D4.1 Common Mobility Strategy

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Executive Summary

The Common Mobility Strategy sets out the shared vision of the EMERGE European University Alliance, which unites nine universities from across Europe. It provides a coordinated approach to improving opportunities for students, teachers, and staff to study, work, and collaborate across borders. The strategy aims to create a coherent and inclusive framework for mobility that connects regions, builds institutional capacity, and supports the long-term development of a European education area based on cooperation, quality, and sustainability.

Mobility is at the core of EMERGE's mission to promote inclusion, solidarity, resilience, multilingualism, multiculturalism, and sustainability. This strategy outlines how mobility can become more accessible, better supported, and environmentally responsible, ensuring that international experiences are open to all. It draws on surveys and analysis of more than 1,500 students and staff within the Alliance, offering an evidence-based understanding of existing barriers, enablers, and opportunities.

Complementary forms of mobility are detailed:

- Physical mobility, including study periods, internships, and exchanges.
- Blended mobility, combining online and in-person activities such as Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs).
- Virtual mobility, enabling collaborative learning and exchange through shared digital environments.

The Alliance has set out to progressively integrate hybrid mobility into a growing share of study programmes, to expand access so that half of all students can experience a mobility opportunity during their studies, and to include virtual components in many shared courses within the coming years. These targets express a collective ambition to make mobility an equitable and transformative part of higher education across the Alliance.

Implementation will focus on reducing financial and administrative barriers, improving language and intercultural preparation, and ensuring recognition of learning outcomes. common frameworks, shared digital tools, and complementary European and national funding will support these actions and contribute to long-term sustainability.

A forthcoming Action Plan will set out concrete measures, milestones, and indicators to monitor progress. Together, these initiatives will help build a more inclusive, sustainable, and connected European mobility ecosystem within EMERGE, reinforcing the role of regional universities as gateways to global engagement, innovation, and lifelong learning.

Empowering the Margins of Europe through Regional and Global Engagement Alliance

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Introduction and background

1.1 The identity of the EMERGE Alliance

The nine partners of EMERGE are developing a long-term joint strategy to enhance inclusion and engagement from and within their respective territories, which are all located far from decision-making centres. The purpose of the Alliance is to create a model of excellence in teaching, learning and research, involving students, staff and the wider community, enlarging a network that will generate new forms of mobilities and international experiences.

EMERGE's training and research projects will be developed around the Alliance's key words: inclusion, solidarity, resilience, multilingualism/multiculturalism and sustainability.

This partnership aims to strengthen cooperation among university networks and stakeholders by sharing best practices and methodologies, as well as synergies that will open up internationalisation. The original identity and strength of the project lie in the fact that each higher education institution, located at the periphery of Europe, will consolidate long-standing links with its own ecosystem and local partners. In turn, this will provide communities with specific solutions adapted to their respective environments. These synergies form a core element of EMERGE and differentiate its approach from more centralised university perspectives. We consider this specific potential not only as key in positively impacting student pathways and their integration into the professional spheres, but also in benefiting staff and stakeholders.

1.2 The need for a Common Mobility Strategy

Connecting the Margins is one of the four strategic objectives of EMERGE which will enable us to become a truly transformative European University. The Alliance's identity brings with it challenges in terms of developing student and staff mobility. These challenges are multifaceted, involving geographical, economic, institutional, and sociocultural dimensions.

Addressing these challenges requires targeted policies that enhance support mechanisms, increase funding flexibility, and foster stronger partnerships inside the Alliance. Such inclusive strategies are essential to ensure that mobility becomes an equitable opportunity for all students across Europe. The EMERGE thematic areas on mobility and education develop a key lever via its plurilingual mobility programmes. These programmes require a seamless exchange of knowledge and experience, enriching the educational and professional journeys of participants.

This initial version of the EMERGE Mobility Strategy establishes a solid foundation for progressively increasing mobility within the Alliance. It draws primarily on the

work conducted by the EMERGE mobility team within the EMERGE Enhancing Mobility workpackage (WP4). Formed at the end of 2024, this team is composed of senior international officers from each of the nine partner universities and led by a vice-president (work package lead) and co-lead.

Its work focuses on two key goals:

- Identifying and reinforcing the key drivers of mobility while addressing and removing barriers that limit or prevent it.
- Defining the mobility formats and instruments that should be prioritised to ensure not only quantitative growth but also feasibility, adequate resourcing, institutional support, meaningful impact, and potential for scaling.

The mobility formats will be designed to be flexible and complementary to meet the diverse needs of students, teachers, researchers, and administrative staff. The principal formats are:

- traditional physical mobility: study trips, internships, fellowships, teaching or research assignments at partner institutions
- hybrid mobility: combining a virtual and physical period, they encourage the participation of a greater number of learners and reduce the carbon footprint. Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) are increasingly common hybrid mobility actions.
- virtual mobility: online exchanges, shared courses, inter-university collaborative projects, language tandems, international hackathons, and co-facilitated virtual classes, expanding opportunities for cooperation without geographical constraints.
- mobility integrated into joint programmes: double degrees, joint degrees, or shared programmes, automatically integrating mobility periods into their curricular model.

1. Objectives and targets

The shared vision of the Alliance aims to ensure that the mobility strategy is accessible, inclusive and sustainable for students, administrative and academic staff alike. It is built on the diversity of mobility offers and the coordinated use of institutional, financial and digital instruments.

The implementation of the common mobility strategy within the EMERGE Alliance will use an integrated and diversified approach to programmes and funding

resources, aimed at ensuring the sustainability of actions and stimulating innovation.

The achievement of the EMERGE strategic objectives and targets will rely heavily on different forms of mobility: physical as a core pillar, complemented by virtual and blended learning and collaboration formats. As stated in the EMERGE Grant Agreement, the overall objectives and targets are as follows:

- to increase the proportion of curricula that structurally include at least hybrid mobility to 20 %, impacting over 6,000 students each year by Year 4;
- to work towards an overall physical mobility rate of over 50 % for each course of study (BA/MA/PhD), impacting 1,000 students by Year 4;
- and to ensure that 50 % of transnational courses include virtual elements, impacting 7,000 students across the Alliance by Year 4.

Key data to consider when drawing up the Common Mobility Strategy (CMS) are the baseline mobility figures for 2023-2024 academic year, which corresponds to Year-1 following the January 2025 launch of the EMERGE Alliance:

2023-2024
Outgoing student mobility: from 0.9 % to 5.3 %
Outgoing staff and academic mobility: from 3.9 % to 25 %

To make mobility accessible to all students, we offer a range of options from established physical and blended to virtual formats. These include low-threshold options and more extensive mobility experiences, allowing for individualised levels of immersion and exposure.

Specifically, to promote mobility and reach these goals several key dimensions will be addressed:

- removal of legal, regulatory and administrative barriers.
- collaborating with the EMERGE Educational Programmes team (WP3) on the development of new mobility formats.
- promoting mobility opportunities in collaboration with EMERGE Dissemination, Communication and Outreach team (WP9)
- integration of mobility opportunities in every curriculum.
- systematic monitoring and quality assurance, including satisfaction and general feedback loops in collaboration with EMERGE Project Management and Quality Assurance teams (WP1).
- searching for additional funding.

- cooperation with the EMERGE Languages and Intercultural Learning team (WP7) to remove language barriers and promote plurilingual and intercultural skills through the EMERGE Plurilingual Mobility Programmes.

The CMS also encourages the mobility of administrative and technical staff, particularly those less exposed to mobility. This can take diverse forms.

Thanks to the mobility strategy, the Alliance member universities will draw closer to the long-term goal of 50 % student mobility set out by the European Universities initiative. This mobility can be physical, online or both (as blended learning). This long-term goal will not be attainable within the initial 4-year period of the Alliance but the common vision of the EMERGE partners will lay the foundations that will enable all nine universities to work towards this objective.

A key driver of the EMERGE Alliance is the common objective to achieve greater inclusivity, providing opportunities for all through new approaches and events and fostering the mobility of students and staff who are excluded from standard mobility opportunities.

The development of mobility connected to engaged communities and third places is included in this strategy through internships, for example.

2. Methodology

As a first step we mapped mobility data, academic calendars, and staff resources earmarked to the enhancing mobility workpackage, as well as financial resources allocated to mobility in each EMERGE member university. Some, but not all, national governments provide financial support to their own national universities to promote the sustainability of European university alliances. Consequently, the mapping confirmed the disparities within the Alliance which must be considered when designing the strategy and actions we wish to implement.

A comprehensive literature review was carried out, based on academic sources and institutional reports published by a range of European bodies, including existing Alliances. Particular attention has been paid to studies dealing with under-represented students.

The mobility team conducted a comprehensive mobility barriers survey of students, administrative staff and academics to identify specific barriers and enablers of mobility within the EMERGE Alliance. Responses were received from 1,555 participants: 643 students, 406 administrative staff, and 506 academics. These results were supplemented with recent internal surveys and national surveys.

3. Mobility drivers, enablers and barriers

Studying abroad, for a short term or a degree mobility, can be analysed as a decision-making process. Salisbury et al. (2009)[1] divide this process into three main stages. In a first stage, students develop intent to study abroad; this is followed by the search for an appropriate location/ programme and their subsequent choice and departure.

All studies point out that this decision is strongly influenced by the student's socio-economic background. They also emphasise the multifactorial nature of the factors (barriers and drivers) that are involved throughout the decision-making process.

Student's perceptions: Reports and scientific papers dealing with students' mobility in Europe (Juškevičienė et al., 2022[2]; Muja, Mensvoort & Cuppen[3], 2024; Vasilopoulos & Pirgotaki, 2024[4]) underline common barriers to mobility. These are related to financial and practical reasons, personal and social ones; they also include institutional or university-related obstacles (as shown in Figure 1).

Sociocultural	Personal	Financial and practical	Institutional
• Family attitudes towards student mobility • Students' socio-economic background • Dearth of cultural capital	• Lack of motivation • Lack of self-confidence • Lack of foreign language skills • Fear of separation from relatives	• Lack of financial resources • Loss of opportunities to earn money • Accommodation problems	• Coordination among collaborating universities • Collaboration between students and academic coordinators • Bureaucratic procedures • Recognition of periods of study or internship abroad • Dearth of information or inadequate information

Figure 1 – The main barriers to student mobility

[1] Salisbury, M. H., Umbach, P. D., Paulsen, M. B., & Pascarella, E. T. (2009). Going global: Understanding the choice process of the intent to study abroad. *Research in higher education*, *50*, 119-143

[2] Juškevičienė, A., Samašonok, K., Rakšnys, A.V., Žirnelė, L., Gegužienė, V. (2022). Development trends and challenges of students' academic mobility in higher education. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability Issues*,9(4), 304-319. http://doi.org/10.9770/jesi.2022.9.4(16)

[3] Muja, A., Mensvoort, C., & Cuppen, J. (2024). Studying abroad for everyone? Obstacles for international mobility among students in EHEA-countries. EUROSTUDENT 8 Intelligence Brief.

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It is important to highlight that the relative significance of these barriers may vary according to the phase of the decisional phase, as stated by two large surveys, carried out in 20 of the 27 EUROSTUDENT countries and in Germany. Moreover, some obstacles have varying significance depending on the country.

4.1 Analysis of drivers and enablers

Analysis of drivers and enablers detected (strengths and opportunities)

Drivers	Enablers
• Personal development • Cultural discovery • Language improvement • Networking and meeting new people • Academic improvement • Increased career opportunities • Mandatory mobility in the curriculum • Enhanced employability	• Accommodation guidance • Financial support • Smooth and simple administrative procedures • Language support prior to mobility • Student integration • Cultural awareness • Buddy system • Student ambassadors

Based on findings from the mobility survey, internal and national reports, personal development is one of the key drivers for students, while for staff it is professional development. Staff mobility, both administrative and academic, has a direct impact on student mobility and often becomes an enabler in itself.

4.2 Analysis of barriers detected

The mobility survey results confirm previous studies on student mobility barriers in Europe, with personal, financial and linguistic reasons acting as the principal barriers. In addition, accommodation concerns, lack of information regarding opportunities, academic uncertainty of credit recognition and administrative burdens are also significant barriers to mobility.

Results of mobility survey and national reports (students):

Barriers	Comments
Financial constraints	insufficient grants, high travel/accommodation costs, peripheral location issues
Accommodation challenges	difficulty in finding/guaranteeing accommodation
Academic compatibility	inflexible study programmes, fear of low credit recognition, colliding semester dates
Separation, integration & social isolation	homesickness, difficulty engaging with local students, cultural adaptation
Language limitations	the pre-requisite B2 level for mobility has not been achieved by all students.
Administrative complexity	lengthy procedures, unclear processes, changes to Learning Agreements
Lack of international opportunities	insufficient offer for short and long-term mobility
Lack of information /awareness regarding mobility types, opportunities and benefits	unaware of possibilities and impact of mobility

The mobility survey highlighted common barriers between students and staff. In addition, both academic and administrative staff raised concerns regarding lack of institutional recognition of mobility.

Results of mobility survey (administrative and academic staff):

Barriers	Comments
Financial constraints	insufficient grants, high travel/accommodation costs, peripheral location issues
Accommodation challenges	difficulty in finding/guaranteeing accommodation
Time constraints	balancing mobility activities with work commitments and family responsibilities proves challenging
Personal or family obligations	difficulty balancing personal and professional demands
Language limitations	a wish for more in-house training prior to mobility
Administrative complexity	lengthy procedures, unclear processes
Lack of information/ awareness regarding mobility types, opportunities and benefits	unaware of possibilities and impact of mobility on career development
Poor institutional recognition following mobility	there is a perception that mobility experience is not sufficiently recognised or valued in career progression or staff evaluations.

Finally, these results can be interpreted considering the challenges faced by universities in peripheral regions:

Geographical isolation. Peripheral universities are often located far from major urban centres or international transport hubs, making travel more expensive, time-consuming, and logistically complex. Limited air and rail connections can reduce the feasibility of exchange programmes, especially short-term mobilities.

Economic constraints are another critical issue. Students from the Alliance regions often come from lower-income backgrounds, and the financial support provided by mobility programmes such as Erasmus+ may not be sufficient to cover the full cost of living abroad – particularly in Western or Northern European countries. This financial gap can be a strong deterrent, even for highly motivated students.

Language barriers and cultural distance further complicate mobility. Students and staff from peripheral regions may have had less exposure to foreign languages and intercultural environments, increasing anxiety around studying in a different linguistic and academic context.

There are also challenges common to universities, regardless of whether they are on the periphery or not.

Institutional disparities also play a role. Universities may differ in terms of financial resources, especially concerning the funding they receive through the ERASMUS+ programme. These structural limitations can hinder access to mobility opportunities.

Challenges in credit recognition and academic compatibility across institutions can discourage students from applying due to fear of delays in graduation or academic mismatch. Insufficient recognition of mobility experiences can also serve as a disincentive for staff participation.

Many barriers can be lifted or eased thanks to streamlined and coordinated administrative procedures among the EMERGE universities, as well as improved communication within each university. The mutualisation and sharing of information and practices among partners is essential if innovative mobility, accessible to all, is to be developed. Thanks to the mapping of educational programmes carried out within the EMERGE Alliance (WP3), an expansion of mobility opportunities is already under way.

4. Proposals: Removing barriers to mobility and acting on enablers

The common strategy also aims to establish a shared culture of mobility within the Alliance. This is grounded in intercultural training, the promotion of multilingualism, and the active involvement of university communities through EMERGE's community engagement and service initiatives (WP2). Mobility therefore becomes not only an educational tool but also a vehicle for institutional transformation and European cohesion.

5.1 Implementation tools

To implement appropriate actions to alleviate barriers, the Alliance will rely on a set of shared tools:

- Harmonised institutional frameworks: inter-institutional agreements, automatic credit recognition (ECTS), alignment of administrative procedures and mobility windows.
- Common digital tools: common website, common registration portal, collaborative spaces, and e-learning tools; online accommodation support.
- Funding mechanisms: Priority will be given to calls for projects under the three key actions of the Erasmus+ programme (individual mobility, cooperation between organisations and support for innovation, capacity building) and the Horizon Europe programme. These European programmes provide a structured framework for developing high-value-added training, research, and innovation projects, while promoting the mobility of students, teacher-researchers, and staff.
- Support and recognition: Within the EMERGE alliance, all mobility formats are inclusive. Support for participants is provided through welcome programmes, student ambassadors, language and intercultural tutoring. Recognition of acquired skills (digital badges, micro-certifications) and recognition in career paths will be encouraged.

However, this approach cannot be limited to these instruments alone. Other complementary financing mechanisms will also be mobilised to support the implementation of the Alliance's joint initiatives. These will include Interreg programmes, which promote cross-border and territorial cooperation, as well as national and regional programmes supporting higher education, research, and internationalisation.

Although obtaining alternative sources of financing is a priority, it is also a long-term objective that requires the contribution of the expertise from various work

packages and the governing board. In this regard, the Alliance aims to create a financial sustainability and fundraising body alongside the governing board. This body will support and advise the mobility team in its search for additional funding. This will ensure that funding mechanisms are addressed in a proactive manner in line with the mission of the Alliance as stated in the General Agreement.

Finally, the Alliance will encourage the creation of synergies between these different instruments, as well as the pooling of its members' administrative and financial expertise, to optimise responses to calls for projects and pool resources. This strategy will help to ensure the consistency, sustainability, and European visibility of actions carried out in the areas of mobility, training, and collaborative research.

5.2 Monitoring and indicators

Under the strategic objective *Connecting the Margins*, EMERGE has identified a series of preliminary indicators to assess progress using both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Measures of innovations in making mobility more inclusive:

- Number of solutions found to identify mobility barriers
- Number of implemented solutions to removing existing mobility barriers

Measures of inclusive mobility:

- Number of students taking up mobility within the EMERGE Alliance
- Number of new types of mobilities proposed and implemented

Measures of the usage of the mobility catalogue:

- Number of mobility testimonials shared across EMERGE platforms
- Number of EMERGE events leveraged to promote mobility
- Indicators defined to evaluate the quality, effectiveness, and satisfaction levels of mobility offerings within EMERGE

Tools to monitor and evaluate mobility are currently being developed, including satisfaction surveys that will be distributed to all students and staff taking part in mobility activities.

5. Conclusion

The Common Mobility Strategy represents a significant milestone in building a shared culture of mobility across the nine EMERGE partner universities. It provides a framework for cooperation, inclusivity, and sustainability that supports students, teachers, and staff in accessing diverse and meaningful mobility opportunities.

This Strategy is both a roadmap and a commitment — establishing the principles, priorities, and shared mechanisms needed to strengthen mobility within and beyond the Alliance. It emphasises the importance of equitable access, recognition of learning outcomes, and the reduction of administrative and financial barriers that may limit participation.

The forthcoming Action Plan will translate these principles into concrete actions, timelines, and measurable indicators. It will guide implementation across institutions and ensure continuous monitoring and improvement. Together, the Strategy and Action Plan will contribute to shaping an open, connected, and resilient European higher education landscape, demonstrating the added value of regional universities working collaboratively within the EMERGE Alliance.

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