FOREU4ALL
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCES

D1.6

Evaluation of Cross-Alliance Collaboration and External Representation 1

FOREU4ALL
EUROPEAN UNIVERSITIES ALLIANCES

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Work Package Leader	Olga Wessels (ECIU)
Work Package Co-Leader	Ludovic Thilly (EC2U)
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Main author	Olga Wessels (Co-Coordinator of FOREU4ALL, ECIU), Ludovic Thilly (Co-Coordinator of FOREU4ALL, EC2U), Lucie Hunter (FOREU4ALL, Central Office)
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1. Executive Summary

Deliverable 1.6 evaluates the extent to which FOREU4ALL has fulfilled its role as an enabler of cross-Alliance collaboration, peer learning, and collective action during its first two years of implementation (November 2024–October 2026). By uniting the previously separate informal FOR-EU communities into a single, integrated Community of Practice, FOREU4ALL brings together all 73 European Universities Alliances, including both fully funded Alliances and Seals of Excellence (SoE) consortia.

Grounded in shared principles of inclusivity, transparency, efficiency, consensus, and respect for institutional autonomy, FOREU4ALL serves as a bridge-building, providing a structured ecosystem where Alliances address operational challenges, exchange best practices, and build sustainable inter-institutional partnerships. This requires a dedicated multi-level Governance structure capable of balancing broad Community representation with strategic policy steering.

Aside from the General Forum and the Forum Board, the project's 20 Topical Groups (TGs) form the true beating heart of the Community of Practice, bringing together over 2000 Alliance experts. Community engagement is comprehensive: 96% of Alliances participate actively in at least one Topical Group, 99% have taken part in the co-organised thematic workshops, and shared leadership is distributed across 34 Alliances holding TG Chair or Co-Chair roles. Over the past two years, cross-Alliance collaboration has also matured into tangible outputs, including a coordinated presence of 35+ alliances at EAIE 2025 and 2026, joint peer-reviewed publications, policy think pieces, conference presentations, student-led governance initiatives, and other collective partnerships organised within or facilitated by FOREU4ALL and its channels.

Despite these achievements, the evaluation below identifies some remaining operational challenges. Because most of the FOREU4ALL engagement relies on individuals' voluntary contributions on top of their regular institutional responsibilities, key contributors, particularly TG Chairing Teams and Alliance Coordinators in the

General Forum and Forum Board, face significant workload strain and capacity constraints. To safeguard the long-term resilience of the Community of Practice as it enters its third year, FOREU4ALL will conduct a second comprehensive needs analysis survey (after the one performed during the FOREU4ALL design phase) and reflection exercise to identify necessary modifications. Priorities will focus on strengthening inclusivity, broadening leadership opportunities to less engaged Alliances, and refining electoral and governance workflows in order to ensure that FOREU4ALL remains a responsive, Alliance-driven engine for cross-collaboration and collective transformation of the European Higher Education Area also in the future.

2. Introduction: FOREU4ALL as an Enabler of Collaboration, Peer Learning, and Collective Action

This Deliverable evaluates the extent to which FOREU4ALL has fulfilled its role as a catalyst for collaboration, peer learning, and collective action among the European Universities Alliances during the first two years of its existence (November 2024-October 2026).

By bringing together the previously informal and separate FOR-EU 1, FOR-EU 2, FOR-EU 3, and FOR-EU 4 structures into a formal, single, integrated Community of Practice, FOREU4ALL has established a cohesive Governance Framework, thematic collaboration spaces via 20 TGs, an active Policy Dialogue structure, and joint communication channels serving to bring the Community of Alliances together on a daily basis. Through these mechanisms, the project has provided Alliances with structured opportunities to exchange knowledge, share good practices, develop expertise, address common challenges, and build trusted relationships and partnerships surpassing institutional and geographical boundaries.

This evaluation examines how FOREU4ALL has contributed to creating an enabling ecosystem that strengthens connections between Alliances, supports joint initiatives and collective problem-solving, and increases the visibility and impact of the European

Universities Alliances within the wider European Higher Education landscape. Particular attention is given to the added value of inter-Alliance collaboration, recognising and evidencing how many of the opportunities and challenges facing the Alliances can be addressed more effectively through cooperation, mutual learning, and coordinated action rather than isolated efforts.

2.1 Synergies with Other Related Deliverables

The outcomes of cross-Alliance collaboration are embedded throughout all FOREU4ALL's activities and this evaluation therefore builds upon several inter-connected project Deliverables.

For example, FOREU4ALL facilitates collaboration in the dissemination of Alliance results and good practices. Through joint engagement with the broader higher education sector, the project enables Alliances to learn from one another and amplify their collective impact. Further information on external engagement can be found in Deliverable 1.4, while communication and dissemination activities conducted during the first year of the project, including cross-Alliance collaboration in this sphere, are described in Deliverable 4.2.

Given that FOREU4ALL is first and foremost a Community of Practice, the beating heart of Alliance collaboration takes place in the 20 TGs, where over 2000 experts work together across 20 overarching thematic groups, further divided into several subgroups allowing for close collaboration on more specialised working strands. More information about the set-up of the TGs can be found in Deliverable 2.1, while information about the first year of their activities and organised workshops can be found in Deliverables 2.2 and 2.4, respectively.

Similarly, Alliances collectively identify common challenges, develop shared solutions, and explore innovative approaches through the policy feedback loop. This work is supported through the Policy Dialogue activities and Policy Learning Labs under Work Package 3, which are described in greater detail in Deliverables 3.1 and 3.2.

3. Building a European Universities Alliance Community

3.1 Values and Principles for Collaboration

By engaging all European Universities Alliances and SoE consortia, FOREU4ALL has established a structured and sustainable framework for the exchange of good practices and mutual learning. The project fosters a collaborative and supportive environment in which Alliance representatives can openly share experiences, challenges, and solutions. This happens on multiple governance levels, spanning the General Forum that brings all Alliance Coordinators to the same table, the elected Forum Board, the Policy Dialogue team under Work Package 3, and the 20 TGs managed under Work Package 2.

Through peer learning, exchange of best practices, and mutual support, participants strengthen their knowledge, skills, and capacity to implement their Alliances' ambitions more effectively. The purpose is not only to share what is already working, as showcased in the Database of Best Practices, but to create a safe space to openly exchange also on challenges and encountered difficulties and to collectively learn from each other's experiences. This is especially crucial as a tool for "inter-generational" exchange amongst the different Alliance waves, providing direct support and learning opportunities also to younger or newly formed Alliances and Seals of Excellence in the early years of their development.

As a merger of the informal FOR-EU 1, FOR-EU 2, FOR-EU 3, and FOR-EU 4 Communities, together with newly funded and SoE consortia from subsequent Erasmus+ calls, FOREU4ALL brings together a diverse and growing Community within a single cohesive structure. This is a very unique role and clearly shows the trust in and recognition of FOREU4ALL among the Alliances and the benefits that a participation in its structures and activities brings to them. However, managing such a complex structure is not an easy feat. In this context, a robust governance framework and identification of a set of shared values and principles have been essential to ensure effective collaboration.

Text Box 1: Values and principles of cooperation FOREU4ALL

Values and principles of cooperation FOREU4ALL

1. FOREU4ALL is **inclusive**: all European Universities alliances can participate in the governance and all activities on an equal footing.
2. FOREU4ALL is **transparent** about developments, activities and processes, sharing information in an open way to empower the European Universities alliances.
3. FOREU4ALL is **effective and efficient**, being mindful of avoiding a heavy structure on top of the European Universities alliances and being responsive to evolving needs.
4. FOREU4ALL respects the **fundamental values** of universities in Europe, such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy and diversity.
5. FOREU4ALL is **consensus-oriented**: decisions are made by consensus, and by simple majority if needed. Consensus decision-making also implies that the distribution of positions in the governing bodies is distributed equally among Alliances.

See also FOREU4ALL Terms of Reference, Deliverable 1.1

The supportive and collaborative environment within FOREU4ALL is rooted in the values and principles for collaboration defined in the Terms of Reference of the General Forum and Forum Board (see Deliverable 1.1). As illustrated in Text Box 1, FOREU4ALL places particular emphasis on fostering an inclusive, transparent, equal and collaborative Community in which all Alliances are encouraged to contribute and benefit from their collective knowledge and sharing of experiences. The aim is to enhance collaboration and development, while safeguarding the diversity and unique profile of each individual Alliance, ensuring that all Alliances remain competitive and attractive entities in their own right.

3.2 Governance Rooted in Collaboration

The governance structure of FOREU4ALL has been specifically designed to create a safe discussion space and facilitate the exchange of knowledge, good practices, and experiences among the European Universities Alliances in an inclusive and supportive environment. Each governance structure offers a different style and level of engagement and is organised as follows:

General Forum

The General Forum is the central governance body of FOREU4ALL. It brings together all Alliance coordinators within a single structure, ensuring broad participation, efficient interaction, and knowledge sharing across the Community. The General Forum guarantees representation of all Alliances and serves as the primary platform for strategic discussion and decision-making. For this reason, any documents or initiatives holding the stamp of approval by the General Forum showcase the formal position of the Alliances on specific matters. A key example here would be the FOREU4ALL's Discussion Paper "European Universities Alliances: Beating Heart of Europe's Future" on the future of the European Universities Initiative. Within the General Forum, all funded Alliances have an equal voice. SoE consortia take an active part in the discussions but do not hold voting rights or candidacy rights during the Forum Board elections.

Forum Board

The Forum Board provides strategic guidance and oversight for the Community of Practice. Through a rotating membership of approximately 15 Alliances per year, the Board ensures broad participation and shared ownership across the Community. Alliances with full or associated partner status to FOREU4ALL (meaning, all funded European Universities Alliances) have an equal opportunity to be elected. The Forum Board oversees the day-to-day implementation of activities carried out by the Community of Practice and prepares strategic discussions and decisions to be taken up by the General Forum. The Forum Board actively deals with topics of strategic interest to the whole Alliance Community, including questions surrounding the Initiative's future sustainability. Given the strategic importance of these topics, the effectiveness of the Forum Board requires a high level of trust, time commitment, and tight cross-collaboration between the participating Alliances. Concrete results, like the above-mentioned Discussion Paper or an Investment Pathway Workshop and Paper which are currently in preparation, evidence the willingness of participating Alliances to come to the same table and collectively collaborate on actions and initiatives that could be of benefit to the whole Alliance Community.

Topical Groups

The 20 TGs provide dedicated spaces for Alliance experts to collaborate on specific thematic areas. Through regular online meetings, specific webinars, in-person workshops, guest presentations and capacity-building trainings delivered by external guests, participants share expertise, exchange experiences, explore solutions to common challenges, and develop joint approaches to emerging priorities. These groups play a key role in enabling peer learning and fostering collaboration among practitioners across the Alliances, which makes them a true goldmine of cross-Alliance collaboration within FOREU4ALL. Moreover, many of these collective initiatives are often further expanded and built upon outside of the framework of the project, be it via joint statements and initiatives, participation at conferences, mutual trainings, guest lectures and the like, allowing Alliances and their members to build deep partnerships and sustainable support networks also for the future. In this sense, FOREU4ALL is acting as a bridge-builder and facilitator, creating an enabling environment for productive and continuous cross-Alliance collaboration.

Inclusion of (Seal of Excellence) Alliances

In line with the principles of inclusiveness and transparency (principles 1 and 2 in Text Box 1 above), all newly funded Alliances from the 2024, 2025, and 2026 Erasmus+ calls, as well as SoE consortia, have been pro-actively integrated into the FOREU4ALL Community. A dedicated onboarding session was organised by the Project Management Team and Central Office in 2025 to support this process and ensure smooth engagement. This means that, since 2024, FOREU4ALL has been representing all 73 existing European Universities Alliances. As a result, all 73 Alliances have equal access to the General Forum, communication and dissemination channels (website, social media, Teams space), and TG activities. For the sake of governance simplicity, legitimacy, and long-term sustainability, membership in the elected Forum Board and voting rights within the General Forum are only reserved for fully funded Alliances. SoE consortia are therefore fully included in the Community and its activities despite not taking part in the elections.

Microsoft Teams Space

The FOREU4ALL Microsoft Teams environment serves as the project's true digital collaboration hub, providing a necessary infrastructure through which Alliances, experts, governing bodies and Work Packages can easily engage with one another and share updates and important resources. By bringing more than 2270 members into a single shared space, the platform creates opportunities for continuous interaction across Alliances, hierarchies and governance levels, supporting the development of a connected and collaborative community. While slightly under-utilised at the onset of the project, the Microsoft Teams space has now turned into a lively digital platform with its own landing page, spontaneously and regularly used by all Alliances willing to share their upcoming events, newly published resources, or to simply pick the brains of their cross-Alliance colleagues on concrete questions and challenges.

The Microsoft Teams environment, therefore, enables members to exchange information, share resources, organise meetings and collaborate on documents regardless of geographical location or Alliance maturity. A dedicated General channel functions as a central marketplace for information, where the Central Office shares regular updates and Community Highlights, spanning a monthly “policy newsletter”, TG updates and new publications, and upcoming external or Alliance-led events and participation opportunities. This way, Alliances can easily identify partners for joint activities, disseminate data collection calls, find speakers and external experts for conferences, share job vacancies, or seek advice and niche expertise from the wider community. This visibility helps facilitate connections that would not be able to emerge through formal governance structures alone.

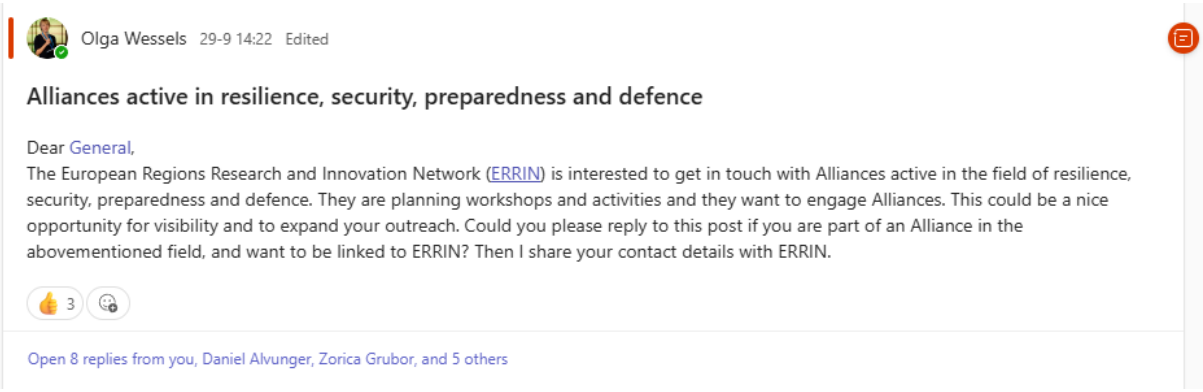
Moreover, dedicated channels for each governing body and Work Packages provide focused spaces for discussion and coordination while remaining connected within the broader FOREU4ALL ecosystem. This is further enhanced through direct access to a dedicated Sharepoint, which serves as a coordinated archive and repository of the project’s institutional memory. Within the WP2 channel, all 20 TGs maintain shared

documents that are accessible across the Community. This reinforces the already mentioned principle of transparency that the project is rooted in, enabling Alliances to learn from one another's activities, outputs, challenges, and positive experiences alike. This shared access reduces duplication of efforts and supports peer learning across thematic areas. It also facilitates onboarding activities, as new TG Chairs get elected, or their membership evolves depending on the Alliances' changing needs.

The platform also contributes to building a common FOREU4ALL identity by providing a central repository for communication resources, templates and promotional materials that can be used by all Alliances. This includes a general FOREU4ALL presentation explaining the project's mission, structure, achievements and upcoming events, which can be used by all members of the Community at conferences or during other forms of external engagement. This helps strengthen the collective ownership of the project and the principle of inclusion, since every single FOREU4ALL participant naturally becomes the project's ambassador.

To ensure the platform remains accessible and effective, the FOREU4ALL Coordinator and Central Office manage membership, permissions and channel structures, while ECIU provides dedicated helpdesk support for authentication and technical issues. This operational support helps remove practical barriers to participation, making sure that all project members feel welcome to the platform and confident about its functionalities.

Last but not least, as the project needs evolve and new cross-Alliance collaboration opportunities arise, the Microsoft Teams space changes in response. Recently, a whole new digital space has been created for the purposes of the Investment Pathway Task Force, bringing together selected members of the Forum Board working on a dedicated Paper and an upcoming workshop. This is in addition to another dedicated space shared with FOREU4ALL's "sister projects", DG EAC and EACEA for the purposes of external engagement, as further explained in Deliverable 1.4. This adaptability is crucial for fostering and enabling cross-Alliance collaborating and continued relevance.



Picture 1: Example of engagement on Microsoft Teams

4. Functioning of Cross-Alliance Collaboration in the Governing Bodies: An Analysis

4.1 General Forum

As the only governance body in which all Alliances are represented at Coordinators' level on an equal basis, active participation in the General Forum is essential for ensuring the legitimacy and effectiveness of FOREU4ALL and its rootedness in the principle of inclusivity.

Meeting Frequency

Given the project's start in November 2024, only one General Forum meeting was held that year, followed by seven meetings in 2025. The increased meeting frequency in 2025 reflected the need to establish a functioning governance structure and agree on upcoming FOREU4ALL activities, including the organisation of the first Forum Board elections in 2025, the call for and subsequent set up of the 20 TGs in 2025, the launch of the in-person/hybrid workshop scheme and selection procedure of individual topics in 2025, and the development of the FOREU4ALL website and other communications and dissemination channels, including the already discussed Teams space, also in 2025.

Additionally, three extraordinary General Forum meetings were organised during the summer of 2025 to discuss the European Commission's proposals for the post-2028 programme framework, coordinate follow-up actions with the European Parliament and

at national levels, and contribute to the development of the FOREU4ALL Discussion Paper, which was officially finalised and presented in November 2025. In line with the principle of effectiveness and efficiency (see principle 3, Text Box 1), as the governance structures and operational activities became fully established, the number of General Forum meetings was reduced in 2026 to five meetings per year.

Participation in Surveys and Forum Board Elections

Despite this reduction, participation and engagement remained consistently high and very fruitful. This is, for example, reflected in high Alliance participation in General Forum consultations, surveys, and Forum Board elections. Participation rates in surveys regularly reach approximately 95% of participating Alliances. For instance, 62 Alliances responded to the FOREU4ALL "Official Mapping of Alliances Activities on the Sharing of Research Infrastructures" in summer 2026. Results were presented at the fourth workshop in Poitiers in October 2026. Requests from external stakeholders (further discussed in Deliverable 1.4) distributed via FOREU4ALL channels also receive a consistently high engagement. For instance, the EUA 2026 Trends Survey received responses from nearly all (69) Alliances and its distribution within the FOREU4ALL Community was much appreciated by the survey organisers.

Moreover, the 2025 and 2026 Forum Board elections both attracted votes from 57 Alliance Coordinators, and the selection of TGs received preferences from 59 Alliances, which clearly evidence the high level of engagement across different topics.

Overall, these figures demonstrate a clear interest and commitment of Alliances to shaping the (future) direction and activities of the FOREU4ALL Community and the effectiveness of FOREU4ALL's channels and governance set up in fostering this active cross-Alliance engagement. This is true both in regard to the project's own activities and those coming from external stakeholders, brought to the Alliances' attention thanks to FOREU4ALL's targeted dissemination and engagement efforts.

4.2 Forum Board

To ensure continuity between Community governance and project implementation, alongside accountability and preservation of institutional knowledge, it was decided that the Project Management Team members will automatically serve as permanent members of the Forum Board. The remaining 15 representatives are elected annually by the General Forum to ensure equal say of all Alliances (principle 5, Text Box 1) and collective ownership.

For the first Forum Board mandate in 2025, 18 applications were received, including four candidates for the position of Chair and four candidates for the roles of Vice-Chair. Given their permanent seat in the Forum Board structure, members of the Project Management Team are not allowed to put forward their candidacy for these positions, leaving even more space to other Alliances to step in. This high level of interest demonstrates the willingness of Alliances to engage at a strategic and political level within FOREU4ALL and to contribute to the wider development of the European Universities initiative.

During its first mandate, ten Forum Board meetings were organised. The Forum Board played a key role in the development of the FOREU4ALL Discussion Paper presented in November 2025 and contributed to the preparation of the Wrocław Forum of Alliances in June 2025. The Board also represented the Community at external events, including conferences and other activities organised by the Spread EUI and Future4Alliances "sister projects" and higher education stakeholder organisations, as further detailed in Deliverable 1.4. Incoming invitations are always distributed by the Central Office and the Project Management Team among current Forum Board members, taking into account their expertise and geographical location. For events with multiple FOREU4ALL representatives, speakers usually discuss beforehand what “hat” to wear in each individual panel, making sure that the views of their own Alliances but also FOREU4ALL are represented and mutually re-enforced and amplified.

For the second mandate in 2026, 15 applications were received, including ten applications from members seeking re-election. One candidate applied for the position of Chair, while five candidates applied for Vice-Chair positions, including one re-application. While the number of applications for Forum Board membership saw a decrease compared to the inaugural election, it does not necessarily indicate reduced commitment, although it should be taken seriously. Rather, it likely reflects the significant demands placed on Alliances during this period, notably the preparation of applications for the Erasmus+ +2 years call for the first, third, and fifth waves of Alliances, alongside the increase in activity levels of the TGs, Policy Dialogue colleagues and other FOREU4ALL initiatives.

Moreover, re-election of sitting candidates is a double-edged tool: on the one hand, it allows for the preservation of institutional memory and ability to further build on initiatives started during the first mandate. On the other hand, it goes partly against the principle of inclusivity, since fewer Alliance representatives will be able to rotate at these important governance positions during the remainder of the project. The Project Management Team has launched an internal reflection regarding the Forum Board electoral process in order to ensure that this governing body remains an inclusive and attractive space for a broader sample of Alliances also in the future, representing the true diversity of Alliance generations and thematic profiles.

Throughout 2026, the Forum Board has met five times and continues to provide strategic reflection and guidance on key policy developments, including negotiations on the post-2028 funding framework, developments in the European Parliament and within Member States, contribution to the IV EUI Forum in Maynooth in July 2026, and discussions on the future investment pathways for the European Universities initiative, as already mentioned above. The Forum Board also represented the FOREU4ALL Community at key policy and sectoral events, be it the DG Higher Education meeting held in Cyprus in May 2026, the Rector's Conference in June 2026, or the participation of FOREU4ALL Forum Board Chair's during mission EVP Mînzatu's mission to the USA.

Looking at these results, it is safe to say that the decrease in meeting frequency did not affect the quality of Forum Board outputs. If anything, it only further proved the continuous need for a coordinated voice rooted in a strong day-to-day cross-Alliance collaboration and the need to continue nourishing dedicated spaces where such exchanges and initiatives can be discussed and implemented.

4.3 Project Management Team and Central Office

The Project Management Team (PMT) and Central Office play a pivotal role in enabling and sustaining cross-Alliance engagement within FOREU4ALL. Beyond their administrative and coordination functions, they act as the connective tissue between the project's governance structures, TGs, and Work Package members, ensuring that activities remain aligned, mutually reinforcing and that everyone contributes based on their expertise and capacity levels. Through regular PMT meetings (10 in 2025 and 5 in 2026) and ongoing coordination within the Central Office (weekly meetings), several emerging opportunities for collaboration, common challenges, and cross-Work Package synergies between Alliances and existing initiatives have been actively identified and followed up on.

This proactive approach helps translating emerging discussions into concrete actions, strengthening links between different parts of the Community of Practice, and reducing the risk of siloed working. As a result, Alliances benefit from a more coherent and well-connected collaborative environment, enabling knowledge exchange, peer learning, and collective problem-solving across organisational and thematic boundaries. Overall, the PMT and Central Office are key enablers of the collaborative culture that underpins FOREU4ALL's cross-Alliance engagement and collective ambition, also helping to preserve the continuity of the Community's institutional knowledge.

4.4 Evaluation and Next Steps

Over its first two years, the General Forum and Forum Board have become key pillars of the FOREU4ALL Community of Practice, providing inclusive and representative structures through which Alliances can exchange knowledge, discuss strategic

developments, and shape collective priorities. The General Forum has successfully brought together the Alliance Community in a shared governance space, fostering a sense of ownership and enabling broad participation in consultations, surveys, elections, and discussions on major policy topics, including the post 2028 European programme proposals or vision for the European Universities Alliances 2.0 strategy. At the same time, the Forum Board has played an important role in translating Community priorities into concrete strategic initiatives, directly contributing to policy discussions, interacting with key stakeholders and decision-makers, drafting the FOREU4ALL Discussion Paper, and representing the Alliance Community externally.

Nevertheless, the first two years have also highlighted challenges related to long-term sustainability and participation. As FOREU4ALL activities and Alliance-level commitments continue to expand, maintaining active engagement and encouraging Alliances to take on governance responsibilities is becoming more difficult, mostly because all of these positions are filled on a voluntary basis on top of Alliance members' regular responsibilities. The lower number of applications for the 2026 Forum Board mandate suggests that capacity constraints and growing workloads are affecting the willingness of individuals to put forward candidacy leadership roles. Sustaining broad, inclusive and representative participation across the Alliances' body will require targeted engagement formats, identification of additional incentives and added benefits of participation, workload management, succession planning, and leadership development. This will ensure that the General Forum remains a space for meaningful dialogue and co-creation and that the Forum Board continues to reflect the diversity of the Alliance community and continues to provide strategic steering and overall vision.

5. Topical Groups and Workshops

5.1 About the Topical Groups

Text Box 2: Set-up of the Topical Groups

FOREU4ALL received 27 proposals for topical groups. This was far beyond the expected 10-20 Topical Groups. Currently, over 2.000 participants are active members of the topical groups, far beyond the initial target of 300 representatives. These high numbers show the need of Alliance experts to be connected.

See Deliverable 2.1 for more detailed information

The TGs are the beating heart of cross-Alliance engagement, since they lie at the very core of the Community of Practice. Bringing together over 2000 Alliance experts from all over Europe (see Text Box 2 for more information), the TGs structure the Community around 20 thematic fields selected for their key importance and relevance for the majority of Alliances. Participation in the TGs is open to all Alliances, including SoE consortia.

As mentioned above, activities of the TGs showcase the most direct evidence of the deep cross-Alliance collaboration that FOREU4ALL is rooted in, starting with their selection process. The TGs have been organised based on a proposal submitted by a group of experts, each consisting of multiple Alliance representatives. This showcased a significant level of trust, openness, and willingness to overcome isolated progress for the benefit of peer exchange and collective capacity-building.

The 20 TGs were selected in May 2025 out of 27 submitted proposals, following a strict evaluation procedure ensuring relevance and avoiding duplication, which meant that certain proposals were eventually discarded or merged (for more information about the selection procedure, see Deliverable 2.1: Set-up of First Topical Groups). Over the course of the past year, several TGs have been further sub-divided into more niche thematic sub-groups, allowing expert exchanges on an even deeper level. This high interest in TG

participation and adaptability of the format as the Community of Practice matures shows the strong interest in and need of the Alliance Community to have a dedicated space to come together, learn from each other, and collectively push for the further development of the Higher Education Sector as a whole.

The TGs are therefore the real key to Alliance collaboration, building a sense of community belonging and trust (relationships and network formation), fostering peer learning and capacity-building (exchange of expertise and practices), and enabling and facilitating collective action. The evidence collected from the first year of TG activities (see deliverable 2.2 Topical Group Report 1) demonstrates that the TGs have been greatly successful at opening up opportunities for cross-Alliance collaboration, be it via a joint organisation of events (e.g. webinars, workshops, guest lectures), development of common positions (e.g. think pieces), exchange of expertise, drafting of publications (e.g. collections of case studies), engagement with policymakers and other key stakeholders (e.g. consultations ahead of April 14 Coordinators' Meeting in Brussels), or, and perhaps most importantly, by building lasting professional networks and partnerships.

The Chairing Teams of each TG, elected on an annual basis with a possibility of renewal, play an especially crucial role here, since the responsibility to agree on the TG's annual plans and terms of references, discussion facilitation, and meaningful engagement despite differences and varying levels of maturity within the expert pool, lies primarily on their shoulders. Coming from different Alliances themselves, the Chairing Teams experience first-hand the added benefits of deep cross-Alliance collaboration but also many of the challenges associated with it.

In this respect, the 8 on-site/hybrid workshops organised over the duration of the project under the framework of Work Package 2 are particularly illuminating. The workshops provide a unique opportunity for Topical Group representatives to meet in person, focus on concrete topics and challenges of collective interest and produce tangible results, be it guidelines, roadmaps, toolkits or policy recommendations.

Organisation of these workshops is a very complex task. Not only because of their high attendance (on average 125 on-site participants with others joining online) but also the need to structure them in such a way to make them useful for a very diverse group of Alliances and members' profiles. Given the structural complexity of the Alliance environment, which requires cross-disciplinary analyses and out-of-the-box thinking, each workshop proposal is submitted as a collective endeavour of 2-4 TGs, making demands on cross-Alliance and cross-thematic cooperation even greater. However, despite this complexity, such cross-collaboration initiatives also have a much greater likelihood of producing something of value for the whole Alliance Community and even the wider sector and are therefore very much worth the efforts.

5.2 Data on Alliance Engagement in Topical Groups and Workshops

Based on internal data, we can now confidently say that FOREU4ALL has successfully engaged nearly all 73 European University Alliances through its TGs and workshops (see Annex 1 for more details). 70 Alliances, or 96%, take part in at least one Topical Group, with many having representatives across all 20 groups. Workshop participation is even broader. Across the three workshops conducted to date, 72, or 99%, of the Alliances, participated either in-person or in an online format. Taken together, the figures show that only one SoE consortium has not participated in any of these two core activities of the Community of Practice. This demonstrates FOREU4ALL's strong capacity to create accessible and complementary opportunities for cross-Alliance engagement, with the TGs providing a strong basis for sustained thematic collaboration and participation across the Community.

Leadership in the TG Chairing Teams is also shared across a substantial part of the Community. Thirty Alliances hold at least one Co-Chair position, and eleven hold at least one Chair position. Taking into account the seven Alliances that perform both roles, 34 Alliances, or almost half, are part of the leadership of at least one or more Topical Groups, evidencing their commitment and willingness to share a greater portion of

responsibility for the sake of collective development. Across the 20 TGs, the data records 59 Co-Chair and 13 Chair positions in total.

However, despite these impressive numbers, the leadership distribution remains somewhat concentrated: 23 Alliances serve only as Co-Chairs, four only as Chairs, seven combine both roles, and 39 hold neither position. Some Alliances can also be seen at the helm of several TGs, while others prefer to participate only as members. This is also due to the fact that holding a role in the Chairing Team, just like participation in the TGs as such, is conducted on an entirely voluntary basis on top of Alliance members' daily responsibilities, speaking, once again, of the incredible commitment of everyone involved and the need to have an open discussion about the sustainability of such a format going forward.

5.3 Concrete Examples of Collaboration

It is impossible to summarise the impact of the TGs on cross-Alliance engagement in its entirety (see Deliverable 2.2 for a full overview of first year activities and Deliverable 2.4 for an evaluation of the first batch of conducted workshops). However, it is still beneficial to provide a selection of concrete cases spanning different categories to showcase the story of cross-collaboration a little more tangibly.

A visible example of the added benefit of a collective approach was the coordinated presence of the Alliances at major European Higher Education Sector events, coordinated by Work Package 4 and the TG on Communication and Dissemination. At the EAIE Conference in Gothenburg in 2025, more than 35 Alliances collaborated to present a **coherent and recognisable European Universities Community**. Using the Communication and Dissemination Topical Group as a brainstorming and resource hub, Alliances coordinated exhibition materials, organised joint conference sessions, and engaged with the European Commission and wider stakeholders. At the same conference, other TGs organised networking events, workshop sessions, and recruitment activities, demonstrating how FOREU4ALL creates opportunities for

Alliances working on largely different topics to contribute to common objectives while simultaneously strengthening their own thematic communities and individual partners.

Text Box 3: Recommendations from Workshop 2

> "Formal recognition of FOREU4ALL as a structural peer-learning mechanism within the European Universities Initiative by both EC-EACEA and University Alliances, with appropriate and sustainable support for its operations, is also strongly recommended."
>
> Workshop 2 on project management and impact report.

The collaborative culture fostered by FOREU4ALL is equally visible in the organisation of **TG workshops and events**. As mentioned above, many TGs have moved beyond exchanging practices towards co-designing and co-delivering activities in a collective manner. The four in-person/hybrid workshops that have been organised to date are a key example of this dynamic.

The FOREU4ALL workshops present an important meeting, networking and capacity-building space, bringing together nearly all European Universities Alliances alongside sector organisations and policymakers, thus creating connections between experts who would otherwise rarely interact or find themselves sitting in the same room (see Deliverable 2.4 for more details). The value and tangible impact of the workshops, both on its participants and for the further development of the sector via targeted recommendations, roadmaps and guidelines, are also clear from the workshop reports. Moreover, all workshop reports are published online on the FOREU4ALL website,

summarizing their main outcomes and recommendations (see Text Box 3 for more details), for the benefit of all interested stakeholders.

Next to the workshops, other **events** are organised as well, including a “clinic” by the Project Managers to collectively prepare for and share information about the +2 years call (2026), public webinars by numerous TGs, “open hours" by the Quality Assurance TG, or a FOREU4ALL Student Workshop and Networking Event organised in Brussels in 2025.

The increasing number of jointly hosted external events also demonstrates the value of FOREU4ALL as an enabler and breeding ground for collaboration. Representatives from multiple Alliances have **co-delivered workshops and presentations**, among others at the European Quality Assurance Forum, the Franco-Dutch Strategic Dialogue, European student conferences, CESAER events, Academic Cooperation Association seminars, European Commission-related activities and all sorts of other public events and conferences, showcasing the willingness to share responsibility and act collectively as a Community of Practice, while still promoting and representing their individual Alliances as well (see Deliverable 1.4 and 2.2 for other details).

These initiatives have allowed Alliances to showcase their collective achievements to external stakeholders, learn from one another, and develop common perspectives or at least a safe space to exchange on emerging policy and operational challenges. Rather than solely presenting experiences of individual Alliances, FOREU4ALL members increasingly approach external engagement from a Community perspective. This leads to members often wearing two or three different “hats” as Alliance representatives / TG members / FOREU4ALL governance representatives, collectively amplifying the visibility and influence of their own Alliances, FOREU4ALL and the European Universities Initiative as a whole.

FOREU4ALL has also stimulated **collaboration between TGs** themselves, bringing to the same table Alliance experts across different generations but also expertise. Numerous

examples illustrate how thematic communities have combined knowledge and capacity to address shared priorities via the organisation of workshops but also beyond. For instance, the Internationalisation and Global Outreach TG joined forces with the Cooperation with Ukraine TG to organize a series of Policy Learning Labs alongside their Policy Dialogue colleagues under the framework of Work Package 3.

Diversity & Inclusion TG has collaborated with the group on Multilingualism and Multiculturalism on more than one occasion, delivered a training session at the Granada Workshop co-organized by the Impact and Project Management groups, and presented to the Student Engagement sub-group within Community Engagement TG. The Multilingualism and Multiculturalism TG co-developed three workshop proposals alongside Diversity & Inclusion, Communication & Dissemination, and Research & Innovation experts. Additionally, the Governance and Legal Frameworks TG co-prepared a joint workshop proposal with the Community Engagement and Student-led Community groups. And the list continues. These examples are absolutely not exhaustive but help demonstrate how FOREU4ALL's structure successfully encourages interaction across themes and prevents the creation of silos.

Another important indicator of the maturity of inter-Alliance collaboration is the emergence of **joint publications and other forms of knowledge production**. Several TGs have moved beyond discussion, experience sharing, and information exchange towards generating shared outputs. To name just a few, the Communication and Dissemination TG produced a jointly authored article for the EAIE Forum Magazine involving representatives from multiple Alliances. The Multilingualism and Multiculturalism TG collaborated with several Alliances to publish a peer-reviewed article in the *European Journal of Language Policy*. Governance experts established dedicated writing teams to produce joint publications on governance models, while several other groups developed shared policy contributions (e.g. a Thinkpiece on Mobility), collection of case studies and best practices (e.g. Impact Case Studies) and workshop recommendations. Most of these outputs are openly accessible on the FOREU4ALL website and serve to

demonstrate that collaboration increasingly results in tangible products, directly contributing to knowledge creation necessary for the further development of the wider European Higher Education Area.

Student engagement provides another powerful example of FOREU4ALL's ability to facilitate collaboration. The Student-led Community on Sustainable and Democratic Participation TG has created one of the largest **cross-alliance student networks** within FOREU4ALL, engaging students from dozens of Alliances and organising dedicated networking events, conferences, policy discussions, and workshops. Through partnerships with organisations such as the European Students' Union, Erasmus Student Network, and European Student Assembly (see Deliverable 1.4 for more information), students have not only exchanged practices across Alliances but have also collectively contributed to European-level discussions on student participation, governance, and the future of the European Universities initiative, strengthening cross-Alliance collaboration from the bottom up.

Several examples also demonstrate FOREU4ALL's ability to catalyse collaboration around strategic priorities extending beyond individual Alliances. For instance, the Cooperation with Ukraine TG brought together representatives from more than 50 Alliances to exchange experiences and develop **common approaches to supporting Ukrainian higher education institutions**. The STEAM TG united Alliances from diverse disciplinary backgrounds in discussions on interdisciplinary education and research, while also launching **joint advocacy initiatives**. Similarly, collaboration around entrepreneurship, micro-credentials, digitalisation, and innovation ecosystems has brought together Alliances with complementary expertise, creating opportunities for joint project development and future cooperation beyond the lifetime of FOREU4ALL.

5.4 Evaluation and Next Steps

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that FOREU4ALL has successfully created the conditions for sustained and meaningful inter-Alliance collaboration. The Community of Practice has evolved into an increasingly inter-connected Community

characterised by trust, mutual support, and willingness to act collectively and bear shared responsibility. Through its governance structures, TGs, workshops, and other networking opportunities, FOREU4ALL has enabled Alliances to share knowledge, build capacities, jointly address challenges, and represent their interests more effectively at the European level and vis-a-vis external stakeholders.

The growing number of jointly organised events, collaborative publications, cross-TG initiatives, and collective outreach activities suggests that FOREU4ALL is increasingly fulfilling its role as an enabler of collaboration, peer learning, and collective action. Beyond the specific outputs generated, the most important achievement may be the establishment of durable relationships and collaboration mechanisms that will continue to benefit the European Universities Community beyond the lifetime of the project itself.

Moreover, the data (available in Annex 1) demonstrates that FOREU4ALL is effective not only in reaching nearly all Alliances, but also in distributing responsibility for the Community of Practice across the board. While near-universal engagement provides the TGs with outreach and representative potential, the involvement of 34 Alliances in Chairing or Co-Chairing roles helps create shared ownership and strengthen commitment. Continued attention should nevertheless be given to broadening leadership opportunities to Alliances who might be less engaged at this stage in order to strengthen inclusivity and avoid excessive dependence and structural demands on a limited number of Alliances (and people) who volunteered to hold multiple positions to keep the existing structures going.

Overall, the TGs have created valuable opportunities for peer exchange, sharing of best practices and challenges, pooling of resources and expertise, and the creation of concrete collaboration opportunities across Alliances. However, their effectiveness depends strongly on the active and sustained engagement of their members. As emphasised above, participation in the Topical Groups is voluntary and takes place alongside representatives' many other responsibilities. Active participation from a broad

range of Alliances is therefore essential to ensure that the TGs remain dynamic, representative and useful to the whole European Universities Alliances Community and also sustainable for the future.

Selection of the right representatives with the possibility of regular rotations helps ensure that the voluntary time and expertise contributed by Topical Group representatives are put to meaningful collective use and the gathered knowledge and opportunities spill over to the rest of the individual Alliances as well. In September 2026, Alliance Coordinators were encouraged to pay particular attention to nominate active, relevant, and motivated experts willing to pro-actively contribute to ensure that the Tgs remain a lively space for mutual exchange and co-creation and not a room of "black screens" steered by a Chairing Team at the limit of their capacities.

6. Other Cross-Alliance Engagement Outputs

Beyond the activities captured through the Governance structures, Policy Dialogue or the TGs, FOREU4ALL has also generated a range of other forms of collaboration outcomes between individual European Universities Alliances, which we did not envision at the beginning. The project has created opportunities for Alliances to connect around emerging policy issues and shared priorities, leading to coordinated advocacy efforts, joint statements, and collective contributions to key European policy debates. Examples include Alliances jointly raising concerns on European Commission initiatives through media and policy channels (e.g. 10 Alliances raising concerns on the EU Survey via NewsTank Academic in July 2026, directly referencing FOREU4ALL), as well as coordinated calls to strengthen the role of European Universities in the post-2028 EU budget framework (e.g. an initiative by UNITA bringing together 271 Rectors from 65 Alliances in September 2026 shared via FOREU4ALL channels for the purposes of signature collection).

The relationships fostered through FOREU4ALL have also facilitated new forms of project-based collaboration between Alliances. Several Alliances have partnered on

various external initiatives and European projects, including cooperation on the European Degree Label projects (see the joint EDL-STEP project by EPICUR, YUFE and ECIU University, or the partnering between EUt+, ELISAA and ECIU University in the PROCEED project), joint communication activities, and shared work packages and milestones.

Here, FOREU4ALL has once again showed its important role as an enabler and bridge-builder, with its channels and networking opportunities used for the identification of fitting partners, expert advice, and dissemination. Additional examples include joint advocacy by multiple Alliances on Erasmus+ funding for joint programmes (e.g. INGENIUM and seven other European University Alliances call on the European Commission to extend Erasmus+ KA131 funding to Joint Programmes in a joint position paper), collaborative conference activities between Alliances (e.g. EPICUR and ENHANCE joint AI session at the IMCL2026 conference in November 2026), and initiatives such as the EUC Voices project, which showcase how Alliances are increasingly working together beyond the formal FOREU4ALL structures.

FOREU4ALL has also supported Erasmus+ applications coming from the Alliances through Letters of Support, demonstrating a growing culture of mutual assistance and solidarity across the ecosystem and the recognition of FOREU4ALL as a connective tissue bringing all of these actors together.

Collectively, these examples illustrate that the impact of FOREU4ALL extends beyond its originally planned outputs, creating a network of trusted relationships that continue to generate new collaborations, initiatives, and a stronger collective voice for the European Universities Alliances Community as a whole.

7. Conclusion and Next Steps

Over its first two years, FOREU4ALL has demonstrated considerable success in establishing a vibrant and collaborative Community of Practice for the European Universities Alliances. Through the General Forum, Forum Board, the TGs and Policy

Dialogue, the project has created inclusive structures that enable Alliances to exchange knowledge, discuss challenges, identify shared priorities, learn from each other, and engage in collective action if and when necessary. These mechanisms have strengthened connections across the Alliance community and have provided a platform through which Alliances can both learn from one another in the framework of a Community of Practice and contribute to shaping discussions at the European level through their collective external engagements.

The evidence suggests that FOREU4ALL is not only effective in reaching and engaging the vast majority of Alliances, but also in fostering shared ownership of the Community of Practice. The broad distribution of Chair and Co-Chair responsibilities, the growing number of jointly organised activities, and the increasing collaboration between TGs demonstrate that Alliances are moving away from simple information exchange towards more structured cooperation. Importantly, FOREU4ALL's contribution extends beyond the tangible outputs produced. The trust, relationships, and collaboration mechanisms established over the first two years of the project constitute a lasting and immeasurable asset for the European Universities ecosystem that is likely to continue generating value beyond the project's lifetime.

At the same time, it is important to highlight that the sustainability of this success cannot be taken for granted. Participation in Governance structures and TGs depends on the voluntary engagement of individuals who face growing demands both within FOREU4ALL and their own Alliances, not to mention external stakeholders and policymakers. Concrete signs, such as the lower number of candidates for Forum Board positions and the reliance on a limited number of highly active contributors in TGs and their Chairing Teams, indicate that capacity constraints are becoming an important consideration. Ensuring broad participation, renewing and rotating leadership roles, and maintaining active engagement across the community will therefore remain critical challenges in the years ahead.

Looking forward, FOREU4ALL enters its next phase from a position of strength. The project has successfully laid the foundations for sustainable inter-Alliance collaboration, peer learning, and collective representation. Continued efforts to broaden leadership opportunities, support active participation, monitor engagement levels, and periodically reflect on the effectiveness of governance and collaboration structures will be essential to preserve momentum and ensure that the Community of Practice remains representative, resilient, and responsive to the evolving needs of the European Universities Alliances.

Moreover, as FOREU4ALL enters its third year, there is an opportunity to move beyond the initial setting-up phase and collectively reflect on the effectiveness of the Community of Practice and its governance structures. Following two years of intensive community-building and project implementation, it is important to assess what has worked well, identify areas where adjustments may be required, and ensure that FOREU4ALL continues to respond to the evolving needs of the alliance community.

To support this process, FOREU4ALL will undertake a new round of a needs analysis survey among Alliances Coordinators and TG Chairing Teams and organise a dedicated reflection exercise to gather further feedback. These activities will provide Alliance representatives with the opportunity to share experiences, assess the added value of existing collaboration mechanisms, and identify priorities for the next phase of the project. The findings will also directly inform the project's mid-term evaluation report and future development.

Building on these reflections, FOREU4ALL should focus on:

- **Further strengthening** opportunities for interactive discussion, peer exchange, and joint problem-solving within the General Forum to foster inclusivity and further strengthen cross-Alliance collaboration.
- **Ensuring** that Alliances' needs continue to shape the priorities and activities of FOREU4ALL, for example by consultation and feedback mechanisms to

systematically capture Alliances' perspectives and reflect them in collective positions and actions through a direct co-creation with the Community without adding unnecessary burdens.

- **Monitoring** participation and engagement trends to identify potential barriers to participation and ensure the continued representativeness of the General Forum, Forum Board, and engagement in TGs.
- **Supporting** the rapid integration and engagement of newly funded Alliances and Alliances with less engagement in Topical Groups/Governing bodies within the Community.
- **Reflecting** the needs analysis and General Forum review process in the future work of the Forum Board, ensuring that its strategic priorities remain aligned with the evolving needs and expectations of the Alliance Community and continue nourishing existing cross-collaboration opportunities.

By embedding regular reflection and feedback into its governance processes, FOREU4ALL can continue to evolve as a responsive and Alliance-driven Community of Practice that supports collaboration, peer learning, and collective action across the full spectrum of the European Universities Initiative.

8. Annexes

Annex 1: Data on Alliance Participation in FOREU4ALL Activities

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