

IT and Digitalization

Terms of Reference

Table of contents

I. Objectives	2
II. Background	3
III. Work plan and working modalities	4
IV. Inputs to WP3 Policy Dialogue & WP4 Communication and Dissemination	6
V. Members.....	7

I. Objectives

The **FOREU4ALL Topical Group on IT & Digitalisation** aims to foster collaboration and innovation in IT and digital transformation among European University Alliances. It provides a structured forum for alliances to exchange experiences, develop shared strategies, and contribute to EU-wide efforts in the digitalization of higher education, aligning these efforts with national policies and initiatives for greater impact at the local and regional levels.

To achieve this, the group is structured around **six sub-topical working groups**, each focusing on a critical dimension of IT and digital transformation in higher education:

- **Interoperability of data structures** — including data related to educational activities, diplomas, degrees, students, staff, and faculty.
- **Digital Identity Management** — exploring federated authentication models, alignment with MyAcademicID, eduGAIN, and the EUDI Wallet.
- **Digital Credentials and Micro-Credentials** — focusing on standardization, blockchain verification, and mutual recognition across institutions.
- **Cybersecurity and IT Governance** — defining secure frameworks, GDPR-compliant policies, and shared threat response strategies.
- **AI and Digital Learning Platforms** — investigating adaptive learning technologies, responsible AI use, and integration with virtual campuses.
- **IT Infrastructure, Shared Services, and Trust Ecosystems** — promoting collaboration on scalable IT models, cloud-based services, and joint platforms.
- **Policy and EU Digital Strategy Alignment** — ensuring coherence with evolving EU policies, including HEIF, DC4EU, EBSI, ESCI, and EWP.

The Topical Group will serve both strategic and operational purposes. It will act as a space for dialogue, co-creation, and shared problem-solving, while also delivering practical outputs such as white papers, technical guidelines, policy recommendations, and institutional case studies.

Timeline for implementation

- **Short-term (2025):** Establish the sub-topical working groups, assign leadership roles, and initiate a regular meeting structure. Begin collecting good practices and mapping institutional approaches to key themes such as identity management, credentials, and IT infrastructure.
- **Mid-term (2025–2027):** Launch thematic pilot projects and produce initial outputs, including reports, technical models, and contributions to EU initiatives such as HEIF, EDEH, and DC4EU. Promote cross-alliance collaboration on testing scalable digital solutions.
- **Long-term (2027–2028):** Support the integration of shared digital services across university alliances, consolidate and disseminate successful models, and develop strategic position papers to inform EU-level digital education policy.

Target audience

The group's work is primarily addressed to:

- **European University Alliances**, particularly IT leads, project managers, and digitalization officers.
- **EU policymakers** and stakeholders involved in digital education and infrastructure initiatives.
- **Developers and technical teams** supporting digital transformation at institutional or alliance level.
- **The broader CoP ecosystem**, including the European Digital Education Hub (EDEH), researchers, and implementation partners.

II. Background

The **Topical Group on IT & Digitalisation** was established within the FOREU4ALL Community of Practice (CoP) in response to the growing strategic importance of digital transformation in European higher education. The group addresses a clear and urgent need to support interoperability, secure data exchange, and policy alignment across European University Alliances, in line with evolving EU digital strategies and initiatives.

European University Alliances are uniquely positioned to act as laboratories for innovation, allowing for cross-institutional testing and scaling of digital services, platforms, and governance models. In this context, the IT & Digitalisation group aims to provide a collaborative structure that brings together technical experts, digitalization leads, and policy contributors from various alliances to co-develop approaches to shared challenges.

The group's activities are aligned with EU frameworks such as the **European Digital Education Hub (EDEH)**, the **European Higher Education Interoperability Framework (HEIF)**, and projects like **DC4EU**, **EBSI**, and **MyAcademicID**. It seeks to support the implementation of digital services and infrastructures that enable joint virtual campuses, interoperable student systems, and trusted mechanisms for credentials and identity management.

Previous informal activities

This topical group builds on several years of informal collaboration under the FOREU umbrella. The original **IT & Digitalisation subgroup** was created in 2021 and functioned as a joint initiative involving alliances from both the FOREU1 and FOREU2 networks.

Between 2022 and 2024, the subgroup met regularly, with discussions focusing on:

- **Digital identity and access management** (e.g., eduGAIN, ESCI, MyAcademicID)
- **Recognition and portability of credentials and diplomas**
- **Shared IT services and cloud infrastructure**
- **Cybersecurity practices and GDPR compliance**

These meetings provided a valuable space for peer exchange and engagement with European stakeholders, such as DG EAC and project consortia involved in digital credential and student mobility initiatives.

In **June 2023**, the subgroups from FOREU1 and FOREU2 were officially merged, setting the foundation for a more formalized and structured collaboration under the FOREU4ALL framework.

Ongoing Need and Strategic Relevance

The formalization of this topical group responds to a pressing need for:

- **Structured collaboration** across alliances on digital infrastructure challenges.
- **Coherent input to EU policymaking** from higher education institutions.
- **Shared resources and solutions** to reduce duplication of efforts.
- **Harmonization of digital ecosystems**, which is essential to ensure the sustainability of joint academic offerings, student mobility, and cross-border cooperation.

As universities continue to navigate complex digital transformation agendas, the group provides a much-needed platform for aligning institutional strategies, pooling expertise, and collectively shaping the digital future of European higher education.

III. Work plan and working modalities

Work Plan and Provisional Timeline

The Topical Group pursues a three-year rolling work plan (2025-2028):

- **2025 (Foundations).** Formalise the six sub-topical working groups; map existing practices; agree on common terminology and priority use cases; launch one cross-alliance pilot per theme (e.g., a proof-of-concept for federated login or an agora for FOREU4ALL).
- **2026 (Development).** Refine the pilots into scalable models; draft thematic white papers (interoperability, credentials, cybersecurity, AI ethics, shared services); run two open webinars to consult the wider CoP.
- **2027-2028 (Consolidation).** Package outcomes into technical guidelines, policy briefs, and a curated repository of good practices; support alliances wishing to adopt the models; deliver a final position paper to EU policy fora.

A light annual review every December allows the Group to adjust milestones to new EU calls or strategic priorities.

Meeting plan

Format	Frequency	Duration	Scheduling Process	Purpose
Core-group video call	Every two months (6x year)	90 minutes	A Doodle poll circulated by the GCT three weeks in advance	Progress review, cross-theme coordination
Sub-topical group call	Monthly (as needed)	60 minutes	Coordinated by each sub-group chair	Theme-specific tasks, pilot follow-up
Annual in-person meeting	Once per year, linked to a major EU event (e.g., EDUtech Europe, FOREU4ALL workshop)	1 day	Date fixed six months ahead	Deep-dive workshops, strategy setting
Ad-hoc task-force session	Whenever urgent (e.g., EU consultation)	≤ 60 minutes	Called by GCT chair(s)	Rapid response drafting

Attributions of the GCT and group members

The GCT (co-chairs) collectively:

- **Plan** the annual calendar and convene meetings.

- **Prepare** and circulate agendas, briefings, and background papers.
- **Document** meetings (minutes, decision logs) and maintain the action tracker.
- **Report** quarterly to the FOREU4ALL WP2 Board and liaise with the WP2 Project Officer.
- **Interface** with WP3 (Policy Dialogue) when advocacy outputs are drafted, and with WP4 (Communication) for dissemination.
- **Support** sub-group chairs—ensuring resources, resolving overlaps, and fostering synergy.

Group members:

- Attend core meetings on a regular basis and contribute to at least one sub-topical group.
- Share institutional experience, data, and tools relevant to the thematic agenda.
- Draft or peer-review deliverables (white papers, guidelines, policy notes).
- Act as liaison officers, channelling feedback between their alliance and the Topical Group.
- Respect agreed deadlines and quality standards for outputs.

Considerations on Equality & Diversity in organisational modalities

- **Inclusive participation.** Each alliance may nominate up to three representatives, encouraging gender balance and a mix of technical and policy profiles.
- **Rotating roles.** Minute-taking, meeting facilitation, and webinar moderation rotate to avoid concentration of tasks.
- **Accessible scheduling.** Meetings alternate between morning and afternoon (CET) slots; materials are provided in accessible formats (screen-reader-friendly PDFs, captions for recordings).
- **Open calls.** Any alliance may volunteer to host the annual retreat or propose guest speakers, ensuring geographic diversity.

Communication and dissemination plan of both the topical group activities and outputs

Channel	Audience	Content	Frequency	Responsibility
Common workspace	Members	Agendas, minutes, draft papers, pilot docs	Continuous	GCT
Mailing list	Members	Meeting invitations, key updates	Bi-monthly	GCT
FOREU4ALL newsletter (via WP4)	EU stakeholders	Highlights of deliverables, event notices	Twice-yearly	WP4 team (input from GCT)
Public webinars	CoP + external experts	Pilot findings, policy consultations	As opportunities arise	Sub-topical groups leads
Conference sessions / EU workshops	Policymakers, practitioners	Position papers, technical guidelines	As opportunities arise	GCT + volunteers

All public-facing documents use the FOREU4ALL visual identity and are archived in an open repository.

The planned activities

Year	Activity	Expected Output
2025	Launch pilots (e.g., cross-alliance login or agora), first webinar	Pilot reports; webinar recording
2026	Draft thematic white papers; CoP workshop	More than one white papers; workshop proceedings
2027	Finalise guidelines; produce policy briefs; annual meeting	Technical guideline suite; a policy brief
2028	Consolidate best-practice repository; position paper to EU	Online repository; EU-level position paper

A concise **yearly report** is submitted to WP2 every January, summarising achievements, risks, and next-year priorities.

EDI principles—gender balance panels, multilingual slide decks, and transparent authorship—are applied to every webinar, workshop, and publication, ensuring that diverse voices shape the group’s outputs.

IV. Inputs to WP3 Policy Dialogue & WP4 Communication and Dissemination

The IT & Digitalisation Topical Group anticipates contributing actively to the FOREU4ALL **WP3 Policy Dialogue** and **WP4 Communication and Dissemination** strands, given the relevance of its themes to European-level digital policy agendas and cross-institutional coordination efforts.

Inputs to WP3 – Policy Dialogue

The group plans to produce several **advocacy-oriented outputs**, including:

- Policy briefs on **digital identity frameworks, micro-credentials, and federated authentication** aligned with EU tools such as MyAcademicID, EBSI, and DC4EU.
- Recommendations for improving the **European Student Card** initiative and the **Erasmus Without Paper** infrastructure.
- A **position paper on interoperability**, intended to contribute to the evolution of the European Higher Education Interoperability Framework (HEIF).
- Reflections on **cybersecurity and digital trust ecosystems**, in light of regulatory frameworks such as GDPR and eIDAS.

These outputs will be developed through structured processes involving expert input from the sub-topical groups, and they will follow the required FOREU4ALL procedure for advocacy materials:

- Drafts will be shared with the WP3 coordination team for feedback.
- Final proposals will be submitted for consultation with the **Forum Board** and adoption in the **General Forum** before public release.

Where appropriate, the group will also support EU consultations (e.g., on EUDI Wallet, Digital Education Action Plan) and provide expert voices to European stakeholder events and working groups via WP3.

Inputs to WP4 – Communication and Dissemination

The IT & Digitalisation group will coordinate closely with WP4 to ensure visibility of its work, broad dissemination of results, and alignment with overall project messaging. Based on the previously defined communication strategy, the following actions are planned:

- **Content contributions to the FOREU4ALL website and newsletter**, including summaries of meetings, interviews with sub-group leads, and announcements of public deliverables.
- **Public webinars** (twice yearly), hosted in collaboration with WP4, targeting external stakeholders such as university IT teams, digital policymakers, and EU project consortia.
- **Social media content**, in collaboration with WP4, to promote major outputs (e.g., white papers, guidelines) and highlight alliance-level pilot activities.
- Use of the **shared CoP repository** (e.g., common platform) to provide access to non-confidential working documents, outputs, and good practices.
- Coordination with WP4 on dissemination at major events (e.g., EDUtech Europe, European University Association conferences), including the potential for joint exhibition materials or sessions.

All public-facing communication will adhere to the FOREU4ALL branding guidelines, and care will be taken to ensure clarity, accessibility, and multilingual reach where possible.

V. Members

Expected profile of topical group members:

Members of the IT & Digitalisation Topical Group are nominated by their respective European University Alliances. They are expected to bring relevant expertise in areas related to the digital transformation of higher education. While profiles may vary by alliance, members typically include:

- **IT professionals and digitalization leads** working on infrastructure, platforms, security, or student information systems.
- **Project managers** responsible for implementing alliance-level digital transformation work packages or virtual campus initiatives.
- **Researchers or academic staff** specializing in digital education, AI in learning, data governance, cybersecurity, or digital trust frameworks.
- **Policy officers or institutional strategists** involved in aligning institutional or alliance-level IT efforts with EU digital education policies.

The group encourages a diversity of profiles to ensure a mix of technical, operational, and strategic perspectives.

Expected role of members:

Participation in the Topical Group is active rather than symbolic. Members are expected to:

- **Regularly attend and engage in core group meetings**, contributing insights, use cases, and updates from their alliances.
- **Join at least one sub-topical working group**, where they will contribute to thematic activities such as drafting documents, conducting peer reviews, or organizing webinars.
- **Act as institutional or alliance liaisons**, sharing relevant outputs and developments internally and collecting feedback to feed back into the group's work.

- **Collaborate on deliverables**, including white papers, policy briefs, and implementation guidelines, either as co-authors or reviewers.
- **Support pilot projects or case study development** by sharing institutional data, technical models, or lessons learned.
- **Facilitate knowledge transfer**, ensuring that successful practices are disseminated both within their alliance and across the CoP.

When possible, members may also host group meetings, moderate sessions, or represent the group at external events and EU-level consultations.

Number of participants per alliance:

Each participating alliance is encouraged to nominate up to three members, with a preferred composition of more than one representative to ensure continuity and balanced expertise across both strategic and technical dimensions.

In addition, alliances are welcome to nominate additional experts to join specific sub-topical working groups, particularly in areas that require specialized knowledge such as cybersecurity, AI ethics, or digital credentialing. To maintain effectiveness and balanced engagement, the group aims to keep the active core membership manageable, while allowing broader participation through sub-groups and open events.