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Europe's Civic University Alliance

CIVIS European University Alliance Model & Sustainability Strategy

CIVIS2 Deliverable 12.1

Approved by the Steering Committee of CIVIS
on 17 September 2026

The CIVIS Alliance member universities

Here are the names of the universities and their acronyms as we use them in CIVIS.

Full member universities

AMU	Aix-Marseille Université
NKUA	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
UB	University of Bucharest
ULB	Université libre de Bruxelles
UofG	University of Glasgow
UNIL	University of Lausanne
UAM	Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
SUR	Sapienza Università di Roma
PLUS	University of Salzburg
SU	Stockholm University
UT	University of Tübingen

Associate member universities

UH2C	Université Hassan II de Casablanca
UCAD	Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
MAK	Makerere University
UEM	Universidade Eduardo Mondlane
USF	Université de Sfax

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CIVIS – Europe's Civic University Alliance

CIVIS is formed by the alliance of 11 leading research-intensive higher education institutions across Europe: Aix-Marseille Université, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Université libre de Bruxelles, University of Bucharest, University of Glasgow, University of Lausanne, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Sapienza Università di Roma, Paris Lodron University of Salzburg, Stockholm University and Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen. Six prestigious African universities join CIVIS as Associate Members: Université Hassan II de Casablanca, Université Cheikh Anta Diop de Dakar, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, Makerere University, Eduardo Mondlane University, Université de Sfax.

CIVIS brings together a community of more than 470,000 students and 58,000 staff members, including 35,000 academics and researchers in Europe alone. Including Associate Members, the Alliance counts 720,000 students and 75,000 staff members.

The Authors

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and the entire **CIVIS Community**

1 Alliance
11 Universities
Countless Possibilities

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CIVIS 2 Work Packages and Streams

The CIVIS2 project is organised around three broad Streams, the Alliance's key areas of activity. Each Stream brings together different operational Work Packages that turn our Alliance's priorities into action.

WP1	Management and Governance	
WP2	Civic Engagement and Challenge-Based Education Strategy	Stream 1: Challenge-Based Education and Civic Engagement
WP3	Challenge-Based Local to Global Educational Activities	
WP4	Local to Global Civic Engagement Projects	
WP5	Enabling the Shared Inter-University Campus	
WP6	Connecting Student Communities through the Inter-University Campus	Stream 2: Inter-University Campus
WP7	Connecting Staff Communities through the Inter-University Campus	
WP8	Embedding Shared Educational Offer	
WP9	Accredited Shared Undergraduate (Bachelor) and Graduate (Master) Educational Offer	Stream 3: Embedded Joint Educational offer
WP10	Doctoral Educational Offer	
WP11	Accredited Modular Educational Offer	
WP12	Consolidation	
WP13	Impact and Dissemination	

Acronyms and Abbreviations

BoR	Board of Rectors
EG	Expert Group
CIVIS	CIVIS – Europe's Civic University Alliance
CIVIS 1	Erasmus+ project "CIVIS" from 2019 to 2022
CIVIS 2	Erasmus+ project "CIVIS2 " from 2022 to 2026
CIVIS 2.1	Erasmus+ project "CIVIS2.1" in grant agreement preparation, planned for 2026-2028
GSC	Global Student Council
MC	Management Committee
OL	Open Lab
SC	Steering Committee
SG	Secretary general
WP	Work Package (of the CIVIS2 project, if not specified differently)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CIVIS, Europe's Civic University Alliance, is one of the largest alliances supported by Erasmus+ funding and one of the oldest, as it belongs to the first wave of 17 alliances launched and co-funded by the European Union in 2019.

Since then, CIVIS has undergone a foundational phase (funded as the project "CIVIS"), followed by an intense development and scaling phase (project "CIVIS2"). Over the past 7 years, CIVIS has thus established robust and efficient structures, which have prompted internal transformations and infused the institution-wide enthusiasm and momentum required for the collaborative activities of the Alliance to thrive.

The Alliance is not a project-based network, but a shared European inter-university campus designed to deliver long-term, systemic and sustainable transformation of higher education institutions across education (as a core mission), research, innovation and service to society. The Alliance's horizons lie well beyond the Erasmus+ funding period, as it embodies the European ambition to move from fragmented cooperation towards durable, integrated and mission-driven university alliances capable of contributing structurally to the transformation of the European Education Area and the European Research Area.

As one of the pioneer alliances, and one of the largest, CIVIS feels a considerable responsibility to reflect on conditions and processes that we experience as successful in developing and consolidating our alliance and deepening its integration. To structure our efforts in understanding and defining the optimal conditions while documenting our experience, we are committed to formalising a CIVIS Alliance Model and a Sustainability Strategy that will be living documents to be updated as the real-life experiment continues, and that can be shared with other alliances and all stakeholders who might find an interest in such documents.

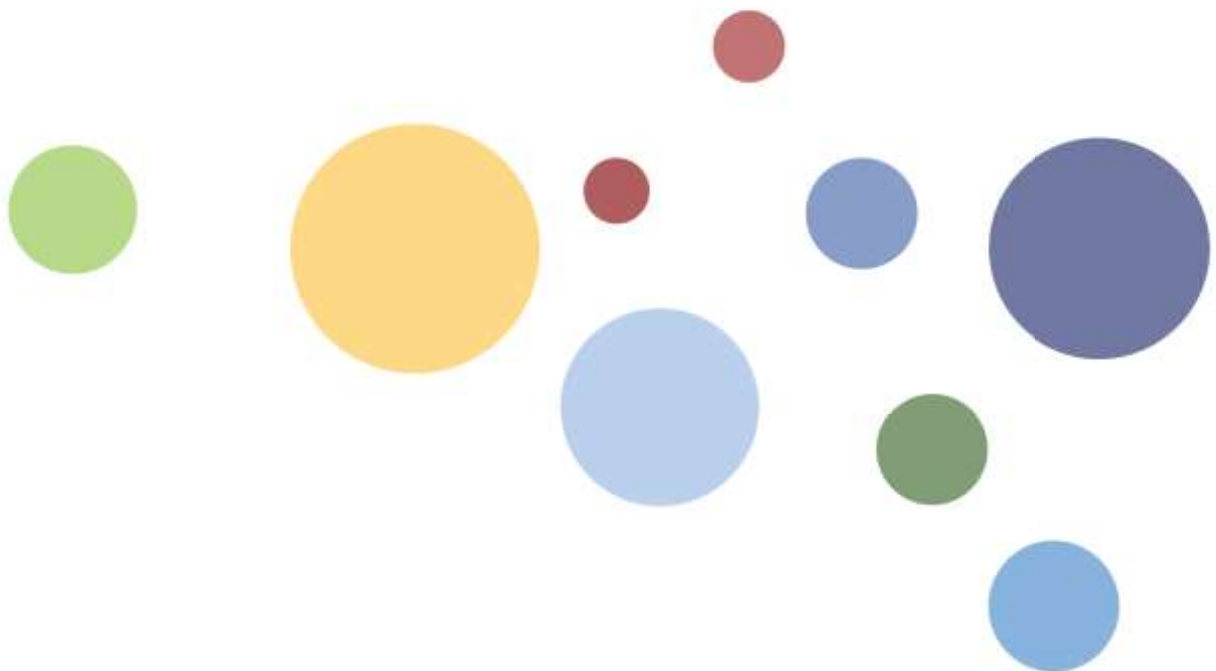
The overall objective of this report is to analyse the development of our alliance so far and outline proposals and scenarios for the future of CIVIS looking ahead 10 years and thereby consolidating the foundation for a robust and sustainable alliance.

This report presents the results of a SWOT analysis conducted after 6 years of effort and providing context to the state of the Alliance, its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The report then presents the vision, the mission, and the core values that have been identified as being shared by all universities involved and constituting a strong foundation for the development of the Alliance.

Based on the SWOT analysis and taking into consideration the foundational set of shared vision, mission and values, CIVIS has devised a strategic and institutional transformation model anticipating the next 10 years. The model is organised into 3 pillars aiming at (1) developing an even more effective and inclusive collaborative space, (2) evolving towards an agent for democracy, prosperity, and well-being, and (3) acting increasingly as a transformative force in our institutions.

A specific chapter describes the process by which CIVIS cements its sustainability by a combination of an indefinite Alliance Agreement signed by all the member universities and the establishment of a legal entity (CIVIS Association).

The report also describes the successful efforts to extend the collaborative dynamics of the Alliance beyond the borders of Europe to develop strong and innovative joint initiatives on the African continent.



1

INTRODUCTION

Strengths and Lessons Learned

Background

CIVIS brings together 11 publicly funded, comprehensive research-intensive universities in Europe that offer cutting-edge education and conduct highest-level research. CIVIS is strategically linked to six associated universities across the African continent. Embracing nearly half a million students and 75,000 staff members among the European universities makes CIVIS one of the largest and thus most influential players within the European higher education area (EHEA).

The shared agenda of the Alliance is motivated by an awareness of the many challenges facing society today in the areas of the environment and climate change, health, democracy and cultural heritage, sustainable and inclusive mobility, and digital transformation. At the heart of the alliance is the ambition to reinforce education and research links between our universities through joint educational offers, scientific collaborations, interdisciplinary exchanges, shared research infrastructure, and incentives for the co-creation of joint and intercontinental initiatives.

With more than 65 European universities alliances funded by four funding cycles within the "Partnership for Excellence" programme of Erasmus+ Key Action 2 (2021–2027), and a further 7 alliances being awarded a "Seal of excellence," we are entering an unprecedented era of international and inter-institutional cooperation in the European Education Area (EEA). These emerging groupings of higher education institutions constitute a new organisational reality, transcending traditional structures at the national level.

At the same time, the uniqueness of each member university and the complementary profile among those within each consortium are critical to the overall success and sustainability of these alliances. In its aspiration for joint and innovative research-driven education, the European Universities Initiative (EUI) aligns well with the "Union of Skills" principles of the European Commission, where mobility and challenge-oriented skills, along with European values and identity, will ensure future competitiveness and autonomy in Europe.

After the Bologna process and the introduction of a harmonised degree and credit system, the formation of European Universities is considered the 3rd reform of the higher education system in Europe, due to its enormous transformative character, for both the universities involved and the novel way of jointness and a shared long-term strategy. This refers to the vision of:

1. Coordinated management and governance structures, a shared pool of resources (human resources, data and services, finances, administration, infrastructure, etc.).
2. An inter-university campus enabling mobility at all levels, joint, flexible and innovative curricula building upon interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approaches, student-centred, customisable educational offers...
3. The co-creation of knowledge in a challenge-based approach and actionable solutions to societal challenges, where students and academics work together in living labs with non-academic actors and innovative learning in creative settings.

The diversity of configurations among European universities alliances is considerable, ranging from smaller, thematically focused alliances to large, comprehensive, research-intensive ones like CIVIS. There are also differences in the transformative ambition, when it comes to centralising strategic or governance structures and the establishment of a legal entity. What unites all alliances is the willingness to engage in the transformation of higher education, to improve the quality of research and education by deep collaboration and intensive exchange of students and staff. But it is not the case that all alliances must be the same, fulfilling all of the ideas, ambitions, and desires expressed

within the European universities Initiative. Each one places the focus that best fits their context, challenges, and ambitions. CIVIS must not only determine its strategic ambitions but also anticipate their operational implementation. This requires clarifying long-term priorities and aligning them with achievable, adequately resourced actions.

The end Erasmus-funded CIVIS2 project marks 7 years of organising and deepening collaboration, and the time was ripe to take stock of where we've come and project ourselves into the future.

Methodology

In March 2025, the Board of Rectors decided to assemble a Task Force with the mandate to develop a European universities alliance model along with a sustainability strategy, including future oriented discussions on our legal entity (CIVIS Association).

This Task Force has engaged in an iterative five-stage process:

1. Collecting and analysing the position and **priorities** for the future from the **authorities** of each of the 11 member universities of the Alliance.
2. Obtaining insights gained so far as well as challenges and opportunities for the future via broad **consultation** with different CIVIS bodies (e.g. Hubs, Open Labs, Units) and functions (e.g. Institutional Coordinators, Work Package leaders).
3. **Processing** and synthesising the input retrieved in 1 & 2 to articulate options and directions for the Alliance in the medium and long term.
4. Where needed, collecting further **feedback** on emerging options.
5. **Synthesising** the information gathered in 1–4 and describing our take on a European universities alliance model and a sustainability strategy for CIVIS Alliance (including the legal entity – CIVIS Association), to be approved and endorsed by the Steering Committee and the Board of Rectors.

This process is well aligned with established procedures for developing strategies in large organisations, which most commonly include the following areas:

1. Performing an in-depth diagnosis grounded in internal data collection and recast into a **SWOT analysis**.
2. Agreeing on **vision, values** and **mission**.
3. Setting a CIVIS dynamics model structured around a set of concepts and objectives defined as **strategic pillars**.
4. Outlining guiding principles for **implementation**.

The strategy development work presented in this document is structured around these five areas. To further clarify proposed strategic goals and specific objectives, identify potential challenges, and ensure that activities are aligned with desired outcomes, a theory of change methodology was applied, where **impact** as well as examples of **outcomes, outputs** and **activities** were identified.

Core Diagnosis — SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool used to evaluate an organisation or a project's strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats. By systematically identifying these four dimensions—strengths (what the entity does well), weaknesses (areas for improvement), opportunities (favourable external factors), and threats (potential external risks or challenges)—the analysis helps stakeholders make informed decisions, align strategies, and optimise resources. A SWOT analysis thereby provides a structured framework for assessing current conditions and planning future actions.

The SWOT analysis undertaken in the current strategy development work was primarily based on responses to questions from among all CIVIS representatives, ranging from rectors to academics, and supporting administrative staff employed by universities or hired by the project funding.

The response rate was extraordinarily good and almost all CIVIS entities handed in answers to the questions. The analysis of the responses was made by combining artificial intelligence with reading and discussion exercises to provide a consolidated perspective to support strategic discussions and decision-making in the context of providing a model.

STRENGTHS

Broad consensus on core themes. Unanimous support for joint degrees, civic engagement, and expanded mobility across all 11 universities.

Strong alignment around embedding CIVIS activities into university structures. Including joint degrees (e.g. TRACEE master), modular learning, and African partnerships.

Innovative education. Formats: BIPs, modular curricula, challenge-based learning (e.g. TRACEE), and micro-credentials are widely, though not universally embraced as flagship initiatives. BIPs are the most popular format, viewed as the best of all these instruments for initiating collaborations in teaching and research and are widely commended by the students. Most institutions emphasise the integration of micro-credentials and lifelong learning into curricula.

Shared commitment to digital transformation. Development of a CIVIS digital campus is widely supported. Interest in interoperable ecosystems, governance of tools (e.g. Agora), and enhanced storytelling capacity.

Unified vision for African partnerships. Strong consensus on the importance of cooperation with African institutions, especially in governance and mobility.

WEAKNESSES

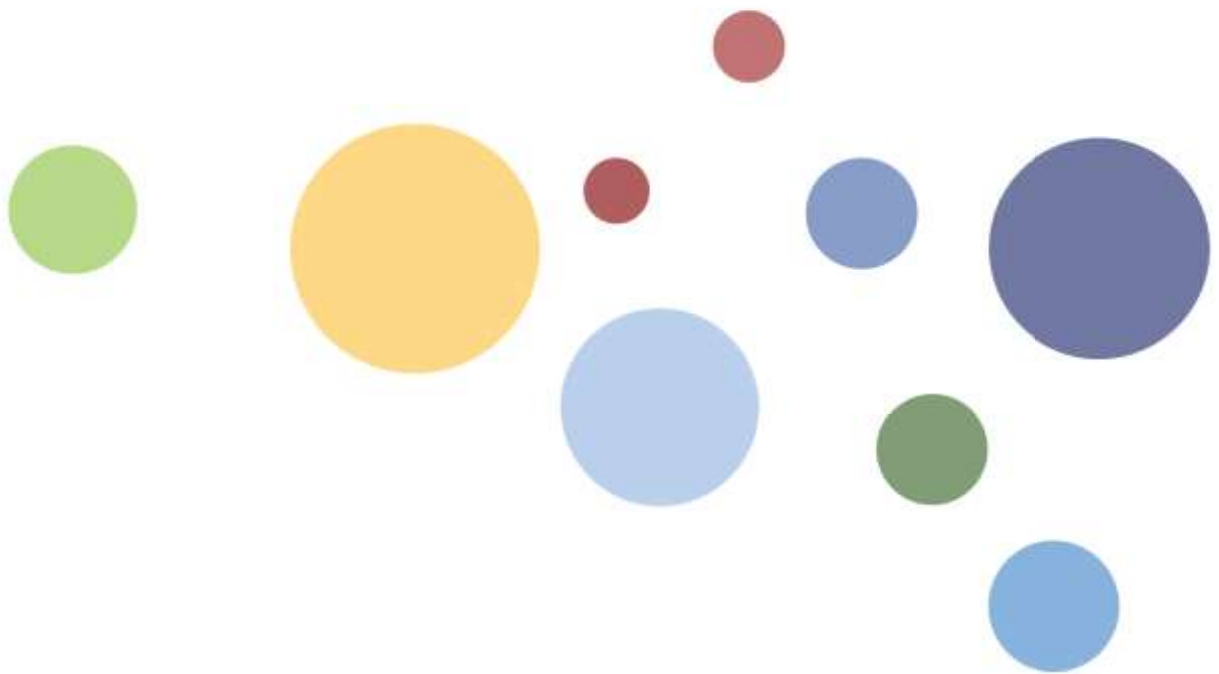
- Governance complexity & role ambiguity.** Criticism of overly complex structures and vague mandates. Need for leaner, trust-based governance with clearer roles.
- Insufficient recognition of academic labour.** CIVIS tasks and contributions are often unrecognised and uncompensated in workload models, risking disengagement.
- Fragmented communication and operational gaps.** Problems with mobility recognition, digital integration, and internal communications persist.
- Scepticism toward student-led projects.** Mixed reviews, with several universities recommending downsizing or discontinuation.
- Underfunded digital & mobility infrastructure.** Risk of stalled initiatives without sufficient funding support.
- Fragmentation and siloed contributions.** Uneven participation across thematic areas may hinder coherence.
- Lack of quality assurance structures.** Absence of dedicated QA system could affect scalability and credibility.
- Decision fatigue and structural overload.** Praise and critique of Hubs/Open labs coexisting, leading to decision fatigue.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Appeal for student mobility in Europe as overseas destinations become less attractive.**
- Support for alliances by ministries with, in some cases, extra funding.**
- Increased credibility for funding applications involving scholars and teams from CIVIS member universities.**
- Strategic use of the legal entity.** Seen as a lever for simplification, alignment, and funding access.
- Embedding civic engagement and values.** Potential to deepen identity through participatory science and co-creative ecosystems.
- Scalable research-education integration.** Advocacy for embedding research in modular teaching and multi-year planning.

THREATS

- Significant decrease in external funding.**
- Major changes in the law and regulations impeding some of the collaboration mechanisms developed within the Alliance.**



2

VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

To effectively enhance CIVIS Alliance in the medium and long term, a thorough consultation of the highest level of authority of all member universities was conducted (2022), then later updated (2025-2026), to establish and describe the shared vision and mission, and a set of core values that are essential in all institutions. These elements serve as the strategic compass to steer the Alliance towards its next phase of development.

In 2022, CIVIS Alliance carefully crafted a *Vision and Mission Statement*. A comparison of this statement with the outcome of the recent analysis of the responses from rectors, universities and CIVIS bodies resulted in a strong consensus that the parts relating to vision, mission and values are utterly relevant for the alliance in the short-, medium- and long-term.

Vision

The vision is the organisation's aspirational long-term goal. It describes the future the organisation wants to create or influence. It answers the question: **"Where do we want to go?"**

We envision our alliance as a space spreading outside European frontiers for innovative and responsible teaching, research, cultural exchanges and citizen action. As a European University, we are rooted in Europe while at the same engaging globally through our international partnerships with Africa.

Based on the solid and innovative education and scientific activity in each of the 17-institution consortium, CIVIS will unite efforts and experiences to develop a European University with an international challenge-based perspective rooted in strong links to its local social and geographical environment. It will contribute to the social, cultural and economic dynamism at both a local and global scale.

Mission

The mission defines the organisation's core purpose and how it plans to achieve its vision. It outlines what the organisation does, for whom, and how and thereby answers the question: **"What do we do, for whom, and how?"**

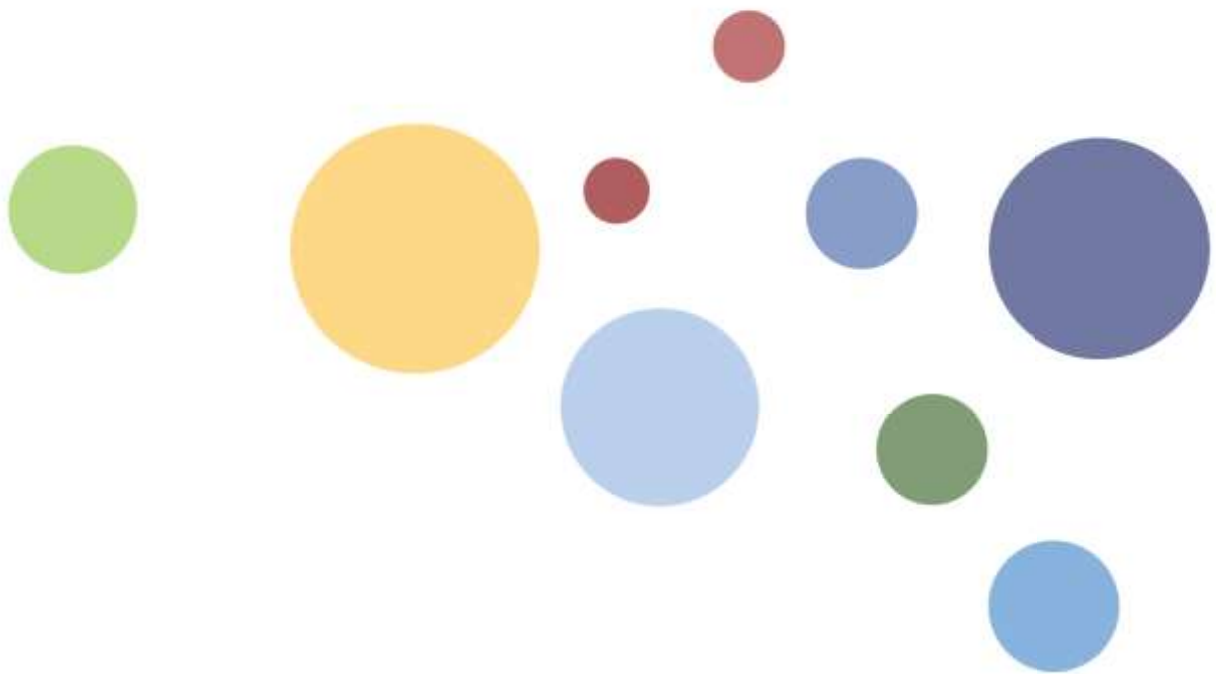
CIVIS aims to create a truly unique European interuniversity campus where students, academics, researchers and staff will move and collaborate as freely as within their institution of origin. We will develop a deep level of European integration, involving joint learning pathways, development of complementary research facilities and diverse degree pathways.

Core Values

The values are the fundamental principles and beliefs that guide an organisation's culture and decision-making. They reflect what the organisation stands for and how it behaves. They answer the question: **"What do we stand for?"**

Our shared self-understanding as European civically minded universities entails espousing a set of shared values. These principles not only shape the Alliance's own activities but also our contributions to the wider debates about the future of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as set out in the European Strategy for Universities. We consider them to be fundamental to the success of our Alliance, our respective universities, and the EHEA as a whole:

- Scientific integrity and academic freedom
- Democracy
- European integration
- Participative governance
- Civic engagement
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Open science
- Sustainability



3

STRATEGIC & INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION MODEL

Foreseeing the alliance landscape

The **institutional transformation model** that CIVIS has developed follows **the dynamics of three long-term strategic pillars**, which derived from the SWOT analysis and align with the organisation's vision, values and mission, both presented in chapters 1 and 2 respectively.



A central feature of developing a European university model is its dynamic nature, as the landscape in which it is intended to operate has yet to be fully stabilised, and it may well never be. Within CIVIS, we have therefore established both the foundations of our model—structured around three pillars detailed below—and a process for developing them from existing practices. We have thus also designed an ensemble of **guiding principles for model development** to thereby ensure its continued evolution.

Pillar 1: Effective and Inclusive Collaborative Space

Within its 17-university consortium, CIVIS Alliance has established sustainable connections through shared infrastructure (digital campus), alliance-wide teams to provide administrative support to joint projects, and fostered hundreds of collaborations between students, researchers, academic and administrative staff, at local, European and global levels. We are working together as a single organism, respecting our diversities and finding a synergy in between them at the same time.

Heightened excellence through increased jointness is the driving force steering the ambition and the reality of CIVIS. Jointness is the condition for major impact, enhanced competitiveness, and the cultivation of a civic mindset throughout our institutions, among students and staff.

CIVIS is and will continue developing and mainstreaming its "jointness", by empowering students, researchers, academic and professional staff, local communities and learners to become more powerful actors locally, at European or global level, through joint educational, research, innovation or social services. Although it is difficult to establish differentiated measures of the impact of this growing transformation and internationalisation of the Alliance's partner institutions, CIVIS can point to more than one hundred joint programmes that have been launched, over fifty joint blended intensive programmes organised each year (most of which are repeated) and a significant increase

in collaborative research projects among partner universities. This demonstrates the emergence of a large-scale, effective and inclusive collaborative space. This space is supported by—and even integrated into—a digital campus that will need to be expanded and further developed to make it even easier for our member communities to connect internationally, simplifying the development and recognition of our joint educational offers, and making the CIVIS Journey a concrete reality for students and staff who engage with the CIVIS mission.

The realisation of these internal transformations will be operationalised through specific overall objectives in terms of governance and mobility.

In terms of **governance**, CIVIS has imagined top decision-making bodies of the Alliance in a continuous reflection around its strategic orientations, with respect to and involving the university communities, local communities and also global partners. Further reflections will be undertaken to ensure continued relevance in light of changing conditions, provide stakeholders with clear and concrete avenues for engagement in the CIVIS journey, and promote long-term sustainability.

CIVIS has successfully strengthened and, in a way, reinvented forms of **mobility** (e.g. the format of Blended intensive programmes, now well established across the Alliance). With respect to the **Digital Campus**, CIVIS will continue its journey towards securing increased interoperability in line with European higher education standards. This is particularly important given the size of our alliance, where mobility and cooperation are counted not in the tens or in the hundreds, but in the thousands. Beyond the gains in efficiency, deepening our technical transformation will provide a more integrated and seamless experience for our students, academic and professional staff. This is key to making CIVIS Alliance a concrete reality for those who choose to engage with it.

Pillar 2: Agent for Democracy, Prosperity and Well-Being

The spirit of the Alliance emerges first and foremost from our dedication to Europe's integration project and cohesion. The European Union, now more than ever before, has taken on a leading role in the world for the upholding and safeguarding of the central values of the European Union: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. However, these values are not exclusive to the European Union and must be understood globally if they are to be preserved. This perspective lies at the heart of the CIVIS project, which is gradually building an international alliance of seventeen universities across Europe and Africa, all sharing the same values at the heart of their educational and research initiatives.

Today, more than ever, it is vital to maintain and secure academic freedom and to increase and consolidate the trust of our communities in science-based knowledge, in the scientific method and rationality, and in the virtues of high-quality research and education more broadly.

The name of the Alliance, CIVIS, was chosen to stress our focus on educating the European citizens of tomorrow, deeply connected to our local communities. Moreover, since our understanding of Europe's role in the world is not to close itself off, but in fact reach out in global partnerships, we placed the partnerships with leading African universities at the top of our agenda from the outset, in 2019.

The CIVIS Alliance will continue to develop and enhance its joint education focused on civic engagement, enabling our students, researchers, staff and alumni, working with local and international stakeholders, to develop solutions to global challenges.

Pillar 3: Transformative Force in our Institutions

Our internal transformations contribute to a deeper and stronger integration of the European Higher Education Area. While initially, European University alliances were the result of a political agenda seeking to transform European higher education, Alliances such as CIVIS have since become real-world laboratories for this transformation, in turn contributing to the policy development of the future of the European Higher Education Area.

For example, CIVIS has made a distinctive and widely recognised contribution to policy making on European degrees, resulting in the adoption of the European Degree label. Similarly, over the coming years, the Alliance will deploy its members' combined resources and expertise to develop more flexible, skills-oriented educational offers in line with the Union of Skills. CIVIS will continue to experiment with flexible learning pathways and their accreditation, feeding into policy-making on European Degree Pathways and on the upcoming Union of Skills by addressing persisting skills gaps and labour shortages, as outlined in the EU Competitiveness Compass (January 2025).

The work of consolidating the "jointness" of our endeavours has led to transformative processes within each institution – such as revising regulations, rethinking processes, devising new methods based on what we learn from each other and what we need from each other in order to collaborate well. These changes are often dependent on regulations that come from our national authorities, leading us to advocate for the necessary adaptations to help make our Alliance more efficient, which in turn, benefits all universities in our respective Member States in their international collaborative endeavours, and improves their attractiveness.

By jointly mobilising education, research-informed teaching, innovation and service to society, CIVIS supports the 2030 vision of a more coherent, interconnected and globally engaged European higher education system and acts as a living laboratory for policy implementation.

The realisation of these European transformations is encapsulated in the third Pillar of our 2035 Mission and is primarily operationalised through the overall objectives linked to two of our work packages: governance, as well as visibility and advocacy.

The work under governance includes the streamlining of quality assurance of educational activities and advocating for regulatory changes that would facilitate mutual recognition of learning. These tasks will constitute essential contributions to the further development of the European Higher Education Area, and to enabling the circulation of skills across the EU.

In terms of visibility, we will continue to share our knowledge and experience with European policymakers as well as other European alliances. Advocacy will seek to influence regional, national and EU policy making with respect to the European Universities initiative, the European Education, Higher Education and Research areas, ensuring that legal or regulatory bottlenecks that lie beyond the competence of CIVIS Alliance members are placed on the policy-making agenda. The CIVIS Alliance is a powerful engine of transformation for higher education in Europe as a whole.

The strategic pillars set a high level of ambition for CIVIS.

Guiding principles for model development

As members of a European University Alliance, we therefore aim to provide guidance for developing this model in line with evolving European, international and national strategies and frameworks, as well as with the degree to which these European alliances are integrated into national institutions.

To optimise the development of this model, we have established a set of guiding principles that focuses on:

- The organisational bodies needed to materialise the pillar objectives.
- The structural alignment of these bodies with the broader CIVIS governance model.

A key precondition in outlining the guideline has been to avoid describing overly detailed principles, maintaining as much of the existing organisational structure as possible, while introducing targeted adjustments to enhance flexibility, efficiency, and strategic coherence.

- **Drawing on the current governance structures of CIVIS, implement a project-based approach to achieve goals more effectively.**

Implement objectives via concrete, project-driven initiatives to enhance efficiency, ensure clarity of priorities, and foster accountability across teams.

- **Drawing on current management structures and the experience of CIVIS bodies, simplify and streamline procedures.**

Review and harmonise administrative processes to reduce complexity, improve accessibility, and facilitate smoother collaboration between academic and administrative units. This requires simplifying governance by limiting the number of existing entities and ensuring that each has a clearly defined role. In this context, it is also essential to identify how the CIVIS Association can actively support and sustain this streamlining process (see more below).

- **Drawing on the current governance structures of CIVIS, promote a flexible and agile approach to managing the Alliance.**

Foster adaptability in processes and decision-making, encourage responsiveness to emerging challenges, and enable teams to adjust priorities swiftly. By cultivating an agile culture, the Alliance can better align strategic objectives with evolving academic, institutional, and societal needs, while ensuring collaboration remains dynamic, efficient, and future-oriented.

- **Drawing on the experience of hubs and open labs, reinforce and expand these experimentation spaces.**

Create knowledge teams that bring together academic and professional teams, fostering academic creativity while ensuring strong alignment with institutional and organisational realities.

- **Drawing on the concept of Learning and Teaching Center and the CIVIS Academy, reinforce and expand collective capacity building.**

Invest in continuous training, knowledge-sharing mechanisms, and collective learning practices to empower individuals and teams, strengthen institutional resilience, and foster long-term innovation.

- **Drawing on the experience of the coordination structures, the Steering Committee, and the Secretary General, establish strategic roles in advocacy, foresight, and fundraising to serve the whole alliance.**

Set up cross-cutting functions dedicated to advocacy, strategic intelligence, and resource mobilisation, serving the collective interests of the alliance.

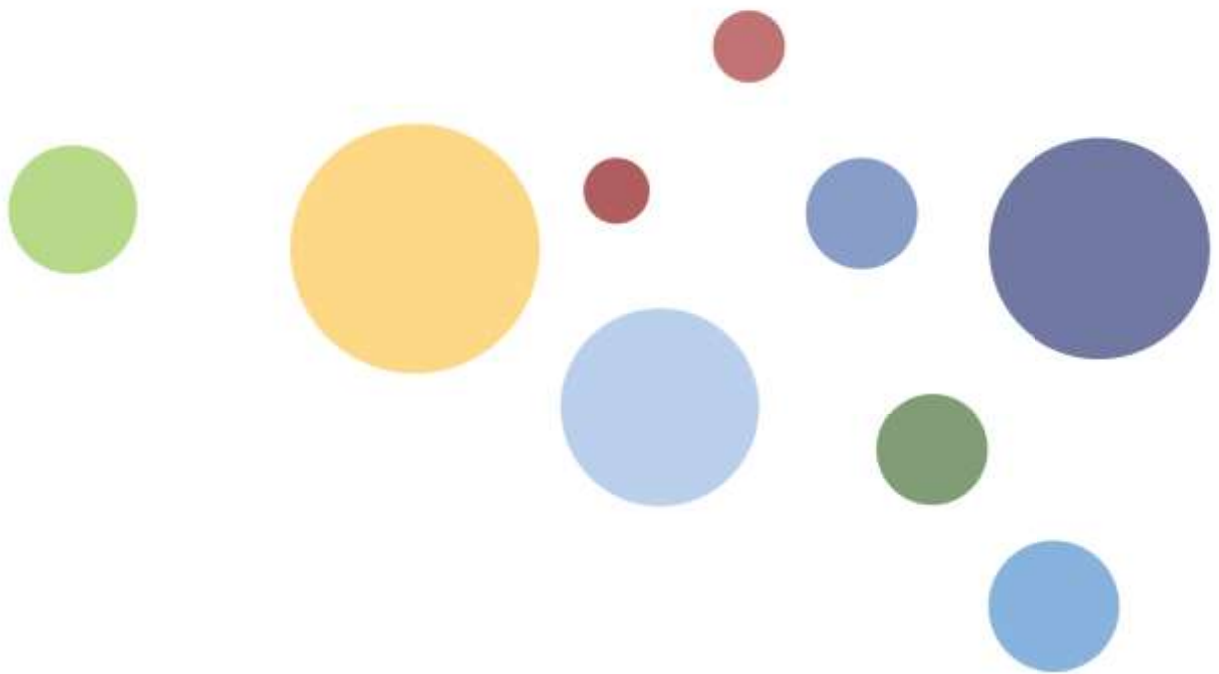
- **Drawing on civic engagement projects and Open Lab experiences, strengthen pivotal roles in scientific communication.**

Identify and support profiles dedicated to the dissemination, translation, and valorisation of scientific knowledge, in order to maximise societal impact and reinforce institutional visibility.

- **Drawing on the current dynamics with associated partners and Open Lab experiences, establish a strategy for building equitable partnerships.**

Identify skills and resources to build knowledge, experience and resilience in developing mutually beneficial relationships with the Alliance associated partners.

These guiding principles provide the Alliance with an opportunity to transition into its future models, foreseen as different longer phases where structures have been consolidated, and ambitions expanded.



4

SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY

As a European University Alliance, this strategy lays the foundation for primarily securing funding through the next calls of ERASMUS programmes. Beyond these, it is foreseen that many other relevant funding opportunities will emerge. It is therefore vital that CIVIS Alliance is both well prepared and efficiently organised in order to meet the requirements of future calls aligned with our vision, mission, and goals.

Sustainability Strategy

From the onset, CIVIS was conceived as a long-term commitment by all participating universities. Yet, initially, it was mostly contingent on the external funding from the EU. Gradually, the Alliance developed a set of features aimed at increasing its long-term sustainability.

Through the alliance agreement, member universities have committed to sustaining their collaboration in CIVIS. Already today, member universities also invest internal resources – in kind – for several vital functions of the CIVIS2 project (e.g. members of the many Expert Groups, of the Research Units, etc.). This dual commitment enables us, on the one hand, to sustain basic operations and, on the other, to work strategically to secure additional external funding.

The objectives of the Alliance Agreement were manifold but drives towards building a structured organism beyond the European Union funding dedicated to the European university project and territory:

- Bringing sustainability to the alliance independently from the project running.
- Giving a clear full membership to UofG and UNIL.
- Including our 6 strategic African Partners as clear associate partners.

A formal Legal Entity (LE) can support the Alliance Agreement and build-up as a tool to help the alliance to fulfill its goals. In order to give clarity and not too much complexity: the two fields are worked on simultaneously.

The core building blocks of the CIVIS sustainability strategy are its **legal entity** (CIVIS Association), its **Alliance Agreement** (signed by all universities involved), and a specific strategy to seek out **external funding** from a variety of sources beyond the Erasmus programme.



Alliance Agreement

CIVIS has gradually come to distinguish the **Alliance** from the **projects** that are run among all or some of the member universities. To make that distinction more formal and conspicuous, and to consolidate, institutionalise, and perpetuate the commitment of the member universities independently from specific projects, an Alliance Agreement, distinct from the various Consortium agreements associated to specific projects, was written up and signed in Salzburg on 25 September 2024.

By signing this agreement, member universities have committed their resolute commitment to deep collaboration within CIVIS **indefinitely**. The Alliance Agreement essentially establishes the

Alliance as a permanent consortium of closely collaborating universities. It constitutes the keystone to the sustainability of the Alliance.

What is more, in this Agreement, all member universities are considered on a strictly equal footing, irrespective of their eligibility to be beneficiaries of specific funding schemes.

Already today, member universities invest considerable internal resources, beyond the required co-funding, for the construction of our university alliance. This is especially true for the member universities that are not (yet) beneficiaries of the main Erasmus+ projects.

CIVIS Association – a supportive, agile, and integrative legal entity

The sustainability of the Alliance is further consolidated by the establishment of CIVIS Association, in the autumn of **2024**, is the legal entity of the Alliance (AISBL, non-profit international organisation under Belgian law). Its main purpose is to “support and encourage collaboration among the members of the European University Alliance CIVIS in the areas of higher education, scientific research and innovation, and service to the community.” (Art. 4 of the Statutes of CIVIS Association). Deliberately and unanimously, CIVIS Association has adopted a straightforward and slender format with a moderate membership fee and rather generic statutes. Still, to foster the integration and self-sustenance of the Alliance in the upcoming years, the Association will need to evolve such that it can serve its purpose in a more proactive and agile mode. The Association could take on tasks such as:

- Being named as a full member and beneficiary alongside the individual partner universities in Alliance grant proposals in order to take responsibility for individual work packages or tasks in the name of the Alliance as a whole (and receive the corresponding funding for staff to do so).
- Supporting governance structures and advocating for the interests of the Alliance.
- Monitoring and evaluating the Alliance's performance and progress.
- Representing the Alliance at the EU level and towards external partners and stakeholders.
- Developing economic activities and generating Alliance-sustaining revenues.
- Promoting continuity, integration and identity (e.g. trademark, branding, etc.) of CIVIS Alliance.

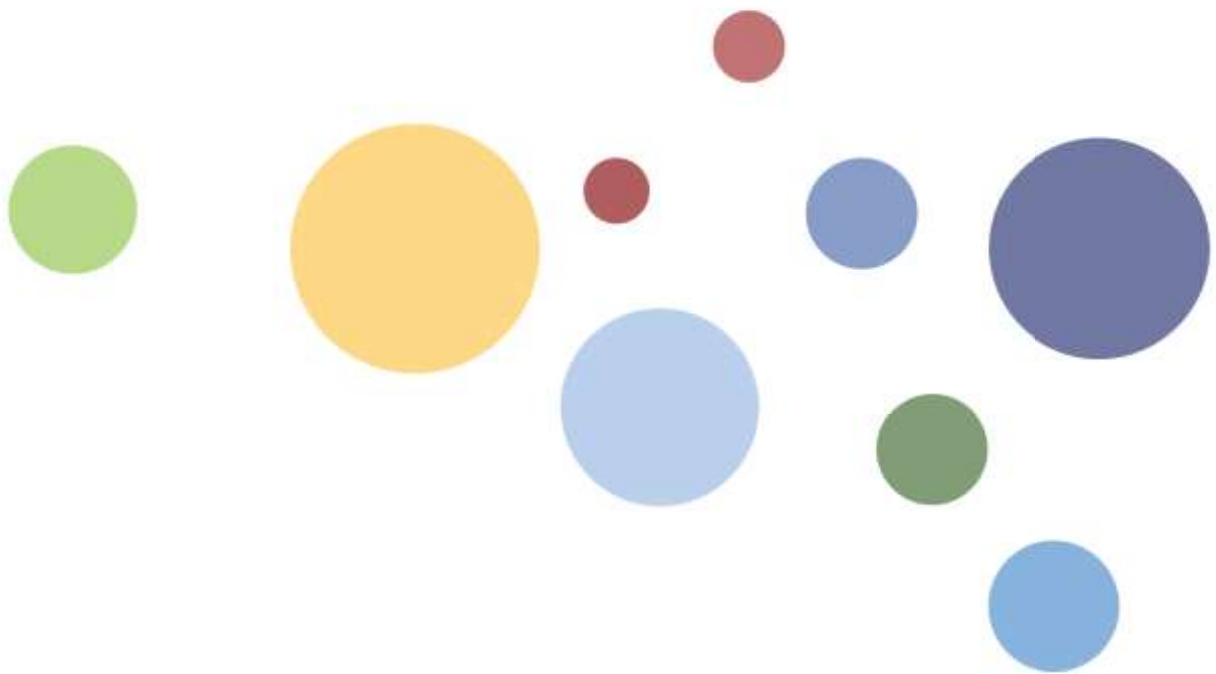
In line with the CIVIS strategic goals forecasted into the year 2035, the embodiment of the Association in the Alliance can further benefit the growth and development of CIVIS by means of constituting:

- A centralised service structure for policy intervention, communication, and synergies in administration.
- Economic benefits in procurement and purchases (software, infrastructure, media services, etc.).
- Research support (call scouting, alerting, advocacy), pooling of resources, IPR handling.
- A single communication channel (“one voice”) towards the EC, stakeholders, national agencies, non-academic partners, industries, facilitating external relations and strengthening visibility.
- Coordination of up-/reskilling training offers for non-academic learners, handling of fees and certificates.

Gradually, the Association could build up a viable team of dedicated staff to execute centralised service functions, including:

- Secretary General (SG)
- Experts for process evaluation, policy, communication, procurement, etc.
- Other professional staff
- (Interns for service learning)

Due to the strong integrative power and added value of a mature, well-suited legal entity, the political will of the European Commission (see the "Union of Skills" communication) is to establish a special legal status for European universities alliances. Currently, the status which fits closest to the declared needs of the alliances are the so-called "European groupings" according to § 165 of the European Treaty (e.g. EGTC for territorial cooperation, EEIG for economic cooperation), which could be adapted to academic groupings. Although neither the timeframe nor the outlook is clear yet, alliances and other academic representatives are already involved in intense discussions about this potential specific legal form. Whether or not an adapted or newly designed legal instrument is established, its purpose for alliances will always remain supportive, beneficial and adaptive to the dynamic nature of the higher education landscape.



5

TRANSCONTINENTAL FIFTH FREEDOM

Developing education, research, and innovation beyond Europe

The European Universities Initiative emerged following the landmark Sorbonne speech by French President Emmanuel Macron's on 26 September 2017, which called for the creation of a new generation of European universities: "Je propose la création d'universités européennes qui seront un réseau d'universités de plusieurs pays d'Europe."

Conceived as a large-scale experimental programme, the initiative provided participating institutions with considerable freedom to design innovative alliance models capable of addressing several key challenges: increasing student mobility beyond traditional Erasmus schemes, developing new and innovative educational offerings, and adapting higher education systems to rapid technological progress and evolving geopolitical dynamics. This broad flexibility resulted in the formation of a highly diverse ecosystem of alliances across Europe. Each alliance developed its own identity, priorities, and strategic ambitions, reflecting the diversity and richness of the European higher education landscape. While this diversity constitutes a major strength of the initiative, it also implies that no single sustainability model can fully capture the realities of all alliances.

To a certain extent, sustainability models may be approached through common principles, particularly regarding governance structures. Most alliances have established governance frameworks, boards, and advisory bodies that are largely inspired by the institutional arrangements of their member universities. In this respect, the range of approaches among alliances is limited. However, the long-term sustainability of European universities alliances depends primarily on their distinctive characteristics and strategic added value. Sustainability is therefore closely linked to what differentiates alliances from other international networks and enables them to generate unique opportunities for the communities of their members and stakeholders. From this perspective, the European Universities Initiative can be seen as an evolutionary process in which alliances continuously refine their structures, partnerships, and value propositions to ensure long-term relevance and sustainability.

In the case of CIVIS, one defining feature is the scale and ambition of its international partnership model. From its inception, CIVIS has embraced a large-scale approach extending beyond Europe through the development of a Global partnership strategy centred on Africa.



The six African partner universities associated with CIVIS represent nearly 400,000 students, a population comparable in size to that of the European consortium itself, 500,000 students (see Annex 1). Beyond their demographic significance, these institutions operate within rapidly evolving

environments characterised by strong innovation dynamics, substantial development potential, and a high degree of flexibility. Their capacity to experiment and adapt often contrasts with the more established and sometimes more rigid structures of many European universities. As a result, the partnership creates fertile conditions for educational innovation, research collaboration, and institutional transformation.

The CIVIS partnership with Africa was built upon the recognition that the major societal challenges addressed by European universities are not confined within European borders. The social, environmental, technological, and economic issues identified by the European Commission are inherently global in nature and require global responses. Addressing these challenges therefore necessitates the development of strong and balanced international and transcontinental partnerships. CIVIS is developing a genuinely mutually beneficial partnership between Europe and Africa. This collaboration extends beyond the traditional objectives of Erasmus mobility and educational provision, and development cooperation. It contributes to the elaboration of shared knowledge ecosystems, research capacity, innovation networks, capacity building, and talent circulation across continents.

In this context, CIVIS also contributes to addressing what has been described as the “fifth freedom” in the Enrico Letta Report by supporting the free circulation of knowledge, research, innovation, and skills. For CIVIS, this freedom should not be understood solely within a European framework but within a broader international perspective. At the scale of the Alliance, it is being realised through an ambitious and strategic Europe–Africa partnership that strengthens both regions while advancing the global reach of European higher education.

Deeply rooted in CIVIS’s commitment to building a comprehensive and long-term partnership with Africa, the Alliance also creates favourable conditions for strengthening the synergies between education, research, and innovation. This integrated approach represents one of the distinctive added values of the CIVIS model.

The rapidly evolving EU–Africa research and innovation landscape offers a unique opportunity for CIVIS to strengthen its role as a bridge between the two continents. Building on the momentum created by the 2023 AU–EU Innovation Agenda, together with the growing number of Africa- and Mediterranean-focused initiatives supported under Horizon Europe, CIVIS can foster ambitious collaborative research and capacity-building projects. These opportunities, listed, though not exhaustively in Annex 2, are further reinforced by the Global Gateway flagship initiative on *Youth Mobility for Africa*, which promotes academic exchanges and talent development, as well as by complementary national and regional funding schemes. By strategically aligning these different funding instruments, CIVIS can create a coherent framework that integrates research, education, innovation, and mobility, while supporting long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships between European and African universities.

Such synergies can be developed through enhanced mobility opportunities for doctoral candidates and early-career researchers, supported by dedicated Horizon Europe instruments as well as by bilateral cooperation mechanisms involving diplomatic representations and other institutional stakeholders across partner countries. By fostering talent circulation and collaborative research ecosystems, CIVIS contributes to the emergence of a truly interconnected Europe–Africa knowledge space. The mutually beneficial nature of this partnership is already illustrated by several existing initiatives below.

HIGHLIGHTS

The most emblematic example, now successfully completed, is the **PolyCIVIS** project. PolyCIVIS is an ambitious international initiative bringing together 21 universities across Europe and Africa to address the global “polycrisis”—the complex interaction of major societal challenges such as growing economic and social inequalities, environmental degradation and climate change. Launched in October 2023 as a three-year, EU-funded Jean Monnet Network, PolyCIVIS connects the 11 CIVIS member universities, six African strategic partner universities and four additional African institutions. This broad partnership creates a unique platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange and joint action across countries, continents, disciplines, territories and languages. Combining research, education and policy engagement, PolyCIVIS examines how simultaneous crises intersect and affect different societies. It brings together cutting-edge scientific knowledge, lessons from the past and diverse local perspectives to develop more inclusive and context-sensitive responses. Its value to society lies in its ability to transform international academic cooperation into shared understanding and practical solutions. By strengthening Europe–Africa collaboration and connecting universities with policymakers and wider society, PolyCIVIS contributes to building more resilient, equitable and sustainable communities. <https://civis.eu/en/discover-civis-alliance/our-work/civis-alliance-projects/polycivis>

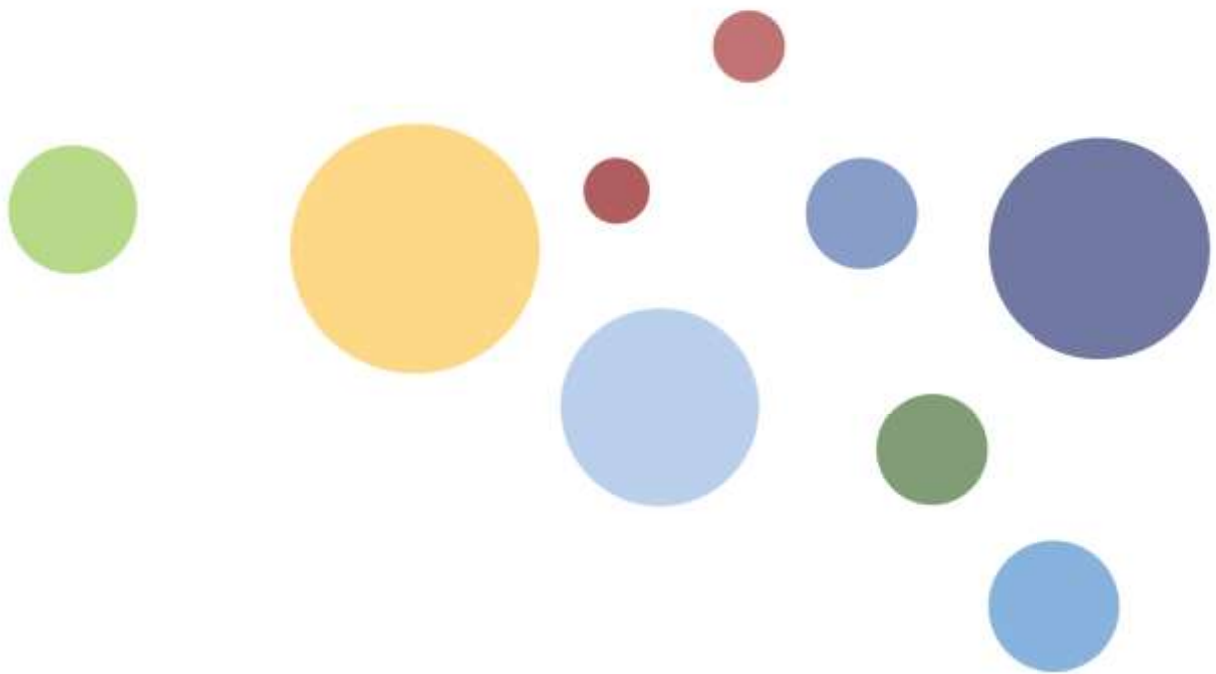
Another striking example is the recent success of **PartiCIVIS**, a MSCA-Staff Exchange project involving the 17 universities of CIVIS Alliance focussed on PhD mobility. PartiCIVIS enriches participatory research as a strategy to strengthen and broaden the third mission of HEIs, a tight research-to-action coupling, research-based education and challenge-driven civic engagement across all MSCA panels. It shall drive the current societal transformation processes in local and regional innovation ecosystems, by taking leadership and engaging in transdisciplinary approaches with societal actors outside academia. PartiCIVIS builds on existing multilevel networks established in our transcontinental University CIVIS Alliance. The core of PartiCIVIS is to (1) enhance participatory tools and methods reflecting key societal challenges in equitable partnership; (2) foster evidence-based reasoning for the facilitating role of participatory research to drive social innovation; (3) establish glocal concern and engagement in innovation ecosystems.

<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101300135>

A particularly compelling example of the added value generated through the interaction of education, research, and innovation is the CIVIS **Innov'Spheres** project. Supported by the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), Innov'Spheres aims to transfer and adapt the French Student-Entrepreneur Status model, together with the support mechanisms developed within the PEPITE network, to both European and French-speaking African universities. The CIVIS Innov'Spheres project aims to make student entrepreneurship a catalyst for social innovation within a Euro-African context, drawing on the pooling of existing resources within partner universities and collaboration with non-academic stakeholders via the CIVIS Open Lab platforms. The aim of this project is to strengthen the societal impact of universities by training a new generation of practitioners in sustainable and inclusive social entrepreneurship that takes into account the interdependencies between Europe and Africa. <https://www.auf.org/projet/innovation-sociale-pour-lhorizon-entrepreneurial-euro-africain-des-etudiants/>

But other promising tracks have also emerged from the first **African-European CIVIS Forum for Research and Education**, a landmark gathering designed to strengthen intercontinental collaboration, develop joint research-driven education, and shape shared solutions to the most pressing societal challenges of our time. Bringing together the 17 research-intensive universities of CIVIS Alliance, the Forum embodies the Alliance's commitment to equitable, transformative, and transdisciplinary cooperation across continents. It is conceived not as a traditional academic conference, but as a collaborative space for exchange, co-creation, and long-term partnership-building. The **African Cancer and Infection Initiative** (TACII) research project exemplifies the transformative potential of the CIVIS Global approach by demonstrating how European and African institutions can combine their expertise to address pressing global challenges. One such case concerns research on the interactions between infectious diseases and cancer treatments. In this field, the pooling of data resources, clinical expertise, and fundamental scientific knowledge is essential to advancing understanding of the underlying mechanisms and developing more effective therapeutic approaches. The integration of European partners into such initiatives appears both straightforward and highly promising, offering significant potential for scientific excellence and societal impact. <https://civis.eu/en/the-civis-newsroom/countdown-begins-for-civis-first-african-european-forum-for-research-and-education-in-casablanca>

As such, initiatives illustrate how the Europe–Africa dimension of CIVIS can generate tangible and sustainable impact well beyond the traditional scope of mobility and academic cooperation. Beyond the transfer of a successful educational model, these results demonstrate how European and African higher education institutions can jointly foster entrepreneurial skills, innovation capacities, and employability. It highlights the potential of the CIVIS partnership to create integrated pathways linking education, research, innovation, and socio-economic development across both continents.



6

CONCLUSION

Next levels of CIVIS Alliance

CIVIS Alliance started as a rather utopian project. The concept of a European University Alliance was exhilarating, intimidating, and utterly vague. The aims were specific, but the means widely open. International collaboration is consubstantial with universities, and yet these alliances were evidently presenting a rare opportunity to step-up the potential and intensity of inter-university collaborative endeavours.

From the onset, CIVIS Alliance has been a real-life experiment. Like all experiments, it was marked by speculation and reality checks, by trials and errors, by proof and disproof. After 7 years of progress (few academic or institutional projects are given so much time), the experiment has delivered a remarkable amount of results which add up to a large collection of assets which are supporting, enhancing and bringing international inter-university to the next level.

After 7 years, CIVIS has developed a model that is stable and mature enough to be described and to be shared. The consensus underpinning the CIVIS model and methodology is not static, but the outcome of continuous dialogue among partners. This ongoing deliberative process has demonstrated that the value of the Alliance lies not only in its outputs, but also in its capacity to collectively define priorities, adapt to evolving contexts and align institutional trajectories. Over time, this consensus-driven approach has created a configuration where the whole (the Alliance) has become significantly more than the sum of its parts (the member universities).

The three strategic pillars set out in the CIVIS 2035 long-term vision define the structural, societal and educational transformation the Alliance seeks to achieve and to drive. Agility and the ability to adapt to increasingly rapid societal changes will become a core feature of the future European Education Area. These transformations will not only enable CIVIS Alliance to materialise its 2035 vision, but also bestow it with the ability to adapt as new imperatives arise.

This will provide resilience to the Alliance as it continues to engage new generations of students and staff to work on solving local problems and global challenges in the spirit of civic engagement. An engagement tackling shared problems through cooperation across countries, languages, cultures and disciplines. Our institutional transformation will not only increase the number of young Europeans engaged in achieving the CIVIS mission, but will also strengthen the quality, performance, attractiveness and international competitiveness of our alliance and thus of European higher education as a whole.

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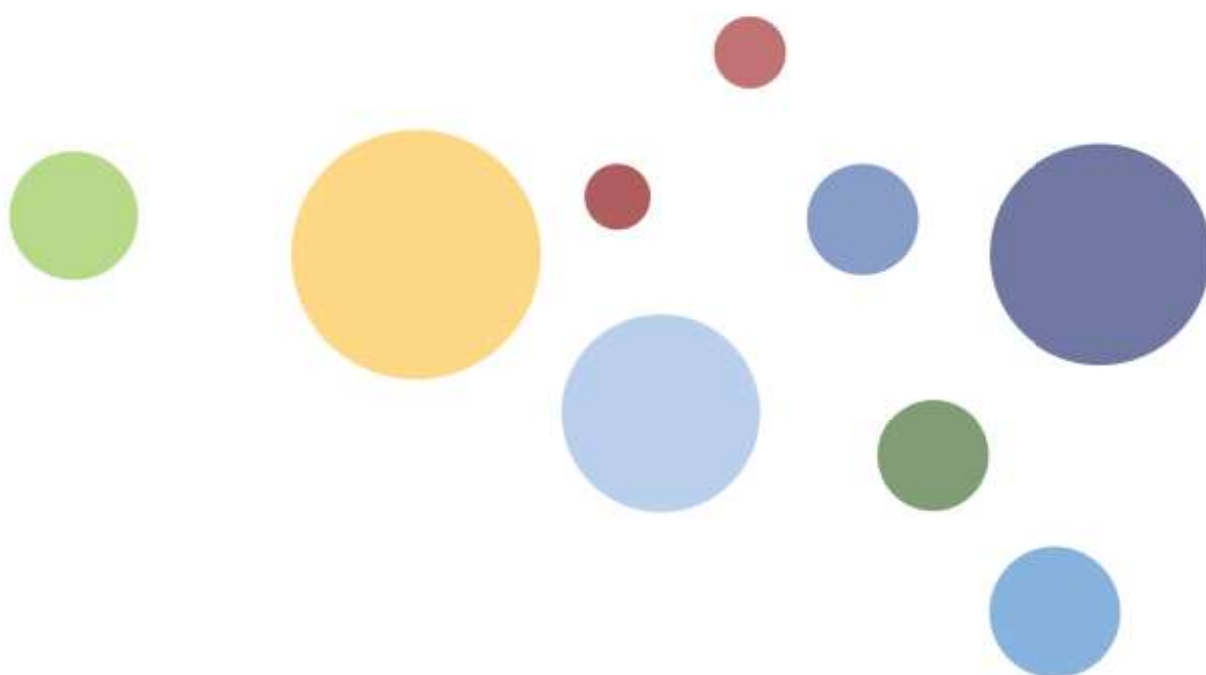
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ANNEXES

Supporting Documents

ANNEX 1: CIVIS Euro-African University Alliance: Student Community

Summary – The CIVIS Alliance brings together 11 European universities and 6 African partner universities, forming one of the largest higher education ecosystems connecting Europe and Africa. Based on the latest student enrolment figures published by the member institutions, the CIVIS community represents approximately **896,000 students**.

CIVIS UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE

University	Country	Students (approx.)
Sapienza University of Rome	Italy	120,000
Aix-Marseille Université	France	80,000
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens	Greece	69,000
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid	Spain	42,000
University of Glasgow	United Kingdom	42,000
Université libre de Bruxelles	Belgium	38,000
Stockholm University	Sweden	33,000
University of Bucharest	Romania	32,000
University of Tübingen	Germany	28,000
Paris Lodron University of Salzburg	Austria	18,000
University of Lausanne	Switzerland	17,000
Total Europe		519,000

CIVIS UNIVERSITIES IN AFRICA

University	Country	Students (approx.)
Hassan II University of Casablanca	Morocco	130,000
Cheikh Anta Diop University	Senegal	92,000
University of the Witwatersrand	South Africa	42,000
Universidade Eduardo Mondlane	Mozambique	40,000
University of Sfax	Tunisia	38,000
Makerere University	Uganda	35,000
Total Africa		377,000

With nearly **900,000 students** across two continents, CIVIS provides an exceptional platform for collaborative education, research, innovation, mobility, and societal engagement, contributing to the development of a strong and sustainable Euro-African Higher Education and Research Area.

ANNEX 2: External Funding Opportunities for Collaboration with African Universities

PROGRAMME	Opportunities
E+ Capacity Building in HE	• Modernise, internationalise, increase access to HE • Address the challenges facing their HE institutions and systems • Increase cooperation with the EU • Voluntarily convergence with EU development in HE • Promote contacts, intercultural awareness, understanding [LINK]
E+ Mundus Joint Masters	• High-level and integrated study programmes, at master level • Fully developed and accredited, ready to run • At least three institutions from three different countries (from EU); association of African partners possible [LINK]
MSCA Doctoral Networks	• Doctoral programmes across Europe and beyond – focus on R&I • Doctoral Networks, Industrial Doctorates, Joint Doctorates [LINK]
Africa Initiative III (Horizon)	• 24 Calls on Public Health, Green Transition, Capacities for Science, Innovation & Technology, Cross-cutting issues [LINK]
Mediterranean Initiative II (Horizon)	• 12 Calls on Health, Climate Change, Renewable Energy [LINK]
MSCA Staff Exchanges (Horizon)	• International, inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary mobility of R&I staff • Knowledge transfer between participating organisations. [LINK]
COST Action	• Research networking activities (meetings/conferences, missions, training schools, virtual networking tools), incl. non-academic partners • BUT: Demanding consortium requirements (at least 7 COST member countries, 50% participation of 'Inclusiveness Target Countries' [mostly Eastern European, e.g. ROM, GR], AM individuals can benefit, but no institutions) [LINK]