

A photograph showing a large audience of diverse individuals seated in rows of chairs in a conference room. They are all facing towards the left side of the frame, where a speaker is likely standing. Many people in the audience are clapping. The room has large windows in the background, letting in natural light.

# Europe's Universities Shaping the Future: 2023 review

## Addendum to EUA's Strategic Plan



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#### **European University Association asbl**

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# Introduction

# The EUA Strategic Plan in a changed context

The general context in which the European University Association's Strategic Plan '[Europe's Universities Shaping the Future](#)' was developed has shifted, in some respects dramatically so. The main consultation phase for the Strategic Plan started in late 2019, and it was published in June 2020, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, this was well before the profound and lasting impact of the latter, both on European universities and on EUA itself, had become visible.

Another obvious example is the Russian Federation's invasion of and ongoing war against Ukraine, which, once again, has profoundly affected the European university sector. What is more, geopolitical instability and related discussions on foreign interference and knowledge security extend far more widely, with evident and difficult implications for universities' values and international relations. These tensions have clearly highlighted that universities are increasingly called upon to respond to difficult political situations that affect their students and staff. At the same time, they have brought focus to the expectations placed on universities to shoulder the responsibility of educating responsible citizens, capable of critical thought and nuanced analysis and debate, who contribute to a better future.

Other underlying societal transformations are also affecting our sector; digitalisation is accelerating, with discussions around cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and other technological advancements dominating the agendas of policy makers and university leaders alike. While these and other technological developments entail potentially huge benefits, the challenges that accompany them require reflection and careful management.

Against the backdrop of an urgent and intensifying climate crisis, many universities have taken on a leading role in decarbonisation. They have done so by prioritising greening and sustainability within their strategies and activities, despite the significant financial challenges this raises for many institutions that are already struggling with stretched budgets.

Finally, the university sector itself is undergoing important transformations, notably in terms of transnational collaboration, which is being shaken up by the proliferation of European Universities alliances. At the same time, more balanced and holistic approaches to research and career assessment are being discussed and developed and calls for more consistency across Europe are being voiced; while these are welcome, they will of course have profound implications for university operations.

All of this makes for an extremely dynamic, uncertain, and challenging landscape in which European universities and EUA operate. The following paragraphs provide an overview of EUA's main achievements since 2020, demonstrating how the Association has addressed its strategic priorities in view of these transformative processes, and offers an outlook on key actions for the coming years. It should be clearly noted that the below text does not contain a comprehensive list of EUA activities and achievements, but rather examples of how the Association has gone about putting the goals stated in the Strategic Plan into practice.

# EUA Strategic Plan: Priority Actions



PRIORITY 1  
**Effective Advocacy**  
*Impact on public policy*



PRIORITY 2  
**Horizon Scanning**  
*Alert, responsive, resilient*



PRIORITY 3  
**European Solidarity**  
*A fundamental value*



PRIORITY 4  
**Enabling Enhanced Performance**  
*Excellence in all endeavours*

# Main achievements since 2020

Despite the changed landscape in which it is being implemented, the core of EUA's Strategic Plan, notably the stated priority actions, remain topical and fit-for-purpose. EUA's growing membership attests to the fact that the Association's Strategic Plan and the activities it pursues are regarded as relevant by European universities. What is more, all priorities and sub-priorities included in the Strategic Plan have been or are being tackled by the Association in some form and to some extent. A certain degree of variation regarding the level of intensity with which topics are being addressed is to be expected, given the need to prioritise EUA's resources and to respond to important external developments in a timely manner.

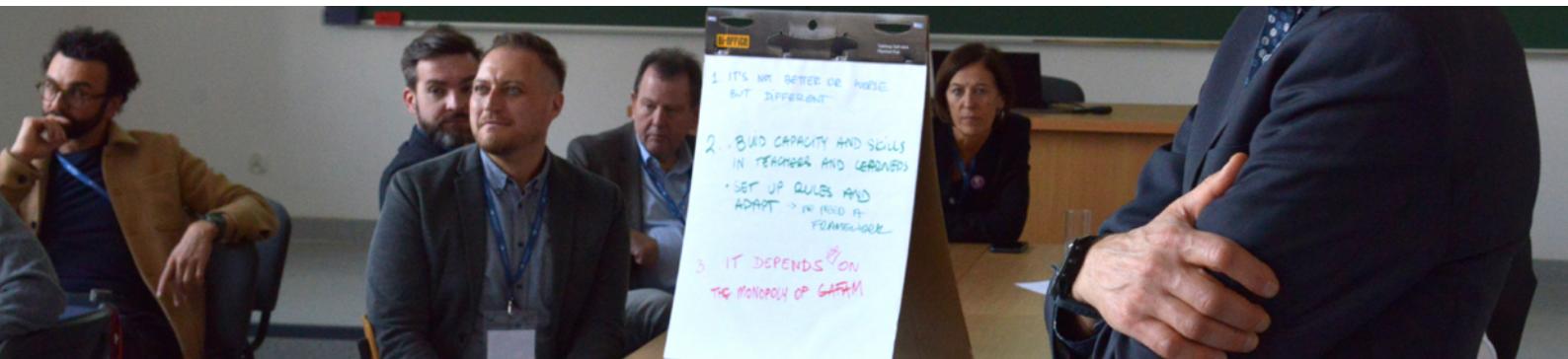
Following on from the development of the [Strategic Plan](#) for the Association in 2020, one of the key actions in support of both **Effective Advocacy** and **Horizon Scanning** was without doubt the development and publication in 2021 of a vision for the university sector. This flagship EUA document, '[Universities without walls: A vision for 2030](#)', imagines what a university might look like in a decade and how this might be achieved, providing inspiration and support for university leaders in the context of their own strategic reflections and planning. Then, 2023 saw the implementation of EUA's [Universities and the future of Europe \(UniFE\) project](#), exploring the future of transnational collaboration in Europe and resulting in the formulation of [high-level policy messages](#) to be put to the next European Commission and future members of the European Parliament following the European elections in June 2024. Of course, EUA has continued to represent the sector's interests on various policy levels and in diverse policy processes, both within the EU and beyond.

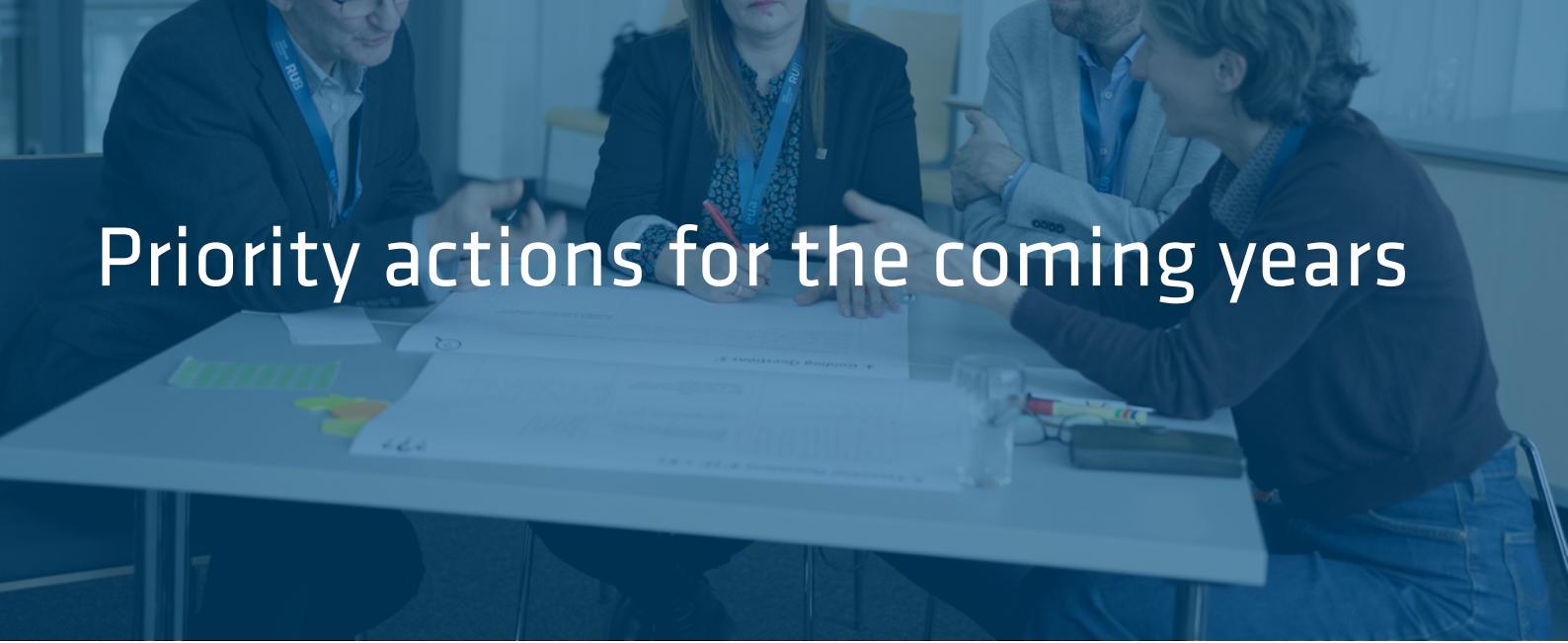
Other horizon scanning and advocacy activities on behalf of the sector have included EUA's input to the European Commission's Communication on a global approach to research, innovation, education and youth (March 2021), the Association's [work on public funding for universities](#) (autumn 2020-spring 2021), the publication of the third edition of the [Autonomy Scorecard](#) (March 2023) and the development of [EUA's first-ever R&I Agenda](#). Additional forward-looking and agenda-setting documents have included the [Open Science Agenda 2025](#) (February 2022), the [EUA-CDE vision for doctoral education](#) (June 2022), the [Innovation Agenda 2026](#) (February 2023) and the [Green Deal roadmap](#) (October 2023). At a global level, EUA was instrumental in establishing the [Global University Associations' Forum \(GUAF\)](#) initiative, as a means of fostering exchange with peer associations and relevant bodies in other global regions on common trends and challenges.

Besides the Association's continuous work to facilitate best practice-sharing and peer-learning between its individual and collective membership, **European Solidarity** has been and is being visibly addressed in the context of EUA's and its members' [efforts to support the Ukrainian university sector](#), through a range of activities and by strengthening Ukrainian membership of the Association. EUA also played a key role in advocating for UK and Swiss association to European funding programmes.

Examples of work in support of **Enabling Enhanced Performance** abound, with EUA's activities on research assessment, learning and teaching practices, Open Science policies and procedures and the green transition, among many others, fostering its members' agility and excellence in all their missions. Internal and external quality assurance frameworks have received considerable attention, notably in the context of the [Quality Assurance Fit for the Future \(QA-FIT\) project](#) dedicated to evaluating the state of play of quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Finally, since the Strategic Plan came into effect in 2020, EUA has made considerable efforts to adapt its **ways of working**: communication and information flows between national rectors' conferences and EUA have been strengthened; increased efforts have been made to consult and engage members, particularly in those countries without a collective member; short-term, agile expert groups have been effectively employed on time-sensitive issues; and internal processes – related to statutory structures and processes and membership affairs, among other things – have been reviewed and revised. The Association's statutes have been modified and a robust process has been established to develop annual operational plans, aiding the efficient management of the Association.





# Priority actions for the coming years

Several areas for focused action are foreseen for the coming years; priority will be given to activities that provide clear added value for EUA's members. **Horizon Scanning** will continue as a strategic priority, with the consequences of the climate crisis and the sector's role in dealing with these a focus, in keeping with EUA's recently published Green Deal roadmap. EUA's R&I Agenda will turn towards emerging opportunities and threats to society, including issues related to foreign interference and knowledge security, and shine a spotlight on the transformational role of universities in society. A strategic reflection is expected to lead to the formulation of a first Learning & Teaching Agenda for EUA.

A key aim under **Effective Advocacy** will be to establish EUA as a central stakeholder vis-à-vis the new European Commission and Parliament from 2024 onwards. In this context, the Association will publish its vision for the tenth EU framework programme for research and innovation (FP10). This will advocate for a programme that supports universities in boosting their performance through excellence, international and cross-disciplinary collaboration, and scale. Policy contributions will be made concerning the further direction of the European Universities Initiative. EUA will also continue to highlight the importance of global dialogue, and opportunities for affirming European values in that context, and provide the sector's input into the next round of the Bologna Process (2024-2027).

**European Solidarity** will be addressed by seeking to communicate a shared sectoral commitment to academic freedom and other key university values. Support to universities and systems in crisis situations, including in Ukraine, will continue and, where necessary, be adapted to changing circumstances and new needs.

In terms of **Enhancing Members' Performance**, a strong focus will be placed on institutional leadership development as a means for building universities' resilience and strengthening their capacity to respond in crisis situations. EUA will therefore craft and deliver a comprehensive and impactful leadership development programme that is tailored to the needs of EUA members and embraces the European dimension of university leadership. The Association will also facilitate dialogue and share knowledge regarding the digital transformation of universities, with a particular focus on artificial intelligence and associated integrity concerns, as well as any other related priority topics.

Talent – or the absence thereof – and related challenges will be addressed through a new set of activities on academic careers and assessment; the '[Staff development for learning and teaching at European universities \(STAFF-DEV\) project](#)' will explore staff development and career paths in teaching, while one of the key tasks of a task-and-finish group dedicated to academic careers will be the development of an EUA vision document on this crucial issue during 2024. This work will complement EUA's management of a working group on academic assessment in the context of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA).

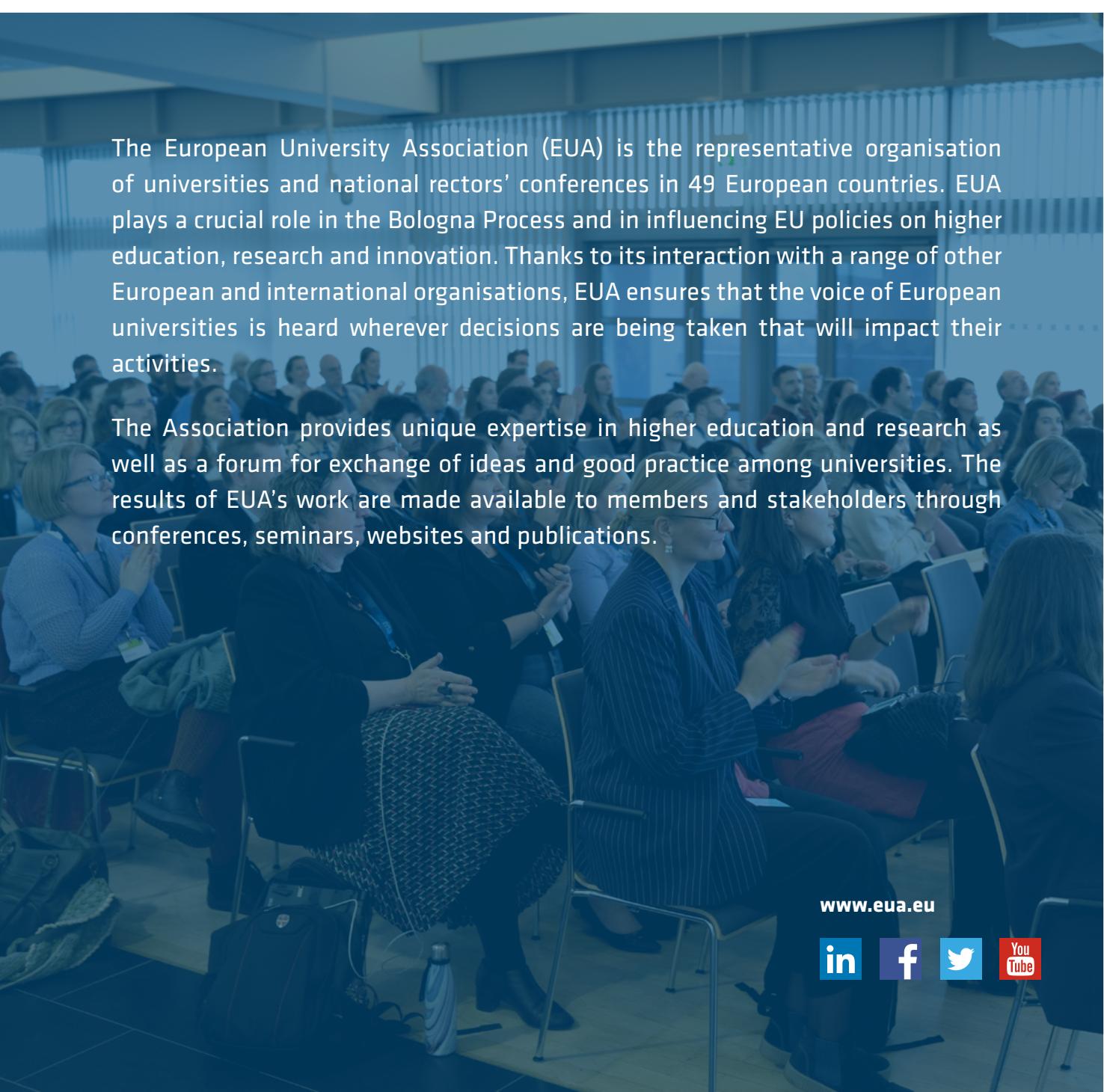
With regard to the European Universities Initiative, EUA will focus on supporting the alliances as one mode of transnational collaboration between universities, establishing links with the wider European university sector and ensuring that related developments serve both EUA's members within and outside of the European Universities alliances.

To maximise its impact and further hone its **ways of working**, the Association will favour the value of positive, sharp, and agenda-setting messaging, especially in the lead-up to the 2024 European elections; tighten feedback loops between the Secretariat, national rectors' conferences and individual members, wherever possible; and widen dialogue channels to involve students and other key partners.

## Towards 2025: a revised strategic plan for EUA

The Association's Strategic Plan remains relevant and still holds potential for shaping positive and impactful work to benefit EUA's membership, as has been shown above. Nevertheless, a thorough revision exercise, which could form the basis for the development of a new Strategic Plan for EUA will be undertaken in 2025, as key policy changes, such as and the elections to the European Parliament and the appointment of a new Commission President and college of Commissioners, will have taken place by then. This revision will entail extensive consultation of EUA's membership, including individual members, mirroring the process leading to the formulation of the 2020 Strategic Plan.



A photograph showing a large audience of people seated in rows, facing towards the left of the frame. They appear to be attending a conference or seminar. The background is slightly blurred, creating a bokeh effect.

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 49 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Thanks to its interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the voice of European universities is heard wherever decisions are being taken that will impact their activities.

The Association provides unique expertise in higher education and research as well as a forum for exchange of ideas and good practice among universities. The results of EUA's work are made available to members and stakeholders through conferences, seminars, websites and publications.

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