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EDUC Societal Outreach Action Plan

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Abstract	The EDUC societal outreach action plan is an initiative to develop and enhance a joint understanding of outreach in EDUC, to reach out and engage our societies in processes of co-creation to shape and transform our regional and transnational communities, and to build and nurture active relationships with actors in the society as a whole.
Keywords	Outreach, communities, societal engagement

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1. Introduction, concept and associated partners

1.1. Introduction

The Societal outreach action plan is a long-term strategic document which describes the scope, aims and means to create a comprehensive network of outreach activities with societal actors at large on alliance level. The plan aims to empower positive change in our various communities through mutually beneficial and transformative partnerships with associated partners, regionally and internationally.

The first part of the plan describes an overall mission and a concept for developing and implementing societal outreach within the frames of the EDUC alliance. The aim is to create a joint understanding of societal outreach between the 8 universities of the alliance. Mapping has shown that the institutional approaches towards outreach are different. The universities are connected to their territories and international partners in many ways. A joint understanding of the “why’s” and “how’s” is therefore crucial to succeed.

Furthermore, the plan seeks to establish a joint policy for adapting associated partners to the alliance. The policy briefings which consist of an important part of the deliverables of the action plan, will set forth a joint policy for approval of associated partners as well as a structure of involvement and governance.

The objectives and actions listed in this action plan respond to the overall mission for outreach in EDUC. A list of short-term actions is already planned as a part of the work packages in EDUC, well connected to their milestones and deliverables. Furthermore, the document describes a long-term plan for the further development of activities, describing possible scopes and development of work packages in EDUC through activities that should be set forth beyond the EDUC II project period.

Finally, the document concludes with a description of risk mitigation, evaluation methods and indicators for measuring achievement.

1.2. Concept, overall mission and objectives of outreach in EDUC

Societal outreach involves activities and initiatives addressing social and cultural issues and aims at enhancing universities’ social engagement. It is linked to the universities’ social responsibility and to the role of universities as hubs for innovation and knowledge transfer, which can directly impact the creating of solutions to social challenges that are more sustainable and inclusive. Societal outreach should therefore be understood as the mission of the university as a contributor to social and economic development in its communities and territories.

The European university alliances are described as a “flagship for the European strategy for universities” (EACEA,2022)¹. The European Strategy for Universities states that universities are key actors for the green transition and for a more sustainable world. One of the aims of the alliances is to shape the **university of the future** and use outreach towards society to **tackle the major challenges**

¹ <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative>

of our times. Thus, alliances can play an important role in the societal and environmental transitions conducting research to find solutions, in cooperation with industry and society, across all levels and disciplines, as well as for the public at large through community engagement.

The overall mission as stated in the GA of outreach in EDUC is to strengthen the experience of European values like inclusion, diversity and equality through cooperating with society in solving joint challenges and contributing to our societal development in phases of transition.

Based on the mission and vision of EDUC, the objectives of the societal outreach action plan are the following:

- Create a dynamic and extended long-term outreach strategy for collaborative partnerships with a vision for the upcoming 10 years.
- Enhance democratic values and participatory citizenship in our communities.
- Integrate teaching, research and innovative approaches by providing transformational experiences for our learners.
- Facilitate knowledge and talent transfer and develop curiosity, critical thinking and open-mindedness.
- Educate and engage our citizens, equip our students and workforce in general with innovative and entrepreneurial skills, to drive economic, social and cultural development.
- Develop the link between research and education, as a pillar for building the campuses of the future, based on interdisciplinary joint activities.

1.3. Expanding and strengthening external partnership collaboration

The alliance consists of the University of Potsdam (UP), University of Rennes (UR), Masaryk University (MU), University of Paris Nanterre (UPN), University of Cagliari (UNICA), University of Pécs (PTE), University of South-Eastern Norway (USN) and Jaume I University (UJI). Additionally, EDUC counts 40 associated partners, as per October 2024. Among these are two Higher Education Institutions: Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University (PNU) in Ukraine and Nottingham Trent University (NTU) in the UK. Local governments, regional authorities, NGOs, industries/private businesses located in the regions of the 8 universities constitute the rest of these partners.

The action plan aims to create a dynamic and extended long-term outreach strategy for collaborative partnerships with a long-term vision to ensure regional integration and connections with local industries, public authorities, and citizens in our territories. Enhancing cooperation with universities and academic networks internationally is also an important part of the outreach of the alliance.

Associated partners are helping to reach beyond the higher education borders to understand how our different ecosystems function and to open improved opportunities for cooperation. European University alliances are actively and systematically working to connect their ecosystems of regional and international partners to their networks and involve them in their activities. Whereas some alliances are forming stakeholders' advisory boards and working groups, others include them in their governance structure through thematic councils and leading work packages. Others again are

forming connected communities with various thematic focuses, creating challenge-based collaboratory programmes connecting academia and society.

The international university partners of the 8 universities have already been mapped in the EDUC pilot phase. A joint policy should furthermore present a clear strategic scope on the selection and inclusion of international partners in the work of EDUC. With several hundred university partners worldwide, there is a huge potential to reach out. However, a selection of networks and partners to an associated level of the alliance needs to be done carefully and based on a joint policy and respond to the challenges the alliance looks to solve.

Associated Partners should play a central role in the implementation of EDUC's long-term strategy, and overall mission, and should contribute to strengthening our responses and make it possible to co-create solutions to societal challenges in our communities.

1.4. Creating a joint policy and long-term strategy for societal outreach

The organizing of two policy-briefings is a key deliverable in leveraging the societal outreach action plan. EDUC will organize 2 roundtable policy-briefings, focusing on the concept, strategies and realistic long-term scopes and objectives for societal outreach. As an outcome of the roundtables EDUC will create a joint policy for the alliance in the area of regional and global outreach, including a possible charter for associated partners.

1) Roundtable policy-briefing 2025: Joint policy

Developing a joint policy for adopting and including associated partners from the 8 institutions in the alliance, including a clear definition of what an associated partner is in terms of roles and responsibilities, potential involvement in the alliance development and activities.

Creating a joint policy will include:

- a strategic scope for indicators on the selection of associated partners
- a systematic approach to the inclusion of associated partners in tasks, governance and development of strategic topics in the alliance
- a description of a formalized adapting process for new associated partners.

A joint policy must be approved by the Board of Rectors and the Steering Committee.

2) Second roundtable policy-briefing 2026: Creating a long-term strategy

After delivering the first roundtable policy-briefing in 2025, the second roundtable should be analysing the outcomes and impact so far, drawing a timeline into the future.

Second roundtable briefing will focus on:

- valuating and measuring: temporary outcomes and impact analysis of the societal outreach action plan

- outlining long-term goals and strategies how to accomplish the overall mission and objectives for the alliance
- creating an extended long-term outreach strategy for meaningful impact with a vision for the upcoming 10 years.

2. Objectives and actions

The action plan describes the following:

Objectives and actions

- Short-term-actions referring to the different activities and organised in work packages and tasks, as described in EDUC II.
 - Long-term actions: Further development of the activities in the long-term, focusing on possible scopes and future activities
- Roles and responsibilities - A description of roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the action plan.

Evaluation and quality

- Indicators for measuring achievement
- Risk mitigation in the implementation of the plan
- Evaluation

2.1. Short-term actions

The first phase consists in concrete actions that are already planned in EDUC II (2023-2026). Actions are referring to the overall mission and objectives for the alliance.

Objectives as introduced in the EDUC mission	Activities	Indicators for measuring achievement
Enhance democratic values and participatory citizenship in our communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement specific outreach programs aimed at young people from marginalised communities. Partner with local schools, community centres, and youth organisations to reach these groups. 	<p>Enhancing the development of the EDUC Youth Integration lab, measuring impact on young people and researchers in the field. Satisfaction and impact surveys on participants.</p> <p>Lead T4.2; Pilot the Youth Integration Lab (UPN)</p>

<p>Integrate teaching, research and innovative approaches by providing transformational experiences for our learners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage designing summer schools, staff weeks and online courses around the pressing societal issues and strategic research areas defined by EDUC. • Ensure activities are interdisciplinary and involve external experts and stakeholders from EDUC's associated partners. 	<p>Increasing number of courses, summer schools and staff weeks focusing on key societal challenges, involving external participants and associated partners.</p> <p>Lead of T2.3; Internationalisation of curricula (UR) 2.4.2, Short mobility formats (MUNI) 3.3; Research and innovation meet education (UR), 5.2; Staff development (USN)</p>
<p>Facilitate knowledge and talent transfer and develop curiosity, critical thinking and open-mindedness.</p> <p>Educate and engage our citizens, equip our students and workforce in general with innovative and entrepreneurial skills, to drive economic, social and cultural development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance employability amongst PhD candidates, master and bachelor students through developing and offering career development workshops and seminars focusing on key skills for employability. Partner with leaders of industries, companies, NGOs and public entities to provide insights into the job market and emerging career opportunities. • Develop and implement the EDUC internship scheme to provide hands-on experience and professional networking opportunities, both for students and professionals, involving associated partners in the region. 	<p>Goals and numbers for students completing the internships, TESE-days and employability modules, key skills gained; enterprises participation, numbers of internships offered and numbers of associated partners involved.</p> <p>Lead T4.3; Entrepreneurial mindset (UR) and 4.4; Internships (Jaume1)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmarking of the partners' knowledge transfer ecosystems for innovation • Develop a common strategic plan for knowledge transfer leveraging both common strengths and unique assets. 	<p>Benchmarking report completed. Joint strategy developed. Number of applications for external funding to further develop our ecosystems and ensure sustainable valorisation.</p>

		Lead 3.2; Benchmarking knowledge-transfer ecosystems (USN)
Create a dynamic and extended long-term outreach strategy for collaborative partnerships with a vision for the upcoming 10 years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate and complete a process for EDUC to map and categorize institutional partnerships (regional and international) and networks by theme, and to connect partnerships with similar thematic focuses. • Develop a charter for associated partners and joint projects that align with the strategic areas and the societal issues in our territories. Projects should involve external partners with corresponding thematic interests within the EDUC Alliance, with an emphasis on addressing regional issues and fostering economic, social, and cultural entrepreneurship, citizen participation, and place-based innovation. 	<p>Mapping and categorization of institutional partnerships completed.</p> <p>Lead T.4.1; Societal outreach (USN)</p>
Raise activities to enhance science communication, citizen science and the collaborative relation between universities and society at large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create/Utilize an alumni network that can provide fundraising, mentorship, advice and job opportunities to current students. • Organize alumni panels and networking events to facilitate knowledge sharing and career guidance. • Fundraising for the 3rd mission: Including outreach in the fundraising strategy for external-funded projects in EDUC • Highlight successful projects and attract potential partners and funders. • Engage with local communities, NGOs, and governmental agencies to identify pressing societal issues that align with the EDUC mission. 	<p>Alumni activities implemented in accordance with strategic plan.</p> <p>Lead T6.3; The friends of EDUC (Jaume1).</p> <p>Increasing number of joint external-funded projects focusing on the overall mission of outreach</p> <p>Lead T1.4; Fundraising strategy (PTE)</p>

2.2. Future long-term actions to enhance collaboration, visibility and outreach

The second phase refers to long-term objectives and actions beyond the activities and possibilities already defined in EDUC II, with a special emphasis on creating a dynamic and extended outreach strategy for collaborative partnerships, as well as enhancing visibility and networking initiatives among partners and outside the alliance and beyond. Long-term objectives should ensure a

sustainable joint approach to the concept of societal outreach and a joint policy, as well as contribute to enhance and develop the alliance visibility and networking regionally and internationally, at the same time enhancing growing collaboration addressing key societal challenges.

The three following major priorities are introduced as the main objectives for developing societal outreach for the future:

- **Enhance matchmaking, comprehensive networking and joint initiatives among partners**
- **Sustain long-term collaboration and development**
- **Strengthen partnerships with associated partners**

Objectives	Actions
Enhance matchmaking, comprehensive networking and joint initiatives among partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilization and integration with the EDUC OpenUp platform through registering and highlighting the partners' societal outreach projects and initiatives on the OpenUp platform. The platform will facilitate visibility, collaboration, and resource sharing among member institutions. (linked to 4.1/6.1) • Utilize the platform's built-in matchmaking tool to create common programs and projects among EDUC institutions. This tool can help identify potential collaborators, advertise missions, and establish partnerships that address societal challenges. (linked to 6.1) • Maximize outreach and engagement through increasing the visibility and impact of societal outreach activities by registering and promoting them on the EDUC OpenUp platform. Ensure that each project gains the attention and support it needs to succeed. (linked to 6.1) • Establish interdisciplinary research and innovation hubs formalized through the OpenUp platform, that bring together researchers, industry leaders, and associated partners to collaborate on R&I projects addressing societal issues, foster innovation, and support entrepreneurial activities. (linked to T3.2)
Sustain long-term collaboration and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement outreach programs that have lasting effects on local, regional, and international communities. Ensure that these programs are continuously monitored, evaluated, and adapted to meet evolving societal needs. (linked to 4.1) • Organize a series of virtual webinars and community-building events focused on specific themes relevant to societal outreach. The events will leverage the projects and initiatives showcased on the OpenUp platform, fostering networking, cooperation, and support across local, regional, and international contexts. (linked to 6.1, 4.1 et.al)

<p>Strengthen partnerships with associated partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve associated partners in the EDUC community by ensuring that the involvement of associated partners is a central theme in virtual community-building sessions. Highlight their contributions and explore new avenues for collaboration, making their engagement a key focus of these events. (link to 6.1/6.2) • Feature the involvement of associated partners in virtual sessions fostering networking, cooperation, and support across local, regional, and international contexts. Involve associated partners in virtual community-building sessions. (link to 6.1) • Identify key themes and objectives to approach associated partners systematically, leveraging their existing relationships with research centres, R&I projects, and university core facilities. (link to 3.2, 4.1, EDUC-WIDE et.al) • Develop and implement joint projects involving associated partners across the EDUC Alliance. Focus on projects that address regional issues and societal challenges, promoting entrepreneurship and innovation. (link to 1.4 / 4.1 / 3.2 / 4.3) • Ensure that the involvement of associated partners is a central theme in virtual community-building sessions. Highlight their contributions and explore new avenues for collaboration, making their engagement a key focus of these events. (link to 6.1 / 6.2) • Feature the involvement of associated partners in virtual fostering networking, cooperation, and support across local, regional, and international contexts. Involve associated partners in virtual community-building session
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2.3. Indicators for measuring achievement

Measuring the results in a broad and multifaceted field such as societal outreach can be challenging. Measures of the outcome spans through multiple work packages and is thematically interdisciplinary. Nevertheless, it should be possible to measure outcomes over time.

Indicators to assess results should be based on the following:

1. **Outcome of policy briefings:** In 2025 and 2026, EDUC will organise 2 policy briefings, focusing on our regional and international collaboration for our outreach mission. The goal of the briefings is to formulate a single, unified policy for associated partners and outreach within the alliance and a long-term strategy for societal outreach.
2. **Number of joint collaboration projects and outreach programs developed,** focusing on our mission.
3. **Number of joint projects involving associated partners.**

4. **Number of webinars, events, etc. focusing on the mission and thematic scopes of the action plan** and involving associated partners.
5. **Future and final report on the way forward – beyond 2026.**

2.4. Risk mitigation

Risks for not succeeding with the action plan are primarily associated with the following factors:

- Lack of a shared understanding of the concept of "outreach".
- Different organization and ownership of outreach work among the 8 EDUC institutions.
- Absence of a dedicated budget to promote outreach activities and develop projects within the alliance.
- Challenges related to a lack of resources, time, and capacity for follow-up.
- Significant discrepancy between ambition levels and possibilities on one hand, and realities on the other.

Risks	Risk mitigation
Conceptual understanding	The action plan seeks to establish a common understanding of the term "outreach" and how outreach should be implemented within the alliance. To establish a shared understanding, systematic work must be carried out within various WPs and tasks. Societal outreach must be integrated into planning and development. Webinars should be organized focusing on concepts, best practices, and work methodologies.
Organization and ownership	EDUC must agree on who is responsible for the follow-up and ownership of societal outreach activities within the different work packages in EDUC II.
Budget	Active efforts are needed through various forms of fundraising, especially external project financing, to implement activities and develop study programs, academic research, and development projects focusing on societal challenges. In any new funding application to the EU, an estimated budget should be included for resources and the follow-up of activities to develop and promote outreach projects and initiatives.
Significant discrepancy between ambition levels and possibilities on one hand, and realities on the other.	The ambitions in the action plan are high. The possibilities are numerous. With clear distribution of responsibilities, a structured approach to the work, and a common understanding of the term "outreach," it will be possible to achieve the goals. However, systematic and conscious efforts must be made within all relevant tasks, in the steering group, and in the rectors' meeting to maintain momentum and achieve the objectives.

2.5. Roles and responsibilities of involved partners

The implementation of the action plan involves broad participation at all levels within the alliance. Therefore, a clear description and a consistent understanding of the various roles involved in the work are necessary for success.

- 1) **Board of Rectors:** Responsible for the strategic dimension in developing a common policy and long-term strategy for outreach. Approves new associated partners and is kept informed of progress.
- 2) **Steering Committee:** Responsible for ensuring the plan is followed up, for involving and approving new associated partners, and for projects and initiatives launched to implement the plan.
- 3) **Project Leaders:** Responsible for the day-to-day follow-up of the plan within the various work packages in EDUC II.
- 4) **Task Teams:** Responsible for ensuring that the societal outreach dimension is followed up in their respective tasks. This is especially relevant for the following tasks: 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3.

2.6. Evaluation of the plan

The Societal Outreach Action Plan is ambitious, interdisciplinary, and spans across several existing work packages in EDUC. To ensure that the plan is followed up and that outreach permeates all relevant work packages in EDUC, the alliance will conduct an annual evaluation:

Annual Evaluation: The task team will prepare an evaluation form that will be distributed across work packages and tasks, focusing on outreach efforts and their relevance to societal challenges. As the EDUC community's output, results can be valorized and used to implement new actions, deliverable or future joint research.

Evaluation period: October–December 2025 and 2026.

The main focus of the evaluation will be on the following topics:

- Integration of strategic topics, societal challenges/issue into the activities within the relevant tasks.
- Connection with associated partners, other external actors, or beneficiaries.
- The collaborative relation between universities and society at large in the relevant tasks.

The evaluation will be presented to the SC in the December meetings of 2025 and 2026, with the aim of gathering feedback and adjusting the course for the development of outreach in EDUC.