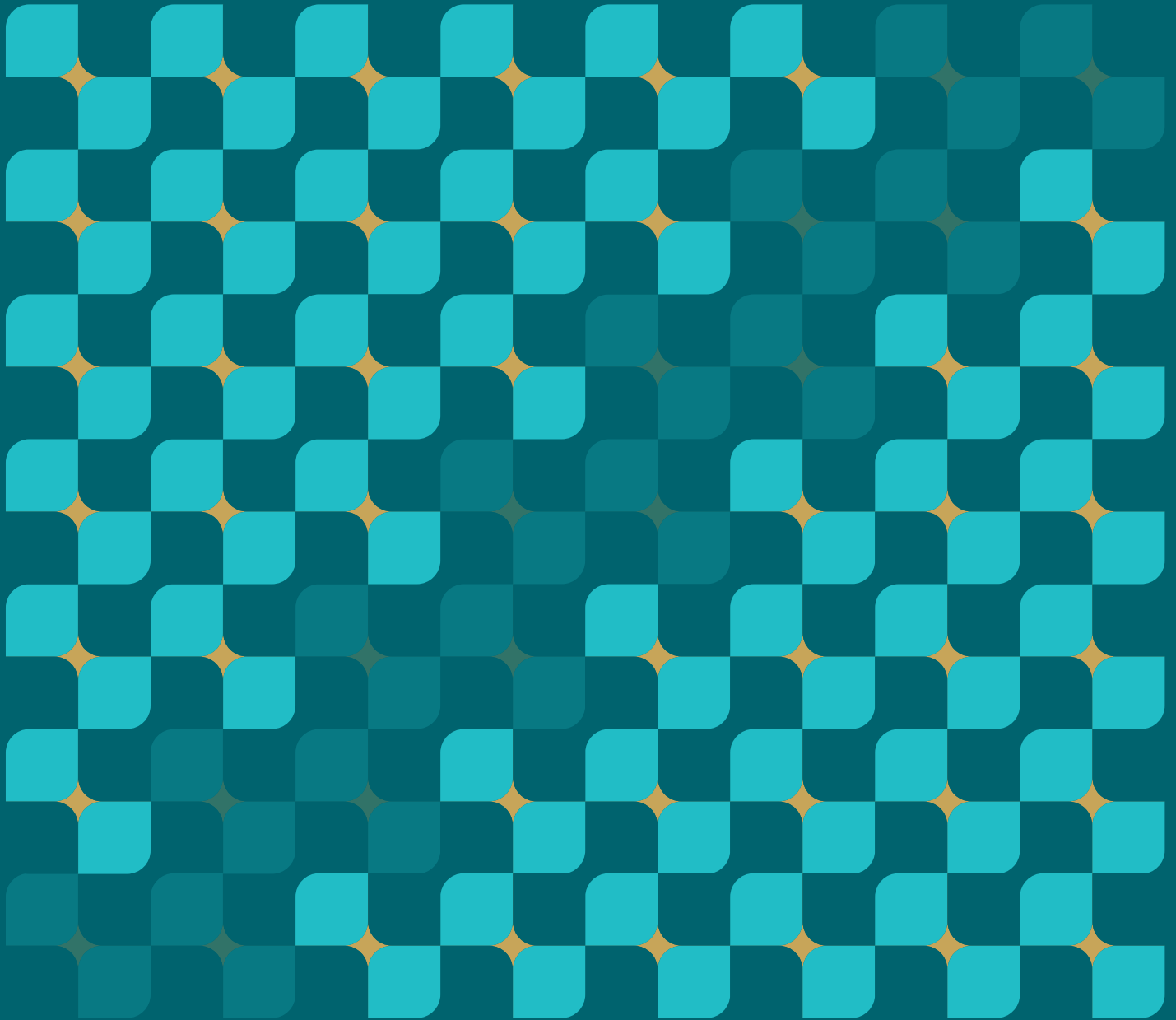


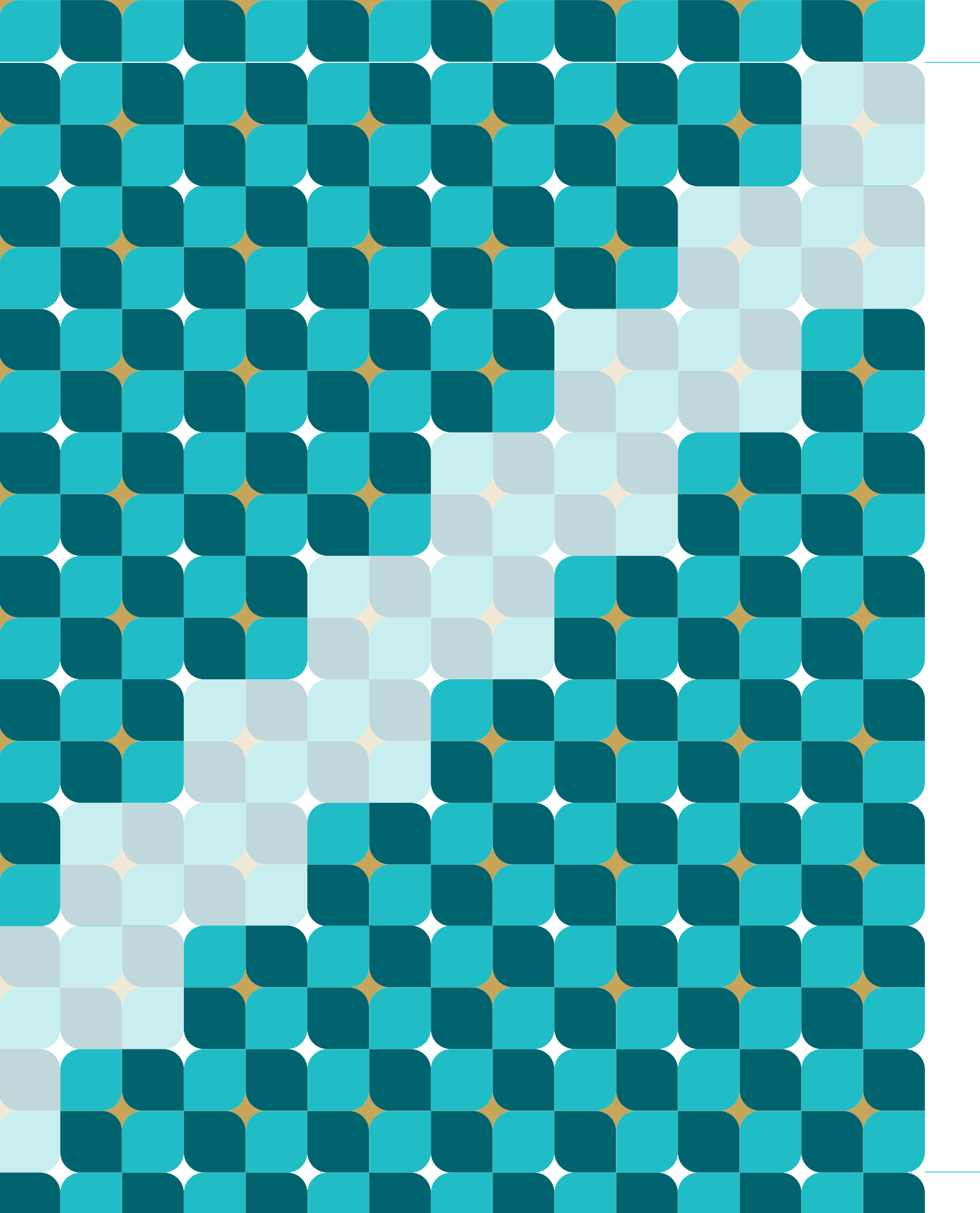
JOINT AND DOUBLE PROGRAMMES IN EUROPE



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JOINT AND DOUBLE PROGRAMMES IN EUROPE



■ Joint and Double Programmes in Europe

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Ladies and Gentlemen



Mirosław Marczewski
Director General,
Foundation
for the Development
of the Education System

It is my great honour to welcome you to the conference on Joint and Double Programmes in Europe on behalf of the National Agency for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes in Poland – Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE). This publication, issued on the occasion of the conference, is a testament to our commitment to the dynamic and crucial field of education. In recent decades, international cooperation in higher education has become a cornerstone of European educational policy. The Bologna Process, followed by programmes such as Erasmus+, has reshaped the academic landscape by promoting student and staff mobility and harmonising education systems. In this context, joint and double programmes have emerged and can be viewed as an advanced tool that requires the coordination of curricula, legal frameworks, recognition systems, and quality assurance across national borders.

Our publication captures the rich mosaic of joint educational initiatives in Europe and demonstrates how they are transforming higher education. The experts whose texts you will find therein emphasise that these initiatives are not merely an academic experiment, but a necessity that responds to the challenges of the 21st century. In light of the labour market globalisation, the need to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, and the integrative goals of the Bologna Process, joint programmes are becoming a cornerstone of education's future.

This publication provides a deep analysis on several levels. The Diverse Landscape of Programmes: It presents a complex mosaic of programmes, from unified joint degrees to the more common double degrees and other flexible models that evolve in response to local traditions and regulations. Practice and Challenges: It describes the achievements and obstacles faced by European University alliances, such as issues with fragmented legal systems and the need for long-term funding. The Role of National Agencies: It explains how, e.g., FRSE, as a National Agency, translates the European vision into concrete actions by offering support, guidance, and institutional capacity-building measures.

I believe that this publication will be a valuable tool for universities, policymakers, and others who strive to create a more integrated and competitive European Higher Education Area. I hope it will serve as an inspiration for further action and the search for innovative solutions that will allow us to collectively build the future of European education. □

Contents

- The colourful landscape of joint educational initiatives in Europe
– *Dorota Piotrowska* ■ 7
- Erasmus Mundus as a flagship of joint educational cooperation
– *Beata Skibińska* ■ 14
- Joint education in action: lessons from the European alliances
– *Patrycja Matusz, Anna Juras* ■ 22
- National Agency's role in promoting joint and double degrees in Germany
– *Beate Körner* ■ 27
- Cooperate, innovate, graduate: Erasmus+ and the future of higher education.
The dynamics supported by the French higher education framework.
– *Nelly Fesseau* ■ 31
- Building bridges through Joint Programmes: Poland's experience and vision
for the European Degree – *Katarzyna Aleksy* ■ 37
- Professional and institutional pathways to joint educational cooperation:
International Relations Offices Forum – *Izabela Zawiska* ■ 42

The colourful landscape of joint educational initiatives in Europe



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The landscape of joint educational initiatives in Europe resembles a multicoloured mosaic, where diverse academic traditions, legal models, and international ambitions meet. Joint and double degree programmes, often referred to as joint programmes, serve simultaneously as instruments of internationalisation, tools for enhancing the quality of education, and means of building institutional prestige. This idea, launched in the 1970s, gained particular momentum with the start of the Bologna Process and the Erasmus Mundus programme. Today, it is clear that the concept is not limited to a single formula. Instead, different models have been developed in different countries, adapted to local traditions and capacities.

When, in 1999, the ministers of education of 29 countries signed the Bologna Declaration to establish the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), few could have anticipated the scale of joint study initiatives that would unfold in the following decades. Just two years later, in Prague, the ministers signalled the need to expand joint programmes, designed not only to facilitate mobility but also to lay the foundations for academic integration. Since then, the idea of joint programmes has become one of the pillars of the internationalisation of higher education in Europe.

The development of joint and double degrees fits perfectly into the logic of globalisation. In a world where economies and societies are increasingly interconnected, studying in programmes co-created by two or more universities has become a way to educate “citizens of the world”. It is not only about learning foreign languages or understanding other cultures, but also about the ability to move between different academic, legal, and social systems.

The Erasmus Mundus programme, launched in 2004, acted as a catalyst. Thanks to it, hundreds of joint master’s programmes were created, involving at least three universities from different countries. This model was demanding – both organisationally and financially – but precisely for that reason, it set the gold standard in the field. At the same time, not all institutions could or wanted to follow this path. Alongside Erasmus Mundus, hundreds of other initiatives were developed: bilateral, network-based, and regional. Together, they now form Europe’s colourful educational landscape.

Not an experiment but a necessity: why do we need joint educational initiatives

The diagnosis is clear. Joint educational initiatives are not merely an academic experiment or a passing trend in internationalisation. They are a response to several key challenges facing higher education in the 21st century.

The globalisation of the labour market means that the traditional educational pathway – confined within the boundaries of a single country – increasingly fails to meet professional realities. ■

- Employers are seeking culturally open graduates, capable of working in diverse teams and moving confidently in an international environment. Joint programmes provide exactly these competences: from language proficiency to practical experience of mobility.

The competitiveness of Europe is another challenge. In a world where the United States, Canada, Australia, and, increasingly, Asia compete for students' attention, the European Union must offer more than just local quality. A joint degree, recognised and valued in many countries, becomes a distinctive "brand of European higher education", attracting talent from outside the continent.

System integration is not only a political goal set out in the Bologna Process, but also a daily practice of universities. Joint programmes require institutions to compare learning outcomes, standardise the ECTS credit system, and harmonise accreditation procedures. This is a step towards genuine cohesion within the European Higher Education Area.

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Institutional development is less visible from the outside but crucial for the universities themselves. Designing joint programmes compels institutions to reorganise structures, seek innovative solutions, make better use of infrastructure, and share resources. Although sometimes difficult, this always pays off in terms of higher-quality offerings and greater resilience in times of crisis.

Finally, building human bonds is a dimension often overlooked in reports, yet it is of vital importance. Joint programmes support not only student mobility but also the creation of lasting academic, professional, and personal relationships. Out of these bonds grows trust, which pays dividends in other areas of international cooperation – from scientific research to social engagement.

All this shows that joint educational initiatives should not be treated as a luxury or an academic curiosity, but as an indispensable element of the future of higher education in Europe.

Models of joint educational programmes – diversity in practice

As highlighted in the introduction to the publication *Joint and Double Degrees. Poland and the World* (NAWA, 2020), it is difficult to speak of a single, universally recognised model of joint studies. In practice, a wide range of solutions exists, shaped by local legal regulations, academic traditions, and the organisational capacities of universities. This very diversity makes the landscape of joint educational initiatives resemble a mosaic, where each element has its own specificity and significance.

The most advanced, and at the same time the most demanding, form, is the joint degree. In this model, the partner institutions ■



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■ design an entirely new programme from the outset, culminating in the award of a single joint diploma. This document is recognised in the legal systems of all countries participating in the consortium, making it a clear expression of full academic integration. Such a model best reflects the spirit of the Bologna Process, but in practice, it remains difficult to implement, as many countries still lack clear legal provisions allowing for the issuance of joint diplomas.

Double or multiple degree programmes are much more common. Within these schemes, students follow a curriculum jointly designed by partner institutions but, upon completion, receive two or more separate diplomas – one from each institution. This solution is easier to implement, as it does not require legislative change; it is enough to harmonise curricula and ensure that students meet the minimum requirements of each university. This model appeals to many candidates who value the prestige of holding multiple diplomas, though it sometimes raises the question of whether this leads to an “excess” of documents.

Another frequently used approach is parallel programmes with a common component. Here, universities align a segment of their programmes – for example, a semester, a block of courses, or a set of learning outcomes – while leaving the rest of the studies different. This makes it possible to award a double diploma with fewer programmatic compromises. Such structures are particularly attractive to institutions wishing to embark on cooperation but not yet ready for full integration.

A further form is represented by programmes with divided responsibility, in which the partner institutions clearly split teaching duties – for example, one university delivers the entire first year and the other the second year. As a result, students complete a significant portion of their studies at each institution, and mobility becomes an integral element of the programme rather than an optional addition. Depending on national regulations, the outcome may be a joint diploma or two separate diplomas. In both cases, however, this model strongly emphasises the transnational and mobility dimensions.

A distinct category is formed by identical programmes delivered in parallel. These are created when institutions adopt a common standard – usually based on international professional accreditations – and deliver it in several countries. Students can begin their studies in one institution and continue them in another without fear that the content of the programme will change substantially. The result is a diploma recognised in many countries, significantly enhancing its value. Yet, this solution is costly and requires a high level of coordination, especially to maintain full programme consistency in a changing legal environment.

The most common model in practice, however, remains the partially aligned programme. This involves comparing existing curricula and identifying areas of overlap. To meet the requirements of all partners, students usually need to complete additional modules or courses that are not part of their home institution's programme. While this solution offers flexibility and enables cooperation to be launched relatively quickly, it is also the most burdensome for students, who often face a heavier workload and longer study duration.

- *Joint studies are not a uniform phenomenon. Each form carries its own benefits and limitations. Together, they create a multicoloured kaleidoscope of educational initiatives, in which diversity is not a weakness but evidence that academic integration in Europe is developing along many parallel pathways.*

- This plurality of models demonstrates that joint studies are not a uniform phenomenon. Each form carries its own benefits and limitations. Together, they create a multicoloured kaleidoscope of educational initiatives, in which diversity is not a weakness but evidence that academic integration in Europe is developing along many parallel pathways. Joint programmes are therefore not only the result of compromises between different systems but also laboratories of innovation, where new methods of teaching and building a European academic identity are tested.

European projects for the quality and development of joint educational programmes

Alongside the practices of individual universities, research projects and expert networks were developed with the aim not only of sharing experiences, but also of systematising terminology, identifying obstacles and suggesting ways to overcome them. These initiatives created the knowledge base that both national institutions and the European Commission draw upon today.

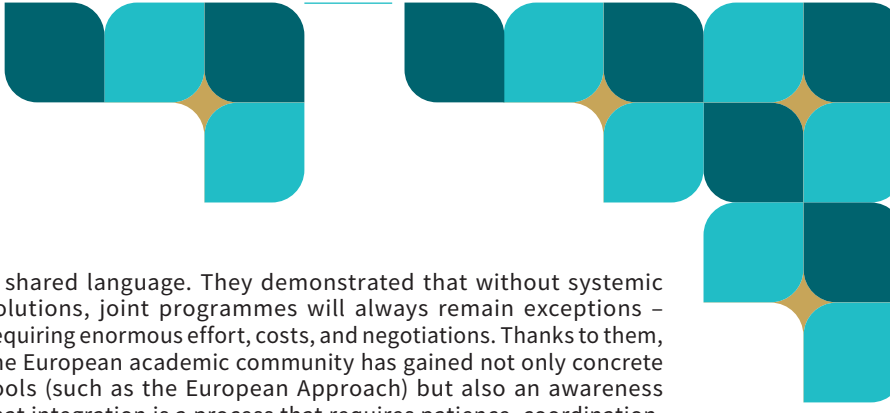
Joint Programmes from A to Z is considered one of the most comprehensive studies produced in this field. It served as a practical handbook – from the first idea for a programme, through issues of financing, to accreditation and diploma recognition. Its great value lies in gathering scattered practices into one place and giving them a coherent structure. For universities approaching the topic for the first time, it provided a clear “roadmap.”

ProDeJIP (Promoting the Development of Joint International Programmes) went a step further. It focused on the practical aspects of implementing joint programmes and firmly embedded them in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It demonstrated how such programmes could be “translated” into the language of learning outcomes and how different national systems could be integrated. This was an attempt to turn ambitious internationalisation slogans into the everyday reality of dean’s offices and programme coordinators.

JOQAR played a truly groundbreaking role. This project introduced and promoted the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (2015) – a common European quality assurance standard. Thanks to JOQAR, universities gained a clear point of reference: instead of undergoing separate procedures in each country, they could rely on a unified approach. In practice, implementation of this standard is still challenging (as not all countries have formally accepted it), but its very creation marked a major step towards integration.

ImPea (ImPeA Project Consortium, 2015) opened the debate on an even broader scale by linking Europe and Asia. It became clear that many barriers were universal in nature: complex accreditation processes, differences in academic calendars, challenges related to mobility, and language issues. The conclusions of the project were significant, as they showed that what had previously seemed a “European specificity” was in fact part of the global higher education landscape.

All these projects shared a common denominator: the desire to move beyond individual institutional experiences and to build ■

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- a shared language. They demonstrated that without systemic solutions, joint programmes will always remain exceptions – requiring enormous effort, costs, and negotiations. Thanks to them, the European academic community has gained not only concrete tools (such as the European Approach) but also an awareness that integration is a process that requires patience, coordination, and cooperation on many levels.

Barriers and challenges – nomenclature, law, and practice

Despite the impressive growth of joint study programmes, their functioning in Europe continues to encounter numerous obstacles. As demonstrated by the publication *Joint and Double Degrees. Poland and the World*, and by the results of European pilot projects, these difficulties are systemic in nature and affect virtually every stage of a programme's lifecycle – from design, through accreditation, to the recognition of diplomas.

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One of the most serious problems remains terminological confusion. The documents of the Bologna Process distinguish between concepts such as joint programme, joint degree, and double degree, yet in practice, different institutions and countries use them inconsistently. In some systems, joint studies are understood as a shared curriculum, in others, only as a joint diploma, while the term “double degree” may be applied both to fully integrated programmes and to those only partially aligned. This lack of a common language is not merely a matter of semantics – it complicates cooperation in tangible ways. Inter-university negotiations are hindered, as partners often interpret the same terms differently, accreditation procedures are repeatedly duplicated, and students are not always sure what to expect from a given programme. As a result, the lack of coherent terminology weakens the transparency and predictability of the entire system (NAWA, 2020).

Legal and administrative issues constitute another barrier. In many countries, there is still no legal basis for issuing a single joint diploma, which forces institutions to award separate documents. Each programme must undergo accreditation separately in every country, a process that not only prolongs implementation but also significantly increases costs. In addition, partners encounter difficulties arising from discrepancies in academic calendars, grading systems, and regulations regarding examinations and mobility. Another problematic area is the recognition of new forms of mobility, such as hybrid or online studies, which in many legal systems are still not treated as equivalent to physical mobility. ■



- Cultural and institutional barriers are no less significant. In different countries, student mobility holds a different status – in some it is regarded as the foundation of the programme, in others merely as an optional supplement. Differences also emerge in the approach to internships and practical training: in some systems, these are integral elements of study, in others, they remain optional. Added to this are differences in teaching culture, such as methods of conducting examinations or assessing student work.

All of these obstacles overlap and generate a heavy administrative burden. As programme coordinators point out, negotiating a single consortium agreement can take up to two years. The greatest cost, therefore, is not financial but the time and energy of those who must constantly negotiate differences and seek compromise.

Taken together, these difficulties are not isolated but pan-European in scope. Every institution attempting to establish a joint programme eventually encounters similar barriers, whether its partner is in Germany, Norway, or Poland. This is why research

- *Every institution attempting to establish a joint programme eventually encounters similar barriers, whether its partner is in Germany, Norway, or Poland. This is why research and reports consistently indicate that the development of joint studies will not be possible without broader systemic solutions.*

and reports consistently indicate that the development of joint studies will not be possible without broader systemic solutions. Harmonised terminology, simplified accreditation procedures, and stable legal frameworks for joint diplomas are essential conditions if Europe's mosaic of initiatives is to become a permanent feature of the educational landscape.

Conclusion

Joint educational initiatives in Europe today form a remarkably colourful and complex landscape. From programmes leading to a single diploma, through solutions producing multiple parallel documents, to partially aligned models, all show that universities continue to seek optimal forms of cooperation. This search is not without its challenges. Terminological confusion, legal and administrative discrepancies, and cultural differences mean that joint programmes often remain exceptions within national systems, requiring enormous organisational effort.

At the same time, two decades of experience demonstrate that they are not an experiment but a necessity. The globalisation of the labour market, the need to strengthen Europe's competitiveness, the integration goals of the Bologna Process, and the importance of building social trust all make joint programmes a cornerstone of the future of higher education. Systemic projects – Joint Programmes from A to Z, ProDeJIP, JOQAR, ImPea – have shown that only through collective efforts can barriers be overcome and lasting foundations for cooperation be created.

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- On 12 May 2025, the EU Council adopted a Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education and a Resolution on a joint European degree label and the next steps towards a possible joint European degree. The Resolution outlines a three-phase roadmap leading to the potential establishment of a full Joint European Degree by 2029. (Council of the European Union, 2025a,b). These decisions may prove to be a historic turning point – for the first time, there is a real chance that previously fragmented initiatives will be supported by common European frameworks of quality and recognition.

In this sense, joint study programmes are no longer merely instruments of internationalisation, but are becoming laboratories for the future of higher education. It is within them that the diversity of systems, traditions, and practices is transformed into a multicoloured kaleidoscope that may form the foundation of Europe's academic community in the decades to come. □

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Erasmus Mundus as a flagship of joint educational cooperation



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Ever since people started educating themselves, they have been looking for attractive forms of learning. Of course, not everyone, but those who are ambitious and wish to be well prepared for challenges in their professional, social, and private life. This is the target group for Erasmus Mundus Master Courses, presently offered as one of the centralised actions of the Erasmus+ programme.

The decision to start the Erasmus Mundus programme was most probably made in light of the good results of student and staff exchange in the Erasmus programme and the expected globalisation of student exchange. Worldwide competition for talent was also anticipated, for which Europe (European higher education) wanted to prepare by creating an interesting and unique educational offer for ambitious students. In this article, I want to address a wider public interested in joint study programmes and share my personal view on how important the Erasmus Mundus programme was and still is for the popularisation and implementation of the concept of a joint study programme.

The history of the Erasmus Mundus actions

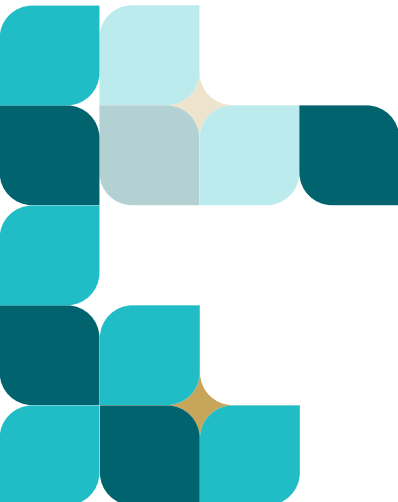
The aim of the Erasmus Mundus programme in its first phase (2004–2008) was to make higher education in Europe more attractive and enhance its quality by promoting cooperation with third countries. The legal basis for Erasmus Mundus 2004–2008 was Decision No 2317/2003/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 December 2003, establishing a programme for the enhancement of quality in higher education and the promotion of intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries¹.

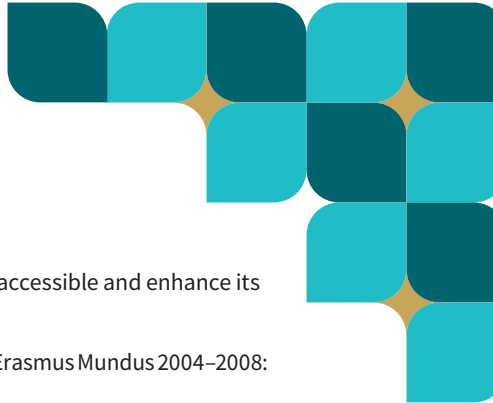
- *The decision to start the Erasmus Mundus programme was most probably made in light of the good results of student and staff exchange in the Erasmus programme and the expected globalisation of student exchange.*

The first phase of the Erasmus Mundus aimed more specifically to:

- promote quality in higher education with a distinctly European added value;
- encourage and enable highly qualified graduates and scholars from all over the world to obtain qualifications and/or acquire experience in the EU;
- develop better-structured cooperation between EU and third-country institutions and increase outgoing mobility from the EU; ■

¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32003D2317>

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- *While preparing the 2014–2020 phase of the educational programmes supported from the European Commission budget, the Commission and the Member States decided to consolidate many stand-alone initiatives into a complex programme.*

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- make European higher education more accessible and enhance its visibility throughout the world.

Five separate actions were available in Erasmus Mundus 2004–2008:

- 1: Erasmus Mundus Master Courses;
- 2: Scholarships;
- 3: Partnerships with third-country Higher Education Institutions;
- 4: Measures enhancing attractiveness;
- 5: Technical Support Measures.

In 2008, by applying Decision No 1298/2008/EC, the European Parliament and the Council decided to open **the second phase of the Erasmus Mundus programme (2009–2013)**², based on its predecessor, consistent with the objectives of excellence of the previous one, but introducing certain changes. An important one was the extension of the joint study programme to the doctoral level. The Commission and the Member States also decided to simplify the programme's structure, reducing the number of actions from five to three:

- 1: High quality Erasmus Mundus joint programmes, including both Master's and Doctoral programmes,
- 2: Erasmus Mundus partnerships between European and third-country higher education institutions,
- 3: Measures promoting European higher education.

The 2014–2020 phase of the Erasmus programmes consolidated many stand-alone initiatives into a comprehensive programme. Its structure is outlined in Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December, establishing Erasmus+: the Union programme for education, training, youth and sport³. Joint Master Degrees (JMD) were included into the Key Action 1 – Learning mobility of individuals. The Joint Master Degree project was described as a high-level, integrated international study programme of 60, 90, or 120 ECTS, delivered by an international consortium of higher education institutions (HEI) and, where relevant, other educational and/or non-educational partners with specific expertise and interest in the study areas or professional domains covered by the joint programme. The action included:

- the delivery of a JMD programme corresponding to 60, 90, or 120 ECTS, organised through an international consortium of HEIs, including participation of invited scholars (guest lecturers) for teaching, training and/or research purposes;
- the award of scholarships to excellent students worldwide for their participation in these JMD programmes.

In the present Erasmus+ phase (2021–2027)⁴ established by Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2024, the Erasmus Mundus Actions were moved

² <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32008D1298>

³ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2013/1288/oj/eng>

⁴ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/817/oj/eng>

- *One may wonder why Erasmus Mundus currently supports only Joint Master Degrees and not joint programmes at Bachelor, Doctoral, or long-cycle Master's level, and why the Doctoral level has been removed, although it was previously supported? This decision reflects a consensus among academic experts and decision makers, who concluded that such demanding and highly specialised study programmes are not appropriate for the first years of studies, when learners quite often have not yet determined their area of interest.*

- to the Key Action 2 “Cooperation among organisations and institutions” as part of “Partnerships for Excellence”.

Two separate lots are offered in this phase:

- Lot 1: **Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters (EMJM)** for consortia ready to run the study programme
- Lot 2: **Erasmus Mundus Design Measures (EMDM)** for HEIs willing to improve study programme quality.

These two lots aim, on one hand, to continue offering Master's programmes to attract talent to EHEA, and on the other hand, to open the Joint Masters to newcomers and less experienced HEIs.

One may wonder why Erasmus Mundus currently supports only Joint Master Degrees and not joint programmes at Bachelor, Doctoral, or long-cycle Master's level, and why the Doctoral level has been removed, although it was previously supported? This decision reflects a consensus among academic experts and decision makers, who concluded that such demanding and highly specialised study programmes are not appropriate for the first years of studies, when learners quite often have not yet determined their area of interest. Joint doctorates remain highly suitable, but due to the introduction of two separate programmes for education and training (Erasmus+) and for research (Horizon 2020) in 2014, joint doctorates were transferred to the research programme.

HEIs wishing to offer joint Bachelor's degrees must secure other funding sources. However, for first-degree ambitious learners, double degrees are equally interesting, and Key Action 1 funds for student mobility, available to HEIs, support such initiatives.

The essence of the Joint Masters and their impact on the development of the European Higher Education Area

Analysing the requirements for Erasmus Mundus Masters Courses, one can say that it is indeed an unique and interesting project. The requirements include:

- a jointly designed and fully integrated curriculum adhering to the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)⁵;
- delivery by a consortium of HEIs and, where relevant, other educational and/or non-educational partners established in an EU Member State or any other country; the consortium must involve at least three HEIs from three different countries, at least two of which are EU Member States and third countries associated with the Programme;
- enrolment of excellent students from all over the world;
- compulsory physical mobility for all students; recognition mechanism for the mobility tracks is agreed between partners;
- exchange of staff and invited scholars as contributors to teaching, training, research, and administrative activities;
- successful completion of the joint master programme leading

⁵ <https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/agreed-standards>

- to either a joint degree (a single diploma awarded by at least two HEIs from different countries, of which at least one must be a EU Member State or third country associated to the Programme), or multiple degrees (at least two diplomas awarded by two HEIs from different countries, of which at least one must be a EU Member State or third country associated with the Programme);
- the awarded degree(s) must belong to the higher-education systems of the countries in which HEIs are based, must be mutually recognised by all awarding full partner HEIs; consortia should provide students with a joint Diploma Supplement covering the entire content of the Master's programme.

■ *Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters must integrate several academic disciplines (should be interdisciplinary); offer a practically oriented component (to enhance graduates' employability), and contribute to the development of key social skills through learning and socialising with peers representing various countries, continents, nations, languages, and cultures.*

Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters must integrate several academic disciplines (should be interdisciplinary), offer a practically oriented component (to enhance graduates' employability), and should contribute to the development of key social skills through learning and socialising with peers representing various countries, continents, nations, languages, and cultures. These features make Erasmus Mundus Masters an excellent educational offer, and no wonder they became a hallmark of the EHEA and are part of the internationalisation strategies of many HEIs in Europe.

Another intriguing question is whether Joint Masters contributed more to the establishment of the EHEA, or flourished only after the creation of the EHEA was announced. Comparing the EHEA goals with those of a single Joint Master Degree study programme shows that delivering as many Joint Masters as possible brings the EHEA idea closer to reality. However, we must remember that higher education should be accessible to all citizens seeking a degree. Joint Master Degrees are aimed at those who search for unique educational offers. The diversity of HEIs, study programmes, and programme complexity remains the defining feature of the EHEA. Europe currently demands professionals with specific skills. It seems that microcredentials offer HEIs a chance to meet this demand. This does not imply that Polish HEIs should abandon participation in Joint Masters, but rather maintain a diverse educational offer to meet the needs of different learners.

What are the steps to be taken to prepare a joint study programme? A HEI interested in developing such a study programme should:

- establish contacts with universities in Europe, and possibly beyond, to create a joint study program;
- appoint a contact person or team responsible for implementing the programme;
- establish the terms and conditions of cooperation between partners;
- obtain support and confirmation from the faculty and university authorities;

■ *After the first phase of the Erasmus Mundus programme as a stand-alone initiative, it became evident that the reparation of a joint study programme meeting all qualitative expectations is a very demanding task.*

- secure human and financial resources for the project's implementation.

It may all sound simple but the proper implementation of the fourth step – reaching an institutional agreement that the study programme complies with at institutional and national laws – is challenging. True jointness requires a lot of flexibility and good will.

Contribution of the Polish National Erasmus+ Agency

After the first phase of the Erasmus Mundus programme as a stand-alone initiative, it became evident that the preparation of a joint study programme meeting all qualitative expectations is a very demanding task. Supporters of the joint study programmes, National Agencies (at that time called National Structures in relation to the Erasmus Mundus actions), among others, managed to convince the Commission that it was worthwhile to invest part of the Erasmus Mundus budget in projects designed to help potential applicants and later beneficiaries to better understand the joint nature of study programmes run by international consortia. Restricted calls were opened, and countries willing to help their academic communities in understanding, applying, and then implementing Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters and other joint programmes had the possibility to apply for special grants. These grants supported the organisation of seminars and the preparation of publications aimed at promoting joint study programmes. Indeed, such projects contributed significantly to the popularisation, understanding, and implementation of joint study programmes. Another objective of these “special projects” was to make the Erasmus Mundus Actions more accessible to countries that had been less represented among Erasmus Mundus beneficiaries. However, I remain quite sceptical about whether, upon completion of these projects, the observed differences in the use of Erasmus Mundus Actions were substantially reduced.

The Polish National Structure was involved in the following “special” projects: Asemundus, EMAP, Interuv, JDAZ.

INTERUV: Joint Programmes – facilitator for university internationalisation was an initiative of Erasmus Mundus National Structures from 15 European countries (Austria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom).

The INTERUV project focused on:

- promoting the idea of joint study programmes among higher education institutions from the EU and third countries in neighbouring regions;
- supporting HEIs in incorporating joint study programmes into their institutional strategies for internationalisation;
- building the capacity of institutions then serving as Erasmus Mundus National Structures and National Tempus Offices, helping them to prepare for the transition to the new Erasmus for All programme to be implemented in the years 2014–2021.

In its second edition, when Erasmus Mundus started to promote joint master's programmes beyond the EHEA, the INTERUV ■

- 
- project supported international cooperation, development, and implementation of joint programmes between European universities and higher education institutions from other regions of the world. It served as a valuable preparation for the international dimension of the Erasmus+ programme, which to a great extent supports International Credit Mobility and other international centralised actions such as Capacity Building in Higher Education, Erasmus Mundus Actions, and Jean Monnet activities.

The **EMAP project (Erasmus Mundus Active Participation)** was a joint initiative of several Erasmus Mundus National Structures aimed at enhancing HEIs' participation in Erasmus Mundus Joint Programmes. The project was carried out in two phases, from October 2009 until September 2012, and was financed by the European Commission within the framework of the Erasmus Mundus programme.

Throughout the EMAP project, partners identified and selected consortia of higher education institutions as potential applicants for new Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's and Doctoral programmes, and organised training seminars to help them prepare high-quality proposals. Representatives of successful Erasmus Mundus joint programmes were invited to share their experience regarding various aspects of implementing joint study programmes. They also assisted National Structures in preparing various training and guidance materials available online through a public website. The greatest

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beneficiaries, however, were those who participated in face-to-face seminars, where National Structures and experts representing established Erasmus Mundus consortia exchanged their experience in writing applications and understanding the specific requirements of implementing a joint study programme.

The EMAP project also contributed to the capacity building and networking of participating Erasmus Mundus National Structures. For this purpose, the partners organised training sessions focused on issues of common interest, especially the quality assurance of joint programmes.

ASEMUNDUS was a project coordinated by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and implemented in cooperation with 8 partners — National Structures for Erasmus Mundus from: (1) Austria (OeAD), (2) Belgium (the Flemish Ministry of Education and Training), (3) Cyprus (the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture), (4) Estonia (the Archimedes Foundation), (5) Hungary (the Tempus Public Foundation), (6) Latvia (the State Education Development Agency), (7) Poland (the Foundation for the Development of the Education System), and (8) the Netherlands (NUFFIC).

- By implementing the projects, National Structures wanted to:
 - enhance the visibility of the European Higher Education Area within Asian ASEM region;
 - increase the participation of Asian HEIs in new and/or existing higher education consortia;
 - facilitate and strengthen institutional cooperation between HEIs from Europe and Asia.

JDAZ – Joint Programmes from A to Z. A reference guide for practitioners was a project that resulted in a practical guide for practitioners involved in establishing and managing international joint programmes. Funded by the Erasmus Mundus programme,

- *An impressive budget has been allocated to the Erasmus Mundus Actions since 2004. However, it is almost impossible to calculate the precise amount due to multiple changes in the funding structure and the involvement of both the internal and external EU funds.*

it aimed to assist with the development, implementation, and management of such programmes. The guide covered various aspects of joint programmes, including management, accreditation, and recognition, offering practical examples and key messages for practitioners.

An impressive budget has been allocated to the Erasmus Mundus Actions since 2004. However, it is almost impossible to calculate the precise amount due to multiple changes in the funding structure and the involvement of both the internal and external EU funds. For this reason, there is no reference to the budgetary aspects of the Erasmus Mundus in this article. What should be noted, however, is that one part of the budget was provided for institutions to prepare and run joint study programmes, while another was allocated directly to students awarded the Erasmus Mundus scholarships.

Polish HEIs in Erasmus Mundus Actions

Polish universities recognised the benefits of the Erasmus Mundus programme early on. In its first phase (2004–2008) eight Polish public universities launched 15 Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree programmes (the University of Warsaw, the University of Wrocław, the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, the University of Łódź, Warsaw University of Technology, Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Lublin University of Technology, Gdańsk University of Technology).

During the second phase, Erasmus Mundus Joint Degrees were implemented by 16 universities offering 24 study programmes in cooperation with partners from various EU and third countries.

Participation of Polish HEIs and other institutions/organisations in joint study programmes funded under the Erasmus+ programme is more complex. Lists of programmes selected for funding under Erasmus+ calls are presented at the



■ FRSE website (<https://bit.ly/4oA9iBN>); however, these may differ from data presented by the Commission's Executive Agency or National Agencies. The information presented here is based on data available to the author at the time of writing.

To sum up: without trust, flexibility, academic freedom, willingness to enhance graduates' employability, and desire for teaching excellence, one cannot build a successful joint study programme. □

Joint education in action: lessons from the European University alliances



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The European Universities initiative is a transformative force in higher education, redefining the role of universities in a world shaped by rapid global change. Far more than an educational reform, it is a cornerstone of European renewal, fostering competitiveness, innovation, and unity through deep, transnational collaboration. Lessons drawn from the alliances highlight their significance as catalysts for systemic change, illustrating how collaborative networks can address skills shortages, promote EU values, strengthen global outreach, and modernise higher education systems. Their role extends beyond academia, bridging the knowledge triangle of education, research, and innovation, embodying the "fifth freedom" of knowledge mobility, and fostering a shared European identity capable of navigating an uncertain future.

Europe today faces a "polycrisis" – a convergence of geopolitical tensions, climate imperatives, economic pressures, and intensifying technological competition from global powers like the United States and China. In this volatile landscape, higher education, research, and innovation are no longer peripheral but central to the continent's resilience and prosperity. Traditional university models, often constrained by national and disciplinary silos, are ill-equipped to tackle these multifaceted challenges. Draghi's report warns of Europe's "slow agony" without bold investment in human capital and technology, emphasising that fragmentation in the knowledge market stifles innovation and competitiveness. Letta's vision of a "Fifth Freedom" – the free movement of knowledge, research, and innovation – calls for an integrated ecosystem where talent, data, and ideas flow seamlessly across borders.

The European University alliances embody this vision, acting as dynamic "living laboratories" that test innovative models of transnational education, interdisciplinary research, and socio-economic collaboration. Lessons from their implementation reveal their capacity to foster mutual understanding, accelerate policy reforms, create a cohesive European Education Area, and promote inclusivity by bridging diverse academic traditions and empowering regions with varying levels of resources.

The initiative builds on a rich legacy of European cooperation, rooted in the Bologna Process of 1999, which harmonised degree structures and quality standards across the European Higher Education Area. The political catalyst came from French President Emmanuel Macron's 2017 Sorbonne speech, which envisioned "European Universities" as engines of integration and global competitiveness. Launched under the Erasmus+ programme, the initiative began with a 2019 pilot call, which funded 17 alliances to experiment with integration models, followed by 24 additional alliances in 2020. By 2022-2024, the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 programme scaled up support, with each alliance receiving up to €14.4 million over four years to deepen their impact.

Context

- Launched in 2019 under Erasmus+, inspired by Macron's Sorbonne speech and the Bologna Process.
- Responds to Europe's "polycrisis" and aims for the "fifth freedom": free movement of knowledge, research, and innovation.

Scale

- **65** alliances, **570** universities, **35** countries, **11M** students, **2200** partners (2025).

Key Achievements

- 600+ joint courses, **160** joint degree programmes ("European Degree").
- Micro-credentials in future skills (AI, sustainability, data science).
- Mobility target: **50%** of students with international experience.
- Cross-border research collaboration and infrastructure sharing.

Main Challenges

- Fragmented legal/administrative systems for joint degrees.
- Dependence on short-term Erasmus+ funding.
- Digital, cultural, and resource gaps across institutions.

Priorities Ahead

- EU: legal status for alliances, long-term structural funding, removal of barriers.
- Universities: align strategies, reward transnational work, invest in shared platforms.

Strategic Value

- Enhances Europe's skills, innovation, and competitiveness.
- Bridges research divides, boosts global academic visibility.
- Strengthens European identity, inclusivity, and resilience.

- As of September 2025, the initiative includes 65 alliances, over 570 higher education institutions across 35 countries, a collective student body exceeding 11 million, and more than 2,200 external partners, including businesses, NGOs, and regional authorities. This exponential growth, surpassing the initial ambitions set in the 2017 Council conclusions, underscores the alliances' role as a systemic feature of European higher education, transforming it from a fragmented landscape into a networked ecosystem that connects academic excellence with societal impact and fosters cross-cultural dialogue.

The alliances' achievements lie in their profound transformation of the educational experience, offering lessons on the power of inclusivity, geographical balance, and strategic partnerships. They have developed over 600 joint courses, including 160 full joint degree programmes, enabling students to study across multiple partner universities and earn a single or mutually recognised "European

- Degree”. This innovation dismantles longstanding administrative and legal barriers, creating a seamless academic experience that enhances student mobility, employability, and intercultural competence.

Beyond traditional degrees, the alliances are at the forefront of educational innovation, offering micro-credentials – short, certified learning units in areas like AI ethics, circular economy principles, or data science – that cater to lifelong learners, professionals, and non-traditional students seeking to upskill or reskill. These flexible offerings align with the EU’s skills agenda, addressing labour market demands in rapidly evolving fields. Their commitment to mobility, with the aim that 50% of students have meaningful international experience, is supported by digital tools like the European Student Card, interoperable learning management systems, and blended learning formats that combine virtual and in-person engagement.

However, achieving this mobility target remains challenging due to funding constraints, logistical complexities, and disparities in institutional capacities, underscoring the need for sustained investment and streamlined processes. Lessons from these efforts emphasise the alliances’ role in making education more flexible, accessible, and inclusive, ensuring that benefits reach beyond elite universities to institutions in less advantaged regions, thus creating a balanced educational landscape that reflects Europe’s diversity and promotes equitable access to opportunities.

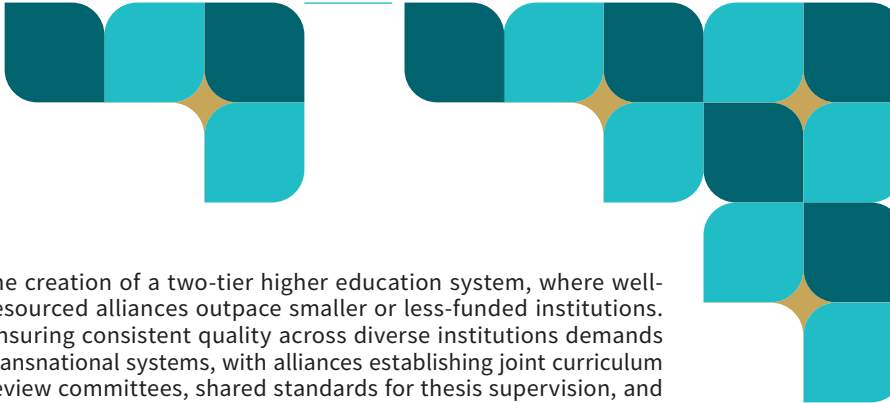
- *The political catalyst came from French President Emmanuel Macron’s 2017 Sorbonne speech, which envisioned “European Universities” as engines of integration and global competitiveness. Launched under the Erasmus+ programme, the initiative began with a 2019 pilot call funding 17 alliances to experiment with integration models, followed by 24 additional alliances in 2020. By 2022–2024, the Erasmus+ 2021–2027 programme scaled up support, with each alliance receiving up to €14.4 million over four years to deepen their impact.*

The path to integration is not without obstacles, yet these challenges have spurred innovation and provided critical lessons on navigating complexity. The heterogeneity of national regulations presents a significant hurdle to accrediting joint degrees, often necessitating compliance with multiple legal frameworks that differ in their credit systems, quality assurance standards, and tuition policies. Alliances are addressing this through pioneering solutions, such as internal quality assurance protocols developed under projects like EUniQ, which establish alliance-wide standards pre-approved by National Agencies, and modular curricula that can be flexibly adapted to meet diverse requirements. Financial sustainability remains a pressing concern, as Erasmus+ funding is project-based and time-limited, creating uncertainty for long-term planning. Alliances are diversifying their revenue streams by blending EU grants with national co-funding, institutional budgets, regional development funds, and private sector partnerships, such as collaborations with tech firms or green energy companies.

Lessons from these efforts underline the urgent need for a shift from temporary grants to long-term, structural funding to avoid ■



■ *The alliances' significance extends far beyond academia, positioning them as strategic engines for Europe's broader objectives. By pooling resources, they deliver cutting-edge curricula in critical areas like renewable energy, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and sustainable urban development. Their interdisciplinary research strengthens the knowledge base for these transitions, addressing skills shortages and equipping graduates to lead in a rapidly evolving global economy.*



■ the creation of a two-tier higher education system, where well-resourced alliances outpace smaller or less-funded institutions. Ensuring consistent quality across diverse institutions demands transnational systems, with alliances establishing joint curriculum review committees, shared standards for thesis supervision, and unified student feedback mechanisms that often exceed national requirements, fostering trust and academic rigor. Digital and cultural interoperability presents another challenge, as connecting disparate IT systems requires significant technical investment. Alliances are building virtual campuses and interoperable platforms, while fostering a shared “alliance culture” through joint staff training, student onboarding events, and collaborative governance structures that bridge linguistic and cultural differences. These efforts highlight their role in driving policy reforms, facilitating a European Degree, and reinforcing academic values such as freedom, inclusivity, and democracy.

The alliances' significance extends far beyond academia, positioning them as strategic engines for Europe's broader objectives. By pooling resources, they deliver cutting-edge curricula in critical areas like renewable energy, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and sustainable urban development. Their interdisciplinary research strengthens the knowledge base for these transitions, addressing skills shortages and equipping graduates to lead in a rapidly evolving global economy. In the European Research Area, alliances foster cross-border research teams, share infrastructure such as laboratories and digital archives, and promote researcher mobility, reducing the research and innovation divide between Europe's core and peripheral regions. Their global outreach enhances Europe's attractiveness as a hub for talent, with initiatives like Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degrees drawing international students and researchers, reinforcing the EU's position in global academic and innovation networks.

To fully realise their potential, stakeholders must act on lessons drawn from recent developments, such as the European Parliament's September 2025 resolution and the Union of Skills initiative. Policymakers should establish a European legal status for alliances to streamline joint recruitment, asset management, and degree accreditation, simplifying administrative processes and enhancing operational efficiency. Shifting from project-based grants to long-term, structural co-funding in the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework, incorporating synergies with programmes such as Horizon Europe, the European Regional Development Fund, and private sector contributions, is critical to ensuring sustainability and avoiding disparities. Systematically removing legislative barriers in areas like quality assurance, tuition fees, and social security for mobile staff and students will facilitate seamless integration.

University leaders must embed alliance goals into their institutions' core strategies, aligning budgets, hiring practices, and career progression to incentivise participation in transnational activities. Encouraging bottom-up engagement by recognising transnational teaching, research, and administrative contributions, as well as simplifying bureaucratic processes will foster a culture of collaboration. Investing in shared infrastructure – robust digital ■



- platforms, joint research facilities, and common administrative services – will create economies of scale and deepen integration, particularly in strategic areas like climate change mitigation, digital skills, and strategic autonomy in critical technologies.

- *Encouraging bottom-up engagement by recognising transnational teaching, research, and administrative contributions, as well as simplifying bureaucratic processes will foster a culture of collaboration.*

The European University alliances are more than an ambitious policy; they are a profound expression of the European project, with lessons affirming their transformative potential in exceeding initial goals, fostering inclusivity, and driving systemic reform despite complex barriers. They address the strategic imperatives outlined by Draghi and Letta, proving that a unified knowledge ecosystem is achievable. Across classrooms, laboratories, and virtual campuses, a new generation of Europeans is learning and collaborating without borders, cultivating the human capital, innovative capacity, and shared identity needed to navigate an uncertain future. By bridging education, research, and innovation, promoting EU values such as democracy and sustainability, and enhancing global competitiveness, the alliances reaffirm education's position as the cornerstone of Europe's renewal, equipping the continent to face global challenges with confidence, resilience, and unity. □

National Agency's role in promoting joint and double degrees in Germany



Beate Körner
Head of the section Erasmus+ Partnerships and Cooperation Projects in the Erasmus+ National Agency for Higher Education of the DAAD

As a department within the DAAD¹, NA DAAD has been the National Agency for Erasmus+ Higher Education Cooperation in the Erasmus+ programme and its predecessor programmes since 1987, making us one of the most experienced National Agencies in Europe. The NA DAAD is responsible for implementing the Erasmus+ programme for higher education in Germany. In close cooperation with the German Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space, it mediates between the interests of German universities and European institutions and develops further programmes in the spirit of Erasmus+. In cooperation with other departments of the DAAD, the NA creates synergies and complementarities for funding programmes within Europe.

Since 1987, the EU's education programmes have become important instruments for the internationalisation of German higher education institutions. The current funding opportunities in the Erasmus+ programme provide sustainable support for academic cooperation, for example, through the mobility of students and staff at higher education institutions, but also through strategic partnerships and capacity-building projects. In addition, we support higher education institutions in the further development of their internationalisation concepts. By carrying out our tasks, we promote the internationalisation of German higher education institutions in a European and global context and contribute to the further development of the European Higher Education Area.

NA DAAD's support to Erasmus Mundus

NA DAAD is also an information and advisory centre for the Erasmus+ higher education programmes administered in Brussels, the Bologna Process, and the ASEM education process. One outstanding example of this commitment is NA DAAD's role in the Erasmus Mundus Programme since its beginnings in 2004. The NA became National Contact Point for Erasmus Mundus, and up to now, we have been advising German HEIs in their application to Erasmus Mundus – in the beginning for joint master's and doctoral programmes; later on also for Mobility Networks, and today again for Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters and Design Measures.

For 20 years, the programme has been a catalyst for global educational exchange, personal development of participants, and institutional excellence. To mark this anniversary, the study *Beyond Borders and Boundaries* was published in 2024 ■

¹ www.daad.de/der-daad/de

- by the Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative². The initiative is implemented by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), the DAAD, and other partners. The study examined the impact of Erasmus Mundus on the participating universities and students, and formulated ideas for future developments. Overall, it has become very clear that the programme has had an enormous impact on developing and advancing joint and double degrees in Europe: by 2023, 585 Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes had been approved, involving around 600 higher education institutions from 140 countries. During the same period, 34,000 students from 179 countries received a scholarship. A total of 111,000 mobility stays in Europe and beyond were realised³.

Germany has played an important part in achieving these figures, partly thanks to the support of NA DAAD. Since 2004, 255 German universities have participated in 212 Erasmus Mundus Master's programmes. This corresponds to 36% of the 585 projects funded by the EU over the last 20 years. Thus, Germany ranks third among the top 5 countries by number of university participations as coordinators and partners: France – 376; Spain – 339; Germany – 255; Italy – 250; Portugal – 170⁴.

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National programmes

Even though more and more international degree programmes have been created in Germany, the HRK University Compass does not explicitly distinguish between joint and double degrees, but only lists internationally oriented degree programmes⁵. In 2023, there were 2,894 internationally oriented and 1,917 English-language degree programmes. The proportion of internationally oriented programmes was 6.76% (bachelor's) and 20.49% (master's).

² The four-year (2023–2027) Erasmus Mundus Support Initiative (EMSI) is funded by the European Union (EU) under the Erasmus+ programme and implemented for EACEA and the European Commission, by a consortium formed of NTT DATA, ACA, DAAD (Brussels) and TIPIK.

³ Erasmus+ Wirkungsbericht 2024, p. 78.

⁴ European Commission: 20 years of Erasmus Mundus Beyond Borders and Boundaries, p. 10.

⁵ Note on the data basis: The label "internationally oriented degree programmes" is not uniformly defined and is used differently by different universities, which can limit comparability. Degree programmes are considered "international" if the main language of instruction is English – with the exception of English/American studies (unless it is a double degree) and teacher training and purely minor degree programmes. See: www.hsi-monitor.de/themen/internationale-studiengaenge/internationale-studiengaenge-grunddaten.

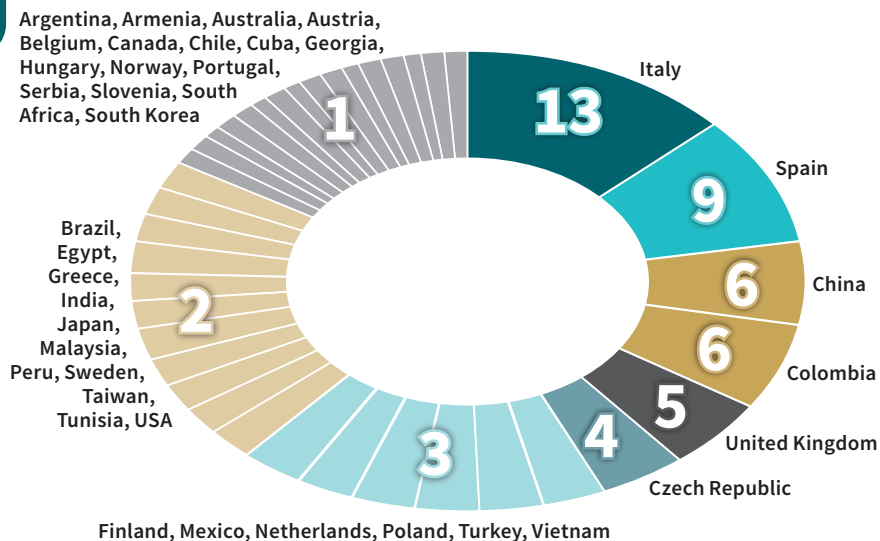
■ *In Germany, as in many other countries, there were and still are different legal, legislative, and administrative challenges concerning joint and double degrees. These are manifold and can range from accreditation issues, institutional and recognition barriers, to legislative challenges.*

■ Nevertheless, there is a wide variety of double and joint degrees in Germany. Concerning double degrees, according to HSI Monitor⁶, which is based on data from the HRK's Higher Education Compass, the number of double degrees has quadrupled since 2009 and stood at 869 degree programmes in 2023⁷. The most common partner countries in 2023 were France (455), the United Kingdom (118), and the USA (114).

Beyond the NA DAADs activities and support, there are other national programmes in Germany supporting joint and double degrees. The most well-known one is the DAAD programme "Integrated international degree programmes with double degrees"⁸. It funds degree programmes at universities and universities of applied sciences that lead to both national degrees after a course of study completed partly at a German, and partly at a foreign university. The degrees can be awarded as joint degrees (awarding of a joint degree) or as double degrees (awarding of degrees from both partner universities). The degree programmes are intended to make a lasting contribution to the establishment and expansion of international structures at the German higher education institutions in order to strengthen the exchange of university teachers and students.

In the current academic year 2024/2025, DAAD is funding 77 projects, of which 65 are double degrees and 12 joint degrees. The double degrees are funded with the following partner countries: ■

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⁶ www.hsi-monitor.de/themen/internationale-studiengaenge

⁷ Double degree programmes in Germany: www.hsi-monitor.de/themen/internationale-studiengaenge/internationale-studiengaenge-grunddaten/doppelabschluss-studiengaenge-grunddaten.

⁸ www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/further-information-on-daad-programmes/integrated-international-degree-programmes-with-double-degrees

■ Challenges and further developments

Besides looking at successes and funding figures, one certainly also has to look at challenges and hurdles. In Germany, as in many other countries, there were and still are different legal, legislative, and administrative challenges concerning joint and double degrees. These are manifold and can range from accreditation issues, institutional and recognition barriers, to legislative challenges. According to my knowledge, there is no national overall collection of challenges and improvements regarding joint and double degrees in Germany. There have been several studies in the past by DAAD identifying obstacles and solutions which can be found on our website⁹.

NA DAAD and DAAD are also constantly looking at evaluations on the European level, such as the impact of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes – EQAR¹⁰. Currently, we are closely monitoring the results of the piloting of the European Degree (*The road towards a possible joint European degree*¹¹), as well as findings concerning the European University Initiative (*Report on the outcomes and transformational potential of the European Universities initiative*¹²) that help to understand the current situation and make improvements, also on the national level. Since NA DAAD is advising and counselling German HEIs on the different Erasmus+ policy support actions, such as the European Degree, and DAAD is running the national support programme European University Networks (EUN) – national initiative – DAAD¹³, we are currently in the process of further evaluating the impact the above-mentioned evaluations have on double and joint degrees in Germany.

We will publish these results on our website: [eu.daad.de](https://www.daad.de).

⁹ <https://www.daad.de/de/infos-services-fuer-hochschulen/weiterfuehrende-infos-zu-daad-foerderprogrammen/publikationen-zum-thema-doppelabschluesse>

¹⁰ www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes

¹¹ op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2844365b-649f-11ed-92ed-01aa75ed71a1

¹² op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/db43f6ca-da14-11ef-be2a-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

¹³ www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/further-information-on-daad-programmes/eun

Cooperate, innovate, graduate: Erasmus+ and the future of higher education. The dynamics supported by the French higher education framework



Nelly Fesseau
Director of the Erasmus+
France Agency for Education
and Training

The Agence Erasmus+ France / Éducation Formation ensures the promotion, implementation, evaluation, monitoring, and communication of the Erasmus+ programme for France in the fields of education and training. It works in close liaison with the Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research – the national authority for the Erasmus+ programme in France – and in liaison with the ministries involved in its governance, i.e., the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty, and the Ministry of Culture. The Agency currently has more than 200 staff based in Bordeaux. The tasks of the Agence Erasmus+ France / Éducation Formation are part of the European and national priorities for education, training, apprenticeship, higher education, and professional integration.

The internationalisation of higher education and research is a complex issue that goes far beyond the mere mobility of students. It addresses issues of global competitiveness, visibility, and influence. In this context, strengthening the European dimension of French higher education institutions (HEIs) is a priority. The development of double and joint degrees through international partnership is one of the many levels of action. For a higher education institution, double and joint degrees are tools for increasing attractiveness and a mark of excellence of its training offer. These courses offer students the best education from each partner in a multilingual context and with the benefit of one or more diplomas recognised in several countries. For the students, this in-depth collaboration between higher education institutions provides real assets for greater professional integration.

The European Commission's initiative to propose a European degree by 2029 has once again put these integrated pathways at the forefront. The Erasmus+ programme, the EU's flagship funding programme for education and training, provides various tools to support the deployment and implementation of these degrees. France offers a particularly favourable ground for the development of double and joint degrees due to the international partnerships of its universities, as well as its strong involvement in two flagship actions of the Erasmus+ programme: the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degrees and the alliances of European Universities.

Erasmus+ mobilities to spread European values and increase the attractiveness of France

Erasmus+, the European programme for education, training, youth, and sport, has transformed more than 16 million lives since its inception in 1987. In 2014, it has opened to all audiences in the fields of education and training, formal and non-formal; not only students, but also people from lower education, apprentices, and adults in ■

- up-skilling and re-skilling. Every year, nearly 150,000 French people benefit from this programme, which embodies mobility, cooperation, and European unity. Erasmus+ is the symbol of a successful European construction, whose actors share the same values.

However, despite a sharply increasing budget for the 2021–2027 period, the Erasmus+ programme is under strain. In France, the satisfaction rate of the demand for funding is 40% in the field of vocational education and training, 33% in school education, and 57.5% in higher education. Our current collective challenge is to convince the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of the European Union to increase funding for the next 2028–2034 programme, so that staying abroad for a period of time becomes the norm in an increasingly inclusive and united Europe.

The international mobility of students, academic and administrative staff, is a means of disseminating cultural, economic, and political values, both European and French. In this sense, Erasmus+ is an incomparable formative experience, contributing to equal opportunities and the defence of democratic values. This is the feedback from the French beneficiaries who have participated on mobility:

- 76% report feeling more like European citizens as a result of their mobility;
- 89% still feel the positive effects on their working life, 5 years after their Erasmus+.

During the period between 2021 and 2027, France has been the 1st sending country: more than 6,000 French organisations offer the possibility to take part in Erasmus+ with top 3 destinations being Spain, Germany, and Italy; and the 4th hosting country with top 3 origin countries being Germany, Italy, and Spain. France also hosts

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an increasing number of students from Europe, with a 5% increase of European students in one year and 24% in five years. These students come in particular from southern Europe countries, such as Spain – the third-largest student nationality in France – and Italy – the fourth-largest.

In this context, the development of double and joint diplomas responds to a dual challenge: maintain this dynamic of Erasmus+ mobilities and foster the graduating mobility. Such curricula add to the attractiveness policy, and make it possible to target students likely to pursue their studies through research projects in France.

Erasmus+ – innovative cooperations to stand out

The Erasmus+ programme is also a source of innovation that enables higher education institutions to stand out in the international ■



■ *Erasmus+ encourages HEIs to undergo transformation by joining partner networks. These strong partnerships make it possible to improve their practices, not only in the context of internationalisation, but also in other key areas, such as student life, career guidance and integration, social inclusion, and green transition. These networks make it possible to offer a quality training offer.*

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Thanks to the projects funded under Key Action 2 of the Erasmus+ programme “Cooperation between organisations and institutions”, HEIs can collaborate with a wide range of organisations, whether French, European, or international: universities, schools, local authorities, trade federations, companies, associations, etc. The aim is to cooperate in discussing common topics, such as the design of joint training programmes, and other priority themes for the European Union (citizenship, inclusion, sustainable, and digital development), such as the need for urgent skills.

France is particularly active in two actions: Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters and European University initiative.

Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters

This programme aims to increase the attractiveness of the European higher education, as well as the employability of students, by financially supporting the implementation of excellent training and by offering scholarships to the best students in the world. They are master's degrees delivered jointly by international consortia of HEIs and culminating in the award of a joint degree or multiple degrees. For the past 20 years, this action has promoted the development of highly integrated joint programmes and the establishment of joint diploma mechanisms.

France is the first country in terms of participating HEIs. In 2024, 114 out of the 214 Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters involved a French institution as coordinator or partner, and 23 out of the 39 new masters selected in 2025 involved a French institution. In its 20 years of existence, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters have enabled France to welcome more than 17,450 foreign students.

These diplomas converge with France's geographical priorities: the majority of the scholarship holders in these programmes come from Europe and Asia. France's priority in the first area is to promote graduating mobility, and in the second, to attract more students.

By enabling the development of strong partnerships between institutions, Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters also play a significant role in the structuring of European Universities initiative.

European Universities

Echoing the French President of the Republic's speech at the Sorbonne in 2017, the European Universities initiative launched in 2018 made it possible to form 65 alliances of European Universities, bringing together more than 570 HEIs of all types and sizes in 35 countries. France is present in 55 of these alliances through the participation of 65 French institutions.

The European Universities initiative, funded by the European Union through the Erasmus+ programme and supported in France by France2030, follows a long-term strategy to offer new learning, research, and innovation opportunities to all their communities. ■

- *The high participation of French institutions has a direct impact on the share of students enrolled in a European university. France, followed by Spain and Italy, is the country with the largest share of students enrolled in an institution that is a member of a European University initiative.*

- These projects contribute to the outreach of the French higher education and research system. The high participation of French institutions has a direct impact on the share of students enrolled in a European university. France, followed by Spain and Italy, is the country with the largest share of students enrolled in an institution that is a member of a European University.

The great strength of these alliances is also the "multi-partner" operation between a large number of partner countries. Between 2019 and 2024, French HEIs that are part of an alliance increased the number of their international partners fivefold, and from 23 to 34 partner countries. Germany, France, Spain, and Italy have strong partnerships with the other 34 countries involved in the alliances. Polish HEIs are not to be overlooked, as they increased their partnerships between the 2023 and 2024 calls by 40% and currently have 32 partner countries in their alliances.

The Report on the results and transformative potential of the European initiative for universities, published by the EC on 24 January, 2025, outlines the first impacts of this initiative:

- more pedagogical innovation: The alliances have collectively established more than 600 joint study programmes and courses at all levels, including around 160 joint degree programmes. They have also launched more than 430 short courses leading to microcredentials;
- more mobilities: Since 2019, there has been a 400% increase in intra-alliance student mobility and a 200% increase in staff mobility. Most alliances have also put in place common mobility services, offices, and measures such as financial assistance, multilateral mobility agreements, and automatic recognition of mobility within the alliance.

In addition, when we look at Erasmus+ projects carried out by French institutions engaged in alliances before they participated in it, we observe that the vast majority of them have carried out several other Erasmus+ actions (since 2014):

- 47.7% were involved in a Cooperation partnership for a higher education project;
- 60% in an Erasmus Mundus action;
- 41.5% conducted a Jean Monnet activity.

For the teams involved, Erasmus+ projects are real networks to work together, test and strengthen their practices, innovate in the higher education and research domain, with the unique advantage of knowing how to collaborate between different cultures.

Diplomas awarded in an international partnership – a strong French expertise

In France, diplomas awarded in an international partnership are governed by Articles D.613-17 et seq. of the Education Code. The international partnership is governed by an agreement concluded between one or more French HEIs and one or more foreign HEIs. The procedures for issuing this type of diplomas are then laid down by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research in the circular ■

- 
- dated 7 May 2023 (NOR: ESR2312764C). The diploma models are set out in the annex.

The awarded diploma is recognised in France, and it must also be recognised in the partner country(ies) according to the terms of the agreement signed between the institutions. A joint diploma is issued if the foreign institutions agree to retain the French parchment model, otherwise, each institution issues its own diploma (a double or multiple diploma).

As for the PhD, the international partnership responds to a more precise formalism, and only a cotutelle is possible.

A tradition of double degree with historical European partners

France has forged partnerships with several of its counterparts to work towards the development of double, multiple, or joint degrees. The Franco-German University (FGU), created in 1998, is probably the most successful network in this area. It brings together no less than 210 French and German HEIs – as well as some from non-EU countries – and supports almost 200 integrated Franco-German courses. They cover all disciplines and their training must be designed according to a standardised pedagogical curriculum. More than 5700 students are now enrolled in a dual degree programme supported by the UFA. The Franco-Italian University (FIU), also created in 1998, “promotes academic and scientific collaboration between France

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and Italy”, such as the deployment of double and joint master’s degrees through the Vinci funding programme. As a result, 135 French and Italian HEIs receive financial support.

However, it is not always necessary to go through a Franco-foreign body to set up double degree courses. The French HEIs have established 57 such curricula with their Polish counterparts, and several other European countries (e.g., Netherlands, Lithuania). The Euroguidance website lists the sites with information about the courses with French-foreign diplomas.

The Franco-Foreign Universities model is also developing in favour of partnerships with countries in the European Union’s Eastern Neighbourhood, such as the French University in Armenia (2000), the Franco-Azerbaijani University (2014), and the Franco-Georgian University (2020).

Thesis cotutelle – a special form of partnership

A true international partnership between two research teams, the international doctoral cotutelle allows for a joint direction of a doctorate by a French HEI and a foreign HEI with a view of obtaining a double degree or joint diploma. This system offers a number of advantages: shared mobility between two countries, ■

- dual expertise in the management of research, access to the disciplinary and transversal infrastructures and training of the two universities, a chance to develop an international professional network, etc.

To underline the importance of doctoral training, doctoral students, and doctors in Europe, France is launching a European Doctoral Day to be held every 13 May, starting in 2026. To support this initiative, you can sign the Declaration of Support for the European Doctoral Day Initiative, available online.

The Erasmus+ programme supports a wide variety of cooperation models for resilient, innovative, and attractive European and French higher education and research. The Erasmus+ programme must therefore remain a widely accessible and ambitious programme.

The proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2028–2034, presented on 16 July by the European Commission,

- *The proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034, presented on 16 July by the European Commission, reinforces the place of joint degrees among the tools of European and international cooperation supported by the Erasmus+ programme. This includes specific mobility grants for joint study programmes, as well as support for the implementation of joint training programmes.*

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On the specific issue of the European diploma, European ministers agreed on a three-step roadmap. First, finalise preparations for the common European diploma label (2025-2026). Then, deploy and evaluate the said label while launching feasibility studies for a European diploma (2026–2028). Finally, in 2029, decide on the action based on the obtained results.

France, with its long tradition of dual degrees and its strong presence in Erasmus Mundus and European Universities actions, plans to be a precursor for experimenting with this future European degree. □

Building bridges through Joint Programmes: Poland's experience and vision for the European Degree



Katarzyna Aleksy
Director of the Higher
Education Programmes
Department, Foundation
for the Development
of the Education System

Across Europe, joint and double programmes have long symbolised more than cooperation between universities. They represent shared values, trust, and a collective pursuit of excellence. They are the living proof that higher education can transcend borders, combining academic traditions, languages, and legal systems into a shared European space of learning and innovation. For Poland, this journey has been one of steady growth, adaptation, and contribution – a bridge between national experience and the broader vision of a European Degree.

Over the past decades, internationalisation has become a central pillar of higher education policy across Europe. Joint and double programmes (often collectively called joint studies) are among the most advanced manifestations of this internationalisation: they require coordination of curricula, legal frameworks, recognition systems, academic quality assurance, and institutional capacities across national borders.

In Poland, the National Agency for the Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps Programmes – the Foundation for the Development of the Education System (FRSE)¹ – has played an important role in translating the European vision of joint and transnational study programmes into practice. As the National Agency for Erasmus+ and other EU education initiatives, the Foundation has built a comprehensive framework of support that combines institutional guidance, data collection, and promotional activities to strengthen the capacity of Polish higher education institutions to engage in joint studies.

FRSE, established in 1993, is one of the most important actors in the Polish educational landscape, with a mission closely tied to the implementation of European frameworks in education and training. Its remit extends across all sectors of education – formal, non-formal, and informal – and it manages a wide portfolio of programmes that support international cooperation and the development of innovative practices. These include Erasmus+, Eurodesk, Europass, eTwinning, Euroguidance, Eurydice, and EPALE. Through these instruments, FRSE has consistently promoted mobility, strengthened institutional capacity and facilitated international partnerships.

The Erasmus+ programme sets out a clear vision for international cooperation: emphasising inclusion, digital transformation, green transition, and active citizenship as cross-cutting priorities. FRSE plays a pivotal role in enabling universities to participate effectively in joint educational initiatives, ensuring that strategic European objectives are adapted to the local context while building institutional capacity and promoting sustainability. ■

¹ www.frse.org.pl

■ *FRSE supports recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes through instruments like Europass, while reinforcing alignment with the Bologna Process, EHEA and EQF. Finally, through extensive support for student and staff mobility, FRSE facilitates the practical implementation of joint programmes and enables the exchange of expertise across borders.*

■ FRSE's contribution to the development of joint and double programmes is particularly visible in several areas. The Foundation plays an analytical and knowledge-sharing role, publishing studies that document the legal, regulatory and operational challenges faced by Polish institutions. FRSE supports recognition of qualifications and learning outcomes through instruments like Europass, while reinforcing alignment with the Bologna Process, EHEA, and EQF. Finally, through extensive support for student and staff mobility, FRSE facilitates the practical implementation of joint programmes and enables the exchange of expertise across borders.

Beyond the administrative management of EU funds, FRSE has a broad mandate that encompasses strategic support for universities, the development of national priorities aligned with European objectives and the fostering of partnerships both within Poland and internationally. FRSE acts as a bridge between the overarching European vision of Erasmus+ and the practical realities of Polish HEIs.

The evolving landscape of join education in Poland

In the last two decades, Poland's higher education institutions have embraced joint and double programmes not only as instruments of internationalisation but as genuine tools of transformation. The momentum began with the Erasmus Mundus programme, which opened a new chapter for Polish universities. Today, joint initiatives are an integral part of institutional strategies, supported by national frameworks and the FRSE as the National Agency for Erasmus+.

The Polish experience is rooted in diversity. From large, research-intensive universities to dynamic technical institutions, Polish universities have demonstrated how international cooperation enhances both academic quality and institutional capacity. Each collaboration – whether with European partners or through global consortia – has required not only administrative flexibility, but also cultural openness and a long-term vision of shared responsibility.

Concrete achievements and good practices

Over the past decade, Poland has hosted or co-created many Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's programmes and multiple double degree initiatives at the master and doctoral levels. These programmes not only attract top international talent but also generate strong academic communities that continue to collaborate in research, innovation, and alumni engagement.

Beyond the Erasmus Mundus framework, many Polish universities have launched bilateral and network-based programmes that serve as laboratories for the future European Degree. These initiatives test new governance models, joint curricula, and shared quality assurance frameworks – all of which are foundational to the emerging European Degree Label.

Legal, regulatory and policy frameworks

To move from vision to action, a supportive legal and regulatory framework is essential. In Poland, the Law on Higher Education ■



■ (Act of 20 July 2018 Law on Higher Education and Science²) provides for joint studies with foreign higher education institutions, stipulating under Article 60 that universities may offer joint programmes if certain conditions are met, including that the degree programme is established by statute or formally authorised. The Integrated Qualifications System, instituted in 2016, complements this by defining qualifications in terms of learning outcomes – covering knowledge, skills, and competencies – rather than simply hours or institutional procedures. This approach facilitates the design of joint and double programmes that are coherent and compatible across borders. At the same time, national policies on recognition of qualifications, validated learning and the implementation of ECTS, aligned with the Bologna Process and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) provide further guidance for cross-border programme harmonisation. Finally, clear terminology is essential: empirical studies indicate that inconsistent understanding of terms such as “joint degree”, “double degree,” or “joint programme” has been a barrier.

FRSE, in its advisory and capacity-building role, supports efforts to clarify these definitions and encourages higher education institutions to specify which model they are pursuing. Together, these legal and systemic enablers create the space in which tools, funding mechanisms and institutional strategies can operate effectively.

Finally, promotion and reputational support constitute an essential strategic priority: FRSE actively raises awareness of opportunities for HEIs, disseminates best practices and encourages

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institutions to take leadership roles within consortia, helping them act as coordinators in transnational partnerships wherever possible.

From support to systemic impact

As the National Agency for Erasmus+, FRSE has played a key role in making joint and double programmes more accessible, better understood, and better managed across Poland. Through national seminars, expert consultations, and publications, FRSE has supported institutional teams in building capacity and navigating complex administrative realities. Importantly, FRSE’s experience has shown that while the barriers are often legal or administrative, the real challenge lies in fostering institutional readiness – embedding international cooperation into everyday practice rather than treating it as an exception.

In recent years, FRSE has also focused on widening participation. It has promoted inclusivity by encouraging smaller universities ■

² Ustawa z dnia 20 lipca 2018 r. – Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce

- and regional institutions to join consortia and by supporting staff training in project management, quality assurance, and digital collaboration. This aligns with the European Union's broader commitment to reducing disparities between well-established and emerging academic centres – ensuring that the European Degree becomes a truly pan-European project, not one limited to a few.

Through conferences, networking events and dissemination of good practices, FRSE helps universities learn from successful projects and avoid common pitfalls. This network-building function is essential for overcoming the administrative and cultural barriers.

Persistent challenges and emerging solutions

One of the most significant barriers is legal and regulatory complexity. Differing national laws, accreditation requirements and recognition procedures create considerable obstacles. Domestic regulations do not always clearly define the conditions for awarding a joint diploma as opposed to separate national diplomas, forcing universities to seek interpretive guidance. This situation complicates not only the development but also the long-term implementation of programmes.

Another challenge is terminology confusion. Concepts such as “joint degree”, “double degree”, “joint study programme” or “double study programme” are sometimes used interchangeably by higher education institutions. This inconsistency can lead to misunderstandings in partner agreements, accreditation processes, recognition procedures and quality assurance frameworks.

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The administrative cost and workload of developing joint programmes also represent a major hurdle. Negotiating curricula, harmonising learning outcomes, coordinating multiple accreditation agencies, managing partner relations, and drafting legal agreements demand significant time and human resources. Many universities report that the burden often exceeds their available staff capacity, creating barriers especially for smaller institutions.

A further difficulty is ensuring sustainability and funding over time. Maintaining programmes beyond the grant period – covering faculty salaries, partner contributions, logistics of mobility and adequate student recruitment – remains challenging. Without stable financial frameworks, programmes risk becoming unsustainable or imbalanced.

Capacity disparities among institutions compound these issues. Larger or internationally experienced universities are better positioned to coordinate joint initiatives, while smaller or regional institutions often lack the necessary administrative, legal, and infrastructural resources.



■ The recognition of diplomas and degrees across borders continues to pose a challenge. Even where joint or double programmes exist, mutual recognition is complicated by bureaucratic hurdles, national legal differences or limited labour market acceptance, which can affect graduates' prospects as well as institutional cooperation.

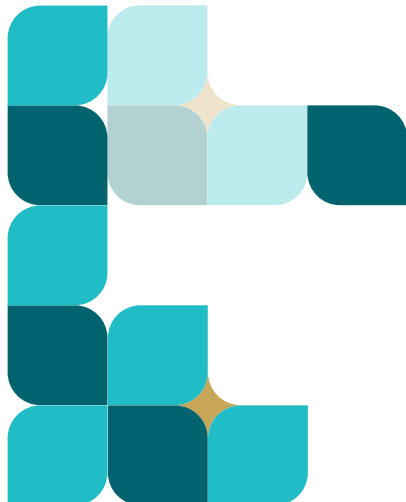
Finally, student mobility constraints remain a limiting factor. Visa requirements, language barriers, insufficient funding for international stays and other logistical obstacles hinder students' participation in the mobility periods that are often mandatory for completing joint or double programmes.

In addition, differences in academic cultures – such as divergent approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment – further complicate cross-border collaboration and require careful alignment.

Looking ahead – a shared European vision

Joint programmes are more than administrative achievements – they are about people learning to collaborate across borders, systems, and cultures. In this sense, Poland's story is emblematic of Europe's own transformation: from cooperation to integration, from pilot projects to shared frameworks, from ambition to practice.

The forthcoming European Degree Label offers a new horizon. It challenges universities and policymakers to think beyond national boundaries and to design a common academic space where excellence and inclusivity go hand in hand. Poland, through continued work and a committed higher education community, stands ready to contribute to this vision – not as a follower, but as a partner shaping the European Degree of the future. □



Professional and institutional pathways to joint educational cooperation: International Relations Offices Forum



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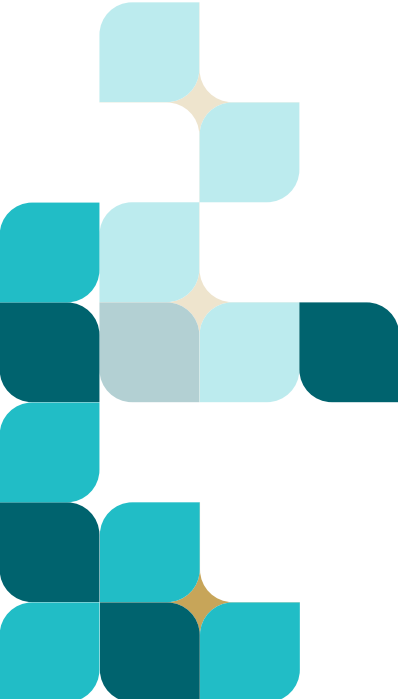
In the evolving landscape of global higher education, effective international collaboration is increasingly recognised as a key driver of academic excellence and institutional prestige. Universities seeking to strengthen their international presence must rely not only on formal frameworks and partnerships but also on coordinated institutional mechanisms that support joint educational initiatives. One of the platforms facilitating internationalisation in Poland is the International Relations Offices Forum – IROs Forum, a national network of international relations offices of higher education institutions. Established nearly twenty years ago, the Forum has continuously evolved into a highly effective hub for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and the development of innovative practices within the international education landscape. Its long-standing presence at the national level has made it an essential mechanism for connecting university international centres, assisting joint initiatives and supporting professional growth. Its core mission is to create a space for sharing experiences, discussing emerging challenges and collectively developing solutions that enhance the quality and effectiveness of international cooperation. Through formal and informal interactions, the Forum enables its members to exchange best practices, consult on new ideas and continuously improve processes that support the internationalisation of HEIs in Poland. By enabling efficient management, promoting innovative practices, and fostering collaboration among universities, the IROs Forum contributes to strengthening institutional prestige and enhancing visibility and reputation of Polish higher education on the international stage. Participation in the Forum demonstrates an institution's commitment to excellence in international cooperation, positioning it as an attractive partner for global academic collaboration.

Space for professional development

The IROs Forum as a unique, long-standing platform promotes institutional cooperation among higher education institutions across Poland and internationally. Fundamentally, the Forum is a community of practice built on trust, mutual respect and shared expertise. It serves not only as a network of offices but as a collaborative space for consultation on operational matters, procedures and strategic initiatives. Through these interactions, the Forum ensures that experience and knowledge within the network benefit everyone, promoting continuous improvement, innovation, and professional development. The primary purpose of the Forum is to ensure that international relations offices can work closely together, learning from each other's experiences, consulting on new ideas, and developing solutions to emerging challenges. Operational matters, procedures and strategic initiatives are regularly discussed, ensuring that knowledge



■ *IROs Forum is a unique, long-standing platform that promotes administrative and institutional cooperation among higher education institutions across and beyond Poland. At its core, the Forum is a community of practice, built on trust, mutual respect and shared expertise. It functions not merely as a network of offices but as a collaborative space where members consult one another on operational issues, administrative procedures and strategic initiatives.*



■ is effectively shared across institutions. This collaborative approach strengthens not only individual offices but also the wider network of universities involved in international cooperation. Unlike formal administrative hierarchies, the Forum functions as a professional network, a collaborative environment where expertise is shared to support joint decision-making and foster innovation, demonstrating that institutional pathways are essential for successful educational cooperation. By integrating professional networking, knowledge sharing and strategic coordination, the IROs Forum has become a cornerstone of international collaboration in the Polish higher education landscape. Its nearly twenty-year history illustrates the transformative power of structured and sustained collaboration.

The IROs Forum is headed by the President who works closely with the Steering Committee, which oversees the strategic development of the Forum's activities, and dedicated Expert Groups focusing on specific areas of cooperation as well as professional support. The Steering Committee is responsible for setting priorities, coordinating projects, and approving new initiatives, while the Expert Groups focus on specific topics such as academic mobility, admission requirements, digitalisation of processes and innovations in managing international cooperation. Currently, the Forum comprises 35 active members across the country, with several new applications received annually. The IROs Forum continues to welcome new members, expanding both its reach and influence. The inclusion of new offices and professionals brings diverse experiences and perspectives into the Forum. Established members provide guidance, share knowledge and support professional development, while newcomers contribute fresh ideas and innovative approaches. This structure allows the Forum to operate efficiently, ensuring both strategic continuity and flexibility in responding to emerging challenges in the internationalisation of higher education. One of the most significant features of the network is the high-quality collaboration among its members. Forum participants actively engage in discussions, consultations and peer mentoring, creating an environment in which innovative ideas are nurtured and tested. Members share solutions to practical challenges, exchange experiences in managing various aspects of international cooperation and discuss processes that support internationalisation. Regular meetings provide opportunities to collaborate on specific initiatives. This allows members to review policies, develop new approaches, and create shared resources, such as guidelines, templates, and procedural handbooks. Through its collaborative framework, the Forum ensures that the expertise of one office benefits the entire network, resulting in more efficient, standardised and effective practices. During its almost twenty-year history, the Forum has grown from a small network into a nationally recognised platform, and thanks to its dynamic exchange of information it remains relevant, adaptive, and capable of responding to the evolving challenges of higher education and international cooperation.

Building trust and encouraging open dialogue

The IROs Forum places a strong emphasis on professional development offering its members opportunities to enhance their skills and ■

■ knowledge in the international higher education field. In recent years, the Forum has organised specialised workshops, professional seminars, and conferences addressing both practical and strategic aspects of international cooperation. Topics covered include effective management of mobility programmes, services offered for international students and academics, regulatory compliance, intercultural communication, and innovations in procedures and management. These events offer opportunities to present joint projects, share case studies and discuss innovative practices in international relations management, and attendees can network with peers and foster connections. The preparation of joint publications and posters represents yet another key dimension of the Forum's work. Members collaborate to develop materials that highlight the best practices, document innovative initiatives, and provide guidance for other institutions. These materials are shared with

■ *By fostering dialogue, mentoring, and collaborative problem-solving, the Forum ensures that international relations offices across Poland are not isolated units but parts of a coordinated system that strengthens the visibility and reputation of the entire higher education sector.*

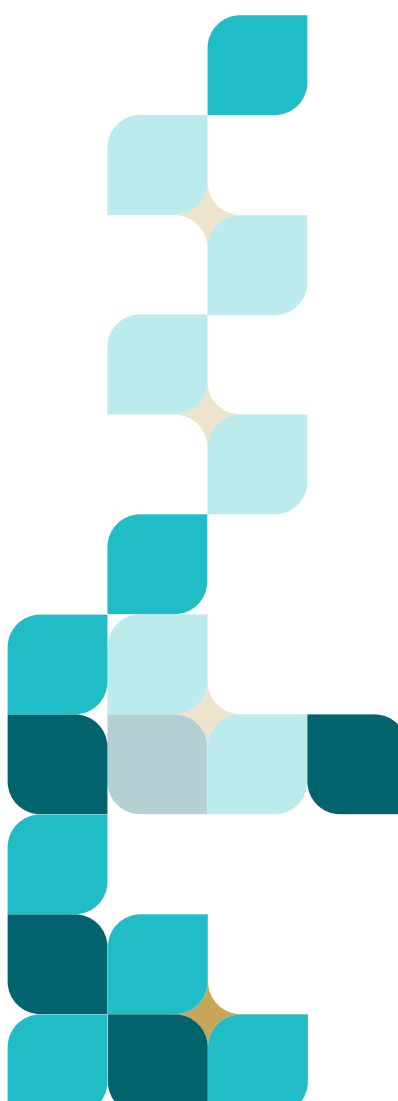
a wider audience during conferences and workshops, as well as being used internally within member institutions, ensuring knowledge dissemination and professional development. Collaborative writing strengthens relationships among members, as it requires negotiation of ideas, alignment of approaches and shared responsibility for high-quality outcomes. Beyond these formal activities, the Forum organises thematic working groups and intensive brainstorming sessions that allow participants to discuss complex and sensitive challenges. These activities foster trust and open dialogue in a safe environment, enabling members to test new procedures, share insights, and co-create strategies that enhance operational efficiency and institutional collaboration. Mentorship and peer learning remain central to the Forum's activities, with experienced staff guiding newcomers through complex regulatory environments, mobility frameworks, and leadership development, ensuring that professional knowledge is retained and continuously updated. By piloting these initiatives within the supportive environment of the Forum, members can assess their effectiveness, refine methodologies, and share successful practices with the broader higher education community.

Impact at multiple levels

The IROs Forum is recognised as a consultative platform, acting as an advisory body to national organisations and agencies that shape the broader framework for the internationalisation of higher education in Poland. Its representatives are invited to contribute to national strategies for international cooperation, ensuring that the perspective of practitioners is considered. The Forum is consulted on key issues directly affecting internationalisation processes. ■

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- By pooling the experiences of its members, it provides valuable input for policies that advance the overall internationalisation of higher education. It strengthens the visibility and reputation of Polish higher education institutions abroad by maintaining

- *The Forum strengthens the visibility and reputation of Polish higher education institutions abroad by maintaining a consistent presence at major international conferences, education fairs, and study abroad exhibitions, as well as through study visits to partner institutions worldwide. Such activities not only promote individual universities, but also build the collective brand of Poland as a competitive and attractive academic destination.*



a consistent presence at major international conferences, education fairs and study abroad exhibitions, as well as through study visits to partner institutions worldwide. These initiatives not only promote individual institutions but also build the collective brand of Poland as a competitive and attractive academic destination. Another dimension is the dissemination of knowledge about mobility opportunities. The IROs Forum helps to promote the programmes offered by individual member institutions as well as the flagship initiatives coordinated by National Agencies responsible for internationalisation. In this way, it acts as a bridge between institutions, policymakers, students, academics and professionals, making the system more transparent, accessible and effective. Through these combined efforts, the IROs Forum has positioned itself not only as a professional network but also as a recognised partner in shaping the internationalisation agenda of Polish higher education. The Forum's long-term impact can be seen in the real benefits it brings to participating institutions, showing how regular, well-organised collaboration enables successful joint initiatives and ensuring that members of the IROs Forum are fully aware that their work does not take place in isolation from the broader higher education environment. To highlight the importance of individuals who significantly influence this field, the Forum established an annual award that honours those whose work has had a profound impact on advancing internationalisation in Poland – the IROs Forum Barbara Centkowska Award. Each year, this recognition is awarded to professionals whose dedication, innovation and leadership inspire the community and contribute tangibly to strengthening Poland's presence in the global academic arena.

The International Relations Offices Forum demonstrates that successful international cooperation requires more than signing agreements or setting broad institutional goals. It thrives on the creation of effective institutional pathways that transform intentions into practice. The IROs Forum is considered both a professional community and a strategic partner, capable of shaping national policies and supporting Polish HEIs in building their international profiles. By fostering dialogue, mentoring, and collaborative problem-solving, the Forum ensures that international relations offices across Poland are not standalone units but parts of a coordinated system that strengthens the visibility ■



- *What makes the Forum exceptional is its ability to operate simultaneously at multiple levels: strengthening everyday administrative efficiency within individual universities, facilitating cooperation and shared initiatives among institutions and influencing national and international strategies for higher education.*

■ and reputation of the entire higher education sector. Its sustained activities – workshops, conferences, publications and continuous peer learning – have provided fertile ground for innovation and professional development, enabling institutions to adapt quickly to new challenges. What makes the Forum exceptional is its ability to operate simultaneously at multiple levels: strengthening everyday administrative efficiency within individual universities, facilitating cooperation and shared initiatives among institutions and influencing national and international strategies for higher education. This multi-layered impact illustrates how institutional pathways can directly support academic goals, from enhancing mobility and joint teaching to contributing to the global prestige of Polish higher education.

Looking ahead, the Forum's role will only become more significant. As internationalisation grows in complexity, universities will need stronger frameworks for cooperation, better alignment between policy and practice, and more resilient professional communities. The IROs Forum already provides such a framework – serving as a living example of how collaborative networks can not only support but also lead the internationalisation process. In this sense, the Forum embodies the very essence of joint educational cooperation: universities working together, guided by a shared vision and a commitment to excellence, while building structured pathways that ensure long-term success and sustainable impact on the global academic stage. The IROs Forum is more than just a network; it is a vibrant community of practice where we exchange expertise, coordinate complex issues, and drive innovation in the global academic landscape. □

See more

Examples of joint degrees implemented under the Erasmus Mundus and Erasmus+ programmes are available on:

- the European Commission website (**Projects' Results Platform**):
- and the Erasmus Mundus Course Catalogue. This is a list for use by those interested in applying for Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters:



The analysis of data on projects accepted in subsequent calls for proposals shows that projects that received funding in the first phase of the programme (Erasmus Mundus 2004–2008) often were continued in the second phase of the programme (2009–2013), and then in the Erasmus+ programme 2014–2020 and 2021–2027). Such situation is easy to be explained – a submitted and positively assessed application becomes a project, and receives its supervisor at the European Executive Agency (EACEA), who helps in proper implementation in terms of organisation, self-monitoring and financial management. An experienced project implementer participating in subsequent competitions as an applicant is able to prepare better application for funding so that it meets all the award criteria. Applicants participating in the competition for the first time, despite incentives for so-called newcomers, find it difficult to compete with those with experience.

At the FRSE website (<https://bit.ly/4oA9iBN>) the list of projects implemented with participation of Polish institutions is available. Due to difficulties in accessing reliable source of data, this list cannot be considered exhaustive. However, it shows which universities have been the most active partners/associate partners in Erasmus Mundus joint master's (or Erasmus Mundus joint doctorates – phase 2009–2013) to date on.

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