



CALL: H2020-IBA-SwafS-Support-1-2020

TOPIC: Support for the Research and Innovation Dimension of European Universities (Part I)

PROJECT: RIS4CIVIS - Research and Innovation Strategy for the CIVIS

Alliance (<https://civis.eu/en/ris4civis>)

## SCOPE OF THE POLICY BRIEF

In this policy brief, the European Universities pilot alliances report on the progress made through cooperation in selected R&I areas and provide a first set of recommendations to the European Commission for further policy development.

### Policy background:

In order to strengthen strategic partnerships across the EU amongst higher education institutions, the European Commission targets the emergence of “European Universities” by 2024 by funding alliances from across Europe. The ambitious mandate aims to trigger systemic, structural and sustainable institutionalized cooperation between higher education institutions. As a complement to the Erasmus+ action geared towards supporting higher education cooperation models, Horizon 2020 support is dedicated to contributing to the research and innovation dimension of the alliances between European universities, in line with their shared, integrated, long-term joint strategy and in synergy with their education dimension.

This initiative is one of the flagships of the [European strategy for universities](#) that aims at supporting and enabling universities to adapt to changing conditions, to thrive and to take a leading role in the recovery of Europe, and in making our society greener, more inclusive and more digital. The adoption of this strategy was accompanied by a Commission [proposal for a Council recommendation on building bridges](#) for effective European higher education cooperation.

In parallel, the [European Research Area Policy Agenda](#) sets out 20 voluntary actions for the period 2022-2024, including several of which are relevant for universities. The feedback from the alliances will help co-shape the design and implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022 – 2024, such as ERA actions 1 (sharing of data), 3 (reform of research management), 4 (strengthening careers), 5 (gender equality), 7 (knowledge valorisation), 8 (research infrastructures), 13 (empowering universities), 14 (engaging citizens), 15 (role in R&I ecosystem), 17 (research management capacity).

## FEEDBACK ON PROGRESS (MAX 1.5P)

1. Please describe the **challenges** your Alliance encountered regarding cooperation between universities in the field of R&I in relation to the institutional change areas (transformation modules) foreseen.

**RIS4CIVIS** – **R**esearch and **I**nnovation **f**or **CIVIS** - integrates six dimensions where to accompany significant transformation in universities for the success of their R&I communities’ excellence and intra-cooperation, as well as for reinforcing their dialogue and collaboration with the non-academic spheres. Besides, these six particular areas are pointed out as ‘Transformational Modules’ after the policies adopted in 2020 by the European Commission. Each Module refers to a particular range of topics within a broader scope, entitled as follows in RIS4CIVIS:

- Module 1: Developing a Common Research and Innovation Agenda,
- Module 2: Sharing infrastructures,
- Module 3: Reinforcing Academia-Business R&I Cooperation,
- Module 4: Strengthening Human Capital,

Module 5: Mainstreaming of Open Science,  
Module 6: Embedding Citizens and Society.

RIS4CIVIS, as a 36-month European project, includes three main successive stages, where each Module is simultaneously addressed:

- 1- the completion of a **Benchmarking (WP1)** – M1-M6,
- 2- the identification of end-points and associated roadmaps leading to a **Consensus-building** common agreement (**WP2**) – M6-M15,
- 3- and finally, the testing of jointly designed programs, policies, tools during a **Case Studies** phase spanning the second half of the RIS4CIVIS lifespan (**WP3**) – M14-M32.

From the very beginning of the project, the following challenges have been identified, respectively related to the modules' specific objectives:

- **Transformational module 1: Common Research and Innovation Strategy**
  - o *Defining a strategy for identification of joint R&I themes for CIVIS*, while taking into consideration the different models of organisation of our universities: centralised/decentralised; bottom-up emergence of projects/research themes vs. strategic priorities defined by the universities' governance, etc.;
  - o *Facilitating the identification of the fields of expertise* to strengthen networking amongst our research community.
- **Transformational module 2: Sharing Infrastructures**, in order to encourage open, effective and efficient use of Research Infrastructures within the Alliance:
  - o *Defining shared and common access point to infrastructures* identified amongst our universities as being opened to the whole community;
  - o *Defining a plan for a Joint Strategy and model for the sharing of infrastructure*, e.g., a labeled and common tool to visualize and promote the opened infrastructures and make them easily accessible.
- **Transformational module 3: Reinforcing Academia-Business R&I Cooperation**
  - o *Combined support to innovation drawing on regional ecosystems* through the development of joint procedures (e.g., to detect innovation) and/or reference tools (e.g., a 'handbook' of our universities' services to offer to innovators);
  - o *Common approach to IP*, notably addressing the ethical aspects that may arise during a research partnership with a non-academic entity;
  - o *Joint Innovation training* considering the existing offer and the gaps identified at our different CIVIS Institutions.
- **Transformational module 4: Strengthening Human Capital**
  - o *CIVIS-wide HRS4R-grade standards on OTM-Recruitment, 3I-mobility, training, and working conditions* through transfer of knowledge activities (e.g., sharing of resources, thematic meetings and workshops involving staff of each university's internal offices, testimonies);
  - o *Joint Transferable Skills training* considering the existing offer and the gaps identified at our different CIVIS Institutions, also to best accompany researchers in their career development.
- **Transformational module 5: Mainstreaming of Open Science**
  - o *Defining a common approach to Open Science* with practical support (including training), systems, and procedures, taking into account the national policy framework that imbeds each institution;
  - o *Addressing the question of research assessment at the Alliance level* by contributing to define a larger set of criteria to evaluate researchers such as OS practices, but not solely.
- **Transformational module 6: Embedding Citizens and Society**
  - o *Shared approach and practices to Open Innovation and Citizen Science* based on existing projects and programs running at our different universities;
  - o *Support to Science Communication* especially at partner's where limited support exists so far;

- *Joint Science Communication training* considering the existing offer and the gaps identified at our different CIVIS Institutions.

2. Please describe how you tackled or intend to **tackle these challenges**. Based on your project’s experience so far (and if applicable), briefly outline case(s) that you consider as **good practice** and of interest to other universities or to policy-makers.

During the first period of this project, and based on the identified challenges above, we went through the two different first subsequent phases – a thorough Benchmark (M1-M6) and a Consensus-building phase (M6-M15) – leading to highlight several difficulties and best practices. The last phase of the project – the Case Studies one (officially launched in M15) – will lead to experiment and deploy good practices and assess their impact.

Each Module leader identified the following difficulties and good practices/lessons learnt:

TRANSFORMATOINAL MODULES	Main difficulties encountered at the Alliance level regarding cooperation between universities in the field of R&I in relation to your Module’s activity	Good practices Identified / developed to tackle these challenges & feedback for case studies
Module 1	Technical competence in building databases	Turning to IT expertise within RIS4CIVIS and CIVIS, but also local experts
	Discrepancies of experiences among the members regarding expertise in research and research support	Communication and dialogue among the module members
	Different views about the use of on-line research profiles for research collaboration	Communication and dialogues among the module members
Module 2	<b>To make evident advantages/benefits deriving from an open, effective and efficient use of Research Infrastructures</b>	<b>Definition of a long-term joint strategy for the creation of a CIVIS RI label</b> , including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. identification of a common set of principles concerning openness of RIs, transparency of access and of use. The principles have been incorporated within the <b>CIVIS RI Charter for access and use</b></li> <li>2. the acceptance of these principles included in the Charter can lead to the <b>awarding of a CIVIS RI label</b>, capable to demonstrate transparency in the management of RIs, quality of procedures, openness of access, etc.</li> <li>3. Design of an <b>appropriate brand of the label</b></li> </ol>
	<b>To promote CIVIS Alliance critical mass/potential</b> in term of high quality RIs as well as <b>to enhance the visibility of CIVIS open RIs</b> not only throughout the Alliance scientific community but also towards external stakeholders, in particular businesses, with the aim of fostering public-private interactions and technology-transfer practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Establishment of one single information access point to CIVIS RIs by the use of a joint online interactive platform</b>: it will include RIs available to joint use, even if only partially, by any user belonging to CIVIS institutions and eventually to external users, i.e. users not belonging to CIVIS Alliance, including CIVIS partner organisations and most of all businesses</li> <li>• Possible planning and organisation of <b>CIVIS Alliance RI Open Day</b> including the official launch of a common Strategy for sharing RIs</li> </ul>
	<b>Need for mapping and measuring the degree of openness</b> and sharing of Research Infrastructures	<b>Definition of a set of measurability indicators</b> concerning openness and sharing of RIs, clustered by input, activity, output, outcome and impact, and organised by short, medium and long term
Module 3	Identify the current status in terms of culture, structure, capabilities and strategies at the universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the help of a questionnaire, an overview could be gained of which resources, infrastructures, etc. are available in the four core areas of innovation at the different universities</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength and weaknesses have been evaluated based on self-assessment of the individual partners</li> </ul>
	Different strengths and weaknesses within the alliance related to the four core areas of innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the benchmarking phase, complementary skills of all CIVIS partner universities have been identified. A transferable skills scheme has been created</li> <li>• Based on the results of the benchmarking, a tandem process was established to create “learning pairs”. The division of the tandems reflected the complementary skills of the universities</li> <li>• The Universities were able to address topics of interest in a closed environment and to exchange best practices, activities, tools and other topic related approaches</li> </ul>
<b>Module 4</b>	Lack of Human Resources, Alliance tasks over daily tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep tasks practical and simple, rely on communication teams to spread information. Creation of working groups and thematic meetings, where universities can benefit at individual level of ideas/organisation of the other universities.</li> </ul>
	Training depends largely on external trainers and seed funding is necessary.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submitting calls for proposals within the Erasmus+ Alliance</li> </ul>
	Creation of training at European level encounters obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening courses when logical and adding them to complementary workshops existing to organise a whole programme based on a specific topic, i.e. science communication</li> </ul>
<b>Module 5</b>	The diversity of the Open Science (OS) landscape and the limited time to implement actions promoting the OS (hence, the need to prioritise)	During the Benchmarking phase, Module 5 aimed to establish a comprehensive view about the status of OS within CIVIS. The desired endpoints and the roadmap established during the consensus phase cover several OS categories, which are further narrowed down by the selection of a few case studies. The module aims to help in creating more support for OS practices, but this takes time and effort, which can only be achieved by intensive collaborative work within the CIVIS alliance.
	Fragmentation of OS approaches: existing resources are not shared; OS policy with different status of implementation (this includes existing national and institutional regulations and guidelines)	This challenge will be tackled by several actions: sharing information about the OS (the case study to create an OS Knowledge-Base), promoting common training programs on OS through a dedicated case study, raising awareness about OS practices (the case study of the OS Award), expanding the discussions about OS to broader concerns related to the reform of research assessment (another case study). Coordinating, but especially collaborating on the development of these actions is expected to reduce the fragmentation
	The constant need for mapping the status of OS practices at the alliance level	One of the case studies of our module consists in the creation of an OS Knowledge-Base, which aims to provide a single access point to OS resources (either developed within the alliance or by other international organisations)

<b>Module 6</b>	<p><b>Find the appropriate people to develop different actions and case studies.</b> The difficulties reside not only in the adequate preparation and background of particular individuals but also in finding reference staff with enough time in our respective institutions to contribute to those initiatives. Module member's work could provide information about people, but it is essential to find information to be shared.</p>	<p><b>Use questionnaires and IT resources</b> to upload the internal benchmark and share it with the rest of the modules and Alliances' staff. It is important to understand differences and similarities regarding the internal organization of our members and thus the Alliance's way to provide this information. Using different online questionnaires helped us mapping the Alliance's landscape and identifying reference people in the different fields related to the module.</p>
	<p><b>Allocation of information</b> about different aspects related to the module activities aims. The existence of a significant amount of information does not correlate with its accessibility.</p>	<p><b>The development of particular tools inside CIVIS</b> helps the work groups share information and detect important information nodes. It is essential to further develop the current tools used by the Alliance to share this information (e.g., joint repositories such as clouds).</p>
	<p><b>Asymmetries in the level of development</b> between the Alliance members concerning aspects related to the Module (Science Dissemination, Citizens Science and Open Innovation). In this respect, detecting and, if necessary, fixing these asymmetries are essential.</p>	<p><b>The promotion of the Citizens Science projects</b> running at our universities and detected during the benchmarking phase. Enhancing the visibility of these projects would be inspiring for our communities and contribute to the design of the initiatives, especially at institutions where Citizens Science is still poorly conducted. In this sense, developing support resources with different (e.g., microprograms, summer schools) and/or creating new joint initiatives are essential.</p>

The Benchmark and Consensus-building Reports are both deliverables that have been submitted to the European Commission. They summarise into more details the main outcomes of the work achieved within the modules and the relevant lessons learnt.

- Please describe the **tangible progress** that individual partners as well as the Alliance as a whole have made in terms of introducing changes in their entities as a result of this project. Please elaborate on whether the inclusive and integrated cooperation approach of your alliance helps accelerate institutional change of all partners (e.g. through sharing of practices from institutions with strong expertise or infrastructure in specific areas to institutions without).

We need first to go through the first part of the Case studies phase to be able to address this question.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (MAX 3P)

In this section, the European Universities pilot Alliances make recommendations in relation to the policy topics identified below. Given the unique strengths and focus of each European University Alliances, please focus only on those aspects of most relevance to your case. Please feel free as well to expand to other policy topics you may wish to share your learnings and recommendations (other recommendations).

At this stage of the project, it is not yet possible to propose relevant and complete Recommendations that can be applied in a general way, as this is a deliverable in itself that we have to produce at the end of the project, i.e. after having implemented the pilot case studies and after having been able to provide a first analysis of the

results obtained. This part will therefore be updated later in the project, according to the progress of our work plan.

### 1. Policy topic 1: facilitating transnational cooperation

- Knowing that the Commission proposed a [Council recommendation to facilitate transnational collaboration between universities](#), which action should be prioritised to address the challenges you encountered as an Alliance in sharing capacities, infrastructures, resources or staff in R&I?

### 2. Policy topic 2: strengthening careers

- Is there a need to develop a model tenure-track system at European level to contribute to solving precariousness of early career researchers? If you believe so, how do you think it should be structured?
- In light of the [policy process on the reform of assessment](#) of research and institutions, what are your recommendations on how to address academic/researcher career assessment?

### 3. Policy topic 3: digital transition

- What are the specific needs of the alliances to accelerate their digital transition in the R&I dimension, and how can this be addressed at the EU level?
- In particular, do you see a need for *additional* dedicated e-infrastructures for data storage and management that are distributed and interoperable? Please take into account progress regarding the development of the federated e-infrastructure for research outputs (EOSC, see [ERA Policy Agenda](#)), and the implementation of a digital platform for cooperation in higher education (see the [European strategy for universities](#)).

### 4. Policy topic 4: access to excellence

- What is your advice on how to accelerate access to excellence in science and in value creation for all participants for higher education institutions across the entire ERA, through the European Universities Initiative?

### 5. Policy topic 5: increasing global competitiveness

- Europe's relative weight at a global level when it comes to research-intensive universities is shrinking. In light of this, a European Excellence Initiative will be established to improve global competitiveness of Europe's universities, in synergy with the European Universities Initiative of Erasmus+. In your view, what would be key elements of such an Initiative? Secondly, could you envisage that such an initiative specifically targets EU objectives such as the Green Deal or European Missions?

### 6. Other recommendations



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*This policy brief reflects only the author's view and the European Commission/REA is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.*