

GLOBAL UNIVERSITY ASSOCIATIONS FORUM

PRESS STATEMENT

On 17 May in Barcelona, the Global University Associations Forum (GUAF) was formally constituted. The Forum brings together representatives of university associations in Africa, the Americas, the Arab region, Asia and Europe. The focus of this first physical meeting of Forum members, chaired by EUA and hosted by University Ramon Llull, was on enabling international collaboration and exchange in higher education.

At this inaugural meeting, Forum members shared their experiences of and visions for enabling international collaboration and exchange. Pathways and mechanisms for fostering collaborative practices were considered in the context of student and researcher mobility, universities' contribution to achieving goals set out in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), associations' respective continental and regional development aspirations as well as the influence of geopolitical factors.

Creating and sustaining frameworks that promote exchange across higher education and research systems is a pivotal step towards safeguarding the future of our communities and our planet. Without robust structures for collaboration in research and education at global scale, society will be ill-equipped to tackle climate change, protect the environment, pursue the global health of its citizens and move collectively towards building sustainable societies and circular economies.

The Forum agreed on a number of actions for follow-up: It will

- promote the role of the higher education sector – and more specifically, its capacity to facilitate international exchange and collaboration – in working towards the SDGs and other continental and regional development regimes; to date, the sector's role in achieving SDG goals has not been widely acknowledged and does not feature sufficiently in government strategies;
- emphasise respect for fundamental values, such as institutional autonomy and academic freedom, as critical in building sufficient scope and decision-making power to engage in international collaboration;
- commit to sharing resources – including policies, guidelines and data – on topics of mutual interest among Forum members to facilitate coherent collective action on key matters at a global level;
- address the obstacles inhibiting mobility at institutional and national levels;
- explore how Forum member associations can contribute to the establishment of collaborative (virtual) learning approaches.

About the Global University Associations Forum

The Global University Associations Forum was conceived in 2020 in response to the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic to international higher education and research collaboration. It was established to complement the ongoing exchange and collaboration initiatives developed by universities, and their national networks and associations. It will identify pathways for joint action to further enhance links between university associations and their relationships with member institutions. In addition, the Forum will advocate for the vital role of partnerships as a vehicle for pursuing joint actions within and across regions.

The Global University Associations Forum is constituted by the following organisations:

Africa	Association of African Universities (AAU)
Arab region	Association of Arab Universities (AAU)
China	China Association of Higher Education (CAHE)

Europe	European University Association (EUA)
India	Association of Indian Universities (AIU)
Latin America & The Caribbean	Latin American & The Caribbean Space for Higher Education (ENLACES)
North America	American Council on Education (ACE) & Universities Canada (UC)
Southeast Asia	ASEAN University Network (AUN)

As a collective voice, the Forum will work towards achieving consensus by engaging in dialogue. Through joint statement and action, it will contribute to the advancement of the sector both in regional and global terms.

The next physical meeting of the Forum will take place in 2023 in ASEAN, under the chairmanship of AUN. In the interim, members will continue to convene virtually to establish next steps for implementing priority actions.