



SOFIA UNIVERSITY
ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI



UNICA IRO GROUP MEETING 2023

“Enhancing International Collaboration and Student Support in Higher Education”

Hosted by Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski
Monday, 6 – Wednesday, 8 November 2023

Concept note

The international landscape of Higher Education continues to evolve, presenting new challenges and opportunities for universities in Europe and worldwide. Leveraging on recent work by the UNICA IRO group, the IRO meeting 2023 aims to foster knowledge exchange, collaboration, and innovative thinking among UNICA members and focuses on **three central themes**:

1. The future of Erasmus+

As usual, a section of the programme will be devoted to the Erasmus + programme and will feature a **keynote speech by a representative of DG EAC** followed by Q&A. The rest of the session will layout conclusions from **UNICA’s participation in the KA131 Higher Education Working Group**, created by the EC with the goal of enhancing the effective execution of future HE Erasmus+ initiatives funded by internal policy funds.

2. Students in the spotlight: tackling the challenges of housing & inclusion

The theme revolves around the multifaceted challenges of student inclusion and housing. By highlighting student voices and experiences, this topic addresses the critical role that universities play in fostering an inclusive environment that supports all students.

3. Strategic partnerships outside Europe

This session aims to delve into the realm of international partnerships, transcending geo-geographical boundaries and embracing diversity. We’re eager to explore the richness of relationships with institutions beyond Europe, with a special focus on those that might pose challenges.

Expected outcomes

Participants will gain insights into effective partnership strategies, innovative student support approaches, and the latest developments in the Erasmus+ programme. Additionally, the event aims to **kick off two concrete initiatives**:

- development of a **handbook of good practices on student housing** at UNICA member universities;
- formulation of a **UNICA IRO position paper on the future of Erasmus+**.



PROGRAMME

Main venue: Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Rectorate building, 15 Tsar Osvoboditel blvd., Sofia

DAY 0 – Monday, 6 November

18:30 – 20:00 **Welcome reception**

Venue: Alma Mater Restaurant, Rectorate building

DAY 1 – Tuesday, 7 November

Overall chair: **Elena Avgoustidou-Kyriacou**, Acting Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus - IRO Coordinator and Observer to the UNICA Steering Committee

Venue: Hall 1, Rectorate Building

09:00 – 09:30	Registration of participants and welcome coffee (<i>Hall 1</i>)
09:30 – 09:45	<p>Welcome addresses, introduced by Irena Atanasova, Head of IRO, Sofia University Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anastas Gerdjikov, Rector, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” and Member of the UNICA Steering Committee • Sorin Costreie, UNICA President (online) • Elena Avgoustidou-Kyriacou, Acting Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus - IRO Coordinator and Observer to the UNICA Steering Committee
09:45-10:00	Tour de table

Session 1 – The future of Erasmus+

Chair: **Ibrahim Yorgun**, Director International Cooperations Office, Middle East Technical University (METU)

10:00 – 10:30 **Online keynote speech “Erasmus+, a programme in constant evolution” by Vito Borrelli**, Team leader of the Erasmus+ programme – Higher education, DG EAC

10:30-11:00 **Q&A**

Working session: UNICA IROs & the KA131 Higher Education Working Group

11:00-11:20 *Results of the UNICA IRO survey on the future of the Erasmus+ programme and reporting to Members from the KA131 Higher Education Working Group*, by **Ibrahim Yorgun**, Director International Cooperations Office, Middle East Technical University (METU)



11:20-11:30	Q&A
11:30-11:50	Coffee break
11:50-12:40	<p>Breakout groups:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accreditation system Facilitator: Ibrahim Yorgun, METU 2. Eligibility rules – mobility Facilitator: Nicole Marinova, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” 3. Funding system – mobility Facilitator: Vratislav Kozák, Charles University 4. Digitalisation/future of the European Student Card Initiative Facilitator: Elena Avgoustidou-Kyriacou, University of Cyprus
12:40-13:20	Reporting from the breakout groups (10' per group)
13:20-13:30	<p>Wrap-up and next steps*, by Elena Avgoustidou-Kyriacou, Acting Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus and IRO Observer to the UNICA Steering Committee</p> <p>(*Conclusions will feed into future work in the HE Working Group and in a UNICA IRO position paper on the future of Erasmus+)</p>
13:30-14:30	Lunch at university restaurant Alma Mater

Venue: Conference Hall

Session 2 – Students in the spotlight: tackling the challenges of housing & inclusion

Chair: Vratislav Kozák, Director of International Relations, Charles University

	Speakers
14:30-15:10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neli Kalinova, Education & Youth Policy Coordinator, Erasmus Student Network • Andrej Pirjevec, Executive Committee member, European Student Union
15:10-15:30	Discussion
15:30-16:50	<p>Training “How to make higher education more inclusive?” Led by Kwanza Musi Dos Santos, Expert of Diversity & Inclusion, Trainer & Consultant</p>
16:50-17:00	Launch of the initiative “ Handbook of good practices on student housing at UNICA member universities ”
17:00	Optional social programme: guided tour of Sofia or tour of the campus
20:30	Dinner at Traditional Bulgarian Restaurant Chevermeto (1 Bulgaria Blvd., National Palace of Culture (NDK) – the small NDK or Pencho Slaveykov Blvd., 1463 Sofia – there are two entrances)



DAY 2 – Wednesday, 8 November

Venue: Conference Hall

Session 3- Strategic partnerships outside Europe

Chair: **Elena Avgoustidou-Kyriacou**, Acting Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus and IRO Observer to the UNICA Steering Committee

9:00-9:30	Welcome coffee
9:30 – 09:50	Keynote speech by Madeleine Danova , Dean of the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski
09:50-10:00	Q&A
	Contributions from UNICA member universities – Part 1
10:00-10:15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mobility without borders – challenges</i>, by Irena Atanasova, Head of IRO, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski
10:15-10:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>UCD's Strategic Partnerships – Opportunities and Challenges</i>, by Catherine Convery, Global Mobility Manager, UCD Global, University College Dublin
10:30-10:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Strategic partnerships outside Europe – the experience of the University of Alcalá</i>, by José Alfonso Lafuente García, Head of The International Relations Office, University of Alcalá
10:45-11:15	Coffee break
	Contributions from UNICA member universities – Part 2
11:15-11:30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sensitive Partnerships Committee: a presentation of ULB's tools</i>, by Lara Rauwers, International Officer, Université libre de Bruxelles
11:30-11:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tea Gergedava, Head Department of Foreign Relations & ERASMUS+ ICM Institutional Coordinator, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University
11:45-12:00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Embracing Complexity: Charles University's Global Footprint and the Power of Unconventional Partnerships</i>, by Vratislav Kozák, Director of International Relations, Charles University
12:00-12:50	World Café
12:50-13:00	Conclusions and wrap-up
13:00-14:00	Farewell lunch at university restaurant Alma Mater