

# Vision for International Collaboration

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# Introduction

In a highly globalized and interconnected world, many of today's most urgent present and future societal challenges are global challenges. These challenges know no borders. As leading research-intensive universities from across Europe, our institutions are intrinsically international and driven by achieving global impact across education, research and innovation and societal outreach. We share a responsibility to ensure that knowledge production and research collaboration are equally without borders. We are committed to further contribute to a better and more diverse understanding of these global challenges and to co-create solutions to ensure resilient, sustainable and equitable societies in the future, both in Europe and across the globe. At the same time, we will continue to ensure that knowledge production is proactively widened across disciplinary, institutional, and geographical boundaries. A vibrant global research and education community and diverse knowledge base, which unite leading scholars and different perspectives from various corners of the world, are the preconditions of deeper understanding, excellence and innovation for the benefit of all global citizens.

Therefore, the Una Europa universities share a strong belief in the importance of designing sustainable international cooperation strategies and developing long-term bilateral and multilateral partnerships with like-minded partners in various regions in the world. This approach will strengthen a diverse knowledge base as a driver for excellence guaranteeing that students are future-ready in an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

## Una Europa dimension

As expressed in our Manifesto, Una Europa represents 'a mirror of humanity in all its diversity, reflecting cultures and languages, conventions and disruptions'. Interdisciplinarity, multilingualism, global collaboration, innovation, interaction, inclusivity and impact are core principles that shape our priorities and our ways of working – both in Europe and the world. As a European University of the Future, Una Europa puts front and centre its commitment to supporting the next generation to become future-ready and globally-connected co-creators of the future we want. Only through strategic collaborations at a global level across research, innovation, education and outreach, and community building can this be achieved.

Building on the strengths of the partner universities, Una Europa has been created as a values-driven alliance to jointly shape the future of high-quality education and excellent research of high impact in Europe and beyond. At its core, Una Europa aims to create an ecosystem for seamless collaboration in education, research and innovation and societal engagement, where knowledge is created, shared and used freely across disciplinary, institutional, and geographical boundaries. These principles, rooted in combined strengths, shared values and common priorities for the future, also form the basis of our approach to international collaboration. It is crucial that Una Europa's approach to international collaboration does not simply replicate the types of collaboration that are already ongoing at the level of the individual partner universities or other European and international networks. While strongly rooted in existing bilateral links and experiences of the partner universities, the alliance's work focuses concretely on the value of multilateral partnerships, recognising the importance of developing deep, sustainable and reciprocal partnerships in an unequal world to find solutions to the most pressing global challenges together.

The six Una Europa Focus Areas have been set up to connect academics across the partner universities and to facilitate collaborations on some of the pressing global and societal challenges. Such challenges can only be addressed comprehensively from multiple viewpoints and perspectives, which makes the Focus Areas inherently interdisciplinary and international in nature. They naturally provide open spaces for collaboration between academics across disciplines, institutions, countries as well as continents. Cultural Heritage, Data Science and Artificial Intelligence, Europe and the World, Future Materials, One Health and Sustainability provide ample opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration with partners around the globe in areas such as sustainability challenges, infectious diseases and approaches to FAIR data within the wider framework of Data Science. In addition, the newly broadened Focus Area on Europe and the World specifically calls for the perspectives of non-European partners, if progress is to be made in the global context in fields, such as migration, peace, justice and security.

Una Europa's ambitions can be summarised around two key objectives. Together with our global partners, we aim to:



- **Achieve maximum societal impact** by contributing to deepened understanding and addressing current and future challenges both at global and local levels, including communicating knowledge and expertise more effectively to the public. As Una Europa, we aim to do this in equal partnership with like-minded partners across the globe, genuinely co-creating research agendas, educational programmes, and dissemination strategies.
- **Promote openness, diversity and inclusion** in Una Europa’s education and research activities. As Una Europa, we share a strong commitment to diversifying knowledge bases, contributing to an inclusive and vibrant global education and research community and enabling more diverse participation in our international classrooms.

Sharing a common understanding and a strategic approach on how Una Europa can work together with external partners is key to the alliance’s diversity and potential to work effectively towards common objectives with various regions of the world.

## Principles for collaboration

There is a strong consensus within Una Europa that engagement with partners across the globe requires an equitable and co-creational approach. We are conscious of the substantial differences that exist to date in access to scientific knowledge, data, research funding and research infrastructures, as well as student and staff mobility opportunities in different regions around the world and are ready to address them in partnership.

The following partnership values and excellence principles have been co-developed in the context of Una Europa’s collaboration with African higher education institutions. In line with Una Europa’s Manifesto and 2030 Strategy, they will guide and provide inspiration for Una Europa’s approach to international collaboration more broadly in the future.

### Partnership Values

- Equity
- Diversity
- Openness
- Long-term commitment
- Trust and transparency
- Complementary strengths
- Positive and proactive

### Excellence Principles

- Ambition
- Co-creation
- Innovation
- Quality
- Impact
- Reflective

## Africa as a priority for international collaboration

The concentration of expertise on, and relations with, Europe’s neighbouring continent Africa are a key strength of Una Europa. In 2020, a first mapping exercise identified several existing individual projects and numerous bilateral partnerships with African universities across the Una Europa partner universities. Moreover, different kinds of institutionalised structures, such as centres, departments and faculties dedicated to Africa, already exist at scale within the alliance. In its first iteration of a shared international strategy, the Una Europa members identified focused action in cooperation with African universities as a priority and first pilot for collaboration on the basis of the following rationale:

- Africa is Europe’s closest neighbouring continent with a longstanding and often challenging shared history.
- The African continent and its research landscape are altogether underrepresented in the existing networks of the Una Europa partners - despite significant numbers of Sub-Saharan African students in some Una Europa institutions and despite long-standing individual partnerships.

- Today's most pressing challenges are of a global nature. The framework of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offers an interdisciplinary and comprehensive global agenda for collaboration. The agenda has been integrated in most higher education landscapes across the globe and has been endorsed both by individual African governments as well as by multilateral organisations, such as the African Union. At the same time, the Agenda 2063, the African continent's strategic framework to deliver on its goal for inclusive and sustainable development, provides a strong framework for collaboration. Both agendas offer various touchpoints with the Una Europa Focus Areas.

The African continent is the world's fastest growing region with a population of 1.4 billion in 2022 that is expected to nearly double by 2050. By then, 2.5 billion people – a quarter of the world's population – will live in Africa. This has enormous repercussions for future global economic developments, political representation and governance, environmental impact, urbanisation as well as diversity and inclusion. Moreover, Africa is not a country, it is a continent with 54 countries and enormous heterogeneity in developments, traditions, challenges and opportunities. Providing diverse knowledge on and perspectives from various African settings is essential for an understanding of the global future. Una Europa students and staff therefore should get to know this region, in terms of knowledge, exchanges, education as well research and innovation activities.

The Una Europa - Africa Partnership, which consists of representatives of Una Europa and select African universities, has recently adopted its Vision and Roadmap for collaboration. Based on a bottom-up and co-creative approach, both are designed to be agile, and will allow for prioritisation, evolution, and potential growth of the proposed activities. The partnership will equally remain open and agile, allowing for the participation and involvement of other interested partner universities as the activities progress. This partnership will act as a pilot for Una Europa's overall approach to international collaboration and serve as inspiration for collaboration with other parts of the world and act as a key building block of the alliance's overarching International Strategy.

## Exploring collaboration with other regions in the world

The open and collaborative approach to collaboration with higher education institutions in Africa is progressively taking shape. This approach may inspire joint Una Europa collaborations with other like-minded universities in other priority regions across the globe. Going forward, Una Europa will initiate a more in-depth exploration of collaboration with higher education institutions in Latin America.

Rooted in the need for a deeper understanding of mutual priorities, respective needs and complementary strengths across the Latin American sub-continent, Una Europa will explore the broader benefits of multilateral collaborations with a view to implementing long-term, sustainable partnerships. Several Una Europa partner universities have a long tradition of engaging in academic exchange and research collaborations with Latin American universities both individually as well as on a multilateral basis via strategic stakeholder organisations. This extensive experience will be used as a basis for a multilateral partnership approach at the level of the alliance.



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