



# CONCEPT NOTE

## European Universities Alliances: An Opportunity for Catholic Universities?

### Background

The European Universities Initiative (EUI), launched by the European Commission in 2019, aims to foster unprecedented levels of cooperation among higher education institutions across Europe. By creating transnational alliances, the initiative - currently counting 65 alliances with more than 570 higher education institutions - seeks to enhance the quality, inclusiveness and competitiveness of European higher education. For Catholic universities, this presents both unique challenges and significant opportunities to integrate their foundational values into a broader European educational framework.

### Main challenges

- 1. Preservation of identity and values:** Engaging in diverse alliances may challenge Catholic universities to maintain their distinct identity and mission. Thorough reflection may be required to ensure that core values such as human dignity, social justice and environmental preservation are respected, together with ethical considerations and the underlying principles of Catholic Social Teaching.
- 2. Addressing inequalities:** The formation of alliances may widen disparities between large powerful institutions and smaller, less-resourced Catholic universities. Ensuring equitable participation and avoiding marginalization is a critical concern.
- 3. Navigating competition:** As universities collaborate more closely, the competitive landscape intensifies. Catholic institutions must look for a more balanced position between collaboration and competition in order to remain distinctive and true to their mission.
- 4. Regulatory and structural barriers:** Differences in national regulations and institutional structures can hamper transnational cooperation, hindering participation in broader alliances. Aligning diverse educational systems while respecting institutional autonomy remains a significant challenge.



## Main opportunities

- 1. Promotion of Catholic values:** The initiative offers a platform for Catholic universities to infuse/advance their values into a broader context, by promoting ethics, social responsibility and integral education across Europe.
- 2. Enhancing inclusion:** By participating in alliances, Catholic universities can extend their reach to underserved populations, fostering social inclusion and offering educational opportunities to marginalized or rural communities alongside minorities – and effectively fulfil their mission of social agents in their local and regional contexts
- 3. Expanding horizons:** Increased collaboration may facilitate sharing knowledge, resources and best practices, while enriching the educational and research experience, and broadening perspectives for students and staff alike at the regional and, hopefully, international level, as well.
- 4. Engaging stakeholders:** Alliances encourage the development of innovative teaching methods, joint research projects and interdisciplinary programs within an ecosystem that involves collaborating with all stakeholders, with a view to increasing their positive impact on their own local communities in the spirit of service that Catholic universities wish to render to society.

## In brief

The European Universities Initiative presents a critical moment for Catholic universities to engage deeply in shaping the future of European higher education. By addressing challenges and seizing opportunities, Catholic universities' unique perspectives and values may contribute to shaping an educational landscape that serves society and the Common Good in a more meaningful way.



## UPCOMING WEBINARS

To further explore all these issues, a series of two webinars will be organized next May 2025, featuring testimonies from Catholic universities already participating in a European University Alliance. These sessions aim to present the European Commission's initiative, share experiences, discuss challenges and highlight the opportunities that the Alliances offer to Catholic higher education institutions.

These webinars will be organized by the **International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU)** in close collaboration with the **Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE)**.