




**ESC
ACADEMY
PRO**

 Ref. Ares(2024)9194091 - 20/12/2024

SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Deliverable D1.4



**Funded by
the European Union**

Sustainability Plan

Deliverable D1.4

Louis Brau, Jeanne Cuny, Arno Schrooyen

European Students' Union, Mundo-Madou. Avenue des Arts 7/8,
1210 Bruxelles, Belgium.

"Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them."

Deliverable information

Grant Agreement No.	Project 101090000
Project acronym	ESC Academy Pro
Project title	ESC ACADEMY PRO – development of skills required for the implementation of European Student Card and digital Erasmus + nationally
Project timeframe and duration	2 years
Project reference number	101090000
WP	WP1: Management and Coordination
Task	T1.8 Sustainability Plan
Deliverable	D1.4 Sustainability Plan
Status	Final version
Version number	1.0.
Deliverable responsible	ESU
Dissemination level	Public
Due date	Month 24
Date of submission	Month 24

Project coordinator

Name	Name
Organisation	European Students' Union
Email	louis.brau@esu-online.org
Postal address:	Mundo-Madou. Avenue des Arts 7/8, 1210 Bruxelles.

Introduction

ESC Academy Pro - strengthening the implementation of the European Student Card initiative

The *ESC Academy Pro* project is designed to drive the successful implementation of the European Student Card (ESC) initiative by enhancing the digital capabilities of higher education stakeholders. This ambitious endeavor focuses on several key objectives: understanding national-level practices among associations, institutions, and students regarding the digitalisation of Erasmus+ and the ESC; developing training programs to support the adoption and implementation of the initiative; and empowering organizations such as ESU and ISIC to lead the charge in the digital transformation of Erasmus+. It also aims to amplify the visibility and impact of the ESC initiative while establishing policy frameworks that promote European values and foster digital skill development within the European Education Area.

The project encompasses a range of activities, including a state-of-the-art analysis, capacity-building initiatives, dissemination and promotional efforts, and a strong emphasis on policy and sustainability. These efforts culminate in showcasing the experiences of higher education stakeholders in promoting European values, advancing the ESC initiative, building digital competencies, and encouraging active student participation.

The *ESC Academy Pro* project is committed to delivering transformative results that will have a lasting impact. It aims to create a stronger, more interconnected network of higher education actors with advanced digital capabilities, ensure a broader implementation of the ESC initiative, and contribute significantly to the digitalisation of Erasmus+. Additionally, the project establishes mechanisms for sustaining its outcomes, including long-term policy recommendations and practices to ensure the continued promotion of digital skills and European values. By fostering a culture of innovation and sustainability, the project helps shape a resilient and future-ready European Education Area.

Political context of the European Student Card Initiative

The European Student Card Initiative (ESCI) is a cornerstone in realizing the vision of the European Education Area (EEA) by 2025. It seeks to unlock the full potential of the EEA by enhancing student mobility, encouraging active participation in educational

and cultural opportunities, and fostering a stronger European Student Identity. By streamlining the management of mobility, making it more efficient, eco-friendly, and digitally advanced, the ESCI supports the overarching goals of the Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027, introduced alongside the EEA framework. Central to this effort is the ESCI's ability to simplify mobility processes through the secure electronic exchange and verification of student data.

As part of the Erasmus+ Programme 2021-2027, the ESCI plays a vital role in achieving the program's priorities, particularly under Key Action 2: Cooperation Among Organisations and Institutions. By facilitating seamless learning mobility, it strengthens collaboration and innovation across higher education institutions. The importance of the ESCI was further recognized in 2022, when it was highlighted as one of four flagship initiatives in the Communication on a European Strategy for Universities, a strategy designed to enhance the European dimension of higher education and research. The Council Recommendation on building bridges for effective European Higher Education Cooperation further underscores its significance, urging Member States to support the ESCI's adoption and implementation to deepen cross-border collaboration.

The European Student Card (ESC) revolutionizes student mobility across Europe, enabling higher education institutions to verify student status easily and reliably at a European level. This innovative system provides students with seamless access to a variety of services—both on and off campus—offered by their host institutions. By creating a more connected, efficient, and enriching mobility experience, the ESC fosters a profound sense of belonging to the European higher education community, empowering students to thrive in an increasingly integrated academic environment.

1. Building a Sustainable Future for the ESC Model: Effective Strategies

Achieving the long-term sustainability of the European Student Card (ESC) model requires a comprehensive strategy focused on fostering awareness, securing institutional and political commitment, and aligning with broader European educational priorities. By bridging communication gaps, strengthening stakeholder collaboration, and embedding the ESC within existing frameworks, the initiative can establish itself as an enduring and transformative tool for students and higher education institutions (HEIs).

A key factor in sustainability is addressing the lack of widespread awareness about the ESC. While many senior administrators at HEIs are informed about the initiative, frontline staff, who play a crucial role in its implementation, often remain unaware of its objectives and requirements. To mitigate this, targeted communication efforts are essential, including tailored training programs and accessible resources that clarify the ESC's value and operational needs. These efforts should also directly engage students by partnering with student unions and conducting campaigns that highlight the ESC's practical benefits, such as enhancing mobility and streamlining campus services.

The initiative's longevity also depends on robust support from European and national policymakers. Integrating the ESC into strategic priorities, such as digital transformation and skills development, reinforces its significance and encourages consistent action across Member States. Advocacy should focus on incorporating the ESC into national higher education policies while engaging local authorities to support its regional implementation. Visible endorsement from decision-makers and alignment with flagship EU initiatives will further strengthen its credibility.

Collaboration with HEIs and their networks is another critical pillar. Partnering with organizations like the European University Association (EUA), the European University Foundation (EUF), and EURASHE facilitates broader outreach and enables the ESC to cater to diverse educational pathways, including vocational education and training (VET). European University Alliances also offer an ideal platform to pilot ESC services, allowing the initiative to evolve based on practical insights and scalability requirements.

To ensure adaptability, the ESC must remain closely aligned with EU priorities, particularly the current emphasis on skills development. Expanding functionalities to support digital credentialing and skills recognition for VET students can increase its appeal and relevance. Simplifying adoption processes for HEIs by standardizing essential services, such as library and campus access, further encourages institutional buy-in and scalability. Engaging HEIs in service design fosters a sense of ownership, enhancing long-term commitment.

Ultimately, the ESC's sustainability depends on a coordinated approach that integrates clear communication, robust advocacy, and inclusive collaboration. By addressing current challenges and maintaining alignment with evolving European goals, the ESC can become an integral part of higher education, driving innovation and providing meaningful benefits to students and institutions across Europe.

2. Ensuring sustainability through collaborative partnerships

Ensuring the long-term sustainability of the European Student Card (ESC) model requires strategic cooperation with key partners such as the International Student Identity Card (ISIC) organization and European Union (EU) institutions. These partnerships can amplify the ESC's reach, enhance its value, and align it with broader student-focused initiatives and policies.

Collaboration with ISIC presents a significant opportunity to integrate the ESC into a well-established global network. ISIC's existing infrastructure, extensive partnerships, and recognition across educational and commercial sectors can complement the ESC's objectives. By working with ISIC, the ESC can leverage its expertise in managing student benefits, such as discounts and mobility support, while exploring joint functionalities that enhance the user experience. A unified approach could also

streamline service delivery, making the ESC more appealing to students and institutions alike.

Similarly, EU institutions play a pivotal role in securing the ESC's sustainability through policy alignment, funding, and visibility. The European Commission can embed the ESC into existing programs like Erasmus+ and the European Education Area (EEA) to ensure its continued relevance and support. Dedicated funding streams within EU initiatives can facilitate the development of new features and ensure widespread adoption across Member States. Furthermore, active promotion by EU institutions, including endorsements in strategic documents and events, can encourage stronger institutional and governmental engagement.

Equally important is collaboration with national partners, including local student unions, higher education institutions (HEIs), and government bodies. National student unions play a key role in raising awareness among students, ensuring they understand the benefits the ESC provides. Collaboration with HEIs allows the ESC to be effectively integrated into the curriculum and campus life, while national governments can provide essential policy support and funding to encourage adoption. National partners are crucial in adapting the ESC to specific local needs, ensuring it remains relevant across different educational systems and regions. Their involvement fosters a sense of ownership and strengthens the ESC's foundation within individual countries.

Partnerships with these stakeholders not only bolster the ESC's operational capacity but also foster synergies that align with its goals of enhancing mobility, accessibility, and integration across Europe. By combining the strengths of ISIC, EU institutions, national partners, and other like-minded organizations, the ESC can evolve into a comprehensive and sustainable platform that meets the diverse needs of students and higher education institutions.

3. Empowering the ESC Through Collaboration with Student Unions

The European Students' Union (ESU) represents over 20 million students across 44 national unions of students (NUSes) in 40 countries. Its extensive network and influence make ESU a powerful ally in advancing the European Student Card (ESC) initiative. Each NUS is uniquely positioned to address the specific needs of their national student populations, from promoting ESC functionalities to advocating for supportive policies within higher education systems.

National unions such as FAGE (France), fzs (Germany), SFS (Sweden), and FAIRe (Portugal) have extensive local networks and experience in working directly with universities and government bodies. Leveraging their regional expertise, these unions can play a pivotal role in raising awareness of the ESC, identifying barriers to adoption, and fostering collaboration between institutions and students. For example, FAGE has led campaigns on housing and mental health—key areas the ESC can support.

Additionally, ESU's capacity to organize transnational initiatives offers an unparalleled opportunity to address disparities in ESC adoption. For instance, NUSes in countries like Romania and Spain, which have seen lower rates of ESC issuance, could benefit from tailored support programs and best practices shared by countries with higher adoption, such as Czechia and France.

One of the critical areas where ESU can contribute is in the recognition and portability of credits through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). By ensuring that the ESC is integrated with mechanisms for ECTS recognition, students can experience seamless transitions between institutions, particularly in cross-border mobility. This integration would not only enhance academic cooperation but also empower students by reducing administrative hurdles and fostering greater trust in the quality and comparability of their educational experiences.

ESU and its NUSes can also partner with organizations like the Erasmus Student Network (ESN), which operates in 519 local sessions across 45 countries. Together, they can amplify the ESC's impact, ensuring that it integrates seamlessly into student life.

Data-driven strategies, such as tracking card issuance and usage trends, can further refine their efforts and focus resources where they are most needed.

By capitalizing on the combined strength of ESU, its NUSes, and complementary organizations, the ESC initiative can grow into a truly universal tool for students, addressing both academic and social needs across Europe. With such a collaborative approach, including a focus on ECTS recognition, the ESC can fulfill its promise as a cornerstone of equitable, accessible, and student-centered higher education.

4. Driving the European Student Card Forward: Growth, Challenges, and Sustainability

The European Student Card (ESC) has seen impressive growth in recent years, demonstrating its expanding value and adoption across Europe (source: ISIC). From 71,034 cards issued in 2021, the number grew to 127,300 in 2022 and 164,161 in 2023, reaching 159,013 in 2024. This growth trajectory reflects increasing recognition of the card's potential to enhance mobility, accessibility, and integration for students across the continent. However, to ensure the ESC's continued success and sustainability, a strategic focus on several key areas is necessary.

Looking at country-specific data, Czechia has shown significant progress, with a rise from 16,889 ESCs in 2021 to 67,408 in 2024, highlighting a fourfold increase. Similarly, France has experienced growth from 57,269 in 2021 to 78,952 in 2024, underlining the card's growing importance in these countries. In contrast, Romania, which had no ESC issuances in 2021, saw a promising start in 2024 with 4,720 cards issued. Meanwhile, Bulgaria has seen steady growth, increasing from 5,238 cards in 2021 to 7,931 in 2024, while Spain has experienced a drastic decline, from 540 cards issued in 2021 to just 2 in 2024, which calls for targeted efforts to understand and address barriers to adoption in these regions.

To ensure long-term sustainability, a key factor will be maintaining and expanding these growth rates. In countries like Czechia and France, ongoing engagement with

universities, student organizations, and government bodies is crucial to sustain adoption and integration of the ESC within national educational and digital strategies. Meanwhile, efforts in Romania and Bulgaria should focus on strengthening awareness, providing localized services, and partnering with national stakeholders to boost further card adoption.

The sustainability of the ESC also hinges on a reliable financial model. Continued support from EU institutions, national governments, and private sector partnerships will be essential in funding its growth. Aligning the ESC with broader European initiatives like Erasmus+ and the Digital Education Action Plan will ensure it remains integrated within Europe's educational priorities.

In summary, the ESC is experiencing significant growth, but maintaining this momentum and ensuring long-term sustainability requires targeted strategies, continuous partnerships, and a sound financial model. By leveraging lessons learned from regions with strong growth and addressing challenges in slower-adopting countries, the ESC can continue to provide lasting value to students, higher education institutions, and European society as a whole.

Conclusion

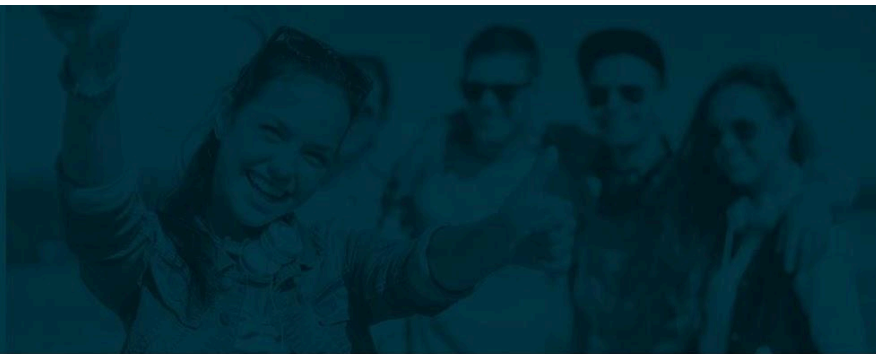
The European Student Card (ESC) represents a bold and visionary approach to transforming higher education in Europe, making it more accessible, inclusive, and mobile for students across the continent. Its remarkable growth—from 71,034 cards issued in 2021 to 159,013 in 2024—highlights the increasing recognition of its potential to enhance the student experience and facilitate seamless academic and social integration. However, realizing the ESC's full impact will require continued efforts to address regional disparities, secure long-term financial backing, and refine its functionality to meet the evolving needs of students.

At the heart of the ESC's sustainability is collaboration. Partnerships with organizations like ISIC, EU institutions, and national stakeholders will be crucial in expanding the ESC's reach and impact. Furthermore, working closely with student organizations such as the European Students' Union (ESU), national student unions, and the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) ensures that the ESC is not only a tool for academic mobility but also a means to enhance students' social experiences—through access to services such as housing, scholarships, mental health support, and the recognition of credits. As the ESC evolves, its role in fostering automatic recognition of credits across institutions

will further streamline academic mobility, allowing students to have their achievements easily acknowledged throughout Europe.

To secure the ESC's long-term success, it must remain aligned with broader European priorities, such as the Erasmus+ program and the Digital Education Action Plan. Equally important is fostering local and national ownership of the ESC, ensuring that its integration into higher education institutions and national policies continues to grow. This engagement will not only solidify its foundation but will also allow the ESC to evolve as an adaptable, indispensable tool for students across Europe.

Ultimately, the ESC's growth is more than a simple statistic; it represents a shared commitment to building an interconnected, equitable educational ecosystem. By focusing on collaboration, innovation, and sustainability, the ESC can truly become a cornerstone of European higher education—empowering students and fostering integration for generations to come.



EUROPEAN STUDENTS' UNION

Avenue des Arts 7/8, 1210 Brussels, Belgium
esu-online.org



Federation of Estonian Student Unions

Pärnu maantee 102-21, 11312 Tallinn, Estonia
eyl.ee



Global Youth and Student Community

9, rue René Goscinny, 75013 Paris, France
gysc.fr



International Student Identity Card

Nytorv 5, 1450 Copenhagen, Denmark
isic.org



**Student Chamber
of the Council of HEIs**

Student Chamber of the Council of HEIs

Ovocný trh 5, 116 36 Praha 1, Czech Republic
skrvs.cz



Out of the Box Europe

Rua Luis Camoes, lote 26 r/c dt 8000-388 Faro, Portugal
otbeurope.com