Initiative aims to create opportunities to develop and implement new educational approaches. The current selection criteria specifically refer to challenge-based learning and other new education approaches that are more student-centred, focused on 21st century skills and impact oriented. It is too early to say whether these activities will spread throughout the institutions. In Scenario Orange and Scenario Pink, the development of teaching and learning approaches does not have decisive implications. In Scenario Blue, the transformation of learning and teaching drives university strategies. To increase their capacity to adapt, more universities may enter alliances, and use them as testing grounds for new innovations in student-centred learning and teaching.

However, when discussing Scenario Blue, the expert panel questioned whether the current concept of a European Universities alliance is really the appropriate organisational form to respond quickly to changing student and labour market needs. The alliances are probably too complex, too slow moving, and too much focused on other aims as well. The threat is that while EUAs try to organise joint innovative teaching and learning activities, the innovation process takes too much time, will not really embed within the own organisation, and be overtaken by other developments.

4.7.4. Broader impacts of the EUAs

The current set up of the initiative aims at a broad set of impacts and the selection criteria do not make clear whether they are optional or whether an alliance is expected to realise them all. Currently, it is unlikely that an alliance will realise all the expected impacts that are mentioned by the selection criteria. Scenario Pink suggests a clear opportunity for the alliances to act upon the impacts by linking the European Universities Initiative to the Horizon Europe program that funds research and innovation activities. Therefore, it foresees more specialised alliances that have a better chance to be successful with programmes more likely to realise impacts beyond teaching and learning.

In the other scenarios, the realisation of such broader impacts is unclear. The threat in Scenario Orange and Scenario Blue is that the current broad set of expected impacts within the selection criteria creates an unnecessary threshold for promising alliances. It increases coordination costs and shifts the focus of an alliance away from realising more specific objectives.

4.7.5. Geographical scope

Discussing the scenarios in general, the expert panel noticed that the scenarios were very much focused on the European Union and its Member States, though it acknowledged that in Scenario Orange, more driven by the Bologna Process, other countries could get involved easier than in the

other two scenarios. Yet they saw an unmentioned opportunity to use alliances to strengthen the international position of HEIs from non-EU Bologna countries and make them more attractive. They specially mentioned countries in the Mediterranean area and former-Soviet countries. However, one can also think of more global partnerships. Experts indicated a related threat of restricting alliances to HEIs from the EU Member States and associated countries and thus possibly reducing the attractiveness of global collaboration in higher education.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

KEY FINDINGS

- The selection process complies with the Erasmus+ objectives. The EUI is a policy measure aimed at developing an innovative model of transnational cooperation at the institutional level.
- The criterion of including HEIs from at least three EU countries effectively addresses the importance of fair participation, ensures geographical balance, and makes the EUI an important instrument for European integration.
- The current model of operation of the alliances is unsustainable and the alliances face significant obstacles in realising the ambitions of the EUI.
- The EUAs are perceived as an opportunity to innovate education, increase the attractiveness and quality of educational offers, and improve transnational collaboration.
- To realise the EUIs ambitions, more coordination is needed to develop a coherent regulatory framework for the EUAs activities in higher education, research, innovation and community engagement.

This study assesses the European Universities Initiative and the European Universities alliances. The goal is to support the European Parliament in evaluating the EC's current work and planned interventions on the EUI, in making evidence-informed decisions as co-legislator, and in assessing the degree to which the EUI supports the EP resolution on the EEA (2021).

To accomplish these aims, the study applies several methods and collected data from various sources to achieve a rich impression of the EUI and the implementation of the EUAs. These research methods included the following elements.

- To assess the selection criteria, we analysed the HEIs involved in selected alliances using ETER and U-Multirank data.
- A systematic literature review and three focus groups provided data for assessing the functioning and experiences of the existing alliances.
- In a scenario workshop, we discussed three possible development paths for the EUAs and the EUI with a group of international experts.

In what follows, we first list a series of limitations to the study. Next, we provide a summary of our findings based on the project objectives highlighted in the Terms of Reference of the European Parliament tender. To conclude this last chapter, we draw five recommendations for the EP in its aim to supervise the work of the Commission on the EUI and considering the role of the EP as co-legislator, its budget role and its reputation in strengthening European values and integration.

5.1. Limitations to the study

Although the data collection aimed at including all relevant information and knowledge on the EUI and the EUAs, our findings have some limitations.

First, the initiative only started in the autumn of 2018 and the EUAs selected in the first or second call had their initial activities delayed by the severe pandemic restrictions of Covid-19 beginning in March 2020. Therefore, the EUI is still in its initial phase, and the EUAs could not unfold as planned. This evaluation can essentially only assess the start-up phase of the initiative and the challenges and benefits associated with it. Thus, the results do not represent the challenges and benefits that may arise if the initiative gets more established.

Second, due to data protection rules, we could only access data on the selected EUAs and not on EUAs that have not been selected. Therefore the findings lack an important comparison or control group. To compensate partly, we compared characteristics with those of all HEIs in the EEA. Although these results give an indication of the impact of the criteria, they do not fully reflect their effect.

Third, because the initiative is quite recent, no extensive body of (scientific) literature has yet evolved. In the research community, there is strong interest in the EUI and the EUAs since they represent a new form of transnational collaboration. Some studies are still ongoing, and their results have not been published yet. Therefore, the scholarly literature offers only a limited base of evidence.

5.2. Selection criteria and procedures

Concerning the first aim of this study, the evaluation of the selection criteria and procedures, we found that most EUAs include a distinct type of HEI, which can be described as an excellent or flagship university. In other words, most of the participating HEIs are large, research-oriented and highly ranked institutions performing well in international collaboration. They could map their EUAs on already pre-existing networks such as LERU or Coimbra. Nonetheless, the selection criteria, due to the mandatory geographical balance of the EUA, created opportunities for HEIs from all Member States to participate.

These results indicate that the current dynamics of the EUI might create a bias in the further development of the alliances, if the path dependency observed continues. However, from the perspective of the Erasmus+ programme, the EUI is a measure aimed at developing a new, innovative model of transnational cooperation at institutional level. In order to contribute to this objective, participating HEIs should have, at least to some extent, the relevant operational capacity and resources to contribute to this development work. Thus, the current selection of HEIs participating in EUAs is on target with regard to this Erasmus+ objective.

For the further development of the EUI, we recommend documenting the work of EUAs in developing the new model of transnational cooperation. Outcomes should flow into the work of the EC and be made available to all HEIs. This exchange of experiences should aim at building the operational capacity of HEIs that have not currently participated in the EUI.

The mandatory criterion of including HEIs from at least three of the European regions has allowed for the inclusion of all EU regions in the EUAs. The criterion effectively addresses the importance of the geographical balance of the EUAs as an important instrument to further develop European integration and the fair participation of all regions in the EUI. Yet, the geographical criteria used in the first three calls limit the possibilities of the EUAs to possibly include more appropriate institutions outside the EU, which would be beneficial for realising other European goals such as the green or digital transformation.

The assessment of first experiences of the EUAs and the scenario analysis raises questions about the long list of criteria and expected impacts that each EUA is expected to realise. We recommend to assess with the Commission the possibilities for more flexible use of the criteria and expectations.

5.3. An initial assessment of EUAs

Our study has revealed a long list of potential benefits and challenges for the European Universities alliances. We focus in this conclusion on the central topics of interest highlighted by the European Parliament.

5.3.1. Governance

The EUI aims to strengthen transnational institutional cooperation in higher education in Europe. In doing so, it raises internationalisation to a different level: whereas much transnational cooperation in education and research has taken place on a case-by-case basis at the level of individuals or faculties, the EUI offers the possibility to form strategic partnerships with higher education institutions. The design of governance models which shape cooperation is largely left to the EUAs. This freedom gives the EUAs sufficient leeway to find the regulations that suit them and create frameworks that allow trusting cooperation between the alliance members. The freedom also intends that various governance models are developed in a bottom-up process that can represent good practice for other subsequent alliances. Also, the bottom-up process intends to involve the universities or alliances as stakeholders in policy processes at the supranational level. This increases the possibilities of co-designing political measures or objectives at the European level by the concerned actors.

For the alliances, this freedom also implies that they have to deal with developing these structures on a daily basis. Often, the newly created and complex governance structures turned out to be unfeasible in practice and had to be adapted several times. In particular, governance structures that aimed at achieving equal and democratic participation of all institutions in decision-making slowed down decision-making, which is striking, considering that Commission and EP value the involvement of staff and students in shaping the EEA. The democratic representation of different status groups should be perceived as an important challenge for further developments of the EUAs and a necessary enrichment in alliance collaboration.

The EUAs from the first call, struggled with transitioning from project status to an institutionalised form of collaboration. We cannot assess to what extent the EUAs have already enriched the supranational policymaking, i.e. their possibilities for co-determination in the EUI. The EUAs pointed out that the transition from the project to an institutionalised form that can be considered a European University is difficult, because there is no legal construct available yet, such as a legal statute, which would enable them to act as an independent body or as a legal entity.

After reflecting upon the governance challenges faced by the EUAs, in section 5.5, we will recommend that the EP in its role as co-legislator places a high priority on developing a coherent regulatory framework that facilitates the EUAs, stimulates democratic governance and significantly lowers transaction costs of the EUAs. The scenario study suggests that linking policies for the EEA and the ERA makes such framework more feasible.

5.3.2. Funding

Ensuring sustainable funding of EUAs is currently one of the biggest challenges for the further development of the EUIs. Currently, the Erasmus+ budget covers only part of the costs, and EUAs need to generate funds from various sources to meet all the challenges faced. In particular, more funding is

necessary for the high costs of implementing the alliances and consolidating their cooperation. The uncertainty of long-term funding for EUAs is another challenge, because many stakeholders expect that with the end of Erasmus+ support, the EUAs will disappear. There seems to be a low possibility that the EUAs will soon develop independent funding. The EUAs find the current funding insufficient and wish for increased support from Member States. They would also like to see funding simplified, i.e. not having to draw funding for its various missions from various sources.

Concerning the EUI, experts also pointed out that this initiative, with very few resources, represents a significant impetus for developing cooperation between universities in Europe. The key question however is how the real costs of the alliances are covered in the future. The budget of the EUI will probably not increase enough, to cover all transaction costs and costs of the new activities. It is likely that the alliances can count on some funding from their government, but it is really uncertain whether they will fully make up the difference. Therefore, in section 5.5, we will recommend that the Parliament raises at least two additional options to shape the European financial contributions to the EUAs. First, the option that activities of alliance can be funded by other programmes, such as those for research and innovation, regional development, and the green and digital transition. Second, the option to make funds available for participation by HEIs in economic weaker European regions, to strengthen their budget position within the alliances.

5.3.3. Benefits for students

For students, the EUI and EUAs offer numerous benefits. The EUAs report that student mobility has increased significantly. They emphasise that a strong driver for this is the possibility of blended mobility, which enables a combination of online learning and short-term international mobility. The EUAs can thus address students whose profile differs from those who were mobile within the longer-term Erasmus+ programmes. This suggests that new forms of blended mobility are more socially inclusive for students. The EUAs enable seamless mobility for students, i.e. there are few obstacles to enrol in modules or courses or recognition of the credits earned. Innovative learning formats, especially challenge-based learning, are an asset for students. These formats enable them to develop different skills. The exchange with students from all regions of Europe and working on societal challenges with intercultural team are considered especially enriching. Students involved in the governance structures of the EUAs enrich the cooperation in the alliances and also learn a lot about the other universities and transnational cooperation.

In section 5.5, we recommend considering these early benefits as an asset of the EUI, especially as they also reflect the opportunities for the EUI to contribute to European integration and cohesion. In its supervisory role, the EP could try to ensure that the initiative's future development consider these contributions as a best practice for new EUAs. It might even consider whether the experiences could be used as examples for other parts of the Erasmus+ programme.

5.3.4. Levels of collaboration

The EUAs 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 areas (research, university-industry collaboration, and community engagement), the EUAs are starting to strengthen cooperation. However, they also point out that initiating cooperation in research can sometimes be artificial. In most cases, EUA member institutions were already involved in international research collaborations before the EUA began its work. These collaborations are mostly bi- or multi-lateral relationships between researchers with cooperation based on a common research

interest. Therefore, establishing new relationships that emphasise institutional research collaboration appears to be a major challenge for the EUAs.

Nevertheless, the EUAs see some opportunities for collaboration. Challenge-based learning, in particular, is seen as a lever that can link teaching, research and innovation in the EUAs. This collaboration may also eventually lead to more organic forms of research collaboration or community engagement.

The EUAs also highlight that their collaboration can be seen as a structured form of institutional peer learning. The possibility of sharing infrastructure for research and good practice in all areas is expected to positively affect the quality of research and the other activities of HEIs.

5.3.5. European added value for institutions

Higher education institutions involved in EUAs receive many benefits. The resource-intensive participation pays off with increased visibility and reputation for those HEIs where participation in a EUA forms an essential part of their mission and strategy. It makes them more attractive employers for foreign academics, because the EUA allows them to be internationally mobile without significant restrictions, build on already institutionalised collaborative relationships with other universities, and find expanded research and teaching opportunities. The institutions, in turn, can create an enlarged and improved teaching offer. The EUI also strongly supports the development of innovative learning formats.

5.4. Opportunities and threats for the future

To assess the future of the alliances, we developed three scenarios, using two main driving forces. The first force is the combination of national and regional higher education policies of Member States and that of the Commission, as well as related strategies of the HEIs and their stakeholders. Scenario Orange emphasised the strength of intergovernmental governance and foresaw that the EUI would push the Bologna Process into a next phase. The Scenario Pink foresaw a stronger role of the Commission with the EUI becoming an instrument not only for higher education, but also research and innovation and other European policies. The second force is the development in teaching and learning, driven by digitalisation and external stakeholder needs for higher educational approaches that are more student-centred, flexible, engaged and responsive to sustainable development goals. Scenario Blue emphasised this driving force and foresaw a transition in teaching and learning to which the HEIs need to respond, and will create alliances to improve their ability to innovate.

The discussion of the scenarios by international experts can be summarised in five related opportunities and threats.

- In all three scenarios, the EUI has the opportunity to create favourable conditions for alliances and make it beneficial for HEIs to enter alliances. This would imply a growth in the number of alliances. When alliances between HEIs become more common, the European Commission can consider to specify further the policy function of the EUI in the development of the EEA and the alliances.
 - The experts considered that when alliances proliferate, the EUI may lose its relevance as an instrument. This was considered most likely in Scenario Blue, in which the main driving force of changes in higher education are innovations in learning and teaching.
- Each scenario foresaw a need to create better provisions for alliances, to improve funding opportunities, to make a European degree possible, and to improve their governance and legal status. A longer term need is to develop a broader coherent legislative framework for research and

higher education. The legal issues include a European degree, good governance, academic freedom and research integrity.

- The related threat is that ad hoc solutions are created separately. Current discussions and activities about improving the conditions for the alliances tend to focus on specific aspects of the regulatory framework and legal status. This approach threatens to result in piecemeal, suboptimal solutions that still generate high transaction costs.
- The EUI creates the opportunity to develop and implement new educational approaches. It is too early to say whether these activities will be disseminated throughout the institutions, but if alliances consolidate then they could function as innovation spaces and testing grounds in higher education, as well as a proper organisational form to offer flexible and student-centred learning.
 - However, the expert panel raised the question whether the current EUAs are really the appropriate form to respond quickly to changing student and labour market needs. The threat is that they cannot realise innovation in higher education, because they are too complex, take too long to consolidate, and are too focused on other policy aims.
- The EUI has the ambition to improve connections between higher education policy and other policy areas, such as research and innovation policies. This is reflected in its selection and award criteria. While many HEIs already make these connections in their strategies, European and national policies often lack consistency. Without clear connections between policies, the alliances may develop a wide portfolio of activities to address a range of expected impacts, without the necessary force to achieve real impact. Moreover, the EUI, as a policy instrument, would only serve a few alliances and HEIs, and especially the traditional comprehensive, research universities.
- The EUI clearly holds the opportunity to further integrate higher education at the European level. This aim legitimises the current focus on the European Union and its Member States. Yet experts indicated that the initiative holds broader opportunities for international collaboration, e.g. to address global challenges or strengthen the position of HEIs from non-EU countries, in the EHEA and the Mediterranean area.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the scenarios assume that the alliances would find sustainable, operational models. In the current situation, considering the challenges for the HEIs, the immature phase of the alliances, and the small size of the EUI within the overall size of the EHEA, the null scenario that the EUI will not hold, should also be seen as a realistic future.

5.5. Recommendations

In discussing the main findings, we gave already some recommendations for the future development of the EUI and how the EP could help make EUI more effective in shaping the EEA. In this section, we synthesise the results into four recommendations and related policy options.

5.5.1. Recommendation 1: improve the financial position of alliances

To strengthen the EUAs, the Commission and Member States must urgently find ways to improve the financial position of the alliances. Currently, the EUI funding does not cover the full costs of governance and other activities of the alliances. Some Member States provide additional funds, but at very different levels, and still insufficient to assure the long-term membership of all EUA partners. A main obstacle for developing sustainable financial strategies is that the de facto funding of governance and the activities is not transparent.

We suggest that the EP, in its dialogue with the Commission about the EUI and EEA, urge the Commission, to make more transparent the actual costs and income of the alliances and then discuss opportunities to improve the budget resources available to the alliances.

Focus groups and the expert assessment of the scenarios identified three policy options.

- The first policy option complies with the aim of the EP to strengthen links between the EEA and the ERA. In Scenario Pink, this was done by realising the opportunity of new educational approaches to create more impacts in industry and communities and support such higher educational activities of EUAs with ERA programme funds, regional funds, and other funds that foster the digital and green transition.
- The second policy option addresses the cohesion objective of the EUI. The Member States and HEIs in the EU have unequal economic positions. Considering that participation in EUAs currently requires considerable investments of alliance members, it might be worthwhile to consider more funding for participation by HEIs from economically weaker European regions and strengthen their position within the alliances. Such support would increase the likelihood of staff and student mobility and truly symmetrical exchanges and collaborations.
- The third option is to lower the transaction costs of cross-border collaborations. Despite significant progress in the convergence of the national and regional higher education systems in Europe, the differences in regulations still induce high administrative costs for the alliances.

5.5.2. Recommendation 2: develop a consistent regulatory framework

The alliances struggle with multiple governance challenges, which in the current pilot phase are solved often on an ad hoc basis. Such a bottom-up process is inevitable considering the scope of issues but needs to be followed up by a more systematic approach. The Commission's current European strategy for universities focuses on creating a European degree, but alliances face a broader set of regulatory issues involving research and innovation.

Our scenario study identified that the Bologna Process as well as the shaping of the EEA create opportunities for developing better regulatory conditions for the alliances. The discussions revealed that the next phase of the Bologna Process may not be sufficiently powerful to realise such a framework.

Instead, we recommend that the Member States and the EP, as co-legislator next to the Council, consider placing a high priority on developing a regulatory framework for both the EEA and the ERA. For some higher education issues, like accreditation and quality assessment of cross-border learning and teaching and new educational approaches, the Bologna Process can be used to develop functional regulations. However, it will probably not cover the full range of issues. The regulatory framework needs to shape future collaborations of alliances in research, innovation and community engagement, but must also regulate other issues related to the ERA, such as research integrity, open science and intellectual property rights.

Moreover, since higher education strengthens European identities and cohesion, a coherent regulatory framework that facilitates the EUAs should also address issues like democratic governance of higher education and academic freedom.

5.5.3. Recommendation 3: reconsider selection criteria and expected impacts

The European strategy for universities and the European Universities Initiative have ambitious objectives. This legitimises the range of criteria and expected impacts that the Commission uses to assess applications and select the best.

However, alliances will probably not be able to be equally successful across all dimensions. By trying too much, they risk not even achieving impacts related to the focus and strengths of the alliance. Moreover, the experts pointed out that, in the long run, EUAs with a more unique profile could develop more successful strategies in acquiring funds and realise impacts in innovation and community engagement.

We therefore recommend that the EP discusses with the Commission and the Member States the possibilities for more flexible use of the criteria and expected impacts. A possible option is to distinguish between:

- impacts on European cohesion and the shaping of the EEA with contributions expected from all EUAs;
- impacts on innovations in learning and teaching which EUAs can prioritise as fitting to the distinct educational strategies of their members;
- impacts on the green and digital transformation and other SDGs which EUAs can prioritise as fitting with the profiles of their members' academic disciplines.

5.5.4. Recommendation 4: maintain benefits and monitor progress

Success in the experimental phase of a policy instrument depends on the extent that stakeholders and policymakers exchange information on obstacles, benefits, results, and challenges. The EUAs are expected to act as a role model and create best practices for other HEIs. Within the alliances, we found that the benefits realised in developing new educational offers and forms of mobility are indeed based on mutual learning, exchanges of best practices, and experiencing the innovations. This has led to some early benefits for students, as in the case of blended mobility, which was considered as a best practice that could be further disseminated. This success might even shape other parts of the Erasmus+ programme.

On other aspects it is less clear whether the first phase of the EUAs has led to best practices or that the EUAs can already act as role models. This can be an effect of the level of information currently available on the development, governance and performance of the alliances, as well as on the implementation of the EUI. For this study, it was not possible to get full information on the selection process. Nor was monitoring information available that the EUAs provide to the Commission. Restricting access to and exchange of information makes it less likely that best practices are recognised and new EUAs can profit from lessons learned in the experimental phase.

To strengthen the function of the EUI to create role models, we recommend better documentation and public availability of the work of the EUAs in developing new models of transnational cooperation. A systematic monitoring of the progress and impacts will also strengthen the EP supervisory role and ensure that the initiative's future development contributes to the development of the EEA and European cohesion.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: Award criteria call 2022

| Topic 1 | |
|--|--|
| European Universities – Intensification of prior deep institutional transnational cooperation | |
| 1. Relevance (maximum 25 points) | |
| Level of ambition and innovative approach of the proposal | <p>Extent to which the proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims to address and progress towards the long-term vision of the European Universities Initiative (please see Section 2). • Is ambitious and innovative. • Builds upon the institutional cooperation achieved so far as a starting point to further deepen, strengthen, intensify and expand institutionalised cooperation across the institutions, enhancing the transformation process at the institutional level and demonstrating progress towards the alliance’s long-term vision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In providing education, linking it where possible to research and innovation, as compared to the current state of play. - Through innovative and new systemic, structural and sustainable cooperation models. • Presents an updated and highly relevant joint long-term mission statement, explicitly endorsed by relevant decision-making bodies. |
| European added value | <p>Extent to which the proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to the development of the European Education Area, in synergy with the European Research Area, where relevant. • Demonstrates European added value through its transnational dimension, in particular for students. • Demonstrates contribution to regional development, for example through the engagement of the alliance's members in their regional ecosystems and with their local communities, including in the context of the Smart Specialisation Strategies. • Benefits other higher education institutions in Europe and beyond, by driving inclusion and excellence |
| 2. Quality (maximum 50 points) | |
| 2.1. Project design and implementation (maximum 25 points) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency between the joint long-term strategy and the proposed joint structures and joint activities to achieve it. • Extent to which the proposal demonstrates how the development of a joint strategy will match the level of ambition of European universities and how the joint activities will contribute efficiently to strengthening and enhancing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High quality education, including through the use of challenge-based and interdisciplinary approaches, innovative pedagogical models to develop forward-looking skills and competences, making best use of digital technologies, blended learning and work-based learning. - Level of mobility (physical, virtual, blended; short and long term) for students, academics and professional staff and researchers. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Where possible, the links between education and research and innovation, including how research results and innovation will feed back into education. • Consistency between the joint long-term strategy and the proposed joint structures and joint activities to achieve it. • Extent to which the proposal demonstrates how the development of a joint strategy will match the level of ambition of European Universities and how the joint activities will contribute efficiently to strengthening and enhancing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High quality education, including through the use of challenge-based and interdisciplinary approaches, innovative pedagogical models to develop forward-looking skills and competences, making best use of digital technologies, blended learning and work-based learning. - Level of mobility (physical, virtual, blended; short and long term) for students, academics and professional staff and researchers. - Where possible, the links between education and research and innovation, including how research results and innovation will feed back into education. |
| <p>2.2. Partnership and cooperation arrangements (maximum 25 points)</p> | <p>Cooperation arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangement structure: the distribution of responsibilities and tasks is clear and appropriate, demonstrates the financial, structural and organisational commitment at highest institutional level. Clearly demonstrates a deep institutional transnational cooperation for a period of at least between two and three years at the time the application is submitted. Gives all staff the opportunity to be part of the co-creation of the alliance, both through the provision of education and, where possible, research and innovation, and at a structural organisation level through shared management structures, common provision of services, databases, human resources and scientific infrastructure. Level of involvement of students in the co-creation of the alliance and in the joint structures. • Roles and responsibilities: the capacity and active role of each member of the alliance to deliver jointly the common vision, strategy and common activities is clearly demonstrated. • Complementarity: the extent to which partners complement each other, including in terms of diversity of types of higher education institutions or show that they are collaborating with each other to obtain value added and cost efficiency, and are complementary with regard to the joint implementation of the common vision, strategy and common activities. • Cooperation arrangements are well designed to maximise the benefits of the integrated cooperation by reducing existing administrative barriers and obstacles and to promote all types of mobility within the alliance, including mobility to and from organisations other than higher education institutions. • The proposal includes clear arrangements and responsibilities for transparent and efficient decision-making, conflict resolution, risk management and reporting and communication between the participating organisations. <p>Geographical balance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which the alliance includes a large number of higher education institutions from different European geographical regions²⁰ as full partners and ensures a wide geographical coverage. • The extent to which the applicant has motivated the geographical composition of the alliance and how it enables partners from different European regions to strengthen their institutional capacity. |
| <p>3. Impact (maximum 25 points)</p> | |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which the proposal addresses and demonstrates progresses towards the impact listed in Section 2 of this call. • Long term strategy for the sustainability of the alliance: the proposal includes a vision on sustainability outlining how each member of the alliance will support this financially or otherwise with the objective of being sustainable beyond the EU funded period. • Capacity of the alliance to act as role model: the extent to which outputs and good practices generated by the alliance will be shared and have the potential to be mainstreamed in other higher education institutions with whom they cooperate beyond the alliance in Europe and beyond. • Dissemination: the proposal provides a clear dissemination plan of results, experiences and good practices put in place, and includes appropriate human and financial resources, activities, tools and communication channels including the use of social media to ensure that results, outputs and innovation triggered by the European University will be fully accessible and shared openly and effectively to a wide range of stakeholders during and after the EU funding period of the European Universities alliance. • Open Education and Open Science and Citizen Science resources: If relevant, and within the limits of existing national and European legal frameworks, the proposal describes how data, materials, documents, audio-visual and social media activity will be made available to make data searchable, accessible, interoperable, and re-usable (FAIR) to other higher education institutions and European Universities in Europe. |
|--|---|

| Topic 2 | |
|--|--|
| European Universities – Development of new deep institutional transnational cooperation | |
| 1. Relevance (maximum 25 points) | |
| Level of ambition and innovative approach of the proposal | <p>Extent to which the proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims to address and progress towards the long-term vision of the European Universities initiative (please see Section 2) and its potential to transform and enhance institutionalised cooperation. • Presents a highly relevant joint long-term mission statement explicitly endorsed by relevant decision-making bodies. • Is ambitious and presents an innovative approach, including the extent to which the alliance will strengthen and expand cooperation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In providing education, linking it where possible to research and innovation, as compared to the current state of play. - Through innovative and new, systemic, structural and sustainable cooperation models. |
| European added value | <p>Extent to which the proposal:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes to the development of the European Education Area, in synergy with the European Research Area, where relevant. • Demonstrates European added value through its transnational dimension, in particular for students. • Demonstrates contribution to regional development, for example through the engagement of the alliance's members in their regional ecosystems and with their local communities, including in the context of the Smart Specialisation Strategies. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits other higher education institutions in Europe and beyond, by driving inclusion and excellence |
| 2. Quality (maximum 50 points) | |
| 2.1. Project design and Implementation (maximum 25 points) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency between the joint long-term strategy and the proposed joint structures and joint activities to achieve it. • Extent to which the proposal demonstrates how the development of a joint strategy will match the level of ambition of European Universities and how the joint activities will contribute efficiently to strengthening and enhancing the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High quality education, including through the use of challenge-based and interdisciplinary approaches, innovative pedagogical models to develop forward-looking skills and competences, making best use of digital technologies, blended learning and work-based learning. - Level of mobility (physical, virtual, blended; short and long term) for students, academics and professional staff and researchers. - Where possible, the links between education and research and innovation, including how research results and innovation will feed back into education. - The level of engagement with key stakeholders fosters societal engagement of students and staff as well as their entrepreneurial key competences. - The social diversity of the student, academics and researchers and supporting measures to promote the inclusion, access, participation and completion of under-represented groups and people with fewer opportunities, as well as support for gender equality in higher education. • Clarity and feasibility of the work plan and roadmap, explicitly describing the expected progress, outputs and outcomes for each phase associated to concrete activities and actions contributing to the realisation of the joint long-term strategy. • Quality and financial settings: setup of a quality assessment and review which includes specific measures for evaluation of progress, processes and deliverables (e.g. through the development of suitable quantitative and qualitative indicators, including the feedback from students and staff). The quality monitoring should also ensure that the implementation of the alliance is cost-efficient. |
| 2.2 Partnership and cooperation arrangements (maximum 25 points) | <p>Cooperation arrangements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrangement structure: the distribution of responsibilities and tasks is clear and appropriate, demonstrates the financial, structural and organisational commitment at highest institutional level while giving all staff the opportunity to be part of the co-creation of the alliance, both through the provision of education and, where possible, research and innovation, and at a structural organisation level through shared management structures, common provision of services, databases, human resources and scientific infrastructure. Level of involvement of students in the co-creation of the alliance and in the joint structures. • Roles and responsibilities: the capacity and active role of each member of the alliance to deliver jointly the common vision, strategy and common activities is clearly demonstrated. • Complementarity: the extent to which partners complement each other, including in terms of diversity of types of higher education institutions or show that they are collaborating with each other to obtain value added and cost efficiency, and are complementary with regard to the joint implementation of the common vision, strategy and common activities. • Cooperation arrangements are well designed to maximise the benefits of the integrated cooperation by reducing existing administrative barriers and obstacles and to promote all |

| | |
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| | <p>types of mobility within the alliance, including mobility to and from organisations other than higher education institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposal includes clear arrangements and responsibilities for transparent and efficient decision-making, conflict resolution, risk management and reporting and communication between the participating organisations. <p>Geographical balance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent to which the alliance includes a large number of higher education institutions from different European geographical regions as full partners and ensures a wide geographical coverage. • The extent to which the applicant has motivated the geographical composition of the alliance and how it enables partners from different European regions to strengthen their institutional capacity. |
| <p>3. Impact (maximum 25 points)</p> | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which the proposal addresses and demonstrates progresses towards the impact listed in section 2 of this call. • Long term strategy for the sustainability of the alliance: the proposal includes a vision on sustainability outlining how each member of the alliance will support this financially or otherwise with the objective of being sustainable beyond the EU funded period. • Capacity of the alliance to act as role model: the extent to which outputs and good practices generated by the alliance will be shared and have the potential to be mainstreamed in other higher education institutions with whom they cooperate beyond the alliance in Europe and beyond. • Dissemination: the proposal provides a clear dissemination plan of results, experiences and good practices put in place, and includes appropriate human and financial resources, activities, tools and communication channels including the use of social media to ensure that results, outputs and innovation triggered by the European University will be fully accessible and shared openly and effectively to a wide range of stakeholders during and after the EU funding period of the European Universities alliance. • Open Education and Open Science and Citizen Science resources: If relevant, and within the limits of existing national and European legal frameworks, the proposal describes how data, materials, documents, audio-visual and social media activity will be made available to make data searchable, accessible, interoperable, and re-usable (FAIR) to other higher education institutions and European Universities in Europe. |

Source: Call: —Partnerships for Excellence – European Universities- (ERASMUS-EDU- 2022-EUR-UNIV) EU Grants: Call document (ERASMUS): V1.0 – 30.11.2021

ANNEX 2: Description of data sources

The quantitative analysis in chapter 2 is based on data from four international databases on education: ETER, U-Multirank, and Erasmus mobility statistics.

The ETER database

The European Tertiary Education Register (ETER) has been developed through a series of contracts by the EC from 2014 onwards. The current contract with the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission (contract no. EAC-2021-0170) runs for three years from May 2021 to April 2024. It has established a comprehensive register of educational institutions delivering degrees at ISCED levels 6 (bachelor), 7 (master) and 8 (PhD). Data at the level of individual HEIs include organisational characteristics and geographical information, staff, revenues and expenditures, students, graduates, research activities and can be downloaded from the public ETER website (www.eter-project.com).

ETER relies as far as possible on existing methodologies, specifically from official statistics, for the definition of variables and indicators. This allows for the reusing of data collected in the framework of educational and R&D statistics for ETER and guarantees the possibility of comparison between ETER and international statistics.

The data used for the analyses presented in this chapter were retrieved on 27 June 2022 from the ETER website, www.eter-project.com.

Coverage

ETER covers 41 countries, including all 27 European Union Member States, EEA-EFTA countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland), as well as candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey), Holy See and Andorra, and the UK.

The coverage is more extensive than research universities, including also almost all colleges and large numbers of specialised schools like art and music schools. Only 40 % of the ETER HEIs have the right of awarding PhD degrees.

ETER coverage at ISCED level 5 is limited to HEIs also delivering degrees at ISCED level 6 and 7. Therefore, coverage at this level (when compared with EUROSTAT) varies strongly by country.

Data sources

The primary data in ETER are the same as those published by EUROSTAT in the country and regional education and training statistics, but disaggregated at the institutional level. These data are provided by National Statistical Authorities (NSAs) or Higher Education Ministries. For a few countries, primary data are collected by the ETER team from official sources, such as the NSAs' websites.

The ETER project team also collects data from institutional websites and NSA websites. These include data such as foundation years, demographic events, and institutional addresses.

Data completeness

Data on students and graduates are available for most countries, including the breakdown by gender, nationality, and fields of education. Data on mobility of students are less widely available. The situation is similar for PhD students, except that for few countries data are missing.

Since the database is a register of higher education institutions that is filled by national statistical authorities, we assume the set of higher education institutions in the ETER database to be the complete population of higher education institutions in the relevant countries, apart from for Romania.

Consequently, as we had evidence for data on Romania to be incomplete, we retrieved additional data on students enrolled from *Registrul Educational Integrat*.

The ETER database comprises a large number of Belgian adult education centres. Since these centres are not within the scope of the study and no data on students enrolled are available, these centres were excluded from the analyses.

The base year of the analyses is 2019 for most countries. For Bulgaria, Czechia, Romania, Slovenia and UK, the analyses are based on 2016 data.

For HEIs that participate in an EUA but have missing data in the ETER database, the research team has retrieved information from institutional websites and other public data sources to fill the data gaps where possible.

The U-Multirank database

U-Multirank is a multidimensional, user-driven approach to international ranking of higher education institutions. The first U-Multirank ranking was the 2014 edition, covering 850 higher education institutions from more than 70 countries. It provided a ranking at the institutional level as a whole as well as at the level of specific fields of study. Thereafter, the coverage of institutions and subject areas was expanded each year.

U-Multirank enables to compare the performances of higher education institutions in five activities: (1) teaching and learning, (2) research, (3) knowledge transfer, (4) internationalisation and (5) regional engagement. Detailed information can be found at the U-Multirank website: <https://www.umultirank.org>.

The project is funded by ERASMUS+ and private foundations.

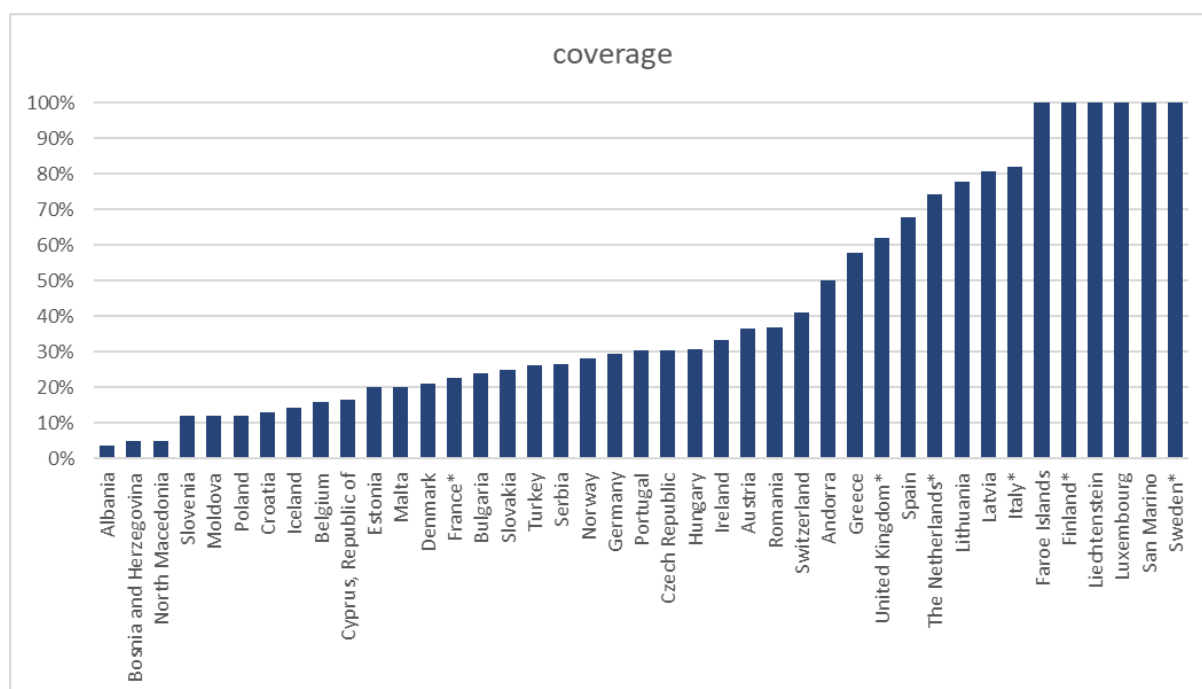
Data sources

The data included in U-Multirank are drawn from various sources: information supplied by the institutions themselves (in an institutional questionnaire), data from international bibliometric and patent databases, national databases, and surveys completed by more than 100 000 students to date at participating universities.

Coverage

The 2022 edition covers 2 202 institutions from 96 countries. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, U-Multirank deleted, after consultation with DG EAC, all institutions from Russia (49) and Belarus (7) from the database. To assess whether the sample of HEIs within U-Multirank is representative, we have used the World Higher Education Database (WHED) of the IAU as the reference population. According to the WHED, the 1 039 European HEIs in U-Multirank are around one third of the total number of HEIs in the 96 countries covered. Figure A2.1 shows that the variation in coverage between these countries is large.

Figure A2.1: Coverage of U-Multirank database of European HEIs



Source: WHED, U-Multirank

Most of the HEIs participating in an EUA are also in the U-Multirank database. The coverage differs between the calls.

Table A2.2: Coverage of U-Multirank database of EUA HEIs

| | Percentage of EUA HEIs in UMR |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Call1 | 97 % |
| Call2 | 95 % |
| Call3 topic 1 (added) | 93 % |
| Call3 topic 2 | 76 % |

Erasmus mobility statistics 2014-2019

The dataset contains the raw data on Erasmus+ mobility for students (study exchanges and work placements) and staff (teaching assignments and staff training) in 2014-2019. The data include information on various fields: age, gender, duration, special needs, subject area, level of study, sending and receiving country, etc. The dataset is published by the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission and available at

<https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/erasmus-mobility-statistics-2014-2019-v2?locale=en>.

ANNEX 3: Transnational networks

In our analyses of previous engagement of EUA members in existing transnational networks we used the list of networks shown below. The list is drafted, using expert consultation and a scan of websites. In creating this list, two criteria were used:

- size: the network should be between 4 and 50 members.
- geographical focus: networks with a clear focus outside of Europe were excluded.

The transnational networks of HEIs included in the analysis are:

3iUniversity network

Athens Network

Aurora universities network

BOVA

CESAER

CLUSTER

Coimbra Group

Compostela Group

Critical edge alliance

ECIU

ELLS

EURASHE

Eurosci

Eurotech

Hanseatic League

IARU

IDEA League

LERU

NOVA

SSUN

TechU

The Guild

U4Society

UNICA

Universitas 21

Utrecht Network

Worldwide Universities Network

YERUN

ANNEX 4: Methodology systematic literature review

Systematic literature review (SLR) is a methodology pioneered in medicine, which made its inroads into social sciences more recently. It provides comprehensive and rigorous overviews of published empirical research. We followed methodological guidelines proposed by other SLRs in higher education research to ensure reliability, validity and replicability of findings (Craciun and Orosz, 2018; Grosemans, Coertjens and Kyndt, 2017). The methods for searching, selecting, analysing, and cataloguing empirical evidence are documented to ensure the reliability and replicability of findings.

The scope conditions of the SLR, how they are operationalised into selection criteria for the literature and their justification are presented in Table A2.2.

Table A4.1: Selection criteria for literature and justification

| SCOPE CONDITIONS | SELECTION CRITERIUM OPERATIONALISATION | JUSTIFICATION |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Publication date | Include studies published from 2019 onwards | The first European Universities alliances were selected in 2019 |
| Language of publication | Include only literature published in English | English is the lingua franca of higher education internationalisation. Available resources do not allow for checking publications in other languages. |
| Geographical scope | Include literature on Europe | European Universities alliances are considered an important pillar towards building the European Education Area. |
| Level of analysis | Include studies on the benefits and challenges of European Universities alliances at all levels of analysis | As indicated, these occur at multiple levels (individual, course/program/institutional, and system level) |
| Type of literature | Include both qualitative and quantitative peer-reviewed and grey empirical literature | The study aims to review a broad spectrum of evidence to provide a comprehensive preliminary assessment of European Universities alliance. |

To guarantee a comprehensive overview of published research, four databases were searched for academic and grey literature:

- ERIC, the world's largest educational database and the most used index for carrying out educational research;
- Scopus, which indexes peer-reviewed journals in top-level subject fields;
- Google Scholar, a comprehensive database of research (including both academic in grey literature);
- OpenGrey, a large repository of European open access grey literature.

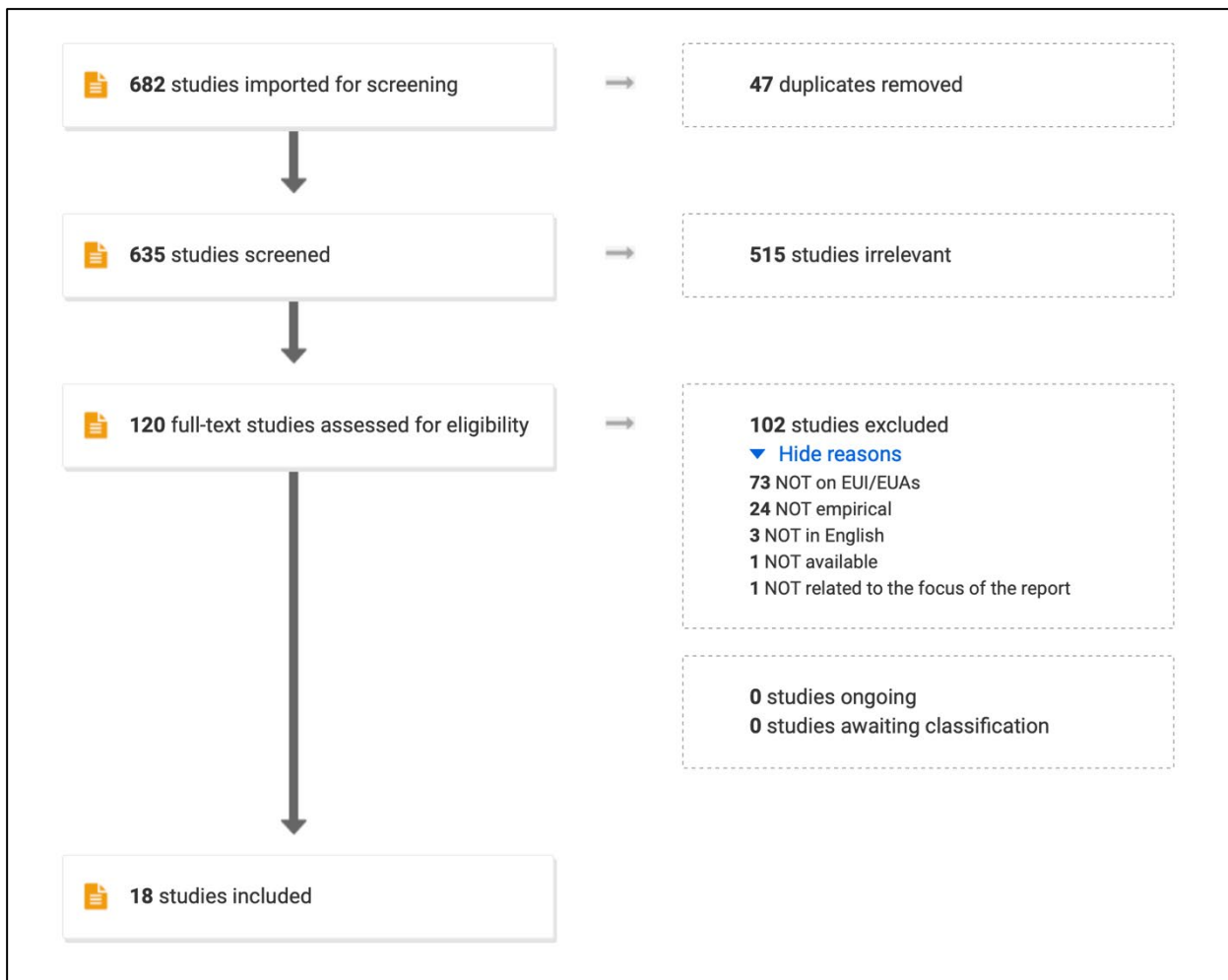
A keyword list reflecting the research questions' focus was developed and tested a priori with controlled keyword searches to mitigate and plan for the possible risk that there is a dearth of literature on the topic. The controlled keyword search used the search string: 'European Universities Initiative' OR 'European universities initiative' OR 'European university alliance' OR 'European Universities alliance'. The results were filtered to keep only those records that were published from 2019 onwards and in English.

In research based on SLR methodology there is a balance that must be struck between sensitivity, finding as many relevant articles as possible, and specificity, ensuring that the articles found are indeed relevant (Siddaway et al., 2019). The keyword selection reflects this concern. The final keyword selection was done in consultation with other higher education experts from 3s and CHEPS.

The results show that the literature available on the European Universities Initiative is limited in terms of quantity, which is to be expected given the novelty of the policy measure. To mitigate the risk of missing out on significant relevant scholarly publications and make up for the fact that grey literature database search yielded only one result, two additional methods (Petticrew and Roberts, 2006) were used to expand the search results:

- Journal scouting. We used the INCHER database of article titles and abstracts published in 28 international journals on higher education that is compiled every year to search for the topic keywords 'European', 'initiative' and 'alliance' and include all relevant publications to the initial pool of results.
- Organisation checking. We scanned the publication records of pertinent international associations doing or commissioning research on the European Universities Initiative and higher education internationalisation (e.g. DG EAC, JRC, EENEE, EURASHE, Nuffic, EAIE, ACA, DAAD, British Council, Campus France, IAU, AIEA, EUA, ESU, ESN, Eurostudent, Coimbra Group) and include all relevant publications to the initial results pool.

The different search strategies yielded a total of 682 possibly relevant records. The results of the searches were uploaded to Covidence, a collaborative SLR management system available at the University of Twente, that helps to efficiently and reliably track, review, and extract data from the literature following PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines. Figure A4.1 shows the PRISMA funnel.

Figure A4.1: Prisma funnel systematic literature review on EUAs

Source: Covidence

Covidence automatically removed any duplicates that might have appeared in the pool of results due to the variety of methods used to search for relevant literature (n=47). Next, a title and abstract review was carried out following the criteria developed to keep relevant records and exclude irrelevant ones. The criteria were modelled after the scope conditions of the SLR and are meant to provide a quick way of sifting through the pool of records. A record was kept only if it meets both of the following criteria:

- it is on the topic of European Universities alliances (all other types of transnational cooperation between universities will be excluded), and
- it is empirical (theoretical, review, and opinion articles will be excluded). If there is any doubt about whether the reference should be removed, it will be retained for the next stage following the principle of sensitivity mentioned before.

For the articles retained after the title and abstract review, the full text was retrieved and uploaded to Covidence for an initial review (n=120). Inclusion/exclusion criteria were developed to ensure the records kept for data extraction answer the research questions proposed by the overview study and meet minimum quality standards. Articles were removed if they were not on the topic of EUI/EUAs (n=73), not empirical (n=24), not in English (n=3), full-text not available (n=10), or the focus of the record was not related to the focus of the report (n=1). For the 18 records kept, a data extraction sheet

was developed focusing on the type of and level at which the benefits/challenges of European Universities alliances occur.

ANNEX 5: Methodology focus groups

In this study we organised three focus groups. The aim was to validate our results from the data analysis and the systematic literature review and to collect insights that might have not been addressed in both.

Each group addressed participants who are in one or another way related to the European Initiative or to the European Universities alliances. All participants volunteered for the focus group they were invited to, and did not receive a remuneration or any other form of compensation. A full list of participants is added at the end of this annex in Table A5.1.

For each focus group, we selected a list of topics we found most relevant for the participants. The focus groups were conducted online on the Zoom platform and were around 90 minutes long. All participants agreed that the meetings were recorded. During the meeting, participants could also send messages through the Zoom chat function. All focus groups were implemented as plenary meetings. We did not implement breakout rooms. Frans Kaiser, Andrea Kottmann and Barend van der Meulen acted as moderators in the focus groups.

The recordings of the meetings were transcribed with the help of Amberscript, a platform which provides machine transcriptions of audio-data. These transcripts were checked and corrected with the help of the audio recording. In a further step, the transcripts were summarised with regard to key findings.

Below we discuss details of each focus group.

Policy perspectives

The 13 participants of the first focus group were policymakers and higher education specialists, who took part in the evaluation of EUA proposals or who consult the EUAs, and staff from representative bodies of HEIs and students and from representative bodies for the EUAs that have been selected in the first two calls. All participants were part of the CHEPS contact database, i.e. we have had contact before in other collaborations or research projects. A major criterion for selecting these participants was that they have had or have experience with EUAs from a policy perspective. In this meeting, we discussed:

- the preliminary findings from our data analysis on the selected HEI and the profile of the EUAs;
- the bottom-up process for establishing sustainable governance models for transnational multi-institutional collaboration;
- the funding of the EUAs.

Perspectives from academic staff and students

The 10 participants in the second focus group included staff and students, who worked in an EUA or already experienced any form of mobility within an EUA. To find these people, we first selected eight EUAs from the first and second call. For this analysis, we used results from Lambrechts, Lepori and Cavallaro (2022) which classifies the EUAs with regard to their prior collaborations. The results clearly distinguish EUAs with moderate cooperation in teaching and research from those who have already been collaborating a lot in both areas before the establishment of the EUA. Also, the results discern strong collaborations in either education or research. From all four groups, we selected two EUAs. We contacted the main coordinators by email and asked them to assist us in finding staff and students, who could participate in the focus groups. To avoid bias, we also asked them to mention up to ten persons who could participate, from which we could randomly select participants.

This process turned out to be a winding road, as either the coordinators we found on the website moved to other positions/jobs or delegated the request. In addition, contacts only responded slowly to our request due to the summer holidays in July and August. Finally, we were able to engage a diverse group of staff and students in the focus groups. With them we discussed foremost the benefits for students that are linked to an EUA with regard to the following aspects:

- seamless mobility;
- challenge-based learning and innovate educational approaches;
- cross-/interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary programmes;
- diversity of the student body in the EUAs.

Governance perspectives

For the third focus group we invited presidents and coordinators from those EUAs that were also selected for the second focus group. For this group we faced the challenge to schedule a date that was suitable for a sufficient number of participants. While most invitees were absent over the summer holidays, their September agendas were already full due to the start of the new academic year/semester. Also a number of obligatory meetings for the EUA/EUI hindered some invitees to participate in the focus group. In this last group, we discussed the following topics with five high level representatives of EUAs:

- European added value – relationships between the EUAs and their host institutions
- profiling of alliances
- research collaboration

Table A5.1: List of participants in the focus groups

| | Name | Institution/EUA/Organisation |
|--|---|---|
| 1st focus group Policymaker, consultants, etc. | Jo Ritzen | Maastricht University |
| | Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik | European University Association |
| | Frans van Vught | European University Institute |
| | Eva Egron-Polak | Free consultant |
| | Tuomas Parkkari | Finnish Ministry of Science, Education and Culture |
| | Matteo Vespa | European Student Union |
| | Ludovic Thilly | EC2U - Representative of Association of EUAs from the first call |
| | Thomas Estermann | European University Association |
| | Olga Wessels | ECIU University – Representative of Association of EUAs from the first call |
| | John Edwards | Eurashe |
| Florian Pecenka | Representative for Austria at the European Commission, research and education | |

| | | |
|--|------------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Sybille Reichert | Free Consultant |
| 2nd focus group Staff and students | Adrian Korzeniowski | ECIUn |
| | Alessandra Scrocarro | ECIUn |
| | Anouk Deana - | EUGLOH |
| | Asta Daunorienė | ECIU |
| | Frank Stadelmaier | Civica |
| | Lisa Dequech - University of Porto | EUGLOH |
| | Marco Rupp | ENGAGE |
| | Marketa Capkova | EUGLOH |
| | Masoumeh Shahverdi | ECIUn |
| | Rodrigo Valdoleiros e Silva | EUGLOH |
| 3rd focus group Coordinators and presidents | Fernando Galán | ARQUS |
| | Dorothy Kelly | ARQUS |
| | Eric Cassan | EUGLOH |
| | Silvia Luber | ENGAGE |
| | Emily Helmeid | EUGLOH |

ANNEX 6: Outcomes logistic regression

In this annex, we present the methodology and tables of the logistic regression, we did to estimate how strongly the institutional characteristics determine the selection of the EUAs in chapter 2. Some of the factors have been recoded for the analysis. For size of the HEIs, we aggregated the very few tiny, small and medium-sized HEIs in one category. To measure the impact of the disciplinary focus, we ran a cluster analysis on the percentage of students in fields of study; this included all HEIs. This cluster analysis identified five different types of disciplinary focus. In the most specialised types of HEIs, the percentage of students concentrated in one field and was higher than 50%. In the comprehensive type, the percentage of students in fields of study distributed across all fields of study. For the scope of educational fields, we established three categories: small – up to three educational fields, medium - up to six educational fields, and large - seven or more educational fields.

The analysis was done separately for the first and the second call. While the analysis for the first call included all HEIs listed in ETER, the analysis of the second call excluded the HEIs that were selected in the first call.

Table A6.1: Outcomes call 1 logistic regression

| | Step 1 | | Step 2 | | Step 3 | | Step 4 | | Step 5 | | 95% C.I.for EXP(B) for Step 5 | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------------|---------|---------------|---------|---------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|----------------------------------|--------|
| | Sig. | Exp(B) | Sig. | Exp(B) | Sig. | Exp(B) | Sig. | Exp(B) | Sig. | Exp(B) | Lower | Upper |
| Size of HEI | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tiny, small and medium size | | ref | | ref | | ref | | ref | | ref | | |
| Large | < 0.001 | 9.387 | < 0.001 | 4.937 | < 0.001 | 3.85 | < 0.001 | 3.317 | < 0.001 | 3.417 | 1.703 | 6.856 |
| Very large | < 0.001 | 34.065 | < 0.001 | 16.403 | < 0.001 | 11.989 | < 0.001 | 8.857 | < 0.001 | 9.448 | 4.435 | 20.127 |
| Cluster of disciplinary focus | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Engineering | | | | ref | | ref | | ref | | ref | | |
| Business | | | 0.903 | 0.944 | 0.895 | 1.064 | 0.909 | 1.056 | 0.721 | 1.187 | 0.463 | 3.043 |
| Services | | | 0.997 | 0 | 0.997 | 0 | 0.997 | 0 | 0.997 | 0 | 0 | . |
| Comprehensive HEI | | | 0.893 | 0.958 | 0.894 | 0.957 | 0.748 | 0.898 | 0.736 | 0.891 | 0.457 | 1.739 |
| Humanities and arts | | | 0.877 | 0.901 | 0.621 | 0.711 | 0.529 | 0.646 | 0.505 | 0.623 | 0.155 | 2.503 |
| Scope of educational profile | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Small | | | | ref | | ref | | ref | | ref | | |
| Medium | | | 0.658 | 0.782 | 0.702 | 0.807 | 0.915 | 0.941 | 0.918 | 0.943 | 0.308 | 2.891 |
| Large | | | 0.1 | 2.398 | 0.085 | 2.504 | 0.051 | 2.929 | 0.045 | 3.046 | 1.027 | 9.037 |
| Age of Institution | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Younger than 25 years | | | | | | ref | | ref | | ref | | |
| 25 - 75 years | | | | | 0.191 | 1.567 | 0.199 | 1.572 | 0.143 | 1.673 | 0.84 | 3.331 |
| 75 - 150 years | | | | | 0.002 | 3.239 | 0.014 | 2.599 | 0.007 | 2.856 | 1.323 | 6.163 |
| older than 150 years | | | | | 0.01 | 2.588 | 0.097 | 1.865 | 0.047 | 2.136 | 1.01 | 4.519 |
| Percentage of graduates | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| None | | | | | | | | ref | | ref | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|-------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|--------|
| Low | | | | | | | 0.742 | 0.692 | 0.923 | 0.898 | 0.1 | 8.07 |
| Medium | | | | | | | 0.402 | 2.408 | 0.299 | 2.984 | 0.38 | 23.447 |
| High | | | | | | | 0.1 | 5.57 | 0.068 | 6.734 | 0.867 | 52.291 |
| Very high | | | | | | | 0.091 | 5.972 | 0.036 | 9.33 | 1.159 | 75.099 |
| European Region | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Central/East | | | | | | | | | | ref | | |
| North | | | | | | | | | 0.017 | 2.49 | 1.177 | 5.266 |
| South | | | | | | | | | 0.37 | 1.372 | 0.687 | 2.741 |
| West | | | | | | | | | 0.179 | 0.635 | 0.328 | 1.231 |

Table A6.2: Outcomes call 2 logistic regression

| | Step 1 | | Step 2 | | Step 3 | | Step 4 | | Step 5 | | 95% C.I. for EXP(B) for Step 5 | |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|--------------|-----------------------------------|--------|
| | Sig. | Exp(B) | Sig. | Exp(B) | Sig. | Exp(B) | Sig. | Exp(B) | Sig. | Exp(B) | Lower | Upper |
| Size of HEI | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tiny, small and medium size | | ref | | ref | | ref | | ref | | ref | | |
| Large | < 0.001 | 7.722 | < 0.001 | 3.572 | < 0.001 | 2.901 | < 0.001 | 2.83 | < 0.001 | 2.933 | 1.927 | 4.465 |
| Very large | < 0.001 | 16.153 | < 0.001 | 7.616 | < 0.001 | 5.92 | < 0.001 | 5.344 | < 0.001 | 6.127 | 3.539 | 10.608 |
| Cluster of disciplinary focus | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Engineering | | | | ref | | ref | | ref | | ref | | |
| Business | | | 0.009 | 0.471 | 0.033 | 0.54 | 0.022 | 0.511 | 0.018 | 0.495 | 0.276 | 0.888 |
| Services | | | 0.996 | 0 | 0.996 | 0 | 0.996 | 0 | 0.996 | 0 | 0 | . |
| Comprehensive HEI | | | < 0.001 | 0.382 | < 0.001 | 0.391 | < 0.001 | 0.368 | < 0.001 | 0.318 | 0.207 | 0.488 |
| Humanities and arts | | | 0.003 | 0.188 | 0.001 | 0.152 | < 0.001 | 0.14 | < 0.001 | 0.116 | 0.037 | 0.367 |
| Scope of educational profile | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| small | | | | ref | | ref | | ref | | ref | | |
| medium | | | 0.043 | 2.072 | 0.042 | 2.092 | 0.039 | 2.13 | 0.026 | 2.305 | 1.106 | 4.805 |
| large | | | < 0.001 | 4.866 | < 0.001 | 4.69 | < 0.001 | 4.563 | < 0.001 | 5.197 | 2.443 | 11.056 |
| Age of Institution | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Younger than 25 years | | | | | | ref | | ref | | ref | | |
| 25 - 75 years | | | | | 0.027 | 1.659 | 0.049 | 1.576 | 0.018 | 1.751 | 1.101 | 2.784 |
| 75 - 150 years | | | | | 0.002 | 2.453 | 0.011 | 2.098 | < 0.001 | 2.728 | 1.508 | 4.936 |
| older than 150 years | | | | | < 0.001 | 3.127 | 0.001 | 2.499 | < 0.001 | 3.455 | 1.915 | 6.233 |
| Percentage of graduates | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| None | | | | | | | | ref | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|-------|--------------|---------|--------------|-------|--------|
| Low | | | | | | | 0.218 | 2.153 | 0.054 | 3.356 | 0.978 | 11.516 |
| Medum | | | | | | | 0.094 | 2.817 | 0.023 | 4.168 | 1.213 | 14.321 |
| High | | | | | | | 0.019 | 4.312 | 0.004 | 6.162 | 1.777 | 21.372 |
| Very high | | | | | | | 0.036 | 3.893 | 0.003 | 7.379 | 2.008 | 27.123 |
| European Region | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Central/East | | | | | | | | | | ref | | |
| North | | | | | | | | | < 0.001 | 2.809 | 1.59 | 4.963 |
| South | | | | | | | | | 0.132 | 1.491 | 0.887 | 2.506 |
| West | | | | | | | | | 0.014 | 0.543 | 0.334 | 0.884 |

ANNEX 7: Analysis of alliances not funded

The absence of official information on the alliances that in the calls were not selected or selected but not funded poses limitations to this study. To get an idea of the scope of the limitations, we tried to identify non-funded/ non-selected alliances and their member HEIs. We used data from three sources: the French Ministry of Education, German DAAD and the internet. Both the French Ministry and DAAD have published information on alliances that met the basic criteria but were not funded in Call 1. The French and German HEIs in those alliances received national support. Of these French HEIs, three participate in alliances which resubmitted in Call 2 and were successful. A fourth alliance did not resubmit. In the German data, we found seven more proposals that were rejected. One was rejected in Call 2 but accepted when it resubmitted in the Call 3.

Eight HEIs that were part of rejected proposals were accepted when in Call 3 they joined EUAs that submitted proposals for continuation. EU4ART was rejected in Call 3.

One rejected alliance was found on the internet (EMERGE).

In the graphs below, we compare the rejected submissions with the overall population of HEIs and the accepted proposals. It is likely that the results for the non-funded proposals are not representative for all non-funded proposals, because we could include only a limited number of non-funded proposals, from a limited number of sources.

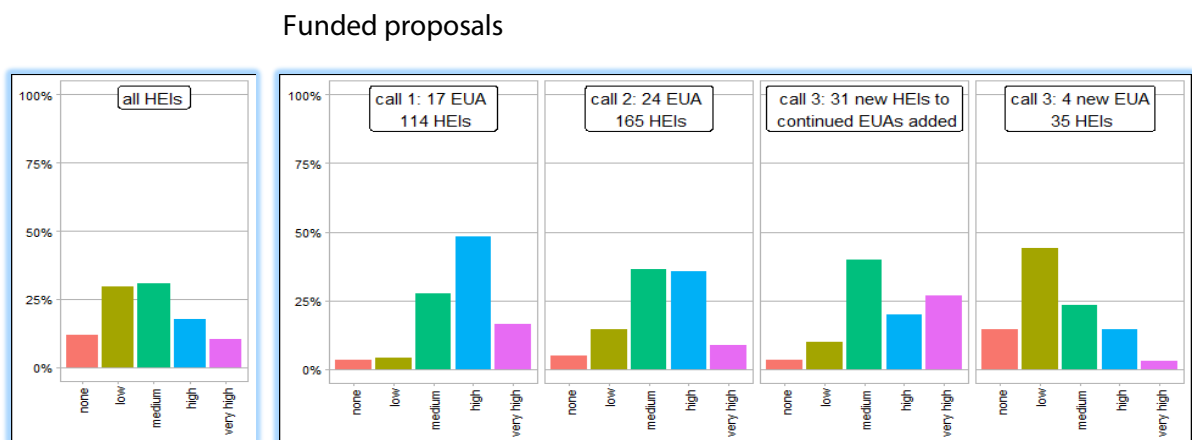
The main results are:

- The HEIs in the non-funded proposals are larger than in the general population, but they are smaller than the HEIs in the funded proposals. (Figure A7.1)
- In Call 1 and Call 2, the research orientation of HEIs in the non-funded proposals differs from the general population. In Call1, the non-funded proposals are less research intensive. In Call 2, the non-funded proposals are more research intensive. In Call 1, the non-funded proposals are also less research intensive than the funded alliances. (Figure A7.2)
- The HEIs in the non-funded proposals differ from the general population: they are more broad in scope. Compared to the funded alliances, there is a difference in Call 1: among the non-funded proposals there are less comprehensive HEIs and thus more specialised HEIs. (Figure A7.3)

Figure A7.1: Size of HEIs in funded and non funded EUA proposals



Figure A7.2: Research orientation of HEIs in funded and non funded EUA proposals



Non-funded proposals

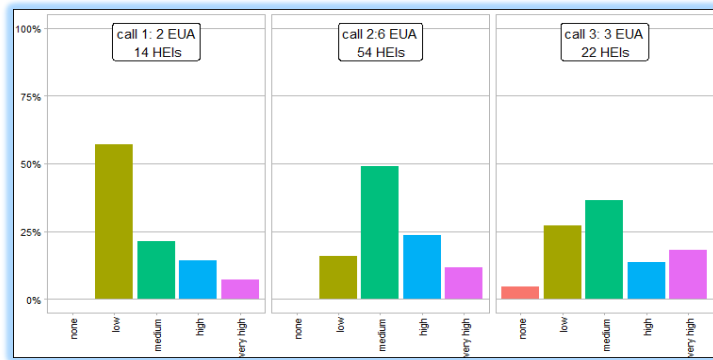
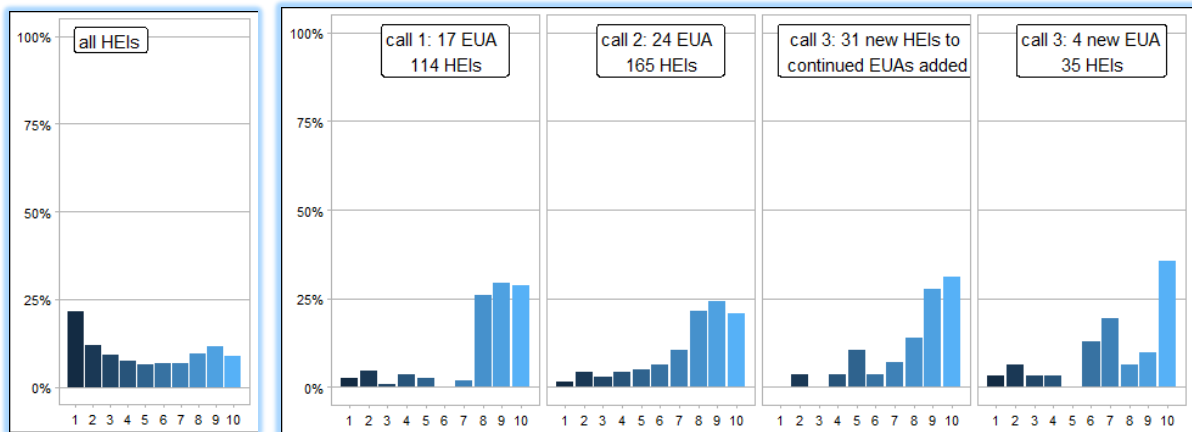
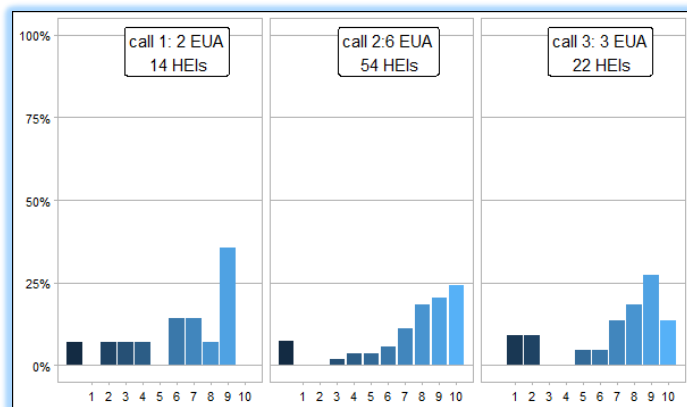


Figure A7.3: Scope of HEIs in funded and non funded EUA proposals

Funded proposals



Non-funded proposals



In 2019 the European Universities Initiative started. Since then, 44 European Universities alliances were created, with 340 participating higher education institutions. This study evaluates the selection procedures and assesses the experiences of the first years. It also drafts three scenarios to map future developments. Recommendations to the EP aim to strengthen the sustainability of the EUAs, create better regulatory conditions and improve the learning processes.

PE 733.105

IP/B/CULT/IC/2022-006

Print ISBN 978-92-848-0115-2 | doi:10.2861/ 601174 | QA-03-22-314-EN-C

PDF ISBN 978-92-848-0114-5 | doi:10.2861/ 160992 | QA-03-22-314-EN-N