

UNICA IRO MEETING 2026

Hosted by the University of Cyprus, 4-6 November 2026

“IROs in the Next Erasmus+ Era: rethinking the concept of successful internationalisation”

Introduction

Internationalisation in Higher Education is undergoing a structural shift. While the numbers of staff and students taking part in mobility experiences remain central indicators of internationalisation, they are no longer sufficient as standalone indicators of internationalisation success. Universities are being asked to demonstrate the *meaning, impact, and institutional value* of international engagement beyond participation numbers.

In short, we are **moving from the logic of mobility as output (“what is delivered”) to mobility as leverage (“what mobility we enable, transform, and improve across the institution”)**.

This evolution is closely linked to the **ongoing policy discussions on the future of Erasmus+ for the post-2027 period**. Current negotiations and preparatory policy directions indicate a clear shift towards a more impact-oriented, skills-driven, and system-level approach. In this emerging framework, learning mobility is increasingly positioned not as an end in itself, but as part of a broader strategy for skills development, inclusion, institutional capacity building, and competitiveness across European higher education systems.

In this context, **evolving formats of international engagement** that have been practised already for some time – including blended mobility, short-term staff weeks, thematic summer & winter schools, and elements of internationalisation at home – gain a new momentum to expand. These developments pressure International Relations Offices to move beyond administrative coordination towards **more strategic roles**: connecting mobility to institutional priorities, fostering inclusive participation, and demonstrating impact.

The UNICA IRO meeting 2026 aims to provide an opportunity to collectively reflect on the shift from mobility as a metric of activity to mobility as a driver of institutional transformation and impact.

Driving questions

- If mobility is no longer the main metric, what should universities be measuring instead? And what tools can universities use to measure that?
- How do internationalisation at home and mobility strategies reinforce each other within a more integrated, impact-oriented approach?
- How can higher education institutions demonstrate and evaluate the contribution of staff mobility and short-term international programmes to the emerging priorities of Erasmus+?
- What innovative formats of international engagement can universities explore to make international experiences more accessible, inclusive, and sustainable?
- How can the sector strengthen the understanding of internationalisation at home as a complementary dimension of mobility-based strategies?

DRAFT PROGRAMME (as of 29 September 2026)

Day 0 | Wednesday, 4 November

17:00	Guided walking tour in the old city (meeting point in the city center - precise address TBC)
20:00 (TBC)	Welcome dinner in the old city

Overall Chair: Elena AVGOUSTIDOU-KYRIACOU, Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus and Coordinator of the UNICA IRO Group

Day 1 | Thursday, 5 November

8:15-8:45	Registration of the participants and welcome coffee
8:45-9:00	Welcome words • Tasos Christofides, Rector, University of Cyprus • Luciano Saso, UNICA Secretary General • Elena Avgoustidou-Kyriacou, Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus and Coordinator of the UNICA IRO Group
9:00 – 9:15	Tour de Table
9:15-9:30	Presentation of the University of Cyprus , by Stella-Maria Vassiliou , Coordinator of the International Recruitment and Promotion Sector, International Relations Service, University of Cyprus
9:30-10:15	Opening talk “What does successful internationalisation look like today?” By Horia Onita, Head of the European Higher Education Secretariat (TBC) Q&A (15’)
10:15-10:45	Coffee break
10:45-11:45	Session 1 - Rethinking impact — beyond mobility numbers Chair: Luciano Saso , UNICA Secretary General Panel discussion with representatives from UNICA member universities Q&A

11:45-12:45	Time for a group picture & Tour of the UCY Campus and Library
12:45 – 13:45	Cocktail lunch
13:45-15:15	Break-out groups: “Measuring internationalisation in practice” Topics Assessing/measuring: • Student outcomes and graduate skills • Staff mobility and institutional learning • Internationalisation at Home • Inclusion and accessibility beyond the mobile minority • Institutional partnerships and institutional transformation Reporting from the breakout groups (30')
15:15-17:00	Session 2 Beyond traditional mobility: Emerging Formats of International Engagement and Internationalisation at Home Chair: Elena Avgoustidou-Kyriacou , Director of the International Relations Service, University of Cyprus and Coordinator of the UNICA IRO Group Opening talk on Internationalisation at Home , by Pablo Salvadores , Rey Juan Carlos University (15') Presentations (10' each) • Helena Deršek Štuhec, Head of Department, Office for international cooperation, University of Ljubljana • Eleni Vasileiou, Head of the International Relations Office, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences • Emma Zeniou, Coordinator of the International Relations and Development Sector and Head of the Mobility Office, International Relations Service, University of Cyprus Q&A and discussion Transfer by bus from Nicosia to Larnaca (approx. 30') Walk in Larnaca, followed by dinner at beach tavern Return to Nicosia by bus
17:00	

Day 2 | Friday, 6 November

8:30 – 9:00	Welcome coffee
9:00 – 11:30	Workshop - Tools and Methods for Demonstrating the Value of Internationalisation • Developing impact frameworks: learn how to define objectives, identify relevant indicators, and select appropriate methods for collecting evidence; • Work in groups to build a simple impact assessment framework for initiatives such as staff mobility, short-term programmes, or internationalisation at home; • Explore strategies for translating data into compelling narratives that demonstrate value to university leadership, funding bodies, and other stakeholders; • Draft impact frameworks that participants can adapt to their own institutions.
11:30-12:00	Coffee break
12:00-12:15	Wrap up: main takeaways and conclusions
12:15-13:00	Time for UNICA IROs' business • UNICA IRO Meeting 2026 evaluation survey • Announcements & Communications from UNICA • Discussion on future UNICA IRO meetings and initiatives • Members' corner: sharing open announcements and whatever they wish
13:00-14:00	Farewell lunch

Information and contact

Regular updates and registration form available at the **event webpage**:
<https://www.unica-network.eu/event/unica-iro-meeting-2026/>

For any questions, please contact the UNICA Secretariat:

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