

17 characters in search of interoperability: European University Alliances in Belgium

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Abstract

European University Alliances (EUAs) are the result of an ambitious initiative launched by the European Commission to promote international cooperation among higher education institutions (HEIs) across Europe [1]. As a key endeavour of the European Education Area (EEA), the EUA initiative seeks to support trans-European networks of universities that collaborate on education, research, and innovation, thereby contributing to a more integrated European Higher Education Area (Gunn, 2020). The first alliances were established in 2019, with funding from the Erasmus+ programme.

As per the information available at the official EUA website of the European Commission, the initiative currently lists 65 European University alliances, involving over 570 HEIs from 35 countries. These countries include EU member states, but also associated institutions at non-EU countries, such as HEIs from the United Kingdom and Switzerland, alongside numerous industry stakeholders, professional associations, and societal organizations.

The EUA map [2] for Belgium currently shows 17 alliances in which HEIs in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels are represented, see figure below.

Belgium

there are 17 higher education institutions part of European Universities alliances.

University of Louvain is part of the [Circle U](#) alliance

Université libre de Bruxelles is part of the [CIVIS](#) alliance

UC Leuven-Limburg University of Applied Sciences is part of the [E3UDRES2](#) alliance

Ghent University is part of the [ENLIGHT](#) alliance

University of Mons is part of the [EUNICE](#) alliance

Hasselt University is part of the [EURECA-PRO](#) alliance

Vrije Universiteit Brussel is part of the [EUTOPIA](#) alliance

Luca School of Arts is part of the [FILMEU](#) alliance

Howest University of Applied Sciences is part of the [RUN-EU](#) alliance

Catholic University of Leuven is part of the [Una Europa](#) alliance

University of Liège is part of the [UNIC](#) alliance

The Higher Education Institution of the province of Liège is part of the [UNIgreen](#) alliance

University of Namur is part of the [UNIVERSEH](#) alliance

HOGENT University of Applied Sciences and Arts is part of the [UREKA SHIFT](#) alliance

University of Antwerp is part of the [YUFE](#) alliance

VIVES University of Applied Sciences is part of the [ARTEMIS](#) alliance

Thomas More University of Applied Sciences is part of the [HEROES](#) alliance

While education represents the primary focus of an initiative promoted by the European Commission DG for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, research is an increasingly integral component of the EUA initiative too. Many alliances are incorporating joint research strategies to reinforce the European Research Area (ERA), with a defining characteristic of each alliance being its unique thematic focus, determined by shared educational priorities and research interests. The research-related activity of EUAs is multi-folded, including the promotion of interdisciplinary collaboration, the sharing of research infrastructures, and the exploration of cross-border funding opportunities. Given this evolving research dimension, the presentation aims to examine the contributions of these EUAs – and in particular of the 17 alliances with Belgian institutions in them – to research.

Best practices and key challenges will be identified in the domain of Research Information Management (RIM). The potential role of CRIS systems – including national and regional CRIS where applicable – in further supporting the development of the EUA initiative will also be examined, with an emphasis on CERIF-enabled system interoperability as a breakthrough.

The presentation will be partially inspired on the conference paper “Common Research Information Management from a European University Alliance Perspective” [3] accepted on 24 Mar 2025 to be presented at the EUNIS annual congress 2025 to be held in June 2025 at the Ulster University in Belfast, <https://eunis.org/calendar/eunis25-annual-congress/>.

Keywords:

European University Alliances; research; research information management; current research information systems; system interoperability; CERIF; Belgium

References

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- [2] European Commission (2025). *European Universities alliances and their partners: map of alliances*. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/european-universities-initiative/map>
- [3] De-Castro, P., Dvorak, J., Orel, O., Schöpfel, J. (2025). *Common Research Information Management from a European University Alliance Perspective*. Accepted paper at the EUNIS25 Annual Congress: Connecting communities and empowering creativity (Belfast, 4-6 June 2025).