

YUFE Impact Assessment

An approach beyond project impact

Table of Contents

YUFE Impact – Why should we care?	1
Defining Impact in the YUFE Context.....	2
YUFE Impact – serving the YUFE Mission	5
YUFE Impact Areas.....	5
YUFE’s Target Groups.....	6
Operationalisation Process	7
Linking with the Sustainable Development Goals.....	8

YUFE Impact – Why should we care?

Assessing impact is essential to the success and sustainability of an organisation. It makes it possible to determine whether activities are achieving the intended effects for the diverse groups they are designed to support. While activities fall within an organisation’s sphere of control, and their outcomes can be influenced, impact itself remains “*desired*” and largely beyond direct control. Evaluating whether the desired impact is being achieved through the implementation of activities is therefore a crucial exercise, enabling the prioritisation and adjustment of future strategies.

For YUFE, the process of assessing impact serves several key purposes. First, it demonstrates accountability and transparency to its stakeholders, ensuring that resources are used responsibly and that initiatives generate meaningful outcomes. Second, it informs decision-making by providing data-driven insights to refine strategies, improve programmes, and, where necessary, discontinue activities that do not yield sufficient value. In this way, impact assessment fosters a culture of continuous improvement, enhancing the quality, efficiency, and relevance of YUFE offerings.

Ultimately, demonstrating impact plays an important role in showcasing achievements, both within the Alliance and to the wider public. By demonstrating the tangible benefits of the Alliance, it becomes possible to attract new partners, funding, and participation, reinforcing the value of collaboration. Importantly, the process also supports the sustainability and scalability of positive effects, contributing to long-term transformation.

To tackle the complexity of this broader framework, an Impact Task Force was established, comprising a small group of internal YUFE partners with different perspectives, and external experts specialising in impact assessment methods.

Defining Impact in the YUFE Context

Given the scope of the YUFE mission and the objectives of its collaboration, a clear definition of “Impact” is needed. This definition should capture a multi-faceted, forward-looking concept that not only considers immediate outcomes but also emphasises values, as well as long-term societal, educational, and economic benefits. The aim is to assess the positive effects of the YUFE collaboration over time and to focus on the joint benefits the Alliance has for its partners and target groups.

YUFE Impact is defined as follows:

YUFE Impact refers to evidenced, sustainable and desired effects and changes our Alliance brings to learners, institutions, and communities, in and beyond academia. This is achieved through diverse collaborative initiatives, anchored in a set of joint values, that foster enhanced competences, attitudes, and innovation.

Theory of Change guiding a robust framework

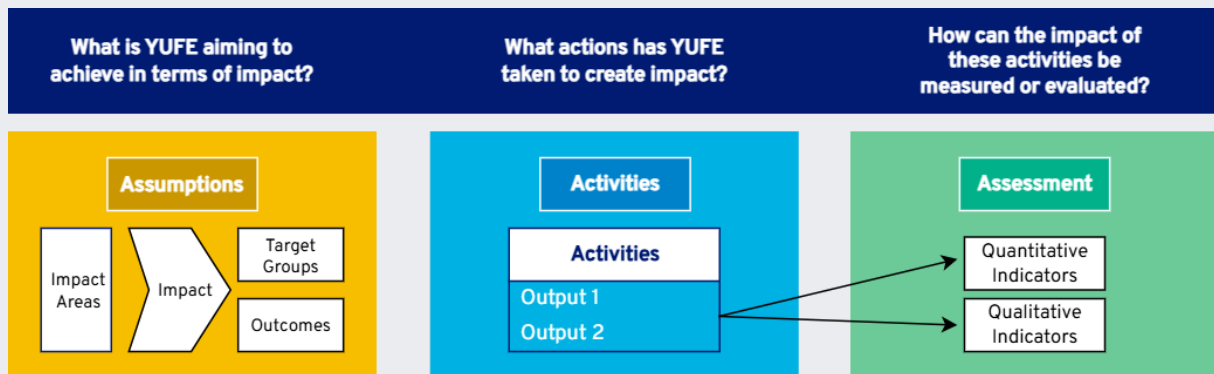
To navigate the complexities of a large and highly transformative initiative like YUFE, it is essential to clearly articulate the process of change that leads to impact. The Theory of Change provides such a framework, explaining how and why a desired transformation is expected to occur in a particular context. It provides a comprehensive description of the cause-and-effect relationships between an organisation's activities and the long-term goals they aim to achieve.

Key Components of the Theory of Change are:

- **Impact:** The ultimate goals or impacts the initiative seeks to achieve. These should be clear and aligned with the mission.
- **Outcomes:** The changes that need to occur before the impacts can be realised. These are stepping stones linking activities to impacts.
- **Activities:** The specific actions or interventions undertaken to produce the desired changes (e.g. delivery of a YUFE training).
- **Outputs:** The immediate results of activities (e.g., number of people trained).
- **Assumptions:** The underlying beliefs about how and why the desired changes (as outlined in our YUFE Mission) will occur thanks to the activities implemented. These should be regularly critically assessed.
- **Pathway of Change:** The logical sequence connecting activities, outputs, outcomes, and long-term impacts.
- **Indicators:** Metrics to assess of progresses.

Building on this framework, YUFE developed its Pathway of Change, mapping the logical sequence that connects the different elements of its impact assessment. This pathway is structured around four key **Impact Areas**, described in detail in the next section.

Theoretical Framework



The first stage of this pathway focuses on assumptions, represented in yellow on the flow chart. These assumptions reflect the ambitions and shared goals that initially brought YUFE partners together to form a joint European University Alliance, and the new expected impact defined along the way. The impact assessment will assess YUFE's actual achievement against these anticipated outcomes.

Each Impact Area targets long-term, sustainable changes, referred to as *impacts*, while *outcomes* represent shorter-term changes that contribute to achieving these impacts. They are aimed at specific target groups as defined further.

After the assumptions, the attention shifts to *activities* and their *outputs*: the actions YUFE has taken to drive change (shown in blue on the flow chart). An activity could be the development of a joint Bachelor on Urban Sustainability Studies and the number of students completing the programme would be one of its outputs.

Finally, *indicators* are used to assess both activities and outputs. Indicators can be *quantitative* or *qualitative* and are designed to evaluate the extent to which outputs lead to desired outcomes and impacts. For example:

- YUFE produces a set of recommendations to be adopted by partner institutions (output). This contributes to **institutional convergence and cohesion** (outcome), which supports the broader goal of establishing a **sustainable, replicable, and inclusive governance model** (impact).
- Indicators might be:
 - **Qualitative:** Evidence of ways in which YUFE's policies/strategies have inspired/enabled universities with the Alliance to adapt to new challenges, innovate, and contribute to making YUFE a socially responsible and forward-thinking Alliance.
 - **Quantitative:** The number/ proportion of YUFE policies/strategies integrated into those of YUFE partner institutions.

Exemplified Pathway of Change

(Desired) Impact	Outcomes	Activities & Outputs	Indicators
<p>Meaningful and lasting institutional transformation is noticeable at partner universities and disseminated via YUFE's novel governance model built on shared European values, policies, and objectives.</p>	<p>1. YUFE partners adopt a shared governance model, and joint policies based on common values.</p> <p>2. Institutional learning is enhanced through the mutual exchange of practices across the Alliance.</p>	<p>1. Development and implementation of YUFE policies and approaches</p> <p>2. Setting up of fora to exchange best practices</p>	<p>C1. Evidence of institutional change at partner universities; extent of joint policy implementation</p> <p>C2. Best practices exchanged and implemented by receiving partners</p>

The elements of the Pathway of Change were defined through internal collaborative work by the Impact Task Force. The indicators selected for this exercise are based on the data available to support their operationalisation. This structured approach provides a clear roadmap for tracking YUFE's progress and evaluating its transformative influence.

Steps to fill in the Pathway of Change

To operationalize the Theory of Change framework, the following steps should be undertaken:

- 1. Define YUFE's desired impact in alignment with its Vision and Mission:** YUFE has established a Vision and Mission Statement that guides its activities and articulates the intended impact of the alliance. Building on this foundation, key decision-making bodies (in our case, the rectors) will be consulted to further refine and specify the desired impacts and outcomes.
- 2. Identify the target groups:** Clearly define the groups that are expected to be directly or indirectly affected by YUFE's activities and intended impact.
- 3. Link activities and outputs to outcomes and impact:** While the desired impact should ideally guide the design of activities from the outset, this initial exercise involved retrospectively linking existing activities to intended impacts. Moving forward, YUFE will adopt a more systematic approach to embedding impact considerations in the design and implementation of all activities.
- 4. Assess intermediate outcomes and effects:** Evaluate the effects of YUFE's activities across different target groups by developing both quantitative and qualitative indicators, taking into consideration available data sources. These indicators will be tailored to reflect the specific changes YUFE aims to achieve for each group.
- 5. Contextualize outcomes within a recognized framework:** Although YUFE holds significant value for internal stakeholders, its relevance may be less evident to external audiences. It is therefore important to position YUFE's objectives and impact within widely recognized frameworks, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to better communicate the broader significance and added value of its activities.

YUFE Impact – serving the YUFE Mission

The YUFE Mission in a nutshell

The YUFE Mission envisions a **transformative, inclusive, and accessible model** for European higher education. It aims to create a **student-centered, socially responsible university that emphasizes equity, diversity, and lifelong learning, offering education for all learners, including underrepresented groups.**

YUFE fosters **interdisciplinary, challenge-based learning** to address societal issues and equips students with **critical skills like adaptability, innovation and an entrepreneurial mindset.** It promotes **mobility, cross-cultural understanding, and a European identity** through its interconnected network of universities, integrating research, education, and societal engagement.

A focus is **digital transformation** via initiatives like the YUFE Virtual Campus, ensuring **flexible, inclusive education** for all. The Mission is deeply rooted in **social responsibility and community engagement.** By actively partnering with local governments, businesses, and civil society organizations, YUFE extends its impact beyond the university settings to contribute directly to the wellbeing and resilience of the regions contributing to a sustainable and cohesive Europe.

YUFE envisions a **European University of the Future** that is not limited by national boundaries, language, or socioeconomic barriers. At its core, the **YUFE Quality Culture** fosters continuous improvement, grounded in principles such as **transparency, equity, inclusivity, and stakeholder involvement.** This culture ensures that YUFE universities remain **participatory** spaces, where students and staff actively engage in decision-making processes, contributing to the development of an emerging **European space** and institution.

YUFE Impact Areas

From the YUFE Mission towards tangible, sustainable and desired effects and changes across key sectors

The impact of YUFE is best understood through its concrete contributions to four key areas: institutional transformation, education and mobility, socioeconomic empowerment, and research and innovation (R&I). By clustering YUFE activities into four key areas, the goal is to facilitate the reading of the results of the impact assessment.

YUFE Culture – transforming institutions and learners

YUFE Culture revolves to the structural elements of the YUFE collaboration, from foundations to values. It encompasses institutional transformation, policy changes and the establishment of sustainable governance and collaborations structures. It also refers to the core values of the YUFE Alliance, student-centeredness, inclusiveness, multilingualism and openness.

YUFE Talent – intergenerational and open education fostering mobility

This area looks at the educational offerings of YUFE, and its transformative force for individuals and society. Elements such as flexible education model, inclusive mobility and challenge-based learning are at the core of the YUFE offer. This area also encompasses lifelong learning initiatives, skill development, and career growth opportunities for citizens, staff and students.

YUFE for Society – civic empowerment and engagement

This impact area emphasises collaboration between YUFE, its students and external partners, such as local communities, businesses, and regional stakeholders. Activities include students' direct involvement in addressing societal challenges, regional development projects, and programmes that foster social cohesion, inclusivity, and intercultural understanding. Overall, YUFE for Society aims to enhance civic empowerment, reduce inequalities, and contribute to a more inclusive and prosperous Europe.

YUFE R&I – investigating and innovating the future

YUFE R&I promotes a responsible, open, and inclusive R&I ecosystem aligned with European values of transparency, collaboration, and academic freedom. This area supports the development of shared policies, interdisciplinary projects, and cross-sector partnerships among academia, business, government, and civil society. By advancing open science, innovation, and entrepreneurship, YUFE enhances the societal relevance and impact of research. Its focus on sustainability, digital transformation, and equality ensures that innovation contributes to a more equitable and forward-looking future.

YUFE's Target Groups

YUFE's desired impact is grounded in the principle that higher education, research, and societal transformation are achieved through collaboration and engagement with diverse stakeholder groups. Assessing impact therefore requires attention to what matters from the perspective of these stakeholders – “Impact is in the eye of the beholder”. By aligning activities with their needs and priorities, YUFE fosters sustainable and meaningful change for both learners and communities. Identifying target groups makes it possible to understand the impact of activities through multiple lenses, extending beyond the perspective of institutional management of YUFE.

Two key distinctions are important. First, between individuals and organisations: their expectations, aspirations, and modes of engagement differ substantially, leading to considering them apart from one another. Second, between internal and external stakeholders: while YUFE's core focus is its desired impact for internal groups (students, staff, partner universities), it also ambitions to impact externals via its education, research, and societal engagement activities.

Based on these distinctions, the table below outlines the main target groups considered as recipients, or desired recipients, of YUFE activities.

	Internal	External
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students • Staff (Professional service staff and R1 to R4 academics and researchers¹) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizens (Alumni, Lifelong learners)
Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YUFE single Academic Partners (Departments, Faculties, Institutes) • YUFE bodies (Strategic Council, Executive Committee, Central Office) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrations (from local to global, e.g. European Commission) • Businesses • NGOs and CSOs • Research Organisations • Other HEIs

These are the target groups that are expected to be directly or indirectly affected by YUFE. Incorporating the perspectives of target groups into an impact assessment ensures that the intervention aligns with their needs and minimizes unintended consequences. Clear identification, thoughtful engagement, and thorough evaluation of effects on these groups are critical to the success and sustainability of any initiative.

Operationalisation Process

The 2025 Impact Assessment draws on multiple complementary data sources. It relies on data collected through the Virtual Campus concerning educational offerings, levels of participation and mobility figures, as well as information derived from YUFE’s Quality Assurance processes, particularly regarding learners’ satisfaction. In addition to this quantitative evidence, qualitative insights were gathered through interviews, questionnaires, and surveys.

In total, 35 interviews were conducted, and two surveys were disseminated. Two targeted questionnaires were also distributed to institutional coordinators at each partner university to capture additional perspectives and context-specific reflections. A variety of personnel were interviewed, from professional service staff to university management. Further details can be retrieved on the table below.

Data Sources Supporting the 2025 Impact Assessment

Category	#	Targeted respondents’ profiles	Consultation focus
Questionnaire	10	Institutional Coordinators	Exploring how YUFE policies, strategies, and shared best practices have influenced institutional change within partner universities.
Survey	169	All staff members engaged with YUFE	Gathering perceptions of staff on the collaboration opportunities and practices enabled by YUFE.

¹ As defined by the European Commission - <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/career-development/organisations/resources-and-tools/glossary>

Survey	71	YUFE staff working with external partners	Mapping and assessing external partnerships established through YUFE activities (1 response = 1 partnership, 71 partnerships reported upon).
Interviews	10	Head of Education, Educational Development Lead, Curriculum Manager, or equivalent	Examining the extent to which YUFE has fostered collaboration in education across partner universities.
Interviews	10	Representative from the Research or Grant Offices, VP for Research	Assessing how YUFE has shaped research collaboration among partner universities.
Interviews	4	Representatives from the YUFE2030 WP3, WP7 and WP8	Evaluating YUFE's cooperation model with external organisations, with a focus on regional economic and social development, and identifying opportunities, challenges, and emerging good practices.
Interviews	2	Central Office and Representative from the FOCl project	Reviewing YUFE's influence on national and European-level education policies.
Interviews	9	Decentralised Admission Officers (DAO)	Gathering staff perceptions on how the YUFE Virtual Campus and YUFENet support cross-institutional collaboration, teamwork, and a shared sense of community.
Questionnaire	8	YUFE Quality Assurance team	Collecting insights on the YUFE Bachelor QA process and policy changes emerging from its development.

Note on the Figure: # refers to the number of respondents or the number of interviewees.

Throughout the impact assessment, the YUFE QA framework distinguishing between lenient and strict scenarios will be used when considering QA surveys.

- In the **lenient scenario**, all responses that are not explicitly negative are considered, excluding “strongly disagree” and “disagree” but including “neutral.”
- In the **strict scenario**, only clearly positive responses are included, such as “agree” and “strongly agree,” while “neutral” and negative responses are excluded.

If 90% or more of the surveys meet a 80% satisfaction rate, the KPI is met. These scenarios provide a standardised framework for interpreting the data, enabling more nuanced analysis. Survey participation levels were in some cases limited, which should be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Linking with the Sustainable Development Goals

Using the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework for the impact assessment helps to ensure that the evaluation of the Alliance's activities is embedded in a widely known structure and goes beyond narrow metrics within the YUFEverse to encompass broader, long-term societal impacts. These goals emphasize inclusivity, equity, and empowerment, which resonate with the wide range of activities (such as education, research, and community engagement) that YUFE is involved in.

By assessing impact through the lens of SDGs, YUFE aligns its efforts with globally recognised standards for sustainable development. This gives this work international relevance and helps stakeholders understand YUFE’s contributions in the context of global challenges. Furthermore, the SDGs offer concrete indicators for measuring impact, such as educational outcomes, inclusion of vulnerable populations, and gender balance in participation.

Given YUFE’s current activities and priorities, the following SDGs were selected to be included in the framework.

SDGs selected for the YUFE Impact Assessment



It should be noted that this list may evolve in future impact assessment exercises.