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"PREPARATION OF EHU PLAN OF ACTION 2021 – 2026"

Action Plan for the European Humanities University for 2021-2026

July 2021

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Action Plan for the European Humanities University for 2021-2026

July 2021

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Table of contents

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

AP	Action Plan
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EHU	European Humanities University
EU	European Union
GB	Governing Board
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HR	Human Resources
LLL	Lifelong Learning
OSUN	Open Society University Network
Sida	Swedish International Development Agency
SKVC	the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

The following Action Plan (AP) for the European Humanities University (EHU) for 2021-2026 relates to the EHU Strategy for 2019-2024. The Action Plan serves as an accompanying document to, not a replacement of the Strategy – rather, it extends the period of implementation of the Strategy, updates the priority tasks and the goals of the Strategy (adjusting these where needed), and introduces additional areas of activity.

The Action Plan contents reflect the proposed increase in funding made available by the donor community, as well as the planned transition to a four-pillar model of funding (replacing the core-funding model in place until now).

The European Humanities University has made positive progress in the change processes introduced in the university from 2018 onwards, as embedded in the EHU Strategy for 2019-2024. However, despite the developments seen in reshaping the portfolio of academic programmes and improvements in programme quality, alongside progress in internationalisation of the university, key challenges remain:

- Student recruitment levels need to be strengthened significantly, if the EHU is to attain a more secure financial footing and move towards sustainability.

- The research activities of the university need to be strengthened further, to ensure that the work of the EHU research centres can draw on effective internal mechanisms and resources to support research staff to engage in research activities, prepare applications for research funding, and manage research projects.

- The financial situation of the EHU continues to be weak, reliant on short-cycle donor funding for >70% of financial needs, and with no reserve fund at its disposal.

- The governance and administrative structures and procedures are in need of reform and strengthening.

Alongside the ongoing internal imperatives for change, the turbulence seen in the external environment – with the political crisis in Belarus accompanied by the fall-out of the COVID-19 pandemic that poses risks for the Higher Education (HE) sector across Europe – also needs to be factored in to the development of EHU's Action Plan for 2021-2026. The university needs to adapt and respond to these external contexts, and to the calls from stakeholders in Belarus and among the international community for the EHU to play a key role in supporting Belarusian society and promoting democratic change in the country.

The proposed Action Plan the measures to be taken by the EHU in order to achieve the set of objectives identified in the Plan, which are grounded in the contents of the EHU Strategy for 2019-2024, and incorporate a range of additional activities.

The Action Plan has been developed following a review process which has included an external evaluation of support to EHU commissioned by Sida (final report presented February 2021), a 'Survey of Impact to the Country of Origin (Belarus) by the European Humanities University,' commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (published April 2021), and a series of consultations with internal and external stakeholders of EHU conducted in Spring-Summer 2021. The review process took into account the findings of previous evaluations of the work of the university, including reports published by the higher education quality assurance agency of Lithuania, the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC).

On the basis of the combined evidence provided by these sources the following Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats can be seen to pertain to EHU at the time of preparation of the current Action Plan.

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1.1. Strenghts

- The EHU is a symbol – a Belarusian higher-education institution (HEI) that functions according to principles of academic freedom, commitment to European values and standards in the sphere of higher education and research.

- The university's staff display strong commitment to their professional and civic activities, and forge a close pattern of relations with the student body and alumni.

- The university's resilience is evidenced by the fact that it has managed to survive both exile from its own country and the challenges of functioning in a new host country.

- The institution provides support to Belarusian academia through the employment of lecturing staff. The range of disciplines offered, and the student-centred approach, make the HEI unique in the context of Belarusian higher education.

- The EHU acts as a 'keeper' of cultural and social legacy of Belarus and its peoples, through its academic programmes and research.

- Through the work of the research centres, the university acts as a centre of expertise on themes relevant to the history and current developments in Belarus.

- The multi-language base for teaching and learning, including in Belarusian and Russian, along with an increasing emphasis on English, plays an important role in the university's identity as a Belarusian HEI embedded in the European higher-education environment.

- The EHU's activities in research and civic engagement have led to impact in the Belarusian public debate on a wide range of issues.

- Alumni of the EHU testify to the value of the educational and extra-mural experience of studying at the institution, and the impact that this has had on their subsequent professional and personal development. A substantial number of alumni have gone on to make significant contributions to socio-economic and cultural developments in Belarus.

- The university has developed a strong track record in delivery of programmes in distance-learning mode.

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- **Weaknesses**
- As a small institution the EHU faces a constant challenge in terms of ensuring that all functions are performed effectively. This is compounded by the fact that as a Belarusian university located outside of its home environment, significant efforts are needed to adapt to the requirements of Lithuanian higher-education sector authorities, and maintaining links with the university core base of lecturing staff and students in Belarus itself.
- The financial base of the university is weak – there is no reserve/capital fund to draw upon, leaving the institution under constant pressure with regards to maintaining its daily running costs.
- The short-cycle nature of funding from donors acts as a constraint with regard to the contractual situation of staff.
- The cohort of students enrolled at the university has shrunk in recent years, with this decline compounded by ongoing challenges in recruitment and retention of students.
- The internal procedures regarding inter alia management of resources, financial planning at the level of academic departments, submission of research funding proposals and management of projects, require strengthening.
- The institution is under-staffed with regard to key leadership positions and administrative roles.
- The Governing Board (GB) is not representative of the HEI's home country, Belarus, and does not have any female members. The GB does not play a sufficiently active role in the day-to-day development of the university.
- Notwithstanding progress, the EHU remains insufficiently integrated into European higher-education networks.
- The research activity of the EHU needs to be strengthened in line with the requirements of the Lithuanian quality assurance agency, SKVC, and the Lithuanian Science Council, and in response to societal demand from Belarussian stakeholders.
- Notwithstanding positive achievements in the sphere of civic engagement and interaction between EHU staff and students and external stakeholders in civil society, there is a need to strengthen and improve relations with civil society.

1.2. Opportunities

- The progress made in revising the portfolio of academic programmes offers the prospect of attracting a larger student cohort, from Belarus and the surrounding region.
- There are strong prospects for establishing partnerships with commercial sector organisations, in terms of academic programme development, research cooperation, employability opportunities for graduates.
- There is increased (and renewed) interest in supporting EHU on the part of prospective donors, including donor countries that formerly were members of the EHU donor community.
- The university's long-standing experience in online and distance education provides a sound foundation for potential to engage in lifelong learning provision, including continuing professional development courses and programmes for public education.
- There is strong interest among external and internal stakeholders for the EHU to expand its third mission role, to enable it to make a larger contribution to the needs of Belarusian society and the surrounding region.

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1.3. Threats

- The tenuous financial situation of the university and its ongoing dependence on donor support mean that prospects for attaining sustainability are limited. If donor support ends before sustainability is achieved the EHU will not be able to continue to function.
- The nature of the actions seen since the summer of 2020 on the part of the Belarusian authorities with regard to freedom of movement and expression pose a severe threat to the university, and its staff and students.
- As a university-in-exile and a university-non-grata for the incumbent regime in Belarus, the university has been the focus of constant attempts by Belarusian authorities and agencies to monitor developments in the HEI, and actions aimed at undermining the work of the university and its reputation.

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1.4.   Assumptions

The Action Plan is based on the following assumptions:

- The core mission of the European Humanities University is to be a 'Student-centred University for promoting civil society development through Humanities and Liberal Arts for students from Belarus and the region by bringing them together, and offering international experience in study quality.'

- In line with the stated values of the university, EHU will be able to respond to the needs of Belarusian society through expanding EHU's activities in the spheres of education and training, research and analysis, engagement with civil society, through acting as a hub of expertise on Belarus and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region.

- The community of donors will increase its financial and other commitments to the EHU, in order to support the attainment of the targets set in the Action Plan. This will include the deployment of an expert support group and in-kind commitments from donors.

- The funding model of donor support will move to a four-pillar approach (teaching and learning; research; administration; capital fund).

- There is consensus within the university community, and with the donors of EHU, regarding the aims and objectives of the Action Plan and the approach to be taken towards achieving the stated targets.

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2. Bloc 1: Teaching and Learning

In line with the EHU's Strategic goals and objectives (1 to 4), by 2026 the European Humanities University will:

1. Offer a strengthened and balanced portfolio of academic programmes at Bachelor's, Master's and PhD levels in the humanities and arts, social sciences and other disciplines, which will attract students from Belarus and neighbouring countries.
2. Achieve a stable overall enrolment of students for academic programmes of 2500 students.
3. Strengthen the international profile of the university and its integration into higher-education networks in Europe and internationally on the basis of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy.
4. Expand non-degree provision through enhanced distance and online learning capacity to provide courses for professionals, students, the general public, in Belarus and neighbouring countries.

Objective 1: Strengthened and balanced portfolio of academic programmes at Bachelor's, Master's and PhD levels in the humanities and arts, social sciences and other disciplines, which will attract students from Belarus and neighbouring countries.

In the first three years of implementation of the EHU Strategy good progress has been made in reshaping the portfolio of academic programmes, improving the quality of education programmes and the procedures employed in quality management. These changes have been recognised by the Lithuanian quality assurance agency in its assessment of the university's performance (resulting in confirmation of the accreditation of study programmes, a process that is still underway) and its approval of new and revised study programmes that the EHU has submitted in the period 2019-2021.

However, the range of degree programmes offered remains limited in number, and the number of students enrolled on EHU programmes has fallen steadily over recent years, as a result of a range of factors.

The rationale to achieve a strengthened portfolio is to render the offering of academic programmes more attractive to Belarusian and non-Belarusian students, in line with the imperative to increase income generated by student fees and scholarships.

The rationale to achieve a more balanced portfolio lies in the need to increase the provision of programmes and number of enrolled students at Master's level, and to increase the opportunities for PhD-level studies beyond the currently limited scope.

In order to achieve this objective by 2026, in the period 2021-2023 the EHU will:

1.1.   Continue to develop the portfolio of degree programmes in line with its core mission and its strengths in the humanities and arts, and the social sciences.

In 2021-2023 the university will:

1.1.1. Introduce procedures to ensure each programme is managed in line with clearly-defined actual costs, and is viable with regard to the availability of staffing and learning resources.

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1.1.2. Review the existing portfolio of programmes (including those pending approval by SKVC) in line with the established viability criteria relating to funding and resourcing, to facilitate decision-making on the need for adjustments to the portfolio.

1.1.3. Introduce new programmes the humanities and arts, and the social sciences, that reflect the EHU's existing and potential capacities in terms of academic expertise, and the expectations and needs of Belarusian students and students in the broader surrounding region.

1.2. Introduce new fields of study (in addition to social science and humanities and arts disciplines) that are in demand among Belarusian students and employers, and which will complement the existing portfolio.

1.2.1. Incorporate the new Bachelor's programme in information technology, developed in collaboration with the commercial sector company EPAM, into the university portfolio.

1.3. The EHU will take measures to achieve an effective balance of academic programme provision across the levels of study (Bachelor's, Master's and PhD levels).

1.3.1. A target will be established for the size of student cohort per level of study, per discipline.

1.3.2. The undergraduate (Bachelor's) level programmes will continue to provide mainly for Belarusian students, with Russian and Belarusian as the core languages of instruction, supplemented by English and other languages where relevant.

1.3.3. The target student audience for Master's level will include students from Belarus, the broader region (Eastern Partnership, East-Central Europe, Russian Federation, Central Asia), and European Union (EU) and international students. An effective balance of provision using Russian and English as the principal languages of instruction will be established per programme.

1.3.4. PhD level provision will be expanded to reflect the core disciplinary strengths of the university. This will be achieved on the basis of partnership arrangements with partner universities and research institutes.

1.4. The EHU will continue to place emphasis on the quality of teaching and learning across the portfolio of programmes, in order to ensure that the requirements of the Lithuanian quality assurance agency are complied with, and to respond effectively to the needs and expectations of students and other relevant stakeholders.

1.4.1. The EHU will continue to develop internal quality assurance procedures, building on the progress seen under the 2019-2024 Strategy. The current Quality Manual (2013) will be reviewed in order to update its contents where necessary. Recent insights on active learning and tools and approaches that promote it will be taken into account.

1.4.2. In line with the proposed expansion of EHU provision of both degree programmes and non-degree learning, a review will be conducted of existing resources available at EHU to support teaching and learning. The review will identify areas that require strengthening and updating and present action points for the attention of the Rector and Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs.

1.5. The EHU will enhance its provision of and facilities for online teaching and learning aspects of degree programmes.

1.5.1. The EHU will elaborate a strategic vision and accompanying set of guidelines for online learning (for both high- and low-residence students). This will serve to identify the roles and contribution of online education in the overall development of the portfolio of academic programmes, and facilitate integration of these aspects into the plans of academic departments, administrative and operational divisions. The plans will outline

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options for use of online education in degree as well as non-degree programmes and consider issues of resourcing, information systems, staff development, innovation and collaboration with partners.

1.5.2. The university will review and update where needed its standards and evaluation procedures for online course delivery.

1.5.3. A motivation system will be established whereby teaching staff will compensated for their efforts in developing online courses.

1.6. The EHU will take measures to strengthen the employability prospects of students.

1.6.1. All programmes will enhance their focus on the development of transferable skills among students, aimed at enhancing employability prospects.

1.6.2. Building on the EHU's existing strong relations with social partners and alumni, academic programmes will seek to increase engagement with employers and donors to pursue opportunities for student work placements/ internships.

1.7. The EHU will expand its current range of student support services relating to student experience at the EHU both for high-residence students based at the campus in Vilnius and for low-residence students based in Belarus and elsewhere.

1.7.1. The EHU will develop further its existing structures and procedures for supporting students in their study and welfare-related needs in order to cater for the planned increase in numbers of students enrolled at the university.

1.7.2. The range and scope of support to students located in Belarus will be enhanced.

1.7.3. Guidelines for supporting international students will be developed and put into effect by the relevant student support teams and the academic departments.

1.7.4. Access to psychological support to students (and staff) will be increased, to respond to the larger numbers of students to be enrolled and to the heightened need for such support among students and staff both on campus and located off-site.

1.7.5. The EHU will expand opportunities for students to engage in roles as teaching assistants, research assistants, event and communication assistants, etc., during their studies as a means to gain valuable experience and contribute to the work of the institution.

Objective 2: Overall enrolment of students for academic programmes will have reached the target of 2500 students.

The current EHU Strategy for 2019-2024 sets a target of achieving a total cohort of 850 students by the 2023-2024 Academic Year, with international (non-Belarusian) students making up 20% (170 students) of the total.

The trend seen in recent years, however, has been one of a decline in student enrolments, compounded by ongoing challenges in achieving retention of students (notwithstanding efforts made to address drop-out causes). The initial enrolment for the current 2020-2021 academic year was just over 670 students, boosted to over 700 during the year through the allocation of emergency donor scholarships to students expelled from Belarusian universities.

Before the crises that emerged in 2020 (political crisis in Belarus, and the COVID-19 pandemic) the EHU faced a range of challenges in the sphere of student recruitment:
- There were severe constraints on the university's ability to engage in recruitment activities inside Belarus because of restrictions imposed by the Belarusian authorities.

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- The range of options for Belarusian students seeking study opportunities in Europe has increased substantially in recent years, including through the provision of scholarship programmes for Belarusian students offered in several countries.
- The university increased fee levels in 2019, in order to improve the financial situation of the institution – however, this was followed by a wave of student protests against the fee increase, which had an impact on student-EHU relations.

In 2020-2021 the political crisis in Belarus has exerted an impact on recruitment activities, with a risk that the Belarusian authorities might introduce measures that would curtail recruitment – while it is also possible to envisage a scenario in which there can be a surge of applicants to EHU as Belarusian students or school-leavers seek to leave the country to pursue education elsewhere. Both scenarios hold significant implications for EHU's ability to adjust to either a major drop or major influx of extra students. Meanwhile, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student recruitment patterns is yet to be seen (a challenge faced by the university sector across Europe, with a drop in international student enrolment for on-campus study likely to continue to affect the HE sector).

With regard to the five-year strategic planning of the EHU, the transition to a four-pillar model of funding, and the imperative to move to full-economic costing of degree programmes and associated fee-level (full cost) identification, also needs to be factored into the question of student recruitment. Additional donor funding is to be made available, and it is on this basis that the current Action Plan has revised upwards the target figure for recruitment.

The figure of 2500 students by 2026 is ambitious and a significant increase from the current target of 850. However, the university did succeed in maintaining a student base of almost 2000 students in its earlier years of operation in Lithuania. If the EHU succeeds in reaching positive results across the objectives presented in the AP (including the introduction of new programmes and fields of study, including through collaboration with commercial sector partners), this new target of 2500 is realisable. Furthermore, it is important that student recruitment, as the key source of university income, is boosted in order that the university can move closer to a position of sustainability by 2026.

In order to achieve this objective by 2026, in the period 2021-2023 the EHU will implement the following measures:

2.

2.1.   The university will adopt the following tenets in the management of the academic programmes:

2.1.1. Financial viability and sustainability: Each programme needs to attract and retain sufficient numbers of students for the programme to be considered viable and its inclusion in the portfolio justified.

2.1.2. Full-economic costing and break-even point identification: The university will aim to recruit and retain a sufficient number of students to achieve at least the financial break-even point with regard to income from fees and scholarships (with a margin in excess of this to allow for reductions in numbers through drop-out post admission). The gross break-even point (for the portfolio as a whole) will be accompanied by target figures for each academic programme based on break-even group sizes per programme. A minimum recruitment level of incoming students per programme will

be established, and annual monitoring of student retention and drop-out will be conducted, to facilitate responsive measures where required.

2.2.   The EHU will introduce additional procedures to use in relation to the management of the portfolio.

2.2.1.   The EHU will conduct annual reviews of each academic programme (assessment of results, analysis of student feedback, peer review by expert support group) in order to fine-tune the content and delivery of the existing portfolio of programmes. Targeted recruitment strategies per programme will be developed, for implementation by university student recruitment teams in collaboration with the respective academic department, supported where relevant by the donor community.

2.2.2.   The EHU will prepare a concept note based on market analysis, for discussion with the Governing Board and donor community, when proposing the introduction of new academic programmes. Predicted recruitment potential will be established for any new academic programme, along with a clear strategy for marketing the new programme.

2.2.3.   In the case that the university wishes to consider phasing out of an academic programme, a justification will be presented to the Governing Board and donor community, to allow for options to be considered prior to final decision being made.

2.2.4.   In line with the transition to the four-pillar model of donor funding, and in reflection of the potential for programme development in cooperation with commercial sector organisations, three basic models of programme funding will be used.

- For those disciplines identified as priorities by the donor community, scholarship funding will be the primary source.
- For programmes developed with commercial sector partners, EHU will agree the funding structure including fee levels and scholarship availability with the partner organisation.
- For other programmes that are not priority disciplines for donors and are not covered in partnership agreements, EHU will assume full financial responsibility for management of the respective programme.

2.3.   The EHU will revise its student recruitment strategy in line with the planned increase in the target figure for student enrolment.

2.3.1.   The EHU student recruitment strategy will be overseen by the Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs, and implemented in coordination with the academic departments.

2.3.2.   The strategy will include sub-components per level of study (undergraduate, Master's, PhD), per discipline, per mode of study (high and low residence).

2.3.3.   Focused strategies for recruitment of Belarusian students, students from Russian-speaking countries, students from the surrounding region (Eastern Partnership and East-Central Europe), and EU and international students, will be integrated into the overall strategy.

2.3.4.   The strategy will reflect the target numbers for recruitment identified per academic programme.

2.3.5.   The EHU will conduct constant monitoring of progress in recruitment campaigns and of challenges encountered. These will be related to the donor community on a regular basis, to facilitate adjustments to the approach where needed and the leveraging of additional support from donors and other organisations in achieving outreach to potential students.

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2.3.6.   The EHU will draw on its experience in using social media and holding virtual recruitment events in relation to promoting studies at EHU, and to assist recruitment onto individual study programmes. The social media and virtual recruitment activities will reach out to potential students in all relevant target countries for student recruitment.

Objective 3. By 2026 the EHU will have strengthened its international profile and achieved deeper integration into higher-education networks in Europe and internationally.

The EHU has demonstrated strong commitment to the goal of internationalisation throughout its history. Substantive progress has been made under the current EHU Strategy through the development of a broader range of collaborative activities and partnership-building, and an increase in mobility of students and staff. However, the goal set for achieving higher numbers of international students enrolled at EHU, which would contribute to the internationalisation of the campus experience, has yet to materialise to the extent predicted (see above). Progress towards establishing joint/ double degrees has also been slow and time- and resource-intensive for staff involved.

The university will pursue an ambitious plan of action regarding internationalisation, on the basis of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy that will build on the existing framework for international activities. The EHU Internationalisation Strategy will encompass all aspects of the university's international cooperation (in the spheres of teaching and learning, research, and its civic mission). In the teaching and learning domain the following activities will be covered.

In order to achieve this objective by 2026, in the period 2021-2023 the EHU will implement the following measures.
3.
3.1.   The university will expand opportunities for student and staff mobility (outward and inward), drawing on available funding schemes to support mobility activities.
3.2.   To cater both for students and staff located on campus, and also those located outside of the campus (in Belarus and elsewhere) the university will expand on its positive experience in engaging in 'internationalisation at home' activities (such as through the OSUN network) through, inter alia:
● Online events (seminars, webinars, workshops, public debates) organised with international partners.
● Increasing opportunities for students to benefit from visits of lecturers, researchers, representatives of civil society and others from neighbouring countries and further afield.
● Where relevant students will be involved in academic networking activities with international partner institutions.
3.3.   In parallel to similar activities in the research sphere, EHU will expand its networking activities with partner institutions in the sphere of teaching and learning, to provide opportunities for students and staff to benefit from joint activities.
3.4.   The targets for embedding English as language of instruction in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes set in the 2019-2024 Strategy will stay in place, but need to be addressed on a programme-by-programme basis. A review will be conducted to

ascertain the level of proficiency in English among target recruitment groups, the capacities of lecturing staff, availability of learning resources in the respective languages, etc.

3.5.   The EHU will review the state of progress in establishing and running joint/double degree programmes, in order to inform decision-making on whether to continue to allocate resources to this goal at this stage, or to pause these efforts in order to focus on other priorities. As with standard degree programmes, any such initiative will be accompanied by assessment of the potential for student recruitment, to ensure that joint/ double degree programmes are designed according to a full-economic costing model and are viable from a resourcing perspective.

Objective 4. By 2026 the EHU will have well-established non-degree course provision achieved through enhanced distance and online learning capacities, serving the needs of professionals, students, the general public, in Belarus and neighbouring countries.

While the EHU has a strong track-record in the delivery of online learning and distance learning provision, this has been focused on academic programmes, with only a limited amount of non-degree course provision conducted.

There is scope for considerable expansion of EHU's offering in the sphere of lifelong learning, to respond to the needs of Belarusian society, academia, and professional spheres. This expansion can also allow the EHU to build a stronger presence as a provider of education to Russian-speaking students and users in the broader region.

The expansion of non-degree provision needs to be coordinated with the degree programme provision to ensure effective use of staffing resources. The focus for the non-degree provision should be complementary to the disciplinary range seen in the portfolio of degree programmes, but can also seek to expand into additional spheres.

The provision of Lifelong Learning (LLL) programmes will include both free-of-charge provision aimed at public education purposes, and fee-paying provision, such as Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for professional groups.

In order to achieve this objective by 2026, in the period 2021-2023 the EHU will implement the following measures.
4.
4.1.   The EHU will identify what provisioning is needed in terms of human resources, information systems, teachers support and will develop a business plan for expansion of online offering to non-degree programs and CPD courses.
4.1.1. The EHU will conduct market analyses among target groups with the aim of assessing needs among potential users (for CPD, and for public education). The CPD aspect will include business development analysis of the potential for income generation through fee-paying.
4.1.2. A set of courses for CPD and for public education will be developed on the basis of the above-mentioned activities, ready for launch in 2022/2023.

4.2.   To proactively embrace emerging technologies and new educational approaches EHU will strengthen its capacity and will seek for the right balance between reliance on external service providers and in-house competences for IT support and development.

4.3.   The EHU will perform audit of the IT systems taking special attention to the security and will prepare plan for further development and maintenance as well as procedures for constant monitoring.

3. Bloc 2: Research, innovation and policy outreach

This aspect of the Action Plan relates primarily to Strategic Goal 5 of the EHU Strategy.

The university's activities in the sphere of research, art and outreach include a number of research programmes and collaborations structured via research centres such as the Center for Constitutionalism and Human Rights, Centre for Gender Studies and others. There is, however, a pressing need to support and expand current research in terms of attention for the social sciences and to create opportunities for research innovation. Research in social science, humanities and art activities will increase the visibility and reputation of the EHU in Belarus and the neighbouring countries and support the university in realizing its mission.

The key challenges in supporting and expanding research activities are:
- Ensuring research receives priority as an activity that is a fundamental part of a university's core mission and key for the reputation and societal impact of EHU.
- Developing high quality research that serves society and supports future policy.
- Combining socially relevant research, mostly in Russian, with realisation of publications in Scopus listed journals, mostly in English.

To address these challenges, by 2026 the European Humanities University will:
5. Have established research/ art as an integral part of its core mission, integrated with all other activities in a sustainable and financially supported manner through three pillars of research funding for structural research support, project seed funding and network building and grant acquisition.
6. Have created research support infrastructure integrated into the departments to support scholars in seeking new funding and the dissemination of results.
7. Generate and support new lines of societally relevant research/ art via a yearly cycle of small project funding followed by applications for international research funding.
8. Have achieved higher visibility of its research/ art programmes through the creation and maintenance of academic networks with scholars from the neighbouring countries and through participation in international networks.
9. Created the conditions to develop forward looking and innovative research collaborations between humanities and arts, social science and IT.

Objective 5: Strengthen structural support for existing research/ art programmes and centres

To achieve this result, scientific research and/or art work should be increased to include a larger share of the workload of all staff, ideally, more than 50 percent of the total time when taking into account delivering lectures and supervising classes. Appropriate financial adjustments need to be made to make this possible (for example, diminishing contact hours staff need to teach).

The rationale to provide structural support for research for at least 0,3 fte is to bring into the open the hidden costs of time spent on research/ art activities as part of the funding model. This will ensure research/ art are accorded their place in academic activities as part of the university's core mission.

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The rationale to strengthen structural support for research is to sustain the developed research programmes, projects, centres and art activities, so that existing lines of research/ art do not deteriorate due to lack of funding. The development of an improved research funding environment will unfold in parallel with improvement in teaching and general contract conditions (in terms of contact hours and digitalization, among others) as both activities are performed by the same core staff.

In order to achieve this objective by 2026, the EHU will bolster research/ art capacity at the department level:

To achieve this, in 2021-2023 the university will:

5.
5.1.   Advertise, hire and allocate additional 2 fte (research time, divided among several positions) between the two departments of EHU. This would involve adding new positions to core staff and providing teaching relief to existing staff. Workload should be redistributed to make sure there is enough time for research activities.
5.2.   Allocate between 0,3-0,4 fte per position for research structurally, depend ing on seniority, and adjust funding models accordingly.
5.3.   Review internally the existing research/ art programmes and centres and allocate additional support in the form of student assistance to be distributed by Heads of department for support of ongoing research to the best performing initiatives to create economies of scale.
5.4.   Advertise and hire four funded student assistant positions to be selected on a competitive basis among existing students.
5.5.   Create a research fund for sabbatical leave for staff members, to be used for developing long term research vision and grant applications.

Objective 6: Support research communication, dissemination and grant acquisition

Academic staff are tasked with teaching and supervision, developing research, disseminating results and grant acquisition. The important research support activities need to be partly redistributed to dedicated staff to ensure the success of core activities such as research and teaching.

For this purpose, the university will create research support infrastructure at the department level to support grant acquisition and the dissemination of results.

The rationale of creating additional positions is to enhance visibility of existing research/ art and create conditions for successful grant acquisition to fund new research.

To achieve this objective by 2026, in 2021-2023 the university will:

6.
6.1.   Reorganize and reintroduce these support positions to each of Academic Departments:
6.2.   Coordinators:.
6.2.1. Coordinator for studies (current position);

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Policy & Development

6.2.2. Coordinator for research and projects; This would be a grant development officer at the department level to support acquisition of research funding/ art funding and establish contacts with potential new donors, partner centres and relevant networks.

6.2.3. Coordinator for communication and cooperation: this would be Hire a staff member for research dissemination, to work at the level of departments, on dissemination and valorisation of research results and art projects.

6.3. Create two social media/ communications positions for student assistants to promote research/ art activities and recent findings for all centres and research/ art programmes at the department level.

6.4. Simplify procedure of submission of project proposals less than x euros when contribution of the university is not required.

Objective 7: Support innovative, societally relevant research

The university should build on existing strengths but also develop new lines of research that respond to societal needs and support research-based teaching. Among others, priority research areas that could be strengthened could be, for example, public policy, economics, political science, area studies.

Research at EHU should become an integral part of funding models but also, in the medium term, attract additional external funding. For this purpose, project-based seed funding should become a key driver of innovation.

The rationale for the provision of seed funding is to encourage innovation and societally relevant research targeting specific deliverables such as reports, databases, articles in popular and think tank outlets, books.

In addition, seed funding guidelines will promote cooperation with stakeholders such as business and Belarus civil society. Projects will involve students when possible and appropriate, to enhance further their participation in research/ art as a core activity of EHU.

The rationale for project competition on a yearly basis with specific criteria and guidelines is to enhance the knowledge of staff and research support staff of application procedures and formats of international funding competitions.

Societally relevant research: new impulse
By 2026 the university would have given a new impulse for the start of societally relevant research/ art projects. **For this purpose, in 2021-2023 the university will:**
7.
7.1. Create and maintain a research seed fund of approximately 50 000 euro per year, to be allocated on a competitive basis for projects with societal and academic relevance.
7.2. Establish a cycle of annual competitions for research seed funding with clear and transparent criteria and procedures for assessment.
7.3. Develop a set of project evaluation criteria, application format and procedure for application and assessment.

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7.4.   Recruit an interdisciplinary committee of international academics and Belarus civil society members to assess projects. Committee members to rotate after two years.

7.5.   Formulate clear and transparent application criteria based on first rounds of applications.

7.6.   Organize annual application rounds for new seed research funding to be judged by the recruited international committee supported by Belarus civil society members.

Objective 8: Enhance collaborations and create new research networks

One of the key problems identified by reviews has been the relative isolation of EHU staff from regional and European university and research networks. A third pillar of research funding should provide, in a limited and targeted way, possibilities for network building and promotion of existing EHU research.

The promotion of research networks will be integrated into the internationalization plan of the university. The university will pursue an ambitious plan of action regarding internationalisation, on the basis of a comprehensive internationalisation strategy that will build on the existing framework for international activities. The EHU Internationalisation Strategy will encompass all aspects of the university's international cooperation (in the spheres of teaching and learning, research, and its civic mission). In the research domain efforts will target the creation of new and support of existing academic networks and developing network building opportunities.

The rationale for funding Initiatives to create or support existing network building opportunities is to enhance research/ art in a broader, comparative perspective. Broader and comparative research or art initiatives would bring deeper insights into Belarusian realities and render research/ art results from EHU interesting and relevant for an international academic and policy audience.

The rationale for holding conferences and workshops would be to showcase EHU research and strengthen international collaborations.

By 2026 the university will have created the means for network establishment and the maintaining of existing academic networks for research purposes.

For this purpose, in 2021-2023 the university will:

8.

8.1.   Prepare and organize one conference per year targeting international academic and policy audiences to be held at the premises of EHU.

8.2.   Organize and fund a series of meetings and workshops with similar institutions from the Eastern partnership countries in order to identify clear and specific avenues of collaboration based on pre-identified complementarities in research (and, possibly, teaching).

8.3.   Establish small fund of approximately 20 000 euro per year to support attendance of international conferences by EHU staff.

8.4.   Establish a small fund of about 10 000 euro per year to support article translation, proof reading and open access.

Objective 9: Develop forward looking strategic research collaborations between humanities and social sciences and IT

To innovate, the university will build on its unique portfolio and combination of social sciences, art and humanities with the recent addition of information technology. The provision of big data-based insights for public policy can be a promising line of societally relevant research given the addition of IT component to EHU's teaching programmes. The importance of integrating IT staff in research projects should not be underestimated.

Innovative interdisciplinary collaborations with IT will seek to use big data for new insights.

In the medium and long term, potential outcomes could be the creation of digital platforms that facilitate citizen science (e.g. bottom up data collection). Synergies and new lines of research could focus on themes such as media and digitalization, or public policy and law.

By 2026 the university will have established digital social science cooperation framework
For this purpose, in 2021-2023 the university will:

9.

9.1.   Actively support collaborations between relevant centres and scholars with IT specialists inside and outside EHU.

9.2.   Create a joint fund for social science and computer science projects or digital humanities projects, with at least 2 pilot projects started in the 1st year.

9.3.   Plan and hold an initial workshop between EHU staff and partner IT companies and stakeholders for the identification of pilot research projects to be supported.

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4. Bloc 3: Governance, administration and resources

4.1. Governance

Following recommendations made in the evaluation report on Support to the European Humanities University (Sida, February 2021), and extensive discussions involving the EHU senior management, the Governing Board, the General Assembly of Part Owners, and the donor community, a number of changes are due to be effected in the governance structures and procedures of EHU in 2021. The rationale is to render the governing structures more representative in terms of Belarusian participants and female members, and to assign specific functions to Governing Board members in support and oversight of the work of the university and the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan.

In 2021-2022:

- The membership of the Governing Board (nine members in total) will include a minimum of three female and three male members, a minimum of three members of Belarusian origin.
- The composition of the GB will include representatives of civil society, academia, industry and commercial sector, public administration sector, the Belarusian democratic movement.
- All members of the GB will be assigned a specific function to perform in support of the work of the university. This can include, inter alia: administration and resources; academic affairs; research; business development; relations with civil society; relations with the donor community; student affairs; student recruitment; internationalisation.
- The rector of the university will no longer have a right to vote at GB meetings.
- The GB will elicit contributions from academic and administrative staff, who will attend meetings on an ad hoc basis as ex-officio members without voting rights.

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4.2. Administration and resources

This aspect of the Action Plan relates primarily to Strategic Goal 6 of the EHU Strategy.

At its core, the EHU organization is made up of a central administrative organization headed by the Rector Magnificus – which also houses the university's support services – and two academic departments within which the primary processes of education, research and valorisation are carried out. In its relatively young existence, the EHU has formally defined a number of administrative and support processes, but there is still a lot of room for actual targeted implementation of those processes to support the development towards an ambitious university in the field of the humanities in the Eastern European region. The key challenges for administration and resources are:

- The financial situation of the EHU continues to be weak, reliant on short-cycle donor funding for >70% of financial needs, and with no reserve fund at its disposal.
- Student recruitment levels need to be strengthened significantly, if the EHU is to attain a more secure financial footing and move towards sustainability.
- Presently, teaching programmes are not financially viable nor sustainable. Programmes do not attract and retain sufficient students. Moreover, principles of full-economic costing and break-even point identification currently generally accepted principles such as full-economic costing and break-even point identification are currently not used. Fee levels are not in accordance with the actual full costs of teaching programmes. This leads to structural shortages in budget in relation to the required teaching time for the admitted students.
- EHU has not been able to source a capital fund. With no other assets and reserves, there is no buffer for any setback or even a possibility to cover temporary cash flow shortages in case of delays in disbursement of for example donor funds. Neither is there the opportunity to benefit from income a capital fund could give.
- No provident fund or alternative insurance arrangement for employees providing for pensions or otherwise compensation in case of retirement or inability to continue working. With low general pension provisions either in Belarus or Lithuania, elderly staff is pressed to seek continuity in their contracts limiting opportunities for younger replacement.
- There is a growing demand from the donor side to for greater transparency on budgeting and expense reporting, making it output based linked to enrolment, numbers graduating and results of research produced.
- The governance and administrative structures and procedures are in need of reform and strengthening.
- The support processes, protocols and procedures have been formally put in place, but are not clearly orientated towards the internal clients and sometimes even unknown to them.

To address the aforementioned challenges by 2026, in the period 2021-2023 the European Humanities University will:

10. Achieve stable and sustainable funding, without extensive dependence on a few sources of income.

11. Make the transition from current core funding to a four-pillar model for funding – starting in 2022 - in which a distinction is made between a) core administration fund, b) education fund, c) research fund and d) capital fund.

12. Design professional support processes, in the vicinity of the scientists where necessary and at a distance from the scientist where possible.

Objective 10: Achieve stable and sustainable funding, without extensive dependence on a few sources of income.

The rationale behind this objective is that EHU funding should be made less dependent on external funding. Financial sustainability is the goal and by 2026 EHU will have made progress towards this. The reality however is that for the foreseeable future EHU will remain reliant on donor funding. The increase in donor funding being offered is needed to allow it to boost its growth and capacities. EHU should be encouraged to develop activities that generate revenue in themselves. All resources available to the university can be used for this purpose: knowledge, talents, infrastructure et cetera.

In order to achieve this objective by 2026, the EHU will in the period 2021-2023:

10.

10.1. Expand non-degree provision through enhanced distance and online learning capacity to provide courses for professionals, students, the general public, in Belarus and neighbouring countries.

10.2. Actively support collaborations between relevant centres and scholars with IT specialists inside and outside EHU.

10.3. Create a joint fund for social science and computer science projects or digital humanities projects, with at least 2 pilot projects started in the 1st year.

10.4. Introduce new programmes the humanities and arts, and the social sciences, that reflect the EHU's existing and potential capacities in terms of academic expertise, and the expectations and needs of Belarusian students and students in the broader surrounding region.

10.5. Introduce new fields of study (in addition to social science and humanities and arts disciplines) that are in demand among Belarusian students and employers, and which will complement the existing portfolio.

10.6. Incorporate the new Bachelor's programme in information technology, developed in collaboration with the commercial sector company EPAM, into the university portfolio.

10.7. Take measures to achieve an effective balance of academic programme provision across the levels of study (Bachelor's, Master's and PhD levels).

10.8. The EHU will enhance its provision of and facilities for online teaching and learning aspects of degree programmes.

10.9. Hire a grant development officer at the department level to support acquisition of research funding/ art funding and establish contacts with potential new donors, partner centres and relevant networks.

10.10. Hire a staff member for research dissemination, to work at the level of departments, on dissemination and valorisation of research results and art projects.

10.11. Prepare and organize one conference per year targeting international academic and policy audiences to be held at the premises of EHU.

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Policy & Development

10.12. Organize and fund a series of meetings and workshops with similar institutions from the Eastern partnership countries in order to identify clear and specific avenues of collaboration based on pre-identified complementarities in research (and, possibly, teaching).

10.13. Establish small fund of approximately 20 000 euro per year to support attendance of international conferences by EHU staff.

10.14. Plan and hold an initial workshop between EHU staff and partner IT companies and stakeholders for the identification of pilot research projects to be supported.

10.15. Engage with donors to showcase work and achievements, as part of which regular donor conferences and other events/ dissemination activities should be conducted.

10.16. Note, define and prioritize in kind contributions from the donors and make a strategic development plan for the use of additional donor in cash funding.

10.17. Identify potential new donors, especially in the Baltic region, create an overview of the programmes these potential donors offer for support, and define what the interests of the potential donors are in the Baltic region.

10.18. Set up a business development team, which should be a small team of experienced professionals from outside EHU will work together with the departments to develop academic activities in a broad sense that in themselves will lead to an increase in EHU's income.

Objective 11: Make the transition from current core funding to a four-pillar model for funding – starting in 2022 - in which a distinction is made between a) core administration fund, b) education fund, c) research fund and d) capital fund.

The rationale behind this objective is that the funding model EHU will become transparent, viable and sustainable. Presenting the EHU budget on a full-cost basis and with clear and transparent performance indicators will allow for more effective (financial) management.

In order to achieve this objective by 2026, the EHU will in the period 2021-2023:

11.

11.1. Develop a funding model based on four funding pillars: core administration, education fund, research fund and capital fund.

11.1.1. Core administration includes basic overheads for central management and support independent from size of student population and research projects.

11.1.2. Education fund covers all staff and material costs for teaching calculated on a student per annum basis or per course hour if related to ad-hoc courses. It includes administrative costs to the extent these can be imputed as related to being additional per student as also a contribution to the capital fund.

11.1.3. Research fund ensures a minimum ring-fenced amount for internal funding of research and seed funding to attract external projects. This fund is normally not used to co-sponsor of external projects, that should strictly adhere to bringing in also the required funding for administrative overheads.

11.1.4. Capital fund to be build up by from an imputed contribution on the total per annum student costs as also any alternative sources of donations form the corporate sector, private contributions, etc.

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11.2.   Attract expertise to execute focused market analyses before defining and preparing new activities in education and research.

11.3.   Design an internal financial distribution model which represents all academic activities within EHU.

11.4.   Create incentives for scientists to develop research activities or activities aimed at business development.

11.5.   Develop an education distribution model that is transparent for the departments and rewards modern education methods.

11.6.   Design an education cost model that on the basis of full costs rather than on modelled costs.

11.7.   Continue the progress made in improving contractual terms of teaching staff, with the transition to longer-cycle donor funding serving as a facilitating tool to secure more stability in the working environment of EHU lecturers.

11.8.   To follow "Recommendations on the Structure of the Workload of Lecturers of Higher Education Institutions" approved by the Minister of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania and c   omplete the reforms underway in adjusting the workload of academic staff and clarifying the distribution of workload per teaching, administrative and research-related tasks. This will serve to ensure that academic staff can perform their multiple functions including making an impact (via publications, project activities etc.) on transformations in Belarus and the region effectively.

11.9.   Develop a model to identify allocation of time for staff to engage in in-service training activities, attendance of external events relating to teaching and learning capacity-building (see also analogous proposal relating to research activity).

11.10. Build up a university-wide investment fund, which makes it possible for EHU to invest substantially in the modernization of its portfolio.

Objective 12: Design professional support processes, in the vicinity of the scientists where necessary and at a distance from the scientist where possible.

The rationale behind this objective is that professional support processes must be set up in order to be able to use the scientists' energy and time to the maximum for realizing the future ambitions of EHU. To support education & research, these processes are designed in collaboration with the scientists and positioned as closely as possible to the scientist (within the departments). When it comes to general support for all staff working for EHU – such as housing, cleaning, but also Human Resources (HR) services – the support can be positioned further away from the scientists (i.e. in the Rector's office). Professional support staff can also significantly contribute to the realization of the ambitious development plan for EHU in terms of the build-up of a research portfolio and the start-up of income generating business activities.

In order to achieve this objective by 2026, the EHU will:

12.

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12.1.   Identify – in close cooperation with the senior scientific staff – which support structures particularly focused on supporting the staff in the departments need to be developed with high priority to maximize the chances of successfully carrying out the academic ambitions of the EHU.

12.2.   Provide structural support for existing research programmes and centres, divided among several positions, between the two departments of EHU. This would involve adding new positions to core staff and providing some teaching relief to existing staff.

12.3.   Introduce two research support positions, being a grant development officer that could mobilize networks and a research dissemination position, to work at the level of departments, on dissemination and valorisation of research results.

12.4.   To establish Centre for Online/Distance Education that would develop, produce and support online/distance courses (with focus on innovative educational technologies, liberal arts education etc.). This will include provision of Continuing Professional Development courses and public education courses for external users, in addition to courses aimed at internal users (students, lecturing staff, administrative staff).

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5. Bloc 4: Third Mission activities

This bloc of the Action Plan is introduced as a complementary set of activities to the core activities covered in the Strategy.

By 2026 the EHU will have increased the scope of its activities relating to the 'Third Mission' of universities (service to society and outreach to external users and partners), building on the already strong foundations established by the EHU in this sphere across the past decades.

The third mission activities of the EHU will form an integrated part of the university's work, drawing on and complementing the teaching and learning and research functions of the EHU, and extending their impact through engaging external stakeholders and audiences.

In the period 2021-2022 the EHU will:
13. Create an EHU Hub to act as a gateway for interaction between the university and external users and stakeholders.
14. Create an EHU Resource Centre for Belarus and the surrounding region.

Objective 13: EHU Hub acts as a gateway for interaction between the university and external users and stakeholders.

There is a considerable amount of activity already taking place at EHU with regard to engagement with users of research and analyses, promotion of cultural heritage, gender studies, coordination of urban development network, independent media activities, work on constitutionalism and human rights, etc. However, these activities are somewhat fragmented in terms of projecting a unified institutional profile of EHU. There is a need to bring such work together into a common hub, that can serve as the venue for in-person and virtual engagement between EHU and its external stakeholders. This can include the activities of the think-tank function proposed in the current Action Plan, cultural and arts events organised by the EHU, conferences and seminars on Belarusian studies.

In order to achieve this goal, in the period 2021-2023 EHU will:

13.

13.1. Appoint a coordinator for the EHU Hub, who will facilitate the development of the Hub and its activities.

13.2. Establish a dedicated website and social media presence for the Hub.

13.3. Promote the Hub among external audiences in Belarus, Lithuania, the broader region, internationally.

13.4. Develop an annual programme of activities for the Hub (e.g. conferences, seminar and webinar series, art exhibitions, master classes, town hall debates, etc.).

13.5. Support the Hub's development through the work of the Business Development team to be established under the Action Plan.

Objective 14: The EHU Resource Centre provides a broad range of services that respond to the needs and interests of citizens of Belarus and the surrounding region.

As called for by a considerable number of external stakeholders, there is a need for the EHU to enhance its role as a resource centre for Belarus and the surrounding region, with regard to the provision of education and training programmes that address professional, civic and

EPRD
Policy & Development

personal capacity needs; analyses that address issues of concern to citizens in Belarus and the region; information services of relevance to users in Belarus and the region.

This area of activity can be seen to relate to gaps in the coverage of such matters in Belarus itself.

The work of the resource centre would draw on the EHU's core activities in teaching and learning, and research, map against the expansion of LLL provision envisaged in the current Action Plan, and provide synergies with the work of the EHU Hub outlined above.

In order to achieve this goal, in the period 2021-2023 EHU will:

14.

14.1. Appoint a coordinator for the EHU Resource Centre, who will facilitate the development of the Centre and its activities.

14.2. Establish a dedicated website and social media presence for the Resource Centre.

14.3. Promote the Centre among external audiences in Belarus, Lithuania, the broader region, internationally.

14.4. Develop an annual programme of activities for the Centre (e.g. public education courses; public information events; series of publications for general and specialist audiences, etc.).

14.5. Support the Centre's development through the work of the Business Development team to be established under the Action Plan.

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