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# National-level support for participation in European Universities Alliances:

Insights from Higher Education Institutions  
and National Agencies

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## List of Abbreviations

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>ACA</b>        | Academic Cooperation Association   |
| <b>AEF-Europe</b> | Agence éducation formation   |
| <b>BIP</b>        | Blended Intensive Programme  |
| <b>CMEPIUS</b>    | Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes |
| <b>DAAD</b>       | German Academic Exchange Service   |
| <b>DZS</b>        | Czech National Agency for International Education and Research                                   |
| <b>EACEA</b>      | European Education and Culture Executive Agency  |
| <b>EC</b>         | European Commission  |
| <b>ECHE</b>       | Erasmus Charter for Higher Education   |
| <b>EHEA</b>       | European Higher Education Area   |
| <b>ERA</b>        | European Research Area   |
| <b>EU</b>         | European Union   |
| <b>EUA</b>        | European University Association  |
| <b>EUI</b>        | European Universities Initiative   |
| <b>F4A</b>        | Future4Alliances Project   |
| <b>FRSE</b>       | Foundation for the Development of the Education System (Poland)                                  |
| <b>FWO</b>        | Research Foundation Flanders   |
| <b>HEI</b>        | Higher Education Institution   |
| <b>HEIs</b>       | Higher Education Institutions  |
| <b>HK-dir</b>     | Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills  |
| <b>INDIRE</b>     | National Institute for Documentation, Innovation and Educational Research (Italy)                |
| <b>KA</b>         | Key Action   |
| <b>LTA</b>        | Long-Term Activity   |
| <b>MedNet</b>     | Mediterranean Network of National Agencies   |
| <b>NA</b>         | National Agency  |
| <b>NAs</b>        | National Agencies  |
| <b>NA DAAD</b>    | German National Agency for Erasmus+ Higher Education Cooperation                                 |
| <b>NAWA</b>       | Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange   |
| <b>OeAD</b>       | Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation   |
| <b>PPMI</b>       | Public Policy and Management Institute   |
| <b>Rannís</b>     | Icelandic Centre for Research  |
| <b>SAAIC</b>      | Slovak Academic Association for International Cooperation  |
| <b>SEPIE</b>      | Spanish Service for the Internationalisation of Education  |
| <b>SERI</b>       | State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (Switzerland)                           |
| <b>SoE</b>        | Seal of Excellence   |
| <b>TCA</b>        | Training and Cooperation Activity  |
| <b>TPF</b>        | Tempus Public Foundation (Hungary)   |
| <b>UHR</b>        | Swedish Council for Higher Education   |
| <b>VLUHR</b>      | Flemish Higher Education Council (Belgium/Flanders)  |



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## Executive Summary

This study explores the landscape of **national-level support available to Higher Education Institutions** (HEIs) funded under the European Universities Initiative (EUI), as well as to Seal of Excellence (SoE) holders. It examines the broad range of **support measures** provided by national funding bodies—particularly Erasmus+ National Agencies (NAs)—and analyses **institutional needs** alongside **opportunities for enhanced coordination** and collaboration at national level.

The analysis is based on two surveys and two focus groups conducted in 2025, involving 33 NAs from 28 countries and 409 respondents representing 251 HEIs participating in 36 European Universities and SoE alliances across 32 countries.

The findings point to a **clear conclusion**: while the EUI has become a widely recognised and valued flagship initiative, its long-term impact depends on coherent and coordinated national-level engagement. National Agencies play an increasingly important supporting role; however, their contributions remain largely informal and unevenly structured, with varying degrees of mandate, resourcing, and strategic alignment.

### *Strategic integration of EUI (Chapter 2)*

A **majority** of respondents (55% of NAs; 95% of HEIs) reported that **participation in the EUI is explicitly referenced in national higher education and/or internationalisation strategies**, signalling a growing recognition of the initiative's strategic relevance at national level. In nearly one fifth of the countries represented in the dataset (18%), national strategies are expected to include such references in the future.

Strategic integration, however, often occurs in **indirect ways**. Rather than explicitly referencing the EUI, many national strategies emphasise related instruments and priorities, such as joint programmes or the European degree (label). In several countries, clearer strategic positioning is contingent on more tangible evidence of alliance-level impact.

At **institutional level**, **four in five HEI respondents** reported that participation in the EUI is reflected in their overall **institutional strategy**, while 70% indicated its inclusion in their **internationalisation strategy**. HEIs respondents emphasised that the predominantly project-based nature of EU funding limits deeper and more sustainable strategic integration across institutional priorities.

Further **strategic consolidation** at both national and institutional levels is closely linked to greater clarity regarding the initiative's future scope, funding horizon, and long-term sustainability.

### *National (and regional) support (Chapter 3)*

**National ministries** for (higher) education and **National Agencies** emerge as the two most significant national-level actors in supporting the EUI, each fulfilling distinct yet complementary roles.



**Ministries** primarily contribute through **financial support**, most commonly via dedicated co-funding schemes, as reported by 73% of HEI and 83% of NA respondents. However, such co-funding is not available in all countries, and where it exists, is often time-limited or subject to policy change, creating uncertainty and constraining long-term strategic planning for participating HEIs.

The role of **National Agencies** is distinct and largely complementary. Funding agencies in general, and **Erasmus+** National Agencies in particular, tend to focus on **non-financial types of support**. These include facilitating networking and peer learning among national HEIs, providing guidance on Erasmus+ participation and funding synergies, supporting the dissemination of good practices, and coordinating inputs into national policy discussions related to the initiative.

While 91% of National Agencies reported providing support to HEIs in the EUI, only 44% of HEI respondents perceived such support. The discrepancy likely reflects **differing interpretations of what constitutes “support”** at national level: HEIs tend to primarily associate support with financial contributions, whereas National Agencies mainly deliver non-financial assistance. Nonetheless, in some countries **NAs** also **administer national-level co-funding schemes for European Universities alliances** on behalf of their ministries of education.

Beyond national contexts, some **NAs have developed transnational cooperation models**, notably through the [SPREAD EUI](#) Long-Term Activity (LTA) and the [KA3 Future4Alliances](#) project. These initiatives demonstrate the potential of coordinated NA action to strengthen system-level peer learning, enhance collective impact, and jointly address questions of sustainability and implementation challenges.

Across countries, **HEIs participating in European Universities alliances consistently express a strong need for support** from national ministries of (higher) education and NAs. Their success depends on an enabling national policy and funding environment that allows alliance-related ambitions to be implemented effectively. Looking ahead, HEIs also require **enhanced national-level support**, both financial and non-financial, to sustain and scale the initiative’s impact.

#### ***Areas for future collaboration (Chapter 4)***

Most **National Agencies** (78%) **plan to continue or expand their support activities**, with many intending to extend these to Seal of Excellence holders and aspiring institutions.

There is **strong alignment between NAs and HEIs** in prioritising networking, peer learning, and knowledge exchange. The areas in which enhanced support is planned largely overlap with those where NAs are already most active in supporting HEIs participating in European Universities alliances.

**Differences emerge** in areas such as funding, quality assurance, and staff capacity building, where HEIs articulate higher expectations than NAs are currently able to meet.

**Greater alignment** between institutional expectations and the capacity of NAs to provide more formalised support would be **conducive to maximising the initiative's impact** at system level.

#### *Possible ways forward (Chapter 5)*

**National Agencies already play a *de facto* strategic role** in supporting the EUI at national level. Many possess the expertise, networks, and institutional commitment, as well as concrete plans, needed to further strengthen this role.

**Clearer recognition** of NAs as **key stakeholders**, combined with a more **explicit mandate**, could enable more effective coordination, stronger transnational cooperation, and more systematic monitoring of national impact. It would also support the institutionalisation of support structures, strengthen evidence-based policymaking, increase overall impact, and increase the likelihood of sustained co-funding at national level.

The **future effectiveness and sustainability of the European Universities Initiative** depend on **aligned action** between EU-level governance, national authorities, National Agencies, and participating higher education institutions. **Strengthening this alignment is essential** to move from experimental cooperation towards lasting, systemic transformation in European higher education.

## Introduction

This study focuses on the **landscape of national-level support** for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) participating in the European Universities Initiative (EUI) and Seal of Excellence (SoE) alliances across EU member states and other countries associated to the Erasmus+ programme, with particular attention to the role of **National Agencies**, including those for **Erasmus+**.

In just over six years since the launch of its pilot stage in 2019, the EUI has attracted an unprecedented level of interest and attention at European, national and institutional levels, both across Erasmus+ programme countries and beyond. Elevated to flagship status under the current Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027), the initiative has remained at the forefront of the EU higher education policy agenda. This prominence reflects the transformative potential attributed to European Universities alliances, both for participating institutions and their partnerships, and for the higher education system as a whole.

Before presenting the rationale for this study and outlining the structure of the report, this introductory section provides a brief overview of the main stages in the development of the European Universities Initiative. It also situates the study within the evolving body of related academic and non-academic literature that examines various aspects of the initiative and patterns of institutional participation.

### *European Universities Initiative (EUI): stages of development*

Originating in an inaugural speech by the French President Emmanuel Macron at Sorbonne University in September 2017, the creation of “*at least 20 European Universities by 2024*” rapidly gained high-level support from EU heads of states and government. Already at the informal Gothenburg Summit in November 2017, and subsequently at the European Council meeting in December 2017, EU leaders entrusted the European Commission with the mandate to formally develop the European Universities Initiative in a co-creation process with member states and higher education stakeholders (Table 1).

From the outset, European Universities were conceived as “*a network of universities across Europe with programmes that have all their students study abroad and take classes in at least two languages. These European Universities will also be drivers of educational innovation and the quest for excellence*” and would “*enable students to obtain a degree by combining studies in several EU countries and contribute to the international competitiveness of European universities*” (European Council, December 2017).

Since this initial stage, **six successive calls** for funding have been launched under both the previous and the current Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) to establish and support a select group of **European Universities alliances** (Table 1).

As of today, the initiative comprises **65 European Universities alliances**, bringing together **more than 570 HEIs** of different types and sizes, from **35 countries**. These include all EU member states as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iceland, Montenegro, the Republic of North-Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, and Türkiye.

Table 1. Main stages in the development of the European Universities Initiative (EUI)

| Year             | Policymakers                      | Stage – main developments  | Number of alliances, HEIs and countries (cumulative)     | Budget (per call & per alliance)  |
|------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|
| 2017 (September) | President                         | Speech by <b>Emmanuel Macron</b> , President of France, at Sorbonne University, calling for the creation of <b>at least 20 European Universities</b>                             | /  | /   |
| 2017 (December)  | EU Heads of States and Government | <b>Education Council conclusions</b> mark official mandate to the <b>European Commission</b> to coordinate the EUI, aiming for “ <b>some 20” European Universities by 2024</b> ” | /  | /   |
| 2018 (October)   | European Commission               | <b>1<sup>st</sup> pilot</b> call for EUI alliances launched (pilot phase)  | /  | /   |
| 2019 (June)      | European Commission               | Results of the <b>1<sup>st</sup> pilot call</b> announced  | <b>17 EUI alliances</b><br>114 HEIs<br>25 countries      | Per <b>call</b> : EUR 85 million<br>Per <b>alliance</b> : up to EUR 5 million (3 years)       |
| 2020 (July)      | European Commission               | Results of the <b>2<sup>nd</sup> pilot call</b> announced:<br>24 EUI alliances selected<br>166 HEIs<br>31 countries  | <b>41 EUI alliances</b><br>over 280 HEIs<br>31 countries | Per <b>call</b> : EUR 120 million<br>Per <b>alliance</b> : up to EUR 5 million (3 years)      |
| 2021 (May)       | EU Ministers of Higher Education  | Concept is endorsed in <b>Council Conclusions</b> and initiative moves out of pilot phase – <b>full rollout</b>  | /  | /   |
| 2021 (November)  | European Commission               | Results of the <b>3<sup>rd</sup> call</b> announced:<br>4 EUI alliances selected   | <b>44 EUI alliances</b><br>over 340 HEIs<br>31 countries | Per <b>call</b> : EUR 272 million<br>Per <b>alliance</b> : up to EUR 14.4 million (4 years)   |
| 2022 (January)   | European Commission               | <b>European Strategy for Universities</b> published, EUI mentioned as a key <b>flagship initiative</b>   | /  | /   |
| 2023 (July)      | European Commission               | Results of the <b>4<sup>th</sup> call</b> announced:<br>6 more EUI alliances selected  | <b>50 EUI alliances</b><br>over 430 HEIs<br>35 countries | Per <b>call</b> : EUR 399 million<br>Per <b>alliance</b> : up to EUR 14.4 million (4 years)   |
| 2024 (June)      | European Commission               | Results of the <b>5<sup>th</sup> call</b> announced:<br>15 more EUI alliances selected   | <b>65 EUI alliances</b><br>over 570 HEIs<br>35 countries | Per <b>call</b> : EUR 187.2 million<br>Per <b>alliance</b> : up to EUR 14.4 million (4 years) |
| 2025 (November)  | European Commission               | The <b>6<sup>th</sup> call</b> announces <b>2 years of extended funding</b> for existing EUI alliances   | /  | Per <b>call</b> : EUR 145.6 million<br>Per <b>alliance</b> : TBC (2 years)                    |
| /                | /                                 | /  | /  | <b>Total: EUR 1.2 billion</b>   |

Going well beyond the initial target of 20 alliances, the current 65 EU-funded transnational university consortia seek to develop long-term, structural, sustainable and systemic cooperation in education, in close synergy with research and innovation, and with a strong societal orientation. As a result, **European Universities alliances** represent a distinct model of **inter-institutional cooperation**, differing in several fundamental ways from other forms of cooperation supported to date under EU programmes in education and training, notably Erasmus+ programme.

In particular, European Universities alliances are unique in several key dimensions:

- **Unprecedented scope and scale.** Rather than focusing on a specific thematic or operational area, as is typical of project-based cooperation, European Universities alliances pursue **deep, institution-wide transformation**. They seek to combine excellence-driven ambitions with an inclusive approach, and to develop integrated (virtual) campuses in which students and staff benefit from seamless mobility. Alliances also serve as laboratories for innovative educational practices, including challenge-based, multidisciplinary, and flexible learning pathways, the development of joint degree programmes, and broader innovation in teaching and learning (European Commission, 2024).
- **Long-term strategic orientation.** European Universities alliances move beyond conventional project logic through a shared mission and joint strategic vision extending over a horizon of ten years or more—well beyond the typical three-year lifespan of EU-funded projects. Their activities are guided by highly integrated governance structures, which in some cases are supported by a dedicated legal status, enabling sustained cooperation and strategic continuity.
- **Level and nature of funding.** While participating HEIs often consider current funding levels insufficient relative to the ambition and scale of the long-term transformations envisaged under the initiative, **support** for European Universities alliances nevertheless **exceeds that available for all other forms of cooperation under the Erasmus+ programme**. Funding levels are closer to those typically associated with research and innovation programmes such as Horizon Europe programme, which for a limited period also provided co-funding for the research dimension of the initiative. With the longer-term objective of moving from a project-based to a more programmatic funding logic, the EUI promotes the combination of multiple funding sources, including EU-level instruments as well as national and regional co-funding.

In addition to the **65 funded alliances**, the European Commission has awarded a **Seal of Excellence (SoE) to 8 additional alliances**. The SoE recognises the high quality of these applications, as evidenced by their high evaluation scores, which could not be funded due to budget constraints. As they do not receive EU funding, the SoE alliances are not subject to the same participation conditions as funded European Universities alliances.

Overall, the European Universities Initiative aims to strengthen Europe's global competitiveness and improve the quality of European higher education, having a transformative effect on the European Education Area as a whole (EC, 2025), and being seen as highly relevant also for the recently launched [Union of Skills communication](#).

### ***EUI – the object of growing analyses***

Despite its relatively recent launch, the European Universities Initiative (EUI) has already generated a substantial body of research and analysis. The initiative's unprecedented nature within the history of EU education programmes, its high visibility on national and European policy agendas, and the strong engagement of participating HEIs have together contributed to a growing literature on the EUI, encompassing both academic and non-academic sources. This body of work also includes studies commissioned by the European Commission and the European Parliament, which have supported the production of technical reports on the initiative throughout its development (Annex I).

Overall, **existing studies point to the initiative's strong transformational potential** and to tangible progress in establishing fully fledged European Universities alliances and advancing several of the initiative's ambitious policy objectives (European Commission, 2025). At the same time, the literature highlights **persistent challenges** faced by alliances, linked to the breadth of expectations placed on them and to enduring legal, administrative, and structural barriers to deep cross-institutional and cross-country cooperation. Given the initiative's relatively recent launch, comprehensive impact assessments remain premature. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that both outcomes and transformative effects are likely to increase over time, as alliances mature and remaining obstacles to transnational cooperation are progressively addressed.

Within this expanding body of literature, the **national dimension of the initiative has also begun to receive some attention**. Existing studies have examined national positions and policy priorities (Charret et al., 2025), mechanisms for national co-funding for HEIs (Jongbloed et al., 2023, EC, 2025), and national regulatory developments in relation to the EUI's transformative potential for HEIs and higher education systems more broadly (European Commission, 2025). Other contributions have analysed the co-creation process during the pilot phase (Felder-Stindt & Vukasovic, 2025; Hartzell & Craciun, 2025), as well as HEIs' participation in the EUI from country-specific perspectives, focusing on participation barriers and opportunities, alliance governance and implementation, and potential impacts (Poszytek & Budzanowska, 2023).

Overall, this literature confirms the initiative's transformative potential for national higher education institutions and systems, while also highlighting the **enabling role that national-level actors can play in this process**. However, the latter dimension remains comparatively underexplored, pointing to a need for more systematic analysis of national support mechanisms and their contribution to the development and system-level impact of the European Universities Initiative.



## ***Rationale and structure of the study***

Against this background, this study examines the **spectrum of national assistance and support mechanisms available to HEIs participating in the EUI** through a **multi-layered analytical approach**, with particular emphasis on measures offered and managed by national funding agencies, including National Agencies for Erasmus+.

The research was conducted in 2025 by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA). It was commissioned and supervised by the Centre of the Republic of Slovenia for Mobility and European Educational and Training Programmes (CMEPIUS) and funded under the Erasmus+ Training and Cooperation Activity (TCA). The study also benefitted from the support of the MedNet National Agencies, covering Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Northern Macedonia, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Türkiye, and builds on work carried out within the [LTA SPREAD EUI project](#) “*European University Alliances (EUI) as role models – Spreading innovative results to other higher education institutions*”. This activity has been implemented by National Agencies in Austria (Austria’s Agency for Education and Internationalisation, [OeAD](#)), Germany ([NA DAAD](#)), Hungary ([Tempus Public Foundation](#), TPF), and Norway (the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills, [HK-dir](#)). The analysis is further informed by the [Future4Alliances](#) project, led by Campus France, with the participation of CMEPIUS (Slovenia), EDUFI (Finland), HK-dir (Norway), and Foundation Tempus (Serbia), among others.

The **first chapter** presents the study’s methodology, outlining the mixed-methods approach and the data sources and samples used.

The **second chapter** examines the extent to which the objectives of the European Universities Initiative are integrated into relevant strategic documents, including national strategies for (higher) education, research and innovation, and institutional strategies of higher education institutions.

The **third chapter** provides an overview of the state of play with regard to financial and non-financial assistance and support at national level, focusing in particular on the role of national and regional ministries for (higher) education and National Agencies (for Erasmus+), illustrated through selected national examples.

The **fourth chapter** identifies promising areas for enhanced support and closer collaboration, highlighting concrete examples of additional support measures that could be developed in the future. These are examined from the perspectives of both HEIs and National Agencies, drawing on existing practices and planned initiatives.

The **fifth and concluding chapter** synthesises the main findings and outlines possible ways forward, taking into account HEIs’ needs and expectations, as well as National Agencies’ capacities to play a more supportive role in the European Universities Initiative—a key condition for maximising its impact at national level.

# 1. Methodology

This chapter outlines the study's methodological framework, including the research objectives, approaches to data collection and analysis, and the characteristics of the data samples, as well as the profiles of the two respondent groups—Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and National Agencies (NAs). Overall, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining a review of relevant literature with quantitative data collected through two separate but closely interlinked surveys, complemented by qualitative insights gathered through two focus groups involving the study's primary target audiences.

## 1.1 Objectives

This study's methodological approach is aligned with its core objectives to:

- a) examine the **needs of Higher Education Institutions** participating in the European Universities Initiative and the types of support required at national level, including support provided by National Agencies (NAs) for Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies;
- b) map and update the range of existing and ongoing **support activities** delivered by National Agencies for Erasmus+ and other types of national funding agencies to date, in complementarity with support provided at EU level;
- c) identify **areas for closer cooperation between European Universities alliances**, their member institutions, and relevant national-level actors including National Agencies for Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies; and
- d) explore **opportunities for enhanced cooperation among Erasmus+ NAs** in jointly supporting alliances involving institutions from their respective countries.

## 1.2 Data collection and analysis

To gain a comprehensive understanding of HEIs' current needs in relation to European Universities alliances, as well as the forms of support provided by National Agencies, **two tailored questionnaires** were developed. These were addressed, respectively, to staff of **National Agencies** (or equivalent bodies) and to staff of **HEIs participating in the EUI**.

The two surveys followed a common **structure**, beginning with questions on the background of the institution or agency in relation to the initiative, followed by sections on current support activities, and concluding with questions on planned or desired future support (see Annex II and Annex III for the full questionnaires).

Given the diversity of national contexts and the expected variation in practices, needs, and expectations, the questionnaires consisted primarily of **multiple-choice questions**, complemented by a limited number of open-ended items. These allowed respondents to share experiences and provide more nuanced insights into both existing and desired forms of national-level support.

The **questionnaire** addressed to National Agencies was targeted at NA staff working in the field of higher education who possess specific knowledge of national resources and support measures. The group of respondents included, but was not limited to, National Agencies for Erasmus+. To avoid receiving conflicting information, each funding agency (or equivalent) at national level was requested to provide only one response, which in most cases amounted to one response per country. In a small number of exceptional cases—such as Germany where the National Agency for Erasmus+ supports HEIs participating in the EUI together with the wider national funding agency, the German Academic Exchange Service – DAAD, of which it is part, two responses per organisation were received and retained.

The **HEI questionnaire** was addressed to HEI staff with direct experience of European Universities alliances and a general understanding of the alliance's funding sources and/or support provided by their National Agency. The target group therefore included senior institutional leadership (such as rectors, vice rectors, and heads of international relations offices), alliance-level leadership (including secretaries-general), and alliance support staff (such as alliance coordinators, work package leaders and administrative staff).

An **Advisory Board** was established to provide expert guidance to the research team on the design of the questionnaires, the preliminary findings presented in the draft report, and the focus groups convening representatives of NAs and HEIs to validate these findings.

The Advisory Board was composed of Directors of National Agencies, including representatives from the MedNet network and the LTA SPREAD EUI project:

- Alenka Flander, CMEPIUS, Slovenia
- Stephan Geifes, NA DAAD, Germany
- Sara Pagliai, INDIRE, Italy
- Vidar Pedersen, HK-dir, Norway

In addition, a **selected group of HEI staff** representing different alliances and countries, provided feedback on the HEI questionnaire:

- Mladen Kraljić, University of Maribor, ATHENA Alliance, Slovenia
- Juan Rayón González, University of Oviedo, INGENIUM Alliance, Spain
- Piet Van Hove, Thomas Moore University, HEROES Alliance, Belgium
- Bert Willems, KU Leuven, Una Europa Alliance, Belgium

The **HEI questionnaire** was disseminated through the network of National Agencies for Erasmus+ and, more broadly, via the FOREU4ALL network of European Universities alliances. In addition, targeted invitations were sent to HEI staff in countries that were initially underrepresented, in order to ensure geographical balance.

The **NA questionnaire** was first distributed through the network of National Agencies (NAs), followed by individual invitations to countries that did not respond in the initial round. Both questionnaires were also promoted through ACA's LinkedIn page and electronic newsletter.

The questionnaires were open to the respective target groups from **March to June 2025**.

In addition, **two focus groups** were convened in October 2025, one with staff from participating HEIs and one with representatives of NAs. Each focus group was organised into three thematic sessions, reflecting the structure of the report: (a) strategic alignment with the European Universities Initiative at national and institutional level; (b) existing forms of national and regional support; and (c) areas for future collaboration.

Both focus groups sought to ensure broad geographical representation. The National Agencies focus group included 13 participants from 12 countries, while the HEI focus group brought together 18 participants from institutions in nine countries, complemented by a small number of alliance coordinators.

The analysis presented in this report draws on a review of relevant academic literature, commissioned studies, and previous analyses related to the EUI, as well as on responses to the two questionnaires. Survey results were synthesised by stakeholder group, country, and in aggregate. Preliminary findings were subsequently discussed, verified, and validated with members of the Advisory Board and through the two focus groups involving National Agencies and HEIs.

## 1.3 Data Sample

This section provides an account of the composition and characteristics of the responses received to the two questionnaires, focusing first on the responders from HEIs engaged in the EUI and subsequently on those working for NAs.

### 1.3.1 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

In total, 415 responses were received to the first survey, of which 409 responses were considered valid and retained for analysis (Table 2). The six responses that were removed were duplicate responses. The survey sample shows a high level of representativeness including valid responses obtained from representatives of **251 unique HEIs** spanning across **32 different countries**. The respondents belong to the institutions participating in **36 alliances**, among which **28 are currently funded** under the EUI and **8 are Seal of Excellence (SoE)** holders.

Table 2. Number of respondents to the HEI and NA questionnaires

| Respondent group | Responses | Unique HEIs/NAs | Unique European Universities alliances (including SoE holders) | Countries |
|------------------|-----------|-----------------|--|-----------|
| <b>HEIs</b>      | 409       | <b>251</b>      | <b>36</b>  | <b>32</b> |
| <b>NAs</b>       | 33        | <b>33</b>       | <b>N/A</b>   | <b>28</b> |

### Representation and size

Among the **32 different countries**, the highest response rates to the HEI questionnaire come from three large higher education systems: **Spain, France, and Germany** (Figure 1). Seal of Excellence (SoE) alliances come from 8 countries and a total of 13 HEIs.

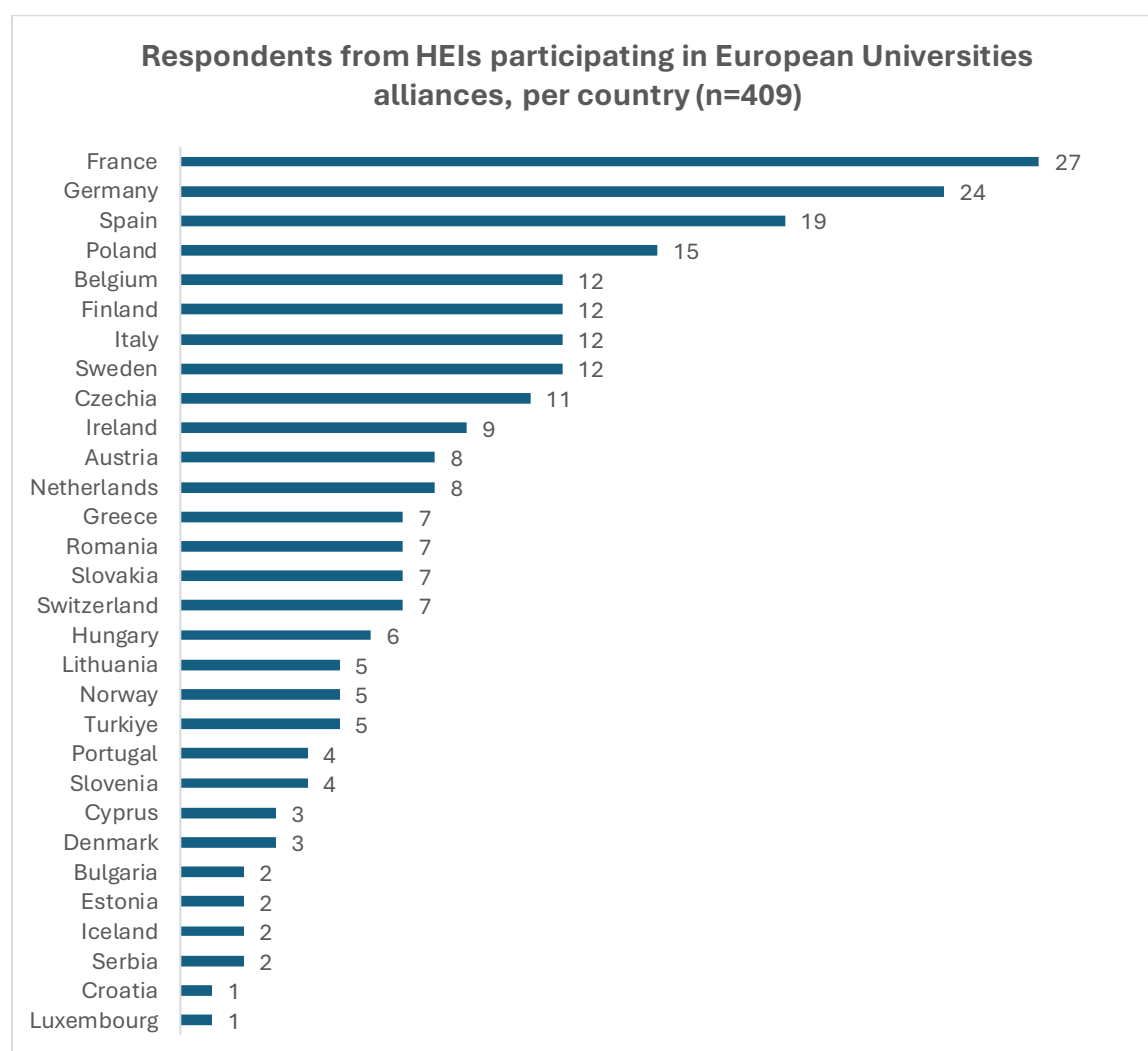


Figure 1. Number of respondents from HEIs participating in European Universities alliances, per country

In terms of institutional coverage, **survey respondents represent, on average, 51% of all HEIs participating in the EUI within each country**, with many countries exceeding the anticipated **30% representation threshold** (Figure 2). Three countries, Hungary, Slovenia, and Türkiye, achieved full institutional coverage (100%), with all HEIs currently participating in the EUI taking part in the study. Two additional countries, Czechia and Slovakia, recorded institutional representation above 80%, while Belgium, Ireland, and Serbia exceeded the 60% threshold.

These figures exclude responses from HEIs participating in the Seal of Excellence alliances (n=15); HEIs no longer participating in the initiative (n=1); and HEIs planning to participate (n=1).

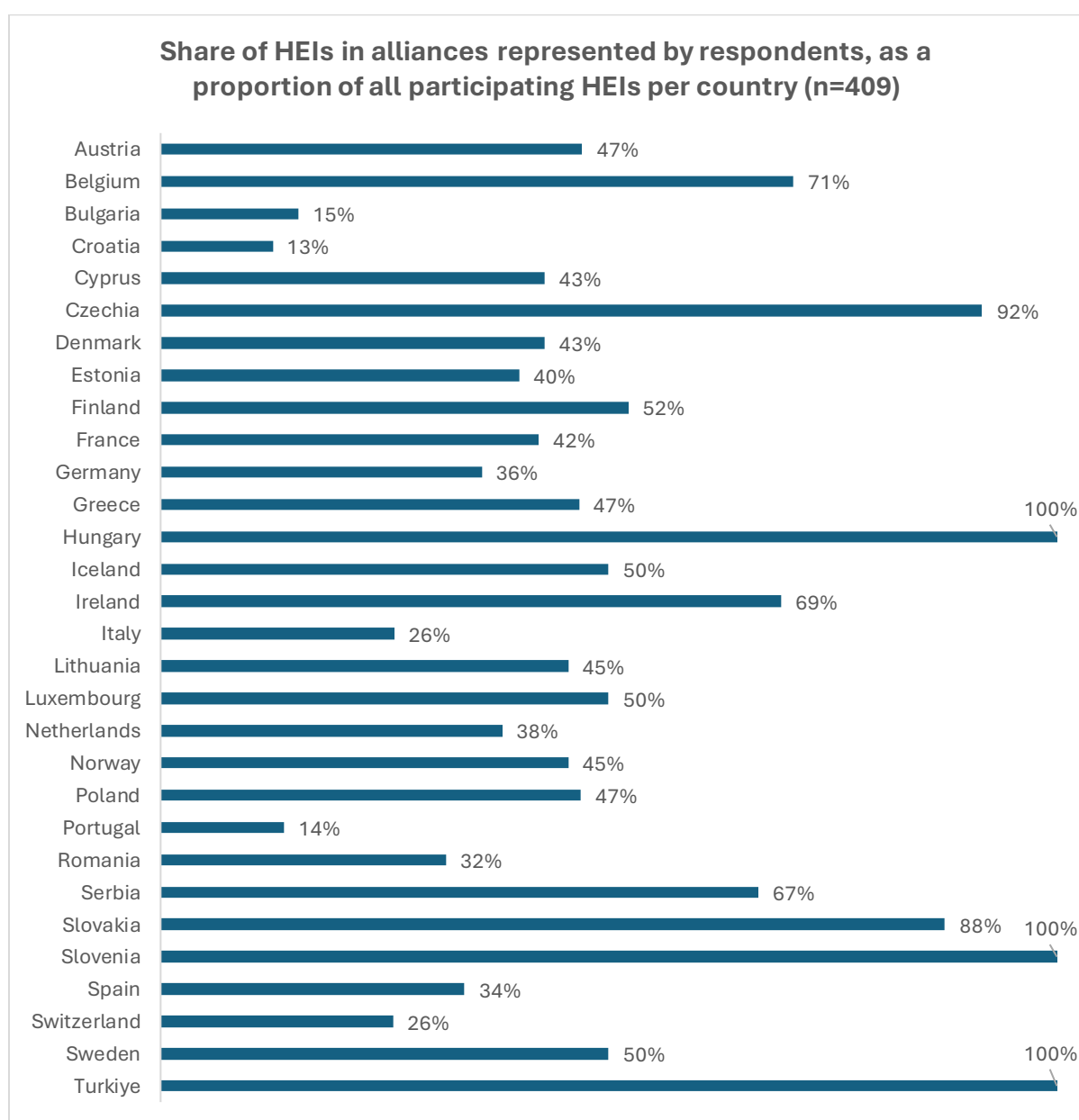


Figure 2. Share of HEIs in alliances represented by respondents, as a proportion of all participating HEIs per country



With regard to institutional size, **more than half of the HEIs** represented in the study (**53%**) are classified as **large institutions**, enrolling at least 15,000 students (Figure 3). Approximately one third (32%) of the sample comprises medium-sized HEIs with student populations between 5,000 and 15,000 students, while the remaining HEIs are smaller, enrolling 5,000 students or fewer. Overall, the composition of the sample broadly reflects the distribution of institutional sizes within the European Universities Initiative.

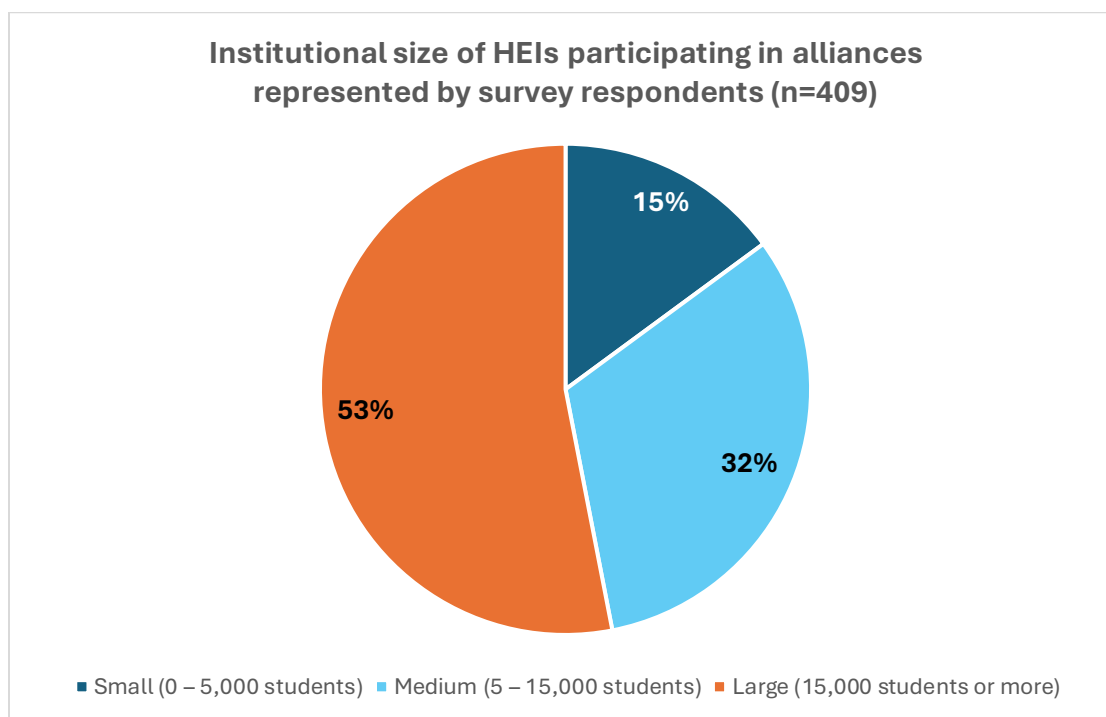


Figure 3. Institutional size of HEIs participating in alliances represented by survey respondents

### **Funding status**

The sample represents the alliances distributed **across all funding periods**, with most responses coming from the alliances funded under the first call, followed closely by those funded in the last call (Figure 4). Nearly **half of the responding HEIs** (42%, 171 respondents) belong to the alliances that have been part of the EUI (or have received the Seal of Excellence) for **five years or longer** (2019 and 2020). Conversely, **the other half** (48%, 196) of respondents belongs to the alliances that are in their **first three years** of experience. About 10% of respondents indicated they were unsure of the year in which their alliance was first selected, which may be partly explained by the fact that more than one third of respondents had only recently taken up roles related to the alliance (Figure 10).

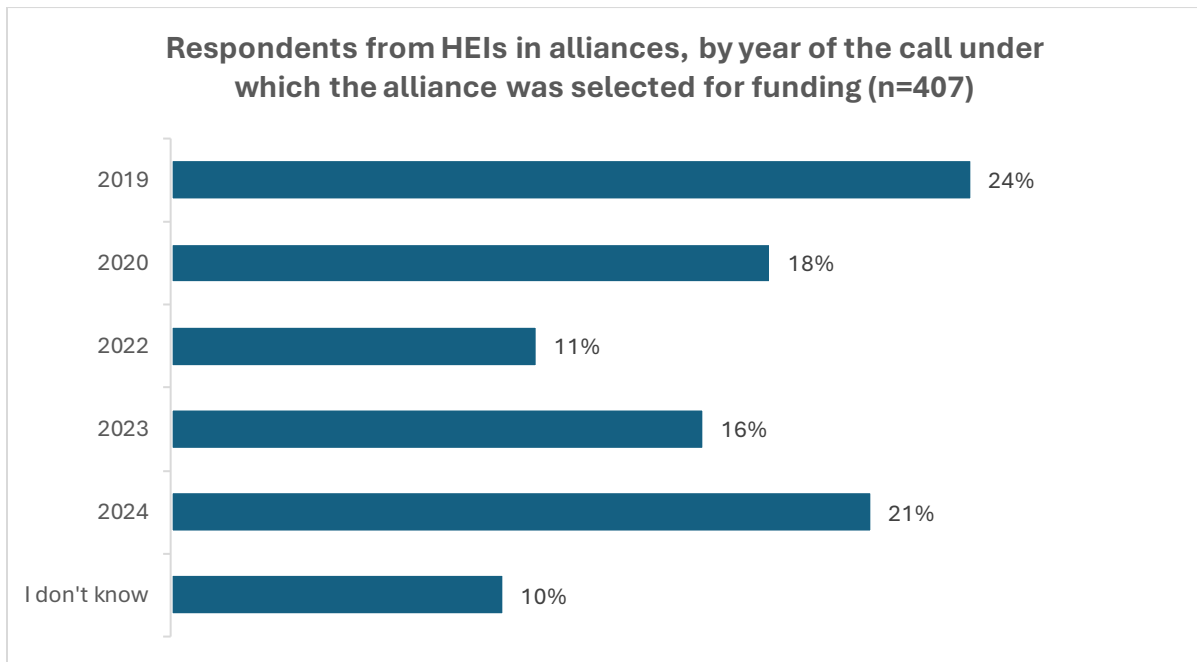


Figure 4. Respondents from HEIs in alliances, by year of the call under which the alliance was selected for funding

The **vast majority** (95%) of HEI respondents are affiliated with institutions participating in alliances that **currently receive EU funding** under the EUI (Figure 5). By contrast, only **a small proportion** of respondents (4%) represent institutions involved in **Seal of Excellence** alliances, which do not receive EU funding and instead rely on alternative sources to support their cooperation.

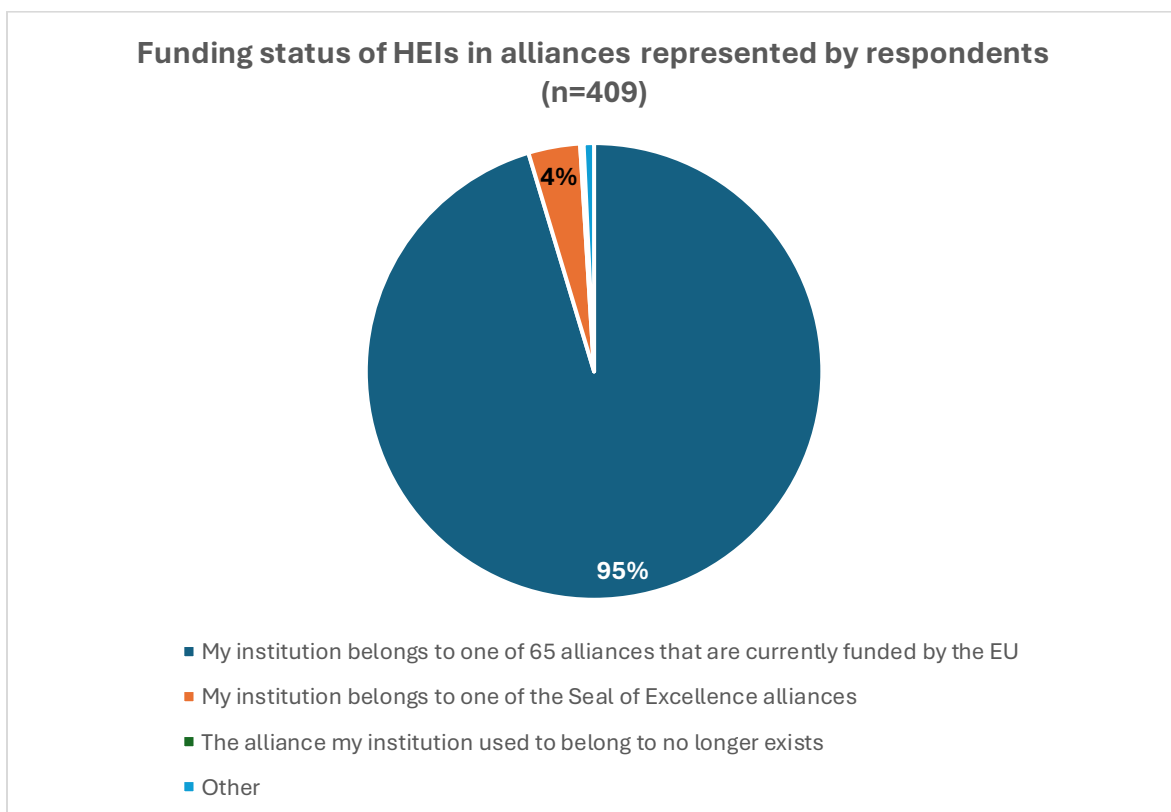


Figure 5. Funding status of HEIs in alliances represented by respondents

### Alliance membership and composition

In total, 61% of responding HEIs represent EUI **alliances with 6 to 9 members**, while the remainder (39%) belongs to alliances with 10 or more partners (Figure 6).

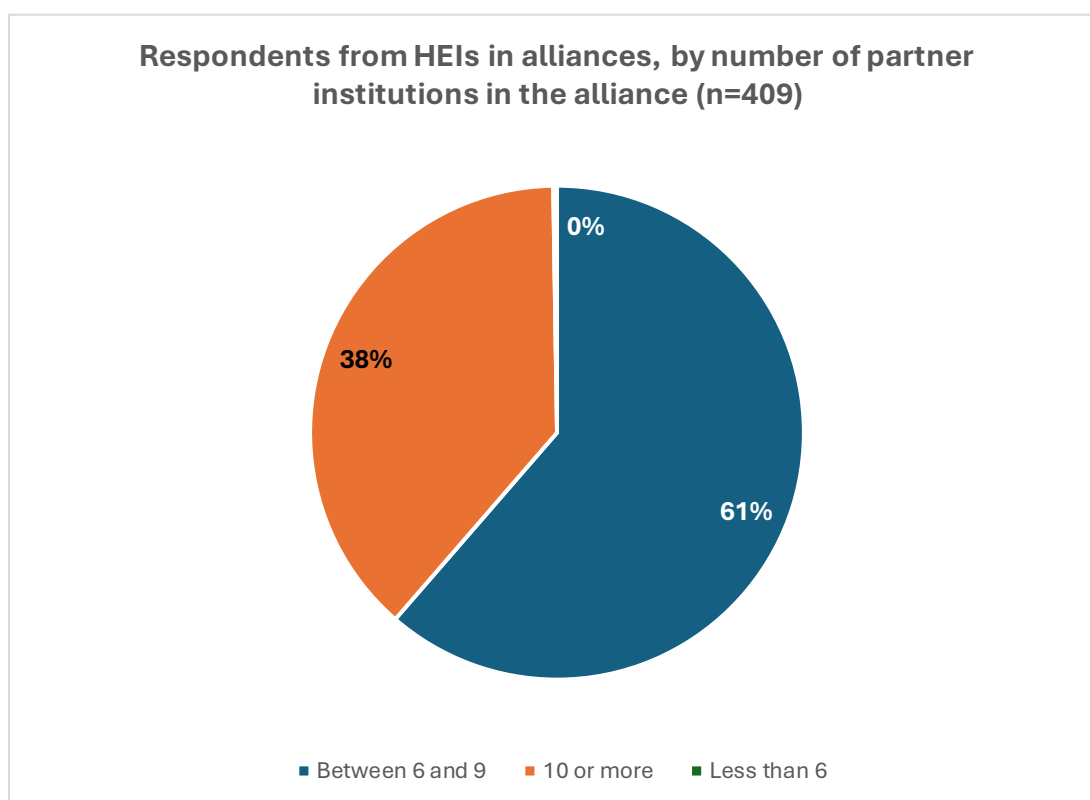


Figure 6. Respondents from HEIs in alliances, by number of partner institutions in the alliance

The vast majority (96%) of HEI respondents participate in their respective alliances as **full partners** and therefore benefit directly from EU funding. By contrast, only a small number of HEIs are involved as **associated partner** (3%). This pattern also reflects responses from Swiss universities, which are not (yet) eligible to participate as full partners but nonetheless take part in alliances through national co-funding arrangements (Chapter 3).

**Fewer than 2%** of HEIs participating in the survey reported having **changed their alliance** since the beginning of the funding period. By contrast, **more than half (54%)** of HEI respondents indicated that the **number of full partners** within their alliance **has changed** over time. This points to the dynamic nature of the alliances' composition and size (Figure 7) and reflects the influence of evolving funding models on alliance structures.

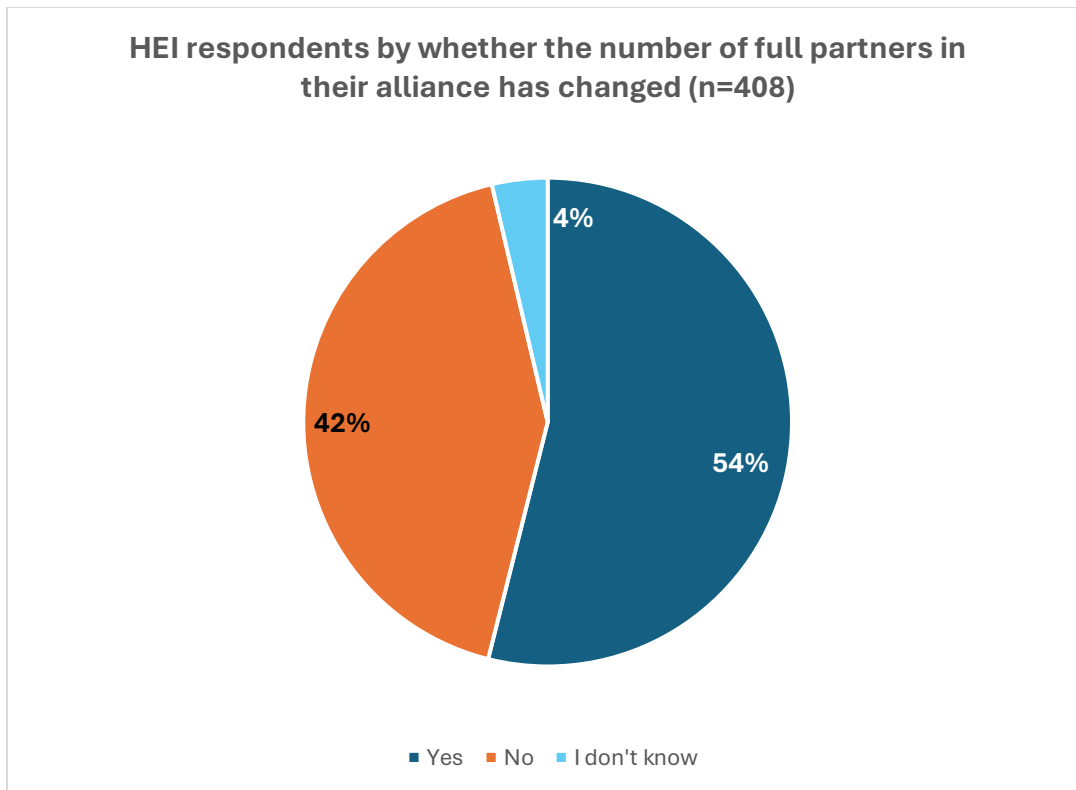


Figure 7. HEI respondents by whether the number of full partners in their alliance has changed

### Staff roles and years of experience

The sample consists of staff directly involved in the work of European Universities alliances. The largest group of respondents currently serves as **local alliance coordinators** (35%, 165 respondents), with responsibility for managing and coordinating alliance activities within their institutions. **Alliance administrators** and **work package leaders** are also well represented (20%, 97 respondents), contributing perspectives from both the administrative and thematic implementation of alliance activities. In addition, a substantial number of responses came from senior institutional representatives, such as **vice rectors** and **heads of international relations offices**, highlighting the strategic importance attributed to the EUI at institutional leadership level (Figure 8).

The fact that the number of responses received to this question exceeds the total number of survey respondents indicates that some individuals hold multiple roles within their alliance.

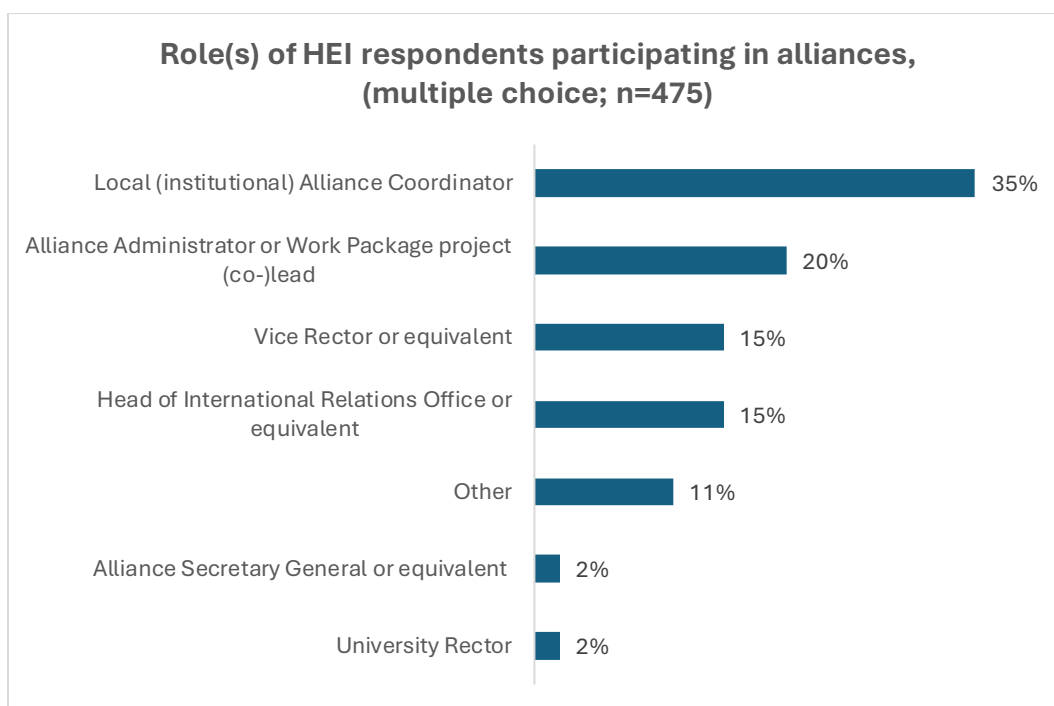


Figure 8. Role(s) of HEI respondents in alliances

More than two fifths of the sample (42%) consists of staff with substantial institutional experience, having worked at their current HEI for **more than 15 years** (Figure 9). At the same time, a sizeable number of respondents reported have been at their institution for **less than 5 years**. This pattern points to recent recruitments linked to alliance-specific tasks and suggests a growing cohort of staff with dedicated roles supporting alliance activities.

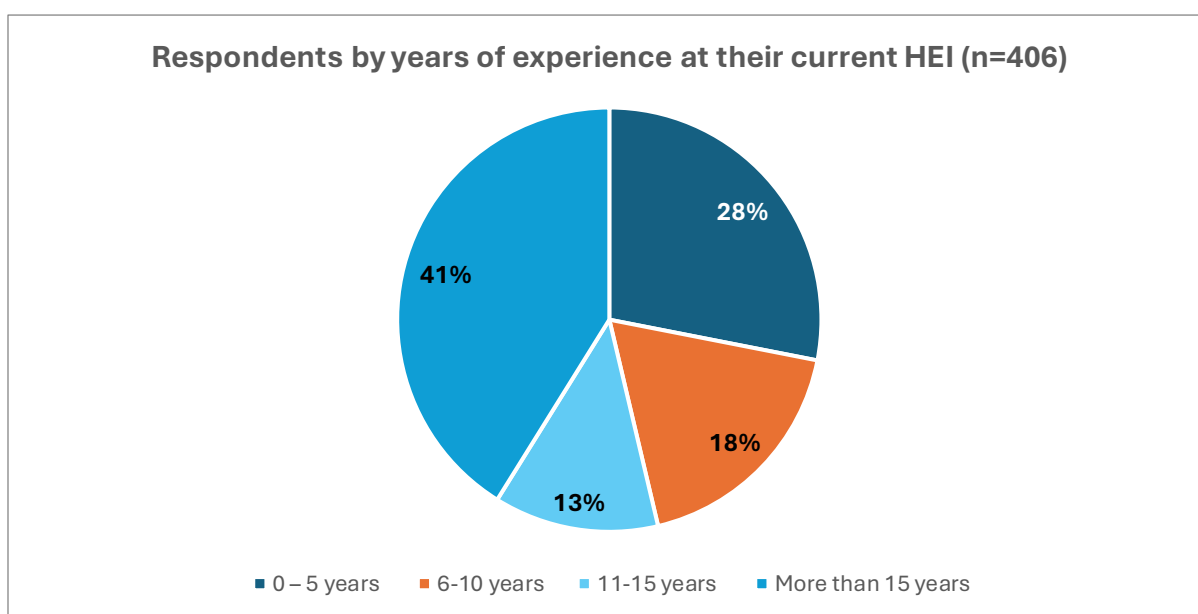


Figure 9. Respondents by years of experience at their current HEI

In addition, a consistent share (42%) of HEI respondents reported having taken on EUI related tasks or roles **only within the last year or two**, while those with more than five years of experience working on alliance-related activities account for just 24% of the sample (Figure 10).

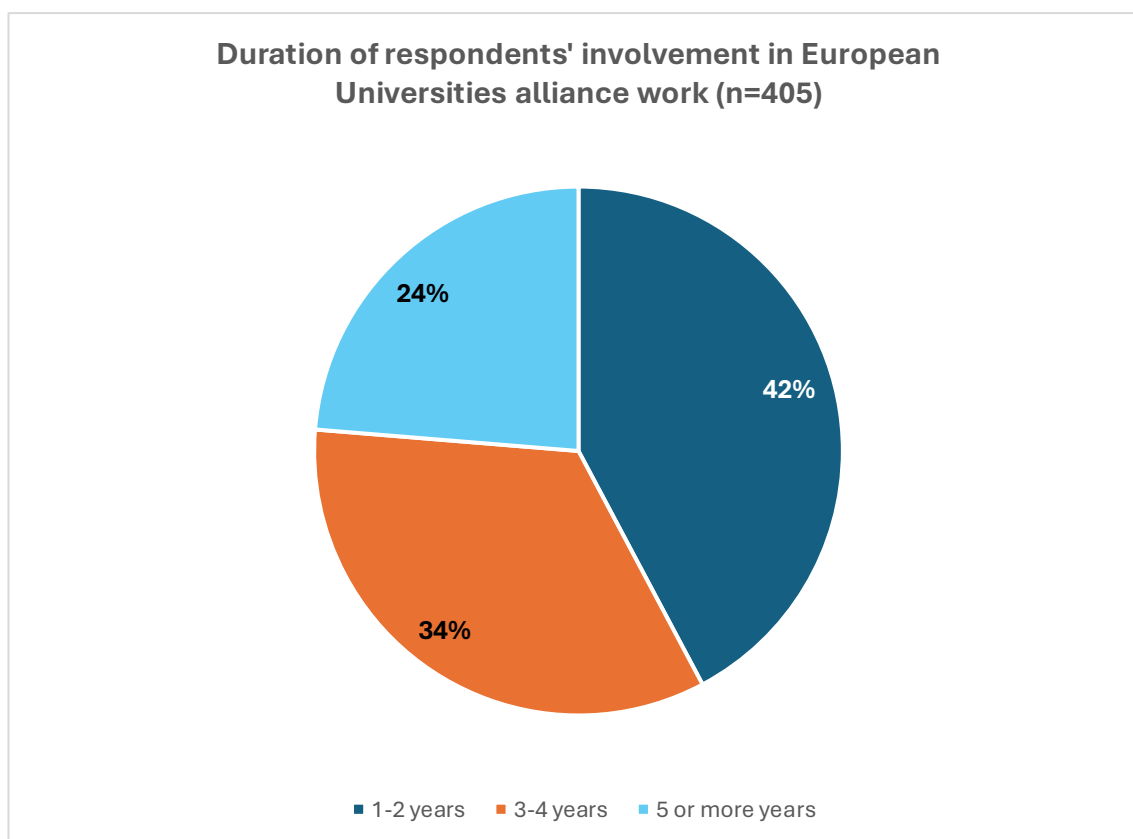


Figure 10. Duration of respondents' involvement in European Universities alliance work

Furthermore, the data illustrate different levels of support to alliance-related activities, showcasing a **diverse distribution of EUI related work** across the sample.

Just over **one quarter of HEI respondents (26%) reported dedicating 80–100%** of their working time to EUI-related tasks (Figure 11). By contrast, around one **third indicated that they allocate around 20–40%** of their time to the EUI, while the remaining respondents reported spending less than 20% of their overall workload on the EUI.



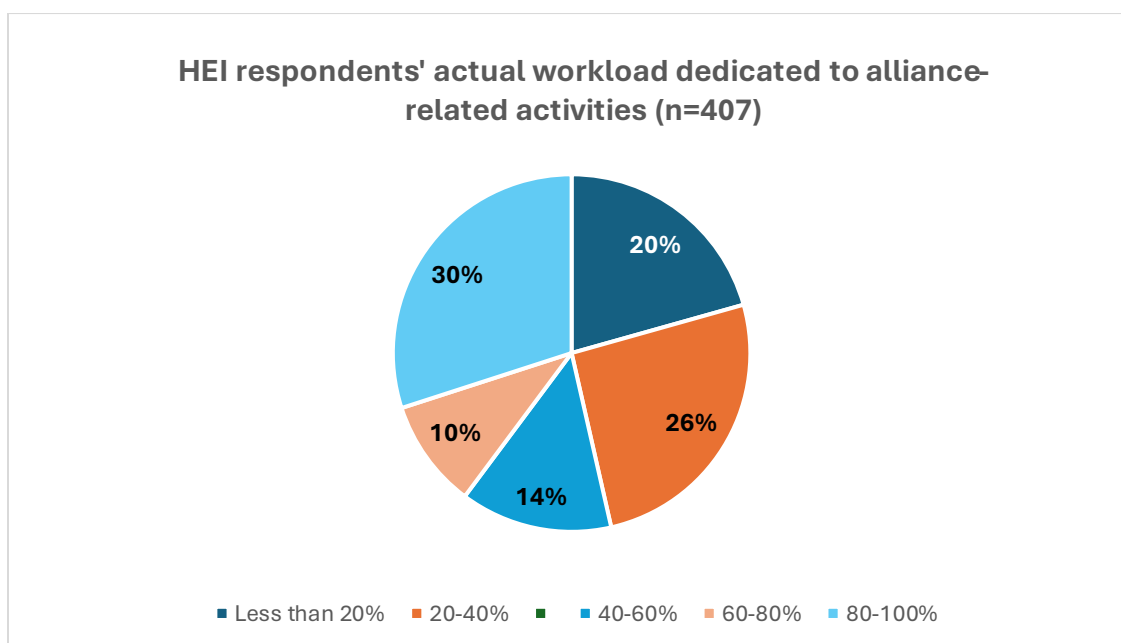


Figure 11. HEI respondents' actual workload dedicated to alliance-related activities

In line with the aims and ambitions of the initiative, **HEI respondents** are most often responsible for topics relating to **strategy and governance**, followed by **student and staff mobility**, and **joint programmes/degrees** or **joint learning offers**.

Overall, the HEI sample offers broad geographical coverage and captures alliances at different stages of development, providing valuable insights into the **diverse challenges and needs faced by HEIs** in their participation in the European Universities Initiative.

In addition, the responses of Seal of Excellence alliances, reflecting the varying degrees of dependency on central funding mechanisms, encompass the input of the alliances operating without direct EU financial support.

Finally, the inclusion of staff active in **both operational and decision-making roles** provides a comprehensive view of the different layers of alliances' management.

### 1.3.2 National Agencies (NAs)

In total, 35 responses from staff employed by National Agencies (NAs) in **28 different countries** were submitted to the second questionnaire (Table 2). Two responses, submitted by a youth national agency and an alliance, were considered not valid, and thus, removed from the **final sample of 33 responses**.

The **vast majority (79%)** of NA respondents represent **National Agencies for Erasmus+**, responsible for the implementation of the programme in their respective countries (Figure 12). A smaller share consists of other types of national funding agencies or other public bodies operating in the field of international higher education. These include **4 organisations** supporting internationalisation of higher education in different countries such as Poland, Belgium, Slovakia, and Switzerland.

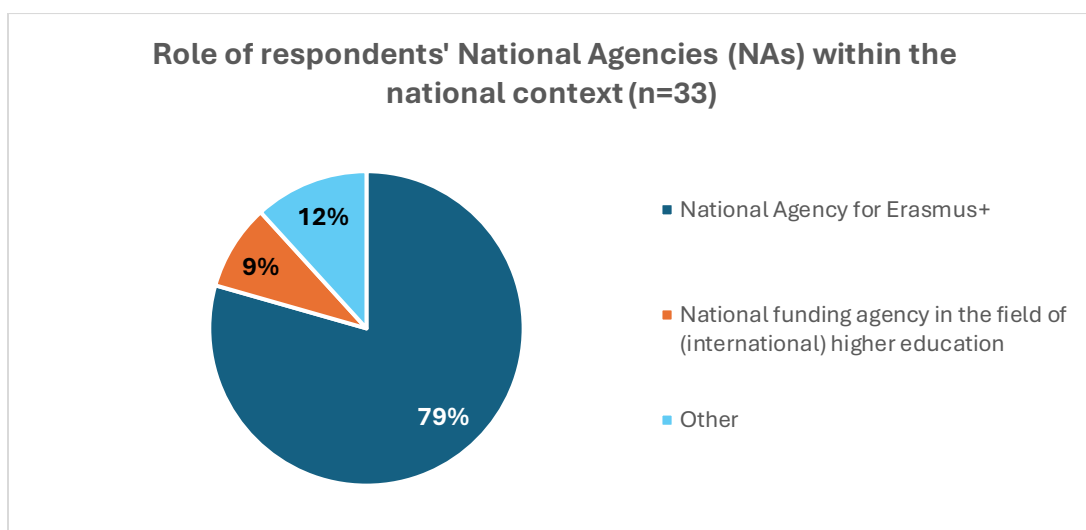


Figure 12. Role of respondents' National Agencies (NA) within the national context

Overall, the data highlight the considerable **heterogeneity of national contexts** in which National Agencies operate. Some organisations serve **very small higher education systems** with only a limited number of institutions (for example, between one and ten HEIs), while others work within **large and highly diversified systems** encompassing hundreds or even thousands of HEIs. In addition, while some NAs have a clearly defined nationwide role in supporting the EUI, in other cases the scope of support is regionally delineated (as in Belgium), reflecting structural diversity within and across countries.

Each NA for Erasmus+ has its own dedicated staff to manage the administration of the Erasmus+ programme and some NAs also employ staff supporting other national or regional initiatives, with approximately **half of the responding NAs (48%)** maintaining **offices of more than 100 employees** (Figure 13). Another significant share (39%) maintains offices of 20–100 employees, representing medium-sized agencies, which are proportional to the size of their respective higher education system.

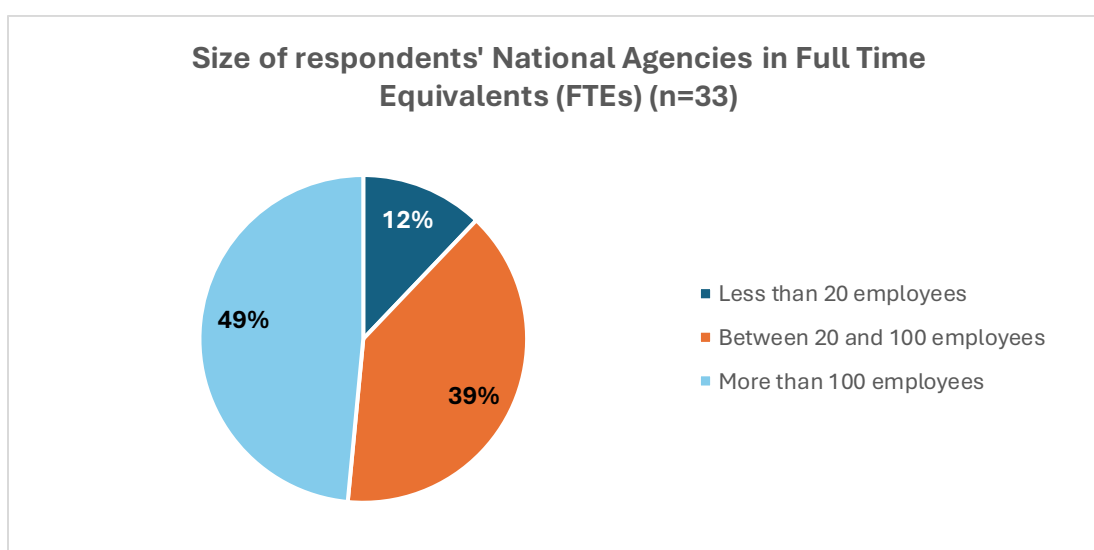


Figure 13. Size of respondents' National Agencies in Full Time Equivalents (FTEs)

Over half (61%) of NAs reported having dedicated staff resources to oversee EUI-related activities (Figure 14), although in most cases this amounts to less than one full-time equivalent. This pattern reflects the status of the **EUI as a centralised action**, while NAs primarily allocate dedicated staff to the implementation of decentralised actions of the Erasmus+ programme at national level. A small number of exceptions stand out: Czechia, Greece, Poland, and Serbia **dedicate between 1 and 3 FTE**, while Germany reported **3 or more FTEs**, reflecting specific support arrangements described in greater detail in Chapter 0.

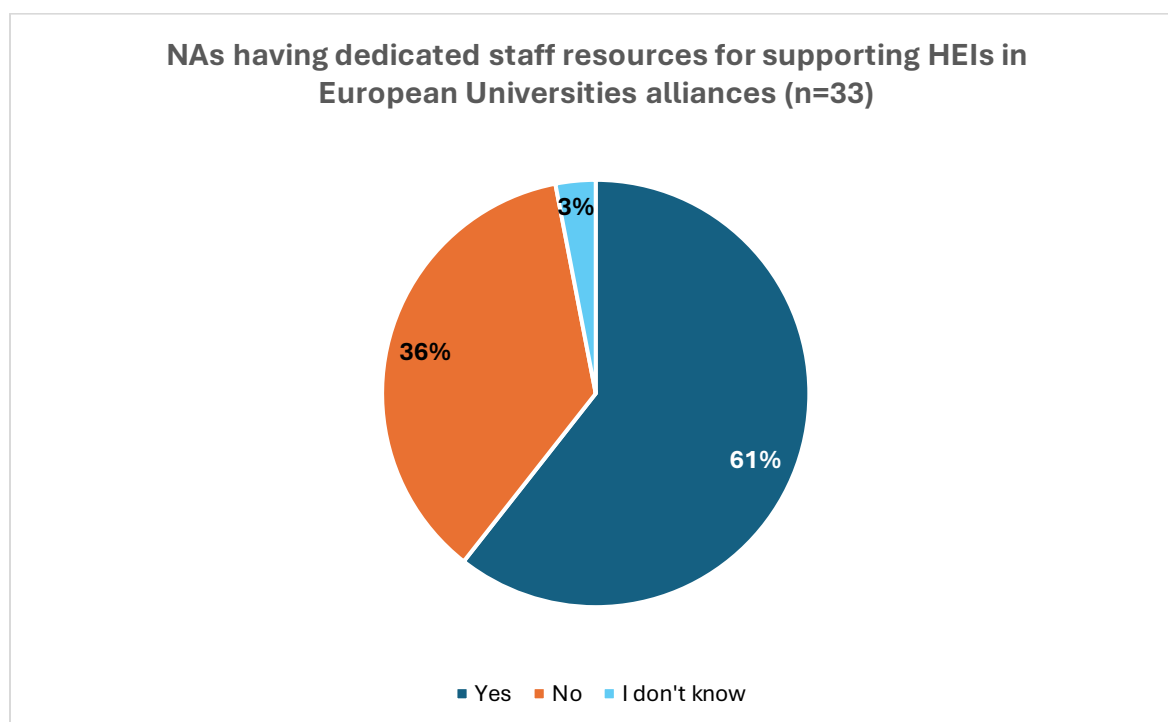


Figure 14. NAs' dedicated staff resources for supporting HEIs in European Universities alliance

Overall, the National Agencies sample offers very strong geographical coverage, encompassing 28 of the 33 countries participating in the Erasmus+ programme. It is also broadly representative in terms of country size, institutional profiles (covering Erasmus+ and/or national initiatives), and the level of resources allocated to supporting the European Universities Initiative at national level.

## 2. Strategic references to the EUI

At national level, key actors—particularly national ministries—play a significant role in shaping inter- and intra-institutional developments in higher education. This influence is most commonly exercised through **national strategies** and policy frameworks, strategic planning instruments, and funding mechanisms.

Strategic documents—such as **national strategies for (higher) education, research and innovation, or internationalisation**—serve, much like institutional strategies, as symbolic and communicative instruments that signal policy priorities and areas of focus for the coming years. In practice, these orientations are often linked to expectations of performance and, in some cases, to prospective funding mechanisms and concrete deliverables. At the same time, strategic plans may also highlight themes or broader objectives primarily in symbolic terms, without specifying clear targets or implementation measures, functioning instead as expressions of political or institutional support. Whether operational or symbolic in nature, such documents nonetheless convey what is considered important at a given point in time and help shape expectations for the immediate future.

As European Universities alliances have become a prominent form of cooperation at both European and national levels, it is reasonable to expect that references to the European Universities Initiative—and to European Universities alliances more specifically—are reflected in national and institutional strategic documents. To examine *whether*, and *in what ways*, **HEIs' participation in the initiative is incorporated into overarching strategies**, respondents were asked a series of questions regarding the visibility of their involvement in such documents.

The first section of this chapter presents findings on the visibility of the European Universities Initiative in **national strategic documents**, such as national higher education and internationalisation strategies. The second section then examines the extent to which **institutional strategic documents** refer to participation in European Universities alliances.

### 2.1 National level references

To assess the strategic significance of HEIs' participation in the EUI at national policy level, respondents from both National Agencies and HEIs were asked whether participation in European Universities alliances is referenced in **national strategic documents**.

A **majority of respondents** reported that **such references are included in current national higher education and/or internationalisation strategies** (55% of NAs and 70% of HEIs), indicating growing recognition of the initiative's relevance at national level (Figure 15 and Figure 16).

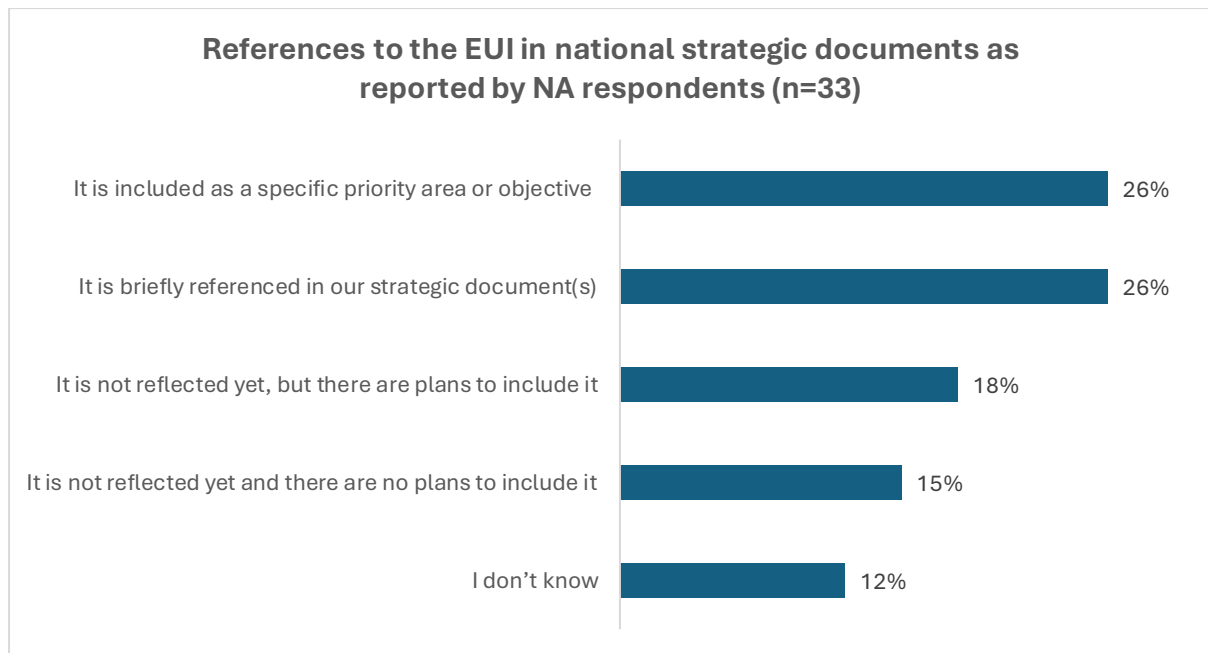


Figure 15. References to the EUI in national strategic documents as reported by NA respondents

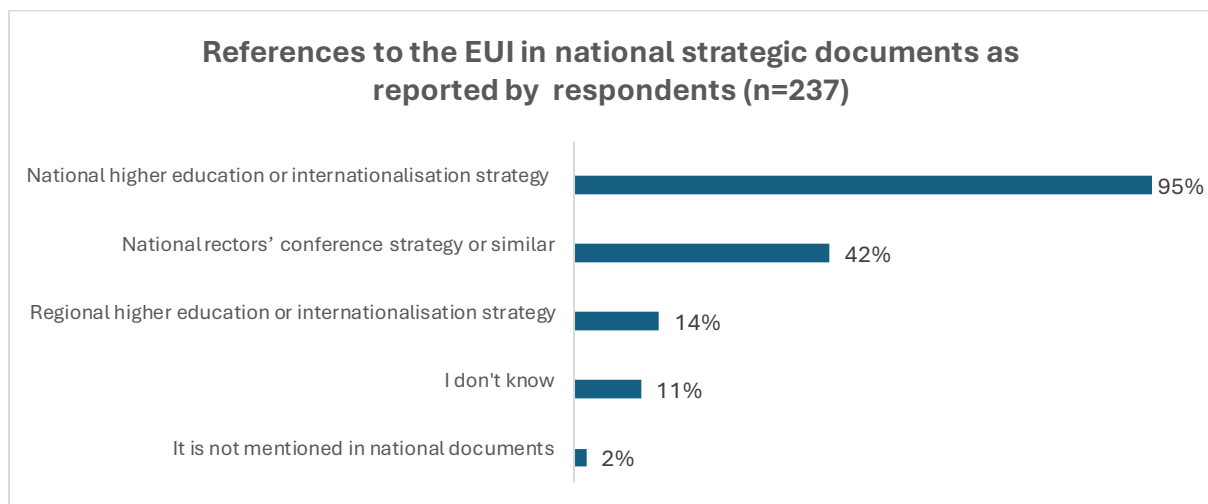


Figure 16. References to the EUI in national strategic documents as reported by HEI respondents

Over half of NA respondents (55%, 19 respondents) reported that participation of their HEIs in European Universities alliances is already reflected in their country's national strategy for higher education or for internationalisation (Figure 15). In nine countries, this participation is framed as a priority area or explicit objective (for example, OeAD – Austria; DAAD/NA DAAD – Germany; Higher Education Authority – Ireland). In further nine countries, participation in the initiative is briefly mentioned more broadly within national strategy, typically as a reference rather than a dedicated priority (for example, Education Exchanges Support Foundation – Lithuania; Slovak Academic Association for Internationalisation – Slovakia; Czech National Agency for Internationalisation – Czechia).

This finding is corroborated by respondents from HEI survey participants: 95% (226 respondents) reported that their institution's participation in the EUI is reflected in

**national higher education** or **internationalisation strategies** (Figure 16). In addition, over two fifths of respondents (42%, 100 respondents) indicated that it is referenced in **national rector's conference strategies** or similar documents. Furthermore, NAs in six countries (18%) reported that while participation of HEIs in the EUI is not yet reflected in national strategies, its inclusion is planned in forthcoming revisions (for example, AEF Europe – Belgium; SEPIE – Spain; Foundation Tempus – Serbia).

**NAs in five countries (15%)** reported that participation of their country's HEIs is **not currently reflected in national strategic documents** and that **no concrete plans for inclusion are in place at present** (i.e. Movetia – Switzerland; Anefore – Luxembourg; Rannís – Iceland; Tempus Public Foundation – Hungary; Danish Agency for Higher Education and Science – Denmark). Focus group participants noted, however, that many existing national strategies were adopted before the EUI gained prominence at national level, which helps explain the current absence of references. They also indicated that this situation may evolve as strategies are updated in the coming years.

Participants in both the **NA and HEI focus groups** explained that, in some national contexts, support for European Universities alliances is expressed implicitly rather than through explicit references to the EUI alliances in national strategic documents. Instead of naming the initiative directly, **national ministries may prioritise specific components of alliance activities** within broader policy frameworks. For example, Poland's forthcoming national higher education strategy is expected to support joint educational developments—such as dual and joint degree programmes and pathways towards a European degree label—which are central to many EUI alliances, without explicitly referring to the initiative itself.

Similarly, some ministries follow a more bottom-up approach, postponing explicit positioning on the EUI in national education strategies while first observing alliance developments and identifying priority areas in consultation with HEIs (as noted by HEI focus group participants, for instance in Finland). Under this approach, more explicit references to the EUI may be introduced at a later stage, once alliance-related impact and sustainability become clearer.

Both NA and HEI respondents noted that **national strategic documents typically do not refer to Seal of Excellence alliances or associated partners**. This appears to reflect the relative novelty of the Seal of Excellence status, as well as, in some contexts, the absence of a clearly defined role or agreed support arrangements for these alliances at national level.

Overall, the extent to which national strategic documents encompass references to national HEIs' participation in the EUI alliances varies across the countries, pointing that while the strategic importance of the topic is growing steadily, it has not yet been fully formalised or consistently embedded in national strategies across Europe.

## 2.2 Institutional level references

When it comes to higher education institutions' strategies, **nearly all HEI respondents (80%)** indicated that their **participation** in European Universities alliances is **referenced in their institutional strategies** or similar documents, and to a great extent (70%) in their **internationalisation strategies** (Figure 17). At the same time, HEI respondents indicated that their institution's participation in alliances is to a lesser extent referenced in overarching education or research strategies or plans (only 38% and 36%, respectively).

This finding highlights that most HEIs seem to perceive their participation in the alliance as linked to wider institutional developments and organisational change, be it in the specific area of internationalisation or of the institution overall. The responses also show that there is further room for integration across other types of institutional strategies (e.g. for education or research), where they exist as separate strategies from the wider institutional or internationalisation strategy (which is the case in some, but not all HEIs).

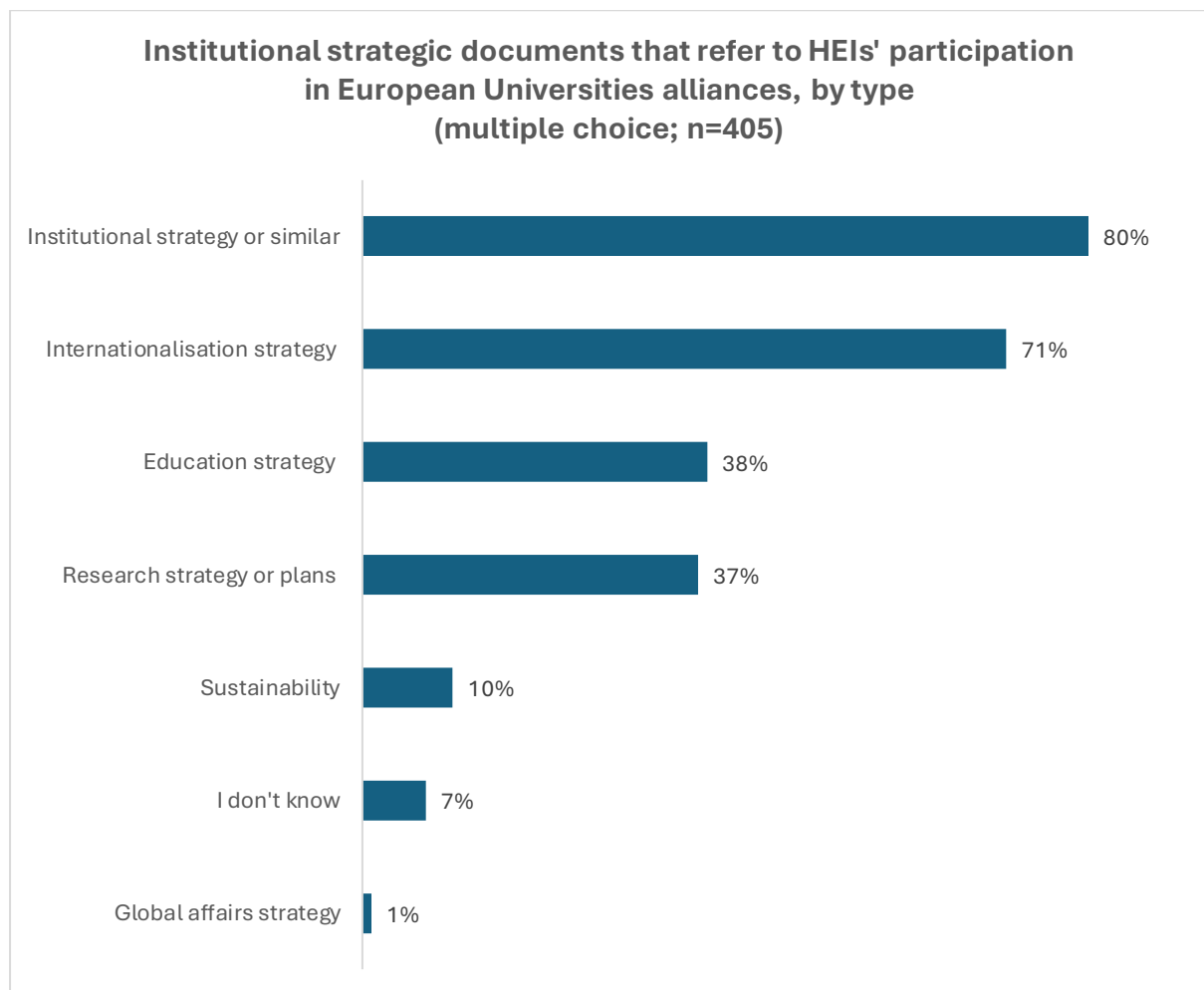


Figure 17. Institutional strategic documents that refer to HEIs' participation in European Universities alliances, by type

HEI respondents noted that the relatively limited and **project-based nature of EU-level funding for EUI alliances can constrain the extent to which participation is embedded deeply and consistently across institutional strategies**. At the same time, they reported that aligning alliance objectives with existing institutional strategies has generally been less challenging, as alliance priorities often build on or are inspired by institutional missions and strategic goals. A deeper and more systematic integration across institutional strategies would likely require a longer-term alliance perspective, supported by sustained financial investment commensurate with the ambition of institution-wide cooperation, as well as a clear sustainability framework.

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In sum, over the past six years, national and regional ministries of education, alongside higher education institutions, have closely followed the development of European Universities alliances and have begun to reflect elements of HEIs' participation in their strategic documents. As shown in this chapter, the EUI has increasingly entered both national and institutional strategic discourse. However, its full and systematic integration into national and institutional strategies remains uneven, reflecting a range of contextual, structural, and timing-related factors.

Further strategic anchoring will depend on greater clarity regarding the future scope of the initiative, the level and duration of available funding, the overall implementation timeline, and the pathways towards the long-term sustainability of the alliances.



### 3. Support at national (and regional) level

In addition to European-level funding provided through the Erasmus+ programme, the European Universities Initiative has, since its early stages, also benefited from a range of financial and non-financial support at national level in many EU member states and countries associated with Erasmus+. In federal systems, such support has at times also been provided by regional authorities. The form, scope, and continuity of this support, however, vary considerably across countries and funding periods.

This chapter examines the landscape of national- and regional-level support available to HEIs participating in European Universities alliances, with particular attention to non-financial forms of assistance. It analyses measures introduced by different actors and authorities, including ministries of (higher) education and research, national funding and quality assurance agencies, as well as National Agencies (including those for Erasmus+).

The *first section* maps **different national and regional actors** supporting HEIs participating in European Universities alliances and outlines the **main types of support they provide** (financial, non-financial, or combination of both). The *second* and *third sections* then examine in greater depth the support offered by the **two national-level actors** most frequently cited by respondents.

#### 3.1 Main actors and types of support

Responses received to both HEI and NA questionnaires highlight a variety of actors supporting HEIs participating in European Universities alliances at national and regional levels. In particular, **two types of key actors are most frequently referenced** by both respondent groups, at significant distance by all other types, signalling that their contribution is, by comparison, much more substantive.

**National ministries of (higher) education** are reported as top national-level actors providing support to HEIs participating in European Universities alliances – according to 59% (238 respondents) of all HEI representatives that answered this question (n=404) (Figure 18) and to 83% (10 respondents) of NA representatives (Figure 19). However, a significant number of respondents representing both categories reported that this support did not apply in their context, signalling that they either did not perceive the respective actor(s) as providing any substantial support that deserves reporting, or that they did not have knowledge of any specific support.

Closely following national ministries, **National Agencies for Erasmus+** are the second most frequently cited providers of support to alliance-member HEIs. They were mentioned by 44% of HEI respondents (173 respondents; Figure 18) and by 58% of NA respondents (7 respondents; Figure 19). **National funding agencies** were cited less frequently, by 17% of HEI respondents (72 respondents) and 33% of NA respondents (4 respondents), respectively.

As National Agencies for Erasmus+ are often integrated in national funding agencies with broader mandates, these two groups partially overlap and should therefore be considered jointly when analysing the support they provide.

Slightly ahead of national funding agencies are **national ministries of research and innovation**, referenced by 20% (79 responses) of HEIs and 42% (5 responses) of NAs. The support delivered by these ministries was reported for five countries only: Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, and Switzerland, based on the respondents' knowledge.

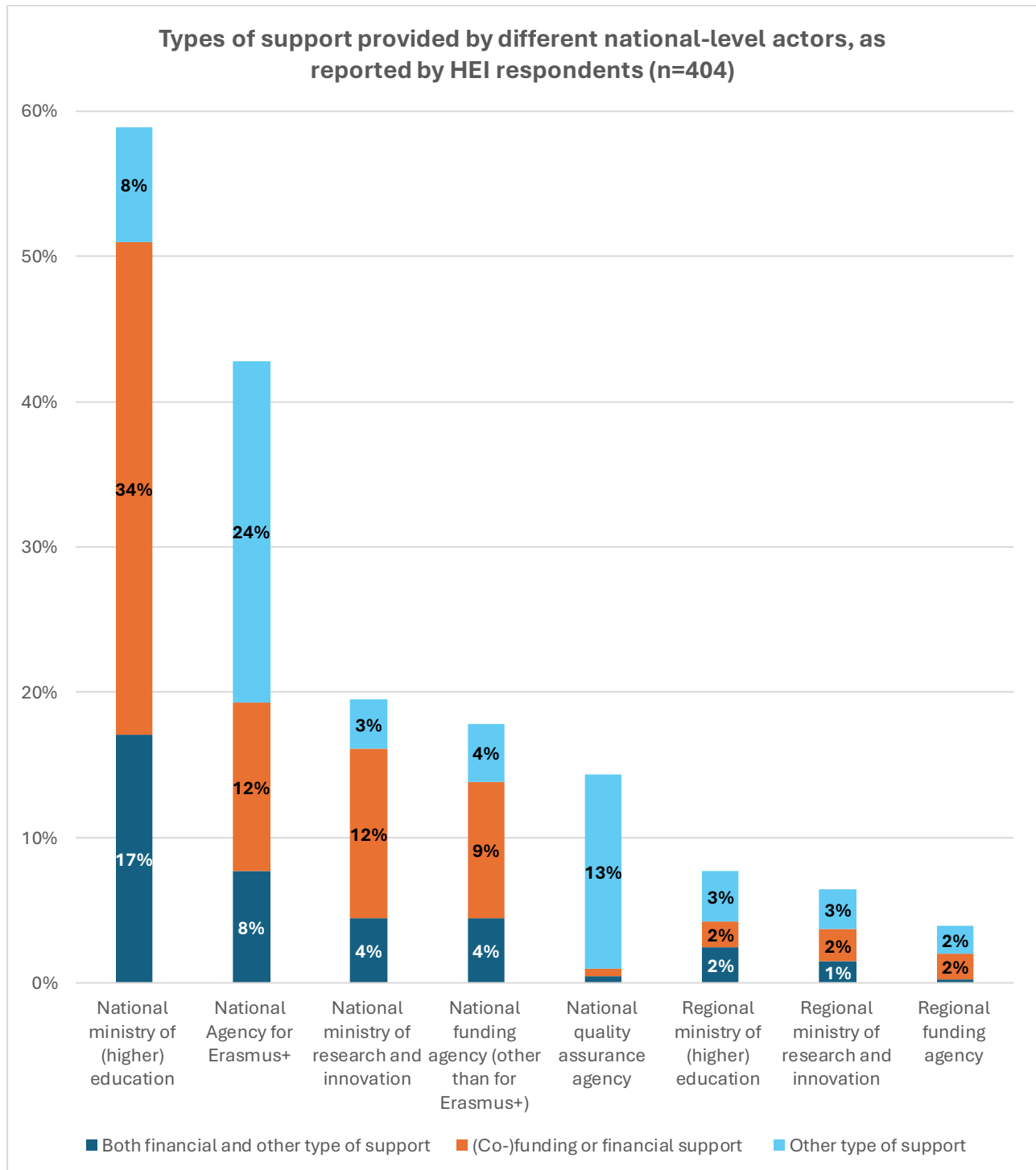


Figure 18. Types of support provided by different national-level actors, as reported by HEI respondents

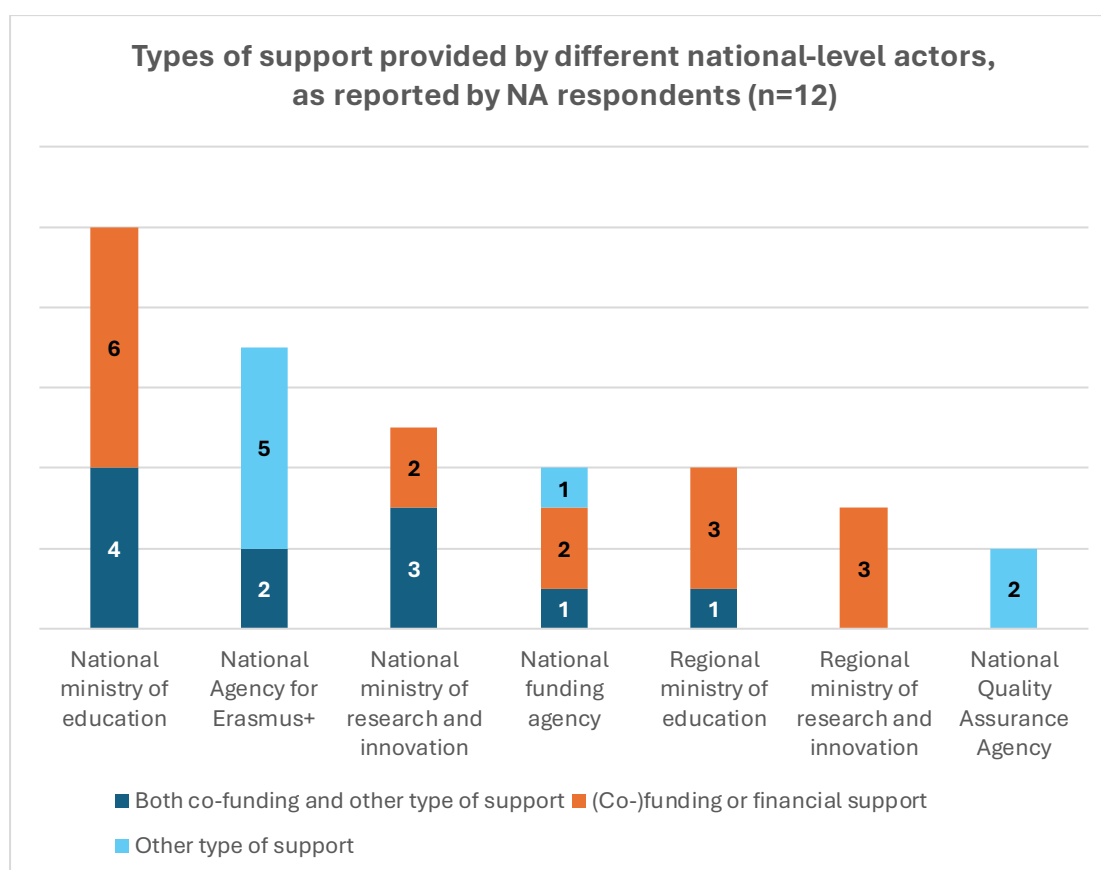


Figure 19. Types of support provided by different national-level actors, as reported by NA respondents

Regarding the **type of support provided**, **national ministries of (higher) education are primarily associated with financial support**—either in the form of direct co-funding or a combination of financial and other support measures, as reported by **51% of HEI representatives** who answered this question (Figure 18), and by **83% of NA respondents** (Figure 19).

In turn, **National Agencies** in general, and those for **Erasmus+** in particular, tend to provide **primarily other types of (non-financial) support**, as reported by 24% of HEI respondents (Figure 18) and by 42% of NA ones (Figure 19), although in some countries (see section 3.3 for further detail) National Agencies also manage national-level co-funding for alliances on behalf of their ministries of education.

Rarely mentioned in terms of financial support, **national quality assurance agencies** are nonetheless the second most reported source of non-financial support/other support, suggesting the important role they have in addressing the remaining barriers to alliance-related activities in national contexts.

**Regional-level actors** – including ministries of education, research and innovation, or regional funding agencies – are the least reported in providing financial or other types of support, likely due to the EUI being perceived primarily as an education initiative, of relevance at the national level. The contribution of regional ministries and regional funding agencies is nonetheless certainly important in some federal systems, with education responsibilities delegated to the regional level.

## 3.2 Specific support by national (higher) education ministries

As mentioned in the previous section, national ministries for (higher) education represent the most referenced type of actor supporting HEIs' participation in the European Universities Initiative beyond EU level funding offered through the Erasmus+ programme.

### 3.2.1 Co-funding and other types of support

As noted above, the **primary form of support** provided by ministries of (higher) education to HEIs participating in European Universities alliances is financial, most commonly through **co-funding** their participation in the initiative.

When asked about the specific forms of support provided by national governments and ministries, a large majority of respondents reported the availability of national co-funding for European Universities alliances. **Dedicated co-funding schemes** complementing EU funding were reported by 83% of NAs (10 respondents) and 73% of HEIs (207 respondents) (Figure 20).

In addition, 21% of HEI respondents and 25% of NA respondents indicated that support for alliance participation is embedded within **general institutional funding allocations**, rather than provided through stand-alone schemes. While less prevalent, national co-funding is not limited exclusively to full alliance partners: 6% of HEI respondents reported that **institutions participating as associated partners** or as **members of Seal of Excellence alliances also benefit** from national financial support.

Although not all EU member states or countries associated with the Erasmus+ programme provide national co-funding for participation in the initiative, many have done so at some point during the implementation of the European Universities Initiative (Table 3).

Ministerial support extends beyond co-funding and encompasses a range of non-financial measures. Thus, **50% of NA and 59% of HEI** respondents reported support was in the form of **experience-sharing and networking among national HEIs** participating in European Universities alliances (Figure 20).

Support related to policy development was also reported, with 42% of NA respondents and 23% of HEI respondents indicating involvement of national authorities in the **design of national policy reforms** linked to the EUI. In addition, 42% of NAs and 37% of HEIs referred to activities aimed at **disseminating good practices and outcomes** from alliance work to HEIs not (yet) involved in the initiative (Figure 20).

By contrast, more infrastructure-oriented support measures remain less common: the provision of dedicated **digital platforms** or spaces for alliances by national or regional authorities was reported by only 17% of NA respondents and 12% of HEI respondents (Figure 20).

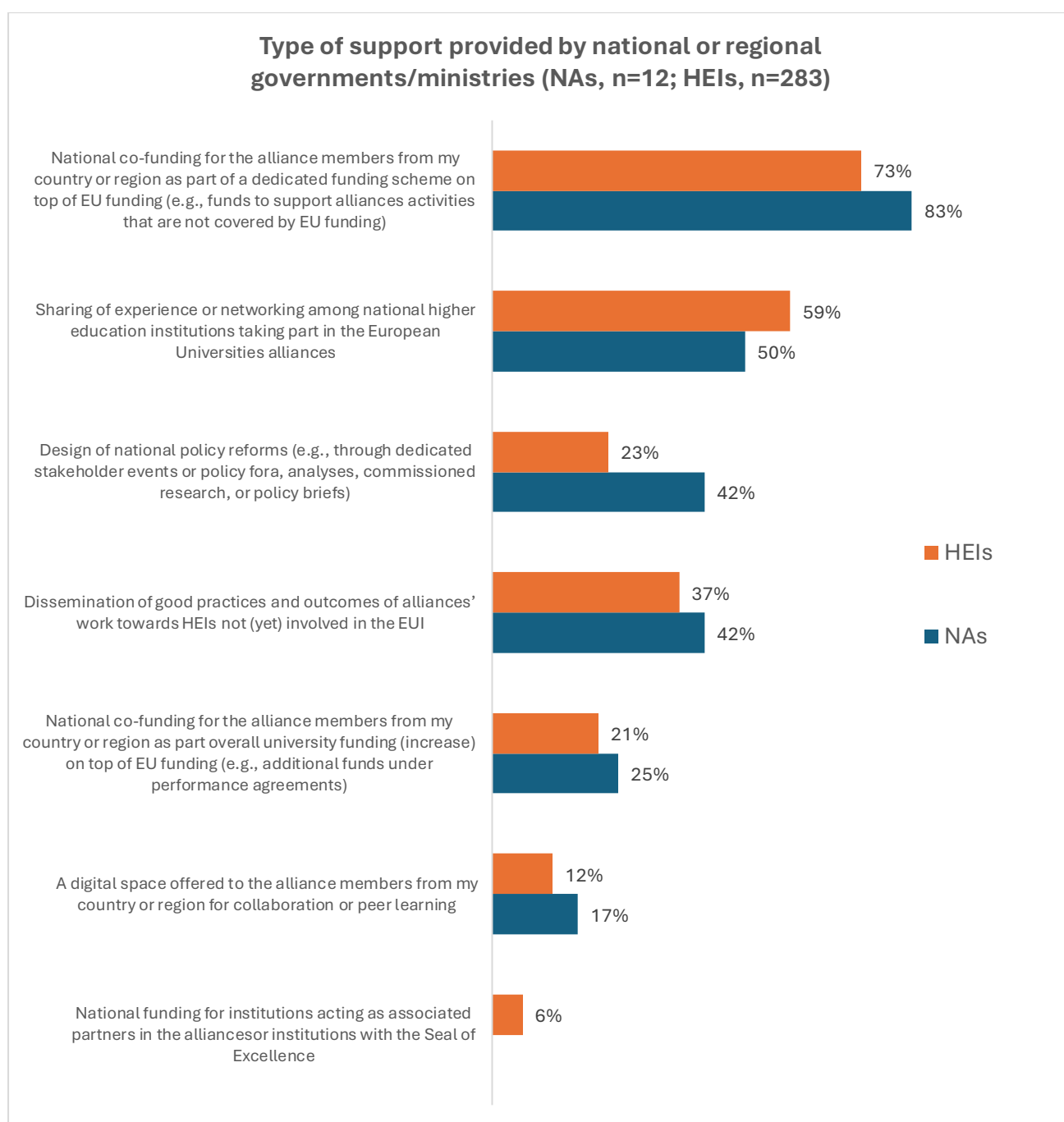


Figure 20. Type of support provided by national or regional governments/ministries

### 3.2.2 Co-funding sources

**Co-funding** of European Universities alliances is a **core requirement** of the EUI. Under Erasmus+, EU funding may cover up to 80% of eligible alliance project costs, with the remaining **20%** expected to be met through institutional resources or other funding sources. At EU policy level, this co-funding principle is considered essential *“in order to achieve real success encompassing quality, excellence and inclusion, support for alliances cannot come solely from the European budget but should also come from national, local and private sources”* (EP’s New Vision, 2025, p. 6/9).

When asked about **specific sources of funding** for their participation in European Universities alliances, nearly all HEI respondents (**90%**; 365 responses) reported that they have been funded **primarily through the Erasmus+ programme**, with the remaining 10% represented by HEIs participating in Seal of Excellence alliances (Figure 21).

More than half – **57%** (230 answers) of HEI respondents – reported that they **co-fund their participation in an alliance from own institutional resources**. Furthermore, 51% (208 respondents) reported that they receive separate national co-funding. Horizon Europe and regional funding schemes appear as much less prominent co-funding sources (selected by 72 and 26 respondents, respectively). National co-funding is thus third in the order of importance, following Erasmus+ and institutional self-funding sources.

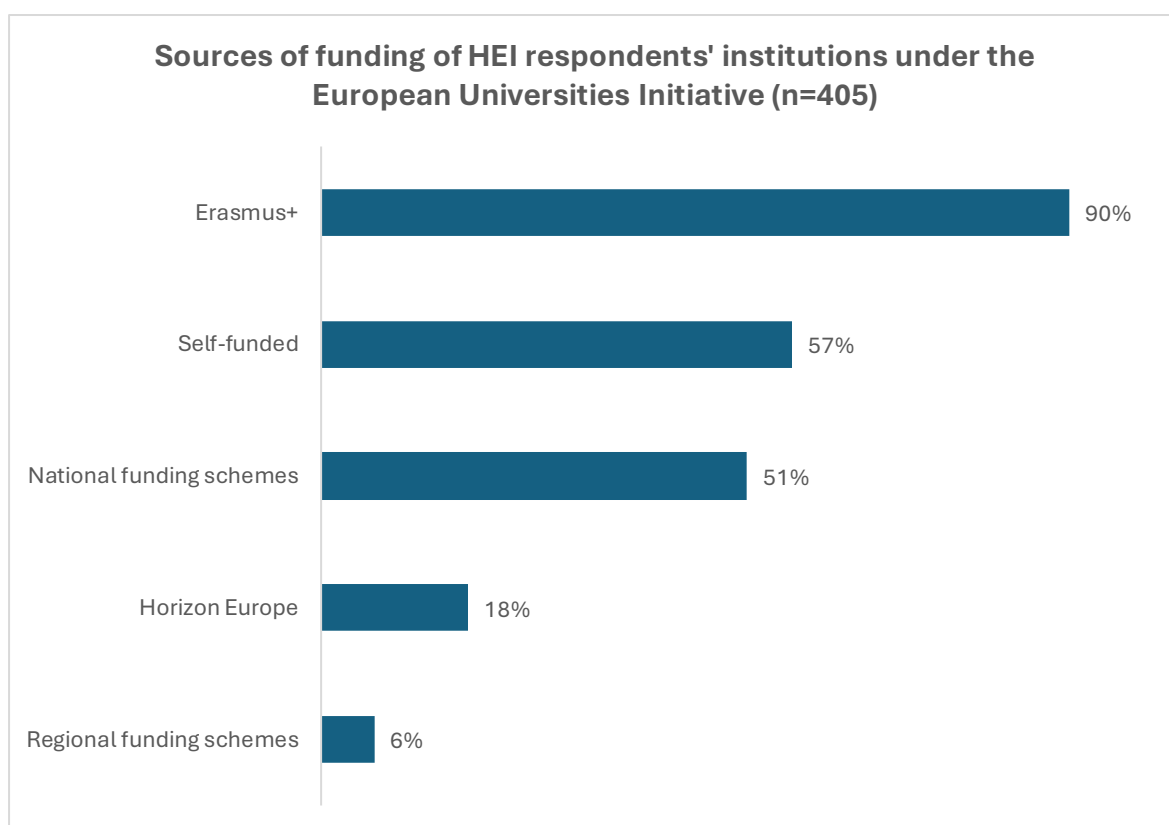


Figure 21. Sources of funding of HEI respondents' institutions under the European Universities Initiative

For example, national ministries of education in **Poland** and **Czechia** cover only part of the 20% co-funding requirement, while ministries in France and Hungary cover the full share of 20%.

**Germany's European University Networks (EUN) programme, managed by DAAD (P13)** supports HEIs through a national project-based funding scheme. The first call for EUN funding took place in 2019, with German HEIs receiving funding from 2020 to 2022, and was followed by a second pilot call (2021-2023). During the pilot periods, funding was organised through two programme lines. Programme line 1 supported German HEIs that were selected for the European Universities Initiative, with EUR 250,000 per HEI per year, while Programme line 2 supported HEIs that had applied to the initiative but were not (yet) selected, providing EUR 150,000 per institution per year.

After the two pilot calls, a further three funding rounds were launched (2023-2026, 2024-2027 and 2025-2028).

With the development of the EUN programme, its increasing visibility among German HEIs and the growing success of German universities within the European

Universities Initiative, the two programme lines have since merged and the funding slightly reduced. HEIs starting in 2023 and 2024 received EUR 175,000 per year, and HEIs starting in 2025 receive EUR 150,000 per year.

Applications for EUN funding are submitted to the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space (BMFTR) and include a project description, an outline of planned measures and a financing plan. Following the review process, successful HEIs receive a funding contract and may begin project implementation. Several German states (*Bundesländer*) also provide additional funding to participating HEIs. Beyond funding, the EUN also consists of a plethora of complementary support activities, facilitating peer-learning, supporting communication tools such as podcasts, article series, social media campaigns, videos, and an interactive map of alliances, alongside workshops, national conferences, and sessions on regulatory barriers and quality assurance.

Link to the programme's webpage: <https://www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/further-information-on-daad-programmes/eun/>

In **Czechia**, the national ministry contributes **75% of the mandatory 20% co-funding** for each participating HEI. In **Poland**, the ministry provides **nearly 20% of the institutional co-funding**, equal to around EUR 225,000 per institution/alliance.

In **France**, the ministry of higher education and research invested up to EUR 1 million per HEI/alliance from the first two generations (2019 and 2020) as part of the **France 2030 programme**. HEIs also benefit from top-up funding managed by the national funding agency (ANR). Funding from the French ministry has since decreased to around one quarter of the initial contributions, i.e. roughly EUR 25,000 per HEI.

**Switzerland**, currently not associated to Erasmus+, **designed its own funding and co-funding requirements** to cover for the participation of Swiss HEIs in the initiative (not being bound by Erasmus+ rules). The State Secretariat for Education, Research, and

Innovation (SERI) offered (through Movetia – the National Agency managing the scheme) direct funding to cover 60% of the Swiss HEIs' costs, with the latter expected to co-fund 40% of their participation (formally as associate partners within alliances).

Importantly, in addition to EUI-dedicated funding under Erasmus+, HEIs in selected and Seal of Excellence (SoE) alliances try to **tap into other, complementary funding lines under Erasmus+** to finance their alliance-related activities. Particularly challenged to combine different sources of funding are SoE institutions, which typically rely on a mix of indirect national funds for internationalisation, decentralised mobility funds from Erasmus+ (KA131), and own institutional funds (including the pulling together of funds at alliance level). For example, a Czech HEI member in a SoE alliance reported collecting alliance membership fees and placing them into a shared account used to fund alliance-activities. A joint team oversees the alliance's project proposals, and the shared funds are granted to specific projects.

### 3.2.3 Co-funding mechanisms

In the countries where national co-funding for the EUI exists, the financing has been allocated either in the form of (a) **direct, targeted funding**, (b) **indirect funding**, or (c) a **combination of both**, according to the categorisation developed by Jongbloed et al. (2023).

**Direct, targeted funding** at national level takes the form of a lump sum, one-off, or subsidised amount of funding **specifically awarded to support the participation** of selected national HEIs in the initiative, as is the case in Norway, for example, where a one-off payment of NOK 1 million was provided for each HEI in an alliance.

**Indirect funding** is made available to HEIs through broader annual (internationalisation) performance agreements or through funding formula indicators, as is the case in Austria. In such systems, HEIs in alliances are left the freedom to redirect part of this funding to support their participation in the latter.

Germany and Poland reported co-funding national HEIs involved in the alliances without any EUI funding (with or without Seal of Excellence), while France, Croatia, Belgium, Slovenia, and Austria reported offering other types of support to such institutions.

### 3.2.4 Management of national co-funding

In some countries, the co-funding for HEIs in alliances is **managed directly by ministries of (higher) education** (e.g. in Denmark, or Italy), while in others **National Agencies (for Erasmus+) are mandated** by the national ministries **to manage** the related co-funding on their behalf (Table 3).

In countries with **two national agencies** supporting internationalisation of their higher education systems, such as Germany and Poland, it is the wider higher education funding agency (and not the Erasmus+ National Agency), namely DAAD (and not NA DAAD) and NAWA (instead of FRSE – the National Agency for Erasmus+), that manage the **co-funding schemes for their respective alliances**.



Table 3. Actors managing the co-funding of the EUI at national level

| Country          | Ministry of (higher) education | National Agency (for Erasmus+) | Additional information/specifications  |
|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Austria          | Yes                            | Yes                            | Originally managed by the Erasmus+ NA and currently administered by the national ministry  |
| Belgium-Wallonia | N/A                            | N/A                            | Regional grants offered by Federation Wallonie-Bruxelles   |
| Belgium-Flanders | N/A                            | N/A                            | Regional grants offered by VLAIO for research activities   |
| Bulgaria         | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Croatia          | N/A                            | N/A                            | No data  |
| Cyprus           | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Czechia          | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Denmark          | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Estonia          | N/A                            | N/A                            | No funding reported  |
| Finland          | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| France           | Yes                            | Yes                            |  |
| Germany          | No                             | Yes                            |  |
| Greece           | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Hungary          | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Iceland          | N/A                            | N/A                            | No data  |
| Ireland          | No                             | Yes                            |  |
| Italy            | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Latvia           | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Lithuania        | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Luxembourg       | N/A                            | N/A                            | No funding reported  |
| Netherlands      | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Norway           | No                             | Yes                            |  |
| Poland           | Yes                            | Yes                            |  |
| Portugal         | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Romania          | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Serbia           | N/A                            | N/A                            | No funding reported  |
| Slovakia         | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Slovenia         | Yes                            | N/A                            | Indirect funding: under the "development pillar" of the national institutional funding, higher education institutions can include activities carried out within European Universities alliance, if relevant. |
| Spain            | Yes                            | No                             |  |
| Sweden           | No                             | Yes                            |  |
| Switzerland      | No                             | Yes                            | Currently not an Erasmus+ programme country, but national funding available through SERI grants to co-fund (60%) the participation of Swiss HEIs as associate partners in the EUI                            |
| Türkiye          | N/A                            | N/A                            | No national funding reported   |

### Support for European Universities in Poland

In addition to the **Polish** Ministry's co-funding towards the mandatory 20% institutional costs, the **national funding agency NAWA** (Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange) provides other direct and indirect funding opportunities.

In 2024, NAWA launched the **Support for European Universities** programme to further help enhance the internationalisation of Polish higher education institutions by supporting complementary activities to those under the European Universities alliances. The programme supports Polish HEIs that are coordinators, partners, or associated partners in the European Universities Initiative. The first call, launched in 2024, supported 24 projects with a total budget of approximately EUR 9.9 million. The second call was open in 2025, supporting 25 projects with a total budget of almost EUR 8 million and was also open to HEIs that were awarded the Seal of Excellence. A third call is under discussion.

This programme was preceded by targeted funding for cooperation with Ukrainian HEIs through the programme **Solidarity with Ukraine – European Universities**, which comprised of two rounds of funding (2023 and 2024) and ultimately supported cooperation with 82 Ukrainian HEIs, with a total budget of approximately EUR 7.6 million. This programme enabled over 4,600 mobilities, of which over 83% were short-term mobilities; the participation of over 1,000 HEI staff and students in conferences; and the implementation of almost 200 didactic tools and micro programmes.

In addition to these dedicated funding lines, Polish HEIs participating in the EUI can benefit from supplementary funding through NAWA's Strategic Partnerships, Katamaran, Spinaker, PROM, and STER programmes. The Polish Erasmus+ National Agency Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE) also offers additional funding opportunities.

Link to the **Support for European Universities** programme's webpage:  
<https://nawa.gov.pl/en/instytucje/wsparcie-universytetow-europejskich>

### 3.2.5 Sustainability of national co-funding

While national co-funding mechanisms clearly and importantly help HEIs participating in alliances finance the activities otherwise not covered by the EU grant, HEIs in alliances also comment on the **complexities surrounding such additional sources of co-funding**. They are generated by the *ad hoc* nature of the co-funding, the irregularity with which the funding is offered or the changing conditions in the allocation of funding, as well as by differences across the same alliance, generated by the different national funding contexts of the alliance partners.

The HEI focus group participants signalled various situations that occur in practice. One is when the ministry of (higher) education provided funding for national HEIs in the EUI alliances at a certain moment in time, while the HEIs that joined their alliance after the respective date were no longer given the same funding. HEI respondents also reported an **emphasis of the co-funding on the first and second generation of the EUI alliances (2019 and 2020)**, with a decrease or even stop in national co-funding support since then.

The Ministry of education in **Norway**, for example, provided indirect, performance-based funding in the past, but this mechanism was discontinued in 2023. However, the funding was not cut but rather allocated directly to HEIs as part of their base allowance. HEIs may thus decide themselves how much of their funding they would like to allocate to support their participation in the EUI initiative. Similarly, the Ministries for education in **Spain** and **Ireland** allocated an initial lump sum for HEIs early in the initiative, but the related support decreased since the second round of funding.

The **volatile nature of national co-funding** poses challenges to alliance's long-term planning, the focus groups participants stressed, endangering the continuation of activities in key areas for the alliance, especially when the institutions were counting on a longer co-funding perspective.

All in all, national co-funding varies per country and evolves over time, creating a complex puzzle for EUI alliances relying on a mix of changing funding sources, including national and regional ministries, funding agencies, institutional (HEI) funds and student-fees, as well as fundraising from private and public entities (EUA, 2022; Jongbloed et al., 2023; De Gayardon et al., Forthcoming).

### 3.3 Specific support by National Agencies (for Erasmus+)

National Agencies for Erasmus+ emerge as the second key group of actors, after national ministries of (higher) education, in providing varied forms of support to HEIs participating in the EUI at national level. In contrast to ministries, the support offered by NAs is predominantly non-financial, as outline in section 3.1. At the same time, in several countries National Agencies also play a role in managing national co-funding instruments, as illustrated in Table 3.

#### 3.3.1 Overall support reported for and by NAs

When asked whether they provide support to HEIs in alliances, **91% of NAs** that responded to the NA questionnaire (i.e. both national funding agencies and agencies for Erasmus+) reported **support** to their country's institutions (Figure 22).

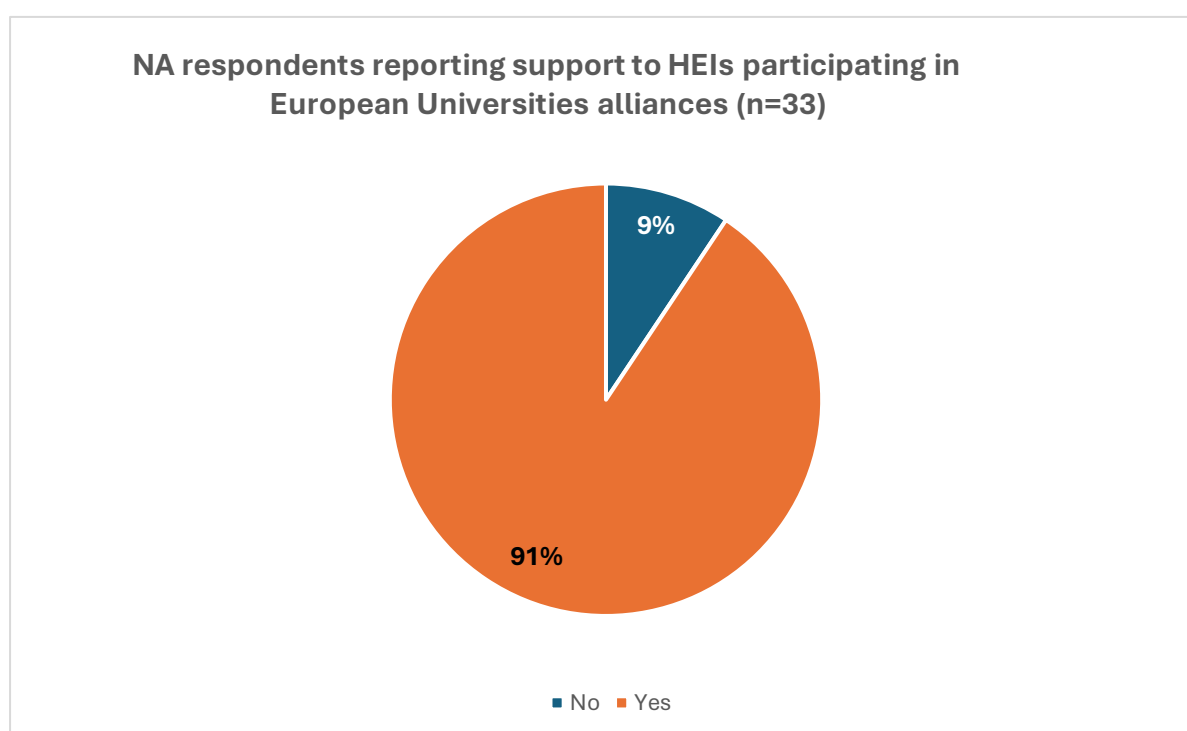


Figure 22. National Agencies reporting support to HEIs participating in European Universities alliances

However, only **44% of HEI respondents** indicated that their **NA supported their participation** in a European Universities alliance, while a combined 56% of respondents marked “No” and “I don’t know” (Figure 23).

The discrepancy between the two groups of respondents may reflect differing interpretations of the term “support”. National Agencies are likely to have understood it in a broad sense, encompassing a wide range of financial and non-financial measures, whereas HEIs may have associated support primarily with financial contributions, an area in which not all National Agencies have a direct or central role.

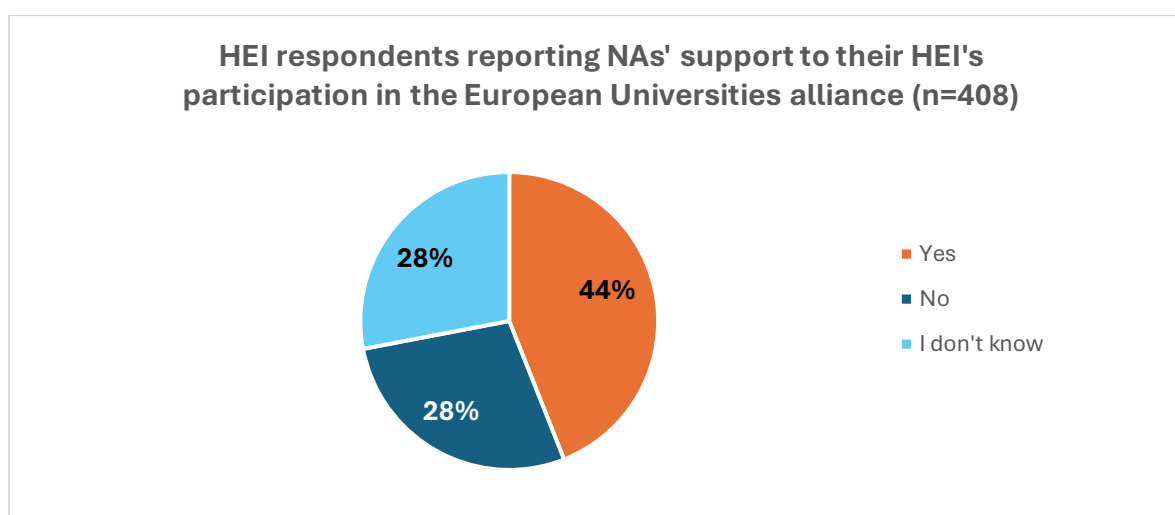


Figure 23. HEI respondents reporting NAs' support to their HEI's participation in the European Universities alliance

The reported levels of support varied by country. The **highest shares of respondents reporting support by NAs** are from **Switzerland** (92% of Swiss respondents), **Czechia** (88%), **Norway** (88%), **Poland** (74%), **Germany** (71%), and **Finland** (67%).

Looking at the status of HEI respondents, 6 out of 15 Seal of Excellence holders reported having receives support from their NAs based in Czechia, Finland, the Netherlands, and Romania.

The **NA support** generally focused on **HEIs with a confirmed status** – of coordinator or full partner – in **a currently funded European Universities alliance**, and subsequently less on co-funding for HEIs aspiring to become a coordinator or partner of an EUI alliance, or for HEIs participating in the non-EUI alliances (Figure 24).

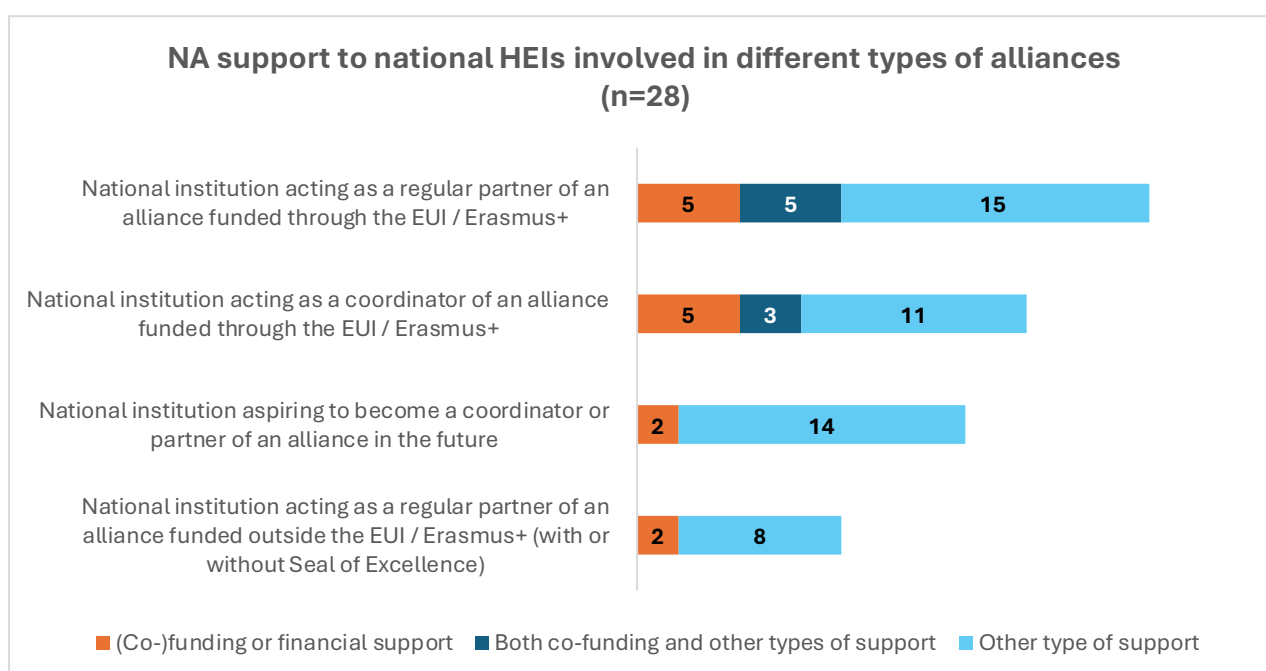


Figure 24. NA support to national HEIs involved in different types of alliances

### 3.3.2 Specific support provided by NAs

Both NAs and HEIs were asked to specify the types of support that NAs provide to HEIs, or that HEIs receive from NAs, through the two respective surveys. The survey questions included identical categories of support, allowing for a comparison of perspectives between the two groups.

Beyond direct financial support, National Agencies for Erasmus+ offer a **wide range of complementary measures** to assist HEIs participating in the European Universities alliances (Figure 25).

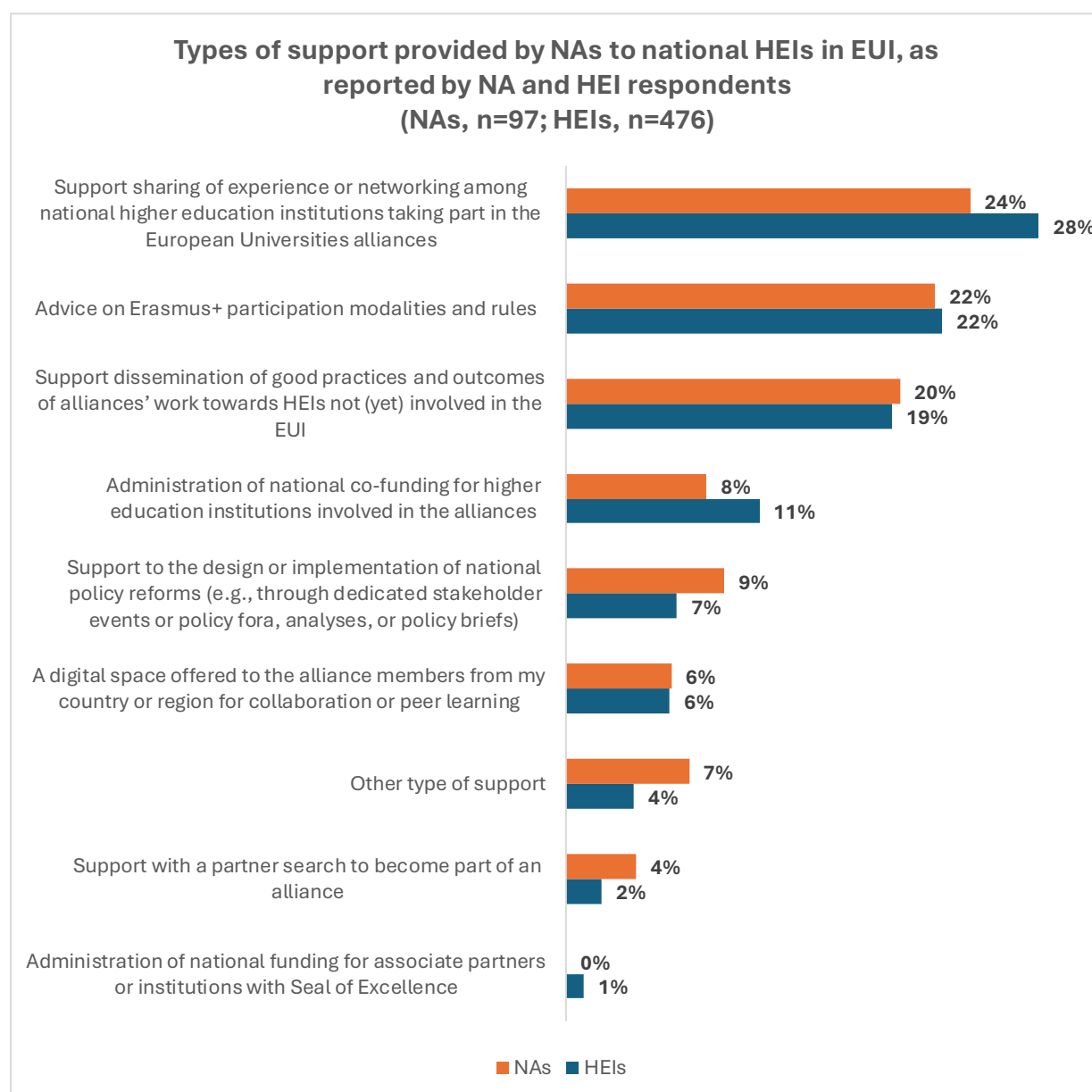


Figure 25. Types of support provided by NAs to national HEIs in the EUI, as reported by NA and HEI respondents

**NB:** Percentages represent each option's share of total selections within the group. As respondents could choose multiple options, values indicate the relative importance of each support area rather than the proportion of respondents selecting it. This approach allows for meaningful comparison between groups of different sizes (HEIs = 409; NAs = 32).

### *Support for networking and peer learning*

Both HEIs and NAs agree (NAs: 28%; HEIs: 24%) that facilitating the **sharing of experience and networking among national institutions** involved in European Universities alliances is the **most common form of support by NAs** in the national context (Figure 25). In practice, this occurs through a variety of formats in different national contexts (in addition to the NA DAAD and NAWA examples featured above):

- In **Czechia**, the NA DZS launched a **Community of Practice** to connect HEIs involved in alliances, foster cooperation and regular meetings, and articulate institutional needs vis-à-vis the NA and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS). This includes **biannual workshops** for project managers and a **high-level roundtable for rectors, vice-rectors, and international office heads**, now also **extended** to Seal of Excellence holders.
- In **Poland**, complementary roles are played by the National Agency for Erasmus+ (FRSE) and the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA), the two NAs **organising events** and offering **targeted grants**, as described in the case example above.
- A collaboration between **three national-level actors** – the NA (INDIRE), the Conference of Rectors (CRUI) and the National Agency for the Evaluation of Higher Education and Research (ANVUR) – led to the organisation of the **first national meeting** for **Italian** HEIs involved in alliances to discuss governance models, possible reforms, and the broader global and extra-European dimension of the initiative.
- Similarly, regular **peer-learning events** are organised in **Finland, Hungary** and the **Netherlands**, while in **Czechia**, EUI visibility features prominently at the **flagship annual conference** CEEDUCON hosted by the Czech NA (DZS) and organised with other NAs active in the Central-European region (DAAD, FRSE, OeAD, SAAIC, and TPF).
- A **national forum** is coordinated in **Iceland** by the NA Rannís, to foster information exchange, while offering organisational support for events and communication activities of the HEIs in EUI.
- Last but not least, the **Austrian** NA OeAD also facilitated **high-level exchanges** between Austrian and Ukrainian HEIs.

In other countries, similar peer learning and networking activities are organised directly by the **university networks**, but with the **engagement of national authorities, including the NAs**:

- A **national forum** of European University alliance partners is formally organised in **Ireland** by the Irish University Association but is attended by representatives of the NA – the Higher Education Authority, who provide advice and guidance.
- A **national network for HEIs involved in alliances** was established with the help of the **Danish** Ministry of Education helped establish, and is now maintained by the institutions themselves, while in **Flanders**, universities requested VLUHR – a regional level organisation – to create a similar **learning community**.

- The Norwegian network of administrative coordinators also consults and meets regularly, physically or online. The network also organises meetings with the National Agency (HK-dir), ministries and other relevant government agencies, being also invited for regular exchanges by HK-dir, for example in connection with other events for the higher education sector.
- **Regular exchanges** also take place among **Slovak** HEIs in alliances, with the NA SAAIC and ministry representatives actively participating.
- In **Spain**, university consortia play a comparable coordinating role.

This networking dimension is further strengthened through **digital and open information platforms** designed to support cooperation and knowledge sharing:

- For example, **Finland** and **Sweden** maintain **collaborative online spaces** for participating institutions.
- **Austria**, **Germany**, and **France** run **national portals** sharing information on EUI participation.
- In **Czechia**, DZS manages a dedicated **Teams platform** to ensure continuous communication between meetings and to gather feedback from HEIs on their needs and priorities.

### **Support for complementary funding in Erasmus+**

Another most frequent form of support reported by respondents concerns **advice on Erasmus+ participation modalities and rules** (NAs: 22%; HEIs: 22%) (Figure 25). This type of guidance generally covers several complementary areas.

The *first* area focuses on **promoting participation in the EUI** and supporting **institutions interested in joining an alliance**. This includes consultations on the conditions and benefits of participation, clarification of call requirements, and awareness-raising across the higher education sector.

- For example, the **Serbian** NA organises **regular online information events and national “info days”** to present the initiative to all 49 ECHE-holding institutions in Serbia. These sessions explain the goals and advantages of joining an alliance, provide advice on structuring partnerships, aligning proposals with European Commission objectives, and clarify application procedures and deadlines.
- In **Germany**, NA DAAD plays an active role through regular **online sessions and workshops** on call preparation, lump-sum management, and dissemination.
- In **France**, the NA established an internal **working group** dedicated to EUI-related issues to ensure better follow-up and representation within decentralised actions and is preparing a study to gather feedback from French HEIs involved in alliances.
- Some NAs also assist institutions in **identifying suitable partners** or strengthening existing collaborations as part of their preparation to join an alliance. Such support has been reported in **Romania, Finland, Spain, and Norway**.



The *second* area relates to providing general **guidance on other Erasmus+ opportunities** that can complement institutional activities within or beyond the alliances. This includes information and advice on how **existing actions** – such as KA1 mobility and KA2 decentralised partnerships – can be strategically **aligned with alliance objectives**, where relevant. Such guidance is offered as part of the NAs’ regular advisory work to all HEIs, helping institutions better understand the programme architecture and identify possible synergies between their ongoing Erasmus+ activities and broader international cooperation initiatives.

- Similar to other NAs, the **Norwegian** Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (**HK-dir**) supports HEIs in understanding Erasmus+ participation modalities and allocates decentralised Erasmus+ funds to all HEIs, though not earmarked to alliances.
- In **Germany**, NA DAAD provides guidance on selecting the most appropriate Erasmus+ action, application preparation, and funding rules. The DAAD’s Policy Support unit has also offered targeted counselling to German HEIs in alliances applying for related initiatives, such as the European Degree Label and legal status calls.

Furthermore, the **Slovene** NA (CMEPIUS) and the **Austrian** NA (OeAD) integrate the topic EUIs in the methodology for ECHE monitoring visits to ensure synergies between KA131 and mobilities within the alliances.

### *Dissemination of good practices in the system*

The **third** most common type of support involves **disseminating good practices and alliance outcomes to HEIs not yet involved in the EUI** (NAs: 20%; HEIs: 19%) (Figure 25).

- In this context, **Germany’s** NA DAAD coordinates a **Long-Term Activity (LTA) SPREAD EUI** “European University Alliances (EUI) as role models – Spreading innovative results to other higher education institutions” in partnership with Austria’s OeAD, Norway’s HK-dir, and Hungary’s TPF to facilitate **exchange between alliance and non-alliance institutions** through targeted events and needs analysis.
- **Sweden’s** NA (UHR) hosts a **national network** that now includes **both EUI and non-EUI members**, reflecting the initiative’s growing influence on the wider higher education sector.
- In **Croatia**, AMEUP organises **annual events** bringing **together both groups** and encourages EUI members to engage in national and international education fairs.
- Similar dissemination efforts are pursued by SEPIE in **Spain** and DZS in **Czechia** through the publication of **national factsheets on alliance participation**.

Beyond their role in disseminating good practices across higher education systems, National Agencies also act as a key source of information on the European Universities Initiative at national level. A previous study coordinated by DAAD under the SPREAD EUI initiative found that 76% of respondents identified National Agencies as their primary information source on the EUI, followed by the European Commission (43%), colleagues within their institutions (30%), and the EACEA (24%) (DAAD, 2025).

### **Contribution to national policy reforms**

Finally, both NAs (9%) and HEIs (7%) recognise the **contribution of NAs to the design and implementation of national policy reforms** related to the EUI (Figure 25). This was most frequently reported by HEI respondents from countries such as **Czechia, Germany, Poland, and Spain**.

- In **Czechia**, the MICHE project (2021–2025), led by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MŠMT) and implemented by DZS, involved national and international experts analysing Czech HEIs' participation in alliances and identifying ways to enhance their **impact at both institutional and system levels**. DZS continues to monitor the implementation of the project's recommendations.
- Similar evidence-based approaches are seen elsewhere: **Iceland's** NA (Rannís) supports **proposals to adjust national regulatory and funding frameworks**; **Croatia's** NA (AMEUP) involved HEIs in national consultations on the **European Degree and Label**; and **Austria's** OeAD organises high-level conferences and working groups, jointly with the Federal Ministry of Women, Science and Research, to address **legal and structural barriers**.

In several other countries, **national ministries** have taken the lead in advancing such **policy discussions**. In **Finland**, this has involved national analyses examining the challenges and opportunities of the EUI, while in **France**, the Senate conducted a dedicated [study](#) assessing the initiative's relevance and potential impact in the national context.

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Overall, this chapter shed further light into the specific roles played by national and regional level actors vis-à-vis HEIs in European Universities alliances. National ministries of (higher) education and National Agencies for Erasmus+ stand out through the magnitude of support they provide, while for both actors there is scope for more, in the words of HEI respondents. National ministries provide important co-funding mechanisms, be they direct, indirect or both, being largely appreciated by HEIs, while a clear call for more sustainable and predictable funding is made across the board.

The chapter also highlights the **evolving and multifaceted role of NAs** as both facilitators and policy actors within the EUI. Despite not having a formal mandate on the EUI, NAs increasingly contribute to the design and coordination of national strategies and approaches supporting the alliances, acting as intermediaries between national institutions, ministries, and EU bodies. Through peer-learning events, thematic workshops, and cross-sectoral dialogue, NAs help **embed the EUI within national higher education ecosystems**. In parallel, their dissemination and communication efforts enhance visibility and encourage broader participation across the sector. By linking policy design, implementation, and impact assessment, NAs play a **central role in maximising the Initiative's national relevance**, and long-term impact.

## 4. Areas for future collaboration

This chapter zooms in on the areas for enhanced support and closer collaboration between NAs and HEIs in the EUI context, based on the feedback received from both groups through the survey and the focus groups. It also explores the enabling conditions for expanding the NA support to the European Universities alliances in the future.

### 4.1 Plans for new support activities

Looking ahead, most NAs (78%) reported that they **plan to carry out new or continued support activities** for national HEIs participating in European Universities alliances (Figure 26). The majority of these NAs (21 out of 25) also intend to extend such activities to Seal of Excellence holders or to other HEIs aspiring to join similar initiatives, indicating an expansion of support to a broader segment of institutions.

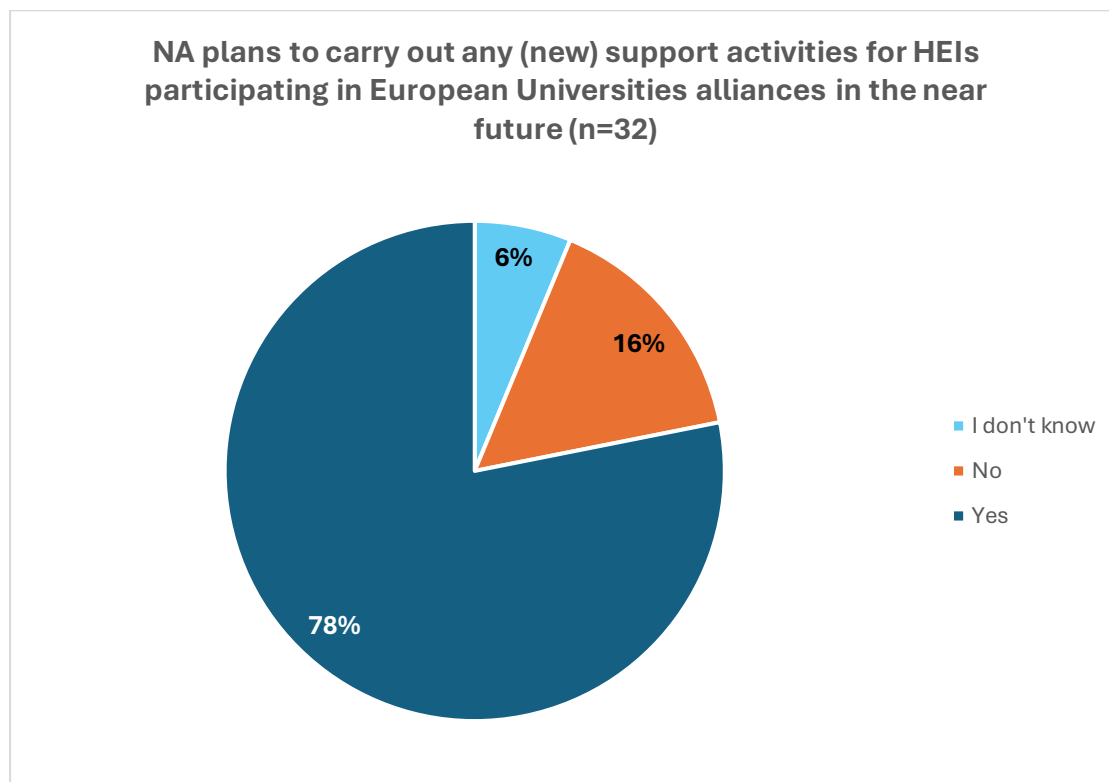


Figure 26. NA plans to carry out any (new) support activities for HEIs participating in European Universities alliances

In contrast, five NAs (16%) reported that they do not currently plan additional activities in this area.

Qualitative feedback from the survey shows that most **NAs intend to continue and scale up their existing support** activities, already **multifaceted** in nature, as described in the previous section. In particular, many agencies plan to maintain and further develop the networks and platforms established for national institutions involved in alliances, while opening these spaces to a wider higher education community (e.g. Croatia, Czechia, Belgium-Flanders, Finland, Germany, Italy, and Türkiye). This includes engaging Seal of Excellence holders from non-alliance HEIs (e.g. Lithuania, Romania) and broadening the thematic scope of discussions and exchanges.

Some NAs also plan to strengthen efforts to promote increased **EU-level funding** and secure (complementary) **national funding** (e.g. Germany, Switzerland), while fostering stronger synergies between current mobility projects and European Universities alliances to encourage more strategic use of KA131 funds (e.g. Croatia, Romania), for example.

Others plan to **deepen the knowledge base** related to EUI activities through dedicated Key Action 3 projects and joint TCA or LTA activities such as SPREAD EUI (e.g. Austria, Germany, Italy, Norway). These initiatives focus on **collective monitoring and knowledge exchange** across several NAs to capture the broader institutional and systemic effects of the alliances. In the same vein, the Latvian NA aims to strengthen cooperation among Baltic HEIs participating in the alliances, reinforcing **regional collaboration** and mutual learning.

In parallel, some agencies conduct national-level monitoring and evidence-gathering, as in **Slovenia**, where the focus lies on assessing the specific needs and experiences of HEIs involved in the alliances within the national context. In **Sweden**, the NA, together with the national monitoring authority, has launched a project on the **development of joint programmes**—across both alliance and non-alliance contexts—to help HEIs identify and address regulatory and procedural barriers and provide practical guidance for their implementation.

## 4.2 Areas for enhanced support

Both NAs and HEIs were asked to indicate the areas in which they believe support provided by NAs to HEIs should be enhanced in the future (Figure 27). The same set of questions was included in both surveys to allow for direct comparison and to identify potential overlaps or gaps between the two perspectives.

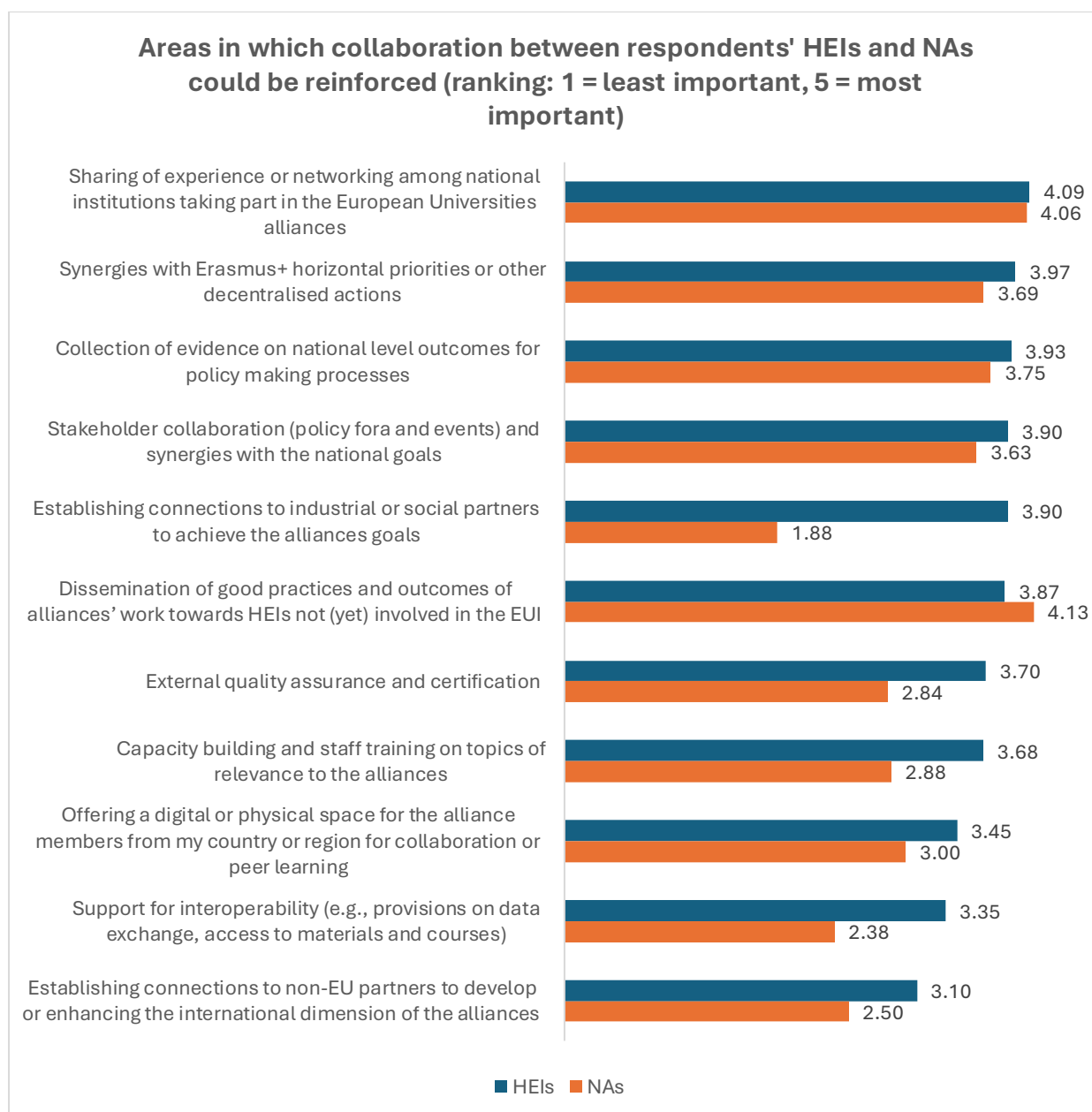


Figure 27. Areas in which collaboration between respondents' HEIs and NAs could be reinforced

From **both perspectives**, the highest priority area for further collaboration relates to **sharing of experience or networking among national HEIs** involved in European Universities alliances, which both groups agree should remain a central focus of NA support (HEIs: 4.09; NAs: 4.06) (Figure 27). As one respondent noted, *“the most useful way of support are thematic meetings where alliances can discuss experiences and challenges focusing on particular topics.”* This consensus underlines the recognised value of peer learning and exchange at national level as a driver of institutional capacity building and cross-alliance collaboration.

While this area ranks second for **NAs**, their top-rated priority is the **dissemination of good practices and outcomes of alliances’ work towards HEIs not yet involved** in the EUI, including Seal of Excellence holders (NAs: 4.13; HEIs: 3.87) (Figure 27). This reflects NAs’ systemic mission to ensure that the achievements of the European Universities Initiative benefit the wider higher education community within the national system. For HEIs, by contrast, dissemination is ranked only sixth, showing that their focus remains more internal—on strengthening their own alliances—than outward-looking at the current stage.

For **HEIs**, the second highest priority is **ensuring synergies with Erasmus+ horizontal priorities or other decentralised actions**, underlining their desire to embed alliance activities within broader Erasmus+ structures and to further tap into existing funding opportunities more coherently (HEIs: 3.97; NAs: 3.69) (Figure 27). One respondent suggested, *“better coordination of interpretation of regulations and application of decentralised actions.”*

For **NAs**, this area ranks third, following the **collection of evidence on national-level outcomes** and their use in policymaking, where they see growing importance in the years ahead. The NAs’ ranking reflects the political momentum for the EUI highlighting the need to showcase the impact and added value of the Initiative after several years of implementation. As one HEI representative put it, *“We are at a stage now where data on the performance of universities which are members of European alliances should be available and could be useful in further developments of the vision and mission of alliances... This type of development concerning reporting instruments is highly necessary and could ensure complete transparency regarding the way in which membership in an alliance did (or did not) manage to enhance mobility for universities involved in EUAs.”*

The next key area identified by **HEIs** concerns **stakeholder collaboration and alignment with national goals** (HEIs: 3.93; NAs: 3.63) (Figure 27). This ranking indirectly points to HEIs’ expectations for stronger national-level commitment and financial support, while NAs take a more cautious stance, linking future engagement to the collection of robust evidence for decision-making.

As expressed by HEI respondents, *“NAs have a key role and a unique opportunity to bring the national dimension into the discussions on the European Education Area... Alliances’ ambitions for changing the landscape through new legislation, new piloting and new forms of higher education should be thoroughly supported financially.”* Another added, *“National restrictions for specific sectors, such as universities of applied sciences in some countries, should be reviewed and removed to enable equal participation in joint European activities.”* Others emphasised *“creating synergies among different funding schemes, supporting the interconnection of platforms and national procedures,”* as well as *“sharing information on national funding schemes.”*

While soft forms of support such as exchange and communication are valued by HEIs, qualitative feedback places particular emphasis on **the need to secure sustainable national funding**, including for research, staff development, and student mobility, alongside calls for greater flexibility and simplified administrative rules.

Despite broad convergence between HEI and NA perspectives, several **notable expectation gaps** emerge in the ranking between the two groups.

*First*, HEIs consider **support for establishing connections with industrial or social partners** a high priority (HEIs: 3.90), whereas it ranks lowest among NA priorities (1.88) (Figure 27), possibly because NAs might not see themselves as best positioned actors to help HEIs establish these links.

A *second* expectation gap relates to **external quality assurance and certification** (HEIs: 3.70; NAs: 2.84) (Figure 27). HEIs link this support need to the ongoing policy discussions on the European degree (label), where several respondents highlighted challenges in navigating diverse national frameworks. As one HEI commented, *“To help us to get an easier way to set up the European Degree.”* Others called for *“support in sharing best practices and promoting dialogue,”* and *“lobbying for changes at the national level in terms of the European Degree.”* Some respondents also pointed to the need for clearer legal guidance—*“Guidance within the legal rules could be helpful, especially for double or joint degrees, including at PhD level”*—and to the necessity of adapting quality assurance tools: *“It is key that the European Approach to quality assurance and certification develops into a fully usable and nationally compatible tool in order to foster further alliance development.”*

A *third* area of difference concerns **capacity-building and staff training on topics relevant to the alliances**, including quality assurance, student and staff engagement, and the third mission (HEIs: 3.68; NAs: 2.88) (Figure 27). This gap may partly reflect resource and capacity differences across countries: while such support is seen by HEIs as essential for sustaining alliance implementation, many NAs face structural or staffing limitations.

Further differentiation arises around the **collaboration infrastructure** supporting alliance work. HEIs place higher priority on access to digital or physical collaborative spaces (3.45) and interoperability mechanisms (e.g. provisions for data exchange, shared access to materials and courses) (3.35), while these topics hold medium importance for NAs (3.00 and 2.38, respectively). Respondents pointed to the need for continuity and digital solutions: *“Set up a permanent framework—beyond periodical meetings—for collaboration, exchange of experiences, and coordinated dissemination and promotion of results at national level,”* and *“Help establish technical standards for data exchange, student mobility, and course information.”* One also noted, *“Support national IT systems to adapt to more joint educational offers and lifelong learning courses for internationals.”*

Finally, both groups identified **connections to non-EU partners** as a lower priority area (HEIs: 3.10; NAs: 2.50) (Figure 27). As alliances vary widely in their international outreach



strategies, cooperation beyond the EU has not yet emerged as a common demand for NA-level support.

Overall, the results show a **high degree of alignment** between National Agencies and higher education institutions (including SoE holders) in prioritising networking, knowledge sharing, and system-wide peer learning within the EUI. Yet, the areas of difference—particularly those related to funding, quality assurance, and staff capacity building—reflect the different institutional needs and capacities of NAs and HEIs in these more technical areas. Strengthening coordination between the two levels, coupled with better evidence on the national impact of alliances, will be essential to ensure that future NA support effectively balances the more immediate operational needs with the long-term systemic goals.

### 4.3 Strengthening collaboration and organisational capacities

National Agencies were asked what they would need organisationally to better support European Universities alliances. They were also questioned how cooperation between NAs, as well as between NAs and the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), could be enhanced to provide more coordinated support to participating higher education institutions.

The results show that the **top request concerns access to more information about the alliances collected by EACEA**, such as detailed application statistics, monitoring outcomes, and feedback from centralised reporting processes (*“access to progress reports”*) (28 responses). This was followed by calls for **additional financial resources** (20), a **clearer political or national mandate** (19), and **dedicated staff** (17). **Additional expertise**—for example, in quality assurance, accreditation, or recognition—was mentioned least frequently (13), in line with the above finding that NAs seem to see their potential support as more limited in this area (Figure 28).

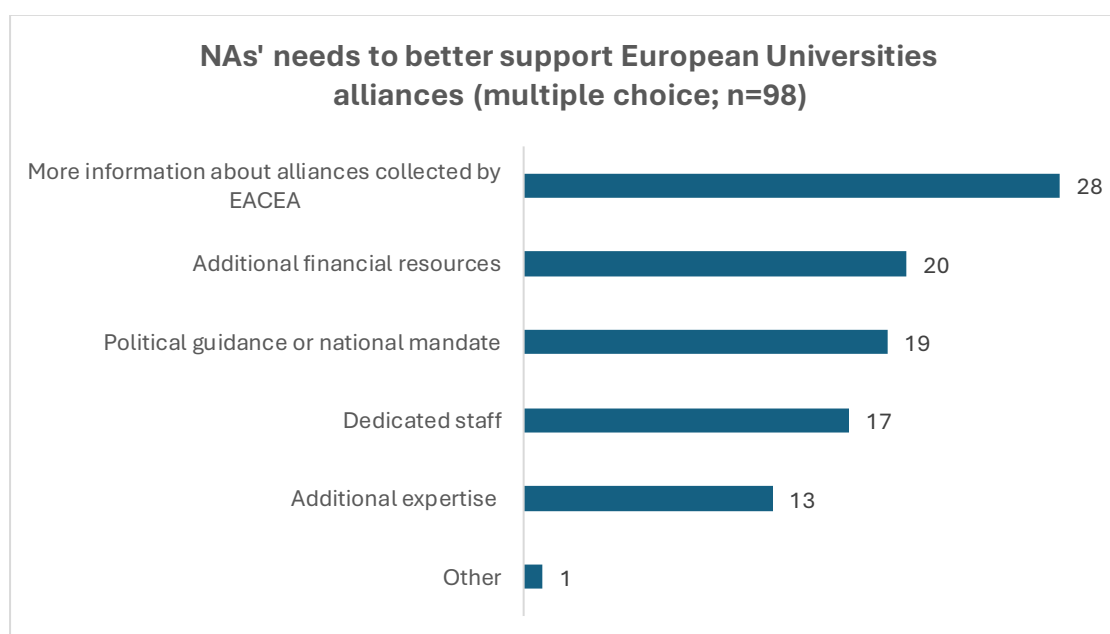


Figure 28. NAs' needs to better support European Universities alliances



Several respondents emphasised the need for a **more formal and consistent framework** for NA involvement in the initiative. As one agency noted, *“Creating a formal mandate for NAs to have a role in the EUI and to provide necessary data and information in order for NAs to be able to provide relevant support to HEIs on the ground. Invite NAs to have a bigger role in shaping the initiative moving forward in view of the future EU funding programmes and national level of funding.”*

Another respondent underlined that *“The involvement of NAs in the EACEA's monitoring activities could aid in identifying examples of best practices at the national level and also in recognising obstacles that could hinder project implementation.”* Such collaboration would, they added, enable NAs to *“disseminate best practices nationally and facilitate exchange among stakeholders regarding the initiative's implementation.”*

Respondents also called for **clearer definitions of roles and responsibilities** among key actors. One NA explained, *“NAs need a clear mandate on the topic to expand the already existing cooperation among them also on this initiative. Some NAs can rely on dedicated staff, while others do not, and that has an impact on the level of involvement an NA can foresee in activities focused on the EUI. Furthermore, a constant exchange of information and updates from EACEA on the initiative and its many elements of impact is needed.”*

Concrete examples of EUI collaborative actions between NAs already exist.

The **joint Long-Term Activity (LTA) “SPREAD EUI”** and the KA3 Policy Experimentation project **“FUTURE4Alliances”** project illustrate how such cooperation can strengthen alignment and mutual learning in key related areas.

### SPREAD EUI

The SPREAD EUI project, launched by four National Agencies – DAAD (Germany), OeAD (Austria), Tempus Public Foundation (Hungary), and HK-dir (Norway) – aims to facilitate the dissemination of experiences and lessons learned from the European Universities alliances to higher education institutions not directly involved in the initiative. The project calls on existing alliances to act as role models for the wider higher education sector, serving as a source of inspiration for other HEIs across Europe, as requested by the Erasmus+ calls on “European Universities”. One of its main activities is to establish a regular exchange among National Agencies, exploring how they can strengthen the conditions for alliances to act as multipliers and make their achievements visible and accessible to institutions beyond the initiative.

Link to the project's webpage: <https://eu.daad.de/infos-fuer-hochschulen/programmlinien/unterstuetzung-und-expertise/de/87192-project-spread-eui--european-universities-alliances-as-role-models-spreading-innovative-results-to-other-higher-education-institutions-as-long-term-activities-lta-in-the-erasmus-programme/>

### FUTURE4Alliances

Future4Alliances (F4A) is a KA3 Policy Experimentation Erasmus+ project coordinated by Campus France, bringing together ministries, national agencies, and higher education stakeholders – 9 beneficiaries and 23 associate partners – from 13 European countries. The project's objective is to provide a platform for dialogue, exchange, and joint action to support the long-term development of the European Universities Initiative (EUI). Through the elaboration of guidelines and policy recommendations, F4A aims at improving coordination among national and regional funding mechanisms, to develop a more coherent support framework for the EUI. F4A focuses on three strategic areas: ensuring the sustainability of alliance funding, advancing joint educational programmes and activities, and reinforcing the international dimension of alliances, including hosting policies.

Link to the project's webpage: <https://future4alliances.org/future4alliances-project/>

As one respondent pointed out, *“NAs can continue to work together through TCA and LTA activities addressing related topics. Collaboration with other national funding agencies could be initiated through dialogue and debates, leading to potential action plans of support programmes being developed.”* Another NA added, *“Our agency collaborates with other national agencies, directly and indirectly, by participating in several EU networks, such as ACA, where we identify models of collaboration already established with alliances and share dissemination practices relevant to our country and region.”*

The call for stronger NA collaboration was **echoed by higher education institutions**, who see **clear benefits in more structured coordination** across Europe. As one HEI respondent put it, *“It would make sense to have the various NAs in Europe collaborate more on this topic and share among each other good practices on how to support alliances. Only expecting this from our own NA is a bit strange, since the alliances operate on a European level.”*

Others similarly highlighted that *“sharing of best practices between NAs would contribute to an enabling environment”* and that *“NAs could better support alliances by coordinating across countries to align funding priorities, simplify administrative procedures, and offer complementary co-funding.”* Several respondents also advocated for joint advocacy and policy dialogue: *“For example, by organising international or regional (e.g. CEE) events for European Universities to exchange information and good practices but also to advocate together for policy reform, for example in relation to joint programmes.”*

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The findings of this chapter highlight NAs' openness to assume a more visible and strategic role in supporting the EUI, provided that clearer mandates, sufficient resources, and improved information flows are in place. The findings also highlight that this role is not only needed but also expected and even requested by HEIs in many systems. Strengthening structured collaboration—both among NAs and with the EACEA—emerges as a key condition for greater coherence and efficiency. By building on their national expertise, networks, and long-standing experience in Erasmus+ implementation, NAs can play an essential bridging role between institutions, national authorities, and European-level governance, helping to ensure consistent policy alignment and sustained impact across member countries.

## 5. Conclusions and possible ways forward

This study set out to shed light on a comparatively underexplored dimension of the European Universities Initiative (EUI), both academically and professionally: **national-level support for HEIs participating in European Universities alliances**. It examined institutions' specific support needs at national level, as well as the interest, roles, and capacities of national-level actors, most notably National Agencies (NAs) (for Erasmus+), to provide and potentially strengthen such support.

Considering the **transformative ambitions of the EUI**, which extend beyond individual alliances and participating HEIs to the European higher education system as a whole, the **national level emerges as a particularly critical arena**. National frameworks and actors have significant potential to create enabling environments for systemic transformation and to address many of the persistent legal, administrative, and structural barriers to transnational cooperation that continue to manifest at national level.

*Against this backdrop, the study draws conclusions on the **current state of national-level support** for HEIs participating in European Universities alliances and highlights potential **pathways for future development**.*

### **1. EUI is a key topic at national and institutional levels, but full strategic anchoring remains uneven.**

Respondents' feedback on the role of the EUI in national and institutional strategic documents (Chapter 2) indicates that, over the past six years, national and regional ministries of education, as well as participating HEIs, have increasingly referred to engagement in the initiative in their core strategies. However, at the time of the study, such references were **neither systematic** across all types of strategic documents **nor consistent** across countries.

While some actors reported plans to reference the EUI in forthcoming strategies, recognising it as an important instrument for advancing national and institutional objectives, future strategic references were widely seen as contingent on forthcoming decisions regarding the initiative's direction. In particular, respondents highlighted the need for greater clarity on the initiative's future scope, funding levels, implementation timeline, and the long-term sustainability of the alliances in the context of the next Erasmus+ programme generation (2028–2034).

## ***2. Ministries of education and National Agencies for Erasmus+ are perceived as the key players offering financial and non-financial support at national and regional levels.***

With regard to **national and regional support for the EUI**, particularly for institutions already participating in European Universities alliances, as well as those with the potential to do so in the future, the study identifies **two main categories of actors** at national level (Chapter 3).

From the perspective of responding HEIs, **ministries of (higher) education** emerge as the primary providers of national-level financial support. In many countries, their contribution mainly takes the form of **dedicated co-funding schemes** supporting national HEIs' participation in European Universities alliances. In a smaller number of cases, this financial support is also extended to HEIs participating in Seal of Excellence alliances or demonstrating strong potential for future alliance participation. Given that HEIs' primary expectation from national authorities relates to additional financial resources to implement ambitious EUI-related objectives, it is understandable that ministries of (higher) education are most frequently cited as key national-level actors.

Alongside ministries, National Agencies (for Erasmus+) also play a central role in supporting the EUI at national level. Although NAs do not hold a formal mandate to support this centralised Erasmus+ action, nine in ten report already providing support to HEIs participating in European Universities alliances. This support is typically delivered through a **diverse and multifaceted range of non-financial activities**, including events, networking and peer-learning opportunities, dissemination of good practices, the establishment of national platforms or communities of practice, and information sessions.

## ***3. National Agencies provide a distinctive form of support, combining operational proximity to institutions with system-level coordination and policy linkage.***

Importantly, the **role of NAs is not limited to 'soft' support measures**. In some countries, such as Germany and Poland, national-level agencies (DAAD and NAWA) are also responsible, on behalf of their ministries of (higher) education, for **managing national co-funding schemes** for institutions participating in European Universities alliances. In addition, NAs frequently advise HEIs in alliances on how to leverage other Erasmus+ funding instruments to further co-finance alliance-related activities.

Across Erasmus+ programme countries, the positioning of National Agencies varies. In some contexts, they take a **leading role**, actively initiating coordination, networking, and dissemination activities. In others, they **contribute to initiatives** led by national networks of European Universities or by other stakeholders, while remaining **active and engaged actors** within the national support ecosystem. In a small number of countries, NAs' engagement may appear less visible, reflecting contextual factors, such as mandate arrangements and, in some cases, resource constraints, which tend to be more pronounced in smaller systems.

While many HEIs participating in alliances—particularly during the first funding cycle—have understandably focused on internal institutional transformation, which is essential for establishing the alliance and setting it on a transformative path, **NAs assume a complementary and overarching role** in supporting wider system-level change. By helping to disseminate emerging practices and lessons from alliances, they contribute to extending the impact of the EUI beyond the institutions directly involved.

Overall, by linking policy design, implementation, and impact assessment, the majority of NAs supporting the EUI at national level play a **central role in maximising the initiative's relevance** and longer-term impact. Together with the national ministries of (higher) education, they are also key actors in **embedding the EUI within national higher education ecosystems**.

***4. There is significant scope, and a strategic need, to strengthen NAs' support for the EUI in the coming years, in order to enhance alignment with national priorities and achieve systemic impact.***

The study shows, first, that HEIs participating in European Universities alliances depend on sustained engagement from national ministries of (higher) education and NAs to operate within an enabling national environment. Such engagement is essential for advancing and successfully implementing alliance-related ambitions. Looking ahead, HEIs consistently anticipate a need for stronger national-level support, encompassing both financial and non-financial dimensions.

Second, the findings indicate that National Agencies (for Erasmus+) have the **potential to further strengthen their support** for the EUI and, in several cases, have expressed openness to assuming a more strategic role in line with HEIs' expectations. Building on their national expertise, extensive networks, and long-standing experience in Erasmus+ implementation, NAs are well positioned to act as key intermediaries between higher education institutions, national authorities, and European-level governance. Realising this potential, however, would depend on clearer roles and mandates, adequate resourcing, and improved information flows across European, national, and institutional levels, contributing to stronger policy coherence, improved coordination, and more sustained systemic impact across countries.

***5. Strengthening the NAs' support for the EUI requires a more clearly defined and recognised role for NAs at both EU and national levels.***

Although the EUI is a centralised action within the Erasmus+ programme, NAs already play a *de facto* supportive role at national level, as this study demonstrates, despite not being formally mandated actors within the initiative. Clarifying and formally recognising this supportive role would help strengthen NAs' contribution to the EUI in a more structured and sustainable way, moving beyond the current status of an add-on activity.

At **national level**, such recognition could be embedded in the ongoing development and revision of national higher education and internationalisation strategies. As several countries increasingly integrate the EUI into these frameworks and seek ways to align it with national-level objectives, a clearer definition of the roles of key actors—including NAs—would support more coherent coordination, strengthen linkages among national actors, and facilitate the removal of remaining barriers to alliance activities and, very importantly, to international cooperation more broadly.

At **European level**, clearer recognition would involve engaging National Agencies as key stakeholders in the further development of the EUI. This would entail more structured dialogue and information exchange with the European Commission and EACEA, informed by National Agencies' insights into national-level implementation, institutional needs within the specific national contexts, and the evolving impact of the initiative.

In practical terms, clearer recognition would also allow interested National Agencies to organise their internal support for the EUI in a more deliberate and targeted manner. While most National Agencies currently devote less than one full-time equivalent to the initiative—often alongside other centralised Erasmus+ actions or responsibilities—many already rely on staff with relevant expertise and prior experience in coordinating, advising, and disseminating practices related to European Universities alliances and comparable centralised actions. This includes experience gained through the Erasmus Mundus action, where NAs acted for several years as National Structures, coordinating support activities, providing information and dissemination, and advising HEIs on prospective participation. A more formalised role would enable this expertise to be consolidated, responsibilities to be more clearly articulated, and support activities to be planned more strategically within existing organisational structures.

## ***6. Transnational coordination activities aiming to maximise the impact of EUI can be further strengthened by upscaling existing successful initiatives.***

Beyond national borders, initiatives such as SPREAD EUI and Future4Alliances, illustrate how coordinated NA action can amplify impact, facilitate mutual learning, and address shared challenges related to sustainability and implementation, while making effective use of existing Erasmus+ instruments and cooperation formats.

Building on the experience gained through such Long-Term Activities and KA3 projects, there is scope to further strengthen transnational coordination among a wider group of NAs. Enhanced coordination could support the alignment of national support measures, contribute to more equal opportunities for HEIs across countries, and foster the creation of increasingly enabling national environments for European Universities alliances.

In this context, more systematic cooperation—potentially through an informal network of National Agencies—could also facilitate the exchange of practices and joint reflection on legislative and regulatory challenges affecting alliance implementation. Addressing such barriers in a coordinated manner would not only benefit the EUI, but could also have positive spill-over effects for other actions and beneficiaries, including institutions aspiring to develop joint programmes and achieve a European degree (label).



***7. There is a strategic need for coordinated monitoring and evaluation of the national impact of the EUI to build on lessons learnt across different programme countries.***

The findings suggest scope for more **coordinated approaches also in the monitoring and evaluation of the national-level impact** of the EUI, with a view to building on lessons learned across different programme countries, and countries associated to the programme. Greater coordination among NAs involved in supporting the EUI at national level could provide a basis for more comparative reflection on alliance-related impacts across national contexts. Such efforts would complement existing evidence collected at European level, including through initiatives such as FOREU4ALL, and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the initiative's broader effects.

***8. Sustainable co-funding mechanisms require stronger alignment of key actors, such as NAs.***

In line with the institutional expectations, sustainable co-funding mechanisms for the EUI depend in part on effective alignment among key actors at European, national, and institutional levels. Clearer coordination between ministries of (higher) education, National Agencies (for Erasmus+), and higher education institutions can help link national and regional co-funding more closely to the initiative's objectives and implementation realities, while improving predictability and continuity over time. Despite variations in national contexts and funding models, stronger alignment among stakeholders may contribute to more stable and sustainable co-funding arrangements for European Universities alliances in the future.



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## Annex II – HEI questionnaire

### Questionnaire for higher education institutions participating in the European Universities initiative regarding their needs in national or regional support

#### Introduction

On behalf of the network of National Agencies for Erasmus+, the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is conducting a small-scale TCA<sup>1</sup> study on **national-level support to the European Universities initiative (EUI)**, particularly to national higher education institutions participating in the European Universities alliances.

The aim of the study<sup>2</sup> is:

- a. To explore the **needs of higher education institutions** participating in the EUI and support needed on a national level (i.e. which, for example, could be offered by respective National Agencies for Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies)
- b. To provide an update on the broad range of prior and ongoing **support activities** conducted by National Agencies for Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies to date, in complementarity with the support offered at the EU level
- c. To **identify areas for closer cooperation** between European Universities alliances, their members, and their respective National Agencies for Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies, and
- d. To explore areas for closer **cooperation between National Agencies** for Erasmus+ in jointly supporting alliances involving higher education institutions from their respective countries.

The questionnaire is designed to collect **feedback from higher education institutions** participating in the European Universities alliances including:

- a. Full alliance partners with prior (co-)funding received from the EU and/or nationally
- b. Full alliance partners with current (co-)funding received from the EU and/or nationally
- c. Associate alliance partners with or without national funding support
- d. Seal of Excellence partners with or without national funding support.

The **target audience** for this questionnaire encompasses:

- (a) Strategic leadership overseeing the institution's involvement in an alliance, including Rectors, Vice Rectors and Heads of International Relations Offices;

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<sup>1</sup> Training and Cooperation Activities (TCAs) are organised by Erasmus+ National Agencies with the purpose of bringing added value and increasing the overall quality of the Erasmus+ programme. URL: <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/priorities-of-the-erasmus-programme/implements>

<sup>2</sup> This study relates to the ongoing work of the [LTA project](#) “European University Alliances (EUI) as role models – Spreading innovative results to other higher education institutions”, run by the NAs in Austria ([QeAD](#)), Germany (DAAD), Hungary ([Tempus Public Foundation](#)), and Norway ([HK dir](#)).

- (b) Leadership overseeing the implementation of an alliance such as Secretary General, Managing Director or similar;
- (c) Staff acting as local (institutional) coordinators or work package leads or co-leads of the alliance.

Several responses per institution are possible and encouraged to ensure the diversity of collected views.

The questionnaire consists of **four parts**:

- I. General information about the responding organisation
- II. Past and current support activities at national level
- III. Future plans and areas for enhanced collaboration
- IV. Contact details

## Questionnaire

### I. Background information

Please share some information about your institution and its position in the alliance, as well as your role in the institution and respective to the alliance.

**1. Please indicate the name of your higher education institution.**

**2. Please select your country from the dropdown list.**

**3. What is the size of your higher education institution? (Single choice)**

- Small (0 – 5,000 students)
- Medium (5 – 15,000 students)
- Large (15,000 students or more)

**4. What is your institution's status within the European Universities Initiative?**

- My institution belongs to one of 65 alliances that are currently funded by the EU
- My institution belongs to one of the Seal of Excellence alliances
- The alliance my institution used to belong to no longer exists
- Other, please specify

**5. How many full partner institutions are there in your alliance? (Single choice)**

- Less than 6
- Between 6 and 9
- 10 or more

**6. Has the number of the full partners changed over time? (Single choice)**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**7. Please indicate how the alliance member composition has changed over time.**  
(If Q6=Yes)

**8. What is the status of your higher education institution in the alliance?** (Single choice)

- Full partner
- Associated partner
- Other, please specify

**9. Has your institution changed alliance over the years?** (Single choice)

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**10. What were the reasons behind this change?** (If Q9 = Yes)

**11. Is the participation of your institution in a European Universities alliance referenced in any institutional strategic documents?** (Multiple choice)

- Institutional strategy or similar
- Internationalisation strategy
- Education strategy
- Research strategy or plans
- Other, please specify

**12. In which Erasmus+ call was your institution's alliance selected to be part of the EUI, or received the Seal of Excellence?** (Single choice)

- 2019
- 2020
- 2022
- 2023
- 2024
- I don't know

**13. How is your institution's participation in the alliance currently funded?** (Multiple choice)

- Self-funded
- The Erasmus+ programme - *Please specify the actions/strands*
- Horizon Europe programme - *Please specify the actions/strands*
- National funding schemes – *Please specify*
- Regional funding schemes - *Please specify*
- Industry support
- Other - *Please specify*

**14. How has the funding arrangement for your institution in the alliance changed over time? Please include details on any changes regarding funding increases or decreases, or funding sources.**

**15. What is your role/position at the higher education institution, in relation to the alliance? (Multiple choice)**

- University Rector
- Vice Rector or equivalent
- Head of International Relations Office or equivalent
- Alliance Secretary General or equivalent
- Local (institutional) Alliance Coordinator
- Alliance Administrator or Work Package project (co-)lead
- Other, please specify

**16. How long have you been working at your current higher education institution? (Single choice)**

- 0 – 5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- More than 15 years

**17. How long has your work involved or supported the European Universities alliance? (Single choice)**

- 1 – 2 years
- 3 - 4 years
- 5 or more years

**18. How much of your actual workload is dedicated to alliance-related tasks and activities? (Single choice)**

- Less than 20%
- 20 – 40%
- 40 – 60%
- 60 - 80%
- 80 – 100%

**19. What topics are you responsible for in relation to the alliance? (Multiple choice)**

- Strategy and governance
- Educational innovation, including pedagogical innovation and flexible learning pathways
- Joint learning offers
- Collaborative research
- Innovation
- Joint programmes or joint degrees (including a European degree label)
- Student mobility
- Staff mobility
- Inclusion
- Digitalisation
- Microcredentials
- Environmental sustainability
- Communications

- Quality assurance
- Other, please specify

## **II: Prior and current support**

The next set of questions covers EU-level, national or regional support for higher education institutions participating in the European Universities alliances.

**20. What kind of support have you received at the EU level (i.e. EACEA and DG EAC) as one of the alliance institutions benefiting from the EU funding?**

**21. Is the participation of your institution in a European Universities alliance, or the European Universities Initiative as a whole, referenced in any national strategic documents? (Multiple choice)**

- National higher education or internationalisation strategy
- Regional higher education or internationalisation strategy
- National rectors' conference strategy or similar
- Other, please specify

**22. At what governmental level has your institution received support for its engagement in a European Universities alliance? (Single choice)**

- At national level
- At regional level
- At both national and regional levels
- None of the above / Not applicable

**23. What government or public agencies have been involved in offering this support? Please tick several boxes in case of organisations with mixed profiles. (if Q22=Yes) (Multiple choice, tick boxes)**

| <b>Status / Type of support</b>                   | <b>(Co-)funding or financial support</b> | <b>Other type of support</b> | <b>Both co-funding and other type of support</b> | <b>Not applicable</b> |
|---|--|------------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| National ministry of (higher) education           |  |                              |  |                       |
| Regional ministry of (higher) education           |  |                              |  |                       |
| National ministry of research and innovation      |  |                              |  |                       |
| Regional ministry of research and innovation      |  |                              |  |                       |
| National Agency for Erasmus+                      |  |                              |  |                       |
| National funding agency (other than for Erasmus+) |  |                              |  |                       |
| Regional funding agency                           |  |                              |  |                       |
| National quality assurance agency                 |  |                              |  |                       |
| Other, please specify                             |  |                              |  |                       |

**24. What kind of support has been provided by your national or regional government/ministry since the start of the European Universities Initiative? (if Q22=Yes) (multiple choice)**

- National co-funding for the alliance members from my country or region as part of a **dedicated funding scheme** on top of EU funding (e.g., funds to support alliances activities that are not covered by EU funding)
- National co-funding for the alliance members from my country or region as part **overall university funding** (increase) on top of EU funding (e.g., additional funds under performance agreements)
- National funding for institutions acting as associated partners in the alliances or institutions with the Seal of Excellence
- Sharing of experience or networking among national higher education institutions taking part in the European Universities alliances
- Dissemination of good practices and outcomes of alliances' work towards HEIs not (yet) involved in the alliances work
- A digital space offered to the alliance members from my country or region for collaboration or peer learning
- Design of national policy reforms (e.g., through dedicated stakeholder events or policy fora, analyses, commissioned research, or policy briefs)
- Other type of support (please specify)

**25. Please provide any further details or examples of support provided by your national or regional government. At what stage of the alliance were the different types of support offered? Have there been any significant changes to the support?**

**26. Has your country's National Agency for Erasmus+ (or equivalent) supported the institution's involvement in the alliance? (Single choice)**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**27. What kind of support has been provided by your National Agency for Erasmus+ (or equivalent) for your institution in the context of its alliance engagement? (if Q26=Yes) (Multiple choice)**

- Support with partner search to become part of an alliance
- Advice on Erasmus+ participation modalities and rules
- Administration of national co-funding for higher education institutions involved in the alliances
- Administration of national funding for associate partners or institutions with Seal of Excellence
- Support to sharing of experience or networking among national higher education institutions taking part in the European Universities alliances
- Support to dissemination of good practices and outcomes of alliances' work towards HEIs not (yet) involved in the EUI



- A digital space offered to the alliance members from my country or region for collaboration or peer learning
- Support to the design or implementation of national policy reforms (e.g., through dedicated stakeholder events or policy fora, analyses, or policy briefs)
- Other type of support, please specify

**28. Does your NA allocate any decentralised Erasmus+ funds (e.g., KA131 or KA220) for higher education institutions involved in the EUI? (Single choice)**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**29. Which Erasmus+ decentralised funds does your NA allocate for the alliance members in your country? (if Q28=Yes) (Multiple choice)**

- Dedicated share of KA131 mobility funds for higher education institutions participating in the European Universities alliances
- Dedicated share of KA2 funds for KA220 projects implemented by higher education institutions participating in the European Universities alliances
- Other, please specify

**30. Is there any national website offering information about various support activities to your national HEIs in the European Universities alliances and the outcomes of their work? If yes, please provide the URL.**

- Yes, please specify
- No
- I don't know

**31. Please provide any further details or examples of support provided by your National Agency for Erasmus+ or other national funding agency(ies). What has been particularly helpful?**

**III. Future Needs**

This section relates to how your institution could be better supported in the future.

**32. Where do you see the potential for enhanced support to be provided by your National Agency for Erasmus+ or equivalent? (Multiple choice) (Likert between 1 for lowest importance and 5 for highest importance)**

- Collect evidence on national level outcomes and feeding it in the policy making process
- Support stakeholder collaboration (policy fora and events) and synergies with the national goals
- Support sharing of experience or networking among national higher education institutions taking part in the European Universities alliances
- Support to dissemination of good practices and outcomes of alliances' work towards HEIs not (yet) involved in the EUI

- Support external quality assurance and certification (e.g., via the European approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, the European degree label)
- Support capacity building and staff training on topics of relevance to the alliances (e.g., quality assurance, student engagement, staff engagement, third mission)
- Support for interoperability (e.g., provisions on data exchange, access to materials and courses)
- Support in establishing connections to industrial or social partners to achieve the alliances goals
- Support in establishing connections to non-EU partners to develop or enhance the international dimension of the alliances
- Offer a digital or physical space for the alliance members from my country or region for collaboration or peer learning
- Ensure synergies with Erasmus+ horizontal priorities or other decentralised actions
- Other, please specify

**33. Where do you see the potential for enhanced support to be provided by your national or regional government/ministry?** *(Multiple choice) (Likert between 1 for lowest importance and 5 for highest importance)*

- Additional funding to support research activities
- Additional funding to support third mission
- Additional funding to support spill-over effects to the sector
- Additional funding to support mobility
- Additional funding to joint programmes
- Better coordination of national or regional co-funding initiatives
- Ensure synergies with national higher education or other policy priorities
- Support governance and/or institutional autonomy reforms
- Support external quality assurance and certification (e.g., via the European approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and/or the European degree label)
- Enhance recognition systems for staff engagement
- Offer the alliance members from my country or region a digital space for collaboration or peer learning
- Recognition frameworks for student mobility
- Support the (national) legal status, pooling of resources, or joint procurement
- Support for interoperability (e.g., provisions on data exchange, access to materials and courses)
- Other, please specify

**34. How do you think the National Agencies for Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies from the countries of your alliance's member institutions can support your alliance (better) together?**

**35. Please provide any further details or remarks.**

## Annex III – NA questionnaire

### Questionnaire for Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies regarding the monitoring or support of higher education institutions participating in the European Universities initiative

#### Introduction

On behalf of the network of National Agencies for Erasmus+, the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA) is conducting a small-scale TCA study on **national-level support to the European Universities initiative (EUI)**, particularly to national higher education institutions participating in European Universities alliances.

The aim of the study<sup>3</sup> is the following:

- a) To provide an update on the broad range of prior and ongoing **support activities** conducted by National Agencies for Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies to date, in complementarity with the support offered at the EU level;
- b) To explore the **needs of higher education institutions participating in the EUI** and support needed at the national level (i.e., which, for example, could be offered by respective National Agencies for Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies);
- c) To **identify areas for closer cooperation** between European Universities alliances, their members, and their respective national agencies for Erasmus+;
- d) To explore areas for closer **cooperation between National Agencies** for Erasmus+ in jointly supporting alliances involving higher education institutions from their respective countries.

The questionnaire is designed to collect **feedback from interested Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies** on their needs to support effective implementation of the European Universities Initiative in the national contexts.

The **target audience** includes staff responsible for overseeing, monitoring or supporting European Universities alliances. Each Erasmus+ or other national funding agency is required to provide **one consolidated answer**.

The questionnaire consists of **four parts**:

- I. General information about the respondent organisation
- II. Past and current support activities
- III. Future plans and areas for enhanced collaboration
- IV. Contact details

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<sup>3</sup> This study relates to the ongoing work of the [LTA project](#) “European University Alliances (EUI) as role models – Spreading innovative results to other higher education institutions”, run by the NAs in Austria ([OeAD](#)), Germany ([DAAD](#)), Hungary ([Tempus Public Foundation](#)), and Norway ([HK dir](#)).

## Questionnaire

### I. General information

Please share some general information about your organisation and higher education institutions from your country involved in the European Universities Initiative.

- 1. Please indicate the name of your organisation.**
  
- 2. Please select your country from the dropdown list.**
  
- 3. What is the role of your organisation? (Multiple choice)**
  - National Agency for Erasmus+
  - National funding agency in the field of (international) higher education
  - Other, please specify
  
- 4. Please indicate the NA code of your organisation. (if Q3=1)**
  
- 5. What is the size of your organisation in full time equivalent (FTE)? (Single choice)**
  - Less than 20 employees
  - Between 20 and 100 employees
  - More than 100 employees
  
- 6. How many higher education institutions are there in your country?**
  
- 7. How many higher education institutions are currently participating in the European Universities alliances in your country?**

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| Institutions with EU / Erasmus+ funding                              | (number) |
| Institutions with Seal of Excellence and national co-funding         | (number) |
| Institutions with Seal of Excellence without any national co-funding | (number) |
| Other, please specify  | (number) |

### II. Prior and current support

The next set of questions covers support provided by your organisation and/or other national or regional bodies to higher education institutions participating in the European University alliances.

- 8. To what extent does the EUI and collaboration with national members of the alliances represent a priority for your organisation (i.e., Erasmus+ or other national funding agency)? (Single choice)**

- It is not an official strategic priority / Our organisation does not have a direct mandate
- It is not yet an official strategic priority, but the importance of this topic is growing within my organisation
- It is one of the many priorities we have at the moment
- Other, please specify

**9. Does your organisation have any dedicated staff resources allocated to work with the alliances? (Single choice)**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**10. How many staff resources have been dedicated to that purpose (in FTE)? (if Q9=Yes) (Single choice)**

- Less than 1 FTE
- Between 1 and 3 FTE
- More than 3 FTE

**11. Has your organisation (i.e., Erasmus+ or other national funding agency) provided any kind of support to higher education institutions from your country participating in the European Universities alliances? (Single choice)**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**12. What kind of support has your organisation provided so far? (if Q11=Yes) (Multiple choice)**

- Support with partner search to become part of an alliance
- Advice on Erasmus+ participation modalities and rules
- Administration of national co-funding for higher education institutions involved in the alliances
- Administration of national funding for associate partners or Seal of Excellence institutions/alliances
- Support to sharing of experience or networking among national higher education institutions taking part in the European Universities alliances
- Support to dissemination of good practices and outcomes of alliances' work towards HEIs not (yet) involved in the EUI
- A digital space offered to the alliance members from my country or region for collaboration or peer learning
- Support to the design or implementation of national policy reforms (e.g., through dedicated stakeholder events or policy fora, analyses, or policy briefs)
- Other type of support, please specify

**13. To whom has this support been provided so far by your organisation? (if Q12=Yes) (Multiple choice, tick boxes)**

| Status / Type of support   | (Co-)funding or financial support | Other type of support |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| National institution acting as a <i>coordinator</i> of an alliance funded through the EUI / Erasmus+                                   |                                   |                       |
| National institution acting as a <i>regular partner</i> of an alliance funded through the EUI / Erasmus+                               |                                   |                       |
| National institution acting as a coordinator of an alliance funded outside the EUI / Erasmus+ (with or without Seal of Excellence)     |                                   |                       |
| National institution acting as a regular partner of an alliance funded outside the EUI / Erasmus+ (with or without Seal of Excellence) |                                   |                       |
| National institution aspiring to become a coordinator or partner of an alliance in the future  |                                   |                       |
| Other, please specify  |                                   |                       |

**14. Does your NA allocate any decentralised Erasmus+ funds (e.g., KA131 or KA220) for higher education institutions involved in the EUI? (Single choice)**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
- N/A

**15. Which Erasmus+ decentralised funds does your NA allocate for the alliance members in your country? (if Q14=Yes) (Multiple choice)**

- Dedicated share of KA131 mobility funds for HEIs partner of an alliance
- Dedicated share of KA2 funds for KA220 projects promoted by partner of an alliance
- Other, please specify

**16. Please provide further details or examples of support offered by your NA for your national higher education institutions in the EUI context.**

**17. To what extent is the participation of your country's higher education institutions in the EUI reflected in your current national higher education or internationalisation strategy(ies)? (Single choice)**

- It is included as a specific priority area or objective
- It is briefly referenced in our strategic document(s)
- It is not reflected yet, but there are plans to include it
- It is not reflected yet and there are no plans to include it
- I don't know

**18. Has your national government provided any kind of support to European Universities alliances or their member institutions from your country? (Single choice)**

- Yes
- No

- I don't know

**19. Has your regional government provided any kind of support to European Universities alliances or their member institutions from your country? (Single choice)**

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**20. What kind of support has been provided by your national or regional government/ministry so far? (if Q18 & 19=Yes) (Multiple choice)**

- National co-funding for the alliance members from my country or region as part of a **dedicated funding scheme** on top of EU funding (e.g., funds to support alliances activities that are not covered by EU funding)
- National co-funding for the alliance members from my country or region as part **overall university funding** (increase) on top of EU funding (e.g., additional funds under performance agreements)
- National funding for institutions acting as associated partners in the alliances or institutions with the Seal of Excellence
- Sharing of experience or networking among national higher education institutions taking part in the European Universities alliances
- Dissemination of good practices and outcomes of alliances' work towards HEIs not (yet) involved in the EUI
- A digital space offered to the alliance members from my country or region for collaboration or peer learning
- Design of national policy reforms (e.g., through dedicated stakeholder events or policy fora, analyses, commissioned research, or policy briefs)
- Other type of support (please specify)

**21. To whom has this support been provided by your national or regional government/ministry? (if Q18 & 19=Yes) (Multiple choice, tick boxes)**

| Status / Type of support   | (Co-)funding or financial support | Other type of support |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| National institution acting as a <i>coordinator</i> of an alliance funded through the EUI / Erasmus+                                   |                                   |                       |
| National institution acting as a <i>regular partner</i> of an alliance funded through the EUI / Erasmus+                               |                                   |                       |
| National institution acting as a coordinator of an alliance funded outside the EUI / Erasmus+ (with or without Seal of Excellence)     |                                   |                       |
| National institution acting as a regular partner of an alliance funded outside the EUI / Erasmus+ (with or without Seal of Excellence) |                                   |                       |
| National institution aspiring to become a coordinator or partner of an alliance in the future  |                                   |                       |
| Other, please specify  |                                   |                       |

**22. What kind of activities pursued by the alliances have been supported? (if Q18 & 19=Yes) (Multiple choice, tick boxes)**

| Status / Type of support   | (Co-)funding or financial support | Other type of support |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Educational activities (e.g., student and staff mobility, joint programmes, innovation with horizontal priorities of Erasmus+) |                                   |                       |
| Research activities (e.g., coordination of research programmes, joint research, events or publications)                        |                                   |                       |
| Outreach to the society, communication and dissemination   |                                   |                       |
| Other, please specify  |                                   |                       |

**23. What government or public agencies have been involved in offering this support? Please tick several boxes in case of organisations with mixed profiles. (if Q18 & Q19=Yes) (Multiple choice, tick boxes)**

| Status / Type of support                          | (Co-)funding or financial support | Other type of support |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| National ministry of (higher) education           |                                   |                       |
| Regional ministry of (higher) education           |                                   |                       |
| National ministry of research and innovation      |                                   |                       |
| Regional ministry of research and innovation      |                                   |                       |
| National Agency for Erasmus+                      |                                   |                       |
| National funding agency (other than for Erasmus+) |                                   |                       |
| Regional funding agency                           |                                   |                       |
| National quality assurance agency                 |                                   |                       |
| Other, please specify                             |                                   |                       |

**24. Please provide further details or examples of support offered by your national or regional government to your national higher education institutions in the EUI context. (open question)**

**25. Is there any national website offering information about various support activities to your national HEIs in European Universities alliances and the outcomes of their work? If yes, please provide the URL.**

- Yes + comment box for URL:
- No
- I don't know

**26. What lessons have been learnt from interacting with national institutions in the context of the European Universities Initiative? What outcomes have been achieved so far (e.g., new forms of partnership, changes in national legislation)?**



### **III. Future plans & collaboration**

This section relates to how your institution's plans and needs regarding the support of national higher education institutions participating in the European Universities alliances.

**27. Does your organisation (i.e., Erasmus+ or other national funding agency) plan to carry out any (new) support activities for the national members of the alliances in the near future?** *(Single choice)*

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**28. Please specify what kind of activities are foreseen by your organisation, even if tentatively.** *(if Q27=Yes)*

**29. Do you plan to open these activities to Seal of Excellence holders, or to other higher education institutions (e.g., those aspiring to be part of the EUI or similar initiatives)?** *(Single choice)*

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

**30. Where do you think the collaboration between your organisation and the national higher education institutions involved in the alliances can be reinforced?** *(Multiple choice) (Likert between 1 for lowest importance and 5 for highest importance)*

- Collect evidence on national level outcomes and feeding it in the policy making process
- Support stakeholder collaboration (policy fora and events) and synergies with the national goals
- Support sharing of experience or networking among national higher education institutions taking part in the European Universities alliances
- Support to dissemination of good practices and outcomes of alliances' work towards HEIs not (yet) involved in the EUI
- Support external quality assurance and certification (e.g., via the European approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, the European degree label)
- Support capacity building and staff training on topics of relevance to the alliances (e.g., quality assurance, student engagement, staff engagement, third mission)
- Support for interoperability (e.g., provisions on data exchange, access to materials and courses)
- Support in establishing connections to industrial or social partners to achieve the alliances goals
- Support in establishing connections to non-EU partners to develop or enhance the international dimension of the alliances
- Offer a digital or physical space for the alliance members from my country or region for collaboration or peer learning

- Ensure synergies with Erasmus+ horizontal priorities or other decentralised actions
- Other, please specify

**31. Please provide further details on the selected areas.**

**32. What would your organisation need to better support the alliances? (multiple choice)**

- Political guidance or national mandate
- Dedicated staff
- Additional expertise (e.g., in quality assurance, accreditation, recognition)
- Additional financial resources
- More information about alliances collected by EACEA (e.g., detailed application statistics, monitoring outcomes, feedback at centralised level)
- Other, please specify

**33. How could National Agencies for Erasmus+ or other national funding agencies better collaborate between themselves as well as with the EACEA to provide joint support to their national higher education institutions involved in the alliances?**

**34. Where do you see the potential for enhanced support to be provided to the national higher education institutions involved in the alliances by your national or regional government/ministry? (Multiple choice) (Likert between 1 for lowest importance and 5 for highest importance)**

- Additional funding to support research activities
- Additional funding to support third mission
- Additional funding to support spill-over effects to the sector
- Additional funding to support mobility
- Additional funding to joint programmes
- Better coordination of national or regional co-funding initiatives
- Ensure synergies with national higher education or other policy priorities
- Support governance and/or institutional autonomy reforms
- Support external quality assurance and certification (e.g., via the European approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and/or the European degree label)
- Enhance recognition systems for staff engagement
- Offer the alliance members from my country or region a digital space for collaboration or peer learning
- Recognition frameworks for student mobility
- Support the (national) legal status, pooling of resources, or joint procurement
- Support for interoperability (e.g., provisions on data exchange, access to materials and courses)
- Other, please specify

**35. Please provide any final comments or remarks.**

