european university
continuing education network

EUCEN SOLIDARITY FUND – PROTOCOL

Version APPROVED in November 2026 by the Steering Committee.

INTRODUCTION

The **eucen** Solidarity Fund is established to promote equitable participation in **eucen** activities by institutions facing structural, social political or financial constraints affecting their participation in European collaboration.

Across Europe, universities engaged in University Lifelong Learning (ULLL) operate under diverse financial, structural, and contextual conditions. While **eucen** strives to be an inclusive European network, structural inequalities can limit participation from certain institutions or regions. The Solidarity Fund is a concrete instrument to reduce such barriers. The Solidarity Fund grants a financial support to selected institutions so that they can participate in **eucen**'s activities and therefore contributing to:

- Reduce structural barriers to participation for under-resourced or crisis-affected institutions.
- Strengthen equity, diversity, and inclusiveness within the European ULLL community.
- Ensure broader geographical and institutional representation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE SOLIDARITY FUND

The primary objective of the Fund is to reduce structural barriers to participation, thereby strengthening the diversity of the **eucen** network. Secondarily, the Fund aims to ensure a balanced geographical and institutional representation, acknowledging that certain countries face systemic difficulties in participating in international academic networks.

By supporting these institutions, **eucen** fosters a more robust and inclusive exchange of ULLL practices across the entire continent.

SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE FUND

The Solidarity Fund provides support for a fixed period of one (1) year, running from June to June of the following year. This support is non-renewable unless a new application is submitted and approved. The number of institutions benefiting from the Solidarity Fund will be determined annually, taking into account the circumstances and resources available in each year. As a general rule, support will be granted to a maximum of four (4) institutions per year; however, this number may be adjusted in exceptional circumstances.

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The support includes:

- A waiver of the annual **eucen** membership fee for the supporting period.
- Full access to all the benefits and opportunities given to **eucen** members for the supporting period.
- Opportunity to write an "In focus" article to be published in the LLL Pathways newsletter of **eucen**, to promote and give visibility to the institution and contribution to ULLL.
- Opportunity to present during the Autumn Seminar in alignment with the theme.
- Travel and subsistence support of up to €800 to attend the **eucen** Autumn Seminar.

ELIGIBILITY

The following general eligibility conditions must apply to be able to be applicants. These conditions ensure fairness, transparency, and alignment with the values and mission of this initiative.

(I) Geographic scope

a. Applicants from countries that are members of the Council of Europe will be prioritised.
b. Applicants from countries outside the Council of Europe may be considered, but their inclusion must be approved by the General Assembly. Additional geographical specifications may be defined in the annual Call for Beneficiaries.

(II) Type of eligible applicants

c. Applicants must be Universities.
d. Any further limitations or exceptions will be defined each year in the Call for Beneficiaries.
e. Applicants must not be current **eucen** members. As the Fund's purpose is to bring new institutions into the **eucen** network, an institution that terminates, suspends, or lets its **eucen** membership lapse in order to become eligible for the Solidarity Fund will not be considered an eligible applicant.

(III) Demonstrated need

f. The applicants must provide evidence of significant budget or operational constraints, such as the impact of armed conflict, political instability, natural disasters, systemic economic crises, reduced public funding affecting ULLL operations, etc.

(IV) Relevance

g. Applicants must demonstrate a clear connection with ULLL and must be actively engaged in this field.

(V) Commitment

h. Beneficiaries must commit to engage in the association activities where possible, and contribute to knowledge exchange and visibility of ULLL practices

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(VI) Compliance and Integrity

i. Applicants must not be subject to ongoing legal or reputational issues that could adversely affect **eucen** or the credibility of the Solidarity Fund.
j. Applicants should be aligned with the vision and mission of **eucen**, and must not take a stand against the democratic, peaceful and dialoguing disposition of the Association, mirroring the standard set out in Article 16 (Exit: Suspension) of the **eucen** Statutes, which identifies such conduct as grounds for suspension in the case of member institutions.
k. Applicants are expected to comply with principles of ethical conduct and academic integrity.
l. Applicants must agree to the use of submitted information for evaluation, communication, and dissemination purposes related to the Solidarity Fund.

Only applications submitted in accordance with the procedures, documentation requirements, and deadlines specified in the annual Call for Beneficiaries will be considered.

The Call for Beneficiaries operationalises this framework and may define additional conditions or modify the set out in this Protocol, as long as they remain consistent with the general principles, scope, and objectives of this framework.

SOLIDARITY FUND PROCEDURE

The **eucen** Solidarity Fund runs on a yearly cycle, from June to June, aligned with the General Assembly celebrated at the **eucen** annual Conference. The General Assembly marks both an ending and a beginning: the beneficiaries selected that year are internally communicated to **eucen** members and their support period starts, while at the same time the Call for Beneficiaries for the following year is opened.

(I) CALL FOR BENEFICIARIES

The annual Call for Beneficiaries operationalises this framework, by providing specific details on the annual process and timeline. In the event of discrepancies, the Call for Beneficiaries shall prevail for the respective year, provided that it remains within the limits and principles established by this framework.

(II) NOMINATION PROCESS

Applications to the **eucen** Solidarity Fund must be submitted directly by the institution requesting the support, the official application route. There is only one channel for submission: the candidate institution completes and submits the official application form.

eucen members who wish to bring a candidate institution to the Fund's attention may contact that institution directly to inform them of the opportunity and encourage them to apply. Interested institutions can then contact the **eucen** Barcelona Office themselves for further information.

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A **eucen** member supporting a candidate institution may be named in the application, whether by providing a letter of support or simply by having their contact details included for reference, and may assist the institution throughout the application process. While not mandatory, this helps the Steering Committee assess the credibility and trustworthiness of the applicant institution and will be taken into account during the evaluation.

To be considered valid, all submissions must provide:

- Essential information regarding the applicant institution,
- Justification (supported by evidence where necessary) of the needs that warrant the support.
- Formal confirmation of the applicant institution of its candidacy and commitment to the Fund's objectives and participation requirements.
- Applicants are strongly encouraged to include a letter of support from a **eucen** member, or the contact details of a **eucen** member who can be contacted for reference. A letter of support, where provided, will be taken into account during the evaluation.

All applications and supporting documents will be treated as strictly confidential by the **eucen** Barcelona Office and the Steering Committee throughout the entire process.

(III) CRITERIA VALIDATION

The **eucen** Barcelona Office will review all applications to check that they meet the eligibility criteria set out in this Protocol and in the annual Call for Beneficiaries. Only institutions that meet all the criteria will move forward in the process. During this stage, the **eucen** Barcelona Office may contact the applicant institution to request any additional documentation or clarifications necessary for a thorough eligibility assessment. Applicants must provide the requested information within two weeks of the request; failure to respond within this timeframe will result in the application being withdrawn from the process.

(IV) EVALUATION

Following the initial assessment by the **eucen** Barcelona Office, the Steering Committee (SC) evaluates and ranks all Candidates who have passed the criteria validation stage. The evaluation is rooted in transparency, fairness, and the objective assessment of demonstrated need, while also considering each Candidate's ULLL profile, geographical contribution, connection to the **eucen** network, and potential contribution to the European ULLL sector.

The evaluation criteria, including the scoring dimensions and minimum thresholds, are set out in **Annex 1**. Meeting the minimum thresholds does not guarantee funding: it is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Candidates who meet all thresholds are ranked according to their total score, and funds are allocated following this ranking until the budget available for that year's Call is exhausted. Where candidacies are closely ranked or tied, the SC will use its judgement, based on the full body of evidence submitted, to determine which institution is considered most deserving of support.

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The candidates with the highest scores will be selected as beneficiaries, up to exhausting the budget available for that year. Once the evaluation is finalised, the winning beneficiaries will be notified privately. After confirming their acceptance, they will gain access to the Fund's benefits for the relevant support period, running from June to June.

(V) MEMBERS ENDORSEMENT, NOTIFICATION AND ANNOUNCEMENT

Once the evaluation process has been finalised, the recommended list of beneficiaries will be presented to the **eucen** members at the General Assembly held during the annual **eucen** Conference. The list shall be deemed ratified unless the General Assembly rejects it in its entirety. Any such rejection shall require a qualified majority and must be supported by exceptional justification.

Following ratification, the successful beneficiaries will be formally notified and the results will be published through **eucen**'s official communication channels. The beneficiaries will also be invited to attend the **eucen** Autumn Seminar, where they will be formally introduced to the membership and recognised as recipients of the **eucen** Solidarity Fund.

DATA PROTECTION AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All personal and institutional data processed within the framework of the **eucen** Solidarity Fund shall be handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and other applicable data protection legislation. Nominations, evaluations, and results shall be treated confidentially. Any potential conflict of interest arising during the procedure shall be identified and managed in a transparent and appropriate manner.

FINAL PROVISIONS

This framework shall enter into force upon approval by the **eucen** Steering Committee, and any amendments to this framework shall be subject to approval by the **eucen** Steering Committee. It shall be complemented annually by a Call for Beneficiaries specifying the categories, criteria, and procedures applicable for the respective year.

The **eucen** Barcelona Office shall act as the official contact point for all matters related to the **eucen** Solidarity Fund. For any questions or concerns, email: **members@eucen.eu**.

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Annex 1

EUCEN SOLIDARITY FUND – EVALUATION CRITERIA

The **eucen** Steering Committee (SC) assesses all verified Candidates using the criteria below. The evaluation is designed to ensure transparency, fairness, and alignment with the Fund's mission. The total score is used to rank candidates, taking into account the evidence provided.

To be considered eligible for funding, a Candidate must satisfy two cumulative thresholds:

- Part A threshold: a minimum of 20 points (out of 40) must be obtained in Part A – Institutional profile. If this is not met, the candidacy is discarded and Parts B and C are not evaluated.
- Part B threshold: a minimum of 30 points (out of 60) must be obtained in Part B – Alignment with the Call. If this is not met, the candidacy is discarded, regardless of the score obtained in Part A.

Parts A and B together account for a maximum of 100 points. Part C provides additional bonus points, with a maximum of 20 points, bringing the total possible score to 120 points.

Meeting the minimum thresholds does not guarantee funding: it is a necessary but not sufficient condition. Candidates who meet the thresholds are ranked according to their total score, and funds are allocated following this ranking until the available budget for the Call is exhausted.

Where candidacies are closely ranked or tied, the Steering Committee will use its judgement to determine which institution is considered most deserving of support, taking into account the full body of evidence submitted.

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eucen Solidarity Fund Evaluation Criteria:

PART A – Institutional profile

Criteria	Description	Points
Engagement in ULLL	Quality and depth of the institution's active involvement in University Lifelong Learning, including contribution to the broader ULLL community. *Scoring Guidance:* *0-10: Limited engagement in ULLL* *11-20: Established engagement in ULLL* *21-30: Strong and sustained engagement in ULLL* *30-35: Extensive and strategic engagement in ULLL*	0-35
Dedicated ULLL structure	Institutional embedding of ULLL (i.e. dedicated department, centre, or unit for UCE or ULLL) evidencing an institutional commitment to the field.	+5
Part A subtotal	*Applicants must at least receive a 20 in this category to proceed.*	*Up to 40*

PART B – Alignment with the Call

Criteria	Description	Points
Severity of need	Extent and impact of the structural, financial, or crisis-related constraints documented by the applicant. Evidence is assessed for credibility, specificity, and relevance to ULLL operations. *Scoring Guidance:* *0-10: Limited evidence of need* *11-25: Significant constraints* *26-35: Severe constraints* *36-45: Exceptional constraints affecting institutional participation*	0-50
Geographical representation	Impact for **eucen**, e.g. the applicant is the first institution from a new country for **eucen**, contributing to broader specially European coverage.	+10
Part B subtotal	*Applicants must at least receive a 30 in this category to proceed.*	*Up to 60*

PART C – Connection to eucen and European ULLL sector

Criteria	Description	Points
Letter of support	The application includes a substantive letter from a current **eucen** member with knowledge of the institution and/or its work, supporting its application.	+4
Collaboration with **eucen**	The institution has collaborated directly with **eucen** on projects, initiatives, or network activities.	+4
Collaboration with **eucen** members	The institution has collaborated recently with one or more current **eucen** member institutions.	+3
Participation in **eucen** activities	The institution or its staff have participated in **eucen** conferences, seminars, or other **eucen**-organised activities.	+3
Former **eucen** member	The applicant institution was previously a **eucen** member	+2
EU relevance	The European Commission is encouraging its member states to strengthen links with that particular country	+2
European involvement	The institution is actively involved in promoting European policies or European values, attending events promoted by the European Commission or its agencies.	+2
Part C subtotal		*Up to 20*

Total score		*Up to 120*

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