

4EU+ European University Alliance

Strategy 2025 - 2035

September 2024

4eu+

Preamble

The 4EU+ European University Alliance brings together **eight research-intensive, public universities** from different regions across Europe. Created in 2019, 4EU+ has grown into a dynamic community currently made up of over 325,000 students, 26,000 academics, and 27,000 staff members.

Since the start, our vision has been clear: together, we aim at creating a truly integrated European university system, marked by a new quality of cooperation in education, research, innovation and outreach. This ambition is embodied in the core statement, developed in 2022, which sets the foundation for this Strategy: building ***One Comprehensive European Research-Intensive University***.

The expression highlights the distinctive features of our Alliance: we *share a common ambition* and are committed to consolidating resources and decision-making processes to achieve it. Our institutions are marked by outstanding *research capacity* and strong ***multi- and interdisciplinary profiles***. We strive to establish a ***university system*** founded on a **shared set of core values: academic freedom, accessible higher education for all, student-centred approach, diversity and inclusion, and service to society**. We are ***European in identity***. As such, it is at the core of our mission to rebalance talent flows, integrate ecosystems and, above all, equip the next generations of citizens to solve the global challenges of our times.

Building on this vision, our universities have already successfully launched new joint programs and educational projects, building bridges across institutions and disciplines. We have increased the mobility of students, academics and staff and we have fostered scientific collaborations.

The 2025-2035 4EU+ Strategy is the result of the strategic reflections initiated in the Alliance pilot phase and the outcome of a wide consultation carried out within our community. Its aim is to **further expand and deepen our collaboration**, by singling out the **4EU+ ambitions** in and across **four domains: education, research, innovation and global outreach**. Through the definition of specific key focus areas and actions related to each domain, the Strategy will serve as a concrete roadmap to guide our future steps. Its very duration speaks for both the awareness of the time needed to realize *One Comprehensive Research-Intensive University* and the **long-term commitment** of our universities to do so.

As a consortium of leading European research universities, the 4EU+ Alliance aspires to be a landmark for the European Higher Education and Research Area. By creating an integrated interuniversity campus, 4EU+ is actively contributing to the development of European University Alliances as **universities of the future**.

Enabling conditions

To successfully implement our strategy, we will rely on a continuously developing enabling framework, serving as fundamental basis to foster cooperation.

Committed leadership - Since its creation, 4EU+ has set up a robust and multi-layered joint governance structure, fully embedded within the governance of each institution. In 2021, moreover, our Alliance created a proper legal entity providing transversal support to all members. The implementation of the 4EU+ Strategy will thus be steered by a strong and committed leadership supported by a joint structure fostering internal coordination as well as external visibility and exchange.

Pooling of resources - Through EU funded projects and substantial internal investments, our universities have already supported the setting up of joint services and structures and have launched various internal calls for funding to enhance educational activities, research collaborations and mobility. The 2025-2035 Strategy builds on the idea of continuing pooling resources, also by further leveraging EU and national funding opportunities, to maximise the potential of our cooperation within an increasingly integrated university system.

Inclusive decision-making - The progressive embedment of 4EU+ activities in our universities' communities, along with significant student involvement, are both objectives of the strategy and core enablers in its realization. In this vein, strategic actions will be constantly monitored and assessed. Regular reporting, collecting feedback and potentially revising actions will then be carried on: within the four 4EU+ Flagships; through the auditing and reviewing procedures ensured by the Alliance quality management system; within the 4EU+ Working Groups and by involving the different universities' levels as well as students' representatives. Such a process will not only ensure transparency but also enhance engagement.

Dialogue with partners and stakeholders - Finally, 4EU+ collaborates with its Associated partners and other actors in the member institutions' ecosystems. The Alliance is also actively engaged in policy dialogue with relevant stakeholders including other Alliances, European, national, regional institutions and networks of higher education institutions. The vision outlined in the strategy as well as progress or obstacles in its realization will be shared with partners and stakeholders to identify solutions, showcase emerging best practices and ultimately contribute to the development of the entire higher education sector.

The 4EU+ Flagships

The four 4EU+ Flagships programmes are broad thematic areas that form the basis for interdisciplinary cooperation in research, teaching and innovation among our eight universities. They initiate and realize a wide range of activities within the Alliance focusing on key issues to address topical global challenges.

Flagship 1: *Urban Health and Demographic Change*

Flagship 2: *Europeanness, multilingualism, pluralities, citizenship*

Flagship 3: *Digitisation - Modelling - Transformation*

Flagship 4: *Environmental Transitions*

Strategic ambitions

The 4EU+ strategic ambitions are gathered along four domains: education, research, innovation and global outreach. Considered together, the domains outline an integrated vision with intertwined objectives across all the university missions.

Education Domain

For the next decade, the 4EU+ Alliance vision is to strengthen and further expand collaborations in education across our universities. Our underlying aim is to provide 4EU+ students and learners with the competences and skills needed to tackle the green and digital transitions, as well as to address the opportunities and challenges of rapidly changing societies.

We build on a variety of ongoing and completed activities which led, for instance, to the launch of two Joint Programmes, a catalogue of shared courses, new mobility schemes and the setting up of joint services such as the 4EU+ Centre for Innovative and Digital Teaching and Learning.

The 4EU+ ambition for the future is to ensure that all students have access to at least one educational component offered by 4EU+ during their degree programs.

Key focus areas:

Consolidating a common research-based educational framework – research-based education, driven by our four 4EU+ Flagships, has been central in the bottom-up development of our current educational activities and offer. For the period 2025-2035:

- We will further expand the 4EU+ educational offer at all levels - from BAs to postgraduate programmes - by setting up joint degrees and programmes, as well as different types of educational opportunities such as shared courses, joint doctorates and MOOCs.
- We will enlarge our lifelong learning offer by developing, in particular, a 4EU+ catalogue of micro-credentials.
- We will support the students' development of a shared portfolio of transversal skills and competences.

Ensuring seamless access to educational opportunities – strengthening our interuniversity campus is fundamental to enhance students' and learners' easy access to 4EU+ educational opportunities across all universities, in respect of the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion. To achieve this:

- We will increase virtual, physical and hybrid mobility opportunities, including through the comparison of curricula and Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs).
- We will strive to further align our administrative support and credit recognition processes to grant efficient assistance to all students and learners.

Enhancing support to teachers – 4EU+ will bolster integrated support to teachers ranging from local assistance at the university level to 4EU+ dedicated task forces. In particular:

- We will strengthen integrated expert support to teachers in the development of innovative pedagogies.
- We will offer shared tools to make administrative and organizational processes linked to the design, management and sustainability of educational activities simpler.

Fostering clear communication – making 4EU+ educational opportunities visible and accessible to all students and learners is vital. To this end:

- We will enhance common infrastructures aimed at facilitating visibility and access to 4EU+ opportunities such as the 4EU+ Student Portal.
- We will develop a comprehensive communication plan, based on the use diversified channels and tools, to clearly present the 4EU+ educational offer to enrolled as well as prospective students and learners.

The 4EU+ graduate portfolio of skills and competences

Multilingualism –

Data literacy -

Critical thinking -

Entrepreneurship –

Social engagement -

Possible updates of the list to be discussed

4EU+QUALITY

The quality of our overall educational offer is continuously enhanced by our Quality Management System.

Based on cycles of internal auditing and external reviewing procedures, in line with the *Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, 4EU+QUALITY provides our Alliance with a sustainable framework for the development of our educational opportunities.

Research Domain

The 4EU+ Alliance vision for 2025-2035 is to create an integrated framework to enhance collaborative research across our universities, throughout Europe and beyond. Through our four Flagships and moving beyond the short-term project logic, we intend to seize the potential of durable research partnerships created within the 4EU+ consolidating community.

In just a few years, our universities have already laid solid bases for enabling cooperation in research. Building on existing competences, we have launched new joint services - such as the 4EU+ Grant Support Service - and training initiatives. We have also provided researchers with mini-grants and seed funding to initiate innovative projects.

The 4EU+ ambition for the future is to empower our researchers and to promote long-term collaborations to carry on excellent, interdisciplinary research with significant European added-value.

Key focus areas:

Nurturing research networks - Experimenting with innovative models for enhancing collaborative research across large, comprehensive universities is not only at the heart of 4EU+ activities but it also has the potential of benefitting the entire European Research Area. With this view:

- We will enhance the creation of networks and of 4EU+ Virtual Institutes carrying on interdisciplinary research programmes across our four Flagships, focusing on topics that are relevant at the European level.
- We will keep supporting, through internal funding schemes, novel research projects as well as visiting professorships.

Supporting the 4EU+ researchers of the future - By investing in the future generation of researchers, we aim at creating a seamless platform for collaboration throughout the European research community. To achieve this:

- We will support PhDs and early-career researchers by equipping them with the essential skills and transversal competences to maximise their potential as researchers.
- We will promote interdisciplinary seasonal schools for PhDs and joint supervisions, and incentivise PhDs and early-career researchers mobility.

Streamlining access to research infrastructures - Our universities operate and manage a wide range of cutting-edge research infrastructures. To seize this potential:

- We will develop innovative models for enhancing access to core facilities, research infrastructures and e-infrastructures by 4EU+ researchers and PhDs across our institutions.
- We will facilitate the exchange and upskilling of our technical staff, promoting the circulation of expertise.

Strengthening research support - Effective and coordinated research support is key to promoting synergies and facilitating access to funding opportunities. Hence:

- We will enhance and broaden our joint support services to assist researchers in building collaborations and in the preparation of joint proposals for calls in Horizon Europe and future FP10, with a particular focus on Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA).
- We will foster, also through mobility, the training and professionalisation of our research managers and administrators.

Innovation Domain

The 4EU+ Alliance vision in the domain of innovation is to progressively integrate the ecosystems and innovation hubs of our universities and to make them accessible for students, researchers, and organisations. Our aim is to foster collaboration in the development of innovative ideas and entrepreneurial solutions to address today's and future challenges.

We build on our universities' strong ties and collaborations with 4EU+ Associated Partners in the business sector and with relevant stakeholders in their ecosystems as well as on pilot 4EU+ activities to foster entrepreneurship.

For the 2025-2035 period, the 4EU+ ambition is to increase joint projects and partnerships in the field of innovation as fundamentally linked to education and applied as well as basic research.

Key focus areas:

Developing a thriving innovation culture – Equipping students and researchers with the skills to create impactful solutions as well as developing institutional capacity to support entrepreneurship are crucial drivers to develop a dynamic innovation culture. Therefore:

- We will create a 4EU+ shared catalogue of specialized courses, workshops and training to strengthen, within our community, skills in technological transfer and entrepreneurship.
- We will create a 4EU+ Virtual Innovation & Entrepreneurship Centre to serve as hub for exchanging best practices across our universities, organising joint webinars and offering support to our researchers through advice and networking.

Fostering interdisciplinary cooperation – As comprehensive universities, 4EU+ partners develop excellent research in a variety of fields. Building on our respective strengths:

- We will enhance interdisciplinary collaboration, within and across our universities, also through internal funding, to tackle complex challenges and spark new ideas.
- We will offer integrated support in the identification of funding opportunities and in the preparation of joint applications to EU programmes supporting innovation.

Integrating ecosystems – Our universities act as gateways to vibrant regional and national ecosystems marked by expertise and innovation capacity in diverse fields. To harness this potential:

- We will organise dedicated events to connect business partners and researchers across our different ecosystems opening up our universities' existing collaborations and ultimately our regional markets.
- We will design flexible educational pathways such as micro-credentials, to address professionals' reskilling and upskilling needs.
- We will promote 4EU+ joint traineeships and internships programmes.

Bringing innovative ideas to the market – Research-intensive universities can play a pivotal role in positioning Europe at the forefront of new technologies development. With this view:

- We will explore possible avenues to favour the creation of spin-outs and start-ups within and across our universities.
- We will strive to expand our contacts with global venture capital firms through networking events and the setting up of joint collaborations.

Global outreach domain

The Global Outreach domain is a bridge linking activities across the three other domains: education, research, and innovation. Through this synergy, we aim to facilitate collaboration among researchers and with policymakers, fostering science-based solutions to address pressing societal challenges. We also intend to promote public engagement, particularly through citizen science activities, with the view of enhancing the Science–Policy and Science–Society interface.

We build on our universities' existing collaborations and on 4EU+ pilot projects already activated within 4EU+.

The 4EU+ ambition for the future is to build impactful collaborations with international organizations, NGOs, and global partners while launching, in parallel, new public engagement and citizen science activities in synergy with the communities in our universities' ecosystems.

Key Focus Areas:

Equipping researchers with policy-dialogue and outreach skills – Training and support to researchers are fundamental instruments to foster participation in policy-development processes and promote effective outreach activities. To this end:

- We will train and provide guidance to 4EU+ researchers on how to engage with policymakers and stakeholders. The competencies acquired in this context will also serve as a basis to establish a scientific dialogue with institutions at all levels.
- We will set up specific training on public engagement and citizen science, addressing in particular PhDs and early career researchers.

Supporting partnerships with international organizations, NGOs, and global partners – European university alliances have the potential to enhance international collaborations to address key global transformations and policies. With this view:

- We will support, also through internal funding, projects addressing and involving international organizations, NGOs, and global partners.
- We will explore possible avenues to set up durable partnerships with international organizations, NGOs, and global partners.

Strengthening public engagement and citizen science activities – Involving citizens in scientific debates and activities is fundamental as today's societies face new challenges and technological developments. Therefore:

- building on our collaborations in education and research, we will support, also through internal funding, public engagement and citizen science activities, for instance by promoting MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses).

Fostering exchange with EU institutions and other alliances – Collaboration and dialogue at the EU level are fundamental to monitor and contribute to policy developments. With this aim:

- we will engage in constant dialogue with EU institutions and relevant actors to monitor emerging European policy priorities related to research and higher education and to proactively contribute to policy developments.
- We will collaborate with other European University Alliances to exchange best practices and to jointly work towards the removal of obstacles to deepened collaborations among European universities.

Looking forward

The 4EU+ Strategy 2025-2035 will be a vital instrument for consolidating our Alliance as ***One Comprehensive European Research-Intensive University***, an integrated interuniversity campus that fosters the circulation of talent and knowledge across Europe and beyond. We will embed our ambitions in education, research, and innovation in pivotal areas, such as environmental sustainability, artificial intelligence, digital transformation, and global health, with the commitment of driving transformative progress. Together, we will build a vibrant ecosystem of European and global partners with the view of remain at the forefront of addressing global challenges and advancing the European Research, Education, and Innovation Areas.