

## Press Release: New Study reveals European Universities Alliances as key drivers of informal diplomacy

Full results to be presented at the **KIND (Knowledge and Informal Diplomacy) Conference on November 21–22 at the European University Institute in Florence**

A groundbreaking new study, part of the HEIDI (Higher Education and Informal Diplomacy) project funded by Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, offers the first comprehensive look at the essential role of European Universities Alliances (EUAs) in fostering global cooperation and informal diplomacy. Led by Dr Marina Cino Pagliarello, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the European University Institute, the study explores how these alliances enable knowledge exchange and partnerships that transcend traditional diplomatic boundaries, addressing critical global challenges. With insights from **294 respondents across 201 institutions in 52 alliances**, the findings highlight how EUAs strengthen the global reach of universities while uncovering key challenges they face.

### Key Findings:

- **Expanding internationalisation:** EUAs are instrumental in fostering new international partnerships, with 90.1% of respondents noting new collaborations with other European universities and 41.3% highlighting new connections outside Europe. Additionally, 56.4% of respondents rated extra-EU partnerships as critical to their institution's international strategy.
- **Challenges in funding and ethics:** Despite their success, EUAs face notable challenges, with 54.4% of respondents citing funding shortages and 81.2% raising ethical concerns regarding international collaborations. These issues highlight the pressing need for stronger support from governing bodies to better align local priorities with global objectives.
- **Influence on institutional autonomy:** National governments and EU bodies exert considerable influence over institutional autonomy, with 96.4% of respondents identifying government impacts on financial decisions and 94% noting organizational influence. EU financial policies also play a significant role, cited by 69.9% of respondents.
- **Student diplomacy:** While only 20% of respondents see student organisations as directly influencing decision-making, this data suggests that students still play a powerful role as informal diplomats. Through mobility and exchange programs, students actively foster intercultural dialogue and strengthen cross-cultural connections.
- **Diverse global reach:** Over 60% of institutions within EUAs also participate in additional international consortia, with partnerships extending beyond Europe to regions like Asia, North America, and the U.K. This broad network positions universities as vital bridges in both formal and informal diplomatic channels.

The study reveals that EUAs significantly enhance university reputations, with over 90% of respondents agreeing that alliance membership boosts national and international prestige. Additionally, 75% reported that EUA membership increases public trust in knowledge exchange and impact efforts. The findings underscore that European universities, through their alliances, are essential drivers of cross-border collaboration and informal diplomacy, shaping global solutions alongside traditional state-led efforts.

For registering to the KIND event: <https://www.eui.eu/events?id=566464> - For additional info about the study, please contact: [marina.cinopagliarello@eui.eu](mailto:marina.cinopagliarello@eui.eu); [heidi.euproject@eui.eu](mailto:heidi.euproject@eui.eu)