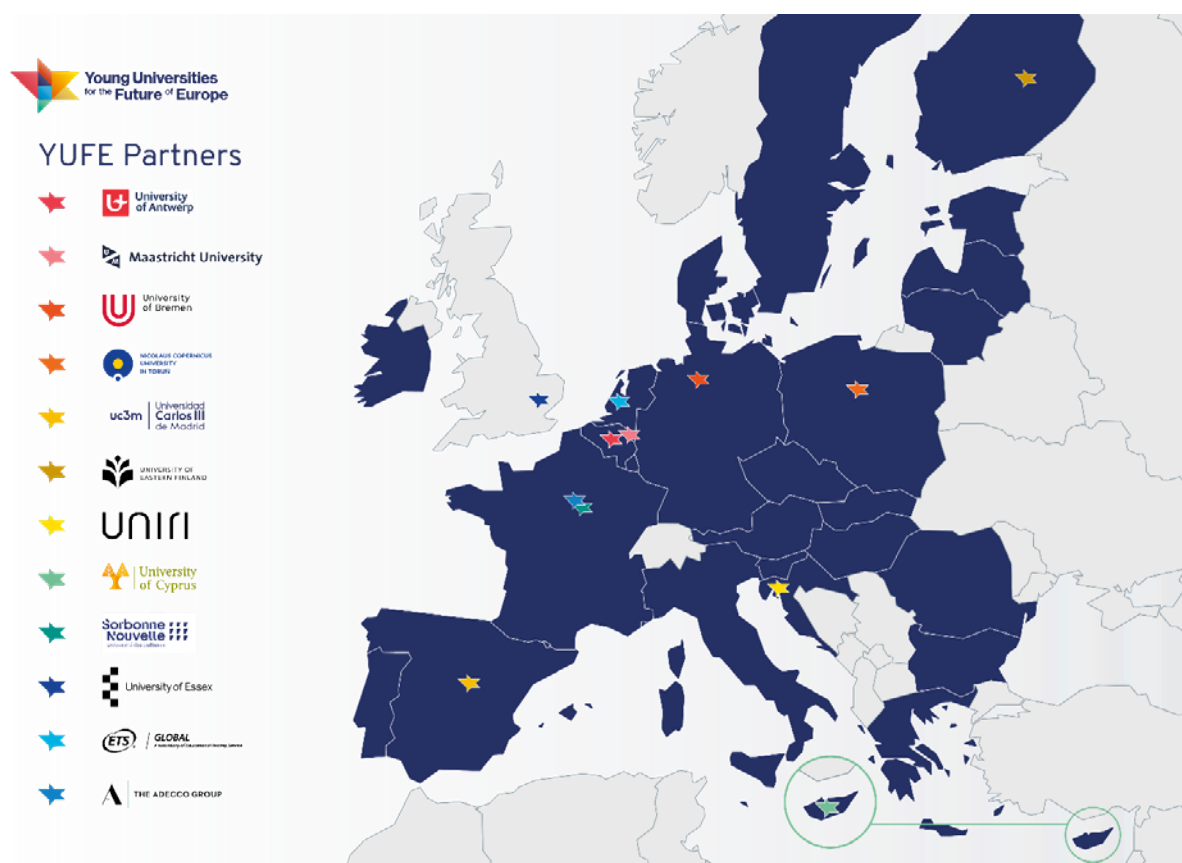


University-Community Collaboration: Strengthening Local Engagement and Global Connections

Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE)

Work Package 8 Community and Civic Engagement

Deliverable 8.2 Report on university-community collaboration



Abstract

The report *University-Community Collaboration: Strengthening Local Engagement and Global Connections* provides a comprehensive overview of the strategies and initiatives undertaken by the **Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) Alliance** to enhance collaboration between universities and local communities. It traces the transformation of ten individual institutions into a cohesive, community-oriented Alliance dedicated to fostering civic engagement at both local and international levels.

The report opens with an overview of existing local cooperation frameworks and introduces the *YUFE Community Engagement Declaration 2025–2030*, which sets out the Alliance's core values and strategic direction. It highlights a series of concrete YUFE initiatives – such as Service-Learning Help Desks, Community Volunteering Programmes, the Friend Programme, the Community Engagement Network, and the CommUNITY Conference – that exemplify YUFE's approach to building inclusive and mutually beneficial university-community partnerships.

Subsequent sections address communication strategies, the measurable impact of community engagement efforts, and the key challenges encountered during implementation. The final chapters look ahead, outlining YUFE's long-term ambitions and presenting key recommendations for effective and sustainable university-community collaboration.

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Introduction

Universities play a vital role in societal development, not only through education and research but also by actively engaging with their communities. This report explores the initiatives undertaken by ten universities within **the Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) Alliance**, united by a shared commitment to collaboration with their surroundings and the promotion of community and civic engagement.

In its activities, YUFE has followed the direction outlined in key European policy documents that emphasise the social responsibility of higher education. The Alliance aligns with the *Council of Europe's Education Strategy 2024–2030*¹, which highlights the importance of empowering learners and making education more responsive to diverse societal needs. YUFE also embraces the principles set out in the *EHEA Rome Ministerial Communiqué*², which advocates for authentic university-community partnerships to address social and democratic challenges. Furthermore, the Alliance supports the vision of the *European Commission's Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education*³, which calls for inclusive, civic-minded institutions that are closely connected to their communities.

Building on the three-year experience of the first phase of the European Universities Initiative (2019-2022) – during which a team of experts from ten European countries, in cooperation with their community partners, created, piloted, and evaluated several community engagement initiatives – **YUFE 2030** has entered the next phase (2022-2026) with the aim of further enhancing its positive impact and becoming a truly socially responsible European University.

The YUFE Alliance is dedicated to fostering meaningful partnerships between academia and local communities, creating opportunities for knowledge exchange, social innovation, and collaborative problem-solving. Through a range of initiatives developed in a spirit of cooperation and mutual learning, YUFE institutions aim to address social challenges while promoting inclusivity and empowerment.

¹ Council of Europe. Learners First: Education for Today's and Tomorrow's Democratic Societies – Education Strategy 2024–2030.

² European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Rome Ministerial Communiqué (EHEA Ministerial Conference, 19 November 2020, online).

³ European Commission. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a renewed EU agenda for higher education (COM (2017) 247 final). Brussels, 30 May 2017

These programmes encourage active participation from students, staff and other community members, enhancing their skills and motivation to drive positive change. By bringing together diverse perspectives, cultural experiences, and resources, YUFE has developed innovative models of university-community collaboration that not only strengthen relationships between academia and society but may also serve as blueprints for similar efforts in other contexts.

From ten universities to one community-oriented Alliance

This chapter outlines the YUFE Alliance's journey toward becoming a unified, community-driven network of universities. It begins by mapping and analysing existing local cooperation schemes across partner institutions, laying the foundation for a shared approach to community engagement. Building on these insights, the chapter introduces the *YUFE Community Engagement Declaration 2025–2030*, a strategic framework that guides joint action across the Alliance. The following sections showcase diverse initiatives that reflect YUFE's commitment to socially engaged higher education.

Mapping & Analysing Local Cooperation Schemes

The first step in the YUFE 2030 process for advancing community engagement was the mapping and analysis of local cooperation schemes between YUFE universities and their surrounding communities. This initiative aimed to better understand how these collaborations function, identify existing strengths, and determine areas in need of enhancement.

All YUFE partner universities participated in a mapping exercise⁴, revealing a highly diverse landscape of university-community collaboration. The findings illustrate that cooperation takes a wide variety of forms, including scientific research addressing societal needs, science communication and outreach events, joint initiatives for regional development, community-building activities, volunteering programmes, student-led projects, and more. These examples highlight the multifaceted ways universities engage with their local communities, responding to specific social, economic, and cultural contexts while promoting knowledge exchange and civic participation.

The analysis also considered critical aspects such as organisational structures, resource allocation, the extent of cross-sectoral collaboration, and the roles of various stakeholders. These insights provide a foundation for identifying opportunities for further development and institutional improvement.

⁴ The TEFCE Toolbox was the recommended tool used to guide the mapping process, helping partners identify and reflect on their existing engagement practices in a structured and comprehensive way. Ćulum Ilić, B., Glavan Šćulac, D., Pašić, M., Šćukanec Schmidt, N. (2020). Community Engagement at the University of Rijeka: Report on Piloting the TEFCE Toolbox. Zagreb: Institute for the Development of Education

Cherry-picked initiatives from the mapping exercise

The rich and diverse community engagement experiences of the ten YUFE universities enrich the Alliance and are reflected in this selection of initiatives, showcasing the variety of approaches and capacities within the partnership.

MAASTRICHT UNIVERSITY	The Green Network The network is the sustainability web within the university, comprising various initiatives affiliated with the Sustainability Hub and the Faculty Green Teams. Each of the six faculties has its own Green Team, which plays a crucial role in integrating sustainability within their respective faculties and connecting sustainability initiatives across the university. Their mission is to drive a culture of sustainability and awareness, actively promoting positive environmental change, fostering collaboration, and empowering the university community to engage in sustainability-focused initiatives.
NICOLAUS COPERNICUS UNIVERSITY IN TORUŃ	Toruń Festival of Science and Arts The festival, held annually since 2001, is organised by NCU in cooperation with the Toruń City Hall and the Scientific Society in Toruń. It is a key initiative promoting science and art within the local community. The three-day festival brings together university staff and students with representatives of local institutions, offering a platform to present scientific and artistic achievements in an accessible, engaging, and appealing way to a wide and diverse audience.
SORBONNE NOUVELLE UNIVERSITY	Narra la Independencia The project is an inter-university initiative that organises participatory workshops focused on history and citizenship. Its primary objective is to redesign and reshape the collective memory of Peruvian independence. Through these workshops, students and participants engage in critical discussions and activities that reframe historical narratives, fostering a deeper understanding of the significance of this pivotal moment in Peruvian history.
UNIVERSIDAD CARLOS III DE MADRID	Disconnected, yet in the Spotlight The project focuses on diagnosing the energy needs of La Cañada Real Galiana, a 15-km informal settlement in Madrid home to over 8,000 residents living below the poverty line. Due to the lack of legal utility contracts, inhabitants rely on irregular connections to nearby networks. UC3M's Engineering Group for Human Development conducted research combining census data with targeted household analysis, including interviews on energy use and campaigns measuring indoor environmental conditions, to address the community's energy and infrastructure challenges.
UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP	Bypass Middelheim project Co-creation of an accessible experiential garden for physical and mental well-being. Commissioned by the Middelheim Museum, a participatory design process was set up with children and young patients from the adjacent psychiatric institution. The idea behind BYPASS stems from scientific medical and urban planning research that shows that a quality environment contributes to a better physical and mental recovery of patients and contributes to a greater quality of life for city citizens in general. The end result is a total experience garden, which invites movement and sensory experiences, but also reflection and dialogue.

**UNIVERSITY
OF BREMEN**

HERE AHEAD

A cooperation initiated by all universities of the state of Bremen as well as the Centre for Foreign Languages Bremen. It develops and realizes outstanding programmes for preparing international students for the demands of university life in Bremen and Bremerhaven. Together with HERE AHEAD, Bremen University manages to offer a wide range of counselling, preparation and mentoring services to newcomers that go far beyond the general services offered at a university's welcome centre alone.

**UNIVERSITY
OF CYPRUS**

Improving Health for All

The Molecular Medicine Research Centre biobank.cy Center of Excellence (CoE), is a Research and Innovation Centre specialising in Biobanking and Biomedical research, working with Biobanking and the Cyprus Human Genome. It has been a pioneer in the study of inherited kidney disorders for over 30 years, with significant local and international impact. The CoE is expanding its focus to include a broader range of inherited disorders and complex genetic traits within the Cypriot population through a systematic integration of biobanking and research. The overarching goal is to understand the molecular and cellular processes that lead to disease, thereby advancing diagnosis, prevention, and therapy.

**UNIVERSITY
OF EASTERN
FINLAND**

Ilosaarirock

Ilosaarirock is an annual music festival held in Joensuu, Finland. For the university, this collaboration offers valuable visibility among the festival's audience of over 70,000 attendees, while the festival benefits from the engaging content and additional activities provided by the university. For example, in 2025, UEF introduced the "Science Corner" – a series of short talks that bring research-based knowledge into the heart of the festival experience. Numerous UEF students and staff members also volunteer in making the festival possible every year.

**UNIVERSITY
OF ESSEX**

The Essex BioBlitz Research

It is a citizen science project aimed at collecting data on plant flowering times in Essex through photographs submitted to the iNaturalist app. The project targets local residents and workers, fostering public engagement while benefiting the University through media coverage and increased visibility. Participants contribute images, which are then analysed to enhance knowledge of local flora and raise awareness of the ecological impacts of climate change. The initiative also engages the community through active data collection, with staff and students encouraged to join in. 'BioBlitz' walks on campus during the summer further connect the University community with local nature.

**UNIVERSITY
OF RIJEKA**

My Place Under the Sun

Since its inception in 2015, the initiative has involved 100 children and 73 families, supported by 180 volunteers and over 50 business partners, including the University of Rijeka. The University has played a pivotal role in providing meals, conducting research, and developing solutions to ensure an equitable childhood. UNIRI has also supported this programme by offering its premises free of charge and launching a joint national donor campaign for the adaptation and furnishing of the space. The success of the initiative also owes much to the active involvement of the local community.

Notably, this process has fostered valuable inter-institutional learning across the Alliance. It has facilitated the exchange of best practices and experiences, allowing universities to learn from one another and to build on shared knowledge. By strengthening these partnerships, the YUFE Alliance enhances its collective capacity to act as a unified force for positive societal change.

Building on the findings of this mapping exercise, a **YUFE Community Engagement Framework** will be developed by the end of 2026. This framework will serve as a strategic tool for scaling up and consolidating cooperation models, embedding the YUFE dimension more firmly within local partnerships, and promoting a (g) local approach – one that merges international cooperation, shared resources, and collective expertise to maximise positive impact at the local level.

YUFE Community Engagement Declaration 2025–2030

The YUFE Community Engagement Declaration 2025-2030 has been developed as part of the Alliance's commitment to creating clear roadmaps and recommendations for its (g)local approach. This policy paper underscores YUFE's mission to enhance European higher education by establishing a leading model of a student-centred, open, and inclusive European University, where community engagement is a fundamental, cross-cutting priority in all Alliance activities. As both a guiding document and a catalyst for change, the declaration aims to transform YUFE universities into institutions that actively engage with and respond to societal challenges. Specifically, the declaration:

- ▶ Reinforces YUFE's core values and commitment to social responsibility,
- ▶ Establishes a clear vision for community engagement throughout the Alliance,
- ▶ Provides practical recommendations to drive meaningful impact, and
- ▶ Promotes a quintuple helix model of collaboration, integrating academia, local governments, businesses, society, and the environment.

By endorsing **the quintuple helix model**⁵, YUFE highlights its dedication to fostering innovation, sustainability, and inclusive partnerships. This framework encourages universities to build strong connections with multiple actors while acknowledging the crucial role of environmental sustainability. Through this approach, YUFE can further demonstrate its leadership in holistic, socially engaged higher education, benefiting diverse communities across its partner cities and regions.

By making **community engagement a structural priority**, the declaration encourages universities to extend their impact beyond traditional education and research, positioning them as key drivers of social innovation, sustainability, and civic engagement. This approach fosters deeper ties between universities and local communities, creating environments where students, researchers, and external partners work together to solve pressing real-world issues.

For YUFE universities, the declaration serves as a strategic framework to **enhance institutional impact** and ensures that higher education responds effectively to societal needs. By embedding community engagement into our policies, curricula, and partnerships, the declaration promotes lifelong learning opportunities, increases

⁵ Carayannis, Elias & Barth, Thorsten & Campbell, David. (2012). The Quintuple Helix innovation model: global warming as a challenge and driver for innovation. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*. 1. 10.1186/2192-5372-1-2.)

student employability, and strengthens the societal relevance of academic research. Moreover, it offers a scalable and adaptable model that can inspire other European universities to adopt similar approaches, encouraging a wider movement toward socially responsible, inclusive, and engaged higher education institutions.

The implementation of the declaration varies across YUFE partner universities. While some institutions have already embedded its recommendations into existing strategies and policies – such as sustainability, inclusion, and community-based learning – others are in earlier stages, planning internal discussions or aligning the Declaration with national and institutional frameworks. Several universities report partial implementation, especially in areas like lifelong learning and science communication, and recognise that full implementation is a long-term commitment requiring continued development and exchange of good practices.

At the Alliance level, the implementation of the declaration is also progressing gradually. This approach reflects both the diversity of institutional contexts within the Alliance and the shared commitment to long-term, collective advancement towards the declaration's goals.

YUFE Community Engagement Initiatives

Through various initiatives, YUFE not only enhances academic learning but also strengthens competence development, cultural exchange, social inclusion, and a sense of belonging. The impact of these programmes extends beyond the university, enriching local communities by providing valuable resources, expertise, and opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Service-Learning Help Desks

The service-learning Help Desks are at the heart of YUFE's mission to bridge academic knowledge with community engagement. Serving as dynamic needs-driven hubs, they empower students, under the guidance of academic professionals, to assist citizens and organisations while fostering a connection between universities and their local environments. Through the Help Desks, students address a range of inquiries from the community, provide tailored and free-of-charge advice, and facilitate knowledge-sharing events such as workshops and training sessions.

YUFE Help Desks operate under two distinct models, each **tailored to local capacities and to meet specific needs and audiences**. The first model, operating in Nicolaus Copernicus University, Universidad Carlos III de Madrid and the University of Eastern Finland, focuses on individual faculties within universities, offering services aimed at residents, staff members and students. These Help Desks are established with the support of faculty deans and function as adaptable, student-led initiatives. Some emerge from pre-existing scientific groups, while others are entirely new grassroots projects. Depending on the internal policies of faculties and universities, student participation may be recognised as part of the curriculum, while in other cases it may be regarded as a purely extracurricular activity. These help desks address the diverse needs of individuals and institutions alike.

The second model, embodied by the Science Shop at the University of Antwerp, targets a different audience – non-governmental organisations and other collective entities. Unlike faculty-based help desks, the Science Shop is multidisciplinary and part of a larger national network. It invites organisations to submit inquiries on a wide range of topics, which can then serve as the basis for a master's thesis. This process transforms community questions into academic pursuits, enabling collaborative problem-solving between students, academics, and organisations.

The delivery methods of YUFE Help Desks **cater to varied preferences** and circumstances:

- ▶ Electronic query submission form allows individuals to submit their inquiries electronically through a designated form, making it easy to request assistance and gather information.
- ▶ Hybrid model, which combines both online and in-person contact, offering flexibility for users to choose their preferred mode of interaction based on convenience or necessity.
- ▶ On-site consulting and support, providing direct assistance at onsite locations through regular office hours or mobile consultation points, such as during university or city events.
- ▶ Organised workshops and training sessions aimed at engaging and educating local residents, offering them valuable skills and knowledge through structured events.

The diversity in services offered by YUFE Help Desks underscores their commitment to addressing the needs of residents across multiple sectors. Whether providing free legal advice, healthcare guidance, or support in education, water management, or employment, the desks are multifaceted. Unique services such as mural design assistance, archive organisation, patent registration guidance, or equality advocacy reflect the initiative's breadth. Specialised desks, like the Finnish English Language Help Desk or those focused on local development and migration, highlight YUFE's inclusive approach to community development.

University-Community Engagement for Staff: What's in it for me?

To strengthen the social engagement of the YUFE staff, the Alliance organised a focused online training session titled **"University-Community Engagement for Staff: What's in it for me?"**. The event was aimed at academic leaders, teaching staff, and administrative professionals, offering three concise, hands-on sessions designed to support the integration of community engagement into everyday academic and institutional practice.

Twenty-nine participants explored strategic and practical aspects of university-community cooperation, including institutional engagement strategies, student-led service initiatives, and community-engaged research. The training helped staff understand the strategic importance of engagement, identify ways to embed it into their work, and differentiate between various models, such as Service-Learning Help Desks and Science Shops.

The programme also highlighted the value of student participation in generating social impact and provided concrete tools to support the launch or development of community-oriented activities at participants' home institutions.

Further training sessions are planned for the 2025/26 academic year.

Building on the experience gained from local Help Desks, the YUFE Alliance launched **the first international Help Desk** to promote cross-border cooperation among students. This initiative enables students from various European universities to collaborate, share good practices, and benefit from each other's perspectives. Within this framework, the YUFE International Legal Clinics Network, aimed specifically at law students, offers Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) – innovative, short-term educational formats combining virtual learning with physical mobility. These programmes create a stimulating international learning environment and are designed to enhance students' legal knowledge, comparative analysis skills, and intercultural competence.

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The collaboration with partner universities in YUFE has been instrumental in establishing the YUFE legal clinic in the form of a Blended Intensive Programme, a ground-breaking initiative. This programme empowers students to critically engage with EU migration policy, offering them a unique platform to analyse its development. By assuming the role of policy advisors, students gain invaluable insights into the evolution and practice of EU migration law. Additionally, it raises students' awareness of the societal impact of migration law and helps them understand perspectives from different EU Member States and the policy concerns there.

Academic teacher,
University of Antwerp

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I had the opportunity to develop my interests and look at some issues from a broader perspective. All the workshops and lectures I attended covered different topics and allowed me to develop my language skills as well as my social skills. Thanks to YUFE, I was able to meet many amazing international students and share my experiences with them. There is no doubt that I will take part in other YUFE initiatives in the future, and I would definitely recommend this life-changing experience to anyone.

NCU student

The first edition of the programme took place in 2024, with the physical module hosted by Nicolaus Copernicus University (NCU) in Toruń. Entitled “National and European Law in the Context of Migration: A Comparative Study and International Practice and Experiences Implemented at the Legal Clinics,” the programme brought together 27 students from YUFE partner institutions and Vytautas Magnus University (Kaunas, Lithuania). The initiative focused on deepening students' knowledge of migration law and fostering cross-cultural collaboration.

The second edition, organised in 2025 and coordinated by Universidad Carlos III de Madrid (UC3M), was titled “EU and National Law in the Context of Migrations: Some Approaches.” It involved 30 students from five universities. In addition to lectures and legal workshops, the programme included training in soft skills such as design thinking, teamwork, and pitching.

Further editions of the BIP are planned, along with the introduction of a student-led legal newsletter, aimed at making complex legal issues more accessible to the general public.

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Civic engagement is essential both personally and professionally, in Europe and beyond. On a personal level, it enables me to contribute to the well-being of my community and to develop empathy. Academically, it enriches my education by providing practical experiences that complement theoretical learning. Looking ahead, I intend to integrate civic engagement into my professional life, as it not only benefits the community but also provides a sense of purpose and personal fulfilment. This, in turn, creates a positive impact on the work environment and beyond.

UC3M student

Why are service-learning Help Desks important?

- ▶ They bridge the gap between academic expertise and real-life challenges residents face.
- ▶ Encourage students to apply theoretical knowledge to solve practical problems.
- ▶ Empower community members by providing free access to expert knowledge in various fields.

What is their value for the community?

- ▶ Increased accessibility to valuable academic resources.
- ▶ Enhanced problem-solving and decision-making for individuals and local organisations.
- ▶ Stronger relationships between universities and local residents.



The YUFE Civic Star

is a certificate awarded to students for their active community involvement for at least 50 hours and for developing key skills and attitudes, such as active listening, intercultural communication, collaboration, commitment to inclusion, respect, empathy, and more. Students can participate in local initiatives through the Help Desks or Volunteering Programmes.

The Civic Star track also includes **self-reflection questionnaires** and **tailor-made training**.

By June 2025, **16 Civic Engagement Activities Intro Training** sessions for students were held to explain the importance of community engagement and how students can gain and recognise competencies through these activities.

By June 2025 **445 learners** have completed at least one YUFE Civic Engagement Activity. A further 198 are expected to complete one by the end of the year.

158 testimonials from students' **Civic Star Reflection Reports** underscore the value of their social engagement, the development of their skills, their empowerment, and their increased intercultural awareness, empathy, and solidarity.

By June 2025 **161 Civic Stars** were awarded to YUFE students.

Volunteering Programmes

YUFE organises **community volunteering programmes** in collaboration with external organisations, public institutions, and non-governmental organisations.

These programs enable students to actively contribute to social causes while providing vital human resources to partner institutions.

A key strength of YUFE volunteering is its **vast network of partnerships with 47 organisations**. These include collaborations with, among others, care centres, youth support services, cultural and business institutions, social welfare foundations, and municipal authorities. This diversity enables students to take part in a wide range of initiatives that reflect the specific needs and realities of the communities they serve. Whether supporting families, empowering young people, promoting cultural integration, teaching languages, or engaging in civic oversight of the courts, the focus remains on meaningful and needs-driven action.

YUFE Online Language Cafés

While most YUFE volunteering opportunities are conducted in collaboration with external partners, one initiative has been developed by the YUFE universities themselves and is designed specifically to benefit the academic community: serving as a student tutor for the **Online Language Cafés**. These cafés provide a welcoming, informal space where YUFE students can practice and maintain their language skills. As a tutor, a student - (near-)native speaker of Dutch, German, French, Spanish, or any other YUFE language - guides weekly online conversation sessions, facilitating discussions and sharing their language and culture with participants. This role not only allows student tutors to connect with learners from across Europe, but also to gain valuable experience in group facilitation and intercultural communication.

One of the key features of these partnerships is that they are deeply embedded in **the local context**, offering students the opportunity to work side by side with professionals and residents. These experiences often involve mentoring, project

coordination, awareness campaigns, caregiving, educational support, or creative community engagement. The variety of volunteering opportunities is one of the programme's greatest strengths. YUFE students can choose from activities that align with their skills, interests, and language abilities. Some roles require regular, in-person engagement, while others offer flexible or remote formats.

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This experience greatly influenced my future goals, as it made me realize that I may want to become a teacher one day. It also helped me overcome certain fears and develop leadership skills. My wonderful students played a role in this realization.

UC3M student

The Young Universities for the Future of Europe (YUFE) is one of the dynamic European University Alliances, selected by the European Commission. YUFE aims to shape a holistic and inclusive future for students and learners, and their society in Europe. The YUFE Alliance strives to be the front-running Alliance of European Higher Education in which students, learners, and staff are co-leaders, co-dreamers, and co-creators. YUFE's mission is to become a successful model of a socially responsible European University.

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To our YUFE volunteers: In a world where more empathy and action are often needed, YUFE students have shown that new generations not only have a voice, but also a deep desire to make a difference. Each accompaniment you have provided, each smile you have offered, and each moment you have dedicated to this program has left an indelible mark on our seniors, grateful for your help.

Thank you for being agents of change, for teaching us that volunteering has no age limit, but it does have an enormous impact on our society. We encourage you to continue with that transformative strength that characterizes you, because being a volunteer is a way of life.

Contigo Programme Team, Spain

Through these programmes, students gain hands-on experience that not only enhances their personal and professional development but also fosters a greater **sense of social responsibility** and community engagement. As they collaborate with diverse groups and tackle real-world challenges, students acquire skills in leadership, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, all while making a tangible impact on the lives of others. In this way, the YUFE volunteering programmes are not only about giving back – they also empower students to become catalysts for positive change.

Importantly, collaboration with external partners ensures that these initiatives are not only student-focused, but also **community-centred**. The volunteering projects respond to real needs identified by local organisations and public institutions, ensuring a sustainable and respectful approach.

Organisations and institutions benefit in several ways from collaborating with a university that provides volunteers:

- ▶ Access to motivated and skilled individuals – students often bring fresh perspectives, academic knowledge, and enthusiasm.
- ▶ Support in daily operations – volunteers help with a variety of tasks, easing the workload of permanent staff, which is especially valuable in non-profit organisations and public institutions with limited resources.
- ▶ New ideas – cooperation with universities often introduces innovation. Students may contribute to more effective solutions.

”

The YUFE volunteering programme brought international energy to Toruń. Over 15 volunteer students from countries such as the USA, Vietnam, Indonesia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan joined our institution as part of their Civic Star track. These young people gained professional experience and developed a range of transversal skills, while offering a fresh perspective on local business and development, enhancing English communication in our office. We remain in contact with the volunteers and follow their careers in Europe.

Business Support Centre in Toruń, Poland

- ▶ Strengthening the organisation's reputation – collaborating with educational institutions shows that the organisation supports youth development and education.
- ▶ Opportunities for future recruitment.

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The collaboration with YUFE brings clear added value to Refugee Project Maastricht. Through YUFE, we've been able to involve motivated students in our volunteer work, which strengthens our activities for and with people with a refugee background. Our contact with YUFE is accessible, reliable, and constructive. Participating in the community-engaged conference in Rijeka and the upcoming Capacity Building Forum in Brussels offers valuable opportunities to share our local experiences within a broader European context. The connection between the university and the community becomes tangible, meaningful, and mutually enriching through this partnership.

Refugee Project Maastricht Team, Maastricht, The Netherlands

Why are Community Volunteering Programmes important?

- ▶ Strengthen the role of universities as socially responsible institutions.
- ▶ Give students first-hand experience in social work, administration, and community service.
- ▶ Help NGOs and public institutions address resource shortages by providing dedicated volunteers.

What is their impact on the Community?

- ▶ Increased support for social services, charities, and public institutions.
- ▶ Development of stronger social responsibility among young people.
- ▶ Long-term improvements in social cohesion and civic participation.

YUFE Friend Programme

The YUFE Friend Programme aims to facilitate the integration of international students and staff by pairing them with local friends.

Developed collaboratively by the YUFE team, the programme is flexible and adapted to the unique cultural and institutional contexts at partner universities, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness across different environments⁶.

The UEF model, first established in the 1990s and relaunched in an updated form within the YUFE framework, adopts a participant-driven approach. It pairs recently arrived international university students and staff with local people to encourage cultural exchange.

In this model, participants are matched based on shared interests and backgrounds through a basic application process and a joint starting event. The key feature of the UEF model is its one-on-one pairings, where local friends support international participants in adjusting to life in Finland. These pairings are flexible, allowing for organic choice of schedules, shared activities and relationship-building. Also, entire families participated in the pilot programme.

In contrast, NCU in Toruń introduced a more event-based version of the YUFE Friend Programme with its *Mystery Friend model*. This approach encourages

The University of Bremen's Senior Citizens model is presented here as a good example of a community-driven initiative fostering integration, though it is not officially part of the YUFE programme.

This initiative has been running for over a decade and involves retired citizens volunteering to support international researchers. The senior volunteers offer informal support through mentoring, participation in Café International sessions, and guided city tours.

The programme is notable for its intergenerational approach, as retirees share their knowledge and experience with younger international participants. This grassroots initiative provides valuable social integration and cultural exchange opportunities.

Although it complements university services, its reliance on volunteer efforts limits its integration into the YUFE framework. Nevertheless, it highlights how community involvement and intergenerational support can create a welcoming environment for newcomers.

⁶ Some partners have raised concerns about implementing of this programme regarding the responsibility of universities for the safety of students/staff and residents. As a result, a slightly revised format has been proposed: organising a series of ice-breaking meetings and casual networking meetings alongside the planned direct matching of students/staff members with residents/families.

community engagement through themed group activities organised by the NCU staff, promoting connections between international students, staff, and local citizens. The programme enhances group dynamics, fostering teamwork through cultural, educational, and artistic events, organised multiple times throughout the academic year.

Mystery Friend includes activities such as:

- ▶ **Mystery Dish:** Participants cook a dish from a chosen country and explain the recipe in a foreign language.
- ▶ **Geocaching:** Teams solve cultural riddles around campus.
- ▶ **Scavenger Hunt:** Groups complete creative tasks, such as taking photos with landmarks.
- ▶ **Mystery Picture:** Participants create portraits of each other in an art workshop.
- ▶ **Mystery Box:** Teams build bird or insect houses for the campus.

These interactive events encourage cultural exchange, teamwork, and engagement in a more structured yet fun environment.

With overwhelmingly positive feedback and strong participation, UEF and NCU plan to continue the Friend Programme into the 2025/26 academic year.

”

I got to befriend a person I would not have met otherwise.

UEF participant

”

The whole concept of meeting a local friend is a great way of connecting people.

UEF participant

”

YUFE Friend is a great initiative that not only helps people get to know each other better but also allows them to have a lot of fun! Each meeting offered a surprising, creative activity – from collaborative projects to unusual team games. Thanks to that, the atmosphere was relaxed and inspiring, and the integration happened naturally and with smiles all around.

YUFE Friend Programme participant in Toruń

Why is the Friend Programme important?

- ▶ Promotes intercultural dialogue and reduces barriers between locals and newcomers.
- ▶ Enhances the international student experience, reducing isolation and improving well-being.
- ▶ Encourages locals to engage with different cultures, fostering openness and understanding.

What is its impact on the community?

- ▶ Greater inclusivity and social cohesion in university towns.
- ▶ Improved integration of international students and professionals, contributing to a more vibrant, diverse community.
- ▶ Reduction of cultural misunderstandings and promotion of global citizenship.

YUFE Community Engagement Network

YUFE Community Engagement Network is designed to facilitate collaborative community action, share knowledge and good practices, and create opportunities for implementing a reverse knowledge transfer model from society to the academic community. The pilot edition of the project has been focused on issues related to forced migration. By bringing together researchers, policymakers, NGOs, and community members, this network aims to develop better responses to pressing global challenges.

Based on the results of surveys of potential participants, identified by the YUFE team in each location, a framework for cooperation and thematic areas were defined. Key areas of interest include access to higher education for migrants, diploma recognition, language learning for integration, and inclusion in the labour market. Topics also cover human rights, new forms of forced migration, the EU asylum system, and best practices for integration without assimilation. There is a strong focus on international experience, recruitment at public universities, and the role of youth and civic engagement in supporting migrants.

The inaugural event of the YUFE Community Engagement Network consisted of two lectures followed by an online discussion centred on the theme "Wartime refugees: legal aspects of protection and cultural background of integration".

Dr. Piotr Sadowski, from the Faculty of Law and Administration at NCU, gave a lecture titled "Temporary protection of 'refugees from Ukraine' – an added value in comparison with other forms of international protection." Dr. Joanna Książek, from the Faculty of Humanities at NCU, presented a lecture entitled "Cultural background of relations and attitudes towards wartime Ukrainian refugees in Poland." Both lectures served as a prelude to a discussion on the legal and social challenges surrounding the integration of refugees and migrants in host countries and communities, emphasizing the importance of understanding both legal frameworks and cultural perspectives when addressing refugee issues.

Following the lectures, the next key event in the Network's agenda was the workshop titled "Face to Face with Otherness." This workshop, led by anthropologist and educator Renata Lesner-Szwarc from the Verda Foundation, aimed to address crucial topics related to the impact of cultural differences on the adaptation process of refugees. It covered the psychological and psychosocial aspects of refugee integration, including providing first aid in these areas and addressing the phenomenon of empathy fatigue, which can affect those working closely with refugees. This workshop offered valuable insights into how cultural differences influence the refugee experience and the

challenges faced by individuals providing support, further enriching the conversation around refugee integration within the YUFE network.

The third online meeting was focused on showcasing best practices from YUFE partners in building relationships between universities and NGOs in support of people with migration experience. The University of Cyprus presented its collaboration with Caritas to implement student volunteering programs, while the UC3M team showcased its pilot initiative of consolidating all training, awareness-raising, and volunteering programmes for refugees under a virtual "Refugee Office." The event also provided an opportunity for a broad discussion on strengthening relationships between organisations and actively supporting initiatives directed towards refugees.

In one case, the YUFE Community Network evolved into a local migration network based in Maastricht, following the identification of a strong need for such an initiative. The foundation of this network aligns closely with the goals of the YUFE Community Network, but it is applied within a local context. To date, three meetings have been held with 14 partners. These meetings have fostered new collaborations – both among local organisations and between these organisations and the university. YUFE supports this network by connecting stakeholders and facilitating the exchange of (academic) knowledge through the YUFE Community Engagement Network meetings mentioned above.

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In collaboration with YUFE, I co-created a local migration network in Maastricht that brings together practitioners, policy makers, and researchers multiple times a year. The goal is to exchange on current challenges and development in local immigration, share knowledge, and identify opportunities for collaboration. As a PhD researcher in migration, this allows me to connect my academic work with local realities and engage with a diverse community of stakeholders.

PhD researcher UNU-Merit

Further network meetings are planned to continue the exchange of experiences and to explore the possibility of joint initiatives.

Why is the Community Engagement Network important?

- ▶ Encourages interdisciplinary and cross-sector collaboration to tackle complex societal issues.
- ▶ Creates a platform for knowledge exchange, leading to more effective policy-making and social initiatives.
- ▶ Strengthens the role of universities as key players in public discourse and social change.

What is its impact on the community:

- ▶ Improved initiatives related to migration, social inclusion, and human rights.
- ▶ Stronger collaboration between universities, local governments, and NGOs.
- ▶ Increased community awareness and participation in humanitarian efforts.

YUFE CommUNITY Conference

The YUFE conference on university-community relations, organised in Rijeka in November 2024, served as a vibrant platform for meaningful dialogue among university leaders, academics, students, researchers, and community actors.

The central part of the conference showcased best practices of YUFE's socially engaged initiatives, with ten initiatives presented:

- **My Place Under the Sun:** Bojana Ćulum Ilić, University of Rijeka
- **RaProChe:** Caroline Masson, Sorbonne Nouvelle University
- **Disconnected Yet in the Spotlight:** Energy Poverty in Cañada Real Galiana: Ulpiano Ruiz-Rivas, Universidad Carlos III Madrid
- **Death Care:** Building the Framework for a Sustainable Funeral Industry in a Superdiverse Society: Katrien Schaubroeck, University of Antwerp
- **Refugee Project Maastricht:** Mohanad Salloum & Azia Lafleur, RPM
- **Community Relations in Bremen/Germany:** HERE AHEAD Academy
- **University's Senior Citizen Community:** Thomas Neumann, Bremen
- **Pilot for Refugees or Asylum-Seeking Women:** How Can Universities Train and Foster Integration: Silvia Gallart Paramon & Victor Gros, Universidad Carlos III Madrid
- **YUFE Volunteering at the Business Support Centre in Toruń:** Piotr Zariczny, Business Support Centre in Toruń
- **Biobanking and the Cyprus Human Genome Project:** Constantinos Deltas, University of Cyprus
- **ECOProd:** Laurent Creton & Laurence Allard, Sorbonne Nouvelle University

This two-day inter-sectoral event highlighted YUFE's achievements and explored innovative strategies to deepen collaboration between universities and their surrounding communities.

The conference focused on various dimensions of community engagement, drawing from the TEFCE Toolbox and showcasing successful initiatives from YUFE partners. These included projects supporting children at risk of poverty, refugee assistance, student-business collaboration, co-creation with the funeral sector, and many more – each illustrating the mutual value of strong university-community ties.

Keynote speeches included an address by the University

of Rijeka Rector Snježana Prijić Samaržija on the topic “What Does It Mean to Be an Engaged University”, as well as talks by Thomas Farnell from the Institute for the Development of Education and Zoran Grozdanov from the CeKaDe Association. The event also featured two panel discussions exploring the question “What’s in it for me (WIFM)?” from two perspectives: university and community.

A recurring theme throughout the conference was the need for greater openness between academic institutions and communities. Presentations and discussions revealed that, despite the richness of ongoing collaborations, much potential remains untapped. Mutual awareness, trust, and openness are essential to unlocking shared ideas, needs, and opportunities.

Cherry-picked initiatives presented and discussions that followed reaffirmed the university’s role as a catalyst for social change and a hub for collaborative innovation. It also highlighted universities' responsibility to act as vocal advocates of rationalism.

Key takeaways inspired the YUFE team to:

- ▶ Regular meetups between universities and community representatives;
- ▶ Integrate insights and identified challenges into YUFE’s broader community engagement framework.

Ultimately, the conference reaffirmed a shared conviction: sustained dialogue and collaboration between universities and communities are essential – and YUFE is uniquely positioned to nurture and expand these connections for the benefit of all involved.

Why was the CommUNITY conference important?

- ▶ It fosters dialogue and collaboration between universities and communities, emphasizing mutual benefits.
- ▶ It highlights the importance of trust and openness for creating new opportunities.
- ▶ Universities are positioned as drivers of social change and innovation, supporting principles like social impact and citizen-centred approaches.

Communication, Impact, Challenges & Beyond

This chapter reflects on the broader outcomes and future prospects of YUFE's community engagement efforts. It examines how communication supports visibility and participation, assesses the impact of key initiatives, addresses challenges encountered along the way, and outlines a vision for sustaining and expanding YUFE's mission beyond 2030.

Communication

Effective communication is essential for the success of the social engagement activities undertaken by the Alliance. This involves a multi-layered and multidirectional approach, implemented both at the central – international – and local levels. Communication efforts must be designed to foster engagement and build lasting relationships with diverse stakeholder groups, employing a variety of channels and communication tools. The key is understanding that our audiences vary significantly depending on the country in which each partner university operates. This diversity further reinforces the need for cultural sensitivity and contextual awareness in our communication strategies. It requires us to adapt our messaging, tone, and channels to reflect the specific social, cultural, and linguistic characteristics of each local context, ensuring that our efforts are both inclusive and effective.

The implementation of social engagement initiatives necessitates collaboration with multiple actors. Depending on the objectives and scope of a given activity, experts select tailored content and appropriate communication methods to ensure messages reach their intended audiences. Centrally coordinated initiatives are communicated through YUFE's official platforms and further disseminated by partner institutions to ensure comprehensive access to information across the Alliance community. On both the [YUFE website](#) and the [YUFE Virtual Campus](#) – a central hub offering a complete overview of opportunities and enabling registration – social engagement activities are clearly presented and easily accessible. However, in order to effectively reach and involve local communities or engage with regional partners, more decentralized and context-sensitive communication efforts are often required. Therefore, communication strategies are adapted to suit specific target audiences. While YUFE's central channels promote initiatives open to the general public – including citizens, students, and university staff – the network of communications professionals at partner universities amplifies these efforts through local channels, newsletters, and established regional networks.

Locally organised initiatives require tailored communication actions involving

a broad range of tools. An important part of communication is done online, featuring the Alliance's social media and institutional platforms and the channels of the faculties, student organisations, and other relevant actors. In promoting such initiatives, aimed often at people who might be digitally excluded, we actively seek to meet audiences where they are – whether by distributing posters, producing radio spots, or participating in local events.

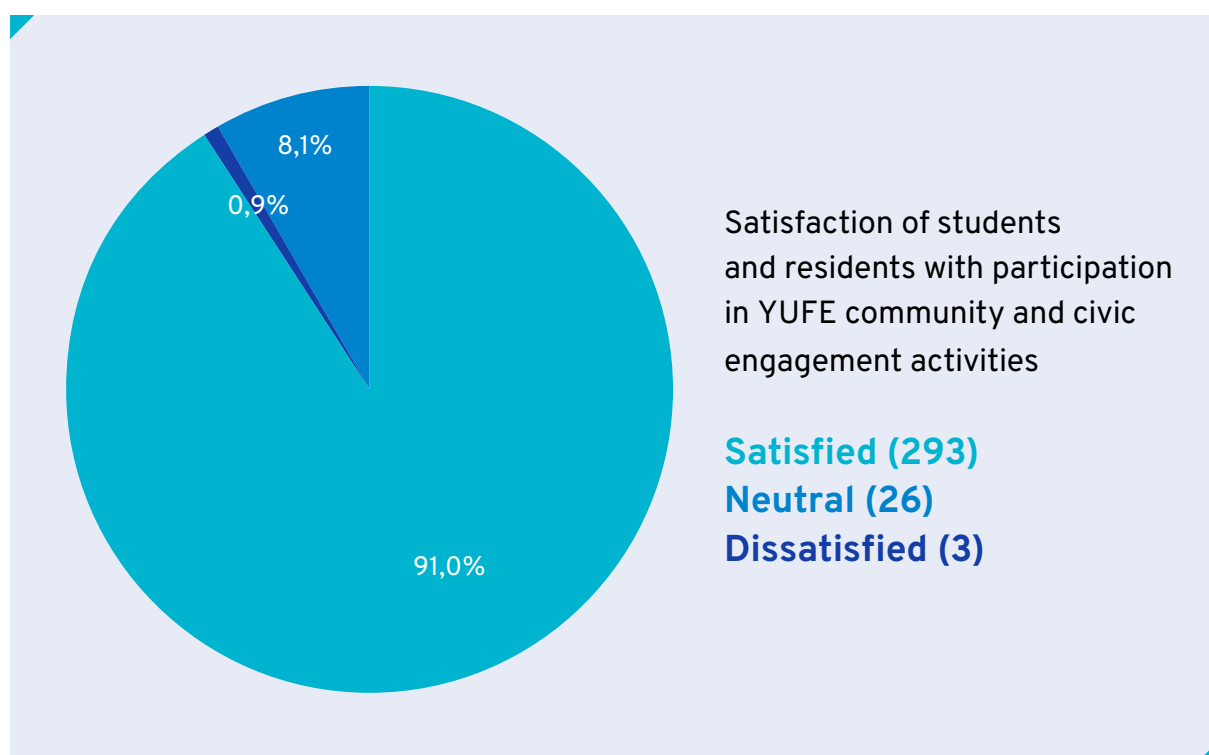
A relevant example of this multi-pronged approach is the promotion of Help Desks at Nicolaus Copernicus University. Communication activities are conducted both, to recruit students to the teams and to disseminate information about the Help Desks' services to potential users. To engage students, website articles were published, internal newsletters were sent, and poster campaigns were organised across campus. To reach the wider local community – particularly non-academic audiences – communication materials were brought into public spaces. In addition to publishing information on the website of the city council (the University partner), an animation was shown on public transport and housing cooperatives distributed printed materials in their facilities.

Importantly, communication in the area of social engagement must be reciprocal. While direct contact with participants allows for immediate feedback, long-term effectiveness also depends on cooperation with non-governmental organisations, which often serve as intermediaries between institutions and the communities they represent. These organisations act as communication hubs, conveying community needs and perspectives back to the Alliance. One example of such reciprocal communication was the decision to make migration the central theme of a YUFE expert network – a choice shaped by input gathered from community partners.

Impact

At YUFE, a quality culture represents shared values that prioritise continuous improvement. Our approach to quality assurance goes beyond procedures and systems – it is dynamic, fostering progress, innovation, and the exchange of best practices among partner universities. This ensures adaptability to the evolving needs of the system it supports. The [YUFE Quality Assurance System](#) includes relevant quantitative and qualitative key performance indicators, which can be used for regular benchmarking exercises across YUFE. The aim of these exercises is the continuous improvement of the quality of activities and outputs.

YUFE has set a KPI of 80% for stakeholder satisfaction – covering cities, local authorities, academic supervisors, organisations, students, and citizens – in relation to collaboration and participation in YUFE activities. In practice, satisfaction exceeds 90%, based on data from student Reflection Reports and two satisfaction surveys conducted among citizens.



Survey responses indicate not only satisfactory quantitative but also qualitative indicators. Based on the Civic Star Reflection Reports, our programmes have significantly contributed to personal and civic development of students, strengthening their sense of European citizenship and fostering a genuine sense of belonging. These initiatives have not only enhanced essential skills and competencies that are vital for active participation in society and success

in the labour market but have also led to tangible outcomes, as reflected in the recognition and certification of students' progress.

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The most valuable lesson I learnt during the Civic Star program was the significance of working closely with migrant families seeking swift integration into society. By providing them with the necessary information, I experienced a deep sense of reward and satisfaction. It made me feel like a valued member of my community capable of effecting positive change. Engaging in the civic-engagement activity was an eye-opening experience.

UC3M student

Furthermore, insights from the Citizen Satisfaction Surveys confirm that our efforts have facilitated an effective transfer of knowledge from academia to society. By addressing concrete local challenges, we have delivered meaningful benefits to our communities and built stronger links between higher education institutions and the wider public.

More broadly, we are proud of how our community – students, staff, and partners – embodies solidarity, mutual respect, and shared

responsibility. Guided by European values of freedom, dignity, and inclusivity, especially in support of minority rights, they promote these ideals through daily actions and collaborations. We are deepening our engagement through partnerships with NGOs and local institutions working on social inclusion, sustainability, education, and more. These collaborations help us extend our impact beyond the university. At the same time, we recognise there is room to grow – strengthening and expanding these partnerships remains an important part of our path forward.

”

I am very grateful for this opportunity. Beyond being able to help others this activity also allowed me to gain confidence and be more and more at ease with speaking and "directing" a group of people. I discovered that I was eager to share my knowledge to help others.

SNU student

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Participating in a Help Desk was not only my first civic engagement activity, but also a deeply rewarding learning opportunity. I developed both creative and interpersonal skills by taking part in real tasks that made a visible impact. Designing materials, co-leading workshops, and collaborating with a committed team helped me grow in confidence and responsibility. This experience showed me how civic work can combine personal strengths with social purpose, and it inspired me to stay involved in similar initiatives in the future.

NCU student

Challenges

While the YUFE Alliance has made significant strides through collaboration and innovation, several years of joint implementation have also highlighted persistent challenges. These issues, rooted in both structural and contextual differences among partner institutions and regions, require targeted responses to ensure continued progress. The following sections outline key challenges identified and the strategies being employed to address them.

Challenge 1: Organisational and financial constraints across partner universities

Due to organisational and financial constraints, it remains challenging to implement all tasks at the same pace across all YUFE partner universities.

Steps being taken:

YUFE continues to explore adaptive strategies that promote both flexibility and shared learning across the Alliance. In response, peer-to-peer support and structured knowledge exchange mechanisms – such as thematic working groups and regular coordination meetings – have been implemented. These mechanisms are designed to bridge implementation gaps and to ensure that insights from early adopters are disseminated effectively. This approach allows for the customisation of implementation pathways according to local contexts, while still aligning with the overall project objectives.

Challenge 2: Diversity of local contexts and limited transnational integration

The diversity of YUFE cities and regions, varying local community needs, and occasional language barriers pose significant challenges in giving a common transnational dimension to local activities and integrating local organisations into a broader European framework.

Steps being taken:

To address this, YUFE has adopted a two-pronged strategy focused on:

- Strengthening local engagement through university-community partnerships; and
- Developing trans-local networking opportunities across partner regions.

One key initiative is the YUFE Community Engagement Network, which supports both local and international collaboration. For instance, while efforts are underway to connect actors working with and for migrants at a transnational level, local-level

cooperation is being enhanced - such as at Maastricht University, where collaboration between university stakeholders and community actors is actively supported.

Challenge 3: Difficulty in measuring the impact of volunteering activities

Measuring the impact of volunteering programmes remains particularly complex. Students often assist individuals in vulnerable or difficult life situations, where direct feedback mechanisms are not always appropriate or feasible. As a result, gathering data on the effectiveness and value of these interventions presents an ongoing challenge.

Steps being taken:

To improve impact measurement, YUFE is refining its evaluation methods. One proposed approach is the introduction of focus groups for programme supervisors, aiming to capture indirect feedback and insights. Additionally, the project explores participatory evaluation models that involve beneficiaries directly in the feedback process - where practically appropriate. These models are intended to foster inclusive evaluation practices and provide more meaningful data on the outcomes of YUFE's community-focused initiatives. Building long-term relationships with societal actors, with a focus on mutual benefits, will enable continuous feedback on impact realised.

As the project advances, YUFE remains committed to an iterative, adaptive approach that balances ambition with pragmatism. By responding to local constraints while maintaining a cohesive transnational framework, the Alliance ensures that progress is continuous and that all partners contribute toward the shared vision of a more inclusive, engaged, and integrated European University.

Beyond YUFE 2030

Looking ahead, YUFE is committed to deepening the impact of its community engagement efforts by building on existing achievements and responding to identified challenges. A key priority will be the phased implementation of the recommendations outlined in the YUFE Community Engagement Declaration, which serves as a strategic roadmap for fostering inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable engagement across the Alliance.

Central to this approach is the continued development of the YUFE Community Engagement Network, with a focus on strengthening partnerships with local actors in each YUFE location. This includes expanding opportunities for co-creation between universities and their surrounding communities, ensuring that local

stakeholders are not only involved but actively shape and guide joint initiatives. By embedding co-creation practices into project design and decision-making processes, YUFE aims to build more equitable and responsive forms of collaboration.

An important aspect of advancing community engagement is the development of pro-civic attitudes among university staff. In line with this, YUFE introduced a training session on community engagement for staff members in June 2025. This training is intended to provide staff with relevant knowledge and skills to support civic responsibility in their professional roles. Additionally, staff have the opportunity to obtain the Civic Star recognition, which acknowledges their involvement in promoting a culture of civic engagement. These measures are intended to gradually foster a greater sense of civic awareness within the university workforce, contributing to the Alliance's ongoing community engagement efforts.

Efforts to increase student involvement in community engagement activities will also continue to be a priority, including exploring the possibility of recognizing students' social contributions through the award of ECTS credits more broadly. These measures seek to foster a stronger connection between academic learning and community involvement.

Improving communication strategies will also be a core objective in the coming period. Efforts will be made to tailor messaging and outreach to better reach diverse audiences, including underrepresented groups, civic organisations, and potential community partners who may not yet be aware of the opportunities YUFE offers. Strengthened communication will help to build visibility, trust, and broader participation in community-focused activities.

Additionally, YUFE will continue refining its methods for measuring the social impact of engagement initiatives. This includes developing more nuanced and participatory evaluation tools that capture both direct and indirect outcomes, and that reflect the perspectives of beneficiaries, volunteers, and community partners alike.

Conclusion

YUFE's university-community collaboration model demonstrates how higher education institutions can actively contribute to societal well-being. These initiatives not only enhance academic and professional development for students but also create long-lasting benefits for the wider community. By fostering knowledge-sharing, volunteering, cultural integration, and interdisciplinary networking, YUFE strengthens social cohesion, promotes inclusivity, and empowers local residents to engage with global challenges in meaningful ways.

One of the unique aspects of YUFE's university-community collaboration is its multinational and multicultural nature. With ten universities from different European countries participating, each institution operates within a distinct socio-cultural, economic, and linguistic context.

While all universities share a commitment to social engagement, the way these initiatives take shape can vary significantly. Differences in available resources, policy frameworks, and local needs influence the speed at which programmes are tested and implemented. Some universities may have the capacity to launch large-scale initiatives quickly, while others might take a more incremental approach, adapting their projects to local constraints.

Additionally, linguistic diversity can pose both a challenge and an opportunity. This diversity in implementation and assessment is not a limitation but rather a strength, as it allows YUFE to test multiple approaches to community engagement, refine best practices, and create adaptable models that can be tailored to different local and national contexts.

While the implementation and impact of these initiatives may vary depending on local conditions, their common goal remains the same: to create lasting, meaningful contributions to both local and global communities.

YUFE recommendations for effective and sustainable university-community collaboration

1. Ensure stable human and financial resources

Sustainable engagement depends on dedicated personnel and stable funding. Appointing teams to coordinate both local and cross-institutional activities is essential for maintaining momentum and continuity in community collaboration.

2. Develop a shared understanding of benefits and added value

Establishing a common vision across the network – including clear goals, expected outcomes, and the value of civic engagement – fosters alignment and strengthens stakeholder commitment. Clarity on who benefits and how helps maintain focus and motivation.

3. Strengthen communication

Effective collaboration requires open and consistent communication among all partners, as well as with local communities.

4. Integrate community engagement into academic curricula

Embedding civic engagement into education – through service-learning, project-based work, and community partnerships – ensures it is not peripheral but central to students' academic and personal development.

5. Build long-term, trust-based partnerships

Trust and continuity are key to meaningful community engagement. Long-term relationships built on mutual respect, dialogue, and co-creation increase the relevance and impact of collaborative projects.

6. Use diversity as a driver of innovation

The multicultural and multilingual context of our network is not a challenge but a strength. Embracing this diversity allows for testing different engagement models, sharing practices, and adapting solutions to varied local realities.

7. Embed monitoring, evaluation, and adaptability

Ongoing evaluation helps track progress and identify areas for improvement. Flexible structures and feedback mechanisms ensure responsiveness to evolving needs and enhance long-term impact.

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