



Network of Universities
from the Capitals of Europe

UNICA Annual Report

2025



Co-funded by
the European Union



Network of Universities
from the Capitals of Europe



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

UNICA Annual Report 2025

Published by: UNICA a.i.s.b.l UNICA – Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe
c/o University Foundation, Rue d'Egmont 11, 1000 Brussels, Belgium
Copyright 2025 © by UNICA All rights reserved.

This information may be freely used and copied for non-commercial purposes, provided that the source is acknowledged (© UNICA)

www.unica-network.eu | office@unica-network.eu

A free electronic version of this report is available at <http://www.unica-network.eu>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5. FOREWORD

5. Message by Sorin Costreie

6. UNICA AS AN ORGANISATION

6. Why UNICA matters in today's Europe

7. Mission, vision & values

9. Structure

10. People

12. Finance

13. Comms & Platforms

14. UNICA AS A COMMUNITY

14. About us

17. New members

18. Members

19. Voices from the network

21. UNICA AS A PARTNER

21. Why our partners matter

21. Looking ahead

22. Partners

25. Expert groups & coalitions

26. UNICA in Action

26. Key Activities and Initiatives in 2025

34. Policy Engagement & Publications in 2025

36. Amplifying voices – UNICA Students at the European Youth Event 2025

39. 2025 Wrapped

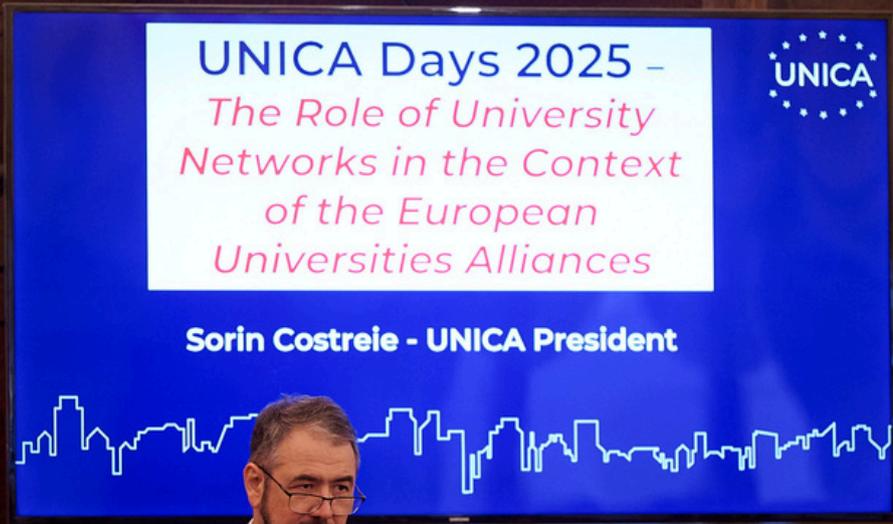
40. 35 YEARS SUPPLEMENT

42. Intro by Luciano Saso, UNICA Sec. General

43. Echoes of UNICA

48. Moments in Time: a UNICA Memory Mosaic

52. A Letter to the Future



FOREWORD



Sorin Costreie, UNICA President

*Dear members of the UNICA Community,
Dear colleagues, partners, and friends,*

We're reaching 2026 and, though we certainly have reasons for celebrating 2025, we do close another year in a context that is far from easy. The world continues to face profound uncertainty: geopolitical tensions, social fragmentation, pressure on democratic values and principles, and growing challenges for higher education across Europe and beyond. Against this backdrop, UNICA's 35th anniversary was not only a moment of celebration, but also an opportunity for honest reflection.

Looking back, the theme **"35 Years of Building Bridges Across European Capitals"** resonated strongly this year.

Building bridges today is rarely straightforward and demands patience, care, and mutual understanding. As we close this chapter, we do so with intellectual humility and institutional responsibility. The work ahead remains demanding but, as this year has demonstrated, cooperation matters and sustained, collective effort is still worth pursuing. Recent developments like Switzerland re-joining the EU's flagship research program Horizon Europe (among other programmes) and the UK returning to the Erasmus+ exchange scheme prove that cooperation is neither linear nor guaranteed, but that it can be regained through persistence, negotiation, and rational approach.

As we move forward, these experiences should encourage us to work further and remain optimistic about the results. We're a collective force of universities scattered across capital cities of Europe. We are uniquely positioned to connect knowledge with policy, local realities with European ambitions, and academic values with public responsibility. By continuing to collaborate, to share perspectives, and to support one another, we can help shape a more open, resilient, and forward-looking European higher education landscape for the years to come.

Allow me to extend my sincere thanks to everyone who contributed and keep on contributing to this journey by participating in events, sharing expertise, hosting colleagues, or supporting the network behind the scenes. Your involvement ensures that UNICA stays not only a network of institutions, but an academic community with capital purposes.

Our TOGETHER in the capitals would ensure our Capitals stay together...

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sorin Costreie'.

UNICA AS AN ORGANISATION

WHY UNICA MATTERS IN TODAY'S EUROPE

In a Europe defined by complexity, interdependence, and accelerating change, **UNICA's mission has never been more relevant.** The Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe unites institutions that sit at the crossroads of academia, policy, and society. In capital cities - where decisions are made, ideas circulate, and global challenges are felt first - universities play a pivotal role in shaping Europe's future. UNICA provides these institutions with a trusted platform to **connect, collaborate, and act collectively** in the pursuit of a stronger European Higher Education and Research Area.

Today's Europe faces a demanding agenda: the green and digital transitions, the defence of democratic values, social inclusion, sustainable growth, and the need to build resilience against crises - from climate to geopolitics. Universities are essential actors in all of these domains, but they can only meet such expectations if they cooperate effectively across borders. **UNICA enables precisely this cooperation:** by facilitating the exchange of strategies, by amplifying the voice of universities in European policy discussions, and by building bridges between academia, cities, and society.

For the **European higher education sector**, UNICA serves as an essential interface between institutions and policy. It contributes to shaping debates on issues such as academic freedom, mobility, sustainability, and inclusion, and it acts as a **voice for universities in the capitals**, whose proximity to decision-making offers unique insights into how higher education and research can contribute to Europe's policy agenda. UNICA thus reinforces the European project itself: a community of knowledge, solidarity, and shared values.

As Europe continues to evolve, UNICA remains committed to supporting its members in navigating change — not in isolation, but together. In times that demand both local engagement and European vision, **UNICA matters because it helps universities turn proximity into partnership, diversity into strength, and dialogue into impact.**

MISSION, VISION AND VALUES

UNICA aims at building on the specific profile of its Members to **widen and strengthen international collaborations**, engage academic leadership, and facilitate networking among academic communities through understanding and sharing between its Members throughout the European Higher Education and Research Areas.

Our vision is to be a **driving force in the development of the European Higher Education and Research Areas** and empower our Member Universities to unlock their full

potential, putting knowledge, research, and innovation at the service of the needs of our societies and of the coming generations.

UNICA is committed to acting as a catalyst in the advancement, integration and cooperation of Member Universities throughout Europe.

To achieve these aims, UNICA promotes activities based on the following core values and principles:

1

Academic Values

We believe that strong and impactful academic communities are grounded in core Higher Education values, namely academic freedom, institutional autonomy, accountability, equitable access and social responsibility.

2

European integration

We believe in the power of democratic values and support the idea of a European mindset based on the respect for human dignity. We work towards further integration of the European Higher Education and Research Areas as a means of advancing European integration.

3

Sustainable development

We consider universities to be privileged pit stops in the route of knowledge and innovation fluxes, with the potential to become facilitators of sustainable development by enabling the scientific, collaborative, and entrepreneurial mindset that leads to solutions for common concerns of societies today, while minding the needs of future generations.

4

Collaborative mindset

Based on the rationale that global challenges require global solutions, we believe in a concerted approach that brings together academia, industry, decision-making bodies, and civil society for transformative change. This entails the idea of open science for the benefit of society.

5

Sense of community

We strive to build a community of universities that embraces the concept of 'advancement by sharing' and is accomplished in an open environment that voices the needs and ideas of all members in academic communities, from university leaders to students.



STRUCTURE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY (GA)

One representative per member university (usually the Rector/President or a Vice-Rector/Vice President)

STEERING COMMITTEE (SC)

- UNICA President
- Steering Committee Members
- International Relations Officers Observer to the SC

SECRETARIAT

- Secretary General
- Head of Office
- Policy, advocacy, communications, and projects staff (Officers, Assistants, and Trainees)
- External monitoring and support (HR and accounting)

WORKING GROUPS

- WG Coordinators
- WG participants
- External experts and guest contributors

PEOPLE

UNICA Steering Committee



President
Sorin Costreie
University of Bucharest



Vice President
Julio Cañero Serrano
University of Alcalá



Steering Committee
Edith Buser
Université PSL (Paris Sciences et Lettres)



Steering Committee
Ksenija Vidmar Horvat
University of Ljubljana



Steering Committee
Dimitrios Karadimas
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens



Steering Committee
Anne Weyembergh
Université libre de Bruxelles



IRO Observer to the Steering Committee
Elena Avgoustidou-Kyriacou
University of Cyprus

FAREWELL AND GRATITUDE

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to **Anastas Gerdjikov** (Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski), former member of the UNICA Steering Committee who finished his mandate in June 2025. We express gratitude for his valuable contributions and unwavering commitment to our mission.

UNICA Secretariat



Secretary General
Luciano Saso



Office Coordinator & Project Manager
Laura Brossico



Project & Policy Officer
Inês Cisneiros



Project & Policy Officer
Maëlle Constantin



Project & Policy Officer
Federica Nestola



Project & Communications Officer
Alexandra Duarte

FINANCE

The data presented in this report refer to civil year 2024.

TOTAL INCOME: 508.784,98€

Membership fees: 330.480,00€

E+ Operational grant 2024: 175.000,00€

Bank interests: 3.304,98€

TOTAL EXPENDITURE: 419.492,42€

Administrative expenses: 66.485,57€

Staff costs: 269.244,58€

President & Steering Committee costs: 1.345,90€

UNICA Activities: 43.699,54€

Membership fees affiliations: 25.708,51€

Amortisations & taxes: 13.008,32€

COMMS & PLATFORMS

LINKEDIN

2,966 Followers
1,476 Page views
40,009 Impressions

UNICA-NETWORK.EU

34,205 Total Visitors
67,206 Total Page Views

UNICA NEWSLETTER

1,676 Subscribers
30% Average Open Rate

NEW! BLUESKY

98 followers (and growing!)



staffmobility.eu

Online platform with training activities
for administrative and technical staff



unicasummerschools.eu

Summer and Winter School Programmes
from UNICA universities

UNICA AS A COMMUNITY

ABOUT US

56

MEMBER
UNIVERSITIES

41

CAPITAL CITIES
OF EUROPE

56

RECTORS /
PRESIDENTS

178

VICE-
RECTORS

>180.000

UNIVERSITY STAFF

>2.000,000

STUDENTS

A network built on trust, people, and shared purpose

At the heart of UNICA lies its community: a diverse, dynamic network of universities united by a common belief that higher education can – and must – make a difference. Our strength comes not from size alone, but from the **trust, openness, and solidarity** that connect our members.

In 2025, UNICA continued to foster meaningful exchange among its members through peer learning, leadership programmes, thematic working groups, and vibrant in-person gatherings. Whether through joint advocacy, capacity-building workshops, or informal moments of dialogue, the network has remained a space where ideas are shared freely and collaboration turns into concrete action.

Many of our members have been recognised for their excellence at the European level: several were named **European Student Card Initiative (ESCI)** Champions for outstanding progress in the digitalisation of student mobility, 58 researchers from UNICA universities were awarded **ERC Starting Grants**, and numerous institutions strengthened their role within **European University alliances**.

In total, 40 UNICA members out of 56 actively engaged with 23 alliances, highlighting the network's strong involvement in shaping European higher education. There is also one member of the network that is part of an alliance that holds a Seal of Excellence, a quality label awarded to proposals of universities alliances that did not receive funding through Erasmus+ due to budgetary constraints. While this also indicates that some members may require support in navigating the initiative, it is important to note that 15 members remain unrepresented, in part due to ineligibility.

These collective achievements and engagements remind us that UNICA is not only a network - it is a **community of excellence** driving the transformation of higher education across Europe.





NEW MEMBERS

In June 2025, the UNICA community grew with the inclusion of Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences (Athens, Greece) and Rey Juan Carlos University (Madrid, Spain). We are delighted to welcome them, and grateful to all our member universities for their ongoing engagement, insights, and openness to collaboration. Let's get to know them better:



Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences Athens, Greece

Founded in 1927, this is one of Greece's oldest public universities. Offers programmes in political science, sociology, communication, international studies, law; has about 21,997 students and ~1,136 doctoral candidates. International cooperation includes +400 agreements with higher education institutions globally.



Rey Juan Carlos University Madrid, Spain

Established in 1996, with 6 Faculties and 5 Schools. Enrolls approximately 43,611 students; ~1,238 PhD candidates. Fields of study span social sciences, business, law, engineering, health, arts and humanities. Strong track record of cooperation with companies, NGOs, and public institutions (≈6,000 agreements over past 3 years).

MEMBERS

Albania

- Polytechnic University of Tirana
- Tirana University

Azerbaijan

- Baku State University

Belgium

- Université libre de Bruxelles
- Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Bulgaria

- Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

Bosnia and Herzegovina

- University of Sarajevo

Croatia

- University of Zagreb

Cyprus

- University of Cyprus

Czech Republic

- Charles University

Denmark

- University of Copenhagen

Estonia

- Tallinn University

France

- Université PSL (Paris Sciences et Lettres)
- Université Sorbonne Nouvelle

Georgia

- Tbilisi State University

Germany

- Freie Universität Berlin

Greece

- National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
- Panteion University

Hungary

- Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest
- Semmelweis University

Iceland

- University of Iceland

Ireland

- University College Dublin

Italy

- Sapienza Università di Roma
- Università degli Studi di Roma "Foro Italico"
- Università degli Studi di Roma Tor Vergata
- Università degli Studi Roma Tre

Latvia

- University of Latvia

Lithuania

- Vilnius University

Luxembourg

- University of Luxembourg

Republic of Moldova

- Moldova State University

Montenegro

- University of Montenegro

The Netherlands

- Universiteit van Amsterdam

Republic of North Macedonia

- Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje

Poland

- University of Warsaw

Portugal

- NOVA University Lisbon

Romania

- Bucharest University of Economic Studies
- "Carol Davila" University of Medicine and Pharmacy
- University of Bucharest

Serbia

- University of Belgrade

Slovakia

- Comenius University in Bratislava

Slovenia

- University of Ljubljana

Sweden

- Stockholm University

Spain

- Universidad de Alcalá
- Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
- Universidad Carlos III de Madrid
- Universidad Complutense de Madrid
- Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

Switzerland

- University of Bern
- University of Lausanne

Türkiye

- Ankara University
- Middle East Technical University

Ukraine

- Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute

United Kingdom

- Cardiff University
- King's College London
- Queen's University Belfast
- University of Edinburgh

VOICES / TESTIMONIALS

“

*“Our intuition is that UNICA has the potential of expanding in a **global web of collaborations** with capital cities of non-European countries.”*

*“Our journey over the years has played a vital role in strengthening international cooperation, promoting knowledge, and **creating opportunities for students and institutions** across Europe. I wish the coming years to be just as creative, successful, and full of new challenges that will lead to even greater accomplishments.”*

*“Hopefully our work will have **encouraged the next generation** to continue to value internationalization.”*

*“The group has grown and evolved over time but the original **spirit of friendliness** and sharing experiences remains.”*

”



UNICA AS A PARTNER

UNICA thrives on collaboration. Our network's impact across Europe and beyond is amplified through a strong ecosystem of partnerships with key organisations shaping higher education, research, and innovation. In an increasingly interconnected and fast-changing world, these partnerships allow UNICA and its members to remain engaged in the major conversations that define the future of universities — from academic freedom and research assessment to student mobility, sustainability, and digital transformation.

Together with our partners, we bridge communities: connecting universities with policymakers, students with institutions, and research with society. These relationships ensure that UNICA's collective voice resonates across the European Education Area and the global higher education landscape.

WHY OUR PARTNERS MATTER

Our partners are more than collaborators - they are co-architects of the ideas, policies, and initiatives that make higher education a driver of progress. Through joint projects, advocacy efforts, and shared events, they help us translate our vision into action.

We warmly thank all our partners for making things happen with us - for the openness, insight, and dedication that make collaboration within the UNICA ecosystem a genuine force for transformation in European higher education.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we move into 2026, UNICA remains committed to strengthening its network of partnerships and building new bridges across Europe and beyond. In a rapidly evolving higher education landscape, collaboration will continue to be our greatest asset — enabling us to anticipate challenges, co-create solutions, and amplify the voice of European universities on the global stage. Together with our partners, we will keep fostering innovation, inclusion, and sustainability at the heart of higher education.

PARTNERS



International Association of Universities (IAU)

The IAU, created under the auspices of UNESCO in 1950, is a membership-based organisation serving the global higher education community through: expertise & trends analysis, publications & portals, advisory services, peer-to-peer learning, events, global advocacy. IAU convenes and connects almost 600 Members from more than 130 countries to identify, reflect and act on common priorities.



European University Association (EUA)

EUA represents more than 850 universities and national rectors' conferences in 49 European countries. EUA plays a crucial role in the Bologna Process and in influencing EU policies on higher education, research and innovation. Through continuous interaction with a range of other European and international organisations, EUA ensures that the independent voice of European universities is heard.



EUA Council for Doctoral Education (EUA-CDE)

The EUA-CDE was launched in 2008 at the initiative of the EUA, responding to a growing interest in doctoral education and research training in Europe. An integral part of the European University Association, it is now the largest European network in this field, covering more than 260 universities and institutions working on issues related to doctoral education and research training in 36 countries.



Science | Business (S|B)

Science|Business is a network of 70+ universities, companies, research and policy organizations, fostering collaboration across industry, research, & policy to drive innovation. It connects research-driven organizations with business interests, while providing companies access to cutting-edge science, policy insights, and strategic partnerships to enhance R&D strategies. UNICA is also a member of the specific S|B Widening Group.



Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is a non-profit international student organisation. Its mission is to represent international students, thus provide opportunities for cultural understanding and self-development under the principle of Students Helping Students. Its mission is enrichment of society through international students.



European Students' Union (ESU)

ESU represents 45 National Unions of Students from 40 countries, advocating for the interests of nearly 20 million students to key European decision-making bodies. Founded in 1982, ESU works to enhance student participation and influence in higher education policy at all levels. Initially named WESIB, it evolved through organisational reforms and expanded membership following political shifts in Eastern Europe.

SCHOLARS AT RISK NETWORK

Scholars at Risk (SAR)

Scholars At Risk Network (SAR) is leading a global movement to protect academic freedom and to support those who face attacks for sharing ideas and asking questions. Its international membership network offers direct assistance to threatened scholars, advocates against attacks on higher education communities, and promotes academic freedom.



Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)

CoARA brings together a variety of stakeholders as a way to work together to enable systemic reform on the basis of common principles within an agreed timeframe, and to facilitate exchanges of information and mutual learning between all those willing to improve research assessment practices.



LEAD Academic Network

The LEAD Academic Network is an international and interdisciplinary platform of collaboration among academics and academic leaders for discussing and sharing theory, practice and research on academic leadership and university governance. The mission of the LEAD Academic Network is to become a major networked community and a center of excellence in academic leadership research and a source of innovative best practices.



Debating Europe

Debating Europe is an online platform launched by Friends of Europe and Europe's World, in partnership with the European Parliament, Microsoft Europe, and Gallup. It conveys citizens' ideas and suggestions on vital issues shaping our future directly to policymakers and influential thinkers



Youth Outreach Unit – European Parliament

The Youth Outreach Unit of the European Parliament works to strengthen young people's understanding of and engagement with European democracy. Through educational activities, participatory events, and dialogue with decision-makers, the Unit empowers young citizens to actively shape the future of the European Union. It supports initiatives such as the European Youth Event (EYE), outreach programmes, and partnerships with educational institutions and youth organisations, fostering political awareness, civic participation, and a sense of European citizenship among younger generations.

EXPERT GROUPS & COALITIONS

EWP University and Students Forum

The EWP (Erasmus Without Paper) University and Students Forum is part of the European Student Card Initiative, facilitating digital interoperability between higher education institutions across Europe. The Forum brings together universities and student representatives to share best practices, coordinate on technical implementation, and enhance the digital mobility experience for students and staff. Its work ensures seamless recognition of learning, smoother mobility processes, and improved access to Erasmus+ opportunities.

ERA Universities Association Group

The ERA Universities Association Group gathers European universities and their networks to coordinate input on the European Research Area (ERA) policies. Its members collaborate to promote excellence, inclusiveness, and innovation in research, ensuring that universities' perspectives are represented in the development and implementation of ERA strategies across the EU.

KA131 Higher Education Working Group

This working group focuses on the Erasmus+ KA131 action for mobility of higher education students and staff. Members exchange experiences, discuss challenges, and share practical solutions for implementing international mobility projects, fostering quality, transparency, and impact in Erasmus+ activities.

Erasmus+ Coalition

The Erasmus+ Coalition is a platform of civil society organisations, higher education networks, and stakeholders advocating for a strong and inclusive Erasmus+ programme. The Coalition works to influence policy, increase programme visibility, and foster collaboration among all participants in the Erasmus+ ecosystem, while actively shaping discussions and recommendations for the next generation of the programme (2028–2034), ensuring it remains innovative, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of future learners.

UNICA IN ACTION

2025 was a milestone year for UNICA, marking its 35th anniversary. This symbolic year added extra resonance to many activities, reflecting on the network's legacy, identity, and vision-setting. Throughout the year, UNICA continued to strengthen its impact across policy, education, research, sustainability, and youth engagement, demonstrating the unique value of a network of universities from Europe's capitals.

Centenary / Milestone Year

The 35th anniversary was celebrated during the General Assembly in Athens, reinforcing UNICA's historic role in shaping European higher education.

Policy & Advocacy Engagement

UNICA remained active in European policy debates, addressing academic freedom, research and innovation (R&I) funding, and institutional autonomy. By joining high-level coalitions and signing open letters, the network amplified its collective voice on key European research and education priorities.

Learning & Education Focus

Through the EduLAB working group, UNICA fostered discussion and innovation on higher education models, lifelong learning, and university-employer partnerships. Webinars and conferences explored timely topics such as microcredentials, reskilling, and governance.

Research Collaboration

The Research Meeting in Warsaw brought together research leaders to discuss infrastructure and data security, demonstrating UNICA's role as a forum for strategic reflection and collaboration across member universities.

Sustainability & Climate Action

Through the OpenPass4Climate (OP4C) project, UNICA emphasized the role of universities in recognising and credentialing climate-related competences, highlighting the intersection of education, civic engagement, and the green transition.

Student & Youth Engagement

At the European Youth Event 2025, UNICA empowered its students as co-creators, not just participants. Their reflections reveal deep insights about democratic engagement, representation, and the future of university governance.



KEY ACTIVITIES AND INITIATIVES IN 2025

4EU+ / UNICA Webinar: “Enhancing University-Employer Collaboration to Equip Students with Next Generation Skills”

Date: 21 January 2025

Location: Online

Partners / Members: 4EU+ Alliance, UNICA EduLAB

Description: Explored partnerships between universities and employers to design forward-looking educational programmes, with case studies and strategies for future-ready skills.

Learn More: [4EU+ / UNICA webinar: Enhancing University-Employer Collaboration to Equip Students with Next Generation Skills | UNICA](#)

UNICA Days 2025: “The role of university networks in the context of the European Universities alliances”

Date: 26–28 February 2025

Location: Brussels, University Foundation

Partners / Members: UNICA, European University alliances, policymakers

Description: Around 100 participants debated the evolving landscape of European higher education, focusing on how networks complement EU-funded alliances. Topics included European Degrees, research in alliances, and innovation in capital-city universities.

Learn More: [UNICA Days 2025 | “The role of university networks in the context of the European Universities alliances”, Brussels, 26-28 Feb 2025 | UNICA](#)

UNICA DAYS IN BRUSSELS



BRUSSELS, FEB 2025

UNICA Rectors' Panel: "Competitiveness & Inclusiveness in R&I in Europe: a UNICA perspective"

Date: 9 April 2025

Location: Riga, University of Latvia

Partners / Members: ~25 rectors/vice-rectors from UNICA

Description: High-level discussion addressing how UNICA universities can balance excellence with inclusiveness in research & innovation, particularly in widening contexts.

Learn More: [UNICA Rectors' Panel | University of Latvia, 9 April 2025 | UNICA](#)

UNICA EduLAB – KCL Conference: "How models of Higher Education travel internationally"

Date: 19–20 May 2025

Location: London, King's College London (hybrid)

Partners / Members: UNICA EduLAB, KCL School of Education

Description: Explored the transfer of higher education models across countries, including governance, funding, and pedagogy, with case studies from Brazil, China, Latvia, Slovenia, and the UK.

Learn More: ["How models of Higher Education travel internationally" | King's College London, 19-20 May 2025 \(onsite and online\) | UNICA](#)



UNICA – 4EU+ Alliance Webinar: “Lifelong Learning Revisited: Can Universities and Alliances Become New Hubs for Reskilling and Upskilling?”

Date: 3 June 2025

Location: Online

Partners / Members: 4EU+ Alliance, UNICA
EduLAB

Description: Highlighted strategies for
lifelong learning, microcredentials, and cross-
institutional cooperation, emphasizing the
potential of universities and alliances as hubs
for adult reskilling.

Learn More: [UNICA – 4EU+ Alliance webinar:
“Lifelong Learning Revisited: Can Universities
and Alliances Become New Hubs for
Reskilling and Upskilling?” | 3 June | UNICA](#)

35th UNICA General Assembly & Rectors’ Seminar: “The key role of the Humanities in our universities”

Date: 18–20 June 2025

Location: Athens, National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens

Partners / Members: All UNICA member
universities

Description: The 35th General Assembly
coincided with UNICA’s anniversary. The
Rectors’ Seminar explored the importance of
the humanities in modern universities,
including civic purpose, governance, digital
humanities, and open science.

Learn More: [35th UNICA General Assembly &
Rectors’ Seminar | National and Kapodistrian
University of Athens \(NKUA\) | 18-20 June 2025
| UNICA](#)



UNICA Research Meeting 2025: “Strengthening Research Collaboration ... Shared RIs & Data Security”

Date: 25–26 September 2025

Location: University of Warsaw

Partners / Members: UNICA Research Working Group

Description: Focused on research infrastructures, data management, and security. Participants discussed open science governance and strategies to balance data protection with accessibility.

Learn More: [“Strengthening Research Collaboration in a Changing Landscape: Shared Research Infrastructures and Research Data Security” | University of Warsaw, 25-26 September 2025 | UNICA](#)

Multiplier Event: “Skills for a Burning World: The Role of HEIs in Climate Action Recognition”

Date: 24 September 2025

Location: Brussels, Fondation Universitaire Partners / Members: OpenPass4Climate (OP4C) consortium, UNICA

Description: Final event of the OP4C Erasmus+ project. Brought together HEIs, students, policymakers, and civil society to present recommendations on recognising climate competences via open badges and microcredentials.

Learn More: [Skills for a burning world: the role of HEIs in climate action recognition | 24 Sep 2025, Brussels | UNICA](#)



European Youth Event (EYE) 2025: “From learning to leading”

Date: 13–14 June 2025

Location: Strasbourg, European Parliament
Partners / Members: UNICA delegation (13 students + 2 staff)

Description: Students participated in workshops and co-created action plans for university-EU engagement, highlighting empowerment, co-creation, and democratic agency.

Learn More: [From learning to leading: UNICA at the European Youth Event 2025 | UNICA](#)

UNICA Alumni Relations Seminar 2025: “Partners for Life: Unlocking the Strategic Value of Alumni for Universities”

Date: 11–12 November 2025

Location: Bucharest, University of Economics Studies (ASE)

Description: Seminar on enhancing alumni engagement strategies, including career services integration, digital engagement tools, and international alumni networks.

Learn More: [UNICA Alumni Relations Seminar | 11-12 November, Bucharest University of Economics Studies \(ASE\)](#)

Looking forward, the experiences, insights, and partnerships of 2025 provide a solid foundation for UNICA to continue leading, connecting, and innovating in 2026 - ensuring that member universities remain at the forefront of shaping Europe’s academic, social, and civic future.

IRO Meeting 2025: “Strategic Internationalisation: Navigating Diplomacy, Partnerships, and Intercultural Competence in a Changing World”

Date: 10-12 December 2025

Location / Details: Tallinn University

Description: Annual meeting of International Relations Offices (IROs) sharing best practices, updates on European mobility, Erasmus+, and collaboration strategies.

Learn More: [30th UNICA IRO Meeting | Tallinn University, 10-12 December 2025](#)

POLICY ENGAGEMENT & PUBLICATIONS IN 2025

UNICA's policy engagement in 2025 was purposeful and visible across European-level debates and initiatives:

Supporting the Launch of the European Parliament's Intergroup on Education and Skills

UNICA publicly welcomed and committed to engaging with this new Intergroup - a cross-party forum of MEPs focused on improving education quality, equity, and lifelong learning policies across Europe. This reflects UNICA's active stance in shaping education policy and reinforcing the link between universities and EU decision-making.

Learn More: [European Parliament's First-Ever Intergroup on Education and Skills Officially Launched | UNICA](#)

Public Advocacy for a Stronger European R&I Policy (FP10)

On 6 March 2025, UNICA signed an open letter calling on EU leaders to develop a more ambitious Framework Programme (FP10) for research and innovation that prioritises excellence, investment, and scientific collaboration across Europe.

Learn More: [UNICA signs open letter in support of FP10, calling for a stronger European Research & Innovation policy | UNICA](#)

The Innovative Role of European Universities alliances in the European Higher Education Area | by Luciano Saso, Sorin Costreie, Romiță Iucu, and Alexandru Carțiș

This paper - written by the President and the Secretary General of UNICA, together with a frequent UNICA collaborator, and published in the peer-reviewed journal *Internationalisation of Higher Education*, highlights how alliances foster collaboration, mobility, and innovative approaches across Europe's universities.

Learn More: [The innovative role of European Universities Alliances in the European Higher Education Area | UNICA](#)

Supporting EUA's Vision on Research, Education & Innovation Partnerships

UNICA endorsed the European University Association's position advocating for a holistic partnership between research, education, and innovation to boost Europe's global competitiveness — illustrating UNICA's alignment with broader sectoral policy frameworks.

Learn More: [UNICA supports EUA's position for a research, education & innovation partnership to boost Europe's competitiveness | UNICA](#)

Call to Champion Academic Freedom & Protect Academics at Risk

UNICA joined a coalition of European universities in signing a statement defending academic freedom and providing support for scholars at risk, reinforcing the network's commitment to democratic values and institutional autonomy.

Learn More: [Call to Europe to champion academic freedom and protect academics at risk | UNICA](#)

AMPLIFYING VOICES - UNICA STUDENTS AT THE EUROPEAN YOUTH EVENT 2025

On the initiative of the **Youth Outreach Unit of the European Parliament**, UNICA attended this year's **European Youth Event (EYE2025)** with a delegation of 15 representatives – 13 students and 2 staff members.

The group joined more than **8,000 young people in Strasbourg** for this unique opportunity for young people to making their voices heard at the very center of European democracy.

Held every two years by the European Parliament, the EYE is a unique platform for youth aged 16 to 30 to engage directly with Members of the European Parliament, policymakers, experts, and civil society actors. The 2025 edition, held on **13–14 June**, offered a rich programme of **debates, workshops, artistic performances, and interactive sessions**, both inside the Parliament and across the vibrant EYE Village, coordinated by the **European Youth Forum**.

As part of this edition, **UNICA – Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe** was also given the chance by the **Youth Outreach Unit** to take part in two workshops exploring the role of universities in promoting youth engagement and democratic participation. The sessions united students and youth networks from across Europe and beyond to re-imagine higher education as a space where learners are not passive recipients of services but active co-creators who shape those services, safeguard quality, and drive universities toward greater inclusivity, democracy, and genuine participation.

Learn more: [Young-Loud-Leading_Reflections-from-the-EYE-2025-1.pdf](#)



IS HIGHER EDUCATION READY FOR GEN Z'S REAL-WORLD SKILLS?

By Alexandra Duarte, Federica Nestola, Guido de Wilde

With the input from the students we took the EYE 2025; we unpack this theme in an **article featured in the Winter edition of EAIE's Forum Magazine on "Skill-building for the Future."**

[READ HERE!](#)

YOUNG, LOUD & LEADING: VOICES FROM UNICA STUDENTS AT THE EUROPEAN YOUTH EVENT 2025



“If decision-makers ever need to find where to start a reform from, us, the youth, is who they must turn to!”

Alessia Ruta, Université libre de Bruxelles

“EYE 2025 helped me to see the challenges in today’s society and gave me the space to reflect on their solutions. It also gave me the space to involve the young people around me in this reflection and, thus, together, shape the future that awaits us.”

Matej Kolík, Comenius University In Bratislava

“EYE2025 was more than just an event - it was a platform for growth, connection, and action. I left Strasbourg with new friends, new ideas, and a renewed sense of purpose as a young European.”

Ieva Poškus, University Of Latvia

“EYE2025 reminded me that youth is not a waiting room for adulthood - it is a powerful force for change. It gave me confidence in my voice, hope in our collective future, and a sense of belonging that crossed borders and languages.”

Ecem Zöhre Alakabak, Ankara University



UNICA DELEGATION AT THE EYE 2025



STRASBOURG, JUN 2025

STRASBOURG

Jun 2025 | UNICA attends the European Youth Event, on the invitation of the EP Youth Outreach Unit

BRUSSELS

Feb 2025 | UNICA President speaks at the Science|Business Annual Public Conference on the EU policies in R&I

Feb 2025 | UNICA Days in Brussels: "The role of university networks in the context of the European Universities alliances"

Jul 2025 | UNICA Summer Reception

Sep 2025 | OP4C Final Event "Skills for a burning world"

Dec 2025 | UNICA Winter Reception



LONDON

May 2025 | Conference "How models of Higher Education travel internationally"

WARSAW

Sep 2025 | UNICA Research Meeting on "Strengthening Research Collaboration in a Changing Landscape"

RIGA

Apr 2025 | UNICA Rectors' Panel "Competitiveness & Inclusiveness in R&I in Europe: a UNICA perspective"

TALLINN

Dec 2025 | UNICA IRO Meeting on "Strategic Internationalisation"

PODGORICA

Oct 2025 | UNICA takes part in the Science|Business Widening public conference

HANNOVER

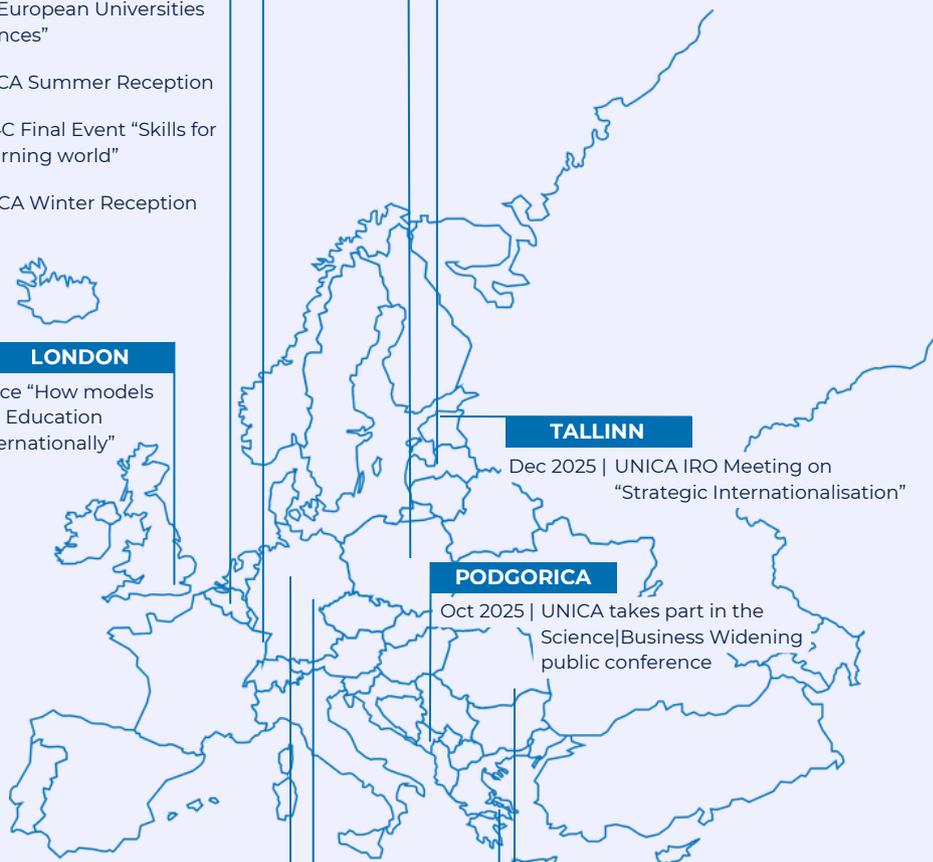
Oct 2025 | UNICA attends the inaugural event of GICHE

BUCHAREST

Nov 2025 | UNICA Alumni Relations Meeting on "The Strategic Value of Alumni Relations"

ATHENS

Jun 2025 | 35th UNICA General Assembly & Rectors' Seminar "The key role of the Humanities in our universities"





35 Years of Building Bridges Across European Capitals

**SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY
SUPPLEMENT**





Luciano Saso, UNICA Secretary General

35 years is a long time!
Long enough to have seen the world go digital, work shift from strictly in-person to hybrid and remote, and universities adapt to profound technological, social, and political change. Over these decades, higher education has been challenged to rethink how it teaches, researches, collaborates, and serves society.

During the past year, the UNICA Office embarked on a treasure hunt through its archives. We rediscovered documents typed on typewriters, messages sent by fax, photographs developed from film, and other artifacts; all telling the story of a changing world, and of a network that evolved along with it. Having been involved with UNICA for over 15 years, I have personally witnessed many of these transformations.

What makes me particularly proud, however, is that amid all this change, **one essential element has remained constant: UNICA's deep-rooted spirit of community.**

Celebrating 35 years is therefore not only about looking back. It is about recognising the resilience of cooperation, the people who have sustained it, and the shared belief that working together still matters. In uncertain times, **UNICA continues to stand for connection** and exchange, and for the conviction that the many individuals who make up what we call a university can, collectively, help shape a better future.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, likely belonging to Luciano Saso, the UNICA Secretary General.

ECHOES OF UNICA

A timeline of the UNICA Network told through community voices across the years, reflecting both our shared history and the story of Europe.

1990



“Why a network of universities?

Because the Universities have an essential part to play in the Europe of tomorrow if, in addition to the free circulation of persons and ideas, full meaning is also to be given to the concept of Europe which, in itself, is becoming increasingly more significant as a key factor in their development” –

From an introduction document shared during a Press Conference at ULB to present the UNICA Network, 25 January 1990

Context: Europe was redefining itself after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Erasmus Programme had just begun (1987), and universities were emerging as key actors in building a new European identity. UNICA was born from this vision — connecting capitals to shape the academic Europe of the future.

1995



“Over the last five years, UNICA has gone through several phases in its development. Some of our initial members have left, new members have joined - today we are 24 universities. (...) We have recently initiated several new activities directly in line with our common urban specificity. These concern racism and xenophobia, public health, and scientific preservation of our cultural heritage.” – Georges Verhaegen, former President of UNICA, writing for the editorial of the third edition of UNICA News, the printed newsletter that circulated by mail in the early years of the network, January 1995

Context: The Maastricht Treaty (1993) had created the European Union and launched the Single Market. Europe was facing new questions about inclusion and citizenship. UNICA’s focus on diversity, health, and heritage reflected a commitment to the social dimension of universities — well before it became an EU priority.

2000



“During the ten years of its existence, UNICA has become one of the most prestigious networks among European Universities. The significance of UNICA today is extremely important in view of the move towards internationalisation in the world and the development of the European dimension. As a network, it can play an important part in further developing links between the universities of the capital cities.” - **Gunnel Engwall, former President of UNICA, on the occasion of the 10th General Assembly and Anniversary celebration, 14 December 2000**

Context: The Bologna Declaration (1999) and the launch of the European Research Area (2000) were reshaping the continent’s academic landscape. Universities were beginning to operate within a common European framework, and UNICA was already positioning itself as a bridge between local identities and continental cooperation.

2005



“I am aware that by attending the Student Conference in London I was able to personally experience only a small sample of UNICA’s activities. However, on the basis of this experience, I was able to appreciate its capability to create and reinforce bonds and links among EU universities. Such links may make an important contribution towards the future of the EU, not only towards the creation of a truly European civil society, but also towards fostering the growth of EU capitals and their competitiveness in a knowledge based economy, in which universities provide a fundamental source of competitive advantage for countries and territories.” - **Riccardo Crescenzi, former student of Università degli Studi Roma Tre who participated in the UNICA Student Conference 2002, in a speech given on the occasion of the 15th UNICA General Assembly, 19 November 2005**

Context: The Lisbon Strategy (2000) had placed education and innovation at the heart of Europe’s competitiveness. The idea of the “knowledge-based economy” was gaining ground, and students like Riccardo were voicing what UNICA stood for: a community shaping Europe’s intellectual and social capital.



2010

"I want to say a warm thank you for all you have done in this time: to drive forward European cooperation on HE. This is a crucial part of the EU's strategy to build a true knowledge society. (...) In the last decade, since the Bologna Declaration was signed in 1999, your institutions have achieved a great deal. It has now become possible to talk of a European shared HE and Research area, where before change was uncoordinated. (...) But things are still far from perfect. (...) Many HEIs still operate in relative isolation with little awareness of the society around them. (...) Cooperation is our watch word. As you know, as members of a flourishing network, we may learn well on our own, but we learn more when we share our knowledge and our experience." -

Androulla Vassiliou, former European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth (2010-2014), on a video message on the occasion of UNICA's 20th General Assembly, 29 October 2010

Context: The European Higher Education Area was officially launched that year. After a decade of Bologna reforms, the EU's focus turned to building a genuine "knowledge society." UNICA's growing cooperation among capital universities mirrored this collective ambition of connection and shared learning.

2015



"To be aware of our diversities and to share it as a common value: it is very important for our future, either as single universities or as universities being part of a community" – **Daniela Magrini, Sapienza University of Rome, on the most important role of UNICA for universities, for the commemorative video of the 25 years of UNICA**

Context: Europe was emerging from the financial crisis and redefining solidarity. Erasmus+ (2014) and Horizon 2020 were reinforcing the European dimension in education and research. UNICA's message of unity through diversity echoed the spirit of inclusion guiding European cooperation.



2020

“Thanks to networks of universities like yours, the Higher Education sector in Europe has shown such resilience, excellence and solidarity during the coronavirus crisis. (...) These may be challenging times, but, by working together, we can ensure that Higher Education, along with our surrounding community, emerges stronger and more connected than ever before. Organisations like UNICA go a long way to achieving this objective.” – **Mariya Gabriel, former EU Commissioner for Innovation, Research Culture, Education and Youth (2019-2023), on the occasion of UNICA’s 30th General Assembly, 19 January 2020**

Context: The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education worldwide. Yet, collaboration networks such as UNICA demonstrated Europe’s capacity for digital adaptation and collective strength. At the same time, the European Commission unveiled its vision for the European Education Area and the European Universities Initiative, reaffirming the role of cooperation in recovery.



2025

“In a time marked by the rise of new obscurantism, we must champion reason, truth, and science. A renewed commitment to illuminism is essential, and UNICA is ready to lead the way.” – **Sorin Costreie, President of UNICA, Message on the occasion of the 35 years of UNICA, 24 January 2025**

Context: As Europe faces global uncertainty, threats to knowledge, and growing disinformation, universities must act as sources of evidence-based knowledge that sustains informed citizenship, fosters critical thinking, and promotes pluralistic dialogues. UNICA’s voice reaffirms the network’s mission: to defend science, democracy, and cooperation as the foundations of Europe’s future.

MOMENTS IN TIME: A UNICA MEMORY MOSAIC

A series of reflections from across our community, beginning with a personal memory or moment that shaped our network's journey.

Elena Avgoustidou-Kyriacou, University of Cyprus

In December 2004, Elena Avgoustidou-Kyriacou took part in the Second Meeting of the UNICA Bologna Lab Coordinators, at the University of Vienna.



THEN



NOW

“At the time the University of Cyprus was already a member of UNICA for 10 years. We had active participation in various working groups as we had so many things to learn, but also to share.

Of course, the Bologna Process was very important to us a newly founded institution (est. in 1989). Therefore, we were very much engaged in the UNICA Bologna Lab Coordinators group! We had long and vivid discussions, as well as debates. And of course, workshops. We had a lot of expectations not only as institutions, but also as professionals. We had too many questions and too many challenges to face as a network and as institutions. And we still do. Too many things to learn back then as a young professional in international relations. And still this never stops since international relations is very dynamic environment ever evolving. But this is what UNICA is all about: sharing, learning, developing, facing new challenges, undertaking initiatives.”

Yvon Molinghen, Université libre de Bruxelles

In 1994, Yvon Molinghen took part in a mobility experience under the “Mobile Administratives Programme” of UNICA, a precursor of the staff mobility scheme of Erasmus+ that exists today.

THEN

Testimony by Yvon Molinghen
taken from the pamphlet
“UNICA News”, nr. 3, January 1995

**YVON MOLINGHEN (ULB)
A l'Universidade Nova de Lisboa**

Le but de cette visite à l'Universidade Nova de Lisboa était triple: améliorer mon niveau de portugais, découvrir comment les programmes de mobilité européens sont gérés à Lisbonne et échanger des informations sur le fonctionnement et les programmes de cours de nos universités respectives, afin de pouvoir développer éventuellement des contacts.

J'ai effectivement été plongé dans un bain linguis-

tique une semaine durant.

Mes visites au Rectorat et dans quatre facultés m'ont également permis de voir comment s'organise la gestion de la mobilité dans une université telle que la Nova, dont les facultés sont disséminées à travers toute la ville. En l'absence d'un Bureau International central, chaque faculté a désigné un responsable académique Erasmus, souvent promoteur d'un PIC, qui coordonne l'ensemble des échanges avec ses collègues. Il est appuyé la plupart du temps, pour l'aspect pratique de l'accueil, par un bureau «Etudiants» où des volontaires prennent en charge la réservation d'un logement et l'intégration des étudiants étrangers (navette depuis l'aéroport, visite des bâtiments, organisation de visites culturelles, etc.).

Ce type de structure a ses avantages: aspect personnalisé et chaleureux de l'accueil, efficacité due au petit nombre (quelques étudiants portugais s'occupent de quelques étudiants étrangers venant uniquement dans leur faculté). Elle a aussi ses inconvénients: manque de cohésion et d'harmonie au niveau de l'institution dans son ensemble, surcharge de travail pour les professeurs, aide basée sur un volontariat d'étudiants dont on n'est jamais sûr qu'il se poursuivra d'année en année. De nombreux professeurs m'ont d'ailleurs signalé que si le volume des échanges continuait à augmenter, il faudrait revoir l'organisation actuelle. La leçon à tirer de cette expérience est sans doute que l'idéal consiste à répartir équitablement et selon les aptitudes de chacun le poids de la mobilité *in* et *out*. Le professeur prend en charge les aspects académiques (contacts avec ses partenaires étrangers, sélection des candidats *out*, constitution du programme des étudiants *in*, etc.);

le Bureau International centralise les aspects administratifs (information générale sur les programmes européens, lettres d'intention pour PICs, paiement des bourses *out*, réservation d'un logement et inscription à l'université des *in*, attestations, etc.); le «Bureau Etudiants» s'occupe de l'intégration (briefing pratique et concret sur la faculté, intégration, loisirs, culture, etc.).

Enfin, j'ai rencontré de nombreux coordonnateurs Erasmus en faculté, à qui j'ai fourni des programmes de cours de l'ULB, ainsi qu'un maximum de renseignements sur nos points forts et nos ouvertures potentielles en matière de programmes européens. L'intérêt des professeurs portugais était manifeste. En Faculté de Médecine, le Prof. SILVA E SOUSA semblait décidé à lancer un nouveau PIC dans lequel l'ULB serait partenaire. Le Prof. RODRIGUES DE CARVALHO, Sous-Directeur de la Faculté des Sciences et Technologies, a remarqué que les disciplines et la structure des études étaient fort semblables à l'UNL et à l'ULB et qu'il serait par conséquent aisé d'organiser des échanges (un PIC commun existe déjà en mathématique). A priori, il était intéressé par l'ensemble des disciplines en ingénierie, et par les sciences s'appliquant à l'étude de l'environnement, notamment la géologie. Sa faculté, qui dispose d'un vaste campus sur la rive gauche du Tage, est en pleine expansion et fait construire de nouveaux bâtiments pour plusieurs sections. L'avenir nous dira si des échanges sont nés de ce premier contact.

Yvon Molinghen
(Attaché au Département des RI)
5/3/94 - 11/3/94

**Yvon Molinghen,
Université libre de Bruxelles
(cont.)**

NOW



“In 1994, I had the opportunity to spend one week at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa in the framework of a UNICA admin staff mobility scheme. I was 28 years old, still had hair and my beard was dark brown instead of grey. I had just started my job at the International Office of Université Libre de Bruxelles and didn’t have much experience or expertise. The objective of my stay was triple: to compare the management of Erasmus student exchanges between ULB’s centralized structure and UNL’s decentralized one, to explore potential new partnerships, and to improve my level in Portuguese.

What I remember most is the warm welcome of all the people I met and all the activities they had organized especially for me, not just meetings at the university but also cultural visits in Lisbon. They had even offered me a ticket to attend Amaramalia, a musical about the life and career of famous fado singer Amalia Rodrigues.

At that time, what we called “international relations” consisted almost exclusively of student exchanges. The Erasmus program was only building speed, we were proud to say we sent 80 students abroad yearly and received about as many. Applications had to be done on paper forms and were sent to the partner institution by fax. Without e-mail and websites, students struggled to find the necessary information to prepare their learning agreement. Most of the time they did not find any and departed abroad with only a vague idea of the courses they would attend. Compared to today’s study-abroad programs, it was quite an adventure!

But what has not changed, I believe, is the benefit youngsters derive from the experience of living abroad. Beyond the famous “soft skills” valued by future employers (resourcefulness, intercultural communication, adaptability, foreign languages), they learn to discover and appreciate people who are different – and that changes them forever. And the same goes for IROs who regularly meet their colleagues in networks like UNICA. As the old saying goes, you never come back from a trip, because the person who returns is no longer the one who left.

I am convinced that the internationalization of universities contributes to a momentum that can really make the world a better place.”

**Marta Brelh-Wąsowska,
former Project & Communications Officer at UNICA
(2010-2018)**

In 2018, Marta Brelh-Wąsowska, former Project & Communications Officer at UNICA, gave a presentation at an IRO Meeting on the then-emerging European Universities Alliances. She would later work for one of these alliances.

THEN

European Universities' (networks): (a lot of) Questions & (few) Answers

Marta Brelh-WASOWSKA, UNICA Secretariat

24th UNICA IRO meeting
King's College London, 18 April 2018

www.unica-network.eu



Contents

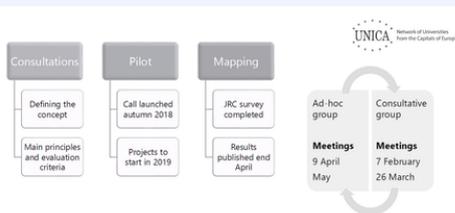
1. How did it all start?
2. Objectives
3. Towards the first call
4. Eligibility criteria and evaluation
5. Activities to be funded
6. Impact and sustainability
7. Role of institutional networks



How did it all start? (1)

- **'Bringing transnational cooperation to the next level of ambition'**
- **Inclusiveness** (variety of HEIs & geographical balance)
- **Flexible and innovative** models of partnerships with **shared long-term strategic vision**
- **Integrating** education, research and innovation
- Erasmus+ programme as the main driver in **synergy** with FP9 and national funding
- Ultimately creating **cross-border European universities**

Objectives



The consultative process & 'co-creation'

Name: European University networks? European Universities? University alliances?

Institutional networks as **'incubators'** for new networks?

Institutional networks as **potential non-HEI partner** under the new call?

'The European Universities' will reinforce Institutional networks' – but how?

Role of institutional networks

Marta Brelh-Wąsowska,
former Project & Communications Officer at UNICA
(2010-2018)
(cont.)

NOW



Back in early 2018, the world of European higher education was stirred by the emerging idea of European university networks — the “working title” for what would later become the European University alliances. Announced at the European Social Summit in Gothenburg, the concept was a direct response to Emmanuel Macron’s widely discussed speech of September 2017.

At UNICA, I recall welcoming the European Universities initiative with both keen interest and a degree of concern. Even the name raised questions: would these new “networks” overshadow those already established? Were they expected to become the new engines of internationalisation? As the initiative’s consultation process began, alongside the parallel “matchmaking” between European universities, questions from higher education stakeholders multiplied.

I remember attending one of the consultation meetings at DG EAC in Brussels and taking part in roundtable discussions. I was taken aback when I heard a stakeholder question whether universities from Central and Eastern Europe were “excellent enough” to participate. Not because I come from Poland myself, but because I had never heard such doubts voiced in UNICA fora.

Looking back at the UNICA IRO meetings I attended and helped organise, there was always a rich mix of presentations and good practices shared by colleagues from every corner of Europe — each bringing value and, often, solutions that could be replicated elsewhere. These (and many other) UNICA meetings demonstrated that excellence in higher education goes far beyond rankings or the number of Nobel laureates.

Nearly seven years into the European University initiative, having worked for the 4EU+ Alliance and observed the development of other alliances, I believe that institutions from Central and Eastern Europe participating in the initiative have disproved their sceptics and shown true commitment to the development of European higher education. Personally, I am forever grateful to UNICA for never entertaining such scepticism and for always remaining faithful to its core values: European integration, a sense of community, and the principle of “advancement by sharing”.

Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe



Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe



U N I C A
Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe

U N I C A
Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe



UNiCA Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe

Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe



Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe



UNiCA
Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe

UNiCA
Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe

Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe



UNiCA
Universities of the Capital Cities of Europe



UNICA Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe

UNICA Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe



A LETTER TO THE FUTURE

To our colleagues - present and future - in the UNICA community,

This letter is written at a moment of continuity and change.

In 2025, UNICA marked 35 years of cooperation among universities in Europe's capital cities - years shaped by transformation in how universities teach, research, govern, and engage with society.

Looking ahead, we know that the context in which you work will not mirror ours. **Priorities will shift. Structures will evolve. New challenges will emerge.** Yet the reason UNICA exists - to create space for cooperation, dialogue, and shared responsibility among universities - will remain relevant as long as higher education continues to matter to society.

What sustained this network over time was never certainty, but commitment. Commitment to exchange rather than isolation; to listening across differences; and to the belief that universities, when connected, can contribute more meaningfully to the public good. These commitments were tested often, and reaffirmed deliberately.

As we marked 35 years of this network, we did not try to summarise what UNICA is. Those definitions change. **What endures is something simpler: the habit of reaching out to one another when answers are unclear, and the willingness to work through complexity together rather than alone.**

Looking further ahead, the future of universities themselves will continue to be shaped by tensions rather than certainties. Universities will be asked to be simultaneously local and global, autonomous and accountable, open and secure, competitive and inclusive. They will operate in environments where knowledge circulates faster than institutions can adapt, where public trust must be earned continuously, and where societal expectations extend well beyond teaching and research alone.

In this context, **universities will increasingly be valued not only for what they produce, but for how they engage.** Their role as spaces for critical inquiry, democratic dialogue, and independent thought will remain essential - and, at times, contested. The ability to protect academic freedom, uphold institutional integrity, and engage responsibly with political, technological, and economic forces will define their credibility in the years ahead.

At the same time, universities will be challenged to rethink learning itself. Lifelong learning, flexible pathways, micro-credentials, and new forms of recognition will continue to reshape educational models. Research will demand stronger collaboration across disciplines and sectors, while addressing global challenges that do not respect institutional or national boundaries. No single university, however strong, will be able to respond to these demands alone.

It is here that networks such as UNICA will matter most. Not as substitutes for institutional autonomy, but as spaces where universities can reflect collectively, test ideas, share risks, and learn from one another's successes and failures. In a future marked by uncertainty, cooperation will not be an optional add-on; it will be a condition for relevance and resilience.

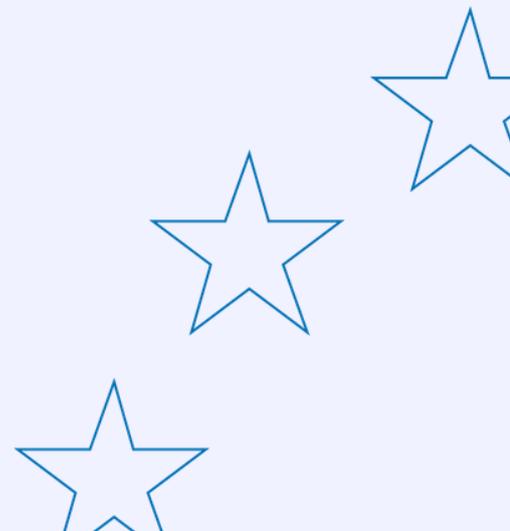
The universities of tomorrow will be judged not only by their rankings or outputs, but by their capacity to contribute thoughtfully to society - to educate engaged citizens, to advance knowledge responsibly, and to remain open institutions in changing times.

To those joining UNICA in the years to come: you will shape the network in ways we cannot foresee. You are encouraged to question its formats, adapt its priorities, and respond to the needs of your time. Networks endure not because they are preserved unchanged, but because they are renewed by those who use them.

To those active today: remember that cooperation is an active practice. It depends on participation, trust, and the willingness to invest time in collective work whose impact is not always immediate, but often lasting.

This letter does not seek to conclude UNICA's story. It is an acknowledgement that the network's future is neither fixed nor predetermined. It will be shaped by the choices, commitments, and imagination of its members.

If UNICA continues to serve as a space for connection, reflection, and shared responsibility, then it will remain relevant - not because of its history, but because of what you choose to build next.





1990



2025



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

www.unica-network.eu

+32 (0)2 514 79 00

office@unica-network.eu