

Impact

Terms of Reference

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I. Objectives

The FOREU4ALL Impact Topical Group is driven by the **long-term ambition to promote a culture of impact¹ across the European Higher Education and Research Areas**. Its efforts are directed towards the **general objectives of:**

- ***Raising Impact Awareness***
To contribute to a deeper understanding of the concept of impact and to foster the internalisation of its importance in the Higher Education and Research sector. This includes strengthening awareness of the value of being impact-driven and recognising the transformative role of European University Alliances (EUAs) in relation to society and the European Higher Education Area. The group also aims to strengthen bridges between European University Alliances and broader higher education stakeholders through collaboration and shared reflection.
- ***Building Impact Literacy***
To build capacity by equipping the EUAs and their partner Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) with the knowledge, competencies, methodological approaches, and tools to support, enhance, and systematically capture, assess, communicate and manage impact.
- ***Enhancing Impact Readiness²***
To support EUAs in creating the necessary conditions – strategies, structures, and processes – to proactively fostering and managing their impact, by maximising desired and minimising undesired impact(s). This includes fostering pathways to increase the value generated by Alliances’ activities, through stakeholder engagement, cross-team collaboration, and strategic communication and dissemination.

In that sense, the FOREU4ALL Impact Topical Group has set as **main specific objectives to be achieved by the end of October 2028:**

1. (O1) **To EMPOWER ALLIANCES**. It will promote a collaborative and supportive environment for the sharing of knowledge, good practices, challenges, and opportunities around the impact topic. The group will actively seek synergies between different Alliances approaches, leading to the development of joint initiatives amongst its members. It will establish a common platform for:
 - *Knowledge Sharing and Learning*. Spreading and sharing know-how, approaches, solutions, successful practices, identified barriers, and challenges, as well as cooperation formats and models around the impact topic. Promoting skills development by opening the participation to selected Alliances’ training activities for group members.
 - *Networking and collaborating*. Alliances joining efforts to address, measure, assess, and capture impact and transformational change on HEIs, on their regional ecosystems and on the European Higher Education and Research Areas.

¹ By impact we understand the changes we can see (demonstrate, measure, capture) on and beyond academia, which happen because of an activity in higher education. On: learners, academics, support staff, leaders, structures, processes; and beyond: on society, economy, environment, regional ecosystems, etc. Impact is thus intrinsically linked to transformation and to transformative initiatives, programmes, projects, including the European Universities Alliances Initiative. Impact can occur in different areas; it can be academic, educational, cultural, economic, environmental, health and wellbeing, political, social, technological.

² The concept of Impact Awareness, Literacy and Readiness was first introduced by Igor Campillo, Glória Nunes Rodrigues and Iñigo Puertas in Campillo, I., Nunes, G., Puertas, I. (2023). “Defining impact: as shift in thinking, acting and being.” At Times Higher Education. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/defining-impact-shift-thinking-acting-and-being>

- *Promoting common approaches.* Support shared strategies for maximising the impact of Alliances through stakeholder engagement, communication and dissemination, as well as for capturing, assessing and managing impact.
 - *Supporting Alliances, and their HEIs, in embedding impact* as a core element of their strategic and operational frameworks.
2. (O2) **To RAISE AWARENESS OF and ENHANCE the VISIBILITY of Alliances’ transformative impact**, in both the short and long-term. The group will provide decision-makers at EU, national and regional levels, and society in general, with a solid data and evidence base of the positive impact(s) of the Universities Alliances, supported by real, first-hand evidence, references and testimonials.
3. (O3) **To SUPPORT A SUBSTANTIAL LEAP of HIGHER EDUCATION IMPACT**, by encouraging the transferability and uptake of good impact-directed management practices within and beyond the University Alliances. This will be done in close collaboration with the FOREU4ALL External Advisory Board Members, WP3 (Policy Dialogue) and WP4 (Communication and Dissemination), and other European Higher Education Stakeholders.

The target audience of the FOREU4ALL Impact Topical Group includes professionals and decision-makers involved in impact-related work across the 65 European University Alliances. This encompasses impact officers, project managers, researchers, academic leaders, and strategic planners from Higher Education Institutions, as well as decision-makers from EU bodies, national and regional authorities, and other key stakeholders engaged in shaping the European Higher Education and Research areas.

II. Background

Rationale

The European University Alliances aim to transform the higher education landscape by fostering long-term structural and strategic cooperation among HEIs. The potential transformations include improving the competitiveness of European Higher Education institutions and further promoting European values and identity. Additionally, each Alliance has its own desired outcomes and impacts that it wishes to achieve and contribute to.

To examine the potential and capture the effects of the European Universities Alliances on this transformational mission of the European Higher Education and Research areas, impact measurement and assessment approaches are of crucial relevance, since it allows Alliances to:

- Gain **credibility** of our transformative effort.
- Improve our **sustainability** as the value we generate will be better identified and assessed by non-academic stakeholders.
- Construct powerful **narratives** of our endeavour, helping us to better communicate our **accomplishments** to society at large.
- Set up clearer intentions for the **future evolution** of European Universities.

Impact is a key priority in higher education and implicit in the transformative mission of the European University Alliances. Notably, impact assessment is strongly supported by society and policymakers alike. Not only does impact assessment provides the data and evidence needed to understand transformations, but it also provides a crucial approach to encouraging reflection, learning, accountability, and improvement for Alliances' activities. This evidence and evaluation approach enables the Alliances to address challenges and risks as well as unforeseen impacts.

Additionally, the group will also look to address the **challenges** that come with trying to implement impact practices at alliance (and university) level, for example:

- Low impact literacy levels (understanding of impact concepts, tools and approaches)
- Low commitment levels to impact
- Lack of supporting structures, capacities and resources
- Differing national, regional and institutional contexts

The impact subgroup will encourage and support the further development of crucial impact practices and support systems to ensure the impacts of the European University Alliances are extensive and well captured and shared between Alliances and universities, with the Commission, as well as the wider education, research community, and society.

FOREU2 Impact Thematic Group

The Impact Topical Group originally started in the FOREU2 Impact Thematic Group in September 2022, but expanded to include Alliances of other call waves. Activities included:

- **Bi-monthly meetings** (September 2022-January 2025) 14 online meetings were organised and served to boost peer-learning. They have given Alliances the opportunity to share different impact approaches and discuss topics of common interest.
- **One in-person meeting** (June 2024) focused on the different Alliances' tools for impact assessment. CIRCLE U., UNITA, EC2U and ENLIGHT presented their respective tools assessing impact.
- **2 in-person workshops** (March 2023, June 2024) Four EUAs representatives presented how their Alliances are bringing about impact and transforming the European Education and Research Areas (EC2U, EUDRES, UNITA, ENLIGHT). 13 EUAs representatives participated in a workshop discussion addressing "What makes research impact so challenging?"
- **Cooperation among alliances** including inter-alliance support and advice sharing, involvement in inter-alliance impact events and subsequent bi-lateral relationships for knowledge sharing.

The FOREU4ALL Impact Topical Group will build on the foundations laid by the FOREU2 Impact Thematic Group, leveraging the strong connections already established among its members and the collective expertise developed throughout its trajectory. This new phase will expand and deepen those efforts within the broader and more diverse framework of the FOREU4ALL Impact Group (see work plan section below). The continued involvement of many members from the FOREU2 group - including within the current Chairing Team – ensures both continuity and a solid basis for further advancements, collaborations, and impact. It is expected that other alliances not having been part of the former FOREU2 Group will be increasingly engaged in the building of the CoP at both the operative and governance levels.

III. Work plan and working modalities

Work Plan and Provisional Timeline

Between May 2025 and October 2028, the FOREU4ALL Impact Topical Group will focus its activities on a range of formats. These include online group meetings (every two months), thematic workshops (every two years), annual expert webinars, the preparation of joint reports, and the development of an impact topical group repository. It will do so in alignment with the overall FOREU4ALL framework, seeking synergies with relevant topical groups and work packages, and in cooperation with key European education and research stakeholders.

A detailed work plan is proposed for Year 1 (May 2025 - April 2026). For the subsequent years, an indicative work plan is outlined; a more detailed version will be presented and subject to approval by the Impact Topical Group at the first meeting of each respective period.

WHAT	MAIN FOCUS	WHEN
Kick-off meeting	Introduction. Election of the GCT. Preparation of Terms of Reference.	19/05/25
2nd meeting	Approval of Draft Terms of Reference and 2025-2026 Work Plan.	23/06/25
3rd meeting	Focus on Wave 1 Alliances (2019): Impact Assessment Methodologies, Approaches, Challenges and Solutions. Other discussion topics: Impact Repository Platform; Template for Case Studies preparation	15/09/25
4th meeting	Focus on Transversal Impact Topic 1: Unpack Impact: Mapping out and planning Alliances' desired impacts and expected outcomes. (Exact title subject to change)	17/11/25
5th meeting	Focus on Wave 2 Alliances (2020): Impact Assessment Methodologies, Approaches, Challenges and Solutions	19/01/26
6th meeting	Focus on Transversal Impact Topic 2: Promoting a Culture of Impact: building impact literacy and embedding impact in Alliances' governance and management strategies. (Exact title subject to change)	16/03/26
Impact Repository Platform	Cloud-based platform located at SharePoint to upload methodological approaches, toolkits, impact assessment reports, impact-related studies developed in the context of the European Universities Alliances. Overall structure to be proposed and discussed in the 3rd meeting of the group. The repository will be systematically updated after each group meeting.	30/09/25
First Joint Report	Focusing on EUAs Good Impact Assessment Practices. One case study per interested Alliance member, highlighting their impact assessment approach, challenges, solutions and lessons learnt.	30/04/26
First Expert Online Webinar	Presentation of EUAs Good Impact Assessment Practices: case studies joint report	April 2026 (tbc)

<p>Collaboration with those Topical Groups offering the greatest potential synergies for</p>	<p>After an internal assessment, the groups considered to present a higher potential for developing synergies with the Impact Topical Group are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Quality Assurance - European Universities Governance - Communication & Dissemination - Community Engagement - Regional Innovation Ecosystems - IT & Digitalisation - Project Management <p>See below for more information on how synergies will be exploited.</p>	<p>Continuous.</p>
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Year 2 (May 2026- April 2027)

- **Ongoing bi-monthly meetings.** Focus on other EUAs' Impact Assessment Methodologies, Approaches, Challenges and Solutions.
- **Second Joint Report on the Transformative Impact of University Alliances.**
- **Stronger CoP Collaboration.** Integrating impact across EUAs and/or HEIs strategies.
- **Second Expert Webinar.** Addressing specific Alliances' needs.
- **First In-Person Impact Workshop.** Aligned with key Alliances' events, focusing on institutional integration.
- **Online Impact Training Module.** Enhancing impact literacy and capacity in EUAs.
- **Engagement with Higher Education Stakeholders.** Collaboration with institutions and stakeholders in European Higher Education and Research to advance on the promotion of a culture of impact.

Year 3 (May 2027- April 2028)

- **Ongoing bi-monthly meeting.** Dedicated discussion space for members.
- **Internal & External Webinars.** Addressing impact challenges and best practices.
- **Third joint report.** either completing the Y1 good practices report or covering new emerging and necessary specific impact issues.
- **Policy Dialogue.** Engaging actions with EC, CoARA, U-Multirank, EU SDG initiatives.
- **Conference Participation.** IHE Conference, EUA Impact Forum, EAIE 2027, EUI Forums, EARMA.

Year 4 (May 2028-October 2028)

- **Ongoing bi-monthly meeting and webinars.** Ensuring continuous knowledge exchange.
- **Final Reflection Papers & Policy Briefs.** Addressing transnational challenges.
- **Increased Dissemination & Policy Contributions.** Strengthening European impact networks.
- **Participation in EAIE 2028, EUA Impact Forum, FOREU4ALL Final Event.**
- **Sustainability Strategy.** Defining post-project collaboration.

The Impact Topical Group will remain adaptive and responsive, ensuring meaningful contributions to European Higher Education and Research.

Meeting Plan and Working Modalities

The Impact Topical Group will operate in an inclusive and collaborative manner, ensuring regular engagement of its members through structured meetings, workshops, and shared outputs. The group will

follow the governance model outlined for the Community of Practice (CoP) and be aligned with the FOREU4ALL framework.

Governance Structure

- Group Chairing Team. Responsible for strategy and coordination, meetings planning and reporting to the WP2 Board/ WP2 Project Officer. For its first mandate, there will be one chairing alliance (ENLIGHT) and four vice-chairing alliances (EU GREEN, UNITA, CIRCLE U., ERUA).
- GCT mandate. Two years, renewable once.
- Temporary Subgroup Leads. Formed based on specific short-term initiatives (e.g., preparation of joint reports, workshops organisation, etc.).
- Secretariat. Hosted by the chairing team alliance. It supports administration, documentation (including meeting minutes), and follow-up.
- Group members are expected to participate in regular group meetings and annual strategic meetings; contribute to discussions, share insights, and exchange good practices, challenges, and lessons learned; collaborate on the development of joint outputs, such as reports, recommendations, and material for the the Impact Topical Group repository; engage in thematic workshops and webinars organised by the Group; contribute to communication and dissemination activities, where appropriate; support the uptake and transfer of good impact-directed management practices within and beyond the Group.
- In addition to internal collaboration among Alliances, the group may engage external stakeholders (e.g. representatives from the E4 Group, other European education networks, or relevant Commission services) in an advisory or consultative capacity. These individuals or organisations may contribute expertise to thematic workshops, review group outputs, or participate in relevant policy discussions.

Decision-Making Mechanism

- The GCT will seek consensus for all its decisions. When consensus cannot be reached, electronic voting should be enabled.
- Electronic voting. Simple majority rule (50%+1) with at least 50% of active members present (quorum).

Regular Meetings

- Bi-monthly online meetings. Group meetings will be hosted on the 3rd Monday of every second month, from 13:00-14:00 (CEST). This schedule was identified as the most convenient for the majority of group members following an initial Doodle poll launched to organise the first meeting. Meetings will provide a platform for sharing insights, discussing progress, and planning activities. The meeting schedule will be confirmed and agreed upon as part of the work plan at the beginning of each group period.
- Group Chairing Team meetings will be organised the Mondays preceding the bi-monthly online meetings, that is, the 2nd Monday of every second month, from 13:00-14:00 (CEST).
- Annual strategic meeting. At the beginning of each period (May), the group will convene to review overall objectives, assess progress, and plan future steps. The annual work plan should be approved as part of this strategic meeting.
- Task-specific subgroup meetings. Created when necessary to work on specific initiatives such as the joint reports, workshops organisation, impact training and/or policy recommendations. At least a representative of the GCT is expected to take part in the task-specific subgroup meetings to ensure coherence with the overall group strategy.

Communication and Dissemination

- Within the Impact Group. A dedicated online platform will facilitate document sharing and resource exchange. Meeting invitations will be sent at least one week before, and minutes shared no later than one week thereafter.
- With other Topical Groups. The group will ensure close collaboration with the topical groups focused on Quality Assurance, Regional Innovation Ecosystems, Communication & Dissemination, European Universities Governance, Community Engagement, IT & Digitalisation, and Project Management to foster synergies and ensure impact is embedded across all institutional strategies. This will be promoted through the participation in the groups' meetings and the organisation of joint workshops and activities (see below for further details).
- With other FOREU4ALL Work Packages. The group will contribute to FOREU4ALL WP2 (Community of Practice), WP3 (Policy Dialogue) and WP4 (Communication & Dissemination) ensuring overall alignment with the project objectives and activities, visibility and uptake of good impact-directed management practices within and beyond University Alliances.
- Beyond FOREU4ALL. All public outputs of the group – such as joint reports, policy recommendations, expert webinars and workshops) will be communicated to relevant target audiences through members' own dissemination channels, in close alignment with WP4 and, where relevant, the Communication Topical Group. The Group will also seek to contribute to external conferences and EU policy discussions to share best practices and foster engagement with the broader Higher Education and Research community.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Assessment

- The GCT will submit annual reports summarising activities, achievements, and challenges, closely following WP2 [procedures for the management, monitoring and evaluation of the topical groups](#).
- The progress of the impact group will be evaluated in each Annual Strategic Meeting.
- Performance and Impact-related indicators will include the number of Alliances engaged, participation in impact workshops, uptake of impact good practices, and contributions to EU policy discussions.
- The group will contribute with findings to the General Forum for cross-group alignment and strategic integration.

Equality and Diversity

The Impact Topical Group aims to create an equitable space where all members can contribute meaningfully, ensuring a broad and representative approach to impact assessment and management.

- Diverse Representation. Efforts will be made to ensure a balanced representation of all 65 Alliances. Gender balance will be actively monitored in leadership roles and participation. Special attention will be given to the inclusion of newcomer Alliances and smaller HEIs through onboarding mechanisms: such as introductory orientation sessions for new members, dedicated Q&A sessions to clarify expectations and group activities.
- Inclusive Participation. The working language will be English, ensuring accessibility for all members. The majority of activities will be conducted through online meetings, ensuring participation across different time zones and institutional capacities. Non-academic stakeholders will be actively engaged in public webinars and workshops, including representatives from industry, civil society, and policymakers to ensure a broad perspective on impact.
- Embedding Equality and Diversity in Content. The group outputs will include case studies and examples from diverse institutional and regional contexts. Reflection papers and policy recommendations will integrate considerations on how impact assessment can contribute to greater social inclusion and equity in higher education. Collaboration with Higher Education networks such

- as EUA, ESU, ENQA, EURASHE, ESN, EARMA among others to ensure best practices are shared between research and practice on impact and innovation.
- Accessibility Standards. All communication materials and reports will follow Erasmus+ accessibility standards, ensuring inclusivity in digital and physical formats.

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

The Impact Topical group will contribute to WP3 (Policy Dialogue) and WP4 (Communication & Dissemination) ensuring overall alignment with the project objectives and activities, visibility and uptake of good impact-directed management practices within and beyond University Alliances.

Policy Dialogue & Advocacy (WP3)

The Impact Topical Group will maintain close collaboration with the Policy Dialogue Work Package to ensure that insights from impact-focused work inform policy discussions at European, national, and regional levels. By sharing evidence, case studies, and recommendations (see work plan above), the Impact Topical Group will contribute to the development of policy positions and advocacy messages that reflect the transformative role of European University Alliances. The representation of the Impact GCT Alliance CIRCLE U. within the WP3 leadership team will help align priorities, strengthen connections, and ensure that impact considerations are embedded in the broader advocacy agenda of the FOREU4ALL Project. The GCT will ensure that whenever the Impact Topical Group produces outputs of potential relevance for advocacy objectives, it will be properly and timely communicated to WP3 leaders. This collaboration will help amplify the collective voice of the Alliances and shaping policies that support a more impactful European Higher Education and Research Area.

Communication & Dissemination (WP4)

It is the intention of the Impact Topical Group to collaborate closely with WP4 in order to ensure that the impact group related outputs are effectively communicated and that the transformative work of EUAs is widely visible. The Impact Topical Group aims to jointly develop communication strategies for key deliverables, translating complex findings into engagement formats (such as reports, infographics, and social media content), and coordinating communication efforts in public events, like webinars, workshops or participation in conferences. The Impact Topical Group also seeks to explore the sharing of networks and dissemination channels to extend the reach of the impact-related work to a broad range of stakeholders, from the higher education community to policymakers and the public. Regular interactions between the topical group and WP4 will help ensure alignment of communication efforts and allow for the identification of synergies. In that sense, the GCT will share its annual work plan with WP4 to facilitate the clear identification of major outputs and associated communication needs.

V. Members

The Impact Topical Group is primarily composed of impact experts and impact task/work package leaders from European University Alliances. It is open to all interested EUAs representatives interested in capturing and maximising the impact of their alliances and promoting a culture of impact. This includes representatives from Alliances with the Seal of Excellence. To ensure efficiency, each Alliance is expected to nominate a maximum of two representatives.

Members are expected to actively contribute to the work and objectives of the group by:

- Participating in regular group meetings and annual strategic meetings.

- Contributing to discussions, sharing insights, and exchanging good practices, challenges, and lessons learned.
- Collaborating on the development of joint outputs, including reports, recommendations, and contributions to the Impact Topical Group repository.
- Engaging in thematic workshops and webinars organised by the group.
- Contributing to stakeholder engagement, dissemination, and communication activities, as appropriate.
- Supporting the uptake and transfer of good impact-directed management practices within their respective alliances and beyond.

Additionally, members may participate in temporary sub-groups established to explore specific topics of interest or priority for the Impact Topical Group. These sub-groups will operate on a time-limited basis, contributing to the development of focused outputs or recommendations for the wider group.

The group may also invite external stakeholders from the European Higher Education and Research Areas—such as the E4 Group, EUA, ESU, ENQA, EURASHE, and others—as advisors or guest contributors to selected meetings, workshops, or outputs.