

OpenEU launched, the first step to a pan-European open university

The [OpenEU](#) alliance, coordinated by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), brings together 14 universities and 13 academic, business, rural, municipal and civil society associations from across Europe to create a pan-European open university

OpenEU will contribute to the **digital transformation of higher education** institutions and the **integration of technology** in teaching and learning

OpenEU is one of the 14 new alliances awarded funding as part of the European Commission's latest **European Universities initiative** call for proposals

OpenEU's objective as the first pan-European open university is to strengthen the **digital, green and social** dimension of the [European Higher Education Area \(EHEA\)](#) by offering access to **high-quality higher education and lifelong learning** to all, providing accessible and sustainable international experiences for all students, and contributing to the digital transformation of institutions.

The **European Commission has decided to back the OpenEU project** as part of its [European Universities initiative](#), selecting it from among 56 proposals submitted by European alliances. OpenEU can now forge ahead thanks to the almost 14.4 million euros it has been awarded. The alliance brings together Europe's leading open and distance universities alongside five on-campus universities that are committed to pushing forward with their digital transformation. Together they promote education that is student-centred, inclusive, digital and green, strengthening the EHEA and ensuring no one is left behind.

The UOC will take charge of leading the project over the next four years. In the words of the UOC rector and president of the alliance, [Àngels Fitó](#), "OpenEU represents a **unique opportunity to extend the scope and impact of Europe's open and distance universities**. Leading the OpenEU alliance is a privilege, and it lets us drive forward with a large community of international students who are committed to their learning; strengthen joint projects with social agents, businesses and other organizations; and boost innovation in technology-mediated pedagogies. This initiative will allow us **to move towards an up-to-date version of the European Higher Education Area that will provide the backbone for lifelong learning** in Europe."

Creation of a pan-European open university

OpenEU wants to make the most of its **collective experience** to strengthen the EHEA by leveraging the potential of **digital tools to create a pan-European open university** that can guarantee learning opportunities for all, anytime and anywhere, regardless of time constraints, place of residence or people's personal or professional circumstances.

[OpenEU](#) represents over **368,000 university students** (the vast majority are not traditional university students: their average age is 36, and 84% work and study at the same time), more

than 709,000 graduates and 24,000 staff. It has been created in response to the main challenges facing the EHEA: the **digital transformation of university institutions**, the **promotion of more inclusive, more equitable higher education**, and the need to provide **opportunities for lifelong learning** for everyone.

The alliance is committed to maximizing its impact and can count on a total of 14 universities from all regions of Europe as well as thirteen associate partner bodies and organizations. The core members of the alliance are the **eight leading online, open and distance universities, alongside two on-campus universities**: [Bifröst University](#), Iceland; [Daugavpils University](#), Latvia; [FernUniversität in Hagen](#), Germany; [Hellenic Open University](#), Greece; [Open Universiteit](#), the Netherlands; [Open University of Cyprus](#); [Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia](#), Spain; [Universidade Aberta](#), Portugal; [Universitat Oberta de Catalunya](#), Spain, and [St Cyril and St Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo](#), Bulgaria. Furthermore, the [Open University](#) of the United Kingdom, Albania's [Fan S. Noli University](#), the [Ukrainian Engineering Pedagogics Academy](#) and North Macedonia's [MIT University](#) are also participating in the project to help drive the digital transformation of the EHEA.

Three of the **leading international academic networks**, the [European Association of Distance Teaching Universities](#) (EADTU), the [International Association of Universities](#) (IAU) and [Mediterranean Universities Union](#) (UNIMED), will contribute to the alliance's growth, providing their experience and ability to publicize the results obtained. In addition, the [Fédération Interuniversitaire de l'enseignement à distance](#) (FIED) of France will collaborate with its expertise in distance education. Likewise, a number of **industrial associations and national and European clusters** have expressed their support for the alliance and **will collaborate** in the different initiatives that OpenEU wants to develop. They are [Brightlands Smart Services Campus](#) from the Netherlands, [Bulgarian Industrial Association](#) (BIA), [Mentoring Europe](#), [SECARTYS](#) from Spain, [Stifterverband](#) from Germany, and Bulgaria's Digital National Alliance. Lastly, the [EUROCITIES](#) association, a network of over 200 cities in 38 countries, and the [European Leader Association For Rural Development](#) (ELARD), with more than 2,500 local action groups, will help connect the alliance's projects with local needs.

A shared mission, ten targets and four years to make it happen

OpenEU unites the shared visions and experiences of 10 universities that are each rooted in their territories. Together they have a joint mission and 10 targets to meet over the next 4 years:

1. **Build the foundations** of a solid and sustainable European open university.
2. **Promote innovation** in curricula, course delivery and assessment, with a firm commitment to micro-credentials that can be stacked and lead to official qualifications, equipping our learners with needs-based technical and non-technical transferable skills.
3. **Expand lifelong learning for employability** across Europe, by providing both traditional and non-traditional students with tailored and flexible learning paths and the skills demanded by society and the labour market.
4. **Widen participation** of traditionally underrepresented and disadvantaged groups in higher education, such as refugees and migrants, women in STEM, disabled people, or those living in underpopulated areas, rolling out solutions in response to their needs and strengthening competencies linked to diversity, equity and inclusion.

5. **Guarantee the quality** of digital learning and innovative educational solutions through challenge-based, multidisciplinary research and innovation.
6. **Drive the digital transformation** of higher education in Europe, sharing OpenEU's experience, knowledge and resources with other universities.
7. **Broaden internationalization** by creating and implementing **innovative and flexible mobility options** that let non-traditional students benefit from opportunities for international learning experiences.
8. **Enhance challenge-based knowledge generation, transfer and exchange**, focusing on three key issues for Europe: the digital transformation, the climate emergency, and the threats to European values and democracy.
9. **Increase universities' societal impact** in education, research and innovation by engaging with the OpenEU communities and the labour market to establish collaborations with non-academic partners.
10. **Foster European values** by establishing a shared culture in OpenEU that is based on the principles of quality, diversity, equity, inclusion, open knowledge and environmental sustainability to contribute to more resilient economies and societies.

About the European Universities initiative

The European Commission's European Universities initiative aims to trigger and **deepen unprecedented levels of institutional cooperation** between higher education institutions, making it **systemic, structural and sustainable**. There are currently 64 European alliances, fulfilling the EC's target to set up at least 60 involving over 500 higher education institutions by 2024. **OpenEU** is the first alliance where open and distance higher education plays a leading role to increase access, coverage and participation in higher education in Europe.

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