

PRESS RELEASE

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UNICA Student Declaration: students from the network of universities UNICA call for action to build the university of the future

- Students set inclusion, sustainability, citizenship and wellbeing as priorities for universities
- Universities must take part in global solutions for global concerns
- Declaration was written by students of UNICA universities with the support of representatives from NOVA University Lisbon, the Erasmus Student Network, European Students' Union, and International Young Nature Friends.

Students from UNICA, the Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe, outline their priorities to build the university of the future in the recently published UNICA Student Declaration 2021.

In the Declaration students call academic and policy leaders across Europe to act in order to unlock the full potential of Higher Education Institutions in achieving better societies, especially in the post-COVID 19 era. To succeed in this endeavour, UNICA students stress that universities must put efforts into becoming more inclusive, sustainable, community driven, and concerned with wellbeing.

These priorities are in many ways in accordance to the ones included in the new Erasmus+ Programme and the rationale behind European University Alliances.

The Declaration is the main outcome of the 10th UNICA Student Conference that took place online in July 2021 and was organised together with NOVA University Lisbon (host university) and student/ youth organisations Erasmus Student Network, European Students' Union, and International Young Nature Friends. During the conference almost 100 students from universities of the network discussed their concerns and ideas related to Higher Education and its role in the society.

The document is divided in 10 chapters that represent the 10 Fora of discussion in which the Conference was organised.

Recommendations to build the university of the future

UNICA students make numerous recommendations in the Declaration in view of solutions for common concerns related to European Higher Education, including:

- Putting more efforts into inclusion and integration (paying special attention to students with disabilities, refugees and, migrants);
- Enhancing the participation of universities in solutions to global challenges by driving change through knowledge and research, partnering with other institutions and actors (inside and outside academia), and promoting interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary practices;
- Encourage students' "preparedness" and social responsibility through innovative curricula and soft skills so they become active and engaged citizens within a community;

- Promoting European and academic values worldwide, by turning universities into hubs of academic freedom, innovation, and truth;
- Set mental wellbeing as a priority in universities to promote the students' success as a whole;
- UNICA expects the Declaration to lead to new initiatives that contribute to the priorities outlined by the students.

Quotes

"As privileged pit stops in the route of knowledge and innovation fluxes, Universities should adopt a more active role in serving their cities, making their student body and local community intertwine and learn from each other, becoming more resilient, developing fitting ways of meeting challenges of different natures, keeping up with general world development and progress and re-organizing whenever required."

UNICA Student Declaration, page 12

"It is the role of current leaders (inside and outside the university) to listen to this voice and respond accordingly by creating the conditions for a university, a city, a world, and a future that responds to the needs of those who will be the leaders of tomorrow."

Luciano Saso, President of UNICA, in the Student Declaration, page 7

About UNICA

UNICA is an institutional Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe founded in 1990, currently bringing together 54 member universities from 38 European capitals.

The Network seeks to be a driving force in the development of the European Higher Education and Research Area and to promote academic excellence, integration and cooperation between member universities throughout Europe. To achieve its aims, UNICA articulates the views of Member Universities to European institutions, to national, regional, and municipal governments, and internationally. It provides the Members with information on European initiatives and programmes, and supports them in developing cooperative projects.

The Network organises member-driven activities, including conferences, seminars, capacity building and skills development workshops and projects. UNICA has currently seven Working Groups, working namely in the areas of International Relations within universities, Education, Research, Sustainability, Scholarly Communication, Communication and Public Relations, and collaboration between Universities and Cities.

About the UNICA Student Conference

Initiated for the first time on the initiative of Freie Universität Berlin, the UNICA Student Conference is an integral part of the UNICA Network that brings together the students of UNICA universities. It is organised every 2-3 years since 2000 (ten editions of the Conference were organized between 2000 and 2021) and lets students examine, debate and share their views on Europe's most pertinent issues.

It also encourages them to formulate their opinions and recommendations that could lead to new interesting initiatives. For instance, the Working Group UNICA Green (now UNICA Green & SDGs), was created following the input from the participants in the UNICA Student Conference 2010 in Rome.

The event is normally hosted by a member university and, traditionally, UNICA partners with student organisations such as the Erasmus Student Network and the European Students' Union. The UNICA Student Conference acts as a bridge between students and the Higher Education Institutions' leaderships as well as European policy makers. The next edition will take place in Rome Ventotene, in Summer 2023, and will be hosted by Roma Tre University.

Further information

- [Message launch of the UNICA Student Declaration 2021](#)
 - [10th UNICA Student Conference](#)
 - [UNICA Student Activities](#)
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