

JANUARY 2024
MISSION STATEMENT



**Empowering the Margins of
Europe through Regional and
Global Engagement**

emerge

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Our Identity

EMERGE (Empowering the Margins of Europe through Regional and Global Engagement) brings together nine universities, united by the conviction that by working together we can better serve our students, territories and communities.



Coordinator

1 - University of Limerick / Ollscoil Luimnigh / **Ireland**

Partners

2 - Universidade da Coruña / **Spain**

3 - Université Rennes 2 / **France**

4 - Université de Bretagne Sud / **France**

5 - Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences / **Norway**

6 - Univerzita Mateja Bela v Banskej Bystrici / **Slovakia**

7 - Europa-Universität Flensburg / **Germany**

8 - Neapolis University Pafos / **Cyprus**

9 - Democritus University of Thrace / **Greece**

UNIVERSITIES FROM THE MARGINS

Our universities are located in the “Margins” of Europe, geographically distant from the central or metropolitan areas within their respective countries.

Our regions reflect the remarkable diversity of Europe in geographic, social, economic and linguistic terms. They all face similar challenges, related to their remoteness and poor connectivity in particular in terms of transport links and access to resources.

THE CHALLENGES OF OUR REGIONS

Demographics

- Ageing population and increasing old-age dependency
- Lower ratios of children and people of working age
- lower levels of attainment, particularly amongst marginalised communities
- Increasing refugee and immigrant populations

Economic

- Lower economic performance (GDP and GVA) compared to national average
- Lagging behind other national territories in economic terms
- Limited investment attractiveness
- EU innovation index scores below the national average

Labour Market

- High levels of out-migration of young and skilled populations
- Lower employment levels amongst marginalised communities
- Low skill level among the labour force and limited attractiveness to the external workforce

Social, Cultural and Environmental

- Preserving and promoting unique cultural and linguistic identities
- Preserving rich, in some cases unique, biodiversity threatened by climate change and anthropic pressure

Within these regions, marginal communities are particularly likely to suffer disadvantages and alienation, thus creating pockets of deprivation - margins within margins. These communities self-identify or/and are categorised in a myriad of ways, which we define as Minorities : from minority groups (LGBTQ+ communities, gender minorities, ethnic minorities, language minorities etc...), to marginalised groups (living in poverty, digital poverty, migrant groups, refugees, asylum seekers, etc...), and disadvantaged groups (disabled, neurodivergent, health and mental health affected individuals, etc...)

It is this intersection of marginal regions and marginal communities that lies at the heart of EMERGE: together we aim to **empower our territories and communities** by taking advantage of the expertise linked to our different profiles and focuses.



Defining the Margins

Many terms have been used to describe the socio-economic and spatial characteristics of similar territories to ours, including “lagging regions”, “catching-up regions”, “sub-regions” or “inner peripheries”. The ambiguity surrounding these terms is such that the first conclusion of the 2020 European parliament study on EU lagging regions was the need to define a fresh typology for less-developed regions, that is supported by a rationale of better identifying and supporting these regions¹.

We consider that the complexity of definitions illustrates the diversity of margins and serves as a reminder of the importance of tailored approaches. We strive to help define strategies to empower the margins, rather than a one-size fits all solution. We are convinced that ideas and innovation are as likely to come from marginal territories and communities as from those at the heart of our countries and societies.

The profound repercussions of the pandemic have underscored the imperative for a fresh university model, one that prioritises placing education and research at the service of solving the challenges of our territories and supporting those most in need.



UNIVERSITIES WITH COMPLEMENTARY PROFILES

Mirroring our location, EMERGE higher education and research institutions are characterised by a greater focus on societal and territorial priorities with greater strengths in applied rather than fundamental fields of research.

Although our nine institutions are all universities, their profiles and focus have complementary differences²:

- **Three are comprehensive universities with a strong regional focus:** Democritus University of Thrace (Greece), University of Limerick (Ireland), University of Coruña (Spain)
- **Three are closer to the model of universities of applied science:** Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (Norway), Université Bretagne Sud (France), Matej Bel University (Slovakia) - although the status of university of applied science does not formally exist in France or Slovakia
- **Two are specialised in Humanities and Social Sciences:** Europa-Universität Flensburg (Germany), Université Rennes 2 (France)
- **One is a smaller private university with a strong grassroots regional focus located at the very frontiers of Europe :** Neapolis University Pafos (Cyprus).

¹ PILATI, M., AND A. HUNTER. "EU LAGGING REGIONS: STATE OF PLAY AND FUTURE CHALLENGES." RESEARCH FOR REGI COMMITTEE. DOI 10. (2020): 12822.

² NOTA BENE : THE BOUNDARIES SEPARATING CATEGORIES ARE FLEXIBLE. WE HAVE CATEGORISED EACH INSTITUTION ACCORDING TO THEIR STRONGEST FOCUS IN RESEARCH. THIS MEANS THAT DEPENDING ON THE PERSPECTIVE TAKEN, SOME INSTITUTIONS COULD BE ASSIGNED TO OTHER CATEGORIES. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE OF MATEJ BEL UNIVERSITY, WHICH COULD ARGUABLY BE IN ANY OF THE FIRST THREE CATEGORIES.



These differences are at the heart of our proposal. This questions the existing national higher education and research systems in which some countries choose to consider all institutions under the same category whereas others categorise them either by mission (universities of applied sciences versus universities) or by disciplinary profile (comprehensive versus specialised).

Our aim is to enable an institutional model to emerge that is better suited to address the challenges of territories and communities by combining our strengths: the strong link between research and education and the interdisciplinary potential of classical comprehensive universities, the focus on student outcomes and territorial impact of universities of applied science, the potential of the humanities and social sciences to question existing models and explore new approaches, the agility and entrepreneurial spirit of a smaller, private university.

Together our comprehensive, social science and humanities, applied science, arts and technology, and private universities thus create the perfect playground for a creative transdisciplinary and trans-institutional approach.

They will help us design and test solutions and institutional models to **Empower the Margins** and address our common challenges.

Our Vision: empowering the margins

The priorities of the territories and communities we serve and the locations in which we operate define a clear and ambitious vision as a European University, closely aligned with European values.

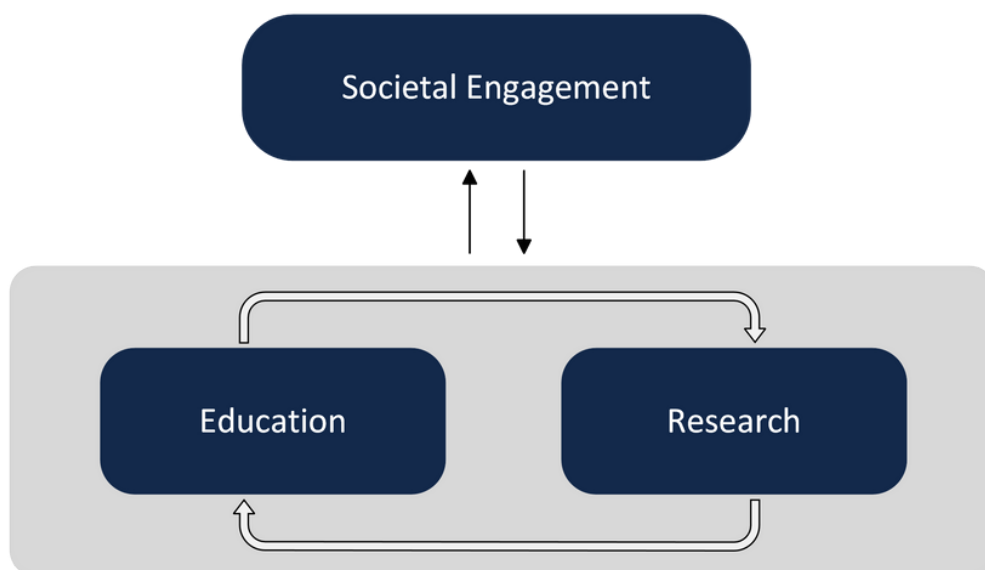
EMERGE will empower our marginalised territories and communities to help build a more equitable, sustainable and prosperous Europe for all.

This vision, in turn, has important implications for each of our universities. It implies a shift in the way we conceive the relative importance of our missions and in particular of the so-called “third mission” of universities. It requires a transition towards a more socially and environmentally conscious approach to teaching and research.

The “third mission”, encapsulating a wide range of activities from technology transfer to societal outreach, is usually conceptualised as a consequence of the first two: research and education enable universities to fulfil their third mission. However, such an approach tends to reinforce classical hierarchical models in which research trends are defined by research intensive universities in major metropolitan centres and their impact is meant to slowly trickle down towards marginal communities and territories³.

This is why EMERGE proposes a radical shift, which reverses the classical order of three university missions.

Societal engagement is at the heart of our identity, it is the First Mission of EMERGE. Although the three missions constantly interact and shape each other, it is our societal and territorial mission that drives our approach in research and education and defines the way we operate as universities.



Our Approach: working in and for the margins

Margins are too often considered to be spaces at the periphery, places that have been left behind, borderlands to go back to the proto-indo-european etymology of the term. Transposed to society, the perception usually remains the same. In both cases, margins are seen as passive. They are perceived as in need of special assistance but not as important actors in their own right in either spatial or societal terms. For decision-makers, their fate is ultimately of marginal importance, so long as it does not impact on the country or society as a whole.



Yet, almost as a mirror of the previous image, margins are also brimming with potential – an interface with the world beyond. In economics, thinking on the margin is a fundamental concept and a key everyday tool for making optimal decisions. It is linked to creativity and the capacity to discover optimal solutions. EMERGE universities are a point of strength and innovation within our respective regions and therefore are well-positioned to be able to empower the margins.

These twin meanings of margins are best understood when we visualise the territory (or the society) as types of network. In the first case a highly hierarchical system in which all nodes are linked to the centre and information flows from the top down. In the third case, a distributed model where all nodes contribute to the system as a whole and where patterns and properties can emerge at any point as illustrated by the Philosophical Concept of Rhizome⁵.



⁴ COMIC : [HTTPS://XKCD.COM/LICENSE.HTML](https://xkcd.com/license.html)

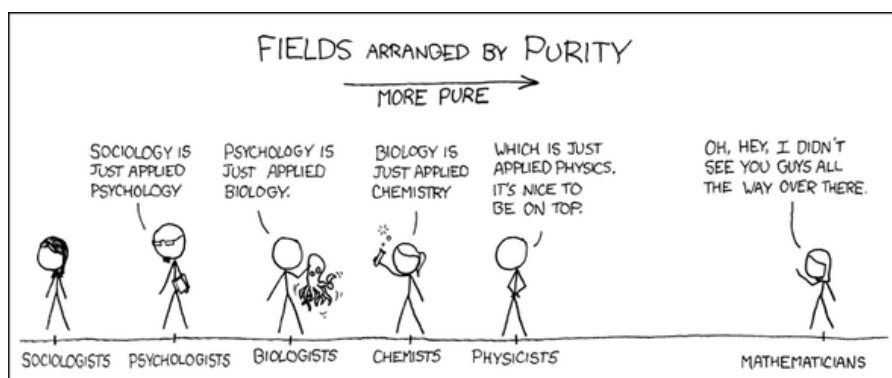
⁵ LITERARY THEORY AND CRITICISM : THE PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT OF RHIZOME, 2017

In this representation, the second and third models are far better aligned with the European vision of both society and territory: a network of equals, working together for a better world.

The problem is that, in both spatial and socio-economic terms, the natural tendency is one of hierarchy with strong agglomeration forces (sometimes called “power law”) resulting in ever increasing inequality, through both brain drain and resource flow from the periphery towards the centre. This is well shown by studies on city size distribution or GINI coefficients, both of which worsen in the absence of effective public policies. Indeed, this is perhaps one of the key differences between Europe on the one hand and China and the US on the other. To counterbalance these trends, the European Union believes in taking a proactive approach to foster greater equality and opportunities for all needs through regional and social policy.



Just like societies and territories, higher education systems themselves are deeply hierarchical. This is nowhere more visible than in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (“Shanghai Ranking”) where the top ranked university, Harvard, has been number one since the creation of the ranking in 2003 and where total scores reflect a power law distribution. But it is also true amongst academics themselves, with classical bibliometric criteria such as impact factor creating a wide disparity between scholars and even disciplinary fields ranked according to their perceived prestige.



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Interestingly, the actual distribution of universities reflects relatively well the GINI coefficient with more equal countries, such as the Netherlands, typically having less hierarchical higher education systems than more unequal countries such as the United States where small elite universities dominate the rankings.

The ranking of universities within a country further reinforces the implicit hierarchy of missions within each university: because both university rankings and individual academic careers depend almost entirely on research performance, research naturally takes pride of place at the heart of a university.

This context has deep implications: it means that defining actions and work packages to address the challenges that we have identified requires a transformation of our institutional priorities and way of working. To succeed, we must reinforce distributed approaches and reposition the territory and society at the heart of the university.

In this, EMERGE is closely aligned with European policy in terms of regional development with EU Cohesion Policy 2021 - 2027; European Pillar on Social Rights; Next Generation EU recovery plan and their translation in terms of Higher Education and Research with recent programmes such as Widening further reinforcing Europe’s commitment to a greater regional and societal equality.

Our Values & Principles

We share the core values of all European universities namely to:

- strengthen quality and relevance for future-proof skills
- foster diversity, inclusiveness and gender equality
- promote and protect European democratic values⁷

However, in addition to these core values, we wish to highlight three values and two principles that are particularly closely aligned with our vision to empower the margins. Anchoring these core values and principles within EMERGE activities and seamlessly integrating them into the operational structures of each member institution will contribute to strengthening the European identity as well as promoting the European way of life⁸.

The European way of life

According to the European Commission, promoting the European way of life is one of the European Commission's 2019-2024 priorities. It is defined as upholding the rule of law, as well as combating all forms of discrimination, whether on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status. It also means valuing the diversity of our cultural and linguistic heritage, our national games, traditions, festivals, art, music, and our clothes and textiles.”

OUR VALUES

Inclusion - EMERGE takes a strong commitment towards Minorities which are frequently overlooked or underserved, particularly marginalised groups who often experience a lack of tailored engagement and personalised services. Additionally, EMERGE is dedicated to providing equal access to opportunities and ensuring that minority groups and disadvantaged groups receive the support they require.

While we emphasise our strong dedication to these Minorities, it is important to highlight that inclusivity, in our view, concerns everyone, not only those defined as Minorities. In addition to this strong commitment, EMERGE celebrates its strong links to local businesses and the industrial sector, with whom we contribute to providing a prosperous Europe for all.

Solidarity - At EMERGE, solidarity stands as one of our core values, especially in our dedication to our local community and our commitment to uplift Minorities within our territory. We believe that true strength and progress emerge when we stand together, supporting one another in our collective pursuit of knowledge and social betterment. Solidarity fosters an environment where diverse voices are not only welcomed but celebrated. It underscores our commitment to empathy, understanding, and collaboration, empowering our students and faculty to not only excel in their respective fields but also to contribute positively to society by working together for a brighter, more equitable future.

Sustainability - We aim to serve as role models for responsible stewardship of resources, actively contribute to solving some of the most pressing global challenges whilst also supporting a socio-environmental transition of our universities.

Embracing sustainability is our declaration of commitment to future generations, demonstrating that the pursuit of knowledge and progress must be in harmony with the well-being of our planet and all its inhabitants. It's a recognition that a sustainable world is not an option but an imperative, and EMERGE will play a pivotal role in nurturing the values and skills necessary for creating a more sustainable and equitable future.

OUR PRINCIPLES

Resilience - In an ever-evolving world where challenges are constant, we must adapt, persevere, and overcome obstacles to continue fulfilling our missions. Resilience is not only about withstanding adversity but also about thriving in the face of it. It empowers us to navigate budget constraints, global crises, and shifts in educational paradigms without compromising our commitment to community engagement, education and research. Moreover, **it instils resilience in students, equipping them with the strength and adaptability needed to thrive in an ever-changing landscape.**

Multilingualism and cultural diversity - Multilingualism and cultural diversity are at the heart of Europe, as consistently reaffirmed by the Council of the European Union in its conclusions on the centrality of language competences in enhancing mobility dating back to Barcelona in 2002, but they are particularly important in regions, like ours, that are characterised by the presence of minority languages, many of which are at risk of being lost forever. The fate of these languages and our capacity to ensure that they can thrive in the future is embedded in the identity and pride of our territories and communities. Multilingualism and Cultural diversity is about making sure that people can participate, be treated equally and embrace democratic principles and European values.

Enhancing linguistic and cultural diversity

Linguistic diversity takes on a plurality of forms, with minority languages, dominant languages and multilingual environments. Our universities and their surrounding communities exemplify this reality.



Like all European Universities, each of the nine partners is confronted by the challenge of combining the national language (French, Irish Gaelic, German, Greek, Norwegian, Slovak, Spanish) with the presence of English as a lingua franca.

But in addition to this challenge, five of our nine partners are situated in regions where the local language is endangered and where the university plays an important role in both the study and promotion of these languages with Breton and Gallo at the Université Bretagne Sud and Université Rennes 2, Frisian and Low German at the Europa-Universität Flensburg, Gaelic at the University of Limerick, and Galician at the Universidade da Coruña.

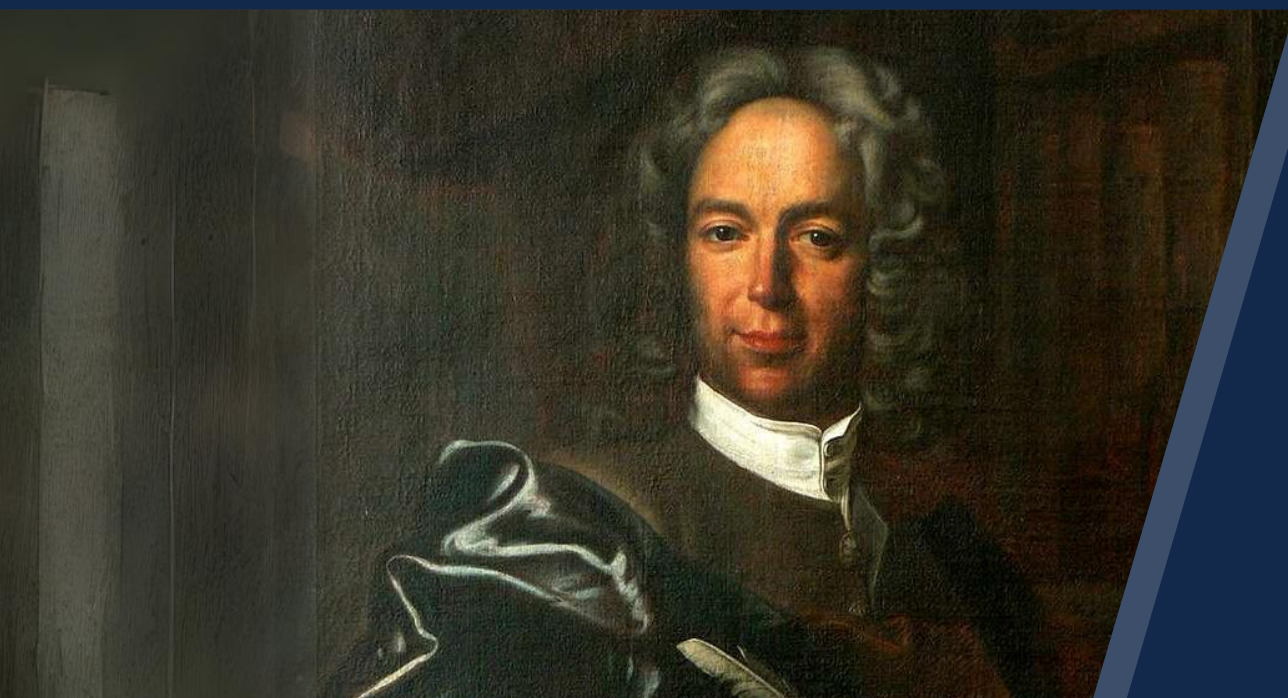
While not endangered languages, some possess a strong historical and cultural significance. In this regard, Neapolis University of Pafos can assume a crucial role in both preserving and promoting Cypriot Arabic and Armenian.

Whilst various others are situated on linguistic borders with important minorities of other languages, including Democritus University of Thrace (Pomak, Greek and Turkish), Europa-Universität Flensburg (German and Danish) and Inland Norway UAS (Norwegian, Sami and Swedish) or Univerzita Mateja Bela (German, Hungarian and Ukrainian).

Finally, all are home to growing migrant communities from all around the world, each of which contributes to the linguistic diversity and richness of our communities, with some, such as the Roma, deeply embedded in the local territories for centuries, whilst others have only arrived in the last few years.

EMERGE embraces the European Union's motto "United in diversity" and celebrates minority and heritage languages and cultures, because they empower our communities and territories.

In this, we symbolically also embrace the figure of Matthias Bel, after whom one of our member universities, the Univerzita Mateja Bela is named, and who beautifully described himself as being by "lingua Slavus, natione Hungarus, eruditione Germanus". In other words, by language a Slav, by nation a Hungarian, by erudition a German ... whilst writing in Latin.



Implementing our Mission to Empower the Margins

EMERGE will be a driver to ensure that **all of our communities** benefit from social cohesion and intercultural understanding, sustainable balanced economic growth, competitiveness and employability across Europe's margins and beyond. We will work with our communities and partners to achieve this **in a spirit of inclusion**.

By coming together, we aim to enhance our local community engagement efforts, better serve all of our communities, and in particular those who are marginalised, and deliver high-quality education and research. Our purpose is to contribute to forming multilingual, critically and socially engaged European citizens equipped to develop the solutions to local, regional and global challenges of today and tomorrow.

EMERGE will transform the student and staff experience by maximising upskilling opportunities and creating the environment to attract the necessary talents. This will take the form of an inter-university campus where students, teachers, researchers and adult learners can access degree courses, professional development, research training, other research groups, microcredentials and technical expertise from any university in the Alliance, magnifying the opportunities to study, research and advance their careers through physical and blended mobilities and virtual learning. It will be achieved through research-driven approaches, drawing on the collective expertise and best practices of each institution involved.

Our mission materialises through four overarching objectives to establish a deep transnational alliance between the nine member universities that develops structural, sustainable and long-term systemic cooperation in education, research and innovation. EMERGE has developed and will implement an integrated long-term joint strategy for education with links to research, innovation, and services to society, that is responsive to the digital and green transition and key socioeconomic challenges with the following objectives.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: ENGAGING THE MARGINS

EMERGE will engage the relevant academic, political, economic and civil stakeholders to create an open, responsive and accessible European University Alliance that empowers local communities by:

- Integrating local communities' perspective into relevant decision making processes.
- Engaging and connecting stakeholder communities to co-design activities.
- Create and maintain knowledge-creating teams in / for / with / about the margins.
- Extend and enhance our network of third places for collaboration with community stakeholders.

Flagship Activity: EMERGE knowledge co-creation teams

Our EMERGE knowledge co-creation teams will be formed and consolidated by defining pathways that ensure stakeholder involvement. Our aim is to strengthen the interplay between research, industry, government and civil society, fostering collaborative efforts for sustainable solutions to societal challenges in our territories. Rooted in the principles of open, digital, green and resilient scientific production, EMERGE prioritises multidisciplinary, international, community-engaged, challenge based and service-oriented co-creation of knowledge in the European periphery.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: EDUCATING THE MARGINS

The EMERGE Alliance will provide the relevant skills to our communities to empower the margins by:

- Integrating a challenge-based approach into all our programmes.
- Developing a common educational offer which is designed to be as open and accessible to all as possible.
- Reforming our teacher education programmes, collaborating with our AP school network and involving our student teachers and in-service teachers as multipliers.
- Developing a portfolio of micro-credentials available in multiple languages to make them available for lifelong learning for all communities.
- Using the lessons of microcredentials to begin delivering a more modular, accessible education programme over time.

Flagship Activities: The EMERGE European Academic Pathways (EAP) and the EMERGE lifelong learning formats

EMERGE EAP will be developed as European education programmes that address real-world challenges affecting our EMERGE territories and communities. They are conceptualised to be integrated into existing degree programmes. They will be designed to 1) propose innovative, flexible and inclusive European curricula, 2) support academic staff to engage in EMERGE education programmes, 3) promote challenge- and service-based learning formats, and 4) facilitate virtual learning.

EMERGE lifelong learning formats will be designed as micro-credentials and flexible formats to empower and upgrade the skills of adult learners, including minorities (both re-skilling and up-skilling). The aim is to enhance their employability and wellbeing, increase their participation in the labour market and improve their overall learning outcomes. In line with the OECD micro-credentials report and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, EMERGE is committed to supporting disadvantaged learners in lifelong learning.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: CONNECTING THE MARGINS

The EMERGE Alliance will connect our members and partners to counteract the natural tendency of institutions, territories and communities such as ours to be subsumed by national hierarchical networks where they play a marginal role, by:

- Ramping up the mobility experience for students and the opportunities for staff via physical or hybrid formats.
- Creating an intercultural and intercampus working experience for learners and staff.
- Fostering language and intercultural skills across campuses.

Flagship Activity: EMERGE Plurilingual Mobility Programmes

The EMERGE Plurilingual Mobility Programmes are tailored for students and staff from across our Alliance. They transcend linguistic and cultural boundaries and offer participants the opportunity to immerse themselves in a plurilingual and multicultural environment. Through these programmes, individuals have access to a wealth of courses, professional development opportunities and collaborative research initiatives. With multilingualism as a cornerstone, our mobility programmes aim to improve language skills, cultural understanding and academic collaboration, contributing to the holistic development of our academic community.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4: REIMAGINING OUR INSTITUTIONS

The EMERGE Alliance will build organisational assets and integrate the experience from our collaboration into our operations and setup to overcome structural barriers to the mobility of people, resources and ideas by:

- Building inclusive, resilient, sustainable and connected campuses.
- Tapping EMERGE as an institutional learning opportunity and enhancing quality processes.
- Fostering more flexible and fulfilling academic careers, emphasising mobility into and out of academia.

Flagship Activities: EMERGE Strategic Planning Unit

The EMERGE Strategic Planning Unit is specifically designed to work closely with EMERGE member's local strategic planning teams. With a focus on long-term vision and comprehensive policy development, it will be key to shaping the overarching policy framework for the EMERGE European Alliance and guiding EMERGE towards a sustainable, inclusive and strategically focused future.






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