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Report on the final outcomes of the Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects: European degree (label) and institutionalised EU cooperation instruments

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Executive summary

Higher education institutions across Europe have the potential to be much more competitive globally if they join forces by cooperating with each other and combine their strengths. To boost Europe's open strategic autonomy and high-level knowledge development, it is important for universities to pool resources, knowledge and expertise across the EU through cooperation and transnational degree programmes. This will allow them to better equip future generations with the skills that European societies need to thrive in an ever more interconnected world, including in key strategic areas.

Substantial progress has been made since the launch of the European Education Area[1] in 2020, including through Erasmus+ European Universities alliances, Erasmus Mundus Joint Master programmes, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, and other types of university partnerships. However, many obstacles to seamless collaboration and especially to the development of joint educational degree programmes remain. The more partner universities that want to get involved, the more complex it gets.

Both the testing of a possible European degree and of institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions are a direct response to these challenges and efforts to find solutions at EU level.

One of the aims of a possible European degree is to simplify the development and delivery of joint degree programmes, so that more students can benefit from a wider offer of this transnational learning offer. The aim is to provide a common level playing field for universities across the EU to work together. They will be able to join forces, push for innovation and propose top-notch degrees to attract and retain talent in Europe. A European degree would offer a voluntary European framework to simplify the development, implementation and recognition of joint degree programmes and joint degrees developed and awarded jointly by several institutions from different countries.

Just like any degree, a European degree would be awarded at the national, regional, or institutional level. The purpose is not to harmonise degrees across the EU. A European degree would be based on a shared set of European criteria to be agreed by all EU Member States.

It would be up to each Member State to decide whether it would want to integrate the European degree into its legal and regulatory framework. And it would be up to each university to decide if it would want to award a European degree (once allowed by their national laws and regulations).

The European degree could, especially in an initial stage, be implemented as a label, a complementary certificate awarded to students graduating from joint programmes developed by European higher education institutions. The 'label' would communicate the added value of a joint degree, as reflected by the criteria it is built on, and would not need to be enshrined in national legislation. However, a label would not make it much simpler for higher education institutions to set up and deliver joint degree programmes. It would not solve the incompatibilities between national rules as identified by the pilot projects.

In a similar spirit, institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions, would give alliances, on a voluntary basis, the latitude to act together, make common strategic decisions, organise joint procurement, experiment with joint recruitment, design joint curricula or pool infrastructure, resources and human, technical, data, education, research and innovation capacities.

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[1] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025, COM(2020)625, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0625.

Policy context

The European degree was presented as one of the flagships of the 2022 Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities[2]. The Communication proposes that exploratory work should be carried out to award a joint European degree based on European criteria. It also proposes to work towards a legal status for alliances of universities by piloting the implementation of existing European instruments.

The Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[3] emphasises that deeper and more effective transnational cooperation in the higher education sector across Europe is key to supporting Union values, identity and democracy, to building the resilience of European society and economy, and to building a sustainable future. The Recommendation invited the Commission to pilot, as a first step, criteria for a European degree label to be awarded as a complementary certificate. The certificate would be in addition to the qualification obtained by students graduating from joint programmes, in collaboration with the Member States, higher education institutions and other stakeholders.

The Council Recommendation also invited the Commission to support the Member States and higher education institutions in testing the use of existing European instruments to facilitate deeper, long-term and flexible transnational cooperation and examine the need for and feasibility of institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions.

The Council Recommendation also invites the Commission to report, at each step, to the Council for further decision based on the results of the preparatory work and the Erasmus+ pilots.

As a follow-up, the Commission has:
- published, in 2022, the Erasmus+ call for a European policy experimentation in higher education. The priority here was to support higher education institutions in piloting a European degree label for joint transnational programmes responding to a number of criteria. It was also to test institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status at the European level for alliances of higher education institutions, including the European Universities. As a result of this call for proposals, 10 Erasmus+ policy experimentation projects (hereafter referred to as 'Erasmus+ pilot projects') were selected. They started their activities in spring 2023 and ended in spring 2024, with their final reports delivered in summer-autumn 2024[4];
- adopted, on 27 March 2024, the Communication on a blueprint for a European degree[5], and the two accompanying proposals for Council recommendations on a European quality assurance and recognition systems[6] and on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education[7]. The regular results of the 10 Erasmus+ pilot projects informed these initiatives and are the founding evidence based for the Blueprint for a European degree, with key evidence presented in the accompanying Staff Working Document;

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[2] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions on a European Strategy for Universities, COM/2022/16, https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities.
[3] Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation (2022/C 160/01), OJ C 160, 13.4.2022, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0413(01).
[4] This present technical report is based on the outcomes of the Erasmus+ pilot projects. It does not represent an official position of the Commission, unless otherwise stated.
[5] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social committee and the Committee of the Regions on A Blueprint for a European degree, COM/2024/144, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52024DC0144.
[6] Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education, COM(2024)147 final, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/105c5bf0-ec49-11ee-8e14-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/.
[7] Proposal for a Council Recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education, COM(2024)145 final, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/161c2e3e-ec48-11ee-8e14-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/.

- adopted this complementary technical report on the final outcomes of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, as announced in the Commission Communication on the blueprint for a European degree[8].

This Report is based on the outcomes of the Erasmus+ pilot projects whose preliminary results were already outlined in the Staff Working Document accompanying the Commission Communication on the Blueprint for a European degree[9]. It does not represent an official position of the Commission, unless otherwise stated. Based on the strong cooperation between the different Erasmus+ pilot projects and the outcomes of the many informal coordination meetings that have taken place throughout the project to come up with consolidated feedback, the outcomes in this report present the collective views of the different Erasmus+ pilot projects. Annexes III and IV to this report set out a more project-specific overview.

Ten Erasmus+ pilot projects

Of the 10 Erasmus+ pilot projects selected as part of this European policy experimentation, six focus on testing the concept of a European degree label while four assess the need for and feasibility of institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions.

Overall, the main partners in these Erasmus+ pilot projects span 23 EU Member States and two Erasmus+ programme countries (Norway and Türkiye), engaging a wide range of stakeholders. Among the 100 main partners, higher education institutions are the most prominent, including comprehensive universities, technical universities, universities of applied sciences and academies of arts. They are joined by accreditation agencies, national authorities and university associations, reflecting a broad commitment to strengthening European transnational cooperation. Notably, all but one of the Erasmus+ pilot projects included European universities alliances as partners through their participating higher education institutions, representing 21 European universities alliances overall. Figure 1 shows the number of full partners per country in the Erasmus+ pilot projects.

Figure 1. Number of full partners in the Erasmus+ pilot projects per country
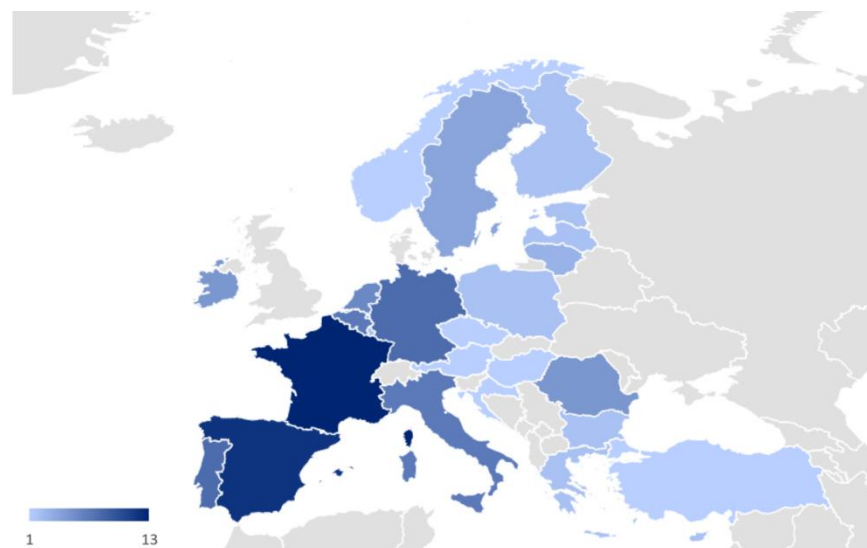
Source: Pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

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[8] Ibid 5.
[9] Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the documents Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a blueprint for a European degree; Proposal for a Council recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education and Proposal for a Council recommendation on attractive and sustainable careers in higher education, SWD(2024)74 final, https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/bec6b5a9-f0e3-11ee-8e14-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/.

The full partners were supported by a number of associated partners that included higher education institutions, universities associations, public authorities, businesses, chambers of commerce, and diverse associations in higher education. Overall, all EU Member States are represented.

Outcomes of the six Erasmus+ pilot projects piloting the criteria for a European degree label

The six Erasmus+ pilot projects involved 140 higher education institutions, 17 ministries, 20 national quality assurance agencies, students' organisations, and economic and social partners. They addressed and tested the concept of the European degree label based on European criteria from diverse complementary perspectives that run transversally to the European degree.

A European degree would be defined by a set of criteria, defining its nature, scope and characteristics. Prior to the beginning of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, a European Commission expert group composed of EU Member States and representatives of universities, students, and national quality assurance agencies drafted a first version of the European criteria based on a study on the impact and feasibility of a joint European degree[10]. This first set of co-created European criteria was published as part of the call for proposals to which the Erasmus+ pilot projects applied to.

The focus of the Erasmus+ pilot projects included:

- a review of the barriers to transnational collaboration and joint programmes;
- the suitability of the draft first version of the co-created European criteria published in the call for proposals in diverse bachelor's, master's, doctorate, and micro-credentials joint programmes;
- the suitability of the criteria in diverse fields of study, including engineering and arts; the development of a digital European degree label; and
- the development of advice for future actions to make the European degree a reality.

This variety of angles allowed for a broad overview and assessment of the potential and challenges relating to the European degree, both in the format of a label or a type of degree.

In particular, the six selected Erasmus+ pilot projects mapped about 1 000 joint programmes across the EU and analysed their possible compliance with the proposed European criteria. They carried out surveys with thousands of higher education institutions and students on the suitability of the criteria and conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups, including EU Member States and quality assurance agencies.

Clear added value

The Erasmus+ pilot projects broadly concluded that a European degree, would represent an enormous advancement in European higher education and create unprecedented opportunities to improve excellence and competitiveness in European higher education.

For students, a European degree would provide a qualification recognised across the EU, promoting the transnational development of future-proof skills, the ability to work in international and interdisciplinarity teams, multilingualism, mobility, and better chances of gaining employment.

Higher education institutions would benefit from reduced administrative burden for joint programme creation, innovation, resource sharing, and increased transnational appeal.

EU Member States would also benefit from improved talent retention and better alignment with local and EU job market needs while employers could readily identify graduates equipped with a transnational mindset and relevant skills.

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[10] Burneikaitė, G., Pocius, D., Potapova, E., Valasevičienė, S. European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, et al., The road towards a possible joint European degree – Identifying opportunities and investigating the impact and feasibility of different approaches – Final report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/945147.

At the EU level, the European degree would strengthen the European identity, support the dissemination of shared values, and advance the European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process objectives, positioning Europe as a top destination for global talent in higher education.

List of existing challenges to overcome

The Erasmus+ pilot projects identified more than 50 obstacles preventing higher education institutions from seamlessly offering joint programmes and award joint degrees across EU Member States. Some of the most telling examples include:

- Incompatible rules on curriculum structure;
- Incompatible duration of Bachelor's or Master's programmes;
- Incompatible rules on mandatory teaching languages;
- Incompatible number of semesters that can be spent abroad by students;
- Incompatible rules governing recognition of blended/online learning;
- Incompatible rules in terms of timelines and accreditation requirements;
- Incompatible rules on the diploma templates and even the thickness of the diploma paper;
- Some countries do not allow joint degree programmes at the Doctoral level.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects informed the work on a revised version for European criteria and on the proposal for a Council recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system so that both the European degree and improvement of quality assurance and recognition systems could lead to addressing the challenges.

The obstacles, identified country by country, are listed in Annex II to this report. They are not exhaustive but provide a good starting point for EU Member States to engage in a dialogue with their higher education institutions, students, quality assurance agencies, and recognition centres to discuss how to best address these challenges also at national and institutional levels. To support this process, the Commission has proposed in its Communication on Blueprint for a European degree to launch Erasmus+ European degree pathway projects in 2025.

Clarification and simplification of the European criteria

The Erasmus+ pilot projects in their work aimed to ensure the necessary level of ambition to make the European degree attractive and allow for the inclusion of any type of higher education institution and discipline.

Each Erasmus+ pilot project tested the initial draft set of European criteria aiming at establishing a transnational framework that would define the elements of a European degree and formulated proposals for their clarification and simplification. The Erasmus+ pilot projects proposed to simplify the list of criteria, refine the terminology and ensure the full respect of academic freedom and the diversity of fields and academic cultures.

The Commission gathered representatives of the six Erasmus+ pilot projects in February 2024 to reach a consensus on the European criteria. Together they came up with a common list of 16 co-created European criteria. The reasoning behind each criterion is presented in this report. These criteria build on structure and quality requirements, they do not dictate the content of the curricula on which universities have full autonomy.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects enabled the optimal formulation of these European criteria, which were presented in Annex II of the Commission Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education (see Annex I of this report).

The refinement of the criteria was, therefore, a fundamental outcome of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, providing a structured framework to guide the establishment of joint programmes that align with the requirements for a European degree, either as a label or as a type of degree.

Links with the Bologna process

The Erasmus+ pilot projects considered vital that the set-up of the European degree brings transnational cooperation to the next level and boosts the implementation of the Bologna instruments by including them in the European criteria to be matched by joint degree programmes as follows:

- Internal and external quality assurance is conducted in line with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).
- The joint degree programme is evaluated using the standards of the European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes.
- The joint degree programme describes the learning outcomes and credits in line with the ECTS Users Guide.
- A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to students.

A European degree would therefore respect the key commitments of the Bologna process and boost their implementation. It would be aligned with the 3-cycle system, quality assured by a quality assurance agency registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), and automatically recognised. At the same time, the European degree would go much beyond the implementation of the Bologna tools. It would remove barriers not addressed by the Bologna tools and ensures high-quality education with embedded mobility, digital and green skills, multilingualism, interdisciplinarity approaches, job market relevance, democratic values, and inclusion.

Need for further guidance

An outcome of the Erasmus+ pilot projects was to develop toolkits and guidelines to put into practice the European criteria and facilitate their common understanding among stakeholders and across EU Member States. This outcome led to the proposal from the Commission for the creation of a European degree policy lab, as highlighted in the Communication on a blueprint for a European degree[11].

Different entry points for an inclusive and step-by-step process

The projects provided feedback on the two entry points for the establishment of a European degree. A preparatory European label issued as a complementary certificate offered by joint programmes and a European degree as a full degree jointly awarded by several higher education institutions.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects concluded that a European label offers a practical starting point, enhancing visibility of joint degree programmes. However, it was also noted that it would lacks the legal weight of a fully recognised degree. A European degree would provide a more impactful solution by addressing directly diverse barriers for joint programmes and transnational cooperation in higher education. While a European degree holds greater potential benefits by removing regulatory barriers and promoting EU-level recognition, the label may serve as an interim step, which could lead to the European degree at the appropriate time, especially for EU Member States with complex legal systems.

A dual approach with both options available could facilitate a smoother and more inclusive process where universities of all EU Member States could take part. It acknowledges the diversity of European higher education systems and understands that reforms will progress at different rates. While some Erasmus+ pilot projects preferred a sequential approach, other Erasmus+ pilot projects advocated for a dual approach to allow some EU Member States to go faster and not be hindered by those where the process would need more time. However, such an approach would need to be explained and communicated well to the wider higher education sector and to students.

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[11] Ibid 5.

Need for agile quality assurance processes

The Erasmus+ pilot projects recommended integrating the potential process for awarding a European degree, either as a label or as a degree, into existing processes, balancing flexibility, transparency, and consistency within existing national accreditation systems to avoid duplication and to maximise efficiency.

EQAR-registered agencies were suggested for quality assurance to check compliance with the European degree criteria. It was suggested that joint programmes could apply for the European label at the same time as their accreditation or periodic evaluation, while the European degree would be included in national legal frameworks. A possible third option was to allow alliances of higher education institutions with a legal status to award European degrees, acknowledging that this option would require a dedicated instrument.

In particular, these outcomes led to Recommendation 4, 'Building the foundations towards a European degree', in the proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education[12] to facilitate coherent quality assurance of a European degree label in the EU Member States, building on existing processes. The proposal for a Council Recommendation invites the EU Member States to start implementing the label on a voluntary basis.

Digital infrastructure for managing data, issuing credentials, and providing students access to verification systems was also deemed essential. Overall, the projects emphasised a phased approach that balances flexibility, transparency, and consistency, allowing the European degree to complement national qualifications across EU Member States.

Need for funding support

The Erasmus+ pilot projects highlighted the need for dedicated funding (at both the EU and national level) to develop the joint degree programmes matching the European criteria, both to incentivise the development of innovative joint programmes and to support students. That is why the Commission has proposed to launch an Erasmus+ European degree exploratory action[13] in 2025, on top of other existing sources of funding in the Erasmus+ programme. This exploratory action could help guide future decisions regarding potential funding support.

Possible next steps towards a European degree

The Erasmus+ pilot projects suggested a coordination process at the European level to steer the European degree initiative, actively engaging the relevant ministries at national and regional levels, national quality assurance/accreditation agencies, recognition centres, representatives of higher education institutions and European universities alliances, representatives of students and economic and social partners. This is key for leveraging existing tools introduced by the Bologna process, including the European Approach for Quality Assurance of joint programmes, and boosting transnational cooperation in the European Higher Education Area.

Other key suggestions include defining a clear implementation roadmap, developing guidelines to implement the European criteria and promoting the European degree to boost its recognition.

This led to the proposal for the creation of a European degree policy lab and a European degree forum, as highlighted in the Communication on a blueprint for a European degree[14], to steer this process at the European level, in synergy with the strategic framework for European cooperation in higher education towards the European Education Area and beyond.

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[12] Ibid 6.
[13] Ibid 5 and Erasmus+ Annual Work Programme 2025 https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/document/2025-annual-work-programme-for-the-implementation-of-erasmus-the-union-programme-for-education-training-youth-and-sport.
[14] Ibid 5.

Outcomes of the four Erasmus+ pilot projects on institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions

The four Erasmus+ pilot projects dedicated to examining the need for and feasibility of institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions, have provided valuable insights into the potential of such a framework.

The projects examined five existing EU instruments for institutionalised cooperation to identify ways to enable any type of alliance of higher education institutions to operate more effectively across borders.

- European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).
- European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG).
- Societas Europaea (SE).
- European Cooperative Society – (SCE).
- Knowledge Innovation Community (KIC) under the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT).

The projects identified four core areas where a specific legal instrument would address the identified needs.

- **Joint educational activities:** streamlining and facilitating the delivery of joint study programmes, quality assurance, and student mobility.
- **Sustainable governance and funding:** ensuring robust, transparent governance and funding structures with accountability and flexibility.
- **Joint resource management:** facilitating joint staff recruitment, joint infrastructure and establishing shared professional services such as procurement, and management of intellectual property.
- **External relations:** boosting international visibility and credibility as a European alliance.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects focused on the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) as the most relevant frameworks. The EGTC offers benefits such as increased visibility, simplified governance, and funding opportunities, yet faces limitations, including restricted employee mobility and dependency on national laws. Similarly, while the EEIG provides organisational flexibility and funding access, its adaptability to alliances of higher education institutions is limited by liability and structural challenges.

The conclusions of all four projects were that no current national or EU legal instrument meets the unique requirements of alliances of higher education institutions operating across different EU Member States. A tailored European legal status, i.e., a new dedicated legal form based on European law, could offer a more effective solution, making it more suited to the cross-border needs of these institutions. However, recognising the complexity and duration of establishing a new legal instrument, the projects recommend interim adaptations to the existing EGTC framework as the most viable option, with one of the Erasmus+ pilot projects also recommending modifications to the EEIG.

To adapt the EGTC for any type of alliance of higher education institutions, the projects recommend enabling its recognition as a higher education institution for the purpose of joint transnational educational activities and clarifying staff provisions to make cross-border hiring and secondments easier. They also recommend measures to:

- further ensure limited liability;
- incorporate a private dimension, allowing for private partners to join on certain conditions;
- strengthen its pan-European scope; and
- streamline its operation as a public non-profit entity.

For the EEIG, the projects recommend broadening its scope to cover non-economic academic activities and revising liability provisions would help make it more relevant for academic alliances.

Policy priority at EU level

In her Political Guidelines for the next European Commission[15], President von der Leyen expressed her intention to continue working towards a European degree as part of the key political priorities to address the skills and labour gaps under a future Union of Skills. As highlighted in the Letta report[16], the European degree is a key cornerstone of a possible fifth freedom, the freedom of education, research, and innovation. It would open up possibilities of having European degrees for specific disciplines (for example engineering, teacher education, European health professions, information and communications technology / artificial intelligence), including for regulated professions. If implemented by all EU Member States, the European degree would be automatically recognised within the EU.

Building on the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[17], the 2024 Commission Communication on a blueprint towards a European degree[18], the proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system[19], and the outcomes of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, the Commission will work with EU Member States to put in place a framework in the national/regional educational systems and with the higher education sector to support the uptake of European degrees/labels. The Commission services will also continue to explore a legal status for alliances of universities, as a follow-up on the outcomes of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, to address the specific needs of alliances of higher education institutions. This work will take into account that any proposed action would need to be voluntary in nature and provide agile solutions that would be tailor-made to the different objectives and needs of such alliances.

Specific EU support and facilitation

Building on the conclusions of the Erasmus+ pilot projects to facilitate the European degree and the label, the Commission proposed in March 2024 a blueprint for a European degree, including:

- to set up a '**European degree policy lab**' encouraging EU Member States and the higher education community to develop guidelines for a European degree;
- a new annual '**European degree Forum**' to take stock of progress, gathering high-level representatives from EU Member States, key organisations in quality assurance and recognition, education social partners and representatives from economic and social partners;
- Erasmus+ support for **European degree pathway projects** enabling EU Member States, together with their accreditation and quality assurance agencies, universities, students, economic and social partners, to engage in the pathway towards a European degree;
- Erasmus+ support for a **European degree exploratory action** enabling higher education institutions to design or adapt joint degree programmes that meet the European criteria for a European degree.

The European degree policy lab will take the shape of a series of dedicated thematic working meetings involving experts. The aim is to develop implementation guidelines and action plans to accelerate the required national reforms. It will enable peer learning and support on moving towards a European degree (label). It will also develop further the cross-institutional quality assurance framework of alliances of higher education institutions, including guidelines on its implementation. Also, the Commission stands ready to support Member States - upon their request - in undertaking national reforms in that field, through the Technical Support Instrument.

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[15] Ursula von der Leyen. Europe's Choice: Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2024-2029. Strasbourg, 18 July 2024. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.pdf. P. 12.
[16] Letta, Enrico. Much More Than a Market: Report by Enrico Letta. European Council, 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf.
[17] Ibid 3.
[18] Ibid 5.
[19] Ibid 6.

1 Introduction

In a world that is growing more internationalised and interconnected, transnational education and deep, long-term cooperation between universities are increasingly important. Higher education institutions across Europe have the potential to be much more competitive on a worldwide scene if they cooperate more among themselves by pooling their expertise, knowledge, and resources, combining their complementary strengths that are not available at any single institution. This will allow them to better equip future generations with the competencies and skills that Europe needs to thrive in an ever more interconnected world, especially in strategic areas crucial for the open strategic autonomy of the EU.

Since the launch of the European Education Area[20] as a common space for quality education and lifelong learning across borders for all in 2020, remarkable progress has been made towards this strategic goal. Currently, many universities are engaged in transnational education, be it through Erasmus+ European Universities alliances, Erasmus Mundus, Marie Skłodowska-Curie (MSCA) Joint Doctoral Programmes, programmes labelled by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology, or other types of university partnerships. However, they face many obstacles when trying to develop joint degree programmes.

The 2022 Commission Communication on a European strategy for universities[21] further developed the vision of deep transnational cooperation by proposing exploratory work towards a European degree as part of four flagships to boost the European dimension of higher education. As a first step, the Commission committed to exploring and developing European criteria for the award of a European degree label that could be issued as a complementary certificate for students graduating from transnational joint programmes. These criteria would be the core definition of what a European degree would stand for. The Council, in a related Conclusions on a European strategy empowering higher education institutions for the future of Europe, as well as in the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[22] invited the Commission to pilot the European criteria.

It called for the Commission to examine the options and necessary steps - in close cooperation with Member States, higher education institutions, student organisations and stakeholders - towards a possible joint degree based on a common set of co-created European criteria. This degree, to be delivered on a voluntary basis at the national, regional or institutional level, could attest to learning outcomes achieved as part of transnational cooperation combining studies in several countries, offered, for example, within 'European Universities alliances'. It gave the mandate to the Commission to pilot, under Erasmus+, the development and implementation of European criteria for the award of a joint European degree label. Such a label would be issued as a complementary certificate to the qualifications obtained by students graduating from joint programmes delivered in the context of transnational cooperation between several higher education institutions. The outcome of this preparatory work is expected to form one of the main elements towards the decision on a possible joint degree based on co-created European criteria.

In response, the European Commission published in 2022 the call for a European policy experimentation in higher education. The priority for this policy experimentation was to support higher education institutions to pilot a European degree label for joint transnational programmes responding to a number of criteria, as well as to test a possible legal status at the European level for alliances of higher education institutions - such as the European Universities alliances[23].

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[20] Ibid 1
[21] Ibid 2
[22] Ibid 3
[23] The European Universities initiative supports ambitious transnational alliances of higher education institutions to develop and share a common long-term structural, sustainable and systemic cooperation on education, research and innovation, creating European inter-university campuses where students, staff and researchers from all parts of Europe can enjoy seamless mobility and create new knowledge together, across countries and disciplines. It is implemented primarily through Erasmus+ funding.

Through this initiative, **ten Erasmus+ pilot projects were selected** to test these two key instruments: six focused on the European degree label[24] and four on the potential legal status[25].

This report presents the results, the main lessons learned and the suggestions arising from these Erasmus+ pilot projects. It is the outcome of one year[26] of intensive work of higher education institutions, stakeholders and Member States' authorities. As requested by the Council, the report provides information to continue the co-creation process towards a European degree as a signal of deep transnational cooperation of European higher education to provide high-level and transferable skills for graduates.

The report is divided into two parts: the first part focuses on the six projects piloting the joint European degree label, and the second part explores the four projects dedicated to the potential European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions. Ten factsheets are annexed to the report introducing each of the Erasmus+ pilot projects in more detail (see Annex III and IV).

2 Participants of the Erasmus+ pilot projects

The ten Erasmus+ pilot projects included 100 partners as coordinators or full partners. These partners represent 23 EU Member States[27] and two Erasmus+ Programme Countries (Norway and Türkiye). While there is a wide distribution of partners across the EU, as seen in Figure 2, the countries with most institutions as partners are France (13) and Spain (12), followed by Germany (8), Portugal (8), Italy (7) and Belgium (7).

Figure 2. Number of full partners per country in the Erasmus+ pilot projects
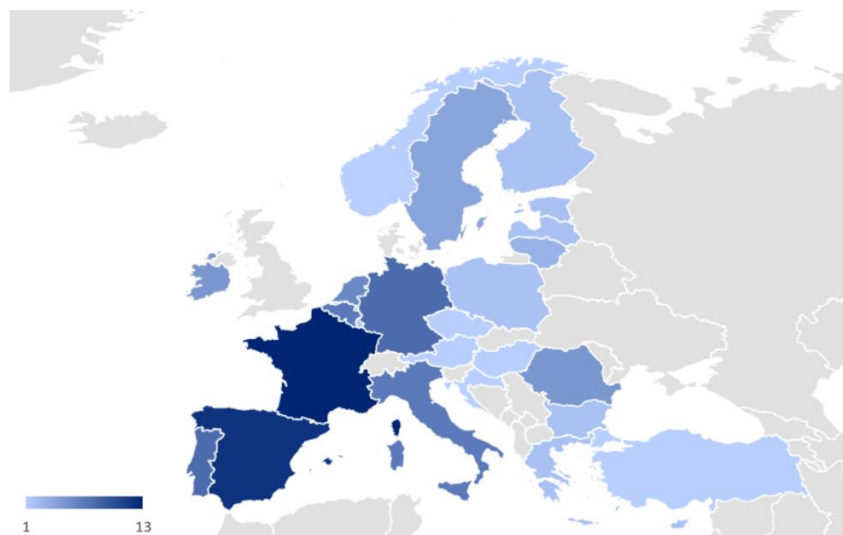
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

When looking at institutions involved in the Erasmus+ pilot projects as associated or affiliated partners, all 27 EU Member States are included, as seen in Figure 3. Associated partners also include institutions based in two Erasmus+ Programme Countries (Norway and Türkiye) and five countries not associated with the programme (Switzerland, Morocco, United Kingdom, United States of America, and Uruguay). The most active countries in terms of participating institutions are similar to those of the full partners, with Spain (22), Italy (22), Belgium (21), France (19), and Germany (15).

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[24] ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP-EUdegree, EU Funding & Tenders Portal
[25] ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP-EUstatus, EU Funding & Tenders Portal
[26] Projects ran from Spring 2023 to Spring 2024, with final reports arriving in Summer/Autumn 2024
[27] All EU Member States, except Denmark, Malta, Slovenia, Slovakia.

Figure 3. Number of associated and affiliated partners per country in the Erasmus+ pilot projects*
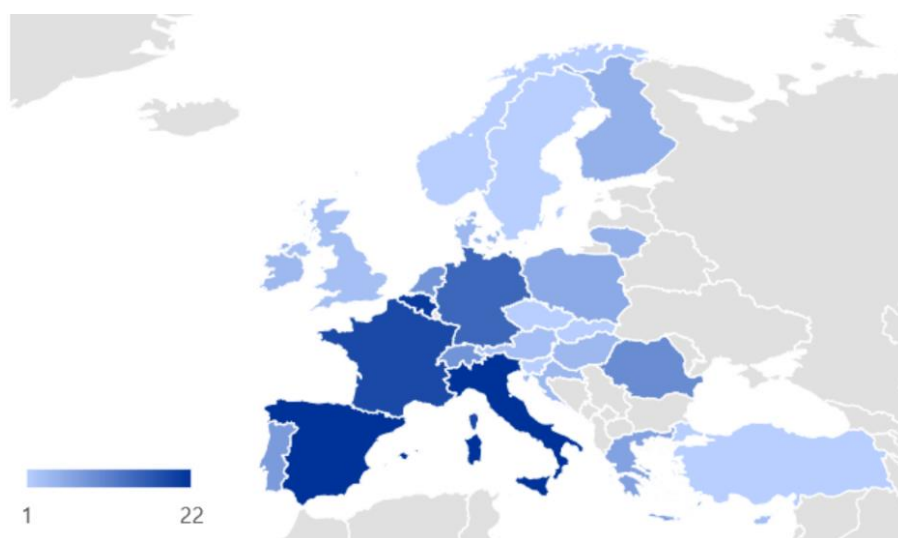
*Additionally, EDLab has one associated partner from Uruguay, and SMARTT has one associated partner from the United States of America and one from Morocco.

Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

While the projects involve various stakeholders, including accreditation agencies, national authorities, and university associations, higher education institutions constitute 90% of the projects' main partners and coordinators, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Types of organisations as main partners in the Erasmus+ pilot projects

■ Higher education institution

■ Accreditation - Quality assurance Agency/organisation

■ Ministry National/regional authoritities

■ Alliance of higher education institutions

■ Association of Universities
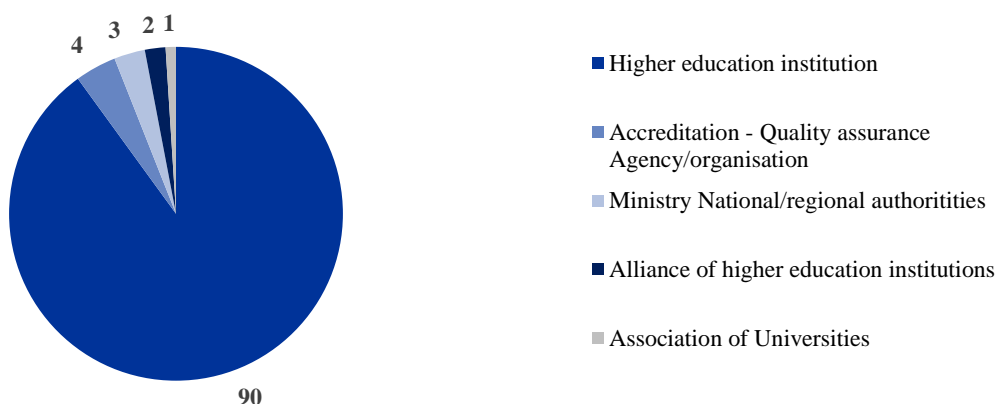
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

Any alliance of higher education institutions could participate in the call for Erasmus+ pilot projects. However, European Universities alliances, being the most ambitious model of transnational cooperation in higher education, were particularly well-placed to test these instruments. This is evident from the fact that all but one of the Erasmus+ pilot projects involved European Universities alliances as partners through their participating higher education institutions, encompassing 21[28] alliances. Beyond these, two other types of

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[28] 4EU+, Arqus, CHARM-EU, CIVIS, EC2U, ECIU, EELISA, ENHANCE, ENLIGHT, EPICUR, EU-CONEXUS, EUt+, EUTOPIA, EUTOPIA, Film-EU, NEUROTECH EU, SEA-EU, UNA Europa, UNITA, Unite!, YUFE

alliances of higher education institutions – Eucor and UniGR – also took part, demonstrating broader interest in these topics across the higher education landscape.

The types of higher education institutions involved are diverse. Comprehensive and technical universities participated more frequently, but universities of applied sciences and academies of arts are also represented, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Types of higher education institutions involved in the Erasmus+ pilot projects as main partners
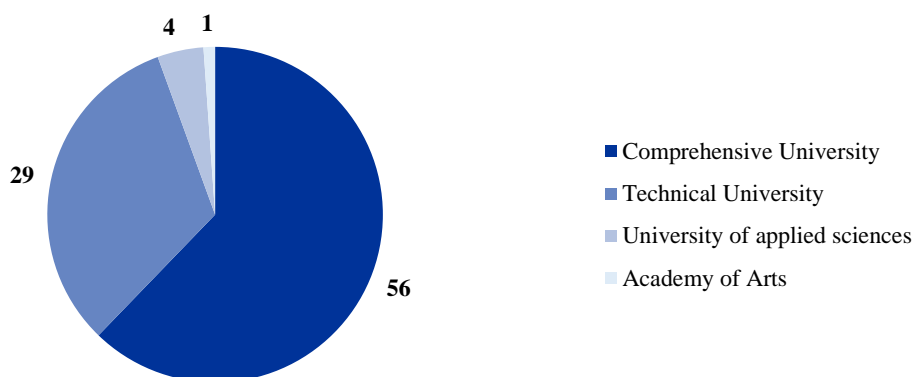
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

Other stakeholders, such as ministries and accreditation/quality assurance agencies[29], participated in the projects as associated partners, as seen in Figure 6. One higher education institution was involved as an affiliated partner. This broad involvement underscores the widespread interest and commitment across Europe to enhance transnational cooperation in higher education.

Figure 6. Types of organisations involved in the Erasmus+ pilot projects as associated and affiliated partners
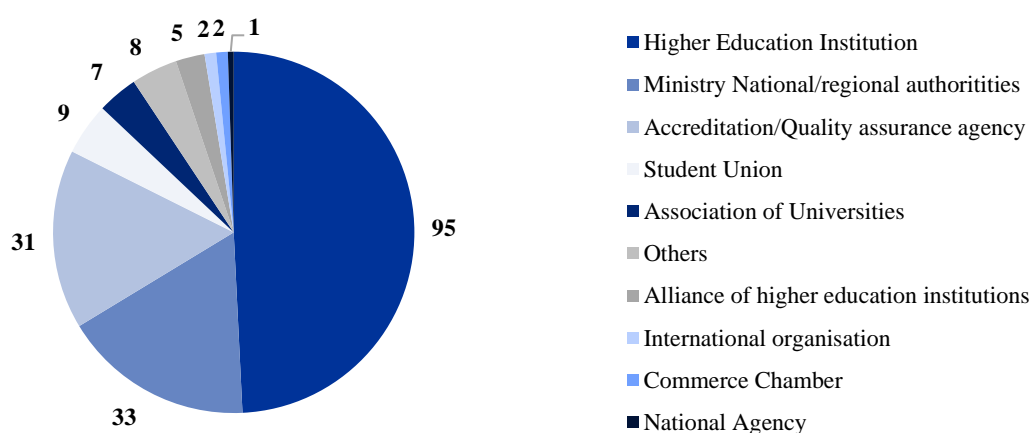
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

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[29] The following countries have ministries or national quality assurance agencies participating in the projects: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Switzerland, Poland, Portugal.

3 Consolidated conclusions of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on the European degree (label)

It is important to remind that the statements and conclusions in this technical report are based on the outcomes of the Erasmus+ pilot projects and do not represent an official position of the European Commission, unless otherwise stated. Based on the strong cooperation between the different Erasmus+ pilot projects and outcomes of the many informal coordination meetings that have taken place throughout the project duration, the outcomes in this report are presented in a consolidated manner, presenting the views of the different Erasmus+ pilot projects in the most aggregated manner. Annex III and IV provide a more project-specific overview per Erasmus+ pilot project.

3.1 Main characteristics of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on the European degree (label)

The Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[30] made a call to 'examine and facilitate the delivery of a joint European degree label. Later on, work could be undertaken towards a possible joint degree at all levels, based on co-created European criteria, to be delivered at the national, regional or institutional level in accordance with the National Qualifications Frameworks'. This recommendation also asks to 'provide financial support under Erasmus+ as from 2022 to those alliances of higher education institutions wishing to test, in the form of **pilot projects**, the implementation of existing European instruments'.

As the first step towards a possible European degree, the European Commission, in collaboration with experts in the higher education field, defined and proposed a **preliminary list of possible European criteria to be further tested and fine-tuned** by the Erasmus+ pilot projects[31]. The co-created European criteria would form the foundation of the European degree and set out what it stands for and why it is different from degrees awarded in other parts of the world. As there is no one-size-fits-all solution, the European criteria should be flexible enough for the European degree to be accessible to all types of universities, all fields and disciplines and at all levels, respecting the diversity of academic traditions and systems[32].

In 2022, the Commission launched the **call for European policy experimentation in higher education**[33]. Its objective was to pilot a joint European degree label by allowing alliances of higher education institutions and national authorities to examine, test and facilitate the delivery of a European degree label based on the common co-created European criteria, as referred above. It aimed 'to encourage (…) and make it easier for higher education institutions engaged in transnational cooperation, to provide joint programmes and award joint degrees, under the Bologna instruments, as well as to take further steps to recognise the value of innovative transnational learning experiences and to increase the visibility, attractiveness and reputation, both in Europe and beyond, of joint programmes provided by alliances of European higher education institutions'.

The definitions used for the purpose of the pilot[34]:

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

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[30] Ibid 3

[31] Burneikaitė et al., 2023.

[32] Ibid 2

[33] Erasmus+ Programme, Call for proposals, European policy experimentation in higher education, ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP-EUdegree, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2022/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2022-pol-exp-he_en.pdf

[34] European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, Definitions, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/

- **Joint degree**: Refers to a single document awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme and nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of the joint programme.
- **Double/multiple degrees**: Separate degrees awarded by higher education institutions offering the joint programme attesting the successful completion of this programme (if two degrees are awarded by two institutions, this is a 'double degree').

Furthermore, the concept of a **European degree** defines 'a new type of qualification to be enshrined in national legislation, [that] would make it easier for universities from different countries to cooperate seamlessly and develop innovative joint programmes leading to a joint degree, in full respect of their institutional autonomy and of the competences of Member State or regional governments. Such a European degree would also contribute to building a common European identity and a stronger European sense of belonging'[35].

The **European degree** could, especially in an initial stage, be implemented as a **label**, a complementary certificate awarded to students graduating from joint programmes developed by European higher education institutions. The 'label' would communicate the added value of a joint degree, as reflected by the criteria it is built on, and would not be enshrined in national legislation. The concept was introduced as a 'European degree label' by the 2022 Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[36] and simplified to 'European label' in the 2024 Communication for a Blueprint for a European degree[37].

Figure 7. European degree and European label.
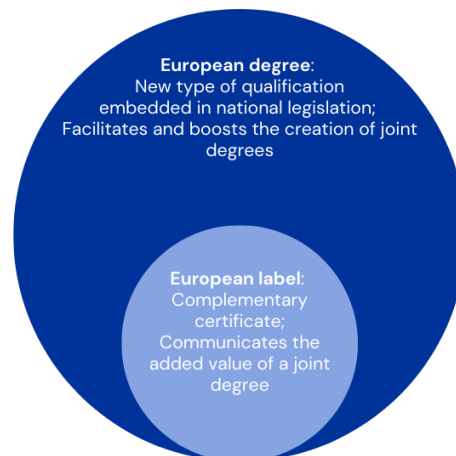
Both the European degree and European label should be based on a set of co-created European criteria, defined at the EU-level and agreed among all relevant stakeholders (EU Member States, higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies, representative organisations of students, among others). Throughout the text, we use 'European degree (label)' to refer to a European degree and a European label at the same time. at the same time.

The Erasmus+ call for European policy experimentation in higher education selected six projects to pilot the European degree label and test the **co-created European criteria for the European degree label[38]**. The Erasmus+ pilot projects leveraged extensive partnerships to test the co-created European criteria with the official participation of 225 organisations. This included higher education institutions, ministries and

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[35] Ibid 5
[36] Ibid 3
[37] Ibid 5
[38] Pilot a joint European degree label, ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP-EUdegree, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/erasmus-edu-2022-pol-exp-eudegree

regional authorities, quality assurance agencies, student unions, associations of universities, and chambers of commerce. The projects had 63 organisations as full project partners from 22 EU Member States plus Türkiye, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Main partners by country (European degree Erasmus+ pilot projects)
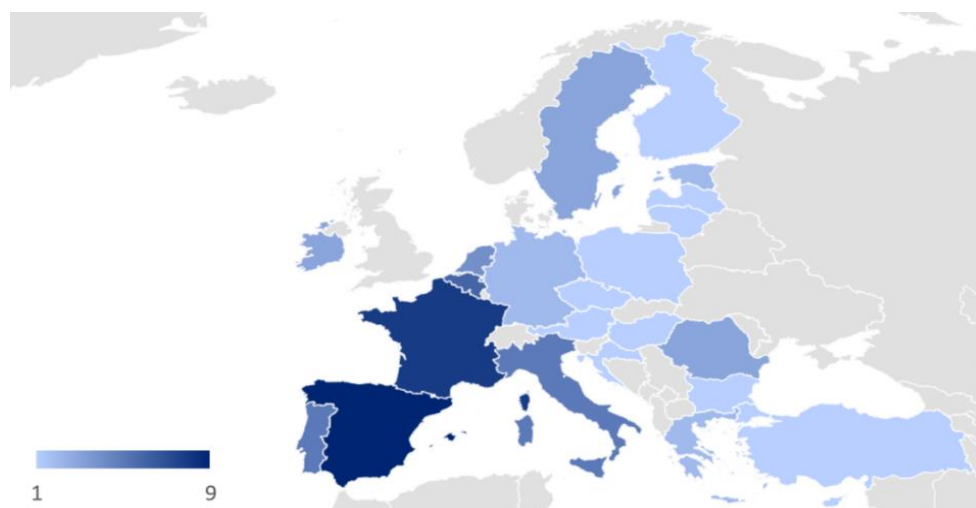
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

Figure 9 provides a breakdown of Erasmus+ pilot project coordinators and full partners by category and Figure 10 classifies the participating higher education institutions by type of higher education institution. The majority of Erasmus+ pilot project partners were higher education institutions accompanied by four quality assurance agencies[39], Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science, and the FilmEU Association (which represents a European Universities alliance). Most participating higher education institutions were universities. Technical universities made up almost one-third, likely explained by one Erasmus+ pilot project's exclusive focus on engineering programmes, followed by one academy of arts and one university of applied sciences.

Figure 9. European degree Erasmus+ pilot project partners by category (main partners only)
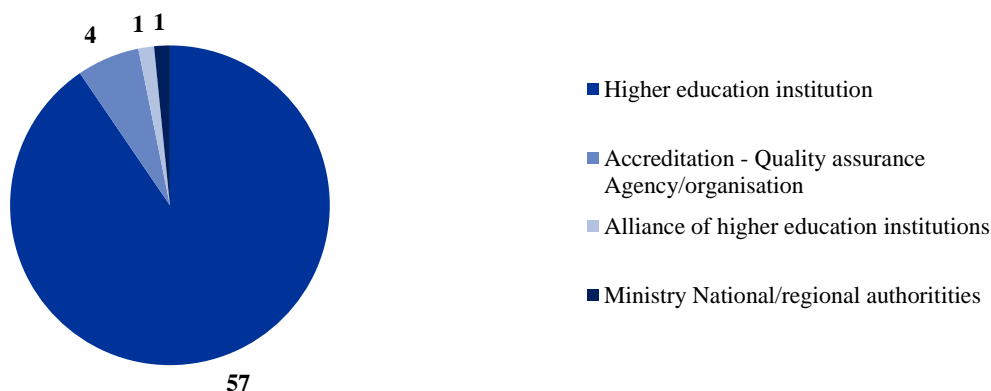
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

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[39] The quality assurance agencies included Education and Youth Board from Estonia, QQI from Ireland, NVAO and EQ-ARTS from the Netherlands

Figure 10. Higher education institutions participating in European degree Erasmus+ pilot projects by type (main partners only)

Legend:
- Comprehensive University
- Technical University
- Academy of Arts
- University of applied sciences

(Pie chart values: 36, 18, 1, 1)
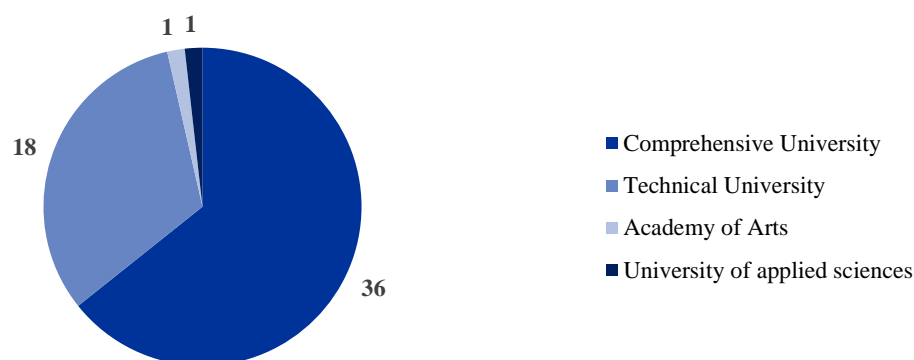
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

The six projects included 161 associated partners and one higher education institution as an affiliated partner, as presented in Figure 11. Associated and affiliated partners represent 23 EU Member States plus Morocco, Norway, Switzerland, Türkiye, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Uruguay. Associated partners played key roles in the projects by supporting project implementation, enhancing the outreach, and contributing with their expertise. Affiliated partners were often involved in delivering specific project outputs, providing necessary resources, or offering access to local networks and knowledge. Meanwhile, associated partners contributed in an advisory or collaborative capacity, widening the project's impact through dissemination activities, stakeholder engagement, and offering feedback based on their expertise. These partners helped ensure that the projects benefited from a broader set of perspectives and facilitated knowledge exchange across sectors and regions.

Figure 11. Number of associated and affiliated partners in European degree Erasmus+ pilot projects by country*
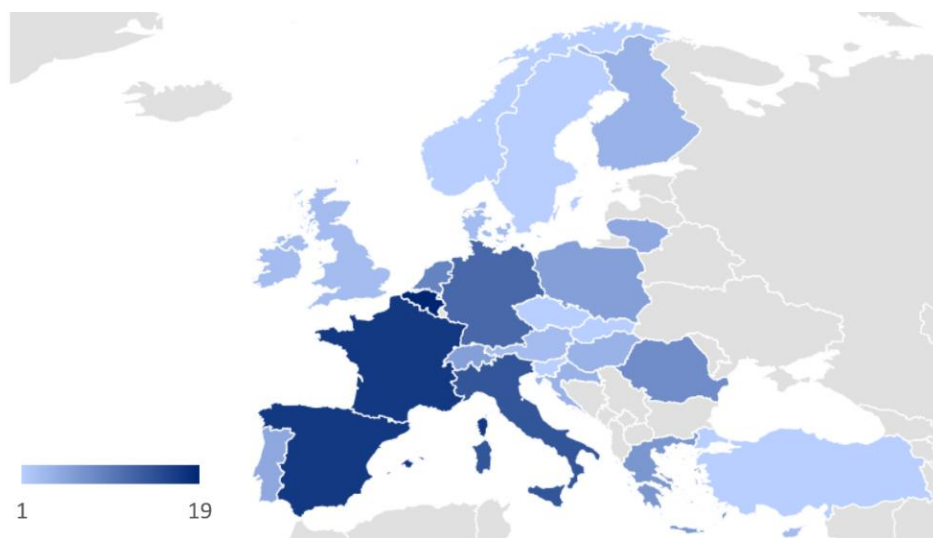
*Additionally, EDLab has one associated partner from Uruguay, and SMARTT has one associated partner from the United States of America and one from Morocco.

Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

More than half of the associated and affiliated partners are higher education institutions (52%), followed by a substantial number of quality assurance agencies and ministries or national and regional authorities (both making up one-third of all associated partners). Since a potential European degree depends on national legislation and quality assurance processes, the involvement of these two groups in the Erasmus+ pilot projects is crucial. The pilot projects also engaged eight student unions and six associations of universities as associated partners, among others, as seen in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Associated and affiliated partners of European degree Erasmus+ pilot projects by type
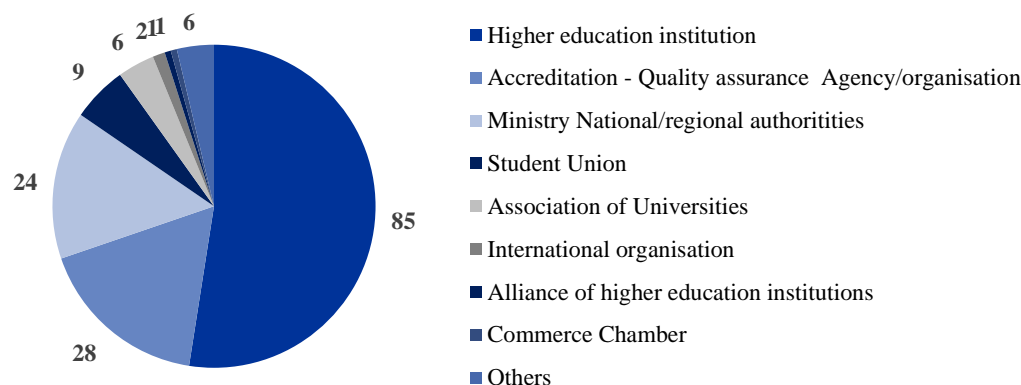
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

As shown in Figure 13, quality assurance agencies and national and regional authorities from 20 European countries participated in the projects as full or associated partners, including 32 quality assurance agencies from 17 countries[40] and 25 ministries, national or regional authorities from 15 countries[41].

Figure 13. Number of quality Assurance Agencies, National Ministries and other National Agencies in the European degree Erasmus+ pilot projects (main and associated partners)
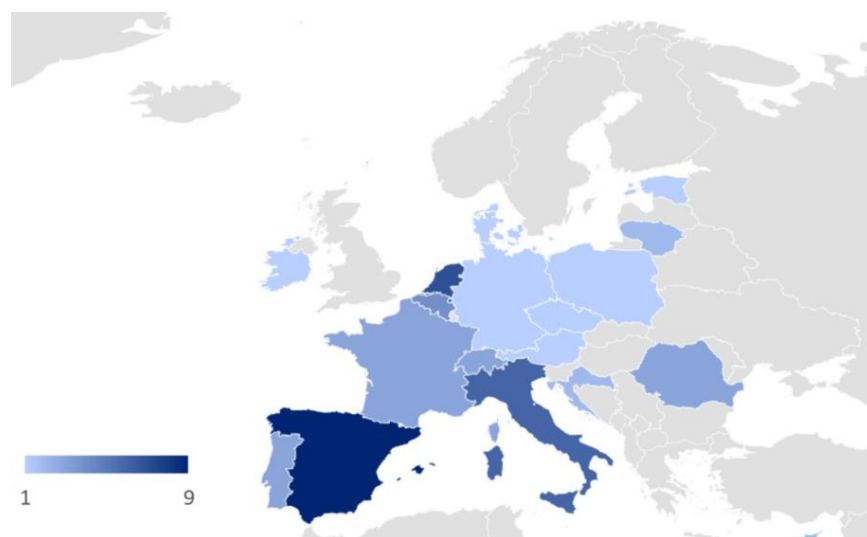
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

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[40] Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland.
[41] Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland.

It is noteworthy that, in total, 21 European Universities alliances participated in the Erasmus+ pilot projects. As such, the projects not only tested the feasibility of the European label but also served as a platform driving collaboration between the alliances. Table 1 lists the European Universities alliances involved in each of the projects.

Table 1. Involvement of European Universities alliances in the European Degree Erasmus+ pilot projects as full or associated partners

Erasmus+ pilot project	European Universities alliances involved
ED-AFFICHE	UNA Europa; Unite!; EU-CONEXUS; 4EU+; EC2U; CHARM-EU
EDLab	Arqus; ENLIGHT; EUTOPIA; SEA-EU
ETIKETA	FilmEU
FOCI	ECIU University, YUFE; EPICUR
JEDI	ENHANCE; EELISA; EUT+
SMARTT	CIVIS; EUTOPIA; NeurotechEU; UNITA

Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

3.2   Main outcomes of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on the European degree (label)

The six Erasmus+ pilot projects mapped 956 joint programmes, which formed the basis for diverse analyses. Moreover, they engaged diverse stakeholders in surveys, interviews and workshops, including 2133+ personnel of joint programmes (coordinators, professors, researchers, and staff), 2648+ students and alumni of joint programmes, and 121 employers' representatives. Additionally, they organised over 56 online and in-person events to disseminate the outcomes of their projects. The primary outcomes and conclusions of the six Erasmus+ pilot projects piloting the European degree label are described below.

In Annex III you can find more information on the outcomes on each of the individual Erasmus+ pilot projects in the form of a factsheet.

a) **ED-AFFICHE — European Degree - Advancing, Facilitating and Fostering International Collaboration in Higher Education[42]**

This project aimed to co-develop a vision for the European degree label and determine actions to achieve it, with a focus on developing an overview of existing obstacles for transnational collaboration.

Key project deliverables include:

- Database of joint programmes across the consortium.
- Report on outcomes of the European degree label criteria mapping exercise.
- Overview grid on national/regional obstacles.
- Policy report on best practices and advice on the future development and implementation of joint programmes in Europe.
- Overview grid on the improvement of criteria associated with the European degree label and the process behind it.
- Policy recommendations on the future implementation of the European degree label.

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[42] ED-AFFICHE Project, https://charm-eu.eu/about-us/our-projects/ed-affiche/

Ed-AFFICHE concluded that:

- A European degree has the potential to foster transnational collaboration and enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of European higher education by addressing the more than 50 challenges as identified by experts from 20 countries and validated by 51 participating higher education institutions in the context of transnational cooperation. However, coordinated efforts are required among all stakeholders (such as universities, Member States, and quality assurance agencies) to align legal frameworks in the context of transnational cooperation and ensure successful implementation across Europe.
- Both the European degree as a label and the European degree as a qualification have the potential to remove obstacles in legislation if Member States are willing to attach legal consequences to it.
- Member States should collectively start implementing a European degree, jointly starting with a label phase and jointly moving to a degree phase. The co-existence of a European degree and a European label during the transition period might add complexity to some processes and delay coherence and coordination at the European level. A European degree as a qualification could be considered for the long term to bring simplification.
- The criteria for the European Degree (label) should be verified using the existing Bologna tools. Programme-based accreditation using the European Approach by an EQAR registered agency is preferred. If the European Degree will be used as a world-wide branding tool, then the integrity of the label/degree is essential. The fact that an external agency verifies that the minimal criteria for the European Degree (label) are met could also give member states the quality reassurance they need to remove obstacles from their legislation. For existing joint programmes, a lean version of the European Approach should be established. Cocreation with the Bologna follow-up group is essential.
- If a quality assurance framework for alliances of higher education institutions leads to cross-institutional accreditation competences to award themselves the joint European degree label or the European degree, then long standing collaborations like alliances would have a simpler process towards the European degree as they would no longer need to go through the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

b) ED-Lab — European Degree Label institutional laboratory[43]

This project aimed to test the implementation of European and international joint degree programmes and the European degree label with a focus on the suitability of the proposed criteria and the issuing of a joint degree label certificate.

Key project deliverables include:

- Report on barriers to applying the criteria in current joint programmes.
- Discussion paper on the European degree label criteria.
- Report on the global attractiveness of already existing European joint degrees.
- Report on the potential attractiveness of a European degree label.
- Discussion paper and recommendations about the global attractiveness of a European degree label.
- Repository of existing joint degree models.
- Report on (joint) degree certificate prescriptions.
- Report on the options for a digital joint European degree label.
- Template for a joint European degree label certificate.
- Report on the pilot issuing of a joint European degree label certificate following the compliance exercise.

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[43] Ed-Lab Project, https://www.ed-lab.eu/

ED-Lab concluded that:

- The creation of a fully recognised European degree would provide the necessary European framework for universities to foster their cooperation with the universities of their choice in Europe and address the pressing needs of Europe. It would represent a significant transformation of European higher education, requiring embedding this new degree type within national qualification frameworks along with other national degrees. This implies creating a distinct joint degree category with specific legal and regulatory implications across Member States.
- The European degree label may be a suitable intermediate step towards implementing a European degree. It would not imply regulatory changes at the national/regional level and hence would not lead to simplification, yet it would serve as an attractive marker for excellence in European collaboration.
- The label awarding procedure should be the competence of EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies. Compliance evaluation should be incorporated into the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes to avoid duplication of efforts.
- The criteria proposed require further accompanying guidelines to ensure consistent interpretation and application across institutions. They should all be compulsory and organised into clear sections.
- As an alternative to a harmonised joint diploma model, a label certificate can be issued as a stand-alone complementary certificate alongside the joint diploma, specified by a European degree label logo. The logo would serve as the key visual identifier that contributes to the branding, publicity and recognisability of the label initiative.

c) **ETIKÉTA — FilmEU degree label[44]**

This project aimed to pilot the co-created criteria for delivering a European degree label and a digital European degree label for joint transnational higher education programmes focused on art.

Key project deliverables include:

- European degree label content and requirements.
- Report on legal frameworks and requisites.
- White paper: Application, delivery and awarding of the European degree label of joint programmes.
- Mapping of possible solutions for a Digital EU label.
- Guidelines for the ETIKÉTA EU label.
- Guidelines for future joint degrees.

ETIKÉTA concluded that:

- A European degree should be supported by common European criteria, technological solutions for credential verification, and collaboration between national authorities and higher education institutions. It would contribute to the necessary simplification needed by universities to develop relevant, innovative and attractive joint degree programmes and enhance the visibility, attractiveness, and reputation of joint study programmes across Europe on a worldwide scene.
- The European degree label is suitable to complement existing degrees and can be aligned with established quality assurance processes, such as the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.
- The initially proposed criteria for the European degree should be refined, excluding non-essential elements and maintaining focus and relevance in monitoring programme compliance with European standards.
- A digital approach to the European degree label is required as a strategy to make it easily shared, verified, and trusted by all the stakeholders involved.

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[44] ETIKÉTA project, https://etiketa.filmeu.eu/

d) FOCI — Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education[45]

This project aimed to pilot and test a blueprint for a European degree (label) with stakeholders, outlining the next steps towards its implementation with a focus on flexible learning and micro-credentials.

The key deliverables include:

- Report on stakeholder needs analysis and developed assessment methodology.
- Analytical report on the procedural, organisational and legal aspects of awarding the European degree label.
- Report on the pilot assessment process for internal use.
- Analytical report on best practices, obstacles/barriers, and models of designing joint programmes in line with the European degree label criteria in different national contexts.
- Policy recommendations on applying the European degree label criteria on diverse innovative models of flexible and societally relevant transnational European Higher Education.
- Roadmap for next steps and actions related to the European degree label.

FOCI concluded that:

- There is a strong potential for a European degree to bring the necessary simplification for universities to develop innovative and attractive joint degree programmes with the partners of their choice based on a common European framework. Its successful implementation requires clear and consistent definitions and goals, compatibility of legal frameworks for transnational cooperation across Member States, and consistent support at the EU level.
- The European degree label would benefit from an expanded scope to include complementary models of higher education cooperation and beyond to full degree programmes, such as micro-credentials. It would strengthen the relevance of the initiative and make it as future-proof as possible.
- Clear communication on the purpose, outlook, and added value of the European degree label to stakeholders is essential for its success.
- The European degree label criteria and the evaluation methodology should emphasise academic freedom and autonomy and cut complexity to the higher education landscape as much as possible.

e) JEDI — Joint European Degree label in engIneering - Toward a European framework for engineering education[46]

This project aimed to develop a prototype Joint European degree label in engineering, based on the common set of criteria adjusted and co-developed with the project partners, that can be applied to any joint European degree in engineering, technology and science.

Key project deliverables include:

- Position paper: Why a European label for technical, engineering and science-oriented degrees?
- List of European joint degrees in engineering, technology and applied sciences in Europe.
- Reports of three collaborative labs (Colabs) involving 80 stakeholders applying JEDI principles to existing and new degree programmes.
- The European label: guidelines for application to joint degree programmes.
- White paper: an integrated European framework for engineering education.

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[45] FOCI Project, http://foci.csd.auth.gr/
[46] JEDI Project, https://blogs.upm.es/jedilabel/

JEDI concluded that:

- A European degree would be feasible and highly beneficial, particularly for enhancing mobility and employability across Europe in the field of engineering. Its implementation would require substantial adaptation to bring more coherence in educational and accreditation standards across Member States in the context of transnational cooperation.
- Despite the potential value of a label, the focus should be on the European degree that allows the removal of legal barriers in the Member States and the consolidation of a more coherent European higher education area.
- The European degree label will not solve the core problem that blocks the development of joint degree programmes, the diversity of national rules and regulations that define degrees.
- The European degree should allow for a dedicated simplified path of joint degrees under a 'Joint European degree umbrella', which would enable to increase the number of students involved and to award European degrees faster.

f) SMARTT — Screening, Mapping, Analysing, Recommending, Transferring and Transforming Higher Education international programmes[47]

This project aimed to analyse, test, and pilot the criteria for the European degree label, improving the quality and increasing the transferability of future developments, with a focus on designing criteria indicators and testing with experts from Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's and CIVIS alliance.

Key project deliverables include:

- SMARTT Set of recommendations based on testing the criteria on the existing Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree Programme South European Studies (EUROSUD)[48].
- Report on EUROSUD Programme.
- Report of quantitative and qualitative analysis.
- SMARTT vision on European degree label criteria.
- SMARTT final recommendations.

SMARTT concluded that:

- The implementation of a European degree would bring the necessary framework conditions for universities to enhance their cooperation to deliver top-notch joint degree programmes to attract and retain talent in Europe. It requires adaptation of legislation across Member States where needed for a specific joint degree meeting European criteria. While the concept is feasible, it depends on enhanced cooperation at the European level to ensure compatibility of qualifications and seamless mobility of students across borders.
- There is a predominantly positive perception of the European degree label among joint programme coordinators. They recognise its potential to elevate programmes' reputation, provide strategic value, and be a flexible and adaptable tool that aligns with long-term educational goals.
- The European degree label criteria require further clarification by defining its measurability and providing detailed guidance for its implementation. The European degree policy lab is welcome for that.
- SMARTT proposes a three-stage approach to facilitate the seamless introduction of the European degree: i) the Emerging phase, focused on defining programme types and degrees; ii) the Converging phase, focused on the national adoption of the European degree; and iii) the Merging phase, focused on the full implementation of the European degree.

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[47] SMARTT Project, https://civis.eu/en/discover-civis/civis-alliance-projects/smartt
[48] EUROSUD Programme, https://www.southeuropeanstudies.eu/the-programme/

3.3 Current state of play for joint education provisions tested by the Erasmus+ pilot projects

3.3.1 Description of the current situation as analysed by the Erasmus+ pilot projects

The Erasmus+ pilot projects tested the co-created European criteria for a joint European degree label by applying them to existing joint programmes. As stated in the call for European policy experimentation in higher education, 'the testing is expected to take place on a significant sample of existing joint programmes implemented by alliances and other consortia of higher education institutions (such as European Universities alliances, Erasmus Mundus consortia, Marie Skłodowska-Curie consortia and other types of transnational cooperation partnerships)'[49].

Although joint programmes are a hallmark of the European education policy, there is no database listing those programmes, the kinds of arrangements for delivering degrees, and their general characteristics. Currently, there are two official databases for joint programmes:

- The Database of External Quality Assurance Results (DEQAR), listing 292 external evaluations of joint programmes reported by higher education institutions in 2021[50]. It also lists **accredited/evaluated programmes through the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes[51], including 37 programmes.**
- Catalogue of Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's[52]**, including 191 joint Master's programmes.**

These lists may contain the same joint programme more than once, as participating universities may report them separately. They are also probably underestimating the total number, as universities with institution-based quality assurance may not have external evaluation reports to include in the database.

Therefore, each Erasmus+ pilot project built their own database of existing joint programmes within the partners of the projects and outside the consortium, according to internal criteria and the purpose of their analysis, having quantitative or qualitative approaches and diverse methodologies. Table 2 presents an overview of the databases developed within the Erasmus+ pilot projects. Altogether, these databases included analysis of **956 joint programmes** at the European Qualification Framework levels 6 (bachelor's), 7 (master's), and 8 (PhD). Additionally, FOCI and ETIKETA projects included micro-credentials programmes and educational labels.

Despite all databases addressing the concept of 'joint programmes', comparability across them is limited. First, definitions are used inconsistently among databases and overlap between programme types, such as the distinctions between joint/double/multiple degrees or joint programmes/joint degrees. Second, some databases developed by the Erasmus+ pilot projects list only the main partners responsible for the programme, while others list all participating institutions. Third, qualification levels are not uniformly applied. Some databases identified the EQF level (bachelor's, master's, doctorate), while for others it was not relevant for their analysis. The projects addressed these challenges internally according to their needs

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[49] Erasmus+ Programme, Call for proposals, European policy experimentation in higher education, ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP, P. 8, https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/erasmus/wp-call/2022/call-fiche_erasmus-edu-2022-pol-exp-he_en.pdf

[50] The ETER database lists 1217 joint programmes, based on EQAR data, for the period of 2011-2021.

[51] The EHEA ministries approved the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in May 2015. It aimed to simplify and harmonise the quality assurance process for joint programmes across Europe, allowing a single evaluation conducted by an EQAR-registered agency to be accepted by all the participating countries. European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), Joint programmes that used the European Approach, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/european-approach-cases/

[52] The Erasmus Mundus Programme was created in 2004 aiming to promote international collaboration and academic excellence by offering joint, double, or multiple degrees in partnership with higher education institutions across Europe and beyond. European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Erasmus Mundus Catalogue, https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/scholarships/erasmus-mundus-catalogue_en

and the scope of their search, but databases of joint programmes are not directly comparable, despite sharing some common characteristics.

Table 2. Mapping of joint programmes within the Erasmus+ pilot projects

Project	Number of joint programmes	Composition of programmes	Characteristics of the databases of programmes
ED-Affiche	388	− 307 Master's − 41 Bachelor's − 31 PhD − 4 Bachelor's + Master's − 5 Other (Engineering and health-related higher education qualifications)	Includes joint, double, and multiple degree programmes in diverse disciplines.
ED-LAB	459	− 309 Master's − 85 Bachelor's − 65 PhD	Includes joint, double, and multiple degree programmes in diverse disciplines.
ETIKETA	10	− 5 Master's (Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's) − 5 Higher education quality labels	Focuses on Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Programmes in the field of film and media arts. Additionally, it includes educational labels and badges at the EU level.
FOCI	14	− 8 Master's − 1 PhD − 5 Micro-credentials / short programmes	Includes joint programmes and micro-credentials.
JEDI	41	− 34 Master's (33 Master's of Science and 1 Master's of Engineering) − 6 Bachelor's of Science (4 Bachelor's of Sciences, 1 Bachelor's of engineering, 1 Bachelor's of Arts) − 1 PhD	Includes joint, double, and multiple degree programmes focused on engineering, technology, and applied sciences.
SMARTT	94	Not possible to segment programmes by level.	Includes joint, double, and multiple degree programmes, and Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's programmes. European Qualification Framework levels 7, and 8.

Source: based on Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

The fields of study covered a broad spectrum of academic disciplines. The disciplines of engineering and technology, arts and humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and business were represented, reflecting the varied academic strengths of the participating institutions. In addition, there are several interdisciplinary programmes that include topics such as environmental sustainability, digital innovation, and the humanities.

The programmes featured in the mapping included all types of degree arrangements, including double/multiple degree programmes and joint degree programmes, at Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral levels. Each project implemented a specific approach to the classification of the programmes, with some focusing on the qualification level according to the European Qualifications Framework (Ed-Affiche, Ed-LAB, and JEDI), and others focusing on the type of joint programme (ETIKETA, FOCI, and SMARTT). Most programmes featured in the databases are at the Master's level as it is the most common level for joint programmes, although there is also significant activity at the Bachelor's level, notably under the impulse of the European Universities alliances.

Geographically, joint programmes are widely distributed across Europe, with strong participation from institutions in countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the Nordic nations. Countries in Central and Eastern Europe are also represented, contributing to a more balanced geographical spread. The broad distribution of these programmes highlights the pan-European nature of joint programmes, fostering regional cooperation across diverse educational systems.

3.3.2   Barriers to the design and delivery of joint programmes

Most of the six Erasmus+ pilot projects mapped legal and regulatory obstacles to design and deliver joint programmes and degrees. The projects primarily relied on consultation with stakeholder groups and experts to identify legal hurdles and suggest initial solutions for further exploration. Additionally, they have supported and enhanced the project findings with relevant studies conducted between 2017 and 2023, particularly for countries not included in the Erasmus+ pilot projects[53].

The obstacles can be categorised into four primary domains presented in the following subsections.

Barriers related to accreditation and quality assurance

The Erasmus+ pilot projects identified the barriers concerning quality assurance and recognition as the most challenging to address. The diverse nature of accreditation and quality assurance standards, processes, and timelines across European countries present substantial barriers for higher education institutions aiming to provide joint programmes and degrees. The main reported barriers were:

1. **Restrictions on the creation of joint degrees**: Certain countries limit the types of degrees eligible for joint programmes. For instance, Germany and Lithuania exclusively allow joint degrees at Bachelor's and Master's levels. In Poland, joint degrees are restricted to specific categories of universities. Although legally allowed in Romania, the practical implementation and accreditation of joint degree programmes remain unfeasible until the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) releases its 'Methodology for the accreditation of joint programmes'.

2. **Diverse accreditation timelines and procedures**: Programme accreditation processes vary significantly across countries, with diverse timelines and criteria, making it difficult to coordinate joint initiatives. Several countries, including Belgium (Flanders), Denmark, Spain, and the Netherlands, require programmes to address specific local market demands, often requiring a country-specific macro-efficiency assessment. Furthermore, the accreditation procedure timelines could clash with other activities, e.g. accreditation timelines in Belgium (Flanders) and France frequently clash with the January examination period in Italy, complicating the development of joint activities between the

[53] European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Implementing joint degrees in the Erasmus Mundus action of the Erasmus+ programme, 2020, https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2797/896549; Burneikaitė et al., 2023; European Commission, Awarding Joint Degrees. State of play report for the 2023 Erasmus Mundus Annual Conference, Boosting the potential of Joint Degrees in Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Programmes, 2023, https://erasmus-networks.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2023-11/Joint-Degrees-and-Erasmus-Mundus.pdf; Frontex, Single Accreditation of Joint Programmes – Turning the Bologna Guideline into Reality Conference Report, 2017, https://www.frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Training/EJMBSM-Conference-report-2017.pdf

countries. Additionally, Spanish legal professionals encounter obstacles in completing consortium agreements within the constrained accreditation timeframe.

3. **Accreditation procedures in cases of changes in the programme**: Several countries, including Spain, Croatia, Italy and Cyprus, require a new accreditation process if there are alterations to the consortium's structure or the fundamental curriculum. In Finland, the situation regarding the necessity for re-accreditation under similar circumstances is not defined for joint programmes.
4. **Financial implications of accreditation**: Accreditation processes pose financial challenges, especially when multiple certifications are necessary. Higher education institutions in Estonia, Latvia and the Netherlands bear the financial burden of these procedures, which exacerbates the difficulties associated with establishing joint programmes.

5. **European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes not uniformly applied across countries**: The application of the European approach is limited in countries such as Cyprus, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Slovakia, and Slovenia. It does not apply in Bulgaria, Czechia, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Serbia, and Sweden[54].
6. **Challenges in interdisciplinary degree creation**: Many countries require interdisciplinary programmes to have a focus on one area manifested through allocation of courses. In Czechia, more than 50% of a degree's content must be focused on a single discipline. Similar restrictions can also be found in Belgium (Flanders), France, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Sweden, limiting flexibility.

Potential solutions

To streamline the accreditation of joint programmes, the projects suggested that national authorities clarify how their regulations apply to the quality assurance and accreditation of such programmes. This would ensure that stakeholders share a common understanding. Where feasible, specific rules and exemptions for joint programmes and joint degree programmes could be established, applying the principles of cross-border quality assurance while also fully aligning with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area and allowing any agency registered with the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) to conduct the accreditation. An alternative proposal that requires minimal legislative adjustments in Member States is to allow alliances, including European Universities alliances, to select a jurisdiction and manage joint programmes/award joint degrees based on that legal framework. Doing so might result in a concentration of the accreditation of joint programmes in a few countries where the procedure is straightforward or cost-effective. The projects also emphasised the importance of Member States fully implementing existing European frameworks such as the Bologna Process tools and the European Approach for Quality Assurance of joint programmes. Furthermore, they suggested that further work towards the European degree should result in enhancing synergies in quality assurance and accreditation practices across EU Member States in general.

Barriers related to programme structure

Findings from the Erasmus+ pilot projects show that higher education institutions across Europe face difficulties in aligning diverse elements of the programmes, such as academic calendars, grading systems, and credit loads, among others, when developing joint programmes and degrees. The main barriers identified are:

1. **Differences in academic years:** Differences in academic year lengths among European countries create difficulties in managing curricula for joint degree programmes. The lack of uniformity/flexibility poses obstacles when coordinating academic calendars and course structures.

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[54] EQAR, National implementation of the European Approach, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/national-implementation/

2. **Grading scales and workload:** Whilst 180 ECTS is typically allocated for Bachelor's programmes, Greece and Poland diverge from this standard, offering courses with up to 360 ECTS. In France, ECTS are not used at the doctoral level. Additionally, some countries have minimum ECTS thresholds for completing the second cycle. For instance, until exemptions for joint programmes were introduced in Spain, the minimum threshold for a Master's programme was 120 ECTS, while the same qualification is typically awarded for 60 ECTS in the Netherlands, introducing another dimension of complexity to the compatibility of educational standards throughout Europe. Moreover, grading scales and the thresholds to award degrees with honours/distinction differ across Member States, posing challenges to determining which system should be followed for joint degrees. While ECTS provide a largely comparative reference for workload, an excellent grade in France is 16/20, in Italy, it is 28/30, and in Germany, 1,5 out of 6, showcasing a variety of scales and potential conversion inconsistencies.

3. **Mobility duration requirements:** In some countries, there are requirements for time spent at the home and/or partner institutions, which impacts mobility in joint programmes. Austria, for instance, has established minimum credit requirements for joint programmes at partner institutions. A student should obtain at least 30 ECTS at a partner institution during a 120 ECTS programme to obtain a degree from it, meaning that diplomas for joint programmes developed by more than four institutions cannot be issued by all the partners involved, creating considerable administrative hurdles for joint programme coordinators. Comparable restrictions exist in several European countries, including Belgium (Flanders), Germany, Estonia, Ireland, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Finland.

4. **Language proficiency and foreign teachers:** Some countries have language proficiency assessments, teaching language prerequisites, and limitations on the number of foreign educators. For instance, Belgium (Flanders) has quotas on foreign language programmes, whilst Czechia applies different fee structures for programmes not taught in the native language. Denmark and Lithuania constrain the languages used for instruction. In Finland, programmes must have national language equivalents, whereas France mandates that a portion of teaching be conducted in French, which affects the types of diplomas awarded. The Italian legislation allows universities to have a maximum of 50% of foreign teachers as the 'core' of the programme, which poses challenges when applied to joint programmes. This diverse regulatory environment creates several challenges for joint programmes.

5. **The recognition of blended/online learning**: The legal frameworks on blended/virtual mobility vary across countries, with some lacking regulations. For example, Sweden and Czechia have no explicit policies in place. Conversely, Poland and Italy restrict the proportion of distance learning permitted in educational programmes. Italian regulations generally prohibit online final examinations, while in Lithuania, joint programmes require physical academic mobility.

6. **Final exam formats:** National or state examinations are not consistent across countries, resulting in varied assessment approaches. For instance, Austria regulates the process of final examinations, whilst Czechia requires a thesis defence and a public state examination. In Finland, the thesis length is specified, whereas Italy regulates the number of final exams. Additionally, there is considerable variation in thesis requirements, including the length and the number of experts on the evaluation panel.

7. **Postponement of studies and de-enrolment:** Regulations for temporary withdrawal from academic studies due to circumstances like pregnancy or illness without losing enrolment status differ across countries. Specific guidelines are in place in several European countries, including Belgium (Flanders), Czechia, France, Hungary, Poland, Finland, and Sweden. Notably, in Finland and Sweden, educational institutions are typically not permitted to terminate a student's enrolment under such circumstances.

8. **Regulations on graduation diplomas and rules:** Several countries, including Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Estonia, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Finland, and Sweden, strictly regulate the design and content of academic certificates. These rules regulate aspects such as the type and dimensions of paper used, the placement of logos, the language employed, and the requirements for signatures. These regulations are a complex challenge for joint degrees.

9. **Regulated professions:** Regulated professions exist in every EU country, each with its list of regulated professions and requirements. Typically regulated professions with studies to be completed with state exams, requiring recognised diplomas, licenses, practical experience, or registration with respective professional bodies include lawyers and notaries, teachers, and engineers, among others, and there is considerable variation across Member States (minimum training requirements are established at EU level for 7 sectoral professions - doctors, nurses, midwives, veterinary surgeons, pharmacists, architects - through Directive 2005/36/EC). This variation creates difficulties in establishing joint programmes within these fields. According to Erasmus+ pilot projects, countries facing challenges with this barrier include Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Finland, and Sweden.

10. **Intellectual property rights legislation:** The variations in intellectual property laws across countries affect the creation of course materials. For instance, in countries such as Belgium (Flanders) and Sweden, intellectual property rights belong to students or researchers, whereas in others, such as Czechia, these rights are held by the institution.

Potential solutions

Findings from the Erasmus+ pilot projects suggest that the full implementation of Bologna Process instruments could have resolved certain legislative discrepancies. However, the Bologna Process alone is insufficient to eliminate all country-specific barriers arising from curriculum regulations such as language use and foreign teachers' involvement, final exam formats, postponement of studies, regulations on graduation diplomas and rules on de-enrolment, regulated professions, and intellectual property rights legislation.

The projects' suggestions call for increased flexibility in national guidelines for joint programme structure, curriculum, and joint degree formats. They propose that joint programmes should be allowed to establish their own academic schedules, different from conventional degree programmes. Furthermore, they recommend that legislation focus on the achievement of learning outcomes rather than physical presence, enabling the incorporation of online and blended learning approaches. When the requirements of a joint programme conflict with national legislation, the projects propose specific exemptions for joint programmes. This may be necessary for laws designed to safeguard the national language by restricting the medium of instruction. In addition, they suggest that national grading systems and examination formats consider implementing flexible approaches due to the implication for transnational joint programmes. Some reports also advocate the implementation of a standardised European grade conversion table to minimise disparities between partner higher education institutions, similar to the approach in the ECTS Users Guide and the Erasmus+ supported EGRACONS tool[55]. The projects highlight the necessity of fully implementing the recommendations outlined in the Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation. They also emphasise the need to grant consortia of higher education institutions the flexibility to determine the specificities of joint programme structures, curriculum development, and diploma templates through cooperative agreements. For regulated professions, legal experts collaborating with Erasmus+ pilot projects proposed aligning requirements for degree programmes leading to regulated professions and involving professionals in programme design or assessment. Concerning intellectual property rights, the projects suggested establishing an agreement on property rights to avoid individual arrangements with academic staff or students.

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[55] See https://egracons.eu/ for more information

Barriers related to the governance structure

Diversity of requirements for consortium agreements: Implementing joint programmes and joint degrees requires well-defined governance frameworks, and numerous countries mandate consortium agreements, including Belgium, Belgium (Flanders), Czechia, Denmark, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, the Netherlands Austria, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Sweden. The regulations for consortium agreements can be complex and lengthy, with varying rules on the structure and duties of programme bodies/institutions further complicating matters. For example, Croatian regulations require agreements to detail enrolment criteria and methods for examining and evaluating students. In contrast, Lithuanian requirements expect these agreements to cover student admission conditions, study procedures, assessment principles, and crediting of student achievements. Consequently, ensuring compatibility between regulations for governance structures across countries is essential for efficient and successful joint programmes and joint degrees.

Potential solutions

A potential solution involves creating a standardised set of basic requirements for consortium agreements across Europe, accompanied by a suggested template. This would enable each consortium to incorporate additional partnership-specific details, provided they adhere to the fundamental criteria. This strategy would simplify administrative procedures whilst retaining the adaptability to address unique partnership requirements. Another far-reaching alternative is to confer legal status to alliances of higher education institutions to issue their degrees.

Barriers related to student admission and enrolment

Student mobility is a fundamental component of joint programmes and joint degrees, yet legislative hurdles in this domain persist. The requirement for students to register at multiple institutions, varying fee structures, and inconsistent acknowledgement of previous education can impede accessibility and affordability. Strict language competency requirements and limiting legislation on student selection can also restrict the inclusiveness and diversity within joint programmes. Streamlining enrolment and admission processes is essential for attracting a diverse student body and ensuring fair access to these educational prospects. The main obstacles identified are:

1. **Restrictive legislation on student selection**: Strict rules governing student selection might make the admissions process challenging for joint programmes. For instance, in Flanders, it is not possible to limit the number of students with secondary education diplomas who can enrol in first-cycle programmes, which may contradict with rules of countries such as Denmark, Hungary, and Sweden with well-established comprehensive guidelines aiming to ensure fair treatment during a selection process. Cyprus has different regulations for distance learning/online courses compared to face-to-face programmes, as well as separate rules for EU and non-EU citizens. Meanwhile, Italy employs a quota system that distinguishes between non-EU and EU students.

2. **Restrictions on student enrolment**: In some cases, it is required for students to register at multiple universities for specific regulatory reasons, which presents financial and administrative difficulties. Finnish regulations stipulate that students must be enrolled in a Finnish institution upon graduation, whilst French rules require enrolment in all degree-awarding universities. In other countries, such as Czechia and the Netherlands, university funding is linked to student enrolment, incentivising institutions to prioritise students who are registered with them.

3. **Tuition fees**: The accessibility and affordability of joint programmes across Europe are influenced by variations in tuition fee structures. For instance, non-EU students pay tuition fees in Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, and Sweden, whilst EU students are required to be given the same conditions as nationals by EU law and thus are exempt. This could make joint programmes co-offered by institutions in these countries less attractive and affordable to students from outside the EU. In Czechia, fees are charged for programmes delivered in languages other than Czech. French institutions set fees at a national level,

with certain agreements allowing for exceptions. In Italy, tuition fees are determined based on the student's income. This could result in a scenario where students enrolled in the same programme are subject to different payment requirements based on their place of enrolment.

Potential solutions

The Erasmus+ pilot project reports suggest that national systems could introduce a rule whereby enrolment at one university in a joint programme implies enrolment at all participating universities. Alternatively, official enrolment could be limited to a single institution, only requiring registration at partner institutions, clarifying which legislation and institutional rules apply.

Insights from the Erasmus+ pilot projects suggested several approaches for managing tuition fees. First, they suggested that Member States could offer financial incentives for joint programmes. This would help joint programmes to reduce a potential reliance on tuition fees. Second, they propose that Member States could provide eligibility for national funding or financial incentives such as scholarships for non-EU students participating in joint programmes. Additionally, there is the possibility of implementing a combined approach by applying the most favourable system within the consortium to all students or by charging fees according to each higher education system. The main concern regarding a potential joint programmes' reliance on tuition fees is the potential development of an elite type of degree that charges high tuition fees for European degrees.

Types of overarching solutions to overcome the barriers

The Erasmus+ pilot projects propose six possible strategies for addressing the legal and administrative barriers to transnational cooperation between higher education institutions resulting from national or regional legal or administrative frameworks. Some of the proposed solutions are overarching and could address several or all of the reported obstacles in a given country at the same time, while a combination of different approaches could be used in other national or regional contexts.

Tailor-made legislation

Article-by-article approach to amending one or more legal texts. This approach requires an extensive mapping of existing barriers and a careful process of modifying legal acts that pose undue difficulties. Although it is a viable way to address the remaining challenges, it requires a high level of coordination among Member States. If Member States amend their legislation independently and without sufficient coordination, there is a risk that similar barriers will remain despite the changes.

Sandbox

A sandbox is a test environment in which joint programmes are given room to experiment. A competent authority declares that certain rules do not apply to joint programmes in order to allow them to be set up and implemented. The idea of a sandbox has already been tested in the EU. For example, Flemish legislation stipulates that international joint or double degree programmes that have undergone a European selection process (e.g. Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's) are not considered new programmes and do not require initial accreditation.

As the national or regional authorities create the conditions for these experimental spaces, this allows them to define the limits of the inapplicability of legal provisions and to retain full control over the process. Nevertheless, sandboxes require a high degree of cooperation between Member States. They can be effective if all Member States of higher education institutions participating in a consortium provide for the same exemptions in their legislation. Otherwise, their impact remains limited. The long-term consolidation of sandboxes leads to a process of deregulation.

Default legislation

The technique of default rules is widely used in civil law. Instead of providing for exceptions to binding rules, it renders the legislation non-compulsory, i.e. a default rule applies only if the parties to the consortium agreement have not agreed on a specific, tailor-made rule for their joint programme. For instance, Spain has recently adopted this strategy to grant flexibility to European Universities alliances. Again, this technique requires sufficient coordination between Member States. It can only be effective if the consortium partners are allowed to deviate from the same set of rules.

Choice of legislation

This is the possibility of choosing the legal framework applicable to a joint degree programme. It makes it possible to choose a single law governing all aspects of cooperation between higher education institutions or to apply different legal provisions to different parts of a consortium agreement. This overarching solution provides a high level of legal certainty and allows higher education institutions to navigate through incompatible legal frameworks governing the functioning of institutions in different Member States. Any discrepancies could be resolved by reference to one or more legal acts agreed between the partners in a consortium agreement. However, this strategy would require a clear position of all Member States on the possibility of applying legal acts of other Member States to certain parts of the consortium agreement. Otherwise, this solution may have far-reaching negative consequences, including the invalidation of the degrees awarded.

Shift of competence

The last overarching solution put forward by the Erasmus+ pilot projects was to transfer or share the competences for coordinating transnational education from the Member States to the European Union. However, this does not fall within the boundaries of the EU competences and would require a Treaty change or an international treaty similar to the one governing the European University Institute. The Erasmus+ pilot projects indicate that both solutions are time-consuming and the latter might not even have the desired positive effect on the overall higher education sector.

3.4 The European label and the European degree

3.4.1 The concept of a European degree and the European label

A European degree represents a voluntary innovative approach in the European higher education landscape aimed at fostering deeper integration and cooperation among higher education institutions across the European Union. This type of degree is designed to be automatically recognised throughout the EU Member States, thereby facilitating mobility and collaboration between students, faculty, and institutions. The European degree would be awarded upon the successful completion of transnational educational programmes—at Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral level – co-designed and co-delivered by multiple higher education institutions from diverse EU Member States. These programmes would integrate the strengths and resources of participating institutions to offer students a transnational and enriched educational experience[56].

Recognising the diversity of starting points, educational traditions, and regulatory frameworks among EU Member States, the concept of entry points is introduced. It refers to the initial stages or pathways that EU Member States and higher education institutions can choose to embark upon as they move towards the full implementation of a European degree. The entry points should provide flexible options that allow countries and institutions to progress at their own pace. This gradual approach should ensure that the European degree can be integrated effectively into the varying national contexts, respecting the autonomy of each country while working towards a European Education Area.

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[56] Ibid 5.

There are two primary entry points that Member States could voluntarily choose from to begin implementing the European degree:

- **Entry point 1 – A European label**: Such a label would be issued as a complementary certificate to the qualifications obtained by students graduating from joint programmes delivered in the context of transnational cooperation between several higher education institutions. This label would be awarded to joint degree programmes that meet the established European criteria by competent accreditation or quality assurance authorities, such as self-accrediting universities, accreditation agencies, or quality assurance bodies. While the European label would provide a valuable branding tool that signals quality and adherence to European standards, it does not directly address all the challenges universities face in creating and maintaining joint degree programmes. This entry point is particularly suited for institutions from countries that are not yet ready to fully integrate a European degree into their national systems but wish to align with European standards and gradually move towards greater European integration.

- **Entry point 2 – European degree**: A degree jointly awarded by several higher education institutions from different EU Member States. The European degree would be integrated as a new type of qualification into national legislation. This would offer significant simplification for higher education institutions and students by removing disparities between national rules and equipping EU higher education institutions with a common and clear framework to create joint degree programmes. As with any degree, it would be accredited following national legislation and national qualification frameworks by the competent authorities at institutional, regional, or national levels. The Erasmus+ pilot projects' results considered this entry point as the most efficient in terms of associated costs and resources required by the higher education institutions involved because it would remove barriers, promote the creation of joint programmes, and provide EU-level guidelines.

Most experimentation projects conclude that introducing a European degree label could be a strategic initial step towards establishing a European degree. **However, while this label could help in aligning perceptions and setting a baseline of quality expectations, it does not directly address the deeper structural barriers inherent in the diverse regulatory and administrative environment of educational systems of Member States.** Significant hurdles, such as varying national legal requirements for degree recognition, different academic calendars, and diverse grading systems, will persist. These challenges are rooted in the national education systems and their legislative frameworks, which a label alone can only incentivise to be modified.

The findings from the Erasmus+ pilot projects agreed that a label on its own lacks legal value and, consequently, may not facilitate cross-border recognition or simplify regulations, thus diminishing its potential benefits. In contrast, the adoption of a European degree was deemed more straightforward due to its regulatory clarity and broader comprehension among relevant parties. A consensus emerged that a European degree would have a more significant impact than a label. The European degree is regarded as more than just a type of qualification; it is viewed as a means to enhance the recognition and value of joint degrees at a transnational level.

Whilst there is consensus that the European degree is the end goal, points have been raised about the practical implementation and timeframe for achieving it. Implementing a label encounters few legal obstacles, while advancing towards a European degree may require adjustments of regulatory frameworks at national and institutional levels. The projects noted potential challenges with national accreditation systems and consulted quality assurance bodies expressed the need for additional information regarding this approach. Furthermore, some countries may have intricate legal frameworks that present obstacles to immediate implementation.

Recognising these difficulties, the Erasmus+ pilot projects agreed that introducing the European label could help national education systems progress towards a European degree fully integrated into national law. The label could serve as a driving force by showcasing the potential of joint degrees. This gradual approach

does not entail delaying the European degree until all Member States have implemented the necessary legislative modifications. Instead, the two options could exist simultaneously: the label could be introduced whilst countries begin to incorporate the European degree into their national legislation. Moreover, the label could remain an alternative in situations where a European degree would be more problematic, such as in some regulated professions. This twofold strategy could facilitate the transition towards a fully recognised European degree without compromising national systems.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects acknowledge that the European degree entry point is more challenging, but it is also more beneficial. It would allow for removing diverse barriers, streamlining transnational cooperation in joint programmes, and possibly increasing the offer of such programmes. On the other hand, the degree label is a valuable tool to promote joint programmes, but the barriers will remain.

Implementing a European degree may require adjusting national legislation on higher education qualifications, yet the Erasmus+ pilot projects unanimously acknowledged the importance of respecting national educational competences. While the awarding of European degrees seeks to boost the appeal of European education, it does not aim to compete with existing national qualification frameworks and conventional educational offerings. Sustained cooperation between higher education institutions and national governments will be vital in guaranteeing that the European degree is implemented in a manner that respects national contexts whilst advancing the broader objectives of European integration and innovation in higher education.

Future actions towards a European degree, according to the projects, should focus on building a detailed, clear framework that defines the scope, standards, and outcomes expected of it. Stakeholder engagement is crucial—gathering input from educational institutions, employers, and policymakers to ensure the degree's relevance and applicability. Promoting widespread understanding and acceptance of this new credential will be essential, as well as the establishment of a robust support system to guide institutions through the transition process and to maintain the quality and integrity of the degree across all participating Member States.

3.4.2 *Benefits and added value of a European degree*

The introduction of a European degree represents a significant advancement in higher education that has the potential to provide substantial benefits to students, higher education institutions and staff, Member States and employers, and higher education in Europe. A European degree could bring about immediate and long-term advantages that will increase employability and skills relevance, cut red tape in creating joint degree programmes, ensure that higher education institutions can efficiently work together, and promote the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education. This section presents the key benefits and added value of the implementation of a European degree by stakeholder groups.

Benefits for students

According to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, a European degree would offer a unique opportunity to obtain qualifications recognised and valued across the entire EU, removing the need for additional recognition procedures. A European degree would also symbolise a student's transnational experience, academic excellence, and language proficiency, making graduates highly attractive to employers. According to the projects, students perceive a European degree as a gateway to enhanced job opportunities that can significantly impact career prospects. The added value of a European degree for students is synthesised as follows:

- **Enhanced opportunities to engage in innovative study programmes**: European degree programmes would stand as innovative, interdisciplinary programmes since they would involve collaborations among higher education institutions, research, and business. This constitutes an attractive element for students and provides them with cutting-edge knowledge and exposure to new teaching methods, preparing them for future challenges.

- **Increased skills and competencies relevant to the labour market**: A European degree would give students skills and competencies directly relevant to the labour market, such as adaptability, problem-solving, and teamwork in international settings. The interdisciplinary nature of a European degree ensures that graduates are well-prepared for the demands of modern, globalised workplaces.
- **Education recognised as excellent by employers**: A European degree would stand as a symbol of high-quality education that is recognised by employers across Europe and globally. Graduates benefit from a credential that assures employers of their ability to work in diverse, international environments and the acquisition of valuable skills across diverse countries.
- **Streamlined transnational mobility (physical, virtual, blended)**: Students would have increased opportunities for transnational mobility. Whether through physical exchanges, virtual learning, or blended approaches, students can study in different European countries and institutions, expanding their academic experience and enhancing networks with peers, academics, and professionals across Europe.
- **Streamlined credit transfer and degree recognition across all Member States**: Automatic recognition of credits, study periods, and degrees across Member States would enable students to move between countries, ensuring their academic achievements are valid throughout Europe.
- **Increased sense of European citizenship, identity, and belonging**: Students would have the opportunity to engage in transnational civic activities, participate in democratic processes, and gain awareness of societal needs, developing a stronger sense of European citizenship and identity. A European degree would foster a sense of belonging to the broader European community and reinforce shared values.
- **Enhanced personal development and global mindset**: A European degree would promote linguistic and cultural competencies by providing opportunities for learning new languages and immersing in diverse academic, cultural and economic environments. This enhances their intercultural understanding and interdisciplinary skills, which are highly valued in the global workforce.

Benefits for higher education institutions and staff

A European degree would streamline the process of creating and delivering joint programmes by aligning standards and reducing administrative burdens, thereby decreasing the cost of setting up a joint degree. This would enable institutions to collaborate more effectively, share resources, and offer a broader range of specialised courses that might be difficult to offer and sustain individually. By fostering formal transnational collaboration, a European degree would enhance the international reputation of participating institutions, making them more attractive to students and staff globally.

- **Increased flexibility for joint programme design and delivery**: A European degree has the potential to enable institutions to innovate in course content, teaching methods, and interdisciplinarity. As reflected in the co-created European criteria, institutions would be encouraged to develop innovative, student-centred, and challenge-based approaches that can lead to more engaging and adaptable educational offerings,
- **Reduced administrative burden and streamlined quality assurance**: A European degree would significantly reduce the administrative burden on institutions by streamlining the legal frameworks for joint programmes. A unified framework for quality assurance across participating institutions would facilitate the maintenance of high standards and simplifies accreditation processes, thus reducing complexity for institutions.
- **Enhanced transnational collaboration and resource sharing**: A European degree can strengthen institutional collaborations by fostering deeper relationships with international partners. This would lead to a better exchange of best practices in education and research and streamlined resource sharing across borders, including access to infrastructure, facilities, and services like libraries and IT systems, fostering transnational academic ecosystems.

- **Enhanced support for educational innovation**: Implementing European degree programmes would encourage institutions to rethink their teaching structures, learning methods, and competency assessments. This would create opportunities for developing and testing more flexible modern educational environments, engaging in innovative teaching approaches, and enabling academic staff to experiment with methods that respond to the evolving needs of students and the labour market.
- **Professional development and mobility for staff**: A European degree would encourage academic staff to collaborate more closely with international peers and institutions, fostering professional development and broadening their academic networks. The degree could also provide opportunities to learn and share best practices in teaching and research across Europe.
- **Diversity in student recruitment**: A European degree can act as a signal of high quality that allows institutions to reach a broader, more diverse student body due to the appeal of its international scope and recognition. Delivering joint programmes across multiple countries allows institutions to reach students who may not otherwise have access to international education.

Benefits for Member States and employers

According to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, a European degree can support the alignment of higher education systems with EU-wide standards, enhance the global competitiveness of their higher education systems, attract international students, and foster brain circulation within Europe. This is particularly important for countries facing challenges related to brain drain, as a European degree can incentivise students to remain within the Member State/region of origin for their studies and careers, thus contributing to the local economy and innovation ecosystem. The main benefits for Member States and employers include:

- **Increased transparency, standardisation, and trust in joint programmes**: A European degree would provide a quality assurance framework for joint degrees across the Member States, simplifying national administrative processes and, as a spillover effect, improving the transparency of all dual, joint, and multiple degree programmes at the EU level. This trust in the quality and rigour of the programmes could reduce uncertainty for employers. Automatic recognition within Europe and international acceptance could facilitate the hiring process, allowing employers to easily identify graduates with the necessary global perspective and adaptability.
- **International competitiveness and attractiveness of national higher education**: A European degree would foster cross-border cooperation between Member States, leading to the sharing of best practices and collaboration on joint programmes. This would strengthen educational systems across countries and promotes regional integration, making them more attractive to global talent and enhancing their reputation on the global stage.
- **Talent retention and brain circulation**: A European degree can help Member States provide students with opportunities to engage in high-quality transnational education with local joint programmes. This would contribute to a balanced brain circulation instead of brain drain, as students can study abroad and bring back knowledge, skills, and experiences that benefit their home country. The European level automatic recognition would allow employers to easily identify graduates with the necessary global perspective and adaptability.
- **Better alignment with labour market needs**: The European degree would facilitate better alignment between education and labour market needs at the national and European levels, ensuring that students acquire the future-oriented skills and competencies relevant to digital and green transitions. Employers, including SMEs, would benefit from hiring professionals who are well-prepared to meet these evolving challenges and contribute to sustainable and innovative business practices.
- **Global-ready graduates with multilingual, interdisciplinary, and soft skills**: European degree programmes would produce graduates who are proficient in multiple languages, culturally aware, and capable of solving complex, interdisciplinary challenges. These graduates would possess essential soft skills like adaptability, teamwork, and critical thinking, making them highly valuable

to employers navigating global markets. For Member States, this benefit strengthens national education systems by promoting balanced brain circulation and global competitiveness.

Benefits for Europe

In the long term, a European degree could significantly enhance the global competitiveness of the European higher education sector. By providing a unified and recognisable qualification across the EU, the degree could help position Europe as a leading destination for higher education, attracting talent from around the world. This could not only strengthen the EU's educational and research capabilities but also contribute to the broader goal of creating a more integrated and resilient European Education Area. By offering attractive educational opportunities within Europe, the degree would encourage students to remain within the EU, thus retaining talent and fostering innovation across the continent.

- **Increased global reputation and attractiveness of European higher education**: A European degree would significantly boost the global recognition of European higher education, enhancing Europe's competitiveness as a leading destination for European and international students and researchers. This increased visibility would strengthen Europe's position in the global educational landscape and attract top talent from around the world.
- **Increased sense of European citizenship and identity**: A European degree would foster a stronger sense of European identity and citizenship by offering students shared educational experiences across EU countries, reinforcing the idea of a cohesive European community built on shared values and goals.
- **Dissemination of European values**: A European degree would help promote and spread European values, including academic freedom, inclusiveness, sustainability, and democracy. This dissemination reinforces Europe's commitment to fostering cooperation, innovation, and respect for human rights.
- **Better cooperation among educational authorities across the EU**: A European degree would foster better cooperation among ministries and educational authorities across Member States by streamlining the creation of joint programmes and degree recognition, ensuring greater alignment of educational policies and practices. This would contribute to a more unified European Education Area.
- **Advancing the European Education Area and Bologna Process**: A European degree would accelerate progress towards achieving the European Education Area and fully implementing the Bologna Process tools. By incorporating and promoting Bologna tools, the degree would enhance compatibility and cooperation across the broad European higher education systems.

3.5 The outcomes of the testing of European criteria for a European degree (label)

The European criteria for a European degree are designed to define the requirements that transnational joint study programmes across the EU must fulfil to attain the designation of a European degree. The criteria are aligned with key EHEA[57] instruments, such as the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)[58], European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG)[59], and the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes[60], thereby ensuring coherence with existing mechanisms. Furthermore, these criteria contribute to broader European Union objectives by fostering academic collaboration, promoting innovation in higher education, and fostering green and digital transitions across European higher education.

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[57] European Higher Education Area https://ehea.info/
[58] Europass, The European Qualifications Framework, https://europass.europa.eu/en/europass-digital-tools/european-qualifications-framework
[59] ENQA, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), https://www.enqa.eu/esg-standards-and-guidelines-for-quality-assurance-in-the-european-higher-education-area/
[60] EQAR, European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/

The European criteria for a European degree have been developed in several stages. The Council recommendation on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[61], adopted in April 2022, introduced the development of 'co-created European criteria' as the basis of a European degree.

In parallel with the Council Recommendation, the feasibility study, *The Road Towards a Possible Joint European degree*[62] commissioned in 2021, developed a set of preliminary criteria through desk research, interviews and workshops with stakeholder groups, an impact and feasibility survey (involving higher education institutions, Member States' authorities, and students), and a feasibility and impact assessment. The results provided an overview of the needs, added value, obstacles, and options for a European degree. The feasibility study developed a preliminary list of European criteria, co-created with EU Member States, Erasmus Mundus consortia, European Universities alliances, higher education institutions, students, quality assurance agencies, and European-level bodies. The set of preliminary criteria was composed of eleven mandatory and nine optional criteria to be further tested as follows:

- **Mandatory criteria**: 1) Higher education institutions involved, 2) Transnational joint degree delivery, 3) Transparency of the learning outcomes, 4) Quality assurance arrangements, 5) Joint policies for the joint programme, 6) Transnational campus – access to services, 7) Flexible and embedded student mobility arrangements, 8) Multilingualism, 9) Innovative learning approaches, 10) Graduate outcomes, and 11) Inclusiveness and sustainability.
- **Optional criteria**: 1) Additional formats of transnational learning beyond physical mobility, 2) Language classes for enhancing European language proficiency, 3) Support for future labour market needs and cooperation with businesses, 4) International professional internships/work-based learning, 5) Career development plans and non-academic sector exposure, 6) Environmental sustainability and minimising environmental footprint, 7) Development of high-level digital skills and digital education, 8) Promotion of democratic values and societal engagement, and 9) Joint promotion and awareness-raising activities for the programme.

Furthermore, the feasibility study proposed three steps towards the implementation of a European degree, which implied further testing and refining the co-created European criteria.

- **Step 1 - Piloting with Erasmus+:** Testing the feasibility of a European degree and fine-tuning its criteria.
- **Step 2 - Agreeing on the fine-tuned European degree criteria with the Member States**: Based on the results of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, the Member States should agree on the criteria.
- **Step 3 - Enabling the award of European degrees based on common European criteria**: As Member States where/if necessary adjust national legislation to facilitate the implementation of a European degree, higher education institutions across the EU would be empowered to award European degrees based on the same or similar European criteria.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects' results supported the refinement of the European criteria through separate testing and co-creation meetings between the pilot project stakeholders. These meetings involved 140 higher education institutions, 17 ministries, 20 national quality assurance agencies, students' organisations, and economic and social partners.

Although they worked separately, the Erasmus+ pilot projects were to come up with one jointly agreed list of criteria, with the final joint session of all Erasmus+ pilot projects taking place in February 2024. Following the proposal of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, they were categorised into three dimensions and formulated to fully respect academic freedom and the diversity of fields and academic cultures. This consensus is presented in Annex II of the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality

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[61] Ibid 3
[62] Burneikaitė et al., 2023.

assurance and recognition system in higher education[63]. The outcomes of the testing of the co-created European criteria for a European degree (label) classified the criteria into three dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Dimensions of the co-created European criteria.
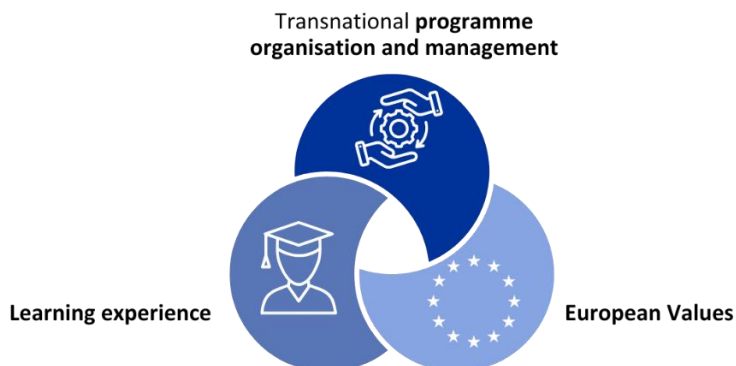
Based on Annex II of the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects shared the views that, while all criteria put to testing would be desirable in an ideal joint programme, the list could be shortened and contain only mandatory criteria to ensure a lean verification process. The Erasmus+ pilot projects also made suggestions to define each criteria in the most precise, yet flexible, way in order to ensure their applicability to all fields, disciplines and types of programmes.

The text below presents a summary of general feedback from the Erasmus+ pilot projects for the 16 consensual co-created European criteria. It also includes examples of possible indicators identified as possible ways to measure compliance with each criterion.

First dimension: Transnational programme organisation and management

1. Higher education institutions involved
2. Transnational joint degree delivery
3. Joint arrangements for the joint programme
4. Quality assurance arrangements
5. Graduate tracking

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1. *Higher education institutions involved: The joint programme is offered by at least two higher education institutions from at least two different Member States (EQF 6, 7, 8).*

Objective: Ensure that any joint programme leading to a European degree is transnational by nature and must, therefore, involve several institutions from different countries.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects debated about the minimum number of higher education institutions and the geographical scope of a European degree. Some projects argued that establishing the number of institutions above two would contribute to increasing the level of ambition of a European degree and align it with the objectives of cooperation models such as the European Universities alliances. However, projects' feedback also showed that, despite a growing offer of joint programmes with multiple partners, most joint

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[63] Ibid 6.

programmes are currently offered in the context of cooperation between two higher education institutions from two different countries. They also reported that for some fields of study, finding multiple partners may prove difficult. Hence, the consensus adopted an inclusive approach and set a minimum of two higher education institutions from two different Member States. Evidently, joint programmes offered by more than two partners, for example, in the context of European Universities alliances, by default comply with this criterion.

In terms of geographical scope, the Erasmus+ pilot projects discussed the possibility of including EHEA countries or leave the criterion open to all countries in general. The discussions highlighted that an initiative discussed at the EU level could not make decisions for non-EU countries. However, the criterion is formulated in such a way so as not to rule out potential expansion. Beyond the minimum of two higher education institutions from two EU Member States, there are no further restrictions on the number of higher education institutions or the countries they are from, within or beyond the EU. As a result, a third partner from a third country can also participate in the delivery of a European degree, provided that there are at least two institutions from two different EU member states collaborating with them. This approach guarantees the promotion of European standards while also allowing for higher education institutions located in non-EU countries to participate in the delivery of a European degree.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects stressed the importance of future guidelines to specify further that the criterion establishes minimum requirements and that joint programmes can certainly exceed them (i.e. involve more than two institutions from at least two different EU member states.

Possible indicators for the criterion:	
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.	
Possible indicators	**Compliance possibly illustrated through**
- Total number of higher education institutions participating in the joint programme	- Demonstrating, as a minimum, two participating institutions
- Number of different Member States represented among the participating institutions	- Demonstrating, as a minimum, institutions hailing from two EU member states

2. *Transnational joint degree delivery:*

   a. **The joint programme is jointly designed and jointly delivered by all the higher education institutions involved (EQF 6, 7, 8).**

Objectives: Ensure that all higher education institutions involved in a European degree participate in the design and delivery of the joint programme.

Feedback from the Erasmus+ pilot projects underscored the necessity for thorough collaboration in both the conceptual and operational stages of the joint programme. Stakeholders agreed that joint design and delivery would bolster the programme's academic integrity and coherence, which can only be achieved with meaningful contributions from each institution involved.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects suggested that future guidelines should define compliance with this criterion to be demonstrated through consensus and alignment amongst the partners regarding the format and content of the programme. This should be specified in the consortium agreement or other related joint documents

and should at minimum level include jointly designed learning outcomes at the programme level as a minimum and demonstrate that all partners contribute to teaching and/or the provision of other learning activities.

Possible indicator for the criterion:	
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.	
Possible indicator	**Compliance possibly illustrated through**
- Existence of an interinstitutional cooperative structure (or body) that designed the programme.	- Confirmation that the structure (or body) functions through a collaborative process. This cooperative structure (or body) can be formalised by a consortium agreement or memorandum of understanding (MOU) or provide other related joint documents agreed upon by the participating institutions.

b. The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree (EQF 6, 7, 8).

Objective: Ensure that the joint dimension of the programme is reflected also in the degree awarded to the student.

Stakeholders debated the possibility of opening this criterion to multiple degrees, such as double degrees. Feedback from the Erasmus+ pilot projects supports that a joint degree is essential for joint programmes, reflecting academic and administrative collaboration. Additionally, it seems more logical for a European degree to be issued as a joint degree instead of multiple separate degrees since none of them alone could claim to be a European degree. It is also important to note that a joint European degree is also aligned with Bologna's commitments to facilitate the delivery of joint degrees across the EHEA.

The results of the Erasmus+ pilot projects showed that although multiple degrees are more frequently awarded than joint or double degrees, the majority of institutions issuing multiple degrees would prefer to award joint degrees. However, these institutions face numerous challenges that prevent them from doing so and resort to issue multiple degrees.

A clear definition and alignment with the objectives of the Bologna Process goals were deemed crucial. Hence, future guidelines should define a joint degree as a single document awarded by higher education institutions offering a joint programme, nationally acknowledged as the recognised award of a joint programme and be aligned with the definition adopted in the European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes.

Possible indicator for the criterion:
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.

Possible indicator	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Number of different degree types awarded to upon programme completion	- Demonstrating that a single joint degree is awarded, as opposed to distinct multiple degrees. This could be attested by the existence of a formal agreement, signed by the partner institutions, explicitly stating the conditions for awarding a joint degree.

c. A joint Diploma Supplement is issued to students (EQF 6, 7).

Objective: Provide comprehensive information about the joint programme, highlighting the involvement of multiple higher education institutions to underscore the joint programme's transnational character, enhancing its transparency and facilitating its recognition.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects' feedback strongly supports issuing a joint Diploma Supplement to students completing a joint programme, viewing it as essential for transparency and recognition. The Diploma Supplement is considered crucial for clearly communicating and recognising qualifications and learning outcomes across different education systems. It is especially necessary in the case of a joint programme so that students can have a single document to share instead of several ones, each only covering parts of the learning experience. The Diploma Supplement should include comprehensive information about the joint nature of the programme, highlighting the involvement of multiple higher education institutions to underscore its transnational character. The project also acknowledges potential technical challenges related to the use of several languages or differences in IT tools to generate Diploma Supplements.

Future guidelines should indicate that a joint diploma supplement clearly describes all parts of the degree programme and contains relevant information on the type and level of qualification awarded, the institutions that issued the qualification, the content of the course and the results gained, the institutions in which the student has earned the different parts of the degree and other relevant details of the national education systems. Due to their specific nature, this criterion would not apply to EQF level 8 programmes.

Possible indicator for the criterion:
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.

Possible indicator	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Existence of a joint Diploma Supplement issued upon completion	- Confirmation that the Diploma Supplement issued to students upon completion of the joint study programme is a joint Supplement (rather than distinct supplements issued by each participating institution). - The joint Diploma Supplement clearly states that the programme achieved is a joint study programme, specifying the involvement of multiple institutions, the mobility completed as part of the programme, the involvement of the students regarding their participations in joint activities.

d. The joint programme describes the learning outcomes and credits in line with the ECTS Users Guide (EQF 6, 7).

Objective: Encourage alignment with existing EHEA tools and ensure that curricular design is premised on reaching intended learning outcomes. This criterion would ensure consistency, transparency, and comparability of qualifications across institutions and countries.

The feedback from the Erasmus+ pilot projects on this criterion emphasises that using ECTS is essential for clearly defining workloads and outcomes, as well as facilitating cross-border credit transfer and recognition. The criterion was reinforced with an explicit reference to the ECTS Users Guide to avoid discrepancies in how learning outcomes and credits are described across different institutions. Feedback also emphasised that the proper use of ECTS would enhance student understanding of the programme and ensure clear communication between partner institutions by providing detailed descriptions of learning outcomes, teaching methods, and assessment criteria. Due to their specific nature, this criterion would not apply to EQF level 8 programmes.

Possible indicator for the criterion:
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.

Possible indicator	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Availability of programme documentation in ECTS credits	- Confirmation that the joint programme is documented in ECTS credits, including the total number of ECTS credits required for program completion. This could be illustrated through demonstrating that the description of each course or module within the joint programme includes ECTS allocated based on a common procedure, as well as a description of contents, learning materials or resources, learning outcomes, teaching methods and modes of delivery, assessment criteria. - Confirmation that student have easy access to these documents.

3. *Joint arrangements for the joint programme: The joint programme has joint policies, procedures and/or arrangements defining curriculum planning and delivery, as well as all organisational and administrative matters. Students' representatives are part of the decision-making process to define the joint policies, procedures, and/or arrangements (EQF 6, 7, 8).*

Objective: Ensure that the joint programme is governed through joint policies and that procedures and arrangements are agreed on, implemented and monitored at programme, institutional or inter-institutional levels.

Feedback on this criterion emphasised the necessity of joint arrangements for consistency across all institutions involved in a joint programme. Where relevant, these arrangements should be formalised through consortium agreements to clarify roles and responsibilities, ensuring a clear framework for programme management. Alternatively, other forms of joint arrangements could be used, leaving full flexibility to the institutions to determine their cooperation arrangements.

Some feedback suggested breaking down the criterion into smaller components to allow for concise explanations. The consensus was that guidelines must explicitly define what the joint arrangements should cover. The minimum elements the guidelines should cover include arrangements related to admission, selection, supervision, progression, monitoring, assessment, degree awarding and recognition. Guidelines could also suggest additional arrangements in the form of good practices with examples. Additionally, guidelines should specify that there is flexibility on how these arrangements can be made, such as through the establishment of joint committees and boards, and also that the arrangements can be programme-specific or at inter-institutional or alliance levels.

Feedback also stressed the importance of including students' representatives in the decision-making processes to allow for greater flexibility and reflect diverse institutional practices. Including students in decision-making was seen as particularly beneficial for meeting learner needs. Therefore, the guidelines are also expected to provide orientation and good practices on how to include student representatives in the decision-making processes.

Possible indicators for the criterion:	
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Possible indicators	**Compliance possibly illustrated through**
- Existence of joint arrangements for the joint programme	- Confirmation that joint arrangements for the programme have been jointly agreed upon by the participating institutions.
- Availability of clear, accessible, and widely communicated joint policies to students, faculty, and stakeholders regarding admission, selection, supervision, monitoring, assessment, and recognition procedures.	- Demonstrating the existence of joint admission policy that outlines the criteria, procedures, and requirements for student admission into the joint programme. - Demonstrating the existence of a joint selection procedure that defines how students are selected for the joint programme. - Demonstrating the existence of joint policies regarding the supervision and monitoring of students' progress throughout the programme. - Demonstrating the existence of joint policies governing the assessment of students' academic performance, including grading criteria and evaluation methods. - Demonstrating the existence of joint recognition procedures for the joint study program, specifying how the degrees or qualifications will be awarded and recognized by the participating institutions.
- Involvement of student representatives in the determination of all joint arrangements	- Demonstrating that elected students' representatives were involved in the determination of all joint arrangements.

4. *Quality assurance arrangements*:

    a. **Internal and external Quality Assurance is conducted in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The higher education institutions, the study field or the programme are evaluated by an EQAR-registered agency (EQF 6, 7, 8).**

Objective: Ensure alignment with existing EHEA tools while respecting the diversity of accreditation and quality assurance systems and the competence of the Member States in this matter.

Feedback from the Erasmus+ pilot projects on this criterion emphasised the importance of aligning quality assurance processes with European standards. Although it may seem redundant to state that EQAR-registered agencies should carry out the evaluations in line with the ESG, it was considered important to explicitly mention both EQAR and the ESG for the sake of clarity.

The criterion respects Member States' competence by explicitly referencing the central role of EQAR-registered agencies and specifying that the evaluation will not be carried out by a European central body. It does not impose a programme-based external evaluation where that is not needed and respects the diversity of accreditation and quality assurance systems.

Future guidelines should support accreditation and evaluation agencies to integrate an evaluation of compliance with the criteria of a European degree within their existing processes and procedures.

<table>
<tr>
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Possible indicators for the criterion:
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</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible indicators</td>
<td>Compliance possibly illustrated through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Internal and external quality assurance mechanism aligned with ESG.</td>
<td>- Existence of a specific body at the programme level, composed by representatives of all HEIs, that oversees the internal QA of the joint programme.
- Confirmation that the internal quality assurance (QA) processes of the joint programme align with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).
- ESG alignment could be demonstrated if Each HEI participating in the joint programme receives external QA reports that assess its compliance with ESG policies (and the joint programme is part of this report).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Accreditation or evaluation by an EQAR-registered agency.</td>
<td>- Confirmation that the joint programme, study field, or participating institutions have received accreditation or evaluation by an EQAR-registered agency.</td>
</tr>
</table>

    b. **The joint programme is evaluated using the standards of the European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes (EA) (EQF 6, 7, 8).**

Objective: Ensure alignment with tools already in place within the EHEA.

Using the European approach would streamline accreditation procedures, reducing the need for multiple separate procedures that can be a barrier to the establishment of joint programmes. It would also promote greater integration and coherence in the delivery of joint programmes across Europe, considering that stakeholders view the European approach as a sound methodology to externally assess the quality assurance

of joint programmes. Future guidelines should ensure the fit for purpose use of the European approach and streamline procedures to facilitate its adoption in countries where it has not been implemented.

Possible indicators for the criterion:

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Possible indicators	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes used in external quality assurance	- Confirmation that the transnational joint programme has used the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA) for its external quality assurance, where required by national regulations.
- European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes used in internal quality assurance	- Confirmation that the transnational joint program has used the standards of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (EA) for its internal quality assurance.

5. *Graduate tracking: The joint programme monitors graduates through a graduate tracking system (EQF 6, 7, 8).*

Objective: Monitor graduates' outcomes for quality assurance purposes and for assessing the relevance of a programme, promoting the programme, and building an alumni network, among other elements.

Feedback from the Erasmus+ pilot projects on this criterion emphasised the need to track graduates and called for clear terminology and guidelines for its effective implementation. The initial mention of EUROGRADUATE was removed from the criterion and was instead recommended to be included in the guidelines to include it as an example of good practice. Stakeholders agreed that tracking graduates would provide valuable insights, refine curricula, and strengthen alignment with labour market needs. This criterion does not impose the creation of a programme-specific system for tracking graduates. Instead, guidelines would specify that such a system can be established at the programme or institutional level, as long as it meets the characteristics of the transnational programme. Where possible, the system should use existing tools, ensuring they are suitable for the programme's specific needs.

Possible indicator for the criterion:

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Possible indicator	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Existence of an adequate graduate tracking system	- Existence of a structured system to monitor and assess graduate outcomes from the joint program. This system includes data collection, and analysis on factors such as such employment rates, further education pursuits, career trajectories, and other relevant indicators.

Second dimension: Learning experience

6. Student-centred learning
7. Interdisciplinarity
8. Labour market relevance
9. Digital skills
10. Transnational campus – access to services
11. Flexible and embedded student mobility
12. Co-evaluation and co-supervision for dissertations

6. *Student-centred learning: The joint programme is designed and continuously enhanced and delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process. Assessment of students reflects this approach (EQF 6, 7, 8).*

Objective: Build on the ESG (1.3 - Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment) to stress the importance of implementing student-centred learning, teaching and assessment.

Feedback on this criterion highlighted the importance of student-centred learning in fostering student engagement and autonomy. It also noted its alignment with the objectives of the Bologna process. This criterion does not impose specific pedagogical methods to encourage flexibility and innovation. Future guidelines to be drafted in the context of the proposed European degree policy lab would link this criterion to compliance with ESG and provide a set of indicators that can be used, as well as examples of good practices.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2"><u>**Possible indicators for the criterion:**</u>
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<tr><td>**Possible indicators**</td><td>**Compliance possibly illustrated through**</td></tr>
<tr><td>- Prioritisation of student-centred learning</td><td>- Confirmation that the joint programme prioritises student-centred learning approaches, compliant with the ESG statements, in most of the courses and modules.
- Confirmation whether teaching and learning activities are based on student-centred learning approaches, such as collaborative learning, challenge-based learning, project-based learning, or inquiry-based learning methods (list is not exhaustive).</td></tr>
<tr><td>- Continuous and consistent use of student feedback to enhance the programme.</td><td>- Existence and use of feedback from students for continuous enhancement of their learning experiences.</td></tr>
</table>

7. *Interdisciplinarity: The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinarity components (EQF 6, 7, 8).*

Objective: Promote the inclusion of inter-disciplinarity elements in the curricula to prepare students for complex challenges and future-proof the learning process for responding to the emerging needs of a fast-changing world.

The criterion does not require every programme to be fully interdisciplinary. It allows for an interdisciplinary dimension in the curricula (through one or several courses, modules, challenge-based learning with peers from other disciplines, etc.).

The Erasmus+ pilot projects reported broad stakeholders' agreement on this criterion, acknowledging the need to incorporate interdisciplinarity elements will allow for the integration of knowledge from across multiple fields. This criterion was deemed relevant for all fields of study, including very specific ones, as no field or discipline can thrive in a vacuum. Flexibility was also deemed necessary and reflected in the final criterion, allowing programmes to define interdisciplinarity in line with their academic focus while ensuring students gain diverse perspectives and methodologies. Future guidelines to be drafted in the context of the proposed European degree policy lab would specify that including elements of inter-disciplinarity in curricula can be achieved in diverse ways, with full respect to academic freedom and diversity of fields and disciplines.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Possible indicator for the criterion:
<i>The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.</i></td></tr>
<tr><td>Possible indicators</td><td>Compliance possibly illustrated through</td></tr>
<tr><td>- Existence of interdisciplinary teaching, learning or research activities over the course of the programme</td><td>- Existence of courses or modules that explicitly integrate content, methods, or perspectives from multiple disciplines.
- Confirmation that learning outcomes of the joint programme explicitly reference interdisciplinary skills or knowledge.
- Opportunities are provided for students to engage in research that spans multiple disciplines.
- Confirmation that students are offered to participate in projects or activities that involve collaboration across disciplines.</td></tr>
</table>

8. *Labour market relevance: The joint programme aligns with labour market requirements by incorporating intersectoral components or activities and developing transversal skills (EQF 6, 7, 8).*

Objective: Ensure that students get future-proof skills matching the needs of society.

Stakeholders consulted by the Erasmus+ pilot projects broadly supported this criterion, emphasising the necessity of equipping graduates with skills pertinent to various professional fields, including research-oriented ones. Flexibility was deemed to be a key element for accommodating all possible fields and disciplines. The wording 'intersectoral components' was selected because it ensures the most flexibility and full autonomy for higher education institutions to decide on what components or activities they would offer in the joint programme.

Intersectoral components were deemed crucial for gaining practical experience, meeting evolving labour market demands, and adapting to the global economy and evolving geopolitical context. They encompass various possible elements and activities, such as cooperation with other sectors (businesses, industries, civil society, the public sector, etc.), traineeships, volunteering, and any other activity that can both help students develop transversal skills and ensure the labour market relevance of the programme.

Future guidelines would provide further details on indicators and good practices to support higher education institutions in identifying and choosing activities to include in their joint programmes.

Possible indicators for the criterion:

The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.

Possible indicators	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Cooperation with businesses integrated in the joint programme curriculum	- Existence of collaboration and partnership with relevant stakeholders of the participating countries (industry, public sector and governmental services, regional and local governance) allowing students to be engaged in real-world projects with relevant partners. - Confirmation of the involvement of industry/private sector professionals as guest lecturers, speakers, or mentors in the joint programme, offering real-world insights to students.
- Existence of internship or work-based learning placements	- Demonstrating the offer of international internship or work-based learning placements in various industries and sectors like business, SMEs, NGOs, international organisations, Community Service Learning, public sector.
- Monitoring of labour market trends and adjustments to curriculum where relevant.	- Evidence that the joint programme continuously monitors labour market trends and adjusts its curriculum accordingly to ensure ongoing alignment with industry and society needs.

9. ***Digital skills: The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of advanced digital skills of students, tailored to the capacities and circumstances of the joint programme, ensuring alignment with its scope and scholarly focus (EQF 6, 7, 8).***

Objective: Ensure that students are prepared to embrace the digital transition by incorporating components and actions for the development of digital skills (from basic to advanced), considering the need for a flexible and proportionate approach aligned with the scope and the focus of each study programme.

Feedback on this criterion emphasised the need for integrating digital skills into curricula across all fields and disciplines, given the ongoing digital transformations across industries and the growing reliance on technology in both academic and professional settings. Feedback suggested including a reference to the fact that tailored digital components must meet the unique programme's specific context and scholarly focus, ensuring they are relevant and aligned to the programmes' goals. Future guidelines should emphasise flexibility in integrating these skills into the curricula with indicators and examples of components and actions to comply with this criterion, whether through, e.g. digital tools in coursework, online learning platforms, or project-based learning.

Possible indicators for the criterion:
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.

Possible indicators	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Confirmation that the joint programme integrates digital skills development across its activities	- Confirmation that students receive training and education on relevant digital tools, technologies, and practices applicable to their field of study. This can include prior analyses of skills gap and personalised training offer. - Confirmation that the joint programme encourages the use of digital technologies and tools in teaching and learning activities like learning management systems, collaborative online platforms and web services, virtual labs, simulation software.
- Existence of training and development opportunities for students and faculty members to enhance their digital skills in teaching and learning.	- Evidence that the programme provides opportunities for students and staff to earn digital skills certifications or badges, indicating their proficiency in specific digital tools, software, or technologies (like DIGCOMP or others).

10. Transnational campus – access to services: The programme has joint policies for students and staff to have access to relevant services in all participating higher educational institutions under equivalent conditions as all enrolled students and local staff (EQF 6, 7, 8).

Objective: Ensure students of a joint programme have equal access to services of participating institutions, regardless of whether they are physically present in the institution or not. This criterion also stresses the importance for staff of joint programmes to have access to services of the partner institutions.

Feedback on this criterion stressed the need for flexibility due to differing infrastructure capacities across institutions and countries. Stakeholders supported the principle of offering equal access to services deemed particularly relevant, such as IT infrastructure, libraries, labs and student support services. This flexibility is reflected in the wording, acknowledging the need for a flexible approach depending on the nature of the joint programme. Future guidelines to be drafted in the context of the proposed European degree policy lab would provide additional guidance on the kind of services that would be deemed relevant, as well as examples of a series of services that can be provided to comply with this criterion.

Possible indicators for the criterion:
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.

Possible indicators	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Accessibility of facilities	- Confirmation of the accessibility to shared physical infrastructure and facilities across participating institutions, ensuring students have equitable access to essential resources like laboratories, workshops, and study spaces.
- Access to student services	- Confirmation that enrolled students have effective access to IT services provided by each participating higher education institutions (such as learning platforms, online libraries (see above), hybrid/virtual classrooms, and other digital tools necessary for their studies). - Existence of career advice and mentoring programmes that assist students in career planning and development and are open to all participants. / Availability of academic guidance services that offer academic advising, mentoring, and support to students, regardless of their location within the joint programme. - Existence of psychological services to support students' well-being; for the period of studies abroad, those services are guaranteed at the same level of quality that students would find in their home institutions.
- Access to staff services	- Existence of faculty development programmes that support teaching staff from all participating institutions in delivering high-quality education within the joint programme.

11. *Flexible and embedded student mobility:*

   a. **The joint programme offers deep intercultural experience, including a minimum of 1 period of student physical mobility (that can be split into several stays) at one or more partner institution(s) representing overall at least 60 ECTS at EQF 6 level and 30 ECTS at EQF 7 level. The joint programme has a policy offering alternatives for students who are unable to travel (EQF 6, 7).**

Objective: Ensure that students at Bachelor's and Master's levels are provided with opportunities to be physically mobile between the institutions offering the joint programme for a minimum of 60 ECTS at the Bachelor's and 30 ECTS at the Master's level.

The feedback on the criteria acknowledges the importance of physical mobility in fostering cultural understanding and enhancing the international aspect of joint programmes. The practical feasibility of requiring extensive mobility, particularly for students who may face financial, personal or other constraints, was a recurrent topic for discussion. As a result, the criterion was enhanced to reference alternatives offered to students who are unable to travel to allow for a flexible interpretation of this criterion, so as to be fully inclusive of all students participating in joint programmes. Additionally, stakeholders emphasised the importance of having clear policies for students unable to participate in physical mobility, in order to ensure equitable access to intercultural experiences. There was also support for defining guidelines for 'deep intercultural experience' to avoid ambiguity and ensure consistency across programmes.

Future guidelines would define minimum requirements that do not prevent higher education institutions from offering more mobility opportunities, including virtual options. Minimum requirements do not entail the completion of rigid, longer and continuous blocks of mobility and would instead allow for the stacking of several smaller periods of mobility.

Possible indicators for the criterion:	
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.	
Possible indicators	**Compliance possibly illustrated through**
- Physical mobility included in the joint programme	- Verification of whether the joint programme offers at least one period of student physical mobility at another partner institution, with a minimum of 30 ECTS credits (that can be split in several stays where relevant).
- Alternatives available for cases where inability to travel may occur for students	- Existence of an alternative offer for students who may be unable to travel (virtual mobility, shorter mobility period, etc.). Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab.

b. The joint programme offers deep intercultural experience, including a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at one or more partner institution(s). The joint programme has a policy offering alternatives for students who are unable to travel (EQF 8).

Objective: Ensure that PhD students are provided with opportunities to be mobile between the institutions offering the joint programme for a minimum of six months.

The feedback from the Erasmus+ pilot projects expressed strong support for the value of mobility in fostering cultural integration and academic collaboration across borders at the doctoral level. Stakeholders noted challenges related to the practical implementation of this requirement, particularly in terms of logistical barriers for students who may be unable to participate in physical mobility. This criterion was also complemented with a reference to alternatives offered to students who are unable to travel to avoid a restrictive interpretation of the criterion that would exclude such students from such joint programmes.

Future guidelines would specify that minimum requirements do not prevent higher education institutions from offering more mobility opportunities, including virtual options. Minimum requirements do not entail the completion of rigid blocks of mobility and allow for the stacking of several smaller periods of mobility.

Possible indicators for the criterion:
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.

Possible indicators	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Physical mobility included in the joint programme	- Verification of whether the joint programme offers a total duration of at least 6 months of physical mobility (including secondment) across partner institutions.
- Alternatives available for cases where inability to travel may occur for students	- Existence of an alternative offer for students who may be unable to travel (virtual mobility, shorter mobility period, participation to international research activities, etc.). Good practices may be further identified in future guidelines in the context of the European degree policy lab.

12. ***Co-evaluation and co-supervision for dissertations: Dissertations are supervised by at least 2 supervisors and co-evaluated by co-supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries (EQF 8).***

Objective: Ensure that co-evaluation and co-supervision offer a true joint doctoral experience. This is also an important element promoted by the MSCA action.

Stakeholders feedback expressed strong support for this criterion and agreed that such an approach enhances the quality of dissertations by incorporating diverse academic perspectives. Additionally, there was feedback recommending clear guidelines on how the co-evaluation process should be structured and documented to ensure consistency across institutions.

Future guidelines would provide indicators and further details on how compliance with this criterion can be assessed.

Possible indicators for the criterion:
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Possible indicator	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Ensuring co-evaluation by supervisors from at least two institutions	- Confirmation, as a minimum, that the evaluation committee includes members from at least two different institutions
- Ensuring co-evaluation by supervisors from at least two countries	- Confirmation that the evaluation committee includes members from institutions located in, as a minimum, two different countries.

Third dimension: European Values

13. Democratic values

14. Multilingualism

15. Inclusiveness

16. Green transition

13. *Democratic values: The joint programme's joint policies promote and adhere to democratic values (EQF 6, 7, 8).*

Objective: Establish a minimum requirement emphasising the important role of education in strengthening common European values and democratic citizenship.

Whilst not initially envisaged as a core criterion, higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies supported the inclusion of democratic values as a core principle, recognising its role in fostering inclusive, participatory learning environments that reflect European ideals. There were suggestions for more explicit guidelines on how these values should be operationalised and evaluated within the programme. Additionally, there were calls to encourage student involvement and inclusivity at all levels of the programme's management and delivery.

Future guidelines would support the assessment of compliance reflected in the joint programme's policies and procedures and the respect of academic freedom. Several documents were mentioned as possible references for this purpose, including the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture developed by the Council of Europe[64], the Erasmus+ Charter for Higher Education[65], and the European Charter for Fundamental Rights[66].

Possible indicators for the criterion:
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Possible indicators	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Joint programme policies promote democratic values	- Confirmation that the joint programme recognises and facilitates students' engagement and participation in activities that promote democratic values and address societal needs, like student representation civic engagement initiatives, volunteering, human rights, community service projects. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab. - Confirmation whether the joint programme or the institutions have established partnerships with local community organisations, NGOs, or institutions to facilitate meaningful engagement opportunities for students in different forms like forums, events, guest lectures. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab.

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[64] Council of Europe, Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC), https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture
[65] European Commission, Erasmus+ Charter for Higher Education, https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/erasmus-charter-for-higher-education
[66] The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT&from=EN

- Joint programme adheres to democratic values	- Confirmation that the institutions have formally committed to respect the principles of democratic values, social justice, and active citizenship. Such commitment could be demonstrated e.g. through references to existing reference documents such as the European Charter for Fundamental Rights, the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture developed by the Council of Europe, or other.

14. Multilingualism: During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU languages (EQF 6, 7, 8).

Objective: Promote exposure to multilingualism as part of the joint programme to further bolster its transnational nature and sense of European identity.

Multilingualism is a core value of the European project and is highly valued by employers and students. Feedback on this criterion highlighted that multilingualism is crucial for fostering a truly European experience, emphasising that it enriches the learning experience and enhances personal and professional development.

Stakeholders pointed out the challenges of achieving meaningful engagement with more than one language, particularly for institutions and students coming from countries with fewer multilingual traditions. Nevertheless, the majority of stakeholders agreed that exposure to multiple EU languages is a significant strength of joint programmes, contributing to students' intercultural competence and European identity.

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This criterion does not define language levels to be achieved by students. It offers full flexibility to achieve this objective through diverse means, which could include e.g., offering language classes, courses or modules taught in a different language than the rest of the curricula, and multilingual curricula, among others).

Possible indicator for the criterion:
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Possible indicator	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Fulfilment of the multilingualism requirement for exposure to at least two EU languages	- Existence of the active or passive use of (at least two) EU languages in teaching and learning activities and/or examinations within the joint programme. - Confirmation of the availability of language classes for students and/or language learning resources, such as multimedia resources, online materials, (virtual) language laboratories.

15. *Inclusiveness*:

   a. **The joint programme commits to widening participation by fostering diversity, equality, and inclusion and by adopting tailored measures to support students and staff with fewer opportunities (EQF 6, 7, 8).**

Objective: Ensure that European degree programmes being inclusive opportunities for all.

Feedback on this criterion indicated that it was widely viewed as essential to create more inclusive joint programmes, especially involving disadvantaged groups or students from diverse geographic backgrounds. Additionally, stakeholders emphasised that the criterion should apply to admissions and support services throughout the student's academic journey, including accessible services and resources. It was also recommended that future guidelines provide specific indicators or examples to help institutions effectively demonstrate how they meet this inclusivity requirement. The criterion leaves freedom for institutions to adopt the measures they consider pertinent to achieve this objective.

Future guidelines to be drafted in the context of the proposed European degree policy lab would specify indicators and guidance to measure this criterion. These arrangements should be reflected in the admission policies and processes and detailed in the consortium agreement or other related joint document(s).

Possible indicator for the criterion:
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.

Possible indicator	Compliance possibly illustrated through
- Inclusion actively promoted through the programme, in line with the Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education adopted as part of the Bologna process[67]	- Existence of specific interventions or support programmes are clearly established for disadvantaged students, in order to facilitate their access, participation, inclusion and achievement of the studies, for any kind of disadvantage. - Presence and effectiveness of tailored admission measures to ensure socially and geographically inclusive participation in the joint programme. - Existence of mechanisms in place to monitor and assess the inclusiveness of the joint programme and its adherence to tailored measures.

   b. **The joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers (EQF 8).**

Objective: Build on well-established principles to ensure inclusive practices in doctoral programmes.

The feedback on this criterion emphasised the importance of maintaining high standards of research integrity and professional development for all participants involved in joint programmes. Stakeholders widely agreed that the Charter promotes the necessary ethical standards and conditions for researchers, ensuring that joint programmes align with best practices in Europe. Institutions highlighted the need for

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[67] Principles and Guidelines to Strengthen the Social Dimension of Higher Education in the EHEA.

flexibility in implementing these standards across different research environments while maintaining the core values of freedom, accountability, and transparency as outlined in the Charter. Some Erasmus+ pilot projects noted that additional guidance might be necessary to ensure institutions fully understand the application of these principles within diverse national contexts.

Future guidelines would specify that the commitment to respect these principles should be clearly referenced in the consortium agreement or other related joint documents, and processes and policies are in place to ensure this alignment.

Possible indicator for the criterion:	
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Possible indicator	**Compliance possibly illustrated through**
- Adherence to the European Charter for Researchers	- Confirmation of the joint programme's or institutions' commitment and adherence to the principles outlined in the European Charter for Researchers - Existence of measures to allowing the self assessing of adherence to EU Charter for Researchers.

16. Green transition: **The joint programme has policies and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities (EQF 6, 7, 8).**

Objective: Promote environmental sustainability.

Stakeholders provided positive feedback for this criterion. They emphasised the importance of incorporating environmental sustainability across all joint programmes, suggesting that it should reflect the values of the European degree. The formulation of the final criterion is open enough to cover a wide range of activities. They also proposed developing guidelines to help universities implement sustainable practices. Furthermore, it was suggested that some of the necessary actions, such as minimising environmental impact, might be better managed at the institutional rather than the programme level.

Future guidelines will suggest what kind of measures can reflect such commitment, keeping in mind the necessity to respect the diversity of contexts and programmes. The guidelines would specify that such commitment should be reflected in the joint policies and arrangements and that students and staff should be informed about these principles.

Possible indicators for the criterion:	
The possible indicators presented in this document are illustrative examples of how compliance with the outlined criteria could be assessed. They are not final and will be further discussed and refined within the European degree policy lab. Meeting a criterion would not necessarily require fulfilling every listed option; instead, compliance could be demonstrated by appropriately fulfilling one or a combination of them. Good practices could be identified in the context of the European degree policy lab and serve as source of inspiration to refine indicators and assessment methodologies.	
Possible indicators	**Compliance possibly illustrated through**

- Existence of an environmental policy and sustainability strategy that outlines the institutions commitment to sustainable practices. across participating institutions	- Demonstration of the existence of a policy and sustainability strategy that outlines the institutions commitment to sustainable practices. across participating institutions. - Existence of collaboration with sustainability organisations or initiatives that can facilitate its commitment to environmental sustainability.
- Existence of measures to actively engage students, faculty, and staff on environmental sustainability issues and promote sustainable behaviours.	- Presence of environmental sustainability topics and principles in modules or activities. - Existence of measures to actively engage students, faculty, and staff about environmental sustainability issues and promote sustainable behaviours (through e.g. blended intensive programmes, joint projects with municipalities, regions and the innovation ecosystem of universities, workshops, seminars, campaigns, educational materials). - Existence of specific support measures to facilitate green travel to the mobility destination and keeps track of the students using sustainable travel.

3.6   Award processes and actors

One of the main issues discussed by the Erasmus+ pilot projects for implementing the European degree is who would assess whether the programme meets the European criteria and decide whether a European degree (label) can be awarded. There is a broad consensus that the European degree should integrate with rather than duplicate existing processes. To minimise costs and maximise benefits, the combination of application and evaluation procedures with existing accreditation/evaluation procedures is considered to be the most effective.

When assessing whether a programme meets the criteria for awarding a European degree (label), the most common suggestions from the Erasmus+ pilot projects is that the awarding process for a label and a degree should look like an accreditation/quality assurance process. Many favour an approach that would involve the use of existing accreditation and quality assurance agencies registered within the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR). In the case of a degree, one EQAR-registered agency would review the criteria, and its decision would be accepted in all participating countries without the need for separate review by their quality assurance agencies. This is also in line with the goal of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. In the case of a label, any EQAR-registered agency may verify the compliance with the criteria and allows the participant institutions to issue personalised joint European degree label certificates to students graduating from the joint programme. The label does not imply transnational recognition of the degree and is not subject to a specific regulatory framework. Its function is to reflect the transnational character of a joint programme, emphasising its highly integrated nature while at the same time remaining adaptable to the context of each joint programme.

EQAR-registered agencies would be eligible to verify the compliance of programmes or institutions with the European criteria, fully integrating this process into their existing procedures for programme accreditation or institutional external quality assurance. This would require that EQAR acts as an official register of quality assurance agencies that comply with the European criteria, like they currently do for the ESG.

Higher education institutions that can self-accredit their own programmes could also award European degrees (labels), provided they have the appropriate processes in place to ensure compliance with the European criteria. Institutions could demonstrate this as part of their regular institutional evaluation or audit by an EQAR-registered agency.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects also emphasised the need for a fair, consistent and transparent process across countries and suggested more detailed descriptions of the criteria. This implies the development of EU-level guidelines and a comprehensive toolkit specifying definitions and indicators, providing examples of good practices. This would ensure better readability, shared understanding, and measurability for both institutions and agencies. Such a resource could be directly used by agencies and evaluators, defining the evaluation methodology and indicators.

As the Erasmus+ pilot projects progressed, a third option emerged: introducing the European degree as a degree offered by alliances of higher education institutions with a legal entity. Under this option, alliances of higher education institutions that have chosen to establish a legal entity could be accredited at the alliance level to deliver joint educational provisions, including a European degree. National legislation would need to allow such accreditation of new legal entities. This option was not explored in depth by all six Erasmus+ pilot projects, but some did gather preliminary views on it, revealing diverse perspectives.

The quality assurance implications for each entry point are presented below, as suggested by the work of the Erasmus+ pilot projects.

For entry point 1 – a European label:

- Joint programmes would apply to receive the label at the same time as applying for their (re-) accreditation or periodic evaluation.
- If an external programme-based evaluation is required, the compliance with the criteria would be verified by an EQAR-registered agency; along with their usual decision, the agency awards the label to programmes that comply with the criteria of the European label.
- If an institution is self-accrediting, an external institutional evaluation verifies that the higher education institutions have the correct processes in place to assess compliance with the criteria of the European label; if positive, the EQAR-registered agency would authorise the institution to use the label. The evaluation of each programme would then be carried out by the self-accrediting higher education institution, which can award the label to its programmes that comply with the criteria for the European label.

For entry point 2 – a European degree.

- The European degree is part of national legal frameworks.
- As with any degree, it would be accredited following national/regional legislation and National Qualification Frameworks by the competent authorities at institutional, regional, or national levels. Compliance with the European criteria would be verified as part of the programme's accreditation by the competent authority (accreditation agency or self-accrediting higher education institutions).
- A European degree could also be awarded by a legal entity established by several higher education institutions from different countries (e.g. a European Universities alliance with a legal status).

The Erasmus+ pilot projects highlighted the importance of robust IT infrastructure to support the awarding process of the European degree (label), e.g. for higher education institutions to award the European degree (label) as a digital credential and for students to access programme-related information. A focus on digital platforms, streamlined administrative procedures for data management, verification systems, and exploring the possibility of issuing digital credentials is essential to ensure that the European degree process can be managed efficiently across multiple countries, stakeholders, and higher education institutions. This particularly includes offering students verifiable digital credentials, an accessible programme database and course catalogue, and other programme-related documents in digital form. This should also be linked to developments with the e-IDAS Regulation.

In conclusion, the Erasmus+ pilot projects highlighted the need for both flexibility and consistency, as well transparency, in the awarding process for the European degree (label). While the process is expected to integrate with existing systems, the option to pursue the European degree alongside or in lieu of the label should remain available. This phased, dual approach would support the long-term goal of a European-wide recognised degree that complements national qualifications.

3.7   Preliminary policy advice for the future work

The Erasmus+ pilot projects agree that there is the need for coordinating the development and implementation of a European degree either as a label or as a qualification at the EU-level. Leadership on the European degree is considered crucial in engaging stakeholders, including EU Member States, quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions, ensuring alignment with European educational frameworks such as the Bologna Process, and promoting the European degree's adoption and recognition both within and beyond the European Education Area.

Advice from the Erasmus+ pilot projects to policymakers

- Coordinating and leading the development of the European degree (label):

    – The European degree initiative should be coordinated at the EU level.
    – Member States should receive detailed guidance on how to integrate seamlessly the European degree into national and regional legislation.
    – Collaborating with key stakeholders, such as the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR), and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), the network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC), universites' and students' representatives is key to the success of the European degree.

- Defining a roadmap for the implementation of the European degree (label):

    – A transparent roadmap is necessary for implementing the European degree, addressing issues of the transition process, legal implications, and alignment with other relevant work, like the Bologna process.

- Interpretation of the criteria and practical guidelines:

    – The interpretation of the co-created criteria for the European degree (label) should be elaborated upon together with stakeholders and Member States to address the diverse needs of stakeholders and education systems.
    – Support should be provided for the co-development of guidelines for the implementation of the co-created criteria. A comprehensive guidebook should be developed to assist higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in the verification process.

- Establishing verification methods:

    – An efficient verification procedure with European stakeholder organisations should be developed focused on checking whether the procedures applied to determine if a programme aligns with the European degree (label) criteria is correct. It should go together with setting up a register of European degree (label) programmes. The Commission would stand ready to support enhanced cooperation between Member States to ensure a successful implementation of verification methods.

- Promoting and raising awareness about the European degree (label):

    – Promotion and awareness campaigns are needed to highlight the value of the European degree (label) and its accredited programmes to prospective students, employers, and the broader community.

- Encouraging research and innovation under the European degree (label):

  – Joint research initiatives within joint programmes under the European degree (label) should be promoted, including dedicated funding for collaborative research, support for research mobility, and recognition of joint publications and innovation.

- Support and incentives from the Erasmus+ programme should be provided, among others, for the development of European degree (label) programmes.

The EU Member States are considered key agents in implementing the European degree (label) due to their role in shaping the legal and structural frameworks necessary for its success. Their full involvement is essential in coordination with the EU, national and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition and effective implementation of this initiative. Additionally, Member States can facilitate the alignment of national policies with the broader European educational frameworks, like, for example, the Bologna Process, thereby contributing to the consistency and compatibility of higher education qualifications across Europe.

Advice from the Erasmus+ pilot projects for Member States/higher education systems

- Adopting the European degree (label):

  – Actively participating in the co-creation of the European degree (label) with relevant stakeholders.
  – Aligning national legislation to remove barriers and incorporate the European degree (label). This may require transitional periods and exemptions.
  – Maintaining continuous dialogue with the European Commission and higher education institutions to ensure a transparent and stable flow of information regarding the steps taken towards implementing the European degree (label).

- Coordinating within the Bologna Process:

  – Ensure that all Bologna transparency tools are implemented with no additional national limitations, especially the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

- Funding and financial incentives:

  – Providing financial incentives such as scholarships and grants to make joint programmes more accessible and addressing the higher costs associated with mandatory physical mobility.
  – Providing support for higher education institutions to develop joint programmes, particularly for those involving multiple institutions across different Member States.
  – Addressing the challenges that joint programmes face in accessing national funding schemes, ensuring that students in these programmes are not disadvantaged.
  – Ensuring that quality assurance agencies and national academic recognition centres have enough resources to manage the European degree (label).

- Facilitating participation of international (non-EU) students:

  – Introducing measures to facilitate smoother transitions for international students, including simplified visa processes.
  – Providing robust services for international students, including mental health support, accommodation assistance, and visa application guidance through dedicated personnel or online resources.
  – Support peer-learning to better understand and address the unique challenges faced by students in joint programmes.

- Ensuring inclusivity and accessibility:

  – Ensuring the European degree is inclusive by catering to diverse student populations and promoting accessibility for disadvantaged or underrepresented groups.

Quality assurance agencies' role in the development of the European degree and label includes the verification of compliance with established criteria and the issuance of the European degree or label. By integrating the European criteria into their processes and collaborating closely with key stakeholders, quality assurance agencies would maintain the integrity and consistency of the European degree (label), thus fostering trust and confidence among students, institutions, employers, and Member States.

Advice from the Erasmus+ pilot projects for quality assurance agencies

- Participating in framework co-creation for the European degree(label):

    - Cooperating closely with the European Commission, Member States and stakeholders to develop a European framework for a European degree/label, particularly in the development of guidelines for the criteria and verification processes, preventing duplication of processes and documentation. The new verification procedure should align with the principles of the European Approach and minimise repetition.

- Aligning the European degree/label to existing accreditation frameworks:

    - Integrating the European degree and label as an additional optional component of established quality assurance processes, such as the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. This integration would help streamline accreditation processes and reduce administrative burdens on both quality assurance agencies and higher education institutions.
    - Allocating resources such as staff, time, and tools to effectively participate in the co-creation of the European degree or label framework and developing workflows to embed the framework into their internal procedures.

- Ensuring clarity of criteria and assessment procedures:

    - Ensuring transparency and coherence in the awarding of the European degree (label) by following the criteria, indicators, clear assessment procedures, and defined roles for stakeholders, as specified in the European guidelines.
    - Ensuring that detailed information about programme structures, learning outcomes, assessment methods, and accreditation status is transparently provided for student decision-making and stakeholders, e.g. through the publication of relevant reports, potentially in DEQAR.

- Developing verification procedures:

    - Supporting the development of a European-level procedure to check the correct application of European criteria when awarding the right for a programme to use the European degree and label.
    - Supporting the creation of an online platform or database that lists all European degree (label)-awarding programmes, potentially as part of DEQAR. It may allow students and graduates to easily download certificates attesting that their programmes received a European degree (label).

- Ensuring framework flexibility :

    - Catering the European degree (label) accreditation procedures to different academic disciplines while ensuring consistency in quality and delivery. It should allow for flexibility within the European degree framework to accommodate the evolving nature of higher education and the specific needs of different academic areas, including in particular also interdisciplinary programmes.

Higher education institutions are expected to contribute to developing strategies for joint programmes and ensure that their institutional frameworks are adapted to meet the unique challenges posed by the European degree (label). By aligning their procedures, IT infrastructure, and support networks with the goals of the European degree, higher education institutions can facilitate smoother coordination and implementation across borders, thereby enhancing the quality and accessibility of joint degree programmes. Their engagement is essential to ensuring that the European degree (label) meets the diverse needs of students, faculty, and the broader academic community.

Advice from the Erasmus+ pilot projects for higher education institutions

- Leading the discussion for the development of the European degree (label):

  − Taking a leading role in ongoing negotiations and discussions regarding the European degree (label) within their respective countries.
  − Providing input and participating in the European-level co-creation process of the European degree (label).
  − Engaging stakeholders in developing the European degree (label), including academics, students, employers, and policymakers, through feedback mechanisms to continuously assess the effectiveness and relevance of the European degree.
  − Engaging in communication strategies to highlight the unique benefits of the European degree (label) using digital channels to reach a global audience.
  − Strengthening international partnerships beyond the EEA/EHEA to enhance the global recognition and attractiveness of the European degree (label).

- Planning strategically:

  − Developing a comprehensive strategy defining the role of European degrees within their educational portfolio and setting priorities regarding the types of joint programmes, the fields they will cover, preferred partners, and target student numbers.
  − Supporting the development and implementation of the European degree (label) by providing guidelines, templates, best practices, and internal resources to support faculties and departments.

- Adapting institutional procedures:

  − Adapting internal regulations to accommodate the European degree (label) by adjusting institutional rules related to admissions, quality assurance, accreditation, and data management to ensure a flexible approach.
  − Aligning joint programmes with the European degree (label), reducing the risk of conflicting regulations and facilitating smoother implementation across different countries.
  − Implementing mechanisms for regular assessment, enhancement, and improvement of European degree programmes.

- Developing supporting IT Infrastructure;

  − Leveraging digital technologies to facilitate the administration of the European degree (label), including accreditation processes, digital certification, and communication with stakeholders.
  − Developing IT tools and services for supporting student registration, mobility tracking, evaluation, and diploma issuance across multiple institutions involved in joint programmes.

- Promoting innovative pedagogies and e-learning:

  − Recognising and rewarding staff engaged in the development and delivery of the European degree programmes.
  − Integrating innovative teaching methods, digital pedagogy, and e-learning tools in European degree programmes.
  − Developing digital assessment tools aligned with the European degree (label), ensuring high academic standards and enriching the student learning experience.
  − Integrating career orientation activities for European degree graduates to prepare them for local and global job markets.

3.8   Conclusions of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on the European degree (label)

The six Erasmus+ pilot projects piloting the criteria for a European degree label have advanced the conceptualisation and potential implementation of a European degree (label), emphasising the role of a European degree in promoting deeper integration within the European education area (EEA) and boosting the competitiveness and appeal of Europe's higher education system. The projects highlighted the diversity in programme structures and the collaborative efforts that need to come together to move towards common European standards. The extensive involvement of multiple higher education institutions across EU Member States and associated countries highlights the strong commitment to improving the quality of joint programmes, which is key for the practical implementation of a European degree.

Introducing a European degree would represent a major advancement in higher education, offering comprehensive benefits across higher education and the job market. With a European degree, students would gain recognised qualifications across the EU, which are clearly understood by employers and symbolise a high standard of inclusive academic excellence. Higher education institutions would benefit from reduced administrative burdens and better opportunities for transnational cooperation, making them more attractive to students and faculties across the globe. A European degree would equip graduates with relevant, transnational skills and competencies, which increases their employability and enables them to effectively meet the evolving demands of globalised workplaces. A European degree would also support EU Member States by aligning education systems with EU-wide standards, promoting talent retention. For Europe, a European degree would strengthen its position as a leading global educational destination, promoting integration, innovation, European identity and shared values across its EU Member States.

Addressing the barriers to implementing a European degree remains challenging. The projects identified persistent obstacles such as differences in accreditation standards, diverse academic calendars, and varying national regulations regarding degree recognition. These barriers complicate the alignment of standards and practices, hinder mobility, and pose significant challenges in achieving a seamless educational framework for joint transnational programmes. Efforts to align practices and reduce these barriers are crucial for the successful adoption of a European degree that is recognised and valued across the EU Member States and further afield.

Refining the criteria for a European degree (label) was a fundamental outcome of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, providing a structured framework to guide the establishment of joint programmes that align with the requirements for a European degree. These criteria are designed to ensure that such degrees not only meet high-quality standards but also embrace the diversity of educational systems and academic traditions across Europe. The flexibility embedded in these criteria means that they can be adapted to various academic disciplines and educational contexts, making the European degree accessible and applicable to a wide range of educational institutions across the EU.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects recommendations point to the need for cohesive action from multiple stakeholders, including higher education institutions, accreditation bodies, and EU Member States. The recommendations advocate for clearer guidelines, streamlined processes, and more substantial support structures to overcome the existing barriers. They emphasise the importance of ongoing dialogue, collaborative policy development, the provision of resources necessary to support the implementation of the European degree, and the definition of a clear roadmap. Addressing these recommendations effectively is crucial to ensuring that the European degree can deliver on its promise of boosting mobility, employability, and the global competitiveness of European higher education.

4 Consolidated conclusions of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on institutionalised cooperation instruments for alliances of higher education institutions, such as a possible European legal status

It is important to remind that the statements and conclusions in this technical report are based on the outcomes of the Erasmus+ pilot projects and do not represent any official position of the European Commission, unless otherwise stated. Based on the strong cooperation between the different Erasmus+ pilot projects and outcomes of the many informal coordination meetings that have taken place throughout the project duration to come up with a consolidated feedback, the outcomes in this report are presented in a consolidated manner, presenting the views of the different Erasmus+ pilot projects in the most aggregated manner. Annex IV provides a more project-specific overview per Erasmus+ pilot project.

4.1 Main characteristics of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on institutionalised cooperation instruments

Transnational cooperation between higher education institutions has a widely recognised and positive impact on academic and research excellence and innovation in the sector and, thus, on the cohesion and competitiveness of Member States and the European Union as a whole. Nonetheless, the pursuit of international cooperation between higher education institutions is often not straightforward.

In 2020, the European University Association conducted a survey[68] among 219 higher education institutions from across 34 European systems. Even then, just two years after the launch of the European Universities Initiative, **59% of respondents identified administrative obstacles to cooperation due to different institutional structures and processes** as one of the most significant barriers to deeper strategic cooperation.

One of the barriers often raised by stakeholders is the lack of an appropriate institutionalised cooperation instruments for alliances of higher education institutions, such as a possible legal status.[69] They see a strong need for this to be able to share financial, human, digital, and physical resources, infrastructures, and services, as well as develop joint activities, including educational activities, more efficiently.

These challenges for transnational cooperation have not gone unnoticed. The Council Recommendation of 5 April 2022 on building bridges for effective European higher education cooperation[70] invited the Commission to 'support the Member States and higher education institutions in testing the use of existing European instruments from 2022 onwards as a step on the way to facilitating deeper, long-term and flexible transnational cooperation and in examining the need for and feasibility of institutionalised cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions'.

In the same recommendation, the Council further elaborated on the objectives that such instruments – to be used on a voluntary basis – could strive for, highlighting, among others, 'the sharing of capacities and data and the exchange of staff, where appropriate, and the implementation of joint programmes, with the aim of awarding joint degrees at the level of alliances, including a joint degree based on co-created European criteria'.

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[68] European Universities Association, Position Paper – The future of the European Universities Initiative: The sector's perspective, April 2020, p. 1,
https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/eua%20council%20position%20on%20future%20of%20eui.pdf
[69] Note that in this report, the concepts of institutionalised cooperation instruments for alliances of higher education institutions and the terms legal status/instrument will be used interchangeably.
[70] Ibid 3

As a result, in June 2022, the Commission launched a **European policy experimentation** in higher education call under the Erasmus+ programme[71], with one topic **dedicated to examining, testing and facilitating the use of existing institutionalised cooperation instruments at the European level, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions**. The aim is to give alliances, on a voluntary basis, the latitude to act together, make common strategic decisions, organise joint procurement, experiment with joint recruitment, design joint curricula or pool infrastructure, resources and human, technical, data, education, research and innovation capacities. This includes:

- Exploring at the level of the alliance **how existing EU instruments for institutionalised cooperation** – such as the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)[72] or the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)[73] – **can provide solutions to the obstacles encountered regarding the deeper cooperation that the alliances are pursuing**. This analysis should be based on a needs assessment of the alliance and take into account, where relevant, the national and regional regulatory frameworks to which the individual higher education institutions part of the alliance need to adhere.
- Where appropriate, elaborating a proposal for improvement of the existing institutionalised cooperation EU instruments or key elements for the design of a new EU-level instrument.

At the end of January 2023, four projects were selected for this purpose (in alphabetical order below) and started their work in Spring 2023. Their outcomes are summarised below. Moreover, in Annex IV you find more information on the outcomes on each of the individual Erasmus+ pilot projects in the form of a factsheet.

a) European Status for ECIU University (ESEU)[74]

The project aimed to identify and map the needs of alliances of higher education institutions for a legal status by formulating eight use cases and based on these use cases, assess the effectiveness of four selected EU legal instruments in supporting transnational cooperation within the framework of ECIU's future ambitions.

Key project deliverables include:

- Definition of eight use cases that illustrate and make concrete the needs of alliances of higher education institutions.
- Analysis of four available legal instruments: the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), European Cooperative Society (SCE); *Societas Europaea* (SE), and the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT).
- A cross-examination of EU legal entities in relation to use cases, i.e. to specific challenges faced by alliances of higher education institutions that should be addressed by a common legal entity.

The project concluded that:

- **The development of a dedicated European legal framework for higher education collaboration is crucial** to support the ambitious goals of transnational higher education alliances, driving innovation and excellence across Europe.

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[71] European Commission, Call for proposals: European policy experimentation in higher education, ERASMUS-EDU-2022-POL-EXP, EU Funding & Tenders Portal.
[72] Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC), OJ L 210, 31.7.2006, p. 19–24.
[73] Council Regulation (EEC) No 2137/85 of 25 July 1985 on the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), OJ L 199, 31.7.1985, p. 1–9.
[74] ESEU project webpage: https://www.eciu.eu/eu/eseu

- A new EU legal instrument could address key operational needs of higher education institutions, incorporate limited liability and be non-compulsory. Furthermore, the Commission could continue co-creative and experimental projects with alliances to design the new instrument.
- Recognising that creating a new legal instrument would take time, **ESEU includes suggestions for adapting the EGTC** to better fit the needs of alliances in higher education.

b) Blueprint for a legal entity for cross-border alliances of higher education institutions (Leg-UniGR)[75]

Since 2015, the University of the Greater Region (UniGR) has operated as a non-profit association under Luxembourgish law. However, the limitations of this arrangement for cross-border cooperation in higher education have prompted the need to explore a new legal status for the alliance. The Leg-UniGR project aimed to evaluate and document the experience of UniGR's with its current legal status as a non-profit association and identify the most appropriate legal structure to support UniGR's development.

Key project deliverables include**:**

- Analysis of the experience of UniGR as a legal entity under Luxembourgish law.
- A set of statutes to guide the transformation of UniGR from a non-profit association to an EGTC, including draft statutes of a legal entity.

The project concluded that:

- To properly reflect the European character of UniGR, it would be important to move from a national entity (non-profit association under Luxembourgish law) to a European entity.
- Although not perfectly tailored for academic cooperation, the EGTC meets some needs for a cross-border university alliance, especially in a financially auditable, not-for-profit structure under public law.
- The project recommends that the EGTC framework be adapted to better support joint higher education services.

c) EUt+ Status and Structure Experience (STYX)[76]

The project aimed to pilot and assess the structures, processes, and legal frameworks needed to integrate higher education institutions within the European University of Technology - EUt+ -, supporting their potential full merger in the long run.

Key project deliverables include:

- Report regarding current legal statuses and their use for EUt+.
- A description of the architecture of key processes, bodies, and procedures necessary to implement the EUt+ vision.
- Analysis of the EGTC status in the EUt+ partner countries and the level of involvement and contribution of the relevant authorities involved.
- Installation guide of the EGTC as a legal structure for EUt+.

The project concluded that:

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[75] Leg-UniGR project webpage: https://legunigr.uni.lu/
[76] STYX project webpage: https://www.univ-tech.eu/the-styx-project-towards-a-status-1

- None of the existing EU legal instruments fully address the needs of higher education institutions, and there is a **need for a European legal status specifically catered to transnational cooperation of higher education institutions**.
- Despite the lack of a perfect solution, EUt+ decided to establish a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) to support its activities in the field of information service provision.
- At the European level, actions can be taken to adapt the EGTC to university cooperation while a new instrument is developed.

d) UNITA as a model for institutionalised university cooperation: from the European Grouping of Economic Interest to the European Grouping of Academic Interest (EGAI)[77]

The project investigates the compatibility of the EEIG with the specific needs of transnational cooperation, such as data, personnel, and resource sharing among member universities. It identifies the EEIG's strengths and weaknesses and determines the necessary legal features for effective academic collaboration.

Key project deliverables include:

- Legal analysis of the possible purpose of EEIG and EGTC applied to academic activities.
- Toolkit of legal instruments for the functioning of the EEIG[78] or EGTC.
- Proposal for a new regulatory framework, a European Grouping of Academic Interest (EGAI).

The project concluded that:

- Current instruments fall short in facilitating the joint performance of core academic activities, like teaching and research, especially when these are publicly funded.
- There is an evident need for a different EU legal instrument, specifically conceived for partnerships among higher education institutions.
- A new legal entity could be founded on legal bases available within the EU treaties, respect the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality and be complementary to national frameworks.

All projects concluded that existing legal instrument cannot fully address the needs of alliances of higher education institutions.

The four selected projects **involved 67 organisations from 20 different countries as full and associated partners**. As Figure 15 shows, Germany was the country with the most organisations participating as main partners in the Erasmus+ pilot projects, followed by France, Spain and Portugal.

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[77] UNITA project webpage: https://www.ubi.pt/Sites/unita/en/Pagina/unita#egai_project

[78] While the legal toolkit aims to be useful for other universities who consider the possibility of using an EEIG to institutionalise their European Universities alliances, it can also be useful to alliances that choose other instruments such as the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), as they may encounter in some cases the same questions.

Figure 15. Main partners by country (Legal Status Erasmus+ pilot projects)
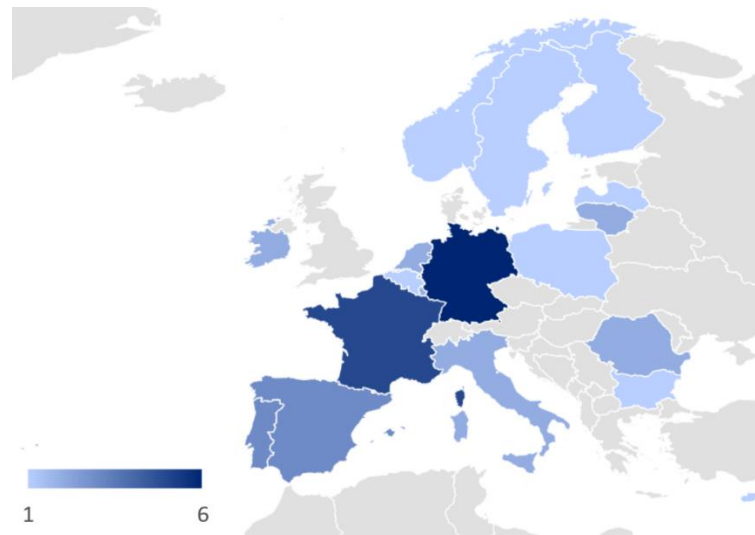
Furthermore, Italy was the country with most organisations participating as associated partners, followed by Spain, Switzerland, Germany and Portugal, as shown in Figure 16.

Figure 16. Associated partners by country (Legal Status Erasmus+ pilot projects)
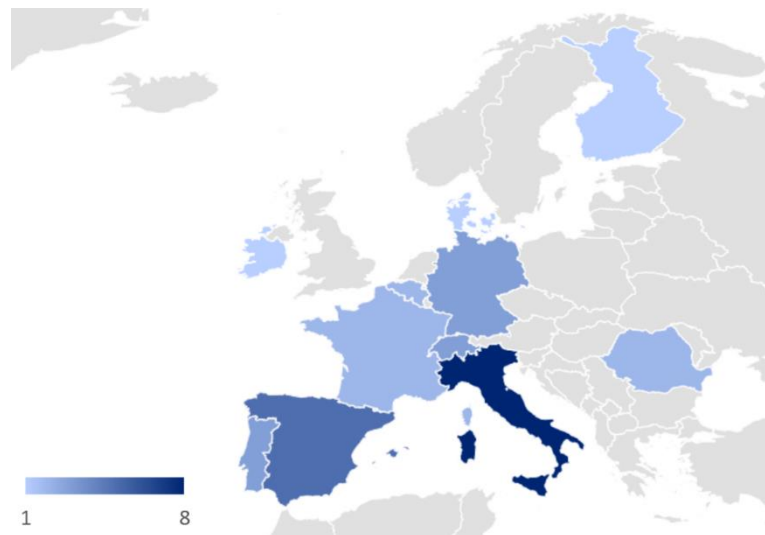
Most of the main partners in the Erasmus+ pilot projects are higher education institutions, but the projects also involve ministries, national and regional authorities, alliances of higher education institutions and associations of universities, as shown in Figure 17.

Figure17. Types of partner organisations in the legal status Erasmus+ pilot projects (main partners only)

2 **1** **1**

33

- Higher Education Institution
- Ministry National/regional authorities
- Alliance of higher education institutions
- Association of Universities
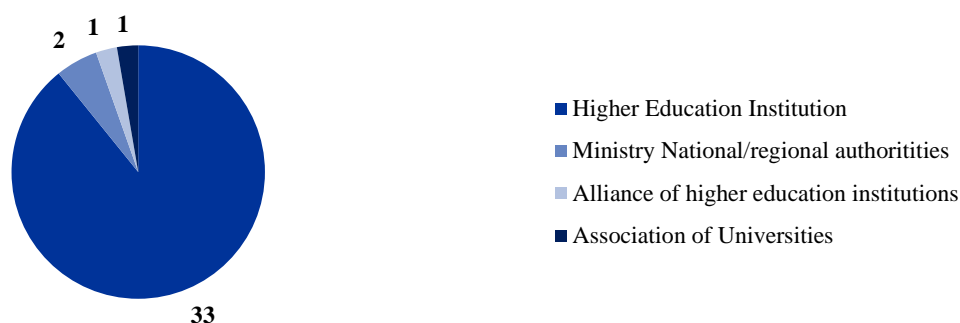
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

The types of higher education institutions involved are also diverse, including mostly comprehensive universities but also technical universities and universities of applied sciences, as shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18. Types of higher education institutions in the legal status Erasmus+ pilot projects (main partners only)
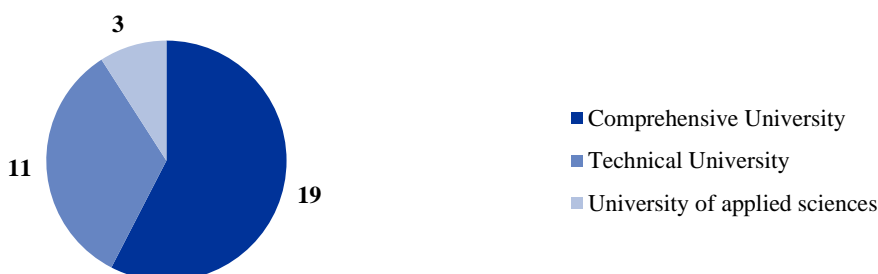
3

11

19

- Comprehensive University
- Technical University
- University of applied sciences

Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

When looking at associated partners, the Erasmus+ pilot projects engage even more types of stakeholders, including Quality Assurance Agencies and Chambers of Commerce, as shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19. Types of partner organisations in the legal status Erasmus+ pilot projects (associated partners only)

1 **1** **1** **1**

3

4

10

9

- Higher Education Institution
- Ministry National/regional authorities
- Alliance of higher education institutions
- Accreditation - Quality assurance Agency/organisation
- Association of Universities
- National Agency
- Commerce Chamber
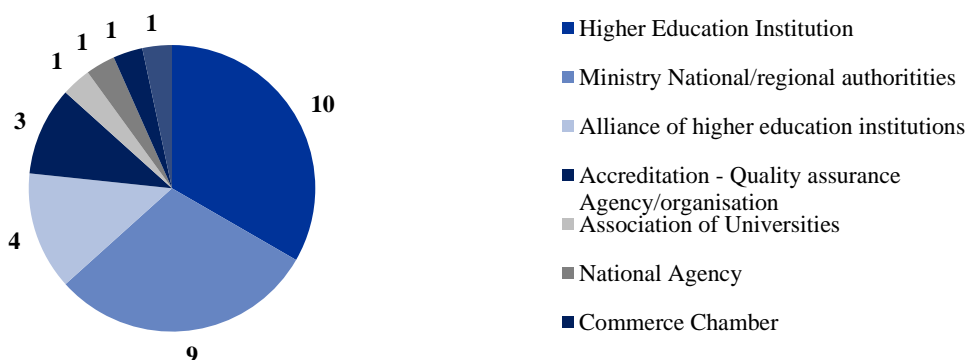
Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

It is noteworthy that three out of four Erasmus+ pilot projects were initiated by European Universities alliances (UNITA, ECIU University and EUt+), hinting that a legal status is a particularly pertinent issue for them. The Leg-UniGR project includes universities participating in four other European Universities alliances (EURECA-PRO, T4EU, UNIC and UNIVERSEH), as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Involvement of European Universities alliances in the legal status Erasmus+ pilot projects as full or associated partners

Erasmus+ Pilot Projects	Participating alliances
EGAI: UNITA as a model for institutionalised university cooperation: from the European grouping of economic interest to the European grouping of academic interest.	UNITA
ESEU: European Status for a ECIU University	ECIU as main subject of investigation (with 4EU+, Una Europa, EU-CONEXUS and CHARM-EU as involved partners)
Leg-UniGR: Blueprint for a legal entity for cross-border university alliances	University of the Greater Region (Uni Gr) as main subject of investigation (with EURECA-PRO, T4EU, UNIC, UNIVERSEH as involved partners)
STYX– EUt+ status and structure experience	Eut+ as main subject of investigation (with EU GREEN, UNITA, EUniWell as involved partners)

Source: Erasmus+ pilot projects application forms and reports to the Commission

4.2   The starting point

4.2.1   Existing alliances of higher education institutions with a legal status

European Universities alliances[79], supported under Erasmus+, are ambitious transnational alliances of higher education institutions (nine on average per alliance, from East, West, North and South of Europe), developing long-term structural and systemic cooperation across all their missions (education, research, and innovation at the service of society) for the benefit of their students, staff, and communities. The rich diversity of the higher education landscape in Europe is also reflected in the different models for cooperation that the European Universities alliances have set up. Depending on the strategic vision of the alliance, different levels of integration and cooperation are envisaged.

Currently, **out of the 64 European Universities alliances, at least 14 alliances have already set up a legal entity**: 4EU+, AURORA, Circle U, CIVIS, ECIU, EU-CONEXUS, EUNICE, EUniWell, FilmEU, UNA EUROPA, UNITA, EUTOPIA, E³UDRES², YUFE. To date, despite having partner institutions from different countries, most of them have chosen one of the legal instruments available under the national legislation of certain Member States, i.e. non-profit association under Belgian law, international non-profit association under Belgian law, foundation under Dutch law, registered association under German law, and registered association under Austrian law. In all these cases, the alliances reported administrative and operational advantages as the decisive factors for setting up a legal entity with a legal identity[80].

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[79] See https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative for more information on the European Universities alliances and the European Universities initiative.
[80] European Commission. Preliminary data from the study Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative (in preparation – not yet published).

A 2023 survey[81] revealed that **12 European Universities were in the process of developing a legal entity for their alliance**. Since then, four of these alliances (CIVIS, EUTOPIA, E^{3}UDRES^2, YUFE) have successfully launched their legal entities. The Unite! alliance is expecting to have its legal entity Unite! e.V. registered under German law in the first quarter of 2025. Among the alliances working on establishing a legal entity, two were aiming to set up a non-profit organisation under Belgian law, one was evaluating legal options under French, Belgian and Austrian law, and another was considering creating a non-profit organisation under German law (e.V.). Several other alliances that took part in the survey indicated they were waiting for the progress and results of the Erasmus+ pilot projects before deciding on establishing a legal entity.

This demonstrates that **European Universities clearly recognise the added value of creating a legal status for their alliances**. Following a 2023 survey, 21 alliances either had already developed or were actively working on their legal status, and many others were awaiting the results of the Erasmus+ pilot projects.

It needs to be noted that the European Universities alliances that have already set up a legal entity are all alliances that started their operation in the pilot phase of the European Universities initiative in 2019 and 2020. They are thus more advanced in their operations than others. If the newer alliances that started their operations only in 2022, 2023 and 2024 would follow the same path, more alliances may, in the coming years, set up a legal entity. These newer alliances were not yet included in the related 2023 survey.

It is important to stress that as Europe is benefitting from a wide variety of transnational cooperation models in higher education, also other alliances of European higher education institutions, beyond the European Universities alliances funded by Erasmus+, have made significant strides in establishing a legal status to formalise their cooperation. This is the case, for example, for the **University of the Greater Region (Uni-Gr)** through a non-profit association under Luxembourg law and for **The European Campus (Eucor)** through a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

Table 4 presents an overview of some of the alliances with an established legal status. As seen from this table, most alliances have created legal entities based on national instruments, with four of them using EU instruments (EEIG and EGTC).

Findings from the Erasmus+ pilot projects reveal that both national and EU instruments have their shortcomings. As reported by ESEU[82], national legal structures, while functional within their own borders, are insufficient for addressing the complexities of cross-border cooperation. EU instruments, on the other hand, are reported to be more suited for transnational cooperation. However, as for the national instruments, also these EU instruments are, according to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, not fully suited to support the core functions of higher education institutions, providing limited support for alliances of higher education institutions to cooperate across borders in their core mission of education. See section 4.4 for a more detailed analysis.

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[81] European Commission. Preliminary data from the study Outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative (in preparation – not yet published).

[82] Wessels, O., Craciun, D. Roadmap on a European legal instrument for transnational higher education cooperation. 2024. https://assets.website-files.com/551e54eb6a58b73c12c54a18/65d642ea23c25bd6c7ba9bb9_ESEU_pages_digital.pdf

Table 4. Overview of alliances of higher education institutions with an established legal status

Type of legal status	Level	Alliance(s)
Registered association under German law (e.V.)	National	4EU+*, EUniWell
International non-profit association under Belgian law (AISBL/IVZW)	National	Circle U, CIVIS, EU-CONEXUS*, EUNICE, EUTOPIA, YUFE
Non-profit association under Belgian law (ASBL/VZW)	National	Film-EU, Una Europa*
Foundation under Dutch law	National	ECIU*
Association under Dutch law	National	Aurora
Not-for-profit organisation under Luxembourg law	National	University of the Greater Region - Université de la Grande Région (Uni-Gr)*
Not-for-profit organisation under Austrian law	National	E^3UDRES^2
European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)	European	UNITA*
European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)	European	European Campus of Studies and Research (Eucor), Wissenschaftsverbund Vierländerregion Bodensee, and European Campus of Studies and Research

Alliances involved in the four Erasmus+ pilot projects (with ECIU, Uni-Gr and Unita as full partners, and 4EU+, EU-Conexus and Una Europa as associated partners). Some of these might change their legal status as a result of the Erasmus+ pilot projects.

4.2.2   National, EU and intergovernmental cooperation instruments

National and EU legal frameworks offer a wide variety of legal forms that could theoretically be applied to alliances of higher education institutions wishing to set up an institutionalised cooperation instrument. This section presents a brief description of eight instruments based on national legislation, as well as five EU instruments. These are the instruments mentioned in the four Erasmus+ pilot projects and those currently used by the European Universities alliances, as presented in Table 4. We also briefly comment on two possible new instruments that are currently being discussed in EU institutions: the European Cross-border Mechanism (ECBM) and the European Cross-border Association (ECBA).

National Instruments

1. Consortia and other public groupings

In most EU Member States, consortia are defined as a cooperation between legal entities governed by a civil law contract. They usually do not give the consortium a separate legal personality[83]. Their purpose is to improve and/or extend the cooperation of an association of institutions to achieve mutually beneficial objectives. Depending on the applicable legislation, consortia and other public groupings may benefit from tax exemptions for activities of general interest and ease of establishment.

Examples of national alliances in higher education using consortia are to be found in Spain[84] and in Italy[85].

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[83] In some Member States consortia and other public groupings have a legal personality limited to the territory of the Member State in which they are established.

[84] Campus Iberus, https://www.campusiberus.es/?lang=en

[85] CNIT - National Inter-University Consortium for Telecommunications, https://www.cnit.it/en/

2. International non-profit association under Belgian law (AISBL/IVZW)

This is a Belgian legal instrument that allows cooperation between natural or legal persons with an international objective for non-profit purposes. The association can be set up even if none of the founding members are residents of Belgium, but the head office must be in Belgium, and the association must obtain a royal decree.

Six European Universities alliances – Circle U, CIVIS, EU-CONEXUS, EUTOPIA, EUNICE, and YUFE – have used this instrument.

3. Non-profit association under Belgian law (ASBL/VZW)

This is a Belgian instrument designed for a group of legal or natural persons who pursue a non-profit purpose. It must consist of at least two members (legal or natural persons), one of which must be established in Belgium. The association does not require a Royal decree but has a strictly prescribed organisational structure.

The Una Europa and FILMEU European Universities alliance have used this legal instrument.

4. Non-profit association under Austrian law

This is an Austrian instrument designed for groups of legal entities or natural persons. Its statutes (the foundation agreement) must be agreed upon by at least two people. The association can adopt resolutions to amend its statutes and is free to structure and organise the association as it wishes within the applicable laws.

The E^{3}UDRES^2 European University is making use of this legal instrument.

5. Registered association under German law

This is a German legal entity established for non-profit purposes. It must have at least seven members, one of whom must be established in Germany. The association must also have a general secretariat established in Germany. The incorporation procedure is relatively simple, and it offers the flexibility of a management structure.

The 4EU+ and the EUniWell alliances are making use of this legal instrument.

6. Foundation under Dutch law

A foundation is a legal entity under Dutch law[86]. The purpose of a foundation can be defined relatively flexibly by the founders but must have primarily social objectives, and its income must benefit the organisation itself. The only statutory body is a board. Other management structures are characterised in the founding documents.

The ECIU alliance has used this legal instrument since 1997 to support the European Consortium of Innovative Universities, a cooperation that preceded the creation of the European Universities alliance.

7. Association under Dutch law

Under Dutch law[87], an association is an organisation whose main objective is not making a profit. It association has at least two members. The meeting of members appoints a committee, which consists of (at least) a chair, secretary and treasurer. An association has no shareholders. All money is collected through contributions by members.

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[86] Business.gov.nl. Foundation. N.d. https://business.gov.nl/starting-your-business/choosing-a-business-structure/foundation/
[87] Business.gov.nl. Association. https://business.gov.nl/starting-your-business/choosing-a-business-structure/association/ Business.gov.nl. Association. N.d. https://business.gov.nl/starting-your-business/choosing-a-business-structure/association/

Aurora has used this instrument since 2016. It was created to support the Aurora Network, a cooperation that preceded the creation of the European Universities alliance.

8. Non-profit association under Luxembourg law

This is a Luxembourg legal instrument that allows the creation of a non-profit association. A minimum of three members is required for the formation of an association. The registered office of the association can be transferred without the association losing its legal personality. The incorporation procedure is fairly simple. The two governing bodies required by law are a board of directors and a general assembly.

The University of the Greater Region (UniGR) has made use of this instrument, although currently, they are in the process of setting up a European legal status in the form of a European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC). This is being done in the framework of the Erasmus+ pilot call for testing institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, such as a possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions.

Existing EU legal instruments

1. European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) is embedded in EU law by a European regulation[88]. It is a legal entity established on the territory of the European Union to facilitate and promote, in particular, territorial cooperation with a view to strengthening the economic, social and territorial cohesion of the EU. It allows regional, local and other public authorities from at least two different Member States to set up cooperation groupings and to provide joint services.

Beyond the areas defined in the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation Regulation, the law of a Member State where the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation has its registered office applies to the functioning of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation. The establishment of a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation requires the consent of the Member States. It is governed by the Regulation, a convention (an agreement between its members), and the statutes adopted on the basis of and in accordance with the convention. It must have at least two organs: an assembly and a director.

The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation has been used by 3 alliances of higher education institutions so far. It is being further experimented by the projects selected in the context of the European policy experimentation in higher education, including the University of the Greater Region (UniGR) and the European University of Technology.

2. European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)

The European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) is a legal entity, the formation of which is regulated by EU law[89]. The purpose of a European Economic Interest Grouping is to facilitate or develop the economic activities of its members and to improve or increase the results of those activities, but not to make profits for itself. A European Economic Interest Grouping can be formed by at least two companies, firms, legal persons or natural persons from two different Member States.

The grouping must have at least two organs: a college of members and the manager or managers of the European Economic Interest Grouping. A contract for forming a European Economic Interest Grouping may provide for other organs and define their powers. The European Economic Interest Grouping and its

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[88] Regulation (EU) No 1302/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 amending Regulation (EC) No 1082/2006 on a European grouping of territorial cooperation (EGTC) as regards the clarification, simplification and improvement of the establishment and functioning of such groupings, OJ L 347, 20.12.2013, p. 303–319, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32013R1302

[89] Council Regulation (EEC) No 2137/85 of 25 July 1985 on the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), OJ L 199, 31.7.1985, p. 1–9, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=celex%3A31985R2137

organs cannot exercise any power of management or control over the activities of its members – the members retain their legal and economic independence.

UNITA, one of the European Universities piloting institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, has created a European Economic Interest Grouping and will use this legal status for several use cases with an economic angle, such as digital infrastructure and micro-credentials.

3. Societas Europaea (SE)

The Societas Europaea (SE) is a legal instrument established by EU law in 2001, allowing companies within the European Economic Area to create a multinational corporate structure. An SE can be formed through various methods, such as merging Public Limited Companies (PLCs) from different EEA countries, creating a holding company or joint subsidiary, or transforming a PLC that has operated a subsidiary in another member state for at least two years. This structure offers several advantages, including streamlined cross-border business operations, cost savings, and enhanced brand positioning on an EU-wide scale.

The SE is governed by a combination of EU and national laws, primarily through Council Regulation (EC) 2157/2001, supported by Directive 2001/86/EC regarding employee involvement. The legal framework allows for two possible management structures: a two-tier system with separate management and supervisory boards or a one-tier system where a single administrative board handles both executive and supervisory functions. The SE structure is designed to provide flexibility while ensuring compliance with both EU-wide and member state-specific regulations, making it a suitable vehicle for companies aiming to operate across multiple EU jurisdictions.

The Societas Europaea was analysed in the ESEU project for their applicability to higher education cooperation. While the Erasmus+ pilot project found that a SE can bring important benefits in attracting private funding and spending alliance's profits, it has strong limitations that stem from the fact that SEs are ultimately companies. It is also strongly connected to national law, making them overall not suited for transnational cooperation of higher education institutions.

4. European Cooperative Society (SCE)

The European Cooperative Society (SCE) is a legal framework designed to facilitate cross-border operations for cooperatives within the EU, complementing the existing European Company (SE) structure but specifically catering to cooperatives. The SCE allows for establishing cooperatives that can operate across multiple EU Member States, thereby reducing legal and administrative barriers to transnational activities. Its primary objective is to serve the needs of its members by enabling them to cooperate more effectively on an international scale. The SCE differs from stock corporations as its focus is on furthering the economic interests of its members rather than generating profit from capital investments.

An SCE can be established in several ways, including from scratch by a group of individuals or legal entities, by merging existing cooperatives, or by converting an existing cooperative that has operated in multiple EU countries for at least two years. The legal framework of the SCE is similar to that of the SE, including the requirement for a minimum capital of EUR 30,000 and the option to adopt either a two-tier or one-tier management system. Voting within an SCE generally follows the principle of 'one member, one vote', although weighted voting can be implemented under specific conditions. Additionally, the establishment of an SCE involves stringent registration requirements and compliance with both EU and national laws, including provisions for employee involvement, which must be addressed before the SCE can be fully incorporated.

The European Cooperative Society was analysed in the ESEU project for its applicability to higher education cooperation. Similarly to SEs, the project found that SCEs have strong limitations because they are ultimately companies, and most of their operations are left to the regulation of Member Status under national law.

5. Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)

The European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) is an EU body designed to enhance Europe's competitiveness, sustainable economic growth, and job creation by fostering collaboration among business, education, and research organisations. Alliances of higher education institutions could be part of Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs), which are independent entities selected by the EIT through a competitive, open, and transparent process. KICs are tasked with integrating partners from the 'Knowledge Triangle'—higher education, research, and business—to drive innovation and entrepreneurship in Europe.

Each KIC has an autonomous legal entity with its own management structure, legal framework, and business plan, though it remains subject to EIT's oversight through continuous monitoring and periodic evaluations. To form a KIC, at least three independent partner organisations from at least three different EU Member States must collaborate, including one higher education institution, one research organisation, and one private company. While KICs are meant to support a broad spectrum of innovation activities, their selection and operational autonomy are heavily influenced by EIT guidelines, which are designed to ensure that KICs contribute effectively to EU policy priorities and global challenges.

EIT KICs combine different activities ranging from the provision of education through master programmes, summer schools, and online education, to the business creation and acceleration support to start up new companies and scale up existing ones. For example, EIT Digital formalised its cooperation as a non-profit association under Belgian law.

The EIT KICs were analysed in the ESEU project for their applicability to alliances of higher education institutions that have a joint long-term mission across all missions (education, research and innovation at the service of society). The project concluded that the model and key features of EIT KICs are not suitable for setting up universities alliances, especially considering the ECIU case. The EIT KICs are not a legal instrument in itself, and – just as is the case for EIT KICs - alliances still have to choose a national legal instrument to support their cooperation. Since ECIU is already a foundation under Dutch law, the EIT KIC model would not result in a material change in their situation, and it would still be fully governed under national law.

New EU legal instruments currently under discussion

The Erasmus+ pilot projects also mentioned two new EU legal instruments: the European Cross-border Mechanism (ECBM) and the European Cross-Border Association (ECBA). These proposals, referenced by the Erasmus+ pilot projects, are briefly described below. However, they have not yet entered into force (see further below for more information). For this reason, while the Erasmus+ pilot projects mentioned these instruments, they could not yet test their applicability to alliances of higher education institutions, as the final format is not yet known. After a preliminary first analysis, the Erasmus+ pilot projects noted that although these proposals may facilitate transnational cooperation, they do not include higher education-specific components, indicating that they would most likely entail limited support for alliances of higher education institutions to cooperate across borders in their core mission of education.

1. European Cross-border Mechanism (ECBM)

The first proposal for the ECBM, a mechanism designed to remove legal and administrative obstacles in cross-border contexts, was published by the Commission in 2018 as part of legislative proposals for the 2021-2027 cohesion policy framework.[90] Although the proposal did not move forward in the Council and Parliament at the time, discussions resurfaced in 2023 when the European Parliament recommended the

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[90] Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context., COM(2018)373 final, EUR-Lex - 52018PC0373 - EN - EUR-Lex

Commission amend the ECBM proposal.[91] In response, the Commission relaunched the proposal in December 2023.[92] The European Parliament and the Council have not yet adopted the amended proposal.

The ECBM's main focus is to create a legal framework for Member States to address legal and administrative challenges in cross-border regions. It is not intended to serve as a legal entity for alliances but is mainly directed at national authorities. However, it can still benefit alliances of higher education institutions using mechanisms like the EGTC by easing the management of differing national rules in areas such as financial control, auditing, and social protection. This would reduce the administrative burden for higher education alliances. Even if adopted, though, the ECBM would not address issues related to the core mission of higher education institutions, such as organising cross-border educational activities.

2. European Cross-Border Association (ECBA)

Proposed by the Commission in September 2023, the ECBA aims to establish a new legal form of non-profit associations for cross-border purposes in each Member State, alongside existing national legal forms.[93] Unlike the ECBM, the ECBA would be a new instrument that alliances of higher education institutions could adopt. However, like current legal instruments, the ECBA, as it stands, does not specifically cater to higher education alliances, which could create significant challenges in supporting certain alliance activities, particularly those related to education. The European Parliament and the Council have not yet adopted the Commission's proposal.

4.3 The need for an EU institutionalised cooperation instrument

The Erasmus+ pilot projects have identified several needs for deeper cooperation across Europe in higher education. A fit-for-purpose EU institutionalised cooperation instrument would, ideally, respond to all of those identified needs according to the Erasmus+ pilot projects.

This section presents the main needs identified in the four Erasmus+ pilot projects, organised in four main areas.

Figure 20. Needs of alliances of higher education institutions related to institutionalised cooperation instruments
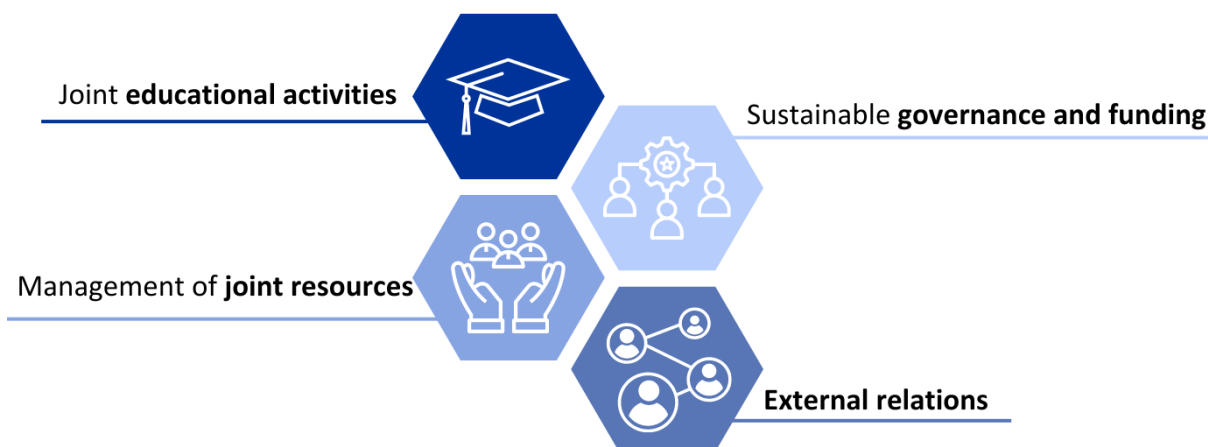
Source: based on information collected in Erasmus+ pilot projects reports to the Commission

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[91] European Parliament resolution of 14 September 2023 with recommendations to the Commission on amending the proposed mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context, P9_TA(2023)0327, Texts adopted - Amending the proposed mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context - Thursday, 14 September 2023
[92] Amended proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context, COM(2023)790final, EUR-Lex - 52023PC0790 - EN - EUR-Lex
[93] Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on European cross-border associations, COM(2023)516 final, EUR-Lex - 52023PC0516 - EN - EUR-Lex

✓ **Educational activities**

- Offer joint programmes, courses and other educational activities

- Facilitate quality assurance and accreditation

- Manage student enrolment and mobility

Transnational alliances of higher education institutions, including those within the European Universities initiative, face significant legal and operational challenges in delivering joint educational activities and managing student enrolment across multiple countries. Their joint educational activities are hindered by the lack of a cohesive legal framework that recognises and supports their unique structure.

According to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, an appropriate legal instrument could enable the alliances to offer joint programmes and other educational activities, such as micro-credentials, more seamlessly. It could reduce the burden of navigating multiple accreditation and quality assurance processes across different jurisdictions. This could also facilitate the awarding of quality-assured and recognised educational qualifications, allowing students to benefit from a truly transnational education experience without being entangled in the bureaucratic complexities that currently impede these collaborations.

Moreover, according to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, an appropriate legal instrument could play a crucial role in the management of student enrolment and mobility within the alliance. By making data sharing between alliance members easier, the legal instrument could enable seamless student mobility between higher education institutions, supporting the development of integrated education programmes and the pooling of resources across member universities. A single legal entity could allow non-degree students and lifelong learners to enrol directly with the alliance, even if they are not registered at any of the partner higher education institutions if that is something the partner higher education institutions desire. This could enable greater flexibility in participation in lifelong learning opportunities, including short courses, and the attainment of micro-credentials and certificates issued by the alliance. Such credentials could be automatically recognised by national universities and authorities, ensuring that they carry the same weight and validity as those issued by individual higher education institutions.

In essence, the Erasmus+ pilot projects propose a legal framework that recognises these transnational alliances as higher education institutions in their own right for the purpose of joint transnational educational activities. **It could streamline the development and delivery of joint programmes and other joint educational activities, facilitate student management, and ensure that the qualifications awarded are universally recognised and respected.** This would not only enhance the operational efficiency of these alliances but also significantly enrich the educational opportunities available to students across Europe and beyond.

✓ **Sustainable Governance and Funding**

- Robust and flexible governance frameworks

- Effective coordination among partners

- Clear accountability

- Acquisition of funding from public and private sectors

- Transparent and equitable financial structures

According to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, establishing a legal instrument for transnational alliances of higher education institutions could significantly support them in creating a sustainable governance structure that meets the complex management and organisational needs of these collaborations. A well-defined legal status would allow alliances to develop governance frameworks that are both robust and flexible, accommodating the special institutional autonomy that higher education institutions require. This autonomy is crucial for ensuring that each member institution retains its unique identity and academic freedom while

contributing to the collective goals of the alliance. The legal instrument could also clarify the rules and regulations governing participation in transnational university networks, including liability, commitments, finances, and decision-making processes. This would provide a clear and organised framework for governance, including entry and exit strategies for partners, thereby supporting long-term sustainability and coherence and reinforcing the strategic and systemic cooperation among the partners.

In terms of financial sustainability, according to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, a legal entity could significantly enhance the capacity of alliances to secure and manage funding from a wide variety of sources. With legal recognition, the alliance could apply for national, regional, and EU funding across Europe, as well as attract private and corporate investment. Notably, the legal status would allow alliances to participate in funding competitions as a single entity rather than as a collection of individual partners, streamlining the process. This would include the ability to combine various types of funding—such as EU grants and regional co-funding from different Member States. The legal role of the alliance in managing these funds for common activities would ensure transparency and clear processes for handling synergies between multiple funding sources, optimising resource allocation and enhancing the impact of projects across Europe.

Internally, a legal entity would enable the shared management of resources and funding among alliance members. This would simplify the process of pooling resources for joint initiatives, increasing the efficiency and impact of the alliances' operations. By centralising the management of certain funds for common activities, the legal entity could ensure a transparent and equitable financial structure, facilitating the fair distribution of resources for common activities. This would also allow alliances to create a long-term structure that exists beyond the lifecycle of specific projects, ensuring continuity in governance and funding mechanisms, which is particularly important for maintaining stability and pursuing long-term objectives.

Overall, according to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, the appropriate legal instrument can serve as a crucial tool for building sustainable governance and financial structures in alliances of higher education institutions. **By creating shared governance structures and supporting both external and internal cooperation and funding mechanisms, the legal entity could enable alliances to operate more effectively and manage resources more equitably, ultimately contributing to the long-term success and sustainability of the alliance and its members**.

- ✓ **Joint resources management**

  - Recruitment of staff
  - Procurement processes for services and goods
  - Manage fiscal implications and social security of employees
  - Manage intellectual property rights

According to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, an institutionalised cooperation instrument tailored for transnational alliances of higher education institutions could address the challenges they face in effectively managing joint resources, including procurement, personnel recruitment and management of digital and physical infrastructures.

Currently, alliances face significant challenges due to administrative and legal barriers, particularly when trying to hire staff or conclude service contracts on behalf of the entire consortium. A legal entity could enable the alliance to allocate resources, sign contracts, and handle procurement centrally, avoiding the need for a complex web of agreements between different universities. This could stimulate joint procurement processes for key services and goods, with significant potential to obtain economics of scale.

The alliance could recruit dedicated personnel through simplified and flexible procedures, ensuring that the fiscal implications and social security of employees are clearly defined and managed. This could also enable the creation of joint positions for alliance staff, mitigating issues related to varying levels of engagement among alliance partners and addressing the impact of staff turnover at all levels of governance and

management. It could simplify and centralise the administration of contracts, ensuring that all employees, regardless of their home country, are treated fairly. This unified approach could mitigate issues related to complex transnational HR requirements, providing clarity on tax and social security matters for staff working in different countries. While national labour laws may still impose challenges, a unified legal entity could allow more clarity on the applicable laws and support fair treatment for all alliance staff.

In addition to personnel management, an institutionalised cooperation instrument could significantly enhance the alliance's capacity to procure, manage, and share both digital and physical infrastructure, ensuring shared use and joint maintenance, including for expensive equipment. This could include investing in and managing facilities such as a European inter-university campus, shared digital education platforms or research infrastructures. A legal entity could allow the alliance to adopt common rules for accessing this infrastructure, ensuring that it is available to all who need it across the member universities. Currently, administrative and legal restrictions often make it difficult for alliances to develop or share resources such as library services, licences, or research facilities, which typically require institutional affiliations. Legal recognition of the alliance as a single entity could overcome these barriers, allowing for the seamless pooling and use of resources across member institutions. This could not only increase efficiency but also provide all alliance members with unrestricted access to shared services and educational resources.

Moreover, a legal entity could facilitate the acquisition and ownership of goods and services on behalf of the alliance, enhancing its operational capabilities and supporting its long-term sustainability. This centralised approach could solve the current issue of universities working in silos, providing a unified structure for managing shared resources and infrastructure.

A legal instrument could also be essential for facilitating the management of intellectual property rights (IPR) and data-related issues within the alliance. As alliances increasingly engage in joint research and innovation activities, the ability to manage IPR collectively becomes critical. The alliance, as a single legal entity, could own (jointly) IPR as needed, ensuring clarity and reducing the complexities of handling IPR across multiple institutions. Additionally, the legal entity would provide a clear framework for managing data, including receiving, storing, and sharing personal and institutional data securely across the alliance. This would formalise data management protocols across higher education institutions, reducing the reliance on disparate national organisations. This structure would support the development of a seamless digital flow of services for learners, enabling the alliance to manage student data and digital information from member universities without legal barriers while ensuring compliance with data protection and privacy regulations.

Moreover, the creation of common or shared support teams could provide professional staff, academics and researchers with additional support and could also for economies of scale, for example, when it comes to student support and mobility support offices, libraries and IT resources; participation in, management of and reporting obligations stemming from competitive education and research related calls.

In light of the above, a legal instrument for transnational alliances of higher education institutions could not only benefit the education dimension of higher education institutions but could also be highly suitable for advancing the other dimensions of the 'knowledge square'—research, innovation, and service to society. By providing these alliances with a formal legal status, the instrument would facilitate cross-border collaboration in research and innovation, enabling seamless partnerships that transcend national boundaries and institutional limitations.

In summary, according to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, the creation of an institutionalised cooperation instrument for transnational alliances of higher education institutions is essential for supporting joint resource management. It would **allow for the efficient pooling, acquisition, and maintenance of shared infrastructure, facilitate centralised procurement and service contracts, and provide a clear legal foundation for managing intellectual property and data.**

- International attractiveness, increased visibility and reputation
- Reliable counterparty for the eco-system stakeholders of the alliance
- Reinforce the European dimension of the collaboration

According to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, a final important characteristic of a legal instrument for transnational alliances of higher education institutions is that it can support their external relations, particularly in terms of joint communication, increased visibility, and reliable representation within their ecosystems. By providing these alliances with a recognised legal status, they can present a unified identity, significantly increasing their attractiveness and influence at both European and regional levels in a sustainable way. This unified, sustainable cooperation could not only improve recognition for the institutions involved but also bolster their appeal to prospective students, faculty, and partners. A common legal identity could allow the alliance to market its unique offerings more effectively, reinforce its reputation as a leader in education, research, and innovation, and promote the shared values and objectives that underpin the collaboration.

A legal entity could also serve as a crucial foundation for the alliance's interactions with a wide range of ecosystem stakeholders, including industry, civil society, and government bodies. This legal status would enhance trust among stakeholders, facilitating smoother collaborations and making the alliance more attractive to external partners. The legal entity could simplify the process of signing contracts with ecosystem partners, such as public authorities, NGOs, industry, and employers, which can act as a catalyst for the further development of the alliances. An example is the cooperation with industry on traineeship programmes for students or student incubators, where legal agreements often come into play.

Moreover, the adoption of an EU legal instrument would further reinforce the alliance's reliability and trustworthiness in the eyes of both public and private stakeholders. The increased visibility and perception of stability that come with a recognised legal status would help attract local entities, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and international partners, thus enhancing the alliance's regional, European, and global presence. This, in turn, would strengthen the alliance's capacity to achieve its objectives and ensure its long-term sustainability.

For many alliances of higher education institutions, which are promoting European integration and values, adopting a EU legal instrument could carry both practical and symbolic significance. It could reinforce the European dimension as an essential cultural and legal aspect of their cooperation, contributing to the broader goals of building a unified European higher education and research area. A EU legal entity could support the development of a European identity and sense of belonging among learners and staff, as they would be engaging with a solid and sustainable European organisation rather than solely national institutions.

Additionally, this legal status could support the alliances in joint representation to national, EU and other international policymakers and organisations, strengthening their ability to influence policy, engage in community outreach, and contribute to societal development on an international scale.

In summary, according to the Erasmus+ pilot projects, a legal instrument could be invaluable for supporting the external relations of alliances. It could provide the sustainable framework necessary for joint promotion, increased regional, European, and international visibility, reliable stakeholder interactions, and the inclusion of non-EU partners, all of which are essential for the long-term success and sustainability of these alliances.

4.4 Tested EU institutionalised cooperation instruments

Combined, **the four projects analysed five existing European institutionalised cooperation instruments** for their ability to support alliances of higher education institutions, as presented below.

Figure 21. European institutionalised cooperation instruments analysed per Erasmus+ pilot project

ESEU	Leg-UniGR	STYX	EGAI
European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)			
European Cooperative Society (SCE)*			European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)
Societas Europaea (SE)*			
Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)*			

■ Main legal instruments analysed   ■ Other legal instruments analysed

*These instruments were assessed in less detail than others

Ex-ante analysis of existing institutional cooperation instruments at the national and EU level

First, at the national level: according to several of the Erasmus+ pilot projects, national institutionalised cooperation instruments, while functional within their own borders, are insufficient for addressing the complexities of cross-border cooperation in the long run. In their view, it is considered less certain, recognisable and trustworthy by external stakeholders and, therefore, not the preferred way forward. Although currently, several alliances have a legal entity at the national level that is already accommodating some of their cooperation needs, the Erasmus+ pilot projects are convinced a stronger legal foundation at the EU level is needed. This to accommodate the high-level ambition of certain alliances already now or in the future, aiming for a much deeper cooperation than ever before, including in the field of joint educational provision. National structures would bring many more challenges when hiring staff abroad, and are not tailored towards delivering education, resulting in issues in the field of developing, offering and issuing joint education and education credentials. If joint facilities, data or IPR must be managed, bought or owned, a national legal status does not solve the issues that come with transnational collaboration. Therefore, they plead for a European-level solution to improve the situation on the ground, compared to the current status quo, where national solutions only partially address the needs encountered.

Second, at the European level: while five institutionalised EU cooperation instruments were analysed in the Erasmus+ pilot projects, the European Cooperative Society (SCE), the European Society (SE), and the Knowledge and Innovation Communities (KICs) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT-KICs), were quickly deemed less suitable. The European Society and the European Cooperative Society were analysed as having strong limitations that stem from the fact these instruments are ultimately aimed at companies and are strongly connected to national law, making them overall not suited for transnational cooperation of higher education institutions. The EIT KICs were also deemed less suitable as they are not a legal instrument in itself, and alliances would still have to choose a national legal instrument to support their cooperation. Since many alliances already have a national legal entity, becoming a KIC

would not result in a material change in their situation, and it would still be fully governed under national law. These instruments are, therefore, not described in further detail below.

Additionally, the Erasmus+ pilot projects briefly looked into other legal forms, such as the European Research Infrastructure Consortium (ERIC)[94] and intergovernmental cooperation models. ERICs were regarded as not sufficiently encompassing to host the different missions of higher education institutions and not suitable from a governance point of view with Member States being the ERIC members, not fully aligned with the spirit of institutional autonomy. Also, an intergovernmental cooperation model was considered to raise questions concerning institutional autonomy. Both were deemed too complex regarding their establishment procedures.

The section below, therefore, presents a summary of the findings of the two EU institutionalised cooperation instruments that were thoroughly tested in the Erasmus+ pilot projects: the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGCT) and the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG). It presents their main advantages and disadvantages and a brief analysis of their fitness for purpose according to the needs presented in the previous section.

4.4.1   European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

Advantages

The Erasmus+ pilot projects that tested the EGTC as an institutionalised instrument for transnational cooperation among higher education institutions found significant advantages, including:

- **Enhanced visibility and recognition**: The EGTC would increase alliance visibility and influence at both European and regional levels, improving recognition for involved institutions.
- **Expanded funding opportunities**: Adopting the EGTC structure opens access to a broader range of funding sources, including European, regional, and national financial support.
- **Strengthened governance**: The EGTC provides a sustainable, robust and credible framework for governance, offering a streamlined decision-making process and addressing accountability, liability, and resource pooling.
- **Simplified governance**: The EGTC simplifies the governance structure, requiring only a single decision-making body and no prior international agreements for its set-up.
- **Possibility of limiting members' liability**: Although members can be subsidiarily and proportionally liable for EGTC liabilities, this responsibility can be limited in the EGTC convention, as stipulated in the EGTC regulation.[95]
- **Permanent and autonomous legal entity**: As a permanent entity with legal personality, the EGTC can manage budgets, employ staff, and participate in tenders, enhancing operational autonomy.
- **Operational flexibility and transnational functionality**: The EGTC allows for flexibility in applicable law and establishing offices across multiple countries, supporting seamless transnational operations, mainly in relation to governance and joint services and resources.
- **Support for joint services and resources**: The EGTC facilitates the creation of shared services across the alliance, such as information platforms and academic support services. It also enables joint fundraising and investment in property and services.
- **Already in use by higher education institutions**: Currently, there is already an alliance of higher education institutions that is successfully using the EGTC, demonstrating that it is, at least to some extent, of use for supporting transnational cooperation in higher education.

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[94] For more information, please visit https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/strategy/strategy-research-and-innovation/our-digital-future/european-research-infrastructures/eric_en

[95] Ibid 96

- **Geared for public bodies:** The EGTC is specifically designed for public bodies, making it the most suitable instrument for alliances of public universities. There are also possibilities for private universities; although the Erasmus+ pilot projects recommend further clarification on this matter.

Disadvantages

Despite the identified benefits of establishing an EGTC, the Erasmus+ pilot projects also found several disadvantages of this legal model, mostly related to the fact that the model was not created to support academic activities and that it is still deeply rooted in national laws:

- **Limited academic applicability**: There are currently no EGTCs that are recognised as a higher education institution for the purpose of joint transnational educational activities, restricting their ability to participate in certain academic activities. This concerns, for example, the impossibility of enrolling non-degree students and lifelong learners directly with the alliance, awarding degrees or micro-credentials and accessing parts of Erasmus+ and other educational and research funding programmes. For the Erasmus+ pilot projects, it was clear that the EGTC primarily supports administrative activities rather than deeper academic integration, which may not fully align with the goals of higher education alliances.
- **Dependence on national laws**: Despite being an EU instrument, for elements not covered by the EGTC regulation, the EGTC user needs to choose the applicable law. As such, the EGTC does not overcome the reliance on national legislation, particularly regarding tax, social security, labour law, and hiring processes, which can hinder alignment across borders and limit operational effectiveness.
  - **Ongoing legal and tax challenges**: The EGTC may face continuous legal and tax issues, requiring ongoing legal advice, which adds to operational costs and complexity.
  - **Restricted employee mobility**: National regulations on tax and social protection can limit the mobility of employees within the EGTC framework, complicating staff transfers between Member States.
- **Time needed to set up of an EGTC and for amending founding documents**: Setting up an EGTC and making amendments to the EGTC's founding documents can be time-consuming, potentially slowing down decision-making and adaptation to new circumstances.

Fitness for purpose

- **Joint transnational educational activities:** The EGTC is **little suitable** for supporting joint transnational educational activities. Its suitability is limited by its legal framework, which does not recognise it as a higher education institution for the purpose of joint transnational educational activities. This restriction hampers its ability to engage in core academic activities such as awarding of degrees or micro-credentials, student enrolment, and participation in certain parts of European funding programmes like Erasmus+. **As a result, the EGTC is more geared towards administrative support rather than deep academic integration.**
- **Sustainable governance and funding:** The EGTC is generally **well-suited** to support sustainable governance and funding for transnational alliances of higher education institutions. It offers increased funding opportunities through access to certain European, regional, and national financial support, and its permanent, autonomous structure provides a robust framework for cross-border cooperation. The EGTC also streamlines governance by allowing for a single decision-making body and offers flexibility in applicable law, enhancing operational adaptability. **However, its time-consuming establishment process and potential legal and tax costs may pose challenges** requiring careful management to ensure effective operation and long-term sustainability.
- **Joint resources management**: The EGTC is somewhat suitable for supporting joint resource management in transnational alliances of higher education institutions. It facilitates streamlined hiring processes, property and service management, and the pooling of resources across member institutions, reducing delays and operational costs. However, its dependence on national laws, particularly

concerning tax, social security, and labour regulations, can limit its effectiveness in creating a unified legal framework, potentially complicating employee mobility and cross-border operations.

- **External relations:** The EGTC is **highly suitable** for supporting external relations in transnational alliances of higher education institutions. It **significantly enhances visibility and recognition at both European and regional levels**, making the alliance more attractive and influential. Additionally, the EGTC's solid legal status, backed by its connection to Member State authorities, provides a reliable framework for engaging with ecosystem stakeholders, further strengthening its role as a credible counterparty in external relations.

4.4.2   European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)

Advantages

- **Enhanced visibility and recognition**: The EEIG would increase alliance visibility and influence at both European and regional levels, improving recognition for involved institutions.
- **Simple procedures for establishing the legal entity:** The EEIG can be quickly established with minimal formalities, such as registration in a national register and publication in national and European gazettes, without requiring a notary deed or authorisation at the EU or member state level. There is no obligation for minimum share capital, making it accessible for universities of varying sizes and financial capabilities.
- **Flexibility in organisational structure:** The EEIG allows for significant customisation in its organisational and governance structures, as many substantive aspects are to be regulated by the members themselves. This enables the EEIG to adapt to the unique needs of academic institutions, ensuring that various academic community components can be appropriately represented in the EEIG's governing bodies.
- **Broad scope of activities:** The EEIG can undertake a wide range of economic activities, as defined by the Court of Justice, enabling it to engage in revenue-generating tasks and various initiatives aimed at supporting academic and research objectives. For academic cooperation, this can include knowledge commercialisation, continuing education and lifelong learning courses, consultancy services, editorial activities, conferences and more.
- **Various funding opportunities:** The EEIG can participate in public funding calls for training and research activities, both independently and with alliance partners. Still, it may face limitations in accessing some EU funding programs.
- **Inclusion of public and private members:** The EEIG can include both public and private entities as members, unlike the EGTC, which faces resistance to private participation. However, including private members might pose challenges in certain public procurement procedures.

Disadvantages

- **Limited academic applicability:** The EEIG can only undertake economic activities and excludes activities primarily funded by public funds, which is often the case in higher education. These activities can thus not fall under the EEIG's remit. This means that important activities like teaching and research can only be entrusted to an EEIG if they are mainly funded by the students or by a third party.
- **Ancillary nature of activities:** The EEIG is required to perform activities that are ancillary to those of its members, meaning it cannot replace members' core institutional tasks. This restricts the EEIG's role to providing support services rather than engaging in strategic coordination or essential academic activities.
- **Private law constraints:** The EEIG operates under private law, which limits its ability to adopt regulations with the legal force of public law. This creates misalignments, especially in labour law, where university staff, usually governed by public law, face discrepancies in employment conditions when engaged by the EEIG.
- **Challenges with personnel secondment:** The secondment of university staff to the EEIG is problematic due to the differing legal frameworks across Member States. In many cases, secondment

may be highly burdensome or even impossible, leaving unpaid leave or suspensions as the only alternative for personnel transfer from the partner universities to the alliance grouping.

- **Restrictions on resource sharing:** The EEIG's private nature complicates the sharing of material resources between public universities and the grouping. Public goods owned by universities are typically intended to serve the public interest, making it in case wished for challenging to transfer them to a private entity like the EEIG.
- **Members required to be in the EU:** The EEIG regulation mandates that all members must be located within the EU, which poses a challenge if the alliance wishes to include partners from non-EU countries. As several alliances of higher education institutions have such associated partners from non-EU countries, this may be a feature for consideration.
- **Unlimited joint and several liabilities:** Members of the EEIG are subject to unlimited, joint, and several liabilities, which, while promoting trust and commitment among partners, raises concerns about potential financial exposure and may pose legal challenges for member institutions, particularly in regions/countries with strict liability laws for their higher education institutions.

<u>Fitness for purpose</u>

- **Joint transnational educational activities:** The EEIG is **not particularly suitable** for supporting joint educational activities in transnational alliances of higher education institutions. Its **focus on 'economic activities'** limits its applicability to higher education, as core academic activities like teaching and research are often publicly funded and fall outside its remit. **Additionally, the EEIG's role is confined to ancillary activities, preventing it from engaging in strategic coordination or essential academic tasks**, further restricting its usefulness in the educational domain.
- **Sustainable governance and funding:** The EEIG is **somewhat suitable** for supporting sustainable governance and funding in transnational alliances of higher education institutions. It provides **flexibility in organisational structure**, allowing members to customise governance to meet the specific needs of academic institutions, which can help ensure appropriate representation across the alliance. Additionally, the **EEIG can participate in various public funding calls**, although it may face some limitations in accessing certain EU funding programmes. However, the **unlimited joint and several liability** of its members poses significant financial risks and is not always fully compatible with regional/national education systems with strict liability laws for their higher education institutions.
- **Joint resources management:** The EEIG is generally **unsuited** for supporting joint resources management in transnational alliances of higher education institutions. While it facilitates streamlined hiring processes and property and service management, **the private nature of the grouping brings several issues for resource (human and financial) sharing**. The secondment of university staff is complicated by differing legal frameworks across Member States, and difficulties might arise depending on whether the secondment occurs between public administrations or from a public administration to a private entity. Additionally, the private nature of the EEIG creates challenges in sharing material resources between public universities and the grouping, as public goods are generally intended for public use and are difficult to transfer to a private entity like the EEIG.
- **External relations:** The EEIG is **somewhat suitable** for supporting external relations in transnational alliances of higher education institutions. It **significantly enhances visibility and recognition at both European and regional levels and** reinforces the European dimension of institutional cooperation. However, the requirement that all members must be located within the EU limits its ability to engage with non-EU partners.

Table 5 summarises the two EU institutionalised cooperation instruments, including main advantages, disadvantages and their fitness for purpose:

Table 5. Summary table comparing the EU institutionalised cooperation instruments examined in-depth by the Erasmus+ pilot projects

	European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)	European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)
Advantages	- Enhanced visibility and recognition and funding opportunities - Strengthened and simplified governance - Possibility of limiting members' liability - Permanent and autonomous legal entity - Operational flexibility and transnational functionality - Support for joint services and resources - Already in use by higher education institutions - Geared for public bodies	- Enhanced visibility and recognition - Simple procedures for establishing the legal entity - Flexibility in organisational structure - Broad scope of activities - Various funding opportunities - Inclusion of public and private members
Disadvantages	- Limited academic applicability - Dependence on national laws - Ongoing legal and tax challenges - Restricted employee mobility - Time needed to set up an EGTC and to amend founding documents	- Limited academic applicability - Ancillary nature of activities - Private law constraints - Challenges with personnel secondment - Restrictions on resource sharing - Members required to be in the EU - Unlimited joint and several liability

Fitness for purpose			
Educational Activities	+/-	+ EGTC can be used by higher education institutions - Not recognised as a higher education institution for the purpose of joint transnational educational activities	+/- + EEIG can be used by higher education institutions - Not recognised as a higher education institution for the purpose of joint transnational educational activities - Focus on economic activities, and ancillary nature of activities
Sustainable Governance and Funding	+/-	+ Increased funding opportunities + Robust framework for transnational cooperation + Under certain conditions, members' liability can be limited - Time needed to set up of an EGTC and for amending founding documents	+/- + Increased funding opportunities + Easy set-up with no obligation of a minimum share capital + Provides flexibility in organisational structure - Unlimited joint and several liability
Joint Resources Management	+/-	+ Streamlined hiring processes, property and service management, and the pooling of resources - Despite being a EU instrument, a strong dependence remains on national laws, particularly concerning tax, social security, and labour regulation	- + Streamlined hiring processes, property and service management - Its private nature creates challenges in sharing material resources with public universities and creates restrictions for staff secondment - Despite being a EU instrument, a strong dependence remains on national laws, particularly concerning tax, social security, and labour regulations
External Relations	+	+ Increased visibility and recognition + Reliable framework for engaging with stakeholders	+/- + Increased visibility and recognition + Reliable framework for engaging with stakeholders - Limited ability to engage with non-EU partners

4.5 Conclusions of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on the institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions

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Main findings and recommendations

1. Alliances of higher education institutions face major obstacles regarding their current legal status or the absence of one, especially for joint transnational educational activities.

2. None of the existing institutionalised cooperation instruments available at national or EU level fully correspond to the identified needs. Available institutionalised cooperation instruments overcome some of the operational and administrative obstacles. None fully simplify the provision of joint educational activities.

3. All projects recognised the added value of an (improved) EU-level institutionalised cooperation instrument compared with a national one.

4. Any proposed institutionalised EU cooperation instrument should have built in flexibility to accommodate the dynamic nature of higher education cooperation across Europe.

5. Any proposed institutionalised EU cooperation instrument should be voluntary and complement, but not replace its partner institutions.

6. Having an institutionalised (EU) cooperation instrument should not be a precondition to gaining access to EU funding (i.e. eligibility criterion), such as Erasmus+ or the framework programme for research and innovation.

7. Existing tools such as the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) and the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) could have the potential to respond to the specific needs of higher education institutions in the future if amended to recognise the alliance as a higher education institution for joint transnational educational activities. Alternatively, the Erasmus+ pilot projects recommend setting up an entirely new EU cooperation instrument tailored to the needs of higher education institutions. However, the feasibility of setting up such an instrument was questioned.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects all recognise the significant benefits that an institutionalised EU cooperation instrument could bring to alliances of higher education institutions. They emphasise the advantages of a EU-level instrument over national alternatives and highlight the need for a legal framework tailored to support transnational higher education cooperation, as no existing legal instrument fully addresses the unique needs of these alliances.

Despite agreeing on the potential benefits of creating possibly an entirely new EU legal status for alliances of higher education institutions, the Erasmus+ pilot projects also recognise the lengthy process that would be required for this and the possible legal challenges. Consequently, alongside their suggestions for an entirely new instrument at the EU level, the Erasmus+ pilot projects also suggest adjustments to existing instruments at the EU level. There was agreement that the EGTC could be the most suitable existing instrument. Therefore, most suggestions focus on adapting the EGTC framework while others also advocate for modifications to the EEIG.

4.5.1 Suggestions for a new EU legal status for alliances of higher education institutions

Overall, the Erasmus+ pilot projects recommend the creation of a new institutionalised EU cooperation instrument, allowing for the creation of a European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions to facilitate their transnational cooperation. To define the detailed characteristics of such an instrument, the projects recommend continuing policy experimentation and co-creation in the run-up to a possible EU proposal going beyond the existing Erasmus+ pilot projects to foster continuous collaboration between higher education institutions, national authorities and EU policymakers.

A possible new legal instrument would ideally need to address key operational needs by enabling alliances to deliver joint educational activities, hire staff, receive funding from diverse sources, generate revenue through non-profit continuous education, and manage facilities, data, and intellectual property rights. In addition, the new instrument would ideally allow the purchase and ownership of goods and services, providing a comprehensive legal framework to support the core missions of universities across borders.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects also recommend that the new instrument incorporates limited liability of its members under the new framework, ensuring that participating institutions are only liable for the property and assets they contribute.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects also highlight that the adoption of a legal entity by alliances of higher education institutions based on a new legal instrument should be non-binding, as well as flexible and adaptable to accommodate the dynamic nature of higher education cooperation across Europe. This would acknowledge the diverse objectives and levels of ambition of different alliances and allow them the freedom to select the most appropriate elements for cooperation for their specific needs offered by the new instrument.

The pilot projects acknowledge that any new legal instrument would have its own set of advantages and disadvantages and that it cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution. Furthermore, the instrument should support organic evolution by avoiding overly rigid frameworks that could stifle innovation, ensuring it remains adaptable and open-ended to accommodate the dynamic nature of higher education institutions across Europe.

4.5.2 Recommendations to amend Regulation 1082/2006 on a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

A key consideration is to simplify the **approval process for establishing and modifying an EGTC**. Currently, within six months, explicit consent from all Member States concerned is required, which can be a cumbersome and time-consuming process. Only after those six months have lapsed, and EU Member States that have been notified have not objected, can the EGTC be deemed to be approved. However, the EU Member State where the proposed registered office of the EGTC is to be located always needs to formally approve for the EGTC to be established. Some Erasmus+ pilot projects recommend that approval should only be required from the EU Member State where the EGTC is registered, streamlining the process and improving the agility of these alliances. Moreover, for the approval process, the Erasmus+ pilot projects recommend the involvement of the ministries of higher education. Currently, these ministries are not involved, not even in cases where an EGTC is set up by alliances of higher education institutions.

Regarding membership in **the EGTC**, the need to clarify the possibility for private higher education institutions to join an EGTC was raised. Several Erasmus+ pilot projects interpret the EGTC regulation as open for public higher education institutions, with only a few confirmed possibilities for private higher education institutions. Under Recital 8 and Article 3(1)(e) of the EGTC Regulation, undertakings entrusted with operations of services of general economic interest, such as education can also become EGTC members, regardless of whether they are organised under public or private law. The Erasmus+ pilot projects as for further clarifications in this respect, as the application of this provision is unclear. In the same spirit, Erasmus+ pilot projects ask to make even more explicit the transnational / European dimension of the EGTC, given that it was initially conceived for cross-border cooperation. Although an EGTC can have

members from non-EU countries, this possibility is limited to members neighbouring at least one of the EU Member States, including its outermost regions. Some Erasmus+ pilot projects ask to further extend the geographical scope.

Another key suggestion is to adapt the EGTC regulation to **recognise alliances of higher education institutions as higher education institutions in their own right for joint transnational educational activities**. This includes, enabling them to facilitate and promote transnational academic cooperation. For example, linked to enrolling non-degree students and lifelong learners directly with the alliance, awarding degrees or micro-credentials, and accessing the Erasmus+ and other educational and research funding programmes. This recognition could solidify the role of alliances as key players in the European Education Area and allow them to operate more effectively across borders.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects also emphasise the need for clear guidance on **staff provision and secondments**. It recommends that the provision of staff by member universities to the EGTC could be exempt from VAT and not considered a commercial service, reducing financial risks and costs. Currently, EU Member States' views diverge on this point. The regulation could also **facilitate the direct hiring of staff across borders** without requiring the establishment of separate legal entities in each country. The projects recommend that the employment of staff in EGTC offices that are not located in the seat country could be made possible either under the law of the country of the decentralised office or under the law of the country in which the EGTC has its seat. Furthermore, the Erasmus+ pilot projects recommend that academic EGTCs could be allowed to manage staff appointments and educational responsibilities for joint transnational educational activities. This could simplify transnational staff employment and further support the integrated operation of alliances.

To address the remaining concerns about **liability and financial flexibility**, the Erasmus+ pilot projects recommend modifying the EGTC regulation to further clarify and ensure limited liability for participating institutions, limiting their liability to the property and assets they contribute. This would make the EGTC structure more attractive to higher education institutions by reducing potential financial risks and incompatibilities with national legislation governing the liability of higher education institutions. Moreover, incorporating a limited private dimension into the EGTC could allow private entities to participate and address tax implications related to sponsorship and revenue generation, particularly for continuous education. Therefore, enhancing the financial sustainability of alliances.

4.5.3 *Recommendations to amend Regulation 2137/85 on the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG)*

A key recommendation to amend the EEIG is to broaden its scope to cover non-economic academic activities. This amendment would allow the EEIG to better support universities' core missions, which are often publicly funded.

Another important recommendation is to revise the liability provisions for the EEIG members. Currently, members face unlimited liability which can be a deterrent for academic institutions considering the EEIG as a viable option for collaboration. By limiting the liability of its members, the EEIG could become a more attractive and practical legal framework for universities.

Table 6. Summary of Erasmus+ pilot projects' suggestions for legal instruments

	Erasmus+ pilot projects' suggestions
For adjusting the EGTC	• Simplify the approval process at Member State level. • Clarify the possibility for private higher education institutions to join the EGTC. • Clarify the transnational/European dimension of the EGTC, given that it was initially conceived for cross-border cooperation. • Recognition as a higher education institution for joint transnational educational activities. • Clarify staff provision and secondments. • Facilitate hiring cross-borders. • Further clarify the possibility to limit liability. • Incorporate a limited private dimension.
For adjusting the EEIG	• Broaden the scope to include non-economic academic activities. • Revise liability provisions for EEIG members. • Recognition as a higher education institution for joint transnational educational activities.
For a possible new EU instrument	• Need to have a suitable legal basis in the EU Treaties. • Recognition as a higher education institution for joint transnational educational activities to address key operational needs. • Incorporate limited liability. • Promote policy experimentation and co-creation. • Ensure non-compulsory adoption. • Support organic evolution. • Complement national frameworks.

5. Common final considerations

The Erasmus+ pilot projects have provided valuable insights into the feasibility and future direction of two key instruments: (i) the European degree (label); and (ii) the institutionalised EU cooperation instruments, such as a possible legal status for alliances of higher education institutions. The projects highlight the growing need for transnational cooperation in higher education, driven by the recognition that collaborative efforts across borders are essential in addressing the challenges of an increasingly interconnected world.

The six Erasmus+ pilot projects exploring the European degree (label) recognise that to boost Europe's open strategic autonomy and high-level knowledge development, it is vital for universities to pool resources and expertise across the EU in the form of in-depth cooperation and transnational degree programmes. This will allow them to better equip future generations with the skills that European societies need to thrive in an ever more interconnected world. The Erasmus+ pilot projects have advanced the conceptualisation of a qualification based on common European criteria. A key finding was the preference for implementing a European degree as a qualification due to its potential to streamline regulatory processes and enable deeper integration within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This would reduce administrative burdens for institutions, boost transnational cooperation, and increase global competitiveness. In addition this European degree would offer students more opportunities to study in different European countries, with mobility embedded in the curriculum (fully and automatically recognised), joint degree programmes with a seamless academic experience across campuses, as well as the future-proof skills not available at any single institution and leading to higher employability worldwide. The benefits for students would include, beyond the acquired knowledge in the field of study, unique intercultural skills, improved language skills, interdisciplinary and job market relevant parts of their programmes and extensive professional networks.

Therefore, making them obvious candidates for an increasingly global/transnational job market. The projects identified persistent barriers to implementing the European degree, such as differences in accreditation standards, academic calendars, and national regulations. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for creating a seamless framework for joint programmes. They also stress that the co-created criteria for the European degree (label) represent a significant step forward, providing a structured framework that aligns with the diversity of educational systems across Europe.

The four Erasmus+ pilot projects examining the potential for a European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions highlighted the limitations of existing national and EU legal instruments in fully supporting these alliances' long-term missions, particularly when it comes to joint transnational educational activities. Also, current frameworks do not adequately address alliances' operational needs, particularly in areas such as staff recruitment and resource sharing. The projects all recognise the added value of a tailored EU-level legal tool over a national tool, emphasising the need for flexibility and adaptability to accommodate the dynamic nature of transnational higher education cooperation.

The projects suggest that a new, voluntary EU legal instrument could enable alliances to pool resources, deliver joint educational activities, and manage data and intellectual property rights across borders. However, the process may prove lengthy and present legal challenges. The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), an existing EU instrument, was identified as having the most potential, if amended, to meet the specific needs of transnational higher education cooperation. Other recommendations were made for the possible adaptation of the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG), another existing EU instrument.

Both the Erasmus+ pilot projects on the European degree (label) and the possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions conclude that further development of these instruments is important in enabling deeper cooperation and boosting the global competitiveness of European higher education. The European degree label is seen as a key tool for equipping students with transnational skills while the legal status would strengthen alliances' capacity to operate effectively across borders to the benefit of its students and staff members.

The Erasmus+ pilot projects have also strengthened the broader understanding that education is fundamental to Europe's future, underpinning personal fulfilment, employability, and active citizenship. As challenges become increasingly global, transnational education is no longer a choice but a necessity. The Erasmus+ pilot projects have laid the groundwork for a more integrated European higher education cooperation path, one that can meet society's evolving demands, encourage innovation, and ensure Europe remains a leader in the global education arena.

ANNEX I: Revised list of criteria for a European degree and a European label

The European criteria set out the features of the European degree and the European label. They guarantee the highest standards for offering transnational programmes and degrees, distinguishing them from degrees awarded in other parts of the world. Higher education institutions would be able to award the European degree after existing national structures (for example, national quality assurance agencies) assess and confirm that the joint programme meets all the specified European criteria.

The proposed European criteria for the European degree and the European label presented below were introduced in Annex II of the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education[96]. They are the result of collaborative work and testing involving more than 140 higher education institutions across all Member States, 17 ministries, 20 national quality assurance agencies, students' organisations and economic and social partners.

European criteria for a European degree (label)			EQF Levels
Transnational programme organisation and management	Higher education institutions involved	The joint programme is offered by at least 2 higher educationinstitutions from at least 2 different Member States.	6, 7, 8
	Transnationaljoint degree delivery	The joint programme is jointly designed and jointly delivered by all the higher education institutions involved.	6, 7, 8
		The joint programme leads to the award of a joint degree.	6, 7, 8
		A joint Diploma Supplement[97] is issued to students.	6, 7
		The joint programme describes the learning outcomes and credits in line with the ECTS Users Guide.	6, 7
	Joint arrangements for the joint programme	The joint programme has joint policies, procedures and/or arrangements defining curriculum planning and delivery, as well as all organisational and administrative matters. Students' representatives are part of the decision-making process to define the joint policies and procedures and/or arrangements.	6, 7, 8
	Quality assurance arrangements	Internal and external Quality Assurance is conducted in accordance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The higher education institutions, the study field or the programme areevaluated by an EQAR-registered agency.	6, 7, 8
		The joint programme is evaluated using the standards of the European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes(EA).	6, 7, 8
	Graduatetracking	The joint programme monitors graduates through a graduatetracking system.	6, 7, 8
Learning experience	Student-centred learning	The joint programme is designed and continuously enhanced anddelivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process. Assessment of students reflects thisapproach.	6, 7, 8
	Interdisciplinarity	The joint programme includes embedded interdisciplinarity components.	6, 7, 8
	Labour market relevance	The joint programme aligns with labour market requirements by incorporating	6, 7, 8

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[96] Ibid 6
[97] Europass, The Diploma Supplement, https://europass.europa.eu/en/learn-europe/diploma-supplement

		intersectoral components or activities[98] and the development of transversal skills.	
	Digital skills	The joint programme includes components and actions related to the development of advanced digital skills of students, tailored to the capacities and circumstances of the joint programme, ensuring alignment with its scope and scholarly focus.	6, 7, 8
	Transnational campus – access to services	The programme has joint policies for students and staff to have access to relevant services in all participating higher educational institutions under equivalent conditions as all enrolled students and local staff.	6, 7, 8
	Flexible and embedded student mobility	The joint programme offers deep intercultural experience, including a minimum of 1 period of student physical mobility (that can be split in several stays) at one or more partner institution(s) representing overall at least 60 ECTS at EQF 6 level and 30 ECTS at EQF 7 level. The joint programme has a policy offering alternatives for students who are unable to travel.	6, 7
		The joint programme offers deep intercultural experience, including a total of at least 6 months of physical mobility at one or more partner institution(s). The joint programme has a policy offering alternatives for students who are unable to travel.	8
	Co-evaluation and co-supervision for dissertations	Dissertations are supervised by at least 2 supervisors and co-evaluated by co-supervisors or a committee with members from at least 2 different institutions located in 2 different countries.	8
European Values	Democratic values	The joint programme's joint policies promote and adhere to democratic values.	6, 7, 8
	Multilingualism	During the joint programme, each student is exposed to at least 2 different EU languages.	6, 7, 8
	Inclusiveness	The joint programme commits to wide participation by fostering diversity, equality, and inclusion and by adopting tailored measures to support students and staff with fewer opportunities.	6, 7, 8
		The joint programme commits to respect the principles of the European Charter for Researchers.	8
	Green transition	The joint programme has policies and actions related to environmental sustainability and implements measures to minimise the environmental footprint of its activities.	6,7, 8

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[98] Intersectoral components and activities include, but are not limited to, elements such as cooperation with economic and social sectors in curricula design and implementation, internships, work-based learning, secondment / placement, volunteering, service learning, challenge-based approaches.

ANNEX II: List of barriers to the delivery of joint programmes and joint degrees as identified by experts in the context of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on a joint European degree label[99]

This list is based on deliverables produced by six Erasmus+ pilot projects based on interviews, surveys, workshops, focus groups, and other activities. The list cannot be considered exhaustive, considering the lack of data from certain regions/countries and representing the perspective of practitioners. Barriers must be understood as a national or regional-specific rule (or lack of rule) that has been reported as presenting complications for the establishment of joint programmes and joint degrees without judgment on whether the rule is justified or not.

Type of barrier	Identified information	Countries
Barriers linked to accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, HR, CZ, EL, PT, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE-FL, CY, DK, FR, EL, ES, HU, IT, LT, NL, PL, RO
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Restrictions to the creation of joint degree programmes.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	CY, CZ, DE, EL, ES, FR, LT, PL, RO
	No information.	AT, BE-FR, BE-FL, BG, DK, EE, FI, HR, HU, IE, IT, LU, LV, MT, NL, PT, SE, SI, SK
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, CY, DK, EL, ES, HR, FI, NL, PT
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE-FL, CZ, FR, HU, IT, LT, PL, RO, SE
	No information.	BE, BG, DE, EE, IE, LV, LU, MT, SI, SK
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	HR, NL, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, BE-FL, BG, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, EL, ES, FI, FR, HU, IE, IT, LT, PL, PT, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, LV, LU, MT, SI, SK
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, BE-FL, CZ, DK, FR, LT, NL, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	CY, ES, EL, FI, HR, HU, IT, PL
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
High accreditation costs	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, BE-FL, CY, CZ, DK, ES, FI, FR, EL, HR, HU, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO, SE

[99] This list is taken from Annex III of the Staff Working Document accompanying the Blueprint for a European degree. See footnote 10.

Type of barrier	Identified information	Countries
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	EE, LV, NL
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, IE, LU, MT, SI, SK
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of joint programmes.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, DK, HR, LT, NL, PL, PT
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE-FL, BG, DE, EE, EI, EL, ES, FI, LU, HU, CY, CZ, FR, IT, LV, RO SE, SI, SK
	No information.	BE-FR, MT
Differences in academic years.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, BE-FL, CZ, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, LT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	CY, EL, HR, IT
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE-FL, DK, ES, FI, HR, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects	AT, CY, CZ, FR, EL, HU, IT, LT, NL, PL
	No information	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LV, LU, MT, SI, SK
Recognition of blended/online learning.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects	AT, BE-FL, CY, FI, HR, HU, NL, PT, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	CZ, DK, ES, FR, EL, LT, IT, PL, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LV, LU, MT, SI, SK
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE-FL, CY, DK, ES, HR, NL, PT, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, CZ, FI, EL, HU, IT, LT, PL, RO
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, FR, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Minimum requirements in terms of physical presence.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	CY, CZ, DK, ES, IT, PT, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, BE-FR, BE-FL, DE, EE, FI, FR, EL, HR, HU, IE, LT, LV, NL, PL, RO, SI
	No information.	BG, LU, MT, SK
Possibility of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, CY, DK, ES, FR, HR, IT, LT, NL, PT, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE-FL, CZ, EL, FI, HU, PL, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, ES, EL, HR, HU, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE-FL, CY, CZ, DK, FI, FR, IT, LT, NL, PL
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, CY, DK, ES, FR, EL, HR, HU, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO

Type of barrier	Identified information	Countries
Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE-FL, CZ, FI, NL, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Requirements related to regulated professions.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, HR, LT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE, CY, CZ, DK, ES, FI, FR, EL, HU, IT, NL, PL, PT
	No information.	BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Requirements for consortium agreements.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	/
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, BE-FR, BE-FL, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FR, EL, HR, HU, IT, LT, MT, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SK
	No information.	BG, CY, FI, IE, LU, LV, SI
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, BE-FL, CY, DK, ES, EL, HR, IT, LT, PL, PT, RO, SE
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	CZ, FI, FR, HU, NL
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Requirements regarding tuition fees.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, CY, CZ, HR, HU, PT, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE-FL, DK, ES, FI, FR, EL, IT, LT, NL, PL, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	No barrier reported by E+ pilot projects.	AT, CZ, ES, HR, NL, PL, PT, RO
	Barriers reported by E+ pilot projects.	BE-FL, CY, DK, FI, FR, EL, HU, LT, IT, SE
	No information.	BE-FR, BG, DE, EE, IE, LU, LV, MT, SI, SK

Barriers reported per EU Member States

Austria	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Joint degrees may face issues if supporting country-specific documents differ. Specific documents are required to validate the degree title within the country, even for international joint degrees. AT informed the Commission that a pragmatic solution was found to simplify the issuance process during a workshop with one of the Erasmus+ pilot project.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	An obstacle regarding the madatory use of grading scales was reported. AT clarified that laws allow for alternative arrangements for joint study programmes. As a result, there is no obstacle from the perspective of the Federal Ministry for Science and Research.

Final exams form - possible national/state examinations (not common in all countries). Minimum requirements in terms of duration (min. number of semesters to be spent at the home university).	An obstacle pertaining to the procedures for final examination was reported. AT clarified that the law allow for flexibility with regards to the final examination procedures witthin the context of joint programmes. There are minimum credit requirements (usually 30 or 60 ECTS) that students must obtain at partner institutions to receive their joint degree which limits the possibility for multilateral cooperation models. AT informed the Commission of its intention to analyse the matter and seek for a solution for greater flexibility.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	The establishment of a consortium agreement is mandatory between partners.

Belgium	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulated professions.	Access to the profession in medicine is regulated by the federal legislator in Belgium, even though the first cycle and second cycle degree programmes are regulated by the Flemish legislator.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	The establishment of a consortium agreement is mandatory between partners.

Belgium-Flanders	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and time frame.	Specific timelines for accreditation procedures that start rather early (with an exception for European Universities but not for other joint programmes). A country-specific test on macro-efficiency in the local context is required (with exceptions for European Universities and Erasmus Mundus but not for other joint programmes).
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Interdisciplinary degrees require universities to offer all related initial degrees. Only universities with existing second cycle degrees can establish interdisciplinary programmes. Degree titles are regulated by both the institution and its location, hindering course integration for joint degrees.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of joint programmes.	Joint doctoral programmes require accreditation from all participating institutions.
Minimum requirements in terms of duration (min. number of semesters to be spent at the home university).	Minimum requirement of physical mobility for joint bachelor and masters programmes, with students acquiring at least 20 credits at institutions other than their initial enrolment. Joint doctoral programmes require a minimum of six months' mobility. For joint PhDs, Flemish law mandates a minimum six-month stay in Flanders for PhD students.
Postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	Students need to pass the first-year courses in a two-year time period.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme .	Quota on the number of foreign language programmes. Programmes need to have an equivalent in the national language. Joint programmes in international cooperation can be conducted in two official languages of the EU.

Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	Students/researchers themselves own the products of their work.
Regulated professions.	Access to the profession in medicine is regulated by the federal legislator in Belgium, even though the first cycle and second cycle degree programmes are regulated by the Flemish legislator.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Tuition fees.	Fees are regulated by law for first degree and second degree programmes.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	It is possible to impose limits of admitted students in initial first cycle degree programmes for students who hold a degree of secondary education.

Bulgaria	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Specific requirements exist for degree parchments, including paper format, watermarks, and official suppliers.

Croatia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Modifications in the programme structure necessitate re-accreditation.
Differences in academic years.	Barrier reported.
Minimum requirements in terms of duration (min. number of semesters to be spent at the home university).	Barrier reported.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners. The consortium agreement must clarify enrolment conditions, examination, and evaluation methods for students.

Cyprus	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and time frame.	Barrier reported.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Absence of a robust national framework specifically designed for joint programmes with extensive mobility schemes.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Barrier reported.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Significant modifications in the programme structure necessitate re-accreditation.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Cyprus mandates the use of its own accreditation agency or requires its consent for accreditation.
Differences in academic years.	Barrier reported.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Challenges arise in aligning arithmetic grading systems with letter grading, especially when the correspondence between the two is not straightforward.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Barrier reported.
Restrictions related to regulated professions	Barrier reported.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Different rules for distance learning/online programmes and for face-to-face programmes, as well as different rules for EU citizens, and non-EU citizens.

Czechia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Lack of an adequate national framework specifically for joint programmes involving extensive mobility schemes.
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	A single discipline must represent over 50% in interdisciplinary degrees, determining the programme's classification code.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Diplomas must include the degree name, abbreviation, and a reference to the specific section of the relevant Act (e.g., "Magistr" (Mgr.) awarded under Act No. 111/1998 Coll.).
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Czechia stated an inability to adopt the European Approach. There is either no or insufficient regulation in Czechia regarding the use of the European Approach.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Legislation mandates the use of a specific grading scale.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	The concept of online mobility is not regulated in the Czech legal system. While entire programmes cannot be conducted online, some classes can be, but they must be reported by the universities.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Students in all study programmes must defend a thesis and pass a public state examination in order to graduate.
Possibilities of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	Czech legislation specifies the consequences of interruption of studies, but makes an exemption for reasons of parenthood.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	A special fee for studying in a foreign language is collected.
Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	The institution where the student/researcher is affiliated has the main claim to the product of their work. Each final thesis has to be made available to the public for free. Those containing sensitive data can be redacted.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Programmes related to regulated professions need approval of the responsible ministry.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	Enrolment is closely tied to funding.

Germany	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Applicable to bachelor and masters level only.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Joint degrees may face challenges if the required supporting documents differ between countries. Specific credentials are necessary for the degree title to be recognized within the country, even for international joint degrees. Germany has precise requirements for degree parchments, such as paper format, watermarks, and designated suppliers.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	At least 25% of the programme must be completed at foreign institutions.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.

Denmark	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	The academic profile of the programme must be documented to meet the demands of the local labour market. It is not sufficient to provide a needs analysis of the European/international labour market.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Danish jurisdiction does not recognize distinctions like 'cum laude' on diplomas, affecting joint degrees with countries that do. Danish universities must issue degree certificates within two months of graduation, conflicting with biannual exam boards in other countries.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Danish legislation does not currently accommodate 'online mobility,' a common feature in joint programmes.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Teaching can only be done only in one foreign language (i.e., English).
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Tuition fees.	It is mandatory for Danish universities to charge tuition fee from non-EU citizens but forbidden for EU-citizens.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Detailed regulations about selection to guarantee equal treatment.

Estonia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules	Over 80% of institutions emphasize the mandatory use of a specific degree template, reflecting a common regulatory practice in Estonia.
High accreditation costs	Higher education institutions bear the costs of accreditation.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence	At least 20% of the joint curriculum must be delivered by a foreign institution.
Requirements for consortium agreements	Obligatory agreement between partners

Finland	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Over 80% of institutions in Finland adhere to a mandatory degree template.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Reports of a lack of knowledge and understanding concerning the European Approach method.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Finnish law regulates the length of the thesis.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Minimum requirements in terms of number of credits (or semesters) to be acquired at each partner institution can be requested to get the degree.
Possibilities of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	Finland's Universities' Act regulates the possibility of being absent due to mandatory or discretionary reasons.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Programmes need to have an equivalent in the national language. Language proficiency requirements exist.
Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	Barrier reported.

Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Respective ministries regulate the professions that fall under their jurisdiction.
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	Students must be enrolled at a Finnish university at the time of graduation.
Tuition fees.	It is not legally permitted to collect fees from EU and EEC students, however Finnish higher education institutions can participate in joint programmes where other partners collect fees.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Detailed regulations about selection to guarantee equal treatment.

France	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	France has early procedural timelines for accreditation, which poses challenges for joint degree creation.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	French universities can issue diplomas within partnerships only with prior state authorization. French law requires foreign partners to match the capacity to deliver equivalent, recognized diplomas in the same field. Partnerships must be reported to the French ministers of higher education and foreign affairs, with agreements not exceeding five years.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Diploma issuance is strictly regulated, requiring printing on specific parchment from the Imprimerie Nationale. French language is mandatory on diplomas issued by French institutions. The signatory process for diplomas is complex, with strict rules on who can sign and the non-acceptance of electronic signatures. More than 80% of French institutions are bound by a compulsory degree template.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	France is identified as a country with either no or insufficient regulation regarding the use of the European Approach.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS	At the doctoral level, France does not use ECTS.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Barrier reported.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Minimum requirements in terms of number of credits (or semesters) to be acquired at each partner institution can be requested to get the degree.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Some portion of any given programme needs to be taught in French. If this requirement is not met, French higher education institutions issue a different kind of diploma (a university diploma instead of a national diploma). Foreign nationals need to demonstrate an understanding of the French language adapted to the planned training.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Specific regulation exists for regulated professions.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	Students must be enrolled at all universities awarding the degree at the time of graduation.
Tuition fees.	Fees are established at a national level, with exemptions possible within the framework of the agreement.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Barrier reported.

Greece	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Barrier reported.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Obstacles noted in awarding joint degrees on bachelor and master-level.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Over 80% of institutions in Greece adhere to a mandatory degree template.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Barrier reported.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Ambiguous legislation that doesn't clearly differentiate between joint and double degrees.
Differences in academic years.	Barrier reported.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Bachelor programmes can range from 240 to 360 ECTS.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Barrier reported.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Doctoral dissertations are evaluated by a seven-member examination committee.
Possibilities of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	Barrier reported.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Barrier reported.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Tuition fees.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Obligatory agreement between partners.

Hungary	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Hungary requires political approval, such as a ministerial decree, before or after the accreditation process for joint degrees.
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Barrier reported.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Hungarian law mandates standard texts for all degree certificates and student status certificates.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Barrier reported.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Barrier reported.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Minimum requirements in terms of number of credits (or semesters) to be acquired at each partner institution can be requested to get the degree.
Possibilities of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	National regulations for study leave periods exist.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Civil engineering has strict requirements for certificates that are issued by the Hungarian Chamber of Engineers. There is a given list of topics/competencies with a given number of ECTS that are needed to obtain a certificate.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	Barrier reported.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Detailed regulations about selection of students.

Ireland	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	More than 80% of institutions in Ireland are required to use a specific, compulsory degree template.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Minimum requirements in terms of number of credits (or semesters) to be acquired at each partner institution can be requested to get the degree.

Italy	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Deadlines for submitting complete study plans are challenging, often immediately following the January exam period.
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Second cycle degrees categorized by "classe di laurea" with set educational objectives and ECTS. Elective courses are capped (8-15 ECTS), limiting interdisciplinary options. Ministry evaluates study plans for adherence to objectives, including courses from foreign institutions, which must fit into designated scientific disciplines.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Diplomas must include the degree programme name and "classe di laurea." Joint diplomas are allowed if they list the participating universities, degree programme denomination, and its national equivalents. Italian diplomas must be issued in the name of the Italian Republic and include signatures of the Rector and Director General. Specific requirements for parchments include paper format, watermarks, and official suppliers.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Significant modifications in the programme structure necessitate re-accreditation.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Italy stated an inability to adopt the European Approach. There is either no or insufficient regulation regarding the use of the European Approach.
Differences in academic years.	Barrier reported.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Legislation mandates the use of a specific grading scale. Italian experts highlight the need for clear resolution protocols in cases of discrepancies within joint programmes.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Italy allows a maximum of 10% of ECTS credits for blended/online courses. Online final exams are generally not allowed.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	The number of final exams is regulated in Italy. The legislation does not allow online final exams (with a list of well-defined exceptions) even if the teaching took place online. A maximum of 12 exams is allowed for a second cycle degree (elective courses, further educational activities and thesis are not included).
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Legislations allows universities to have a maximum of 50% of foreign teachers as "core" of the programme.

Tuition fees.	If the coordinating university where students are enrolled is an Italian university, the law states that the fee is calculated on the base of student's income conditions.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Quotas distinguishing between non-EU and EU students.

Latvia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
High accreditation costs.	Higher education institutions bear the costs of accreditation.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	The European Approach is not available in Latvia for accreditation purposes.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Each partner needs to deliver at least 10% of the entire programme.

Lithuania	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Internal agreement and signature collection are slow and complex, more so than legislative issues, especially with multiple universities or European University structures involved. This can delay the accreditation process if signatures are required beforehand.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Lithuania permits the issuance of joint diplomas exclusively for bachelor's and master's level programmes.
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Programs may cover up to three study fields, but are named after the predominant one. Accreditation of joint specializations is constrained by the need to conform to the main field's criteria, demanding a minimum of 50% of credits. Certain engineering subjects are not allowed to be combined.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Barrier reported.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Lithuania specifies a precise 26.67 hours of work per ECTS. Lithuania specifies ECTS credits for the thesis.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Lithuania's joint programmes often require physical academic mobility.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Doctoral dissertations are evaluated by a Doctoral Committee consisting of nine high-level research scientists.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Physical mobility of the student in the joint programme is mandatory (of at least 15 credits).
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	The choice of languages must be explicitly stated in the consortium agreement. Language proficiency requirements exist.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners. The consortium agreement is obligated to encompass student admission conditions, study procedures, principles of assessment, and the crediting of student achievements.
Tuition fees.	The standard price of studies is determined in a course or group of courses, and if it is reduced, the state funding

	also decreases. Entry and registration fees for foreigners are higher due to the need for educational recognition.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Barrier reported.

The Netherlands	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	A report on a macro-efficiency test in the local context needs to be done before a new programme can be accredited.
High accreditation costs.	Higher education institutions bear the costs of accreditation. Advocates for a single accreditation process for joint programmes argue it should eliminate the need for multiple payments across countries, reducing workload and costs.
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Each ECTS credit represents 28 hours of study.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	For study programmes that receive government funding, at least 25% of the teaching should take place in the Netherlands.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	Barrier reported.
Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	Barrier reported.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Barrier reported.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Obligation of double or single enrolment of students in chosen universities.	Enrolment is closely tied to the funding of higher education institutions. Details regarding enrolment for joint programmes can be mutually agreed upon in the consortium agreement. In the case of a joint programmes the university can still request that students are enrolled at the Dutch university for the whole period.
Tuition fees.	Experts point out that restrictive rules on the ability to raise tuition fees add complexity to the administration of joint programmes.

Poland	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Legal frameworks require government action, such as a ministerial decree, either before or after accreditation to ensure the joint programme aligns with national degree standards, which can further complicate and prolong the process.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Polish higher education law allows only certain university categories to offer joint degrees with foreign institutions, with distinct regulations for joint doctoral programmes. Poland is among the countries reported to lack a comprehensive national framework specifically designed for joint programmes with extensive mobility components.
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Universities are required to assign each field of study to at least one discipline.

	For fields covering multiple disciplines, one is identified as primary, with over half of the learning outcomes linked to it.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	National legislation requires diplomas issued by Polish universities to be in Polish as an original public document, with translations only allowed in copies. Over 80% of Polish institutions must adhere to a compulsory degree template.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Barrier reported
Differences in grading scales and workload per ECTS.	Poland offers bachelor programmes ranging from 180 to 240 ECTS. At least half of the ECTS should be obtained "in classes" directly involving academic teachers or other lecturers and students, thus limiting time for written assignments or project/individual work.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	A review committee for thesis evaluation includes a minimum of three persons, possibly from foreign institutions.
Final exams form - possible national/state examinations.	Doctoral dissertations are evaluated by a Doctoral Committee consisting of nine high-level research scientists.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Certain programmes that differ from the regular duration (for example, 7 semesters for engineering). Regulations indicate that students may participate in short-term mobility abroad for studies or internships, lasting from 5 to 30 days, which must include a virtual component, either before or after the physical mobility period.
Possibilities of postponement of studies (due to pregnancy, illness etc.).	National regulations for study leave periods exist.
Restrictive legislation regarding the use of languages and Restrictive national legislation regarding the % of foreign teachers in a degree programme.	A special fee for studying in a foreign language is collected. If English is chosen as the language of teaching for the joint programme, then the whole programme must be taught in English.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	The Act on Higher Education and Science lists concrete professions for which the educational standards need to be met.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Tuition fees.	Barrier reported.

Portugal	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Portugal has strict requirements for degree parchments, including specific paper format, watermarks, and designated official suppliers.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Barrier reported.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.

Romania	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Barrier reported.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Although the law theoretically allows for the organisation and accreditation of joint degrees, it's not feasible in practice until ARACIS publishes its "Methodology for accreditation of Joint programmes".

Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Interdisciplinary programmes are regulated in the law only for doctoral studies.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	Although the European Approach is theoretically available, practical implementation is pending until ARACIS finalizes the "Methodology for accreditation of Joint programmes."
Final exams form – possible national/state examinations.	Integrated study programme completion involves a licensing exam, second-cycle integrated programmes require publicly defending a dissertation.
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	At master level: at least 1 year has to be studied in Romania; number of ECTS for one semester is 30.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners

Slovenia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Minimum requirements in terms of minimum physical presence.	Minimum requirements in terms of number of credits (or semesters) to be acquired at each partner institution can be requested to get the degree.

Slovakia	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	European Approach is not available.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.

Spain	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Accreditation criteria, procedure and timeframe.	Existing need for market analysis tailored to specific national criteria.
Restrictions to the creation of joint degrees.	Spain is among the countries reported to lack a comprehensive national framework specifically designed for joint programmes with extensive mobility components.
Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	Diplomas must feature the name of the King, the Spanish shield, and be in Spanish, as mandated by legislation. Lack of specific legislation for joint degrees creates challenges due to the absence of clear guidance. The signature process for diplomas is complex, with limited flexibility on signatory authority and the non-acceptance of electronic signatures.
Requirements for a new accreditation procedure for changes in consortium partners or curriculum change.	Significant modifications in the programme structure necessitate re-accreditation.
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Barrier reported.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	The Spanish Ministry publishes ministerial orders regulating these professions, that are negotiated with the respective other Ministers.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners.
Tuition fees.	Barrier reported.

Sweden	
Type of barrier	**Barrier(s) reported**
Restrictions to the creation of interdisciplinary degrees.	Degrees specify minimum credits in core subjects like chemistry and mathematics, limiting the scope for multidisciplinary studies within the credit constraints of a degree.

Regulations on the diploma parchment and graduation rules.	The Degree Certificate must include the student's name, registration number, qualification title in both Swedish and English, cycle of award, reference to joint degree legal framework, list of completed courses from each university, and legal framework contact details. Over 80% of Swedish institutions are required to use a compulsory degree template.
Barriers to use the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.	European Approach is not available
Recognition of blended/online learning.	Swedish legislation does not mention digital learning, leading to uncertainties.
Different intellectual property rights legislation (development for course material).	Students/researchers themselves own the products of their work.
Restrictions related to regulated professions.	Regulated professions exist in some academic areas, especially in the area of health.
Requirements for consortium agreements.	Obligatory agreement between partners
Tuition fees.	Mandatory tuition fee for non-European students on first degree and second-degree level and Swedish universities may not charge any fee for students from an EU/EEA country. On PhD-level no tuition fee can be charged.
Restrictive legislation regarding selection of students.	Detailed regulations about selection to guarantee equal treatment.

Annex III: Factsheets of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on a European degree (label)

ED-AFFICHE
European Degree - Advancing, Facilitating and Fostering International Collaboration in Higher Education

Project duration: from 01.04.2023 to 30.04.2024

ED-AFFICHE OBJECTIVES

The project aimed to co-develop a vision for the European degree and determine actions to achieve it, with a focus on developing an overview of existing obstacles to transnational collaboration. The specific objectives included:

- Provide a comprehensive review of joint programmes across six participating European Universities alliances.
- Offer suggestions for the design of a European degree label to maximise its potential attractiveness and impact.
- Support the development of a more inclusive, accessible and transparent framework for the development of joint programmes.
- Foster synergies, promoting Bologna tools, greater flexibility in national legislation, and high-quality transnational collaboration.

COMPOSITION OF ED-AFFICHE
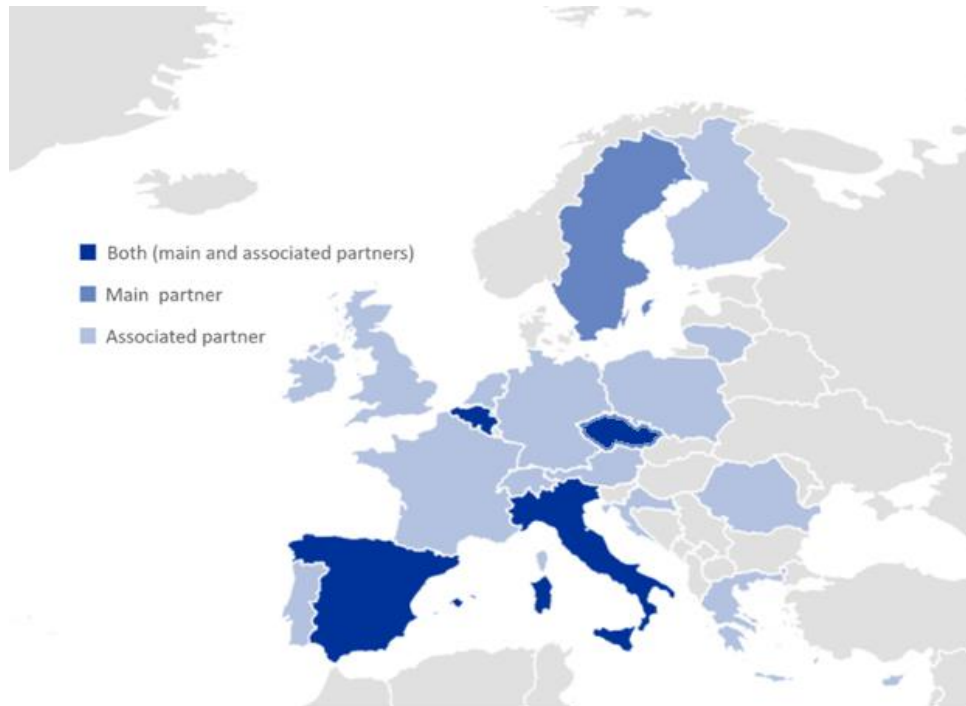
Full partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
Catholic University Leuven (KU Leuven)	BE	Higher education institution	UNA Europa
University of Barcelona (UB)	ES	Higher education institution	CHARM-EU
University of Pavia (UNIPV)	IT	Higher education institution	EC2U
Catholic University of Valencia (UCV)	ES	Higher education institution	EU-CONEXUS
KTH Royal Institute of Technology (KTH)	SE	Higher education institution	UNITE!
Charles University (CU)	CZ	Higher education institution	4EU+

Associated partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (UTCB)	RO	Higher education institution	EU-CONEXUS
Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)	IE	Higher education institution	EU-CONEXUS
Rostock University (UROS)	DE	Higher education institution	EU-CONEXUS
La Rochelle University (La Rochelle)	FR	Higher education institution	EU-CONEXUS
Agricultural University of Athens (Uni Athens)	EL	Higher education institution	EU-CONEXUS
Klaipeda University (KU_LT)	LT	Higher education institution	EU-CONEXUS
University of Zadar (UNIZD)	HR	Higher education institution	EU-CONEXUS
Frederick University (FU)	CY	Higher education institution	EU-CONEXUS
Polytechnic University of Turin (POLITO)	IT	Higher education institution	UNITE!
Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC)	ES	Higher education institution	UNITE!
University of Lisbon (ULISBOA)	PT	Higher education institution	UNITE!
Technical University of Darmstadt (TUD)	DE	Higher education institution	UNITE!
Graz Technical University TU GRAZ)	AT	Higher education institution	UNITE!
Wroclaw University of Science and Technology (PWR)	PL	Higher education institution	UNITE!
AALTO University (AALTO)	FI	Higher education institution	UNITE!
Grenoble Alpes University (UGA)	FR	Higher education institution	UNITE!
University of Milan (UMIL)	IT	Higher education institution	4EU+
Heidelberg University (UHEI)	DE	Higher education institution	4EU+
Copenhagen University ((UCPH)	DK	Higher education institution	4EU+
Sorbonne University (SORBONNE)	FR	Higher education institution	4EU+
University of Warsaw (UNIWARSAW)	PL	Higher education institution	4EU+
University of Geneva (UNIGE)	CH	Higher education institution	4EU+ (as associated partner)
Free University of Berlin (FUB)	DE	Higher education institution	UNA Europa
University of Bologna (UNIBO)	IT	Higher education institution	UNA Europa
Complutense University of Madrid (UCM)	ES	Higher education institution	UNA Europa
Paris I Pantheon-Sorbonne University (Paris 1)	FR	Higher education institution	UNA Europa
Leiden University (ULEI)	NL	Higher education institution	UNA Europa
Jagiellonian University Krakow (JU)	PL	Higher education institution	UNA Europa
University of Helsinki (UH)	FI	Higher education institution	UNA Europa
University College Dublin (NUID UCD)	IE	Higher education institution	UNA Europa
The University of Edinburgh (UEDIN)	UK	Higher education institution	UNA Europa

			(as associated partner)
The University of Zurich (UZH)	CH	Higher education institution	UNA Europa (as associated partner)
Utrecht University (UU)	NL	Higher education institution	CHARMEU
Eotvos Lorand University (ELTE)	HU	Higher education institution	CHARMEU
University of Montpellier (Montpellier)	FR	Higher education institution	CHARMEU
ABO Academy	FI	Higher education institution	CHARMEU
Julius-Maximilians-University Wurzburg (UNI WUERZBURG)	DE	Higher education institution	CHARMEU
Hochschule Ruhr West (HRW)	DE	Higher education institution	CHARMEU
Trinity College Dublin (TCD)	IE	Higher education institution	CHARMEU
University of Poitiers (Poitiers)	FR	Higher education institution	EC2U
Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi (UAIC)	RO	Higher education institution	EC2U
Friedrich Schiller University of Jena (Uni Jena)	DE	Higher education institution	EC2U
University of Salamanca (USAL)	ES	Higher education institution	EC2U
University of Coimbra (Coimbra)	PT	Higher education institution	EC2U
University of Turku (Uni Turku)	FI	Higher education institution	EC2U
Una Europa vzw	BE	Other	UNA Europa
Ministry of Science, Research and Arts Baden-Württemberg (BW Ministry)	DE	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (MOECSY)	CY	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (CZ Ministry)	CZ	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Higher Education and Science (DK Ministry)	DK	Public authority	NA
Department of Higher and Adult Education (VL GEMEENSCHAP)	BE	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Universities and Research (MUR)	IT	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Lithuania (LT Ministry)	LT	Public authority	NA
Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (NL Ministry)	NL	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Education and Science (PL Ministry)	PL	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Education of Romania (RO Ministry)	RO	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Universities of Spain (MUNI)	ES	Public authority	NA
Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SBFI)	CH	Public authority	NA
Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (Cyprus Agency)	CY	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)	NL	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES)	FR	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (EL Authority)	EL	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Hungarian Accreditation Committee (MAB HAC)	HU	Quality Assurance Agency	NA

Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR)	IT	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RO Quality)	RO	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya)	ES	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Valencian Agency for Assessment and Forecasting (AVAP)	ES	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Swiss Accreditation Council (CH ACCRED)	CH	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Lithuanian Centre for Quality Assessment in High Education (LT Quality)	LT	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association (EMA)	BE	Stakeholder association	NA
Coimbra Group (CG)	BE	Stakeholder association	NA
Academic Equivalence Mobility Information Centre (CIMEA)	IT	Other	NA
National Accreditation Bureau for Higher Education (Czech Agency)	CZ	Quality Assurance Agency	NA

ED-AFFICHE ACTIVITIES AND MAIN DELIVERABLES

Mapping of criteria associated with the European degree label: Leveraging the extensive experience of the partners to develop a database of 388 existing joint/multiple/dual degree programmes and analysing the criteria associated with the European degree label through targeted surveys and focus groups with programme directors. The key deliverables include:

- ED-AFFICHE database of collaborative programmes
- Outcomes of the European degree criteria mapping exercise

Dialogue with national/regional authorities: Organising 17 national workshops, interviews, and consultations with experts, across 20 countries through a system of 'national contact points' to provide an overview of legal obstacles to the development of joint programmes. The key deliverables include:

- Obstacles for transnational collaboration in higher education
- Best practices & recommendations for the future development & implementation of joint programmes in Europe.

Suggestions for a future European degree label: Engaging national accreditation and quality assurance agencies from 22 countries, 2500+ students from 51 higher education institutions and employers from across the continent, through interviews and surveys to develop suggestions on the design and delivery of the European degree label. The key deliverables include:

- Comparative analysis of the criteria associated to the European degree label and the process behind it
- ED-AFFICHE policy recommendations on the future of the European degree (label)

- **Proposed criteria**: The proposed criteria foster transnational collaboration, promote European values, and ensure that degrees awarded under this label are recognised for their high quality across Europe. The application of these criteria needs to be uniform and the processes of verification fit for purpose. The proposed criteria should not interfere with the HEIs' autonomy and academic freedom. They should however be an incentive for Members States to address obstacles in their legislation.
- **Quality assurance**: The use of EQAR-registered agencies and alignment with the European Approach and the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) are highlighted as essential steps to maintain high standards and facilitate the recognition of joint programmes across national contexts. The project favoured programme-based accreditation for the European Degree (label) through the European Approach.
- **Obstacles**: Variations in national legislation, diversity of accreditation processes, complexity of aligning different educational frameworks, and lack of coordination among higher education institutions, accreditation agencies, and governments are among the key obstacles. While successful implementation of European Degree is necessarily linked to corresponding legal changes, The European Degree could incentivize the removal of these obstacles even in its label format, provided that Member States remain committed to removing barriers in legislations.
- **Added value**:
  - **Branding and visibility**: It is crucial to establish a strong brand identity for the label, ensuring it is easily recognisable, particularly by both employers and students. For Member States, the label should serve as a magnet for international students, enhancing visibility of the country.
  - **Employers**: Making the label appealing to employers is essential, and this can be achieved by actively collaborating with them to shape the curriculum of the joint programme. This engagement ensures that the programme meets the evolving needs and expectations of the industry.
  - **Innovative approaches**: Furthermore, it provides a platform to promote innovative approaches and make them indispensable for European Degree programmes. It is an opportunity to tackle existing barriers to equity and inclusion, such as English proficiency and mobility, with digital skills recognised as a crucial learning outcome.
  - **Momentum to address legal challenges**: In ED-AFFICHE's experience, one immediate observation is that this initiative has enabled universities and ministries to engage in collaborative dialogues, which constitute the first added value of the European Degree (label). It has provided momentum for addressing legal challenges related to Joint programmes. During ED-AFFICHE workshops, ministries have, in some cases, discovered limitations and promptly proposed solutions. Additionally, it offers an opportunity to share information and best practices among countries. However, it's crucial to consider all perspectives; the label should be accessible to as many countries as possible to prevent alienation.
  - **European approach**: QA agencies should play an active role in label attribution and criteria design. This presents an excellent opportunity to underscore the European approach as the preferred tool for assessing the quality of joint programs. It's also a chance to explore whether the EU approach could be made less costly and complex in certain countries, and fully implemented in others. Similarly, other existing Bologna tools could be implemented and facilitated through this initiative.
  - **Innovative approaches**: Furthermore, it provides a platform to promote innovative approaches and make them indispensable for European Degree programs. It's an opportunity to tackle existing barriers to equity and inclusion, such as English proficiency and mobility, with digital skills recognized as a crucial learning outcome.

Coordination and Leadership

- The Commission should take a central role in coordinating the European Degree initiative, engaging member states and stakeholders to ensure smooth incorporation into legislative frameworks.
- Discussions should extend to the European Higher Education Area, involving key stakeholders such as QA agencies, EQAR, and ENQA.
- Facilitate conversations among member states to tackle these issues in a coordinated fashion.

Scope of the European Degree

- Extend the European Degree beyond EU universities and European Universities alliances for higher impact and inclusiveness.

Link to Bologna Process

- Actively involve Quality Assurance agencies, member states, employers, and students in designing and implementing a common framework for the European Degree.
- Quality Assurance agencies should play a pivotal role in verification, ideally through a lean version of the European Approach, with member states' alignment across the entire EHEA.

Roadmap for Introduction of Implementation Phases

- Propose a timeline and open a dialogue with member states about various stages of implementation of the European Degree.
- Advocate for a coordinated process where all members start with the label phase and move to the degree phase simultaneously without hindering ongoing legal framework revisions.

Criteria advice

- Specific advices include provisions for regulated professions, adherence to validated Consortium Agreements, mandatory adoption of the European Approach for Quality Assurance and major engagement of labor market representatives.

Transitional Period for Implementation

- Implement a transitional period, especially for the European Approach, to allow Member States time for legislative adjustments.

Practical Guidelines for Criteria Interpretation

- Develop comprehensive guidelines for criteria interpretation to address subjective interpretations, ensuring transparency and consistency.
- Entrust Quality Assurance agencies, facilitated through EQAR/ENQA, with preparing these guidelines.

Model Consortium Agreement

- Prepare a model consortium agreement, drawing upon best practices, to address regulations and integrate European Degree Label criteria.
- Consider existing national/regional regulations during model development.

Verification Methods and Actors
- Use a single EQAR-registered Quality Assurance agency chosen by the joint programme consortium for verification.
- Propose a lean verification procedure based on the processes of the European Approach focusing on checking alignment with the European Degree (Label) criteria.
- Allow for flexibility in verification time frames to accommodate programme needs.
- Ensure sufficient added value for the European Degree to justify workload associated with verification procedures.

Template of a European Diploma

- Design a unified diploma template at the European level for joint diplomas, maintaining clear distinction between label and qualification diplomas.
- Prioritize quality branding and a cluster of features over singular visual representation, allowing for co-existence of multiple visuals.

Visibility and Branding
- Launch a branding campaign by the Commission to promote pathways towards a European Degree, articulating the added value for HEIs and students.
- Introduce uniform visual identification tools, such as a certificate template and logo, for actors engaged in the awarding process.
- Establish a website to present existing European Degrees and European Degree Label Programmes, supporting students in programme selection

Funding

- Provide dedicated funding instruments for European Degree programmes, incentivizing programme creation and supporting students.
- Align existing financial instruments to attract students and implement joint programmes, reviewing mobility rules under Erasmus+.
- Investigate challenges posed by existing Erasmus regulations and address concerns regarding compulsory mobility periods.

Continuation of Work

- Maintain active involvement of pilot projects throughout the process, forming a single working group with interested team members.
- Recognize the ongoing need for collaboration and support from stakeholders, extending beyond the pilot phase.

For Member States
Introduction of the European Degree

- Continue and enhance the mapping exercise initiated by the pilot projects on legal obstacles hindering the implementation of joint programmes.
- Member states are advised to make informed decisions on introducing the European Degree into legislative frameworks, considering various award types and their implications.
- Continuous dialogue with the Commission and HEIs is recommended, along with ensuring transparent information flow regarding member states' measures.

Bologna Follow-up Group

- Organize within the Bologna follow-up group for coordinated actions related to the European Degree, especially concerning verification methods aligned with the European Approach.

Support for Quality Assurance (QA) Procedures

- Member states should ensure their legislation incorporates the European Approach and aligns QA agency procedures with the criteria.
- Enhanced support towards QA agencies is recommended for effective implementation, considering resources and sustainability.
- Coordination among QA agencies is essential for a uniform process across participating countries.

Funding

- Offer scholarships and financial incentives to students engaging in joint programmes.
- Financial support for launching joint programmes would incentivize universities and academics to commit to collaboration.
- Address challenges in accessing national funding schemes for joint programmes, by for example having interministerial consultations and financial incentives for HEIs.

For Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies
Additional Workload and Processes

- QA agencies should have a crucial role in the European Degree implementation, possibly issuing the label or checking compliance with criteria.
- Recommendations include active participation in framework co-creation and development of implementation guidelines.
- Consideration of resources such as workload, staff, and timeline is advised.

European Approach

- Ensure that already existing programmes that would verify their compliance with the criteria could use a slim procedure integrated wherever possible with already existing planned evaluation procedures and aligned with the European Approach, with a single EQAR-registered agency for verification.
- New programmes should follow the full European Approach, while existing accredited programmes shift to a lean version of the European Approach.
- Internal procedures should be updated to embed these processes.

Cooperation and Coordination

- Coordinate at the European level, suggesting EQAR and/or ENQA take a leading role.
- QA agencies should cooperate closely to ensure a uniform interpretation of criteria and processes.

Electronic Certification System

- Establish an online platform listing European Degree-awarded programmes.
- EQAR or the Commission could host the website.
- Implement a downloadable certificate function for graduates, synchronized with national QA agencies' websites.

For Higher Education Institutions

Active and Leading Role

- HEIs should actively participate in negotiations regarding the European Degree within their countries, ensuring their voices are heard and considered.
- Dialogue with responsible ministries and the Commission is essential for successful implementation, balancing EC recommendations, legal frameworks, and HEIs' preferences.

Strategy for Joint Programmes

- HEIs are advised to develop a comprehensive strategy defining the role of transnational joint programmes within their educational portfolio.
- This strategy should establish priorities, preferred partners, degree types, funding targets, and other considerations, serving as a foundation for informed decisions.

Institutional Procedures Curated for Joint Programmes

- HEIs must adapt internal regulations to accommodate the needs of transnational joint programmes, ensuring streamlined processes without compromising quality.
- Amendments and exemptions should clarify their purpose and avoid reintroducing obstacles removed by legislation.

Supporting IT Background

- Dedicated attention to IT tools and services is crucial for smooth operation of student lifecycle processes, especially in joint programmes.
- IT tools should be adapted to handle the complexity of joint programmes, ensuring efficient data tracking, reporting, and exporting.

Practical Support for Joint Programmes

- Establishing a dedicated support network within HEIs for joint programmes is essential, providing resources, guidelines, and contacts to increase engagement.
- Internal funding instruments and dedicated personnel positions support the development and execution of joint programmes, incentivizing participation and relieving workload.

Alignment with European Framework

- HEIs interested in facilitating transnational collaboration should adopt tools connected to the Bologna process to ensure compatibility with European and EHEA standards.
- Alignment with basic principles and definitions across member states is crucial for future development and collaboration.

MORE INFORMATION?

Please visit https://charm-eu.eu/about-us/our-projects/ed-affiche/
Get in touch: *laura.colo@4EUplus.eu*

ED-Lab
European Degree Label Institutional Laboratory

Project duration: from 01.03.2023 to 30.04.2024

ED-Lab OBJECTIVES

ED-Lab aimed to test the implementation of European and international joint degree programmes and the European degree label with a focus on the suitability of the proposed criteria and the award of a joint degree label certificate. The specific objectives include:

- Analyse the suitability of the criteria proposed by the Commission and the existing barriers to the award of the European degree label;
- Analyse how the European degree label and joint programmes enhance the global attractiveness of the European higher education systems;
- Analyse the procedure for the issue of a European degree label certificate and its format, along with potential barriers to be addressed to produce detailed policy advice.

COMPOSITION OF ED-Lab
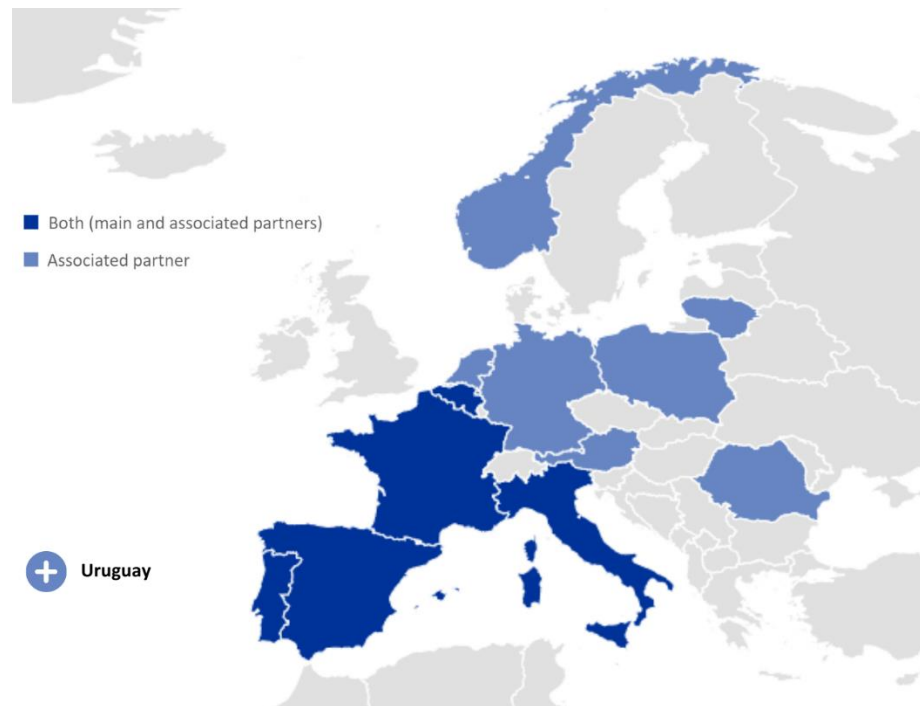
Full partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
University of Granada (UGR)	ES	Higher education institution	ARQUS
University of Padova (UNIPD)	IT	Higher education institution	ARQUS
University Lyon 1 Claude Bernard (Lyon 1)	FR	Higher education institution	ARQUS
University of Minho (UMinho)	PT	Higher education institution	ARQUS
University of Cadiz (UCA)	ES	Higher education institution	SEA-EU
University of Western Brittany (UBO)	FR	Higher education institution	SEA-EU
University of Naples Parthenope (UPN)	IT	Higher education institution	SEA-EU
University of Algarve (UALG)	PT	Higher education institution	SEA-EU
Pompeu Fabra University Barcelona (UPF)	ES	Higher education institution	EUTOPIA
NOVA University of Lisbon (UNL)	PT	Higher education institution	EUTOPIA
Ca' Foscari University of Venice (UNIVE)	IT	Higher education institution	EUTOPIA
Cy Cergy Paris University (CY)	FR	Higher education institution	EUTOPIA
Ghent University (UGent)	BE	Higher education institution	ENLIGHT

Associated partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
Ministry of Universities and Research (MUR)	IT	Public Authority	NA
Ministry of Education and Science (MEC)	PT	Public Authority	NA
Ministry of Universities (MUNI)	ES	Public Authority	NA
Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR)	IT	QA Agency	NA
Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES)	PT	QA Agency	NA
Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)	NL	QA Agency	NA
European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)	BE	QA Agency	NA
Andalusian Knowledge Agency (DEVA-AAC)	ES	QA Agency	NA
National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA)	ES	QA Agency	NA

Graz University (UG)	AT	Higher education institution	ARQUS
Leipzig University (UL)	DE	Higher education institution	ARQUS
University of Vilnius (VU)	LT	Higher education institution	ARQUS
University of Wrocklaw (UWr)	PL	Higher education institution	ARQUS
Nord University (NO)	NO	Higher education institution	SEA-EU
Christian-Albrechts University of Kiel (CAU)	DE	Higher education institution	SEA-EU
University of Split (UNIST)	HR	Higher education institution	SEA-EU
University of Gdansk (UG)	PL	Higher education institution	SEA-EU
University of Malta (UM)	MT	Higher education institution	SEA-EU
Free University of Brussels (VUB)	BE	Higher education institution	EUTOPIA
Technical University of Dresden (TUD)	DE	Higher education institution	EUTOPIA
Babes Bolyai University (UBB)	RO	Higher education institution	EUTOPIA
University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU)	ES	Higher education institution	ENLIGHT
University of Bordeaux (UBx)	FR	Higher education institution	ENLIGHT
University of Padua Alumni Association (Alumni UNIDP)	IT	Stakeholder organisation	NA
Erasmus Student Network (ESN)	BE	Stakeholder organisation	NA
European Students' Union (ESU)	BE	Stakeholder organisation	NA
Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association (EMA)	NL	Stakeholder organisation	NA
Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence (CIMEA)	IT	Other	NA
Department of Higher and Adult Education (VL GEMEENSCHAP)	BE	Public authority	NA
The Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities (The Guild)	BE	Stakeholder organisation	NA
Coimbra Group (CG)	BE	Stakeholder organisation	NA
Academic Cooperation Association (ACA)	BE	Other	NA
Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED)	IT	Stakeholder organisation	NA
Consortium for Advanced Studies Abroad (CASA)	ES	Stakeholder organisation	NA
Association of Universities Montevideo Group (AUGM)	UY	Stakeholder organisation	NA

Mapping and screening of existing joint programmes: Analysis of the suitability and barriers of the criteria proposed by the Commission for the award of the European degree label in 459 existing joint programmes through a survey of programme coordinators. The key deliverables include:

- Discussion paper on the ED label criteria
- Report on barriers in applying the criteria in current joint programmes

Global attractiveness: Analysis of how a European degree label and joint programmes enhance the global attractiveness of the European higher education system, conducted through a literature review, survey of 140 stakeholders in 11 European countries, webinar and in-depth interviews to EDLabs' global partners. The key deliverables include:

- Report on the global attractiveness of already existing European joint degrees
- Discussion paper and recommendations about the global attractiveness of a European Degree Label
- Report on the potential attractiveness of a European Degree Label

Design and testing of the European degree label: Analysing the procedure for the issue of a European degree label certificate and its format, along with potential barriers to be addressed, developed through a qualitative analysis including questionnaires, a series of focus groups and in-depth interviews with stakeholders and two EDLab workshops. The key deliverables include:

- Report on (joint) degree certificate prescriptions
- Template for a joint European degree label certificate
- Report on the pilot issuing of a joint European degree label certificate following the compliancy exercise

ED-Lab FINDINGS

- **Proposed criteria**: The criteria are, in general terms, realistic and fit for purpose, though they require further clarification and accompanying guidelines to ensure consistent interpretation and application across institutions. A series of changes were proposed including making all criteria compulsory and organising them into clear sections.
- **Quality assurance**: It is necessary to develop clear and uniform criteria for evaluating compliance with the European degree label. The process should be closely aligned with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes to avoid duplication and ensure consistency. The evaluation of compliance should be carried out by EQAR-registered agencies, with the procedures designed to be streamlined and efficient.
- **Obstacles/barriers**: These include legislative and regulatory challenges posed by national and regional laws, administrative and technical difficulties, and resistance to changing established procedures at the institutional level. The lack of effective coordination among national authorities, institutions, and stakeholders could lead to inconsistent implementation of joint programmes and the European degree label. Additionally, the lack of clear explanations and understanding of joint programmes and the European Degree Label could hinder the implementation and broader adoption of joint degrees among students and potential employers.
- **Added value**: The European Degree Label offers numerous benefits, including enhanced job prospects, increased international recognition of academic achievements, and a competitive advantage for graduates. Employers view the label as an indicator of global recognition and international experience, high educational standards, possession of essential global competencies (including generic skills, such as adaptability, intercultural experience and communication), and trust in qualifications.

- **Development of a fully recognised European Degree:** The creation of a fully recognised European degree represents a significant transformation of European higher education, as it would involve integrating this new degree type within national qualification frameworks. For this, it is necessary to create a distinct degree category with specific legal and regulatory implications across Member States.
- **The European Degree Label as an intermediate step:** The European degree label is a suitable intermediate step towards the implementation of a European degree and does not imply regulatory changes at the national/regional level while serving as an attractive marker for excellence in European collaboration.
- **Label-awarding procedure:** The European Degree label should be awarded by EQAR-registered quality assurance agencies, and the compliance evaluation process should be aligned with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes to avoid duplication of efforts.
- **Label certification as a stand-alone credential:** As an alternative to a harmonised joint diploma model, a stand-alone label certificate can be issued alongside the joint diploma, tied together by a European degree label logo. The logo would serve as the key visual identifier that contributes to the branding, publicity and recognisability of the label initiative.
- **Standardised implementation and administrative coordination**: Engaging policymakers and accreditation bodies to promote supportive policies for joint degree programmes and the European degree label, while streamlining administrative processes to align with international standards.
- **Comprehensive student support**: Encouraging member states to harmonise immigration policies to facilitate international student transitions and providing robust support services, including mental health, and accommodation to enhance the student experience in joint programmes.
- **Engagement, marketing, and global visibility**: Fostering graduate engagement and collaborate with employers to highlight the benefits of joint degree programmes and the European Degree Label. Establishing a central information hub for joint programmes. Developing targeted marketing campaigns to increase global recognition and appeal, showcasing the unique advantages and international opportunities offered by these programmes.
- **Internationalisation and academic enhancement**: Expanding partnerships with global universities and industry partners to promote multilingual education and emphasise the development of generic skills through international experiences. Providing training on programme management and continuously monitoring global education trends to adapt programmes and maintain academic innovation.
- **Financial assistance and cultural integration**: Collaborating with governments and organisations to expand scholarship opportunities for students in joint degree programmes. Promote cultural integration through events, mentorships, and orientation services that address cultural and language barriers, ensuring a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students.

MORE INFORMATION?

Please visit *https://www.ed-lab.eu/*
Get in touch: *edlab.management@ugr.es*

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ETIKÉTA
FilmEU Degree Label

</div>

Project duration: from 01.04.2023 to 30.04.2024

ETIKÉTA OBJECTIVES

ETIKÉTA aimed to pilot the co-created criteria for delivering a European degree label and a digital European degree label for joint transnational higher education programmes focused on art. The specific objectives include:

- Map existing joint educational offers to test and optimise criteria for a European degree label and evaluate strategic options for its future implementation.
- Develop and test standardised self-evaluation and external evaluation methods for joint programmes, assess these processes, and design a template for issuing the European degree label in physical and digital forms.
- Deliver a clear understanding of the European degree label's role in enhancing cohesion among institutions and between academic and professional communities, establish the label as a quality hallmark at key events, and provide guidelines for its implementation and the development of future joint degrees.

COMPOSITION OF ETIKÉTA
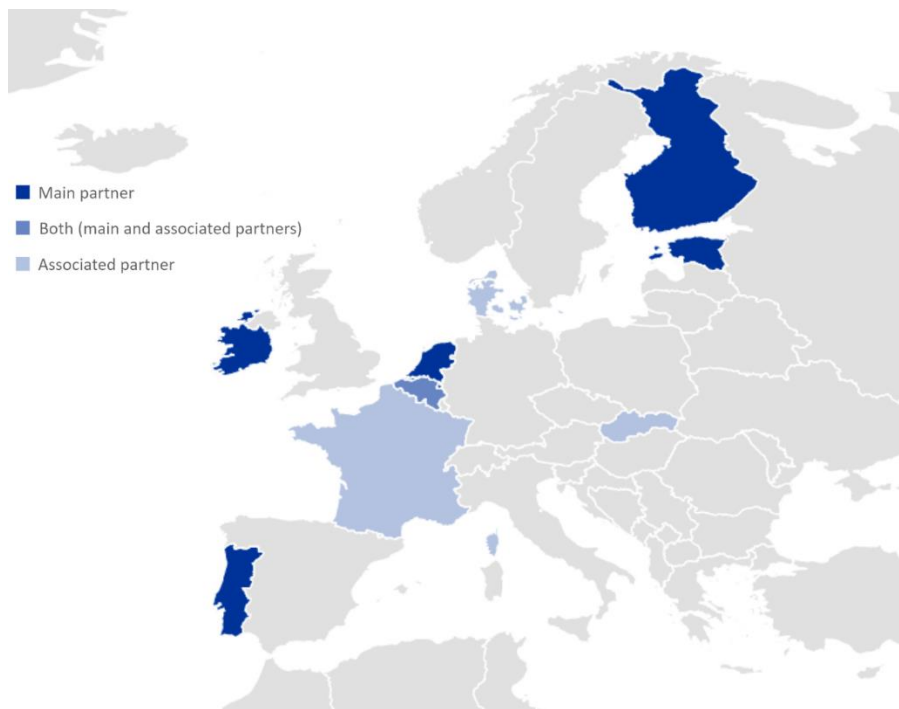
Full partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
Lusófona University (LU)	PT	Higher education institution	FilmEU
Institute of Art, Design + Technology Dún Laoghaire (IADT)	IE	Higher education institution	FilmEU
LUCA School of Arts (LUCA)	BE	Higher education institution	FilmEU
Tallinn University (TLU)	EE	Higher education institution	FilmEU
FilmEU Association (FilmEU Assoc)	NA	Higher education institution	FilmEU
Aalto University (AALTO)	FI	Higher education institution	NA
Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)	NL	Quality Assurance agency	NA
EQArts Foundation - Enhancing Quality in the Arts (EQ-Arts)	NL	Quality Assurance agency	NA
Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority of Ireland (QQI)	IE	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Education and Youth Board (HAKA)	EE	Quality Assurance Agency	NA
Ministry of Education and Science (MEC)	PT	Public authority	NA

Associated partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
European Association of Conservatoires (AEC)	BE	Stakeholder organisation	NA
European Grouping of Film and Television Schools (GEECT)	FR	Stakeholder organisation	NA
University of Theatre and Film Arts (SZFE)	HU	Higher education institution	FilmEU (as associated partner)
Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava (VSMU)	SK	Higher education institution	FilmEU
VIA University College (VIA UC)	DK	Higher education institution	FilmEU

ETIKÉTA ACTIVITIES AND MAIN DELIVERABLES

- **Mapping, optimisation & evaluation**: Mapping joint educational offers at European Qualifications Framework (EFQ) levels 6, 7, and 8, benchmarking them against criteria to establish a European degree label, optimise the criteria, evaluate guidelines to maximise the label's attractiveness, and explore future recipient personas. Key deliverables include:
  - Report on the mapping of existing joint educational offers with the Consortium at EFQ levels 6, 7 and 8.
  - Proposal of E-template setting out the criteria required for joint degrees.

- **Developing and testing the European degree label**: Creating a consistent self-evaluation method for institutions and a standardised template for external evaluators, such as national quality assurance agencies and accreditation organisations, to independently assess these programmes. Key deliverables include:
  - White paper: Application, delivery and awarding of the European degree label of joint programme.
  - European degree label of joint programmes brand.
- **Delivery and future directions**: Transforming the findings and suggestions from the examination, research, and testing phases of established joint degrees into practical outputs for implementing the European degree label within joint degrees:
  - Guidelines for the ETIKÉTA EU label.
  - Guidelines for future Joint Degrees.

ETIKÉTA FINDINGS

- **Proposed criteria**: The criteria should clearly differentiate between a 'label' and a 'degree', with a suggestion to introduce transversal criteria that intersect with mandatory items.
- **Quality assurance**: Quality assurance for the European degree label should be centralised under EQAR, with all registered agencies adhering to standardised and simplified procedures. Collaboration among quality assurance agencies is essential to ensure a flexible and European approach, avoiding overly rigid measures. The framework should be versatile, covering traditional degrees as well as certifications and micro-credentials.
- **Obstacles**: Institutional barriers, though challenging, can be addressed through dialogue and trust within consortia, although national regulations present more substantial obstacles. These include issues related to degree cycles, language constraints, and recognition processes. Strategies to overcome these challenges involve modifying local legislation or creating a supportive legal framework.
- **Added value**: The European degree label promotes a unified European vision that strengthens institutional cooperation and reputation. For students, the benefits include access to innovative, future-proof education, diverse mobility options, and enhanced employability. Employers appreciate the multilingual, multicultural, and interdisciplinary skills that joint degrees foster, which help overcome recognition obstacles and support broader European academic and professional integration.

ETIKÉTA POLICY ADVICE

- **Defining added value and distinctiveness:** Clarify the unique attributes and European dimension of a European degree label to emphasise its role in promoting transnational collaboration and advancing European qualifications.
- **Criteria clarity and assessment procedures:** Ensure transparency and coherence in a European degree label criteria and assessment procedures to instil confidence in its integrity and reliability among all stakeholders.
- **Comprehensive information and alignment:** Provide detailed information on programme quality and outcomes, aligning with European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), to enhance transparency and the European degree label's value proposition for students and employers.
- **Complementing existing accreditations and avoiding duplication:** Align the European degree label with established quality assurance processes to avoid duplication, streamline accreditation, and reduce administrative burdens on agencies.
- **Exclusion of non-essential criteria:** Focus on clarity and specificity by excluding non-essential criteria to maintain relevance and ensure accurate monitoring of compliance with European standards.

- **Alignment with existing procedures and facilitation of comparability:** Leverage the European degree label to strengthen comparability across European qualifications by aligning its criteria with existing educational frameworks.
- **Student informedness and clarity in career outcomes:** Enhance student understanding of European degree label criteria and career outcomes to empower informed decision-making and promote clear career pathways for graduates.

MORE INFORMATION?

Please visit *https://etiketa.filmeu.eu/*
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FOCI
Future-proof Criteria for Innovative European Education

Project duration: from 01.04.2023 to 30.04.2024

FOCI OBJECTIVES

FOCI aimed to pilot and test a blueprint for a European degree with stakeholders, outlining the next steps towards its implementation with a focus on flexible learning and micro-credentials. The specific objectives include:

- Test and facilitate the delivery of a joint European degree label, based on a common set of co-created European criteria through a pilot programme informed by stakeholder needs.
- Increase the value of innovative transnational learning experiences and increase the visibility, attractiveness, and reputation in Europe and beyond, of joint programmes, by contributing to the creation of recognised programmes that meet the needs of students, the labour market, and broader society.
- Propose a potential path forward for policy and practical implementation for the European degree label.

COMPOSITION OF FOCI
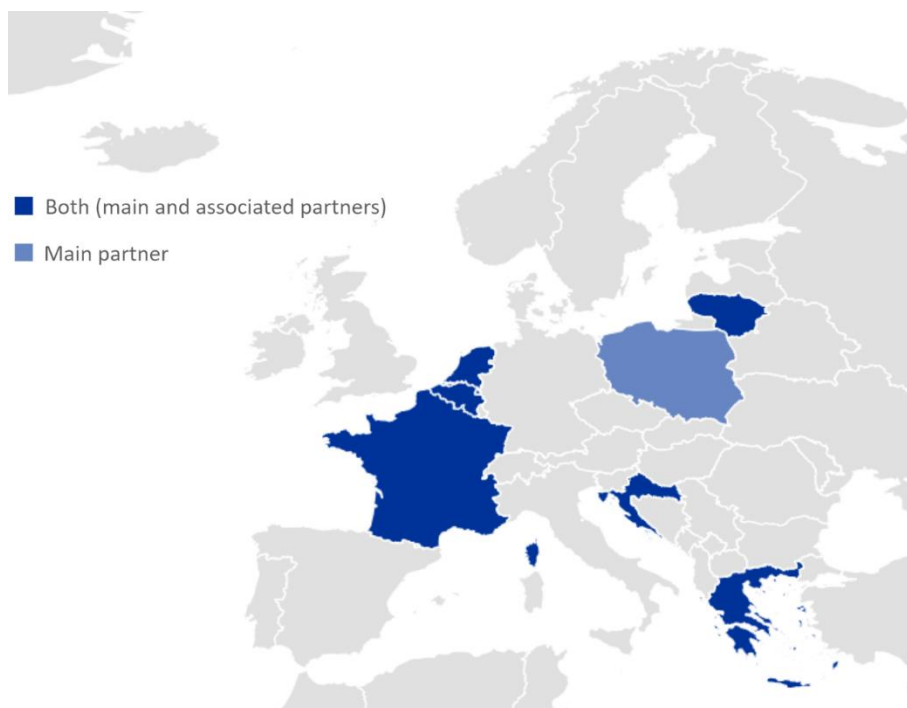
Full partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
University of Rijeka (UNIRI)	HR	Higher education institution	YUFE
University of Antwerp (UANTWERPEN)	BE	Higher education institution	YUFE
University of Maastricht (UM)	NL	Higher education institution	YUFE
University of Strasbourg (UNISTRA)	FR	Higher education institution	EPICUR
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTh)	GR	Higher education institution	EPICUR
University of Amsterdam (UvA)	NL	Higher education institution	EPICUR
Kaunas University of Technology (KTU)	LT	Higher education institution	ECIU
Lodz University of Technology (TUL)	PL	Higher education institution	ECIU

Associated partners

Name	Country	Category
Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MZO)	HR	Public authority
Agency for Science and Higher Education (AZVO)	HR	Public authority
Hellenic Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs (YPEPTH)	GR	Public authority
Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science	NL	Public authority
Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (HAHE)	GR	Public authority
Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)	NL	Quality Assurance agency
European Students' Union (ESU)	BE	Stakeholder organisation
Erasmus Student Network (ESN)	BE	Stakeholder organisation
Lithuanian National Union of Students (LSS)	LT	Stakeholder organisation
Flemish Ministry of Education and Training (MINEDU-FC)	BE	Public authority
Adecco Groupe France (ADF)	FR	Other

In addition to its associated partners, FOCI also collaborated with organisations that, although not formally associated with the project, made significant contributions. Two notable examples come from the collaboration with the Council of Europe and the French Ministry of Higher Education, Research, and Innovation (MESRI).

Methodology development: Creating methodologies for applying and awarding the European degree label to joint study programmes. It included developing a methodology for assessing programmes against the European degree label criteria and identifying legal and procedural barriers to issuing the European degree label.

The key deliverables include:

- Report on stakeholder needs analysis and evaluation methodology.
- Analytical report on the procedural, organisational and legal aspects of awarding the European degree label.

Piloting the European degree label criteria: Implementing and testing the European degree label criteria in 11 joint programmes developed in collaboration with European Universities alliances to validate the reliability and transferability of the criteria and methodology. The key deliverables include:

- Report on the pilot assessment process for internal use.
- Analytical report on the application of European degree label criteria to joint programmes.

Impact, policy and path forward: Developing policy advice for the European degree label, focused on societal and stakeholder needs, formulating relevant and broadly applicable guidelines. The key deliverables include:

- Policy recommendations on applying the European degree (label) criteria on diverse innovative models of flexible and societally relevant transnational European higher education.
- Roadmap for next steps and actions to take related to European degree label.

FOCI FINDINGS

- **Proposed criteria**: The criteria for the European degree label were overall found relevant and applicable, despite requiring further guidelines and definitions to ensure consistent application and evaluation across programmes. These elements will need to be included in a comprehensive evaluation methodology that is to be built on the existing criteria. There is also a need to streamline and simplify the criteria to reduce the burden on institutions, especially for smaller and flexible educational units such as micro-credentials, since the project detected not only a strong need, but also a significant potential, for applying the European degree label concept and methodology to units of learning smaller in volume than a full programme.
- **Quality assurance**: Applying rigorous quality assurance processes remains a critical aspect of the European degree label, with an emphasis on alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The pilot evaluation highlighted challenges in applying these standards uniformly across diverse programmes due to variations in institutional practices and the complexity of transnational collaborations.
- **Obstacles/barriers**: These include national legal and regulatory barriers, differences in national quality assurance practices, and the administrative burden on institutions. Additionally, the diversity of educational models and the varying capacity of institutions to comply with the criteria pose significant challenges.
- **Added value**: The European degree label is seen as a valuable tool for enhancing the quality, European dimension, transnational collaboration, and international visibility of European higher education. However, the added value must be communicated clearly and effectively to all stakeholders, including students, employers, and institutions. It should also demonstrate its distinctiveness from existing frameworks and be positioned as a mark of excellence in international cooperation and innovation in higher education, rather than a general mark of excellence of the study programme in question.

- **Purpose of the European degree (label)**: The goals and intentions distinguishing the European degree (label) from existing options for transnational collaboration must be clearly defined. It should represent a strong European dimension and values, without compromising global cooperation. It should demonstrate excellence in international programme co-creation, leading to qualitative enhancements in European joint education.
- **Scope of the European degree (label)**: The scope should be expanded to include smaller units of learning, such as micro-credentials, to ensure flexibility and future-proofing. This approach allows for innovative educational offerings and supports the integration of informal and non-formal education within the European degree (label) framework.
- **Fitness of the proposed European degree (label) criteria**: The criteria should be streamlined to focus on specific characteristics that align with the goals and values of the label. This includes reducing the number of criteria, clarifying their targets, and ensuring flexibility in the evaluation of international mobility and academic autonomy. This should be done through developing a comprehensive and robust evaluation methodology. The use of existing tools and frameworks should be leveraged to avoid additional administrative burdens.
- **Legal frameworks and their impact on the European degree (label) concept**: Compatibility with national legislation is crucial for the successful implementation of the European degree (label). A phased approach to introducing the label should be considered, starting with legally feasible options like issuing the label in diploma supplements.
- **Policy framework for the European degree (label)**: To minimise the administrative burden, the European degree (label) should align with existing national and international processes and tools. A coordinating body at the EU level should oversee the implementation, ensuring clear guidelines and communication with national authorities. The digitalisation of the process, including digital diplomas, is suggested to ease adoption and ensure smooth implementation.

MORE INFORMATION?

Please visit *https://foci.csd.auth.gr/*
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JEDI
Joint European Degree label in engIneering - Toward a European framework for engineering education

Project duration: from 01.04.2024 to 30.04.2024

JEDI OBJECTIVES

JEDI aimed to develop a prototype joint European degree label in engineering based on the common set of criteria adjusted and co-developed with the project partners, that can be applied to any joint European degree in engineering, technology and science. The specific objectives were:

- To conduct a comprehensive analysis of the current accreditation landscape for joint degrees in engineering, science and technology, identify the main barriers, assess the added value of JEDI, and identify potential early adopters of the label within the consortium.
- To develop an experimental proof of concept for JEDI by optimising and applying its criteria through collaborative stakeholder engagement and demonstrating its implementation in existing and emerging joint degrees.
- To produce a long-term vision for the European label based on views from stakeholders involved or interested in the definition of an integrated European framework for engineering education.

COMPOSITION OF JEDI
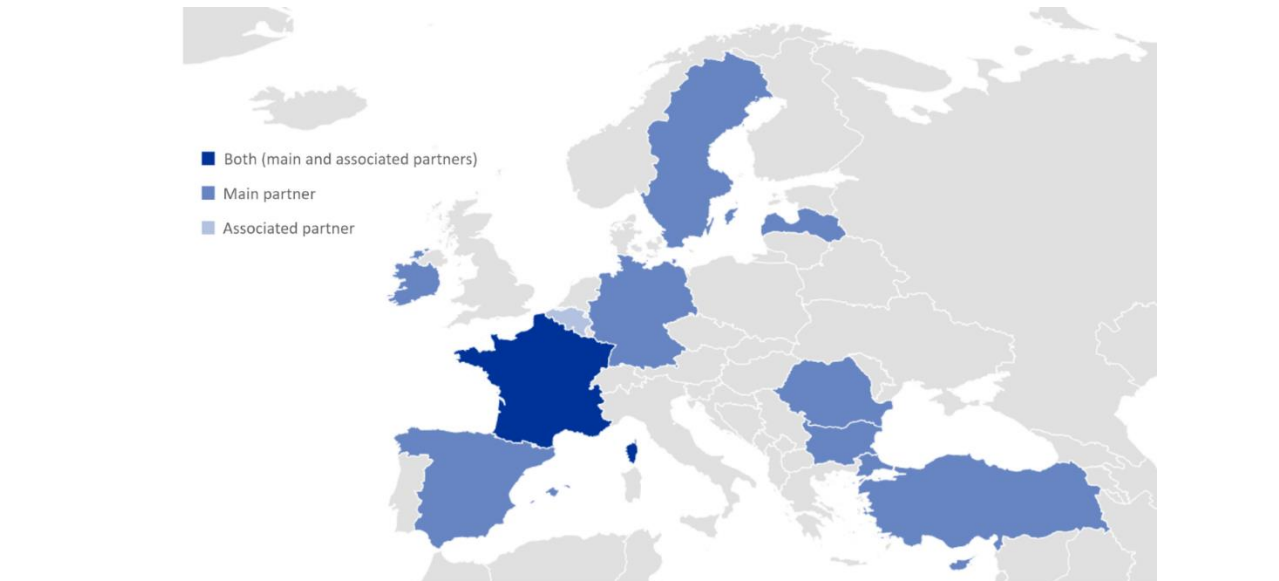
Full partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM)	ES	Higher education institution	EELISA
École Nationaledes Ponts et Chaussées (ENPC)	FR	Higher education institution	EELISA
Istanbul TekniK Universitesi (ITU)	TR	Higher education	EELISA
Universitatea Politehnica Din Bucuresti (UPB)	RO	Higher education institution	EELISA
Budapesti Muszaki Es Gazdasagtudomanyi Egyetem (BME)	HU	Higher education institution	EELISA
Université Paris Sciences et Lettres (PSL) / École nationale supérieure de chimie de Paris (ENSCP)	FR	Higher education institutions	EELISA
Université de technologie de Troyes (UTT)	FR	Higher education institution	EUT+
Hochschule Darmstadt (H-DA)	DE	Higher education institution	EUT+
Universidad Politécnica de Cartagena (UPCT)	ES	Higher education institution	EUT+
Technologiko Panepistimio Kyprou (CUT)	CY	Higher education institution	EUT+
Technical University of Sofia (TU Sofia)	BG	Higher education institution	EUT+
Universitatea Tehnică din Cluj-Napoca (UTCN)	RO	Higher education institution	EUT+
Riga Tehniska Universitate (RTU)	LV	Higher education institution	EUT+
Technological University Dublin (TU Dublin)	IE	Higher education institution	EUT+
Chalmers Tekniska Högskola AB (CHALMERS)	SE	Higher education institution	ENHANCE
Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV)	ES	Higher education institution	ENHANCE

Associated partners

Name	Country	Category
European Network for Accreditation of Engineering Education (ENAEE)	BE	Quality Assurance agency
Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur (CTI)	FR	Quality Assurance agency

JEDI ACTVITIES AND MAIN DELIVERABLES

Assessment of the current situation: This task analysed the landscape within 172 joint degree programmes on engineering and technical sciences across Europe. It identified the main barriers, assessed the added value of JEDI, and pinpointed potential early adopters of the label within the consortium. The main results of this activity include:

- Why a European label for technical engineering and science-oriented degrees?
- List of European joint degrees in engineering, technology, and applied sciences in Europe

Developing the JEDI label: This task involved selecting and optimising European criteria, engaging stakeholders through three collaborative labs (Colabs) focused on institutional aspects, innovative learning and European added-value involving 80 stakeholders, and applying JEDI to existing and new joint degree programmes. The main results of this activity include:

- *Colabs report as a result of collaboration with stakeholders and joint degrees owners*
- *The JEDI label: guidelines for application to joint degrees*

Long-term vision: The task involved applying JEDI, collecting, analysing, and synthesising the views of accreditation agencies, ministries, universities, industry representatives, and student bodies to develop a vision for a European framework for engineering education over the next 5 to 10 years. The main results of this activity include:

- Consultations about the long-term vision of the European degree label
- *White paper: an integrated European framework for engineering education*

JEDI FINDINGS

- ***Proposed criteria:*** JEDI proposed a set of criteria focusing on institutional aspects (such as admission and degree awarding processes), transformative learning approaches (such as interdisciplinary skills, use of diverse projects and challenge-based methodologies), and European added value (such as multilingualism, inclusiveness, and contributions to green and digital transitions). JEDI aims for greater collaboration across Europe by extending the minimum number of participating countries in the joint degree program to 3 and fostering collaboration between higher education institutions by extending thesis co-supervision to the EQF levels. These criteria ensure the label certifies academic excellence and aligns with broader European educational and societal goals.
- ***Quality assurance:*** The quality assurance framework for JEDI emphasises the importance of transparency, consistency, and stakeholder engagement. It proposes the creation of a board, potentially within an organisation like ENAEE, to oversee the evaluation process, ensuring that the criteria are consistently applied across all EU countries. JEDI proposes guidelines to use accepted EUR-ACE as a baseline to define joint programme outcomes to streamline the accreditation process across different engineering disciplines.
- ***Obstacles:*** These include differences in national regulations, programme lengths, and accreditation requirements. In addition, proper communication is required to explicitly show student the benefits to enrol in new academic programmes. There is also a concern about the potential bureaucratic burden associated with the accreditation process for the JEDI label, which could discourage participation for the higher education institutions. Extension of European degrees to regulated professions face a diversity of national regulations across Europe.
- ***Added value:*** JEDI could enhance the recognition and mobility of graduates across Europe by certifying additional competencies beyond traditional academic qualifications. It differentiates European engineering education on a global scale by emphasising values such as multilingualism, inclusiveness, and sustainability, making the programmes more competitive and attractive.

- ***Joint programme design:*** JEDI has proposed a methodology for the design of a joint programme leading to a European degree encompassing European criteria, specificities of European alliances, regulated professions or stakeholders to define learning outcomes, and quality assurance.

JEDI POLICY ADVICE

- **Engaging stakeholders in the development process**: Actively involve a broad range of stakeholders, including higher education institutions, accreditation agencies, ministries, employers, and students, in the development and ongoing refinement of the European degree label. Their engagement is crucial for ensuring that the label meets the diverse needs of the European educational landscape and maintains its relevance and credibility.
- **Defining a European integrated framework**: integrate joint degrees into existing national systems while promoting a unified European standard with the same principle as the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. This framework should provide guidelines for the development, accreditation, and recognition of joint degrees across Europe, ensuring consistency and quality.
- **Ensuring flexibility in national regulations**: Encourage member states to adapt their national regulations to accommodate joint European degrees. Flexibility in these regulations is essential to overcoming legal and administrative barriers, allowing for the seamless implementation of joint degrees across different national contexts.
- **Implementing a 'European joint degree label'**: This Label should serve to enhance transnational collaboration and academic mobility as an additional certification that complements national degrees, symbolising a commitment to European values and standards in higher education. The label is well received as an intermediate step to push forward to European degrees.
- **Implementing a 'joint European degree'**: Take steps toward implementing a Joint European Degree in engineering embedded in or equivalent to national degrees. This degree would allow students to earn both a national qualification and a European degree, enhancing their academic and professional mobility across Europe.

MORE INFORMATION?

Please visit *https://blogs.upm.es/jedilabel/*
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SMARTT

Screening, Mapping, Analysing, Recommending, Transferring and Transforming Higher Education international programmes

</div>

Project duration: from 01.04.2023 to 30.04.2024

SMARTT OBJECTIVES

SMARTT aimed to pilot the co-created criteria for delivering a European degree label and a digital European degree label for joint transnational higher education programmes focused on designing criteria indicators and testing with experts from Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's and CIVIS alliance. The specific objectives of the project were:

- Evaluate and refine the European degree label by testing its criteria on the Joint Degree Programme South European Studies (EUROSUD) by collaborating with the Commission to design a standardised template and provide advice for optimising and updating the criteria to develop a comprehensive approach to the European degree.

- Expand and validate the European degree label criteria by testing them across a diverse range of programmes and educational activities within the CIVIS Alliance, replicating the process on a larger scale across multiple regions, fields of study, and programme types, and broadening the scope of policy advice.

COMPOSITION OF SMARTT
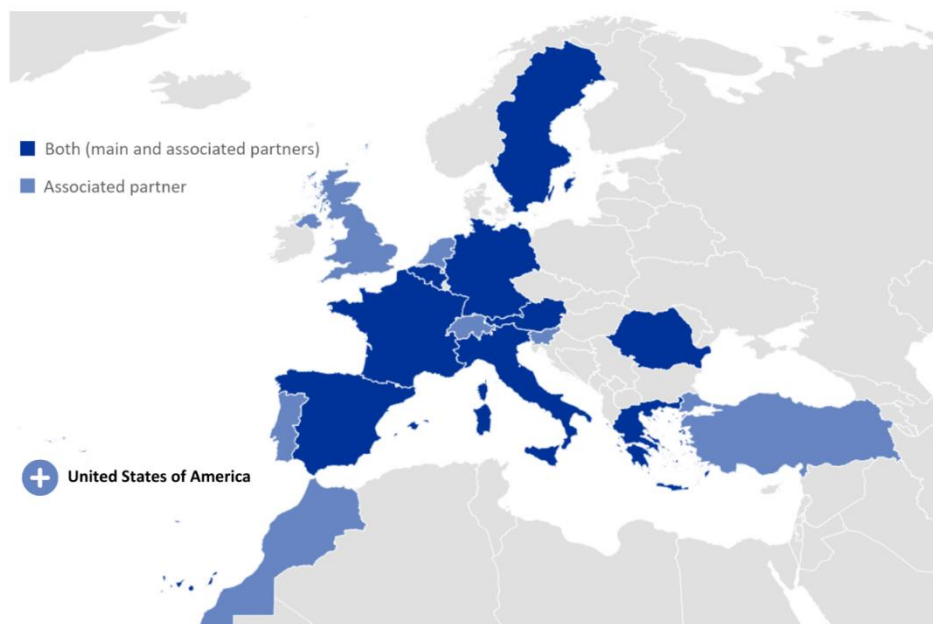
Full partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM)	ES	Higher education institution	CIVIS
University of Aix Marseille (AMU)	FR	Higher education institution	CIVIS
Free University of Brussels (ULB)	BE	Higher education institution	CIVIS
Sapienza University of Rome (SUR)	IT	Higher education institution	CIVIS
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (NKUA)	EL	Higher education institution	CIVIS
University of Bucharest (UB)	RO	Higher education institution	CIVIS
University of Stockholm (SU)	SE	Higher education institution	CIVIS
Paris Lodron University Salzburg (PLUS)	AT	Higher education institution	CIVIS
Eberhard Karls University of Tuebingen (UT)	DE	Higher education institution	CIVIS

Associated partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
University of Glasgow (UofG)	UK	Higher education institution	CIVIS
University of Zaragoza (UNIZAR)	ES	Higher education institution	UNITA
University of Turin (UNITO)	IT	Higher education institution	UNITA
West University of Timisoara (WUT)	RO	Higher education institution	UNITA
University Beira Interior (UBI)	PT	Higher education institution	UNITA
University of Savoie Mont Blanc (UNIV-SAVOIE)	FR	Higher education institution	UNITA
University of Pau and Pays de l'Adour (UPPA)	FR	Higher education institution	UNITA
Radboud University (RU)	NL	Higher education institution	NEUROTECHEU
Miguel Hernandez University of Elche (UMH)	ES	Higher education institution	NEUROTECHEU
Karolinska Institute (KI)	SE	Higher education institution	NEUROTECHEU
University of Bonn (BONN)	DE	Higher education institution	NEUROTECHEU
Bogazici University (BOUN)	TR	Higher education institution	NEUROTECHEU
The Chancellor, Masters and Scholars of the University of Oxford (UOXF)	UK	Higher education institution	NEUROTECHEU
Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medicine and Pharmacy (UMF Cluj)	RO	Higher education institution	NEUROTECHEU
University of Debrecen ((UNIDEB)	HU	Higher education institution	NEUROTECHEU

			(as associated partner)
University of Lille (ULille)	FR	Higher education institution	NEUROTECHEU
University of Ljubljana (UL)	SI	Higher education institution	EUTOPIA
Free University of Brussels (VUB)	BE	Higher education institution	EUTOPIA
Lausanne University (UNIL)	CH	Higher education institution	CIVIS (as associated partner)
Hassan II University of Casablanca (UH2C)	MA	Higher education institution	CIVIS (as associated partner)
Ministry of Universities and Research (MUR)	IT	Public authority	NA
State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation (SBFI)	CH	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (CHEA)	EL	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Higher Education and Research (MESR)	FR	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Universities (MUNI)	ES	Public authority	NA
High Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (HCERES)	FR	Quality Assurance agency	NA
Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes (ANVUR)	IT	Quality Assurance agency	NA
Hellenic Authority for Higher Education (ETHAAE)	EL	Quality Assurance agency	NA
National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA)	ES	Quality Assurance agency	NA
Fundación para el Conocimiento madri+d (MADRIMASD)	ES	Quality Assurance agency	NA
Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (AQACAT)	AT	Quality Assurance agency	NA
Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)	RO	Quality Assurance agency	NA
Conservation Volunteers Greece (ELIX)	EL	Other	NA
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)	US	Other	NA
Academie de recherché et d'enseignement superieur (ARES)	BE	Other	NA
Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Services of Madrid (CAMARA)	ES	Other	NA

EUROSUD Joint Programme and the European degree label: This task involved screening the EUROSUD programme against the label's criteria, designing relevant indicators and testing tools, and collecting data from stakeholders involved in the programme and 70+ experts. The main results include:

- SMARTT Report on EUROSUD Programme
- SMARTT Set of recommendations based on EUROSUD programme
- SMARTT Dataset

Transferability and improvement of European criteria: This task focused on testing and refining the European degree label criteria by applying them to various educational programmes within the CIVIS Alliance. It involved mapping 175 joint programmes, screening them against the criteria, surveying 95 programmes, and developing suggestions to strengthen the European degree label. The main results include:

- SMARTT vision on European Degree Label criteria
- CIVIS Report of quantitative and qualitative analysis
- SMARTT Final recommendations

SMARTT FINDINGS

- **Proposed criteria**: The criteria were validated and showed alignment with the diverse joint programme's objectives. However, the need for enhanced definitions, such as 'transnational degree delivery' and 'learning outcomes transparency', was highlighted to improve their applicability across diverse educational contexts.
- **Quality assurance**: The quality assurance mechanisms proposed for the European degree label emphasise adherence to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). Internal and external quality assurance processes are required, ideally utilising the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. These processes will need clearer guidelines and more robust frameworks to handle the complexities of joint programmes.
- **Obstacles**: These include legal and administrative barriers across different national contexts, challenges in aligning joint degree programmes with the proposed criteria, and the complexities involved in maintaining consistent quality assurance standards. Additionally, the need for more structured support and guidance for institutions, as well as potential financial incentives, were noted as critical factors to overcome these barriers.
- **Added value**: The European degree label is expected to add significant value by enhancing the visibility and recognition of European joint degrees. It could promote transnational cooperation, align educational outcomes with labour market needs, and strengthen the integration of European values in higher education. The label also offers potential benefits in employability and mobility for graduates, making it a valuable tool for students and institutions across Europe.

SMARTT POLICY ADVICE

- **Clarity and harmonisation**: Establishing clear and consistent definitions and guidelines across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) for joint programmes and degrees. Align the European degree label with existing European frameworks, such as the Bologna Process and European quality assurance frameworks, to ensure compatibility and ease of integration.
- **Centralised coordination and support**: Creating a temporary coordinating body to oversee the implementation and deployment of the European degree label and joint European degrees. This body would provide operational guidelines, templates, and support to institutions, ensuring the European degree label's alignment with existing quality assurance standards and facilitating the adoption process.
- **Flexible and inclusive educational framework**: Developing a structured yet flexible framework for the European degree label that accommodates diverse academic disciplines and evolving

educational needs. Ensuring the framework promotes inclusivity, accessibility, and student mobility, catering to diverse student populations and academic contexts.

- **Digitalisation and technological integration**: Leverage digital technologies to support the European degree label's administration, including digital certification, online information platforms, and virtual learning components. Developing a comprehensive digital platform to streamline application, evaluation, and accreditation processes, while also serving as a resource hub for institutions and stakeholders.
- **Funding and incentives**: Provide financial incentives and support for institutions to develop and implement European degree-label accredited programmes. This includes grants, mobility funding, and simplified accreditation processes to encourage adoption and enhance the visibility of European degree label programmes.
- **Stakeholder engagement and international cooperation**: Engage a wide range of stakeholders, including academic institutions, students, employers, and policymakers, in the ongoing development and refinement of the European degree label. Strengthen international cooperation beyond the EHEA to enhance global recognition and the attractiveness of the European degree label, ensuring it is recognised and valued both within and outside Europe.

MORE INFORMATION?

Please visit *https://civis.eu/en/discover-civis/civis-alliance-projects/smartt*
Get in touch: *smartt@lists.civis.eu*

Annex IV: Factsheet of the Erasmus+ pilot projects on institutionalised EU cooperation instruments

> **EGAI**
>
> *UNITA as a model for institutionalised university cooperation: from the European grouping of economic interest to the European grouping of academic interest*

Project duration: from 01.04.2023 to 30.04.2024

EGAI OBJECTIVES

The EGAI project aimed to assess and enhance the European Grouping of Economic Interest (EEIG) as a model for institutionalised transnational university cooperation and to propose the characteristics of a new legal entity for transnational inter-university cooperation, named the European Grouping of Academic Interest (EGAI). The project involves the European Universities alliance UNITA – *Universitas Montium* alliance members and other stakeholders, supported by national education authorities and legal entities. The project analysed the compatibility of the EEIG with the specific needs of transnational cooperation in the academic sphere and analysed, in particular, the useful tools for sharing, such as data, personnel, and resources between the member universities. The project identified the EEIG's strengths and weaknesses and determined the necessary legal features for effective academic collaboration. Additionally, it contributed to the European academic debate through dissemination activities and proposed a new regulatory framework to support such collaboration.

COMPOSITION OF EGAI

The partners of the EGAI project are located in countries in West- and Southern-Europe, in line with the composition of the underlying UNITA European University. The project worked intensively together with several ministries of the countries concerned as associated partners.
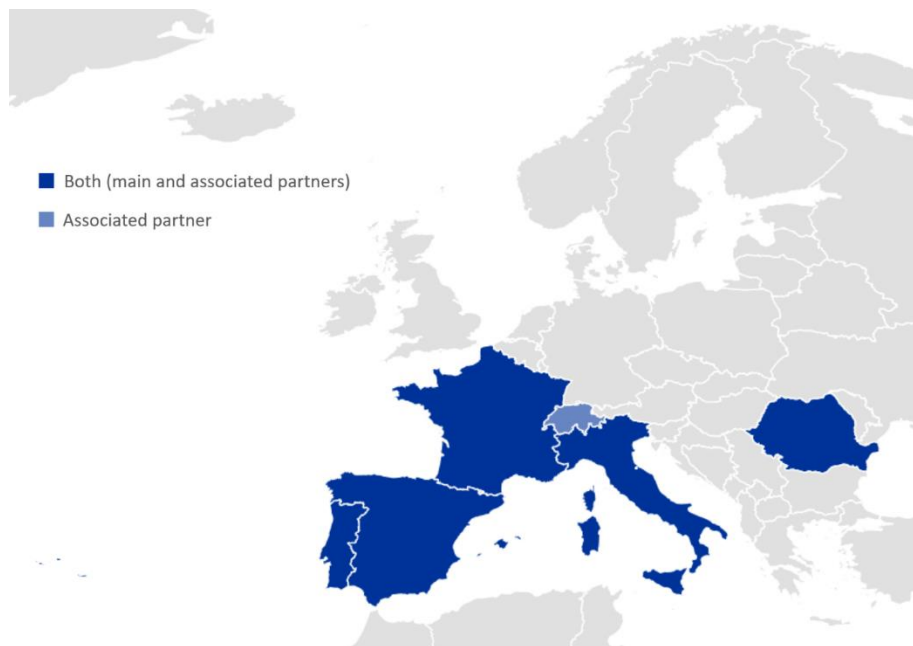
Full partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
University of Turin (UNITO)	IT	Higher education institution	UNITA
University of Savoy-Mont-Blanc (USMB)	FR	Higher education institution	UNITA
University of Zaragoza (UNIZAR)	ES	Higher education institution	UNITA
Western University of Timișoara (EVT)	RO	Higher education institution	UNITA
University of Pau and the Adour Region (UPPA)	FR	Higher education institution	UNITA
University of Beira Interior (UBI)	PT	Higher education institution	UNITA

Associated partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland (HES-SO)	CH	Higher education institution	UNITA (as associated partner)
University of Brescia (UNIBS)	IT	Higher education institution	UNITA
Transilvania University of Brașov (UTBV)	RO	Higher education institution	UNITA
Public University of Navarra (UPNA)	ES	Higher education institution	UNITA
Polytechnic Institute of Guarda (IPG)	PT	Higher education institution	UNITA
Chamber of Commerce of Turin (CAMCOM)	IT	Public authority	NA
Erasmus+ Education and Training National Agency (ANE+EF)	PT	QA agency	NA
State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SBFI)	CH	Public authority	NA
Department of Science, University and Knowledge Society (DCUSC)	ES	Public authority	NA
Swiss Accreditation Council (AAQ)	CH	QA agency	NA
Ministry of Education and Science (MEC)	PT	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Higher Education and Research (MESR)	FR	Public authority	NA
EURELATIONS GEIE	IT	Other	NA
Ministry of Universities and Research (MUR)	IT	Public authority	NA

EGAI ACTIVITIES AND MAIN DELIVERABLES

EGAI's activities centred on evaluating the suitability of the EEIG established by the UNITA Alliance for addressing the specific needs of transnational cooperation in higher education. One of the key objectives of the project was to identify which activities within the institutional missions of the alliance partners could be effectively entrusted to an EEIG. To achieve this, EGAI distributed a questionnaire to the governance bodies of the UNITA Alliance to gather insights on the activities they intended to delegate to the EEIG and to assess the economic relevance of the activities they were already undertaking.

A significant outcome of the project was the development of a 'Toolkit of Legal Instruments for the Functioning of the EEIG'. This toolkit serves as both a reference document for the EEIG and its members and as a practical guide for other European Universities alliances considering the creation of an EEIG to formalise their cooperation. The toolkit identifies tools that can be used for staff sharing (e.g. secondment, unpaid leave, etc.) and analyses the legal issues underlying the sharing of data and resources. It also features a proposed framework agreement to more thoroughly regulate the relationships between the EEIG and its members. Additionally, the toolkit provides a model recruitment notice for administrative and teaching personnel, which can be used by the EEIG for staffing purposes.

To experiment with the EEIG, a workshop on 'Interpersonal Skills and Sustainability' addressed to SMEs was organised. It facilitated the first service contracts between the universities and the grouping, which was necessary to employ the teachers involved in the event.

The project also organised several events to contribute to the debate on the need for a new EU cooperation tool conceived for inter-university cooperation, as listed below.

Kick-off Meeting

- **Participants:** 61
- **Description:** Held online, the meeting introduced the project's objectives, structure, and upcoming activities.

Webinar: 'GEIE *universitaire et services d'intérêt économique général*'

- **Participants:** 13
- **Description:** Led by the Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, this webinar was devoted to analysing the economic character of the activities carried out by universities, with a view to defining the possible scope of an academic EEIG. The papers debated explored in depth the notion of service of general economic interest in the university sphere, the regulation of instruments of collaboration between companies and universities, and university contracts.

Webinar: 'University EEIGs and Services of General Economic Interest: Addressing Some Issues'

- **Participants:** 13
- **Description:** Also led by the Université de Pau et des Pays de l'Adour, this webinar focused on the legal aspects of university EEIGs. Topics covered included copyright regulations concerning intellectual property within the context of EEIG activities, competition law, and EEIGs, and employment law considerations for EEIGs.

Spring School in Timisoara

- **Participants:** 32 in-person, 5 online
- **Description:** Held from March 15-19, 2024, this hybrid event provided intensive learning and networking opportunities. It included lectures, group activities, and interactive sessions. The legal toolkit was officially presented and discussed, allowing for assessment and sharing of best practices.

Scientific Conference: 'Paving the Way for European Universities'

- **Participants:** 70 online, 30 in person
- **Description:** Held in Chambéry on March 7-8, 2024, the conference discussed the project's findings, focusing on obstacles and best practices in using different cooperation tools. It involved representatives from various universities alliances and served as a platform for disseminating research outputs.

EGAI FINDINGS

In one year, EGAI made significant progress in examining, testing, and facilitating the use of an EEIG as an instrument for institutionalised university cooperation. The [Final Report of the Strategic Committee](#) presents the key findings that have emerged from these research activities. It identified the main advantages and disadvantages of the EEIG for university cooperation, as summarised below:

Advantages of EEIG:

- **Simple procedures for establishing the legal entity:** The EEIG can be quickly established with minimal formalities, such as registration in a national register and publication in national and European gazettes, without requiring a notary deed or authorisation at the EU or member state level. There is no obligation for minimum share capital, making it accessible for universities of varying sizes and financial capabilities.
- **Flexibility in organisational structure:** The EEIG allows for significant customisation in its organisational and governance structures, as many substantive aspects are to be regulated by the members themselves. This enables the EEIG to adapt to the unique needs of academic institutions, ensuring that various academic community components can be appropriately represented in the EEIG's governing bodies.
- **Broad scope of activities:** The EEIG can undertake a wide range of economic activities, as defined by the Court of Justice, enabling it to engage in revenue-generating tasks and various initiatives aimed at supporting academic and research objectives.
- **Various funding opportunities:** The EEIG can participate in public funding calls for training and research activities, both independently and with alliance partners. Still, it may face limitations in accessing some funding programs expressly reserved for academic or other higher education institutions, at the national or EU level.
- **Inclusion of public and private members:** The EEIG can include both public and private entities as members, unlike the EGTC, which was primarily conceived for public entities.

Disadvantages of EEIG:

- **Limited applicability to higher education activities:** The EEIG can only undertake 'economic activities', which excludes any activity primarily by public funds, which is often the case; they would not fall under the EEIG's remit. This means that important activities like teaching and research can only be entrusted to an EEIG if they are mainly funded by the students or by a third party.
- **Ancillary nature of activities:** The EEIG is required to perform activities that are ancillary to those of its members, meaning it cannot replace members' core institutional tasks. This restricts the EEIG's role to support services rather than engaging in strategic coordination or essential academic activities.
- **Private law constraints:** The EEIG operates under private law, which may limit its ability to adopt regulations with the legal force of public law. This can create misalignments, especially in labour law, where university staff, usually governed by public law, face discrepancies in employment conditions when engaged by the EEIG.
- **Challenges with personnel secondment:** The secondment of university staff to the EEIG is problematic due to the differing legal frameworks across member states and the private law nature

of staff regulations within the EEIG. In many cases, secondment may be highly burdensome or even impossible, leaving unpaid leave or suspensions as the only alternative for personnel transfer from the partner universities to the alliance grouping. Moreover, professional experience in an EEIG will normally not be recognised in academic career paths, as the EEIG is not a higher education institution: it will therefore be unattractive for academic staff.

- **Restrictions on resource sharing:** The private nature of the EEIG complicates the sharing of material resources between public universities and the grouping. Public goods owned by universities are typically intended to serve the public interest, making it challenging to transfer them to a private entity like the EEIG.
- **Members required to be in the EU:** The EEIG regulation mandates that all members must be located within the EU, which poses a challenge if the alliance wishes to include partners from non-EU countries.
- **Unlimited joint and several liabilities:** Members of the EEIG are subject to unlimited, joint, and several liabilities, which, while promoting trust and commitment among partners, raises concerns about potential financial exposure. This liability necessitates careful consideration of the services that public universities can entrust to the EEIG, given their mandate to serve the public interest.

The EGAI project also briefly analysed the advantages and disadvantages of the **European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)**. It found that, while EGTC's are entities specifically crafted for transnational cooperation between public entities, making it a suitable alternative for university alliances, they have the drawback of requiring a very demanding creation procedure. Moreover, there is uncertainty about the possibility of a private entity becoming a member of an EGTC and about the possibility of including academic activities, such as providing classes or granting diplomas. Further critical profiles that emerged from the analysis of the use of the EGTC for academic cooperation also include the national discipline of the establishment procedure, which does not involve the authority/ministry in charge of higher education but a different minister (although varying in national experiences); the difficulty of recognising professional experience gained within the EGCT in academic career paths.

After the analysis of these two legal instruments, the EGAI project concluded that **there is an evident need for a different EU legal instrument specifically conceived for partnerships among higher education institutions and based on academic founding values, such as academic freedom.** Current instruments like the EEIG and EGTC fall short in facilitating the joint performance of core academic activities, like teaching and research, especially when these are funded by public sources. A legal entity tailored to the unique needs of higher education institutions would not only bridge this gap but also streamline access to various forms of funding, which are often contingent on recognition as a higher education institution. Nonetheless, among its proposals for a new regulatory framework, the EGAI project also advanced **concrete legal proposals to adapt the current EEIG and EGTC regulation**s to better fit the needs of alliances of higher education institutions.

A European solution is preferred to national solutions as it enhances the symbolic value of EU cooperation, promotes a sense of European identity and is deemed more reliable among stakeholders. It would also ensure consistent interpretation of legal provisions across borders while acknowledging the influence of national regulations.

EGAI POLICY ADVICE

1. *For a new EU legal instrument for transnational cooperation in higher education*

EGAI strongly advocates for the creation of a new EU legal instrument specifically designed to facilitate transnational cooperation among higher education and research institutions. This new entity, tentatively named the European Grouping of Academic Interest (EGAI), would be crucial in enabling universities across different member states to collaborate effectively on core academic missions, such as teaching and research.

To achieve these goals, the EGAI status should be founded on legal bases available within the EU Treaties. The project investigated the possible legal basis in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union of a new EU instrument. Several legal bases were analysed, with none being conclusive on legal feasibility.

It is essential that the regulation creating the EGAI respects the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, as interpreted by the Court of Justice. This means that the EU should act only if the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the member states and can be better accomplished at the EU level. This criterion is clearly met in the context of higher education cooperation, as it would provide a cohesive framework that transcends national borders, something that individual member states cannot achieve on their own.

The creation of the EGAI should offer a legal entity that is complementary to national frameworks, rather than imposing harmonisation. This new instrument would be registered in a member state and subject to its regulations and laws, ensuring that it aligns with the domestic legal environment while still facilitating European-wide academic collaboration. However, certain challenges would remain, such as the ability of an EGAI to award degrees or ensure mutual recognition of diplomas, which would require alignment with national legislation.

2. *For adapting the EEIG*

To better serve higher education collaborations, EGAI suggests specific adaptations to the existing European Grouping of Economic Interest (EEIG). The scope of the EEIG should be expanded to include non-economic academic activities, enabling it to support the core missions of universities, such as teaching and research. Additionally, the liability provisions for EEIG members should be revised to limit their responsibility, making the EEIG a more attractive option for academic institutions. However, care must be taken to avoid creating a dual legal regime within the EEIG framework, which could complicate its application. Drawing inspiration from the French Public Interest Grouping model, these adaptations would provide greater flexibility and better alignment with the needs of higher education institutions.

3. *For adapting the EGTC*

EGAI suggests several key amendments to the EGTC regulation to better support transnational academic cooperation. First, on the nature of an EGTC (Article 1), it suggests the regulation be updated to specify that if the EGTC includes members capable of granting diplomas, its objective should be to facilitate and promote academic collaboration. Additionally, on the composition of an EGTC (Article 3), the regulation should be amended to include higher education institutions, both public and private, that are competent to grant diplomas or engage in research activities.

Furthermore, on the tasks of the EGTC (Article 7), it is suggested that the regulation allows EGTCs comprising academic institutions to encourage student and staff mobility, promote the academic recognition of qualifications, and foster cooperation between educational establishments, including the development of distance learning. Lastly, the regulation could enable EGTCs to manage academic curricula, including setting tuition fees, while adhering to EU and national laws.

4. *For further research*

The findings from the EGAI project highlight the need for more comprehensive research into the national legal frameworks of all 27 EU Member States. This broader analysis would ensure that any proposed legal instrument is viable across the entire EU, addressing the diverse legal landscapes and regulatory environments of member states.

MORE INFORMATION?

Please visit *https://www.ubi.pt/Sites/unita/en/Pagina/unita#egai_project*
Get in touch: *egai@unito.it; unita@unito.it, barbara.gagliardi@unito.it* (Barbara Gagliardi, Project Coordinator)

| ESEU: |
| :---: |
| *European Status for a ECIU University* |

Project duration: from 01.03.2023 to 30.04.2024

ESEU OBJECTIVES

The ESEU project, involving all ECIU European University members and numerous national authorities, was dedicated to exploring and advising on the legal frameworks that could enhance transnational cooperation among higher education institutions in Europe. More specifically, ESEU aimed to:

- Identify and map the needs of university alliances for a legal status by formulating eight use cases.
- Based on these use cases, assess the effectiveness of four selected EU legal instruments in supporting transnational cooperation within the framework of ECIU's future ambitions.
- Facilitate a deeper understanding among stakeholders of the strengths and limitations of current legal instruments for transnational cooperation.
- Offer strategic advice to ECIU University on adopting suitable legal instruments that align with its operational and governance needs.
- Develop a comprehensive roadmap for enhancing existing legal frameworks, aimed at guiding European and national policymakers, as well as other alliances of higher education institutions, towards more effective transnational higher education cooperation.

COMPOSITION OF ESEU

The partners of the ESEU project, both main and associated partners, are spread across Europe as shown on the map below.
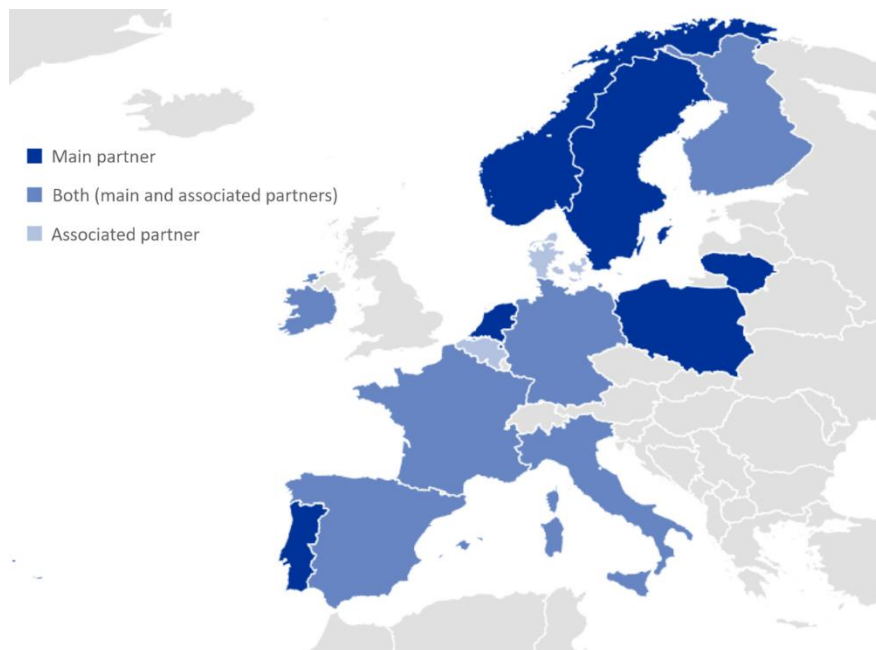
Full partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
University of Twente (UT)	NL	Higher education institution	ECIU
Kaunas University of Technology (KTU)	LT	Higher education institution	ECIU
National Institute of Applied Sciences, Rouen (INSA Rouen)	FR	Higher education institution	ECIU
Dublin City University (DCU)	IE	Higher education institution	ECIU
Linköping University (LIU)	SE	Higher education institution	ECIU
Tampere University (TAU)	FI	Higher education institution	ECIU
Hamburg University of Technology (TUHH)	DE	Higher education institution	ECIU
Lodz University of Technology (TUL)	PL	Higher education institution	ECIU
Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)	ES	Higher education institution	ECIU
University of Aveiro (UAveiro)	PT	Higher education institution	ECIU
University of Stavanger (UiS)	NO	Higher education institution	ECIU
University of Trento (UNITN)	IT	Higher education institution	ECIU
ECIU	NL	Other	ECIU
Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (SMM)	LT	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Education and Science (MEC)	PT	Public authority	NA

Associated partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
Aalborg University (AAU)	DK	Higher education institution	ECIU
4EU+ European University Alliance E.V.	DE	Stakeholder organisation	4EU+
Una Europa	BE	Stakeholder organisation	Una Europa
EU-Conexa	BE	Stakeholder organisation	EU-CONEXUS
EUCOR-The European Campus	NA	Stakeholder organisation	EUCOR
Ministry of Education and Culture (MINEDU)	FI	Public authority	NA
Ministry of University and Research (MUR)	IT	Public authority	NA
Ministry of Universities (MUNI)	ES	Public authority	NA
Autonomous Province of Trento (PAT)	IT	Public authority	NA

Cimea Association	IT	Public authority	NA
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QA AUTHORITY IE)	IE	Quality Assurance agency	NA
CTI Commission des Titres d'Ingénieurs	FR	Public authority	NA
University of Barcelona (UB)	ES	Higher education institution	CHARM-EU

ESEU ACTIVITIES AND MAIN DELIVERABLES

ESEU worked from the question of what a European alliance of higher education institutions implies in practice, including its governance needs, and it built upon the 25-year experience of ECIU with a national legal status (Foundation under Dutch law), and its network and knowledge. Other alliances of higher education institutions, national/ local authorities and relevant entities and experts were closely involved, e.g. through input sessions, interviews and surveys.

To achieve the project objectives, ESEU: 1) Formulated eight use cases, that are based on a thorough assessment of the needs of university alliances for a legal status, to illustrate the concrete need for such a status. 2) Analysed four existing European cooperation instruments and matched them to the needs, i.e., use cases, to clarify which gaps exist for universities alliances in the current landscape of available legal statuses. 3) Conducted interviews with 11 national ministries[100] about transnational university cooperation, to understand better the national context, and to explain why a European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions is needed. 4) Developed a roadmap advising on the concrete next steps to be taken to support alliances of higher education institutions in their transnational cooperation, for example on the adaptation of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC).

As part of ESEU-project team efforts, three large online or hybrid events with up to 200 participants were organised:

Kick-off Event

- **Date:** 13 March 2023
- **Participants:** 50
- **Description:** The initial online event where the use cases and project goals of ESEU were presented to the participants.

Mid-term Event

- **Date:** 16 October 2023
- **Participants:** Over 100

Description: This online event focused on building understanding of the need for a legal status for European Universities alliances and other strategic alliances. The project team presented the findings so far, discussed available legal instruments and their limitations, and explored the national context. Participants provided input on challenges in transnational university cooperation, which was used to develop a policy roadmap.

Final Event

- **Date:** 28 February 2024
- **Participants:** Nearly 200
- **Description:** Held both online and in Brussels, this final event brought together colleagues from across Europe to discuss the future of a EU legal instrument for alliances of higher education institutions. The event featured presentations from different stakeholders, including the

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[100] (Finland, France, Germany (Hamburg), Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden).

Commission, the European Students' Union (ESU), the European University Association (EUA), and legal status sister Erasmus+ pilot projects (Leg-UniGR and EGAI). A summary of ESEU results and the EU Roadmap were presented.

In addition to this, the ESEU-project mid-term and final results were presented in more than 10 meetings and events organised by other higher education stakeholders or alliances, including participation in the Spanish Presidency Forum of European Universities in September 2023, the Academic Cooperation Association event (ACA) event in January 2024, EEA Working Group on Higher Education in February 2024, the UNITA EGAI conference 'Paving the way for European Universities' in March 2024, and the joint final event of the Erasmus+ pilot projects in April 2024.

ESEU FINDINGS

ECIU Use cases:

To define a suitable legal status for its alliance, ESEU defined some of the needs of alliances for a legal status through the formulation of eight use cases based on ECIU University needs:

- **Hiring of Staff** at the European level through simple, agile and equal hiring processes and employment requirements;
- **Receive Public and Private Funding Flexibly from Various Sources**: ECIU University must be eligible to apply for national, regional and European funding sources across Europe and receive private and corporate funding. ECIU University needs to manage and distribute the funding across the ECIU and other stakeholders;
- **Provide Flexible Learning Paths at the European Level:** ECIU University needs to be recognised as a higher education provider at the European level that can recruit and serve learners, provide new learning opportunities, and award credentials which are quality assured and recognised;
- **Create Private Revenue on Continuous Education:** Continuous education can mix content- and resource-wise with free public degree education (e.g. shared learning modules stemming from the ECIU University member universities). Consequently, commercial continuous education in ECIU University might use learning opportunities developed with a mix of corporate and public funding;
- **Invest Into and Manage Facilities**, both physical and digital, in collaboration with its member universities and partners;
- **Manage Data-related Issues**, such as the owning, sharing, receiving and other management of data to create a seamless digital flow of services for learners across the ecosystem;
- **Manage issues related to Intellectual Property Rights (IPR):** ECIU University as a legal entity can (jointly) own IPR as needed in the field of education (e.g. micro-modules) and research/innovation; and
- **Buy and Own Goods and Services**, including purchasing data through subscription models. Issues related to taxation, competition law and public procurement must be clear.

Analysis of existing legal instruments

To understand what possibilities existing legal structures offer to strengthen the cooperation for alliances of higher education institutions, ESEU analysed the status quo of ECIU as a foundation under Dutch law, versus the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC), the Societas Europea (SE), the European Cooperative Society (SCE) and a Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) under the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) as possible avenues for strengthened higher education cooperation. The different legal structures were cross-examined against the eight use cases:

ECIU current legal status (foundation under Dutch law)

Advantages:

- **Established Governance Structure:** Specifically for the ECIU case, there is the advantage that the foundation has a developed and functioning governance structure that is already in place and operational, running for over 25 years.
- **Versatile Use:** The Dutch law framework allows the foundation to be flexible in its operations, accommodating a variety of activities, including some covered by the use cases. The ECIU uses the foundation to participate in project proposals, create and trademark logos, issue micro-credentials, and conclude rental and employment contracts.
- **Entrepreneurial Activities:** It is possible for the foundation to engage in entrepreneurial activities and attract private funding, which can support its initiative, although there are limitations derived from its not-for-profit nature.
- **Procurement Capabilities:** The foundation is legally able to buy goods and services, facilitating its operational needs.

Disadvantages:

- **Lack of European recognition** – actors from other countries do not understand the remits of the Dutch Foundation. This results in misunderstanding and difficulties for cross-border collaboration and contracts.

- **Lack of recognition as a higher education institution**, and therefore a limited ability to deliver education and apply for certain Erasmus+ funds. Although the ECIU Foundation is the awarding entity for micro-credentials, this is not recognised as such, which results in a possible lack of trust in the ECIU credentials.

- **Hiring Challenges:** Significant difficulties arise in hiring staff from different Member States due to the need to navigate diverse national legal systems, including tax and social security laws. Moreover, the Foundation must be registered in multiple countries where ECIU employees are located, this is a high administrative burden.
- **Non-profit Nature:** The foundation's ability to generate and utilise revenue is limited, as all income must benefit the foundation directly and cannot be distributed, as the foundation is not intended to make a profit.

European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC)

Advantages:

- **Streamlined Hiring Processes:** An EGTC could simplify the hiring of staff by preventing the need to establish separate entities in each participating Member State, thereby reducing delays and costs.
- **Property and Service Management:** The EGTC can own property and manage services, facilitating investments into and management of facilities.
- **Solid Legal Status:** The EGTC provides a strong legal status, supported by its connection to Member State authorities, which can help secure joint funds and solidify the legal entity.
- **Joint Funding Opportunities:** EGTCs have the potential to jointly raise and manage funds, including accessing national and European-level funding programmes such as Horizon Europe.
- **Suitable (to some extent) for academic cooperation:** The EGTC responds to many of the ECIU University needs and ESEU use cases, and is already used by other academic networks, such as Eucor[101], demonstrating its effectiveness in similar contexts.

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[101] https://www.eucor-uni.org/en/

Disadvantages:

- **Complex Creation Process:** Establishing an EGTC involves a heavy procedural burden. The convention signed by EGTC members needs to be formally approved by the Member State where the proposed registered office of the EGTC is to be located, and it cannot be objected by the other Member States involved. This process can be time-consuming and resource intensive.
- **National Law Dependence:** Despite offering a choice of law, the EGTC remains strongly rooted in national legislation, particularly in areas such as tax, social security, and labour law, limiting its effectiveness for transnational cooperation.
- **Limited Legal Scope:** The EGTC's focus on territorial rather than academic cooperation, and its orientation towards the public domain, poses challenges for engaging in revenue-generating activities, such as continuous education.
- **Employee Mobility Restrictions:** National tax and social protection regulations can limit employee mobility within the EGTC framework, particularly when moving staff between Member States.
- **Not Recognised as Higher Education Institutions:** EGTCs are not recognised as higher education institutions under national law, which restricts their ability to apply for some Erasmus+ funding, limiting opportunities for educational cooperation. While the EGTC can facilitate educational cooperation, degrees still need to be issued by individual universities, limiting the scope of academic integration.
- **Ongoing Legal Challenges:** Even after establishment, EGTCs may continue to face legal and tax challenges, necessitating ongoing legal advice, as national laws do not always provide clear guidelines for EGTC operations.

Societas Europaea (SE)

Advantages:

- **Attracting of Private Funding:** As a European public limited liability company, an SE can attract more private investments, offering greater financial flexibility.
- **Flexibility in Profit Use:** Compared to the current ECIU foundation, an SE provides more freedom in spending profits, enabling reinvestment into various activities and operations.
- **Investment and Asset Management:** An SE can invest in and manage facilities, and it can buy, own, and dispose of goods and services, supporting its operational needs.
- **Increased Reputation:** The SE structure can enhance the image of higher education cooperation by presenting it as a European or global player, which could be beneficial for reputation and branding.
- **Change of Registered Seat:** The SE has the flexibility to move its registered seat to another Member State, allowing it to benefit from more favourable corporate, tax, and labour laws, depending on national implementation of the SE regulation.
- **Employment Representation:** The SE allows for negotiation with employees on their participation in company management, potentially leading to a more inclusive governance structure.

Disadvantages:

- **Dependence on National Law:** Despite being a European legal form, the SE remains heavily reliant on national laws, which can vary significantly and limit its effectiveness. Some Member States' legal systems may prevent the establishment of an SE for purposes typically pursued by public institutions, posing legal challenges for its creation and operation.
- **Hiring and Worker Involvement Challenges:** Staff must be hired within subsidiaries, and additional criteria regarding worker involvement may complicate management.

- **Limited Public Funding Opportunities:** The corporate nature of an SE could restrict access to public funding.
- **Obstacles to Providing Education:** National legal systems might restrict the SE from pursuing activities typically reserved for public universities, potentially limiting its ability to function as a higher education institution.
- **Tax Issues:** SEs are subject to different tax regimes across EEA countries, leading to potential complexities and burdensome procedures for transferring the place of registration.
- **Complexity in Registration Transfer:** Transferring the registered seat of an SE requires authorisation and justification, making the process time-consuming and administratively burdensome.

European Cooperative Society – SCE

Advantages:

- **Cross-Border Operations and Legal Recognition:** The SCE is legally recognised across all EU Member States, allowing cooperatives to operate in different countries without needing to create separate legal entities in each one.
- **Flexibility:** The SCE offers a flexible legal structure, enabling cooperatives to tailor their governance to meet specific needs, which includes the ability to invest in and manage facilities, as well as buy and own goods and services.
- **Member Rights:** The SCE ensures that members have guaranteed rights, including participation in management and access to information about the cooperative's operations.
- **Tax Benefits:** Depending on national tax laws, the SCE may benefit from certain tax advantages in the Member States where it operates.
- **Funding Flexibility:** The SCE can gather both public and private funds flexibly, including the ability to attract non-member private investments.

Disadvantages:

- **Complex Legal Framework:** The SCE's legal framework is complex and may be challenging to navigate, particularly for cooperatives with members from multiple Member States.
- **Higher Costs:** Establishing and maintaining an SCE can be more expensive than setting up a purely national cooperative due to the need to comply with both EU and national regulations.
- **Limited Alignment:** The SCE's legal framework is not fully aligned across all EU Member States, creating potential challenges for cross-border operations.
- **Bureaucratic Burden:** The SCE is subject to a significant bureaucratic burden, as it must comply with the SCE Regulation and Directive, relevant national laws, and its own statutes, making administration more cumbersome.
- **Hiring Challenges:** Staff must be hired within subsidiaries, and additional criteria regarding worker involvement may complicate management.
- **Educational Restrictions:** There are different legal restrictions on whether SCEs can provide higher education activities, depending on the national laws governing cooperatives.

Knowledge Innovation Community under EIT

Advantages:

- **Focus on Higher Education and the Knowledge Triangle:** A KIC is specifically designed to integrate the knowledge triangle (education, research, and innovation), making it suited to higher education institutions.
- **Funding Opportunities:** KICs are intended to generate funding from both public and private sources, offering a diverse range of financial support for their activities.

Disadvantages:

- **Creation Dependent on EIT Initiative and change of legal framework:** KIC themes set in the legal basis. The criteria for selection and the selection process are dependent on the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT). The establishment of a KIC is thus dependent on the EIT, limiting the autonomy of institutions in creating one. There cannot be KICs dedicated exclusively to the cooperation of universities.

- **Governed by National Law and EIT Regulations:** KICs need to choose a legal form under national law - i.e. a different legal entity is needed to set up a KIC - with their general objectives set by the EIT Regulation.

- **Dependence on EIT and National Law for Operations:** KICs are subject to national laws and the EIT's guidance for crucial activities such as hiring staff, receiving public and private funding, generating private revenue, investing in and managing facilities, and purchasing or owning goods and services, which can limit their operational autonomy. The KICs must each year submit a business plan, the assessment of which is taken into consideration in the EIT's decision on grant allocation. A KIC can only revise its strategic agenda in agreement with the EIT.

Need for a European legal status for transnational cooperation between higher education institutions

The analysis conducted by the ESEU-project highlighted the critical need for a European legal status to effectively support transnational cooperation between higher education institutions. National legal structures, while functional within their own borders, are insufficient for addressing the complexities of cross-border cooperation. They often lead to challenges such as difficulties in hiring staff, managing double taxation, and navigating diverse national labour and social security laws. Moreover, these national frameworks are not tailored to support the development, offering, and recognition of joint educational activities and programmes, facilities, and intellectual property rights across multiple countries. The findings of ESEU clearly indicate that a cohesive and recognisable European legal status is essential to overcome these obstacles and provide a stable foundation for seamless cooperation and integration across borders.

A European legal status could also significantly enhance the experiences of learners, staff, and institutions by facilitating smoother mobility, improving the recognition of degrees and credits, and supporting the issuance of European credentials. It could strengthen the European identity among students and staff, simplify administrative processes, and increase institutional visibility and competitiveness on a global scale. Ultimately, the development of a European legal framework is crucial to support the ambitious goals of transnational higher education alliances, driving innovation and excellence across Europe.

ESEU POLICY ADVICE

While ESEU recognised the need to create a new, dedicated instrument for transnational cooperation in higher education, it also acknowledges the challenges of achieving this. As a result, ESEU's policy advice below includes the desired characteristics of a possible new instrument, but also suggestions for adapting existing structures to better fit the needs of alliances of higher education institutions.

For creating a new instrument

- **Address Key Operational Needs:** It is suggested the new legal instrument allows alliances to hire staff, receive funding from various sources, provide education at the European level, create revenue through continuous education (non-profit), invest in and manage facilities, manage data and intellectual property rights, and buy and own goods and services (following the 8 use cases defined by the ESEU project).

- **Incorporate Limited Liability:** Ensure that the legal status includes limited liability, where partners are only liable for the property and assets they contribute to the new legal entity.

- **Promote Further Policy Experimentation and Co-Creation:** Continue and expand policy experimentation projects beyond the current Erasmus+ pilot projects, involving higher education

institutions, national authorities, and European policymakers. This ongoing co-creation process is crucial to developing a legal framework that is flexible, responsive to the evolving needs of alliances, and capable of serving the diverse missions of universities.

- **Ensure Non-Compulsory Adoption:** Ensure that the new legal status is not compulsory for any alliance of higher education institutions, recognising that different alliances have varying aims and may not require a common European structure.

For adapting the EGTC to HE cooperation

- **Recognition as a Higher Education Institution:** Adapt the EGTC regulation to allow joint entities of higher education institutions to be recognised as higher education institutions, enabling them to deliver education, issue diplomas at the European level, and access Erasmus+ mobility funds.

- **Clarify Staff Provision and Secondments:** Provide clear guidance in the EGTC regulation that the provision of staff by member universities to the EGTC is exempt from VAT and not considered a commercial service, reducing financial risks and costs.

- **Facilitate Hiring Across Borders:** Ensure that the EGTC regulation allows for the direct hiring of staff in countries other than the EGTC's headquarters without the need for setting up separate legal entities, simplifying transnational staff employment.

- **Further Ensure Limited Liability:** Modify the EGTC regulation to further guarantee limited liability for participating institutions, where members are only liable for the property and assets they contribute, making the structure more attractive to higher education institutions.

- **Incorporate a Private Dimension:** Adapt the EGTC to include the possibility of participation by private entities and to address tax implications related to sponsorship and revenue generation, particularly for continuous education, thereby enhancing the financial flexibility of the alliances.

- **Strengthen the European Dimension:** Ensure that the adapted EGTC functions as a truly European legal instrument, minimizing reliance on national laws and avoiding the creation of parallel legal entities, while also expanding its scope to include participation by public bodies from third countries, thereby fostering global academic partnerships.

MORE INFORMATION?

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Leg-UniGR
Blueprint for a legal entity for cross-border universities alliances

Project duration: from 01.04.2023 to 30.04.2024

Leg-UniGR OBJECTIVES

The University of the Greater Region (UniGR) is an innovative, cross-border university network established as part of the Interreg IV 'A Greater Region' project. Since 2015, UniGR has operated as a non-profit association under Luxembourgish law. However, the limitations of this arrangement have prompted the need to explore a new legal status for the network. The Leg-UniGR project aimed to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of UniGR's current legal status as a non-profit association and document the experience of operating under Luxembourgish law.

- Identify the most appropriate legal structure to support UniGR's development as a transregional, cross-border university alliance, ensuring it aligns with governance objectives.

- Explore legal frameworks that enhance UniGR's capacity for securing European and national funding, supporting its core missions.

- Share the process and outcomes of institutionalising UniGR with other European universities.

COMPOSITION OF Leg-UniGR

The partners of the Leg-UniGr project are located in Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg, in line with the composition of the University of the Greater Region. The project worked intensively together with several ministries of the countries concerned.
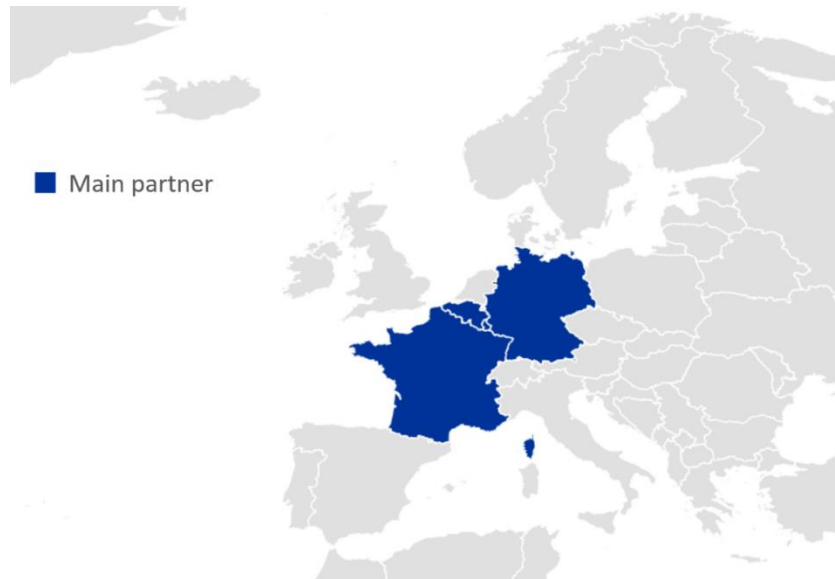
Full partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
University of Luxembourg (uni.lu)	LU	Higher education institution	UNIVERSEH
University of the Greater Region (UniGR)	LU	Higher education institution	NA
Saarland University (USAAR)	DE	Higher education institution	Transform4Europe
University of Liége (ULIEGE)	BE	Higher education institution	UNIC
University of Trier (UT)	DE	Higher education institution	NA
University of Lorraine (UL)	FR	Higher education institution	EURECA-PRO
University of Kaiserslautern-Landau (RPTU)	DE	Higher education institution	NA
Saarland University of Applied Sciences (htw saar)	DE	Higher education institution	NA

Cooperation with ministries

Name	Country
Rhineland-Palatinate Ministry of Science and Health	DE
Saarland Ministry of Finance and Science	DE
Ministry of Higher Education and Research	LU
Région Grand Est	FR
Department of Meuthe and Moselle	FR
The Grand Este Academic Region	FR
Department of Meuse	FR

Leg-UniGR ACTIVITIES AND MAIN DELIVERABLES

Since 2013, UniGR has considered creating a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) to facilitate and structure its cooperation. However, it became clear that establishing an EGTC would require significant effort, involving many decisions from both the university network and political and regulatory authorities. Additionally, local regulations in Rhineland-Palatinate prevented two partners, Trier University and TU Kaiserslautern, from joining an EGTC. As a result, the Luxembourgish form of non-profit association (a.s.b.l.) was deemed the most suitable alternative, leading UniGR to establish itself as an a.s.b.l. in 2015.

However, the a.s.b.l. structure did not meet all UniGR's governance, infrastructure, and funding needs. In response to these limitations, the UniGR grouping decided to revisit the possibility of transitioning to an EGTC. This decision was further supported by an upcoming amendment to the Rhineland-Palatinate Higher Education Act, which would enable universities in the region to join an EGTC.

In this context, the first objective of the Leg-UniGR project was to document and present UniGR's development under its legal status as a non-profit association. A report was produced tracing the evolution of the cross-border network from its origins as an Interreg project to its establishment as a legal entity under Luxembourgish law.

To conclude this phase, a dissemination event titled 'UniGR Foundations and Progress Towards a New Legal Entity' was held on 16 October 2023, in Luxembourg. With 22 participants attending in person and 30 online, the event highlighted UniGR's evolution as a non-profit association, emphasising the systemic, structural, and sustainable cooperation between UniGR partner universities. It underscored UniGR's pioneering role as a recognised transregional cross-border universities alliance and stressed the need for a European framework to support its future operations and success.

Following the evaluation of UniGR's development as an a.s.b.l., the project assessed which legal entity was most suitable to support their cooperation. They determined that a legal status to support its cooperation needs to:

- Be commensurate with the vision and mission of higher education institutions.
- Be established under a European regulation and respecting national legislation and regulation.
- Respect of subsidiarity of higher education institutions within the member states
- Enable a smooth implementation with the partner universities of the alliances.
- Operate in a cross-border context.
- Be financially auditable by the Court of Auditors of the head office's Member State.
- Be a not-for-profit structure under public law.

Leg-UniGR found that the EGTC, even if not perfectly suited for academic cooperation was the most suitable legal form for UniGR. Consequently, the project focused on developing a comprehensive set of statutes to guide the transformation of UniGR from a non-profit association to an EGTC.

The project outcomes were presented at a concluding event titled 'European Alliances and Their Legal Status - A Proposal', held on 19 March 2024. This hybrid event, attended by 46 participants in person and 15 online, featured discussions with academic and political stakeholders from the Greater Region, highlighting the importance of the proposed European legal status for UniGR. The event emphasised the strategic significance of transitioning UniGR into a European framework to strengthen cross-border cooperation among partner universities.

A final outcome of the project is to serve as a model for other networks of cooperating universities undergoing similar legal transitions. The experiential learning gained through this project will be disseminated to support other alliances of higher education institutions in their legal transitions, with all tangible outputs and key documents remaining publicly accessible on the UniGR website. Dissemination will be particularly focused on European universities alliances involving UniGR members, such as UNIVERSEH, Transform4Europe, UNIC, and EURECA-PRO.

Moreover, Leg-UniGR was invited to several external events to present the project outcomes and the UniGR network, including:

- 2nd Forum of European Universities Alliances (14 & 15 September 2023, Barcelona)
- Rector's meeting of EUt+ - European University of Technology (16 November 2023, online)
- DAAD Meeting of the International Offices of German universities (29 & 30 November 2023, Bonn)
- ACA Academic Cooperation Association Meeting (25 & 26 January 2024, Brussels)
- Meeting with France Universités (14 February 2024, online)
- Meeting of the EEA Strategic Framework Working Group on Higher Education (21 February 2024, Brussels)
- Transform4Europe Conference (21 & 22 February 2024, Brussels)
- ESEU-project final event (28 February 2024, Brussels)
- EGAI-project final event (7 & 8 March 2024, Chambery)
- EGAI - UNITA Spring School (18 March 2024, Timisoara)
- Final Joint event of the Erasmus+ pilot projects (29 April 2024, Brussels)

- GECT Eurorégion Nouvelle-Aquitaine Euskadi Navarra Cross-border summer school (15 July 2024, Bayonne)
- EUA Funding Forum: sense & sustainability: future paths for university finances (3 & 4 October 2024, Helsinki)

This wide dissemination ensures that the project's insights and policy advice will continue to benefit other institutions and networks, contributing to the broader landscape of cross-border university cooperation in Europe.

Leg-UniGR FINDINGS

Findings related to the non-profit association under Luxemburgish law (a.s.b.l)

Advantages of the a.s.b.l.:

- **Support to UniGR operations**: The a.s.b.l. structure has facilitated the successful evolution of UniGR, helping to solidify the alliance's operations under a national legal framework.
- **Simpler to Establish**: The foundation process for an a.s.b.l. in Luxembourg is straightforward and can be completed quickly. This is particularly advantageous compared to Germany, where associations require at least seven founding members and often carry a 'leisure club' image.
- **Legal Flexibility**: The legal framework in Luxembourg allows for the accession of other universities to the a.s.b.l., supporting the expansion of the network.
- **Alignment with UniGR's Activities**: The activities permitted under the a.s.b.l. structure are well-aligned with those envisaged by UniGR, ensuring compatibility with the alliance's goals.
- **Eligibility for Funding**: The a.s.b.l. is eligible for funding opportunities and is structured as a non-profit entity, which aligns with UniGR's mission and financial requirements.

Disadvantages of the a.s.b.l.:

- **Governance Requirements**: The a.s.b.l. structure necessitates the creation of a general assembly and a board of directors, adding layers of governance that may complicate decision-making processes.
- **Limitations for European Development**: While the a.s.b.l. has been effective at the national level, its national structure has inherent limitations that restrict UniGR's ability to progress and develop at the European level.

Findings related to the EGTC

Advantages of the EGTC:

- **Enhanced Visibility**: The EGTC could significantly increase UniGR's visibility at both the European and Greater Region levels, improving its recognition and influence
- **Increased Funding Opportunities**: By adopting a European legal status, the EGTC could open up additional funding, including access to European, regional, and national financial support.
- **Strengthened Governance and Infrastructure**: The EGTC structure could strengthen UniGR's governance and infrastructure, providing a more robust and credible framework for cross-border cooperation.
- **Permanent and Autonomous Structure**: The EGTC is a permanent, autonomous entity with legal personality under public or private law, enabling it to conclude contracts, employ staff, manage budgets, and participate in tenders.
- **Diverse Objectives and Tasks**: The EGTC can implement a wide range of territorial cooperation programmes, including INTERREG, regional projects, and territorial strategies, offering flexibility in its operations.
- **Simplified Governance**: Unlike the a.s.b.l., which requires both a general assembly and a board of directors, the EGTC can operate with a single decision-making body, streamlining governance.

- **Flexibility in Applicable Law**: The EGTC structure allows flexibility in the applicable law, enabling UniGR to maintain its current organisation with an official seat in Luxembourg and an operational seat, as a branch office, in Saarbrücken or elsewhere, supporting a fully cross-border operational scheme.

Disadvantages of the EGTC:

- **Political Support Requirement**: Establishing an EGTC requires the political support of the concerned Member States, making exchanges prior to its creation crucial. Identifying and communicating with competent authorities can be difficult and time-consuming.
- **Dependency on National Law**: The EGTC is heavily dependent on national laws, particularly when it comes to hiring staff, which can create challenges in aligning operations across borders.
- **Legal and Tax Advice Costs**: The EGTC may incur significant costs for legal and tax advice, which need to be optimised to ensure efficient operation.
- **Time-Consuming Amendments**: Any amendments to the founding documents of the EGTC can be time-consuming, potentially slowing down decision-making and adaptations to new circumstances.
- **Limitations within the Academic Field**: The EGTC, while offering a solid legal basis, has limitations within the academic field. Specifically, the legal structure of the EGTC itself cannot be recognised as a Higher Education Institution (HEI), which limits its eligibility for certain European funding calls, including Erasmus+.
- **Liability Concerns**: The EGTC's lack of initial limitation of liability posed challenges for some partners due to regional legal constraints on liability under the Rhineland-Palatinate Higher Education Act. While this specific challenge was solved by a change in the Rhineland-Palatinate legislation, other higher education institutions might face similar issues.

The project concluded that although not perfectly tailored for academic cooperation, the EGTC meets most needs for a cross-border university alliance, especially in a financially auditable, not-for-profit structure under public law. The EGTC status was judged to be better suited than the existing legal entity, and other available forms either at national or European level.

Following this analysis, the EGTC founding documents elaborated upon during the Leg-UniGr project were confirmed by the UniGr Council in November 2023 and revised by the Luxembourgish Ministry for Spatial Planning in February 2024. A finalised version of the statutes paved the way for the start of the official founding process of the EGTC for UniGr. It is expected that the EGTC for UniGr would become operational in 2026.

Leg-UniGR POLICY ADVICE

- **Suggestion for a mechanism to resolve legal and administrative obstacles in a cross-border context**: The project highlights the need for a robust European framework to address legal and administrative obstacles in transnational and cross-border contexts. In this context, the European Parliament in September 2023 requested the Commission to submit a proposal for a regulation on a Border Regions' Instrument. As a result, the Commission has adopted a Proposal of a Regulation on Facilitating Cross-Border Solutions in December 2023, to help Member States resolve obstacles that are impacting cross-border regions. The Commission's proposal will be discussed with the co-legislators, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union.

- **Suggestion to Adapt the EGTC for Higher Education Collaboration**: The way forward is to adapt existing structures, such as the EGTC, to higher education to fully support higher education services mid-term, until a new legal instrument for university cooperation can be put in place. By evolving Regulations (EC) No 1082/2006 and (EU) No 1302/2013, the EGTC can successfully facilitate cross-border and transnational cooperation between higher education institutions within the European Union, including providing classes and European labelling of diplomas. This choice of an adapted EGTC would enable a fast, more efficient, and integrated collaboration between European higher education institutions, and successful training of the future workforce in the Member states.

MORE INFORMATION?

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| STYX |
|---|
| *European University of Technology (EUt+) status and structure experience* |

Project duration: from 01.04.2023 to 30.04.2024

STYX OBJECTIVES

The STYX project, developed by the European University of Technology (EUt+), aimed to explore the creation of a legal status for alliances of higher education institutions. The project aimed to pilot and assess the structures, processes, and legal frameworks needed to integrate higher education institutions within the EUt+ alliance, supporting their potential full merger. Specifically, it aimed to:

- Support the embedding of key EUt+ processes (decision-making, resource allocation, implementation) into the daily operations of alliance members to offer a seamless experience.
- Define common standards and guidelines that characterise an EUt+ campus, with teams continuously self-assessing their implementation with guidance and support by a dedicated unit.
- Create and refine a trajectory for governance bodies and processes that support a progressively integrative approach of the alliance members towards the alliance's eventual merger, with clear documentation and decision-making frameworks to guide their evolution.
- Establish a European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) to integrate common services for alliance members, beginning with data management and information services. The EGTC should provide added value to all individual members and thus reinforce the common trajectory of EuT+ towards a merger.

COMPOSITION OF STYX
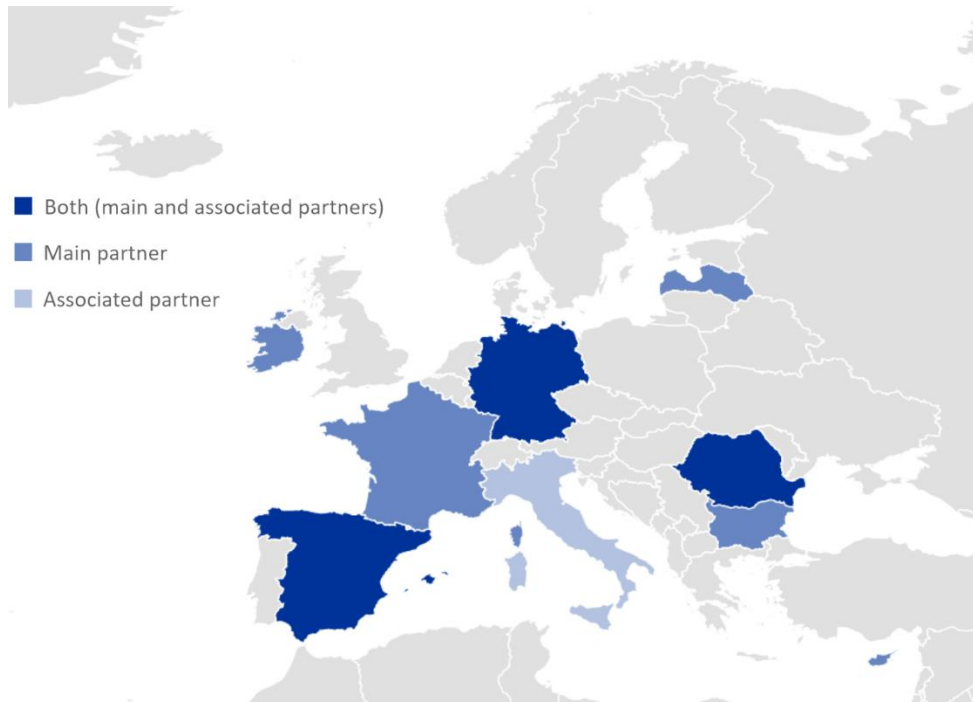
Full partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
University of Technology of Troyes (UTT)	FR	Higher education institution	EUt+
University of Applied Sciences Darmstadt (H-DA)	DE	Higher education institution	EUt+
Riga Technical University (RTU)	LV	Higher education institution	EUt+
Technical University of Sofia (TUS)	BG	Higher education institution	EUt+
Technological University of Dublin (TU Dublin)	IE	Higher education institution	EUt+
Cyprus University of Technology (CUT)	CY	Higher education institution	EUt+
Polytechnic University of Cartagena (UPCT)	ES	Higher education institution	EUt+
Technical University of Cluj-Napoca (UTC)	RO	Higher education institution	EUt+

Associated partners

Name	Country	Category	Linked alliance of higher education institutions
University of Extremadura (UEx)	ES	Higher education institution	EU GREEN
University of Turin (UNITO)	IT	Higher education institution	UNITA
University of Cologne (UNI-KOELN)	DE	Higher education institution	EUniWell

STYX ACTIVITIES AND MAIN DELIVERABLES

The STYX project, as part of the European University of Technology (EUt+), was created to address the specific challenges faced by EUt+ in its journey towards deeper integration and potential full merger as a single transnational university. Unlike other alliances, EUt+ lacks the extensive experience in legal frameworks. Additionally, EUt+ has one of the most ambitious goals among universities alliances—to merge into a single university. This high level of ambition requires a robust and suitable legal status that can support such an integration, something that existing legal instruments cannot fully provide.

STYX approached this challenge not by seeking the best legal status from a purely legal perspective, but by pragmatically asking what common actions need to be supported by a legal status to facilitate EUt+'s ambitious goals, while at the same time allowing for a meaningful "affectio societatis". The project focused

on creating shared structures and processes that could enable this integration, treating the legal status as a facilitator rather than the final objective.

Key deliverables of the STYX project include:

- **Analysis Leading to the Choice of the EGTC**: This document details the rationale behind selecting the EGTC as the most suitable interim legal status for EUt+.
- **Installation Guide**: Serving as a business plan, this guide describes the mission, tasks, structure, and required competencies of the legal entity necessary for implementing the EGTC.
- **Roadmap for common services provision**: This document outlines the strategic and operational steps needed to implement the chosen legal status, detailing the timeline for active and upcoming work.
- **Comparative Report on Legal Status Pilots**: STYX produced a summary report comparing the four Erasmus+ pilot projects, including interviews with leads from other projects such as EGAI, Leg-UniGR, and ESEU, as well as coordinators from other alliances. It presents the generally made observation that no existing national or European legal status for alliances of universities presently accommodates the needs of universities and concludes with a proposal for amendments to the existing ETGC Regulation to allow accommodating these specific requirements for such legal entities being a transnational university and wanting to act as such.

STYX findings

The STYX project identified that **a legal status for universities alliances is crucial for facilitating the sharing of resources and conducting joint activities across borders within Europe**. Such a legal status would help overcome the challenges associated with managing human, physical, digital, and financial resources needed for transnational collaboration as a European higher education institution. Establishing a European legal entity can offer significant benefits, such as creating a clear identity, ensuring legitimate representation, enhancing credibility, and enabling joint transnational activities, including in the field of education. Additionally, it would facilitate funding acquisition and ensure accountability and transparency in decision-making.

However, none of the existing national or EU legal instruments fully address the needs of higher education institutions. Current legal entities of alliances of higher education institutions cannot be recognised as higher education institutions, which prevents them from exercising some powers conferred by public law. As a result, they are unable to enrol students, award academic qualification or degrees, participate in the Erasmus Charter for higher education, employ academic staff across borders, or access university-specific research funding.

Recognising these limitations, STYX identified the need for a European legal status specifically catered to transnational cooperation between higher education institutions. Such a status would lay the foundation for effective transnational cooperation, offering attractive opportunities at regional, national, European, and global levels for students, teachers, and researchers.

Despite the lack of a perfect solution, STYX has decided to establish a EGTC for the EUt+ alliance as an interim measure. While not ideal, the EGTC was chosen as the most relevant legal status available after a thorough business case analysis. This strategic approach will support the integration of EUt+ while a more suitable long-term solution is developed. The main advantages and disadvantages of an EGTC for EUt+ are listed below:

Advantages

- **Long-Term Cooperation Framework for transnational cooperation:** Provides a reliable and enduring framework for ongoing cooperation and investment among member institutions.
- **Support for Joint Services**: Facilitates the creation and delivery of shared services, such as information platforms and academic support, across the alliance.

- **Structured Resource Pooling**: Enables the effective pooling and mutualisation of resources across alliance members.
- **Streamlined Governance:** Establishes a clear governance structure that addresses accountability, liability, and decision-making within the alliance.
- **Precedent for Use**: Utilises an existing legal instrument that has been employed successfully by other cross-border and transnational groupings, providing a well-defined legal space for collaboration.
- **Geared for Public Bodies**: The EGTC is specifically designed for public bodies, making it the most suitable instrument for alliances like EUt+ that consist of public universities.
- **Uniform Legal Application:** Ensures consistent legal treatment and participation across all member states within the alliance.
- **Operational Flexibility:** Allows for the establishment of registered and branch offices in multiple countries, providing operational adaptability.
- **Simplified Formation Process:** Does not require prior international agreements, streamlining the process of establishing the EGTC.

Disadvantages

- **Inability to Operate as a Higher Education Institution:** The EGTC cannot function as a higher education institution, meaning it cannot handle core academic activities such as student enrolment, awarding qualifications or degrees, or managing academic staff. For that same reason, the EGTC is not legally recognised for academic accreditation purposes, preventing participation in quality assurance, rankings, and certain academic networks.
- **Exclusion from Erasmus Charter for Higher Education and Similar Programmes:** The EGTC cannot obtain the Erasmus Charter or participate in similar student mobility programmes, limiting opportunities for student exchanges.
- **Ineligibility for Certain Research Funding:** The EGTC is restricted from applying for certain research funding programmes, which could hinder the alliance's ability to secure financial resources for research.
- **Lengthy Establishment Process:** Establishing an EGTC involves a time-consuming process, which may create administrative and operational challenges.
- **Focus on Administrative Rather than Academic Integration:** The EGTC primarily supports administrative and service provision activities, which may not align with the alliance's goals for deeper academic integration.

STYX POLICY ADVICE

SYX project found that a new, dedicated legal instrument is necessary to fully support transnational higher education cooperation in the long-term. However, in the meantime, it is recommended to adapt existing instruments, such as the EGTC, to create an experimental space for testing and refining potential legal frameworks. This approach provides a medium-term solution while laying the groundwork for the eventual development of a comprehensive and tailored legal instrument, designed in close collaboration with higher education institutions and policymakers to meet the unique needs of cross-border collaboration of higher education institutions. Specific **policy advice** are listed below:

For creating a new instrument

- **Foster Co-Creation and Experimentation**:
  o Extend the current Erasmus+ pilot projects to enable higher education institutions to work collaboratively with policymakers at both European and national levels, focusing on co-creating solutions that address practical obstacles in transnational cooperation.
  o Use the experimental approach to pilot, refine, and share recommendations across different universities alliances, learning from common phenomena and practices that emerge to inform the development of the new instrument.

- o Support a learning-by-doing approach, recognising that good practices will naturally emerge when there is sufficient space for experimentation and growth.
- **Embrace and Accept Organic Evolution**:
  - o Avoid imposing overly rigid frameworks that could stifle natural growth and innovation, acknowledging that the development of universities alliances cannot be precisely predicted.
  - o Ensure that the new legal instrument is open-ended, adaptable, and capable of evolving in response to the dynamic needs of institutions across Europe.

For amending the EGTC regulation to higher education cooperation

- **Introduction of European Grouping for University/Academic Cooperation (EGUC/EGAC)**: Amend or extend the existing EGTC regulation to allow the creation of a special type of EGTC, termed EGUC or EGAC, as an additional possible type of EGTC, specifically tailored for university cooperation.
- **Recognition as Public Higher Education Institutions**: Ensure that EGUCs are recognised as public higher education institutions, which would enable them to:
  - o Exist and be accredited based on defined quality criteria.
  - o Execute powers for awarding academic degrees, both national and European.
  - o Enrol students.
  - o Access the Erasmus Charter for higher education, being eligible for university funding programmes.
- **Ease of Operation as a Public Non-Profit Entity**: Suggest general adaptations to ease the operation of EGUCs as public non-profit entities, addressing aspects such as:
  - o Founding and membership processes.
  - o Liability and taxation considerations.
  - o Auditing requirements.
  - o Management of staff and data.
  - o Designation of the main seat and additional sites.

MORE INFORMATION?

Please visit *https://www.univ-tech.eu/the-styx-project-towards-a-status-1*
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