

# Erasmus Without Paper (EWP): Involvement of third countries

Creating opportunities for participation of third-country partner universities

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## Setting the scene

European Universities alliances share an ambitious objective of building interconnected inter-university campuses to facilitate **new levels of international student mobility**. In addition, European Universities are committed to contributing to the digital transition by exploring ways to develop new and innovative infrastructure to support transnational collaboration of all kinds and investing in the further development of digital skills for both students and staff.

In recent years, **Erasmus Without Paper (EWP)** has evolved into a key tool to support this transition, as a digital solution conceived for higher education institutions (HEIs) to efficiently manage mobilities. Not every partner in every European Universities alliance, however, has access to the EWP network to facilitate mobility – a challenge shared by all undersigned alliances with partner universities in the United Kingdom and Switzerland. At the same time, persisting operational challenges must be borne in mind going forward in the ambition to build a robust global network. The express ambition of EWP is to design a digital workflow that “leaves no university behind”. Therefore, we advocate for increased **inclusivity and accessibility of the EWP network** by opening up to those institutions in third countries not associated to the Erasmus+ programme, **who wish to and are technically able to be part of it**.

## Added value of involving third countries in EWP

- There is a growing call among students across Europe and beyond for a more international approach to higher education that reflects the **borderless, interconnected nature** of our global and societal challenges.
- As a result, HEIs in the European Union are invested in widening and deepening partnerships with universities across the continent and in different parts of the globe, in order to be able to offer a wide range of international experiences to students that allow them to acquire future-proof competences and skills.
- A vast number of mobility flows between HEIs in Programme Countries and HEIs in third countries are in line with the objectives of EU policy and external actions and funded as part of the Erasmus+ programme.
- Numerous European Universities alliances encompass HEIs in third countries not associated to the programme, including from the United Kingdom, Switzerland, and Ukraine, key to delivering the ambitious strategies behind their respective alliances. This includes all alliances supporting this paper: Una Europa, 4EU+, Circle U, CIVIS, ENHANCE, EUTOPIA, EUonAIr and UNITA.
- Currently, designing inter-institutional mobility agreements for students in collaboration with these partners, requires separate administrative procedures. This is not only creating real hurdles for students but also putting further pressure on staff supporting mobilities both from programme and non-programme countries.
- The ability to handle international student data and processes through the same network used for intra-European mobility would therefore be of strong added value that could make a tangible impact on the day-to-day work of staff, who are forming the backbone of European Universities alliances.
- At the same time, there is the potential to reduce the administrative workload linked to reporting requirements to the European Commission on EU programmes involving partners, students and staff from third countries.

## Examples of supporting European Universities alliances

- At the **Una Europa partner universities** the University of Edinburgh and the University of Zurich, respectively, 60% (UoE) and 73% (UZH) of inter-institutional agreements exist with universities in Erasmus+ programme countries.
- At the University of Warwick, an **EUTOPIA partner**, around 50% of annual mobilities are with universities in Erasmus+ programme countries.
- At the HES-SO University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, **UNITA associated partner**, more than 55 percent of annual mobilities are with universities in Erasmus+ programme countries.

## What is needed?

- We are advocating for HEIs in third countries not associated to the programme to be granted **full access to the EWP network, in line with their priorities, technical capacities and maturity of institutional mobility management (systems)**.
- This comes at a time when EWP is approaching an important point in its development, where the consolidation of existing features is under discussion. The inclusion of universities in third countries not associated to the programme must be considered in order to incrementally transition towards a system, where mobilities with partners around the globe can be supported, managed and tracked with EWP, as the leading digital solution.
  - A first concrete step could be taken by facilitating the exchange of data via the use of similar Inter-Institutional Agreements (IIAs) and Learning Agreements (LAs) templates/data models for all mobility scenarios to avoid duplicating technical effort, as recently highlighted by the Erasmus Without Paper Back to the Future White Paper<sup>1</sup>.
- In this process, the wide range of higher education institutions that exist across non-programme countries around the world must be carefully considered. Therefore, **a flexible approach**, incorporating diversity, equity and inclusion considerations, is key.

## Concluding remarks

- We call on the European Commission to enable full access for data exchange within the EWP network for HEIs in third countries not associated to the programme, which already meet the technical requirements.
- In addition, once full access to the EWP network has been facilitated, this should be clearly articulated in the guidelines provided to Erasmus+ National Agencies (NAs).
- With the full roll-out of the student features of EWP, it is further important to ensure continued engagement with student representation groups, such as the Erasmus+ Student and Alumni Alliance (ESAA), the European Students' Union (ESU) and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), to directly reflect the needs and priorities of all students.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://zenodo.org/records/11066283>

All undersigned European Universities alliances and their partner universities are ready to work closely with both the European Commission and respective Erasmus+ National Agencies to continue to refine EWP together in a collaborative effort, in order to deliver outstanding mobility experiences accessible to every student.

Circle U.

CIVIS

ENHANCE

EUonAIR

EUTOPIA

4EU+

UNITA

Una Europa