EC2U Student Challenge

EC2U Student Challenge is a concept where students work in groups on selected topics, presented as challenges to which they propose solutions. During the EC2U Forum in Turku on 18-21 May 2026, 10 groups of students work together to produce a poster on their topic. On the poster, groups summarise key takeaways from their discussions and present solutions to their challenge. A poster template will be provided.

The posters will be printed and presented in a Voice of Students poster session. During the week, each group will be led by a mentor. When applying to be part of the EC2U Forum and the Student Challenge, students are asked to rank all the topics in a prefence order. Students will be assigned a topic and placed in a group before the event.

The overall theme of the 2026 EC2U Forum is Shaping European Futures through Quality Education, to which the topics below are also connected. The topics are given below with a brief descrition and a few guiding questions per topic.

Topics

1. Equitable, inclusive and accessible learning for all

Description of the challenge: Equitable, inclusive, and accessible learning means creating educational environments where all learners feel valued, supported, and able to participate fully. Many learners face obstacles such as disabilities, language barriers, economic disadvantage, or discrimination. The challenge is to remove barriers—whether physical, digital, social, or cultural—so that no one is left behind. Universities should therefore strive to create study conditions that meet the needs of a diverse group of learners and provide access to equal opportunities and information. In addition to supporting students with different abilities, support mechanisms may also be applied to professional athletes and artists who study alongside their careers.

How can education be designed so that everyone has an equal chance to learn, participate, and succeed? What do accessible and inclusive study conditions mean? How can EC2U universities ensure equitable access to quality education for students of all backgrounds and abilities? How do we create a sense of belonging in our campuses? What is the role of cities and student organisations in supporting inclusivity and accessibility? What can cities do to ensure accessible transportation and accommodation?

2. Digital transformation and the future of learning

Description of the challenge: Higher education is undergoing rapid digital transformation driven by technologies such as artificial intelligence, online platforms, and hybrid learning models. These changes are reshaping how students learn, how instructors teach, and how universities design and deliver education. Digital tools—particularly AI, blended learning environments, and digital technologies—can enhance learning experiences while also creating new challenges. Key issues include the effectiveness of hybrid learning, the ethical use of AI in education, data privacy, academic integrity, and the evolving role of educators and students.

How is digital transformation (e.g. AI, online platforms, hybrid learning) changing the way students learn and teachers teach in higher education? How can EC2U universities best support students and staff members in this transformation? How can we create safe boundaries and clear, ethical rules for the use of AI? What are the main benefits and challenges of hybrid and blended learning for students and universities? How can we ensure that learning is meaningful? Students can also compare differences among their home universities and exchange good practices.

3. Education for active European citizenship

Description of the challenge: Education for active European citizenship faces the challenge of addressing low civic engagement, limited understanding of EU institutions, and growing misinformation. Many students feel disconnected from European institutions and decision-making. Educational systems must foster critical thinking, democratic participation, intercultural dialogue, and a shared sense of European values while respecting cultural diversity. Many Europeans lack opportunities to develop civic competencies, leading to disengagement, skepticism toward democratic institutions, and vulnerability to disinformation. The challenge is to provide inclusive, accessible, and engaging education that empowers individuals to act as informed, responsible, and active European citizens.

How can education empower students to become informed, engaged, and active European citizens? How can EC2U universities and student organisations cultivate democratic participation, critical thinking, and civic engagement? What kind of local activities and learning opportunities exist or could be developed to support this? How can the Alliance foster a sense of a European citizenship? What is the role of Student Unions and Erasmus Student Network sections? How can regional associations and other associated partners of the Alliance work towards this goal together with EC2U? For more on the EC2U associated partners you can refer to https://ec2u.eu/about/who-we-are.

4. Sustainability in higher education

Description of the challenge: Universities face the challenge of reducing their environmental impact while preparing students to address global issues such as climate change, social inequality, and responsible development. Education must equip students with the knowledge, skills, and motivation to act sustainably. The challenge is integrating sustainable thinking into teaching, research, campus life, and decision-making. EC2U universities must not only teach sustainability but also model it through their practices and empower students to drive positive change. One way universities can approach is to to integrate the UN Sustainable Development Goals into teaching, learning and everyday actions to promote environmental responsibility, social sustainability, and sustainable development.

How can EC2U universities and students contribute to a more sustainable future? How can EC2U universities support their communities in building sustainability know-how and awareness? What sustainable practices can be implemented on campus to reduce environmental impact? How can students actively contribute to sustainability initiatives at their institution? Students can also refer to the Little Book of Green Nudges.

5. Continuous learning and skills for the future

Description of the challenge: Continuous learning and skills for the future mean developing the ability to keep learning throughout life and gaining the skills needed to adapt to a rapidly changing world. The challenge of continuous learning and skills for the future is preparing students for a world where jobs, technologies, and societal needs are constantly evolving. Education must help learners build adaptable skills such as critical thinking, digital literacy, creativity, and the motivation to learn beyond formal education. Many students are trained for today's requirements but not for tomorrow's uncertainties. The challenge is to ensure education supports lifelong learning, flexibility, and the development of transferable skills that remain relevant in the future.

How can we reimagine education and learning beyond graduation and traditional degree programmes? How can EC2U universities place themselves in this dynamic, and reflect on new innovative possibilities? Should more emphasis be placed e.g. on microcredentials and extracurricular activities? What kind of continuous learning opportunities might graduates need? What skills will be

most important for future graduates, and why? Students can also refer to the European Commission's Union of Skills for background information.

6. Innovation and entrepreneurship in higher education

Description of the challenge: In addition to research and teaching, universities have an important role in bringing about innovation and in fostering a creative mindset though e.g. entrepreneurship. Boosting an entrepreneurial way of thinking among students can also contribute to the societal impact universities have. Traditional education often focuses on theory rather than practice. The challenge is to bridge this gap by fostering entrepreneurial thinking, experimentation, and collaboration between students, academia, and society. EC2U universities should empower students with the mindset, skills, and opportunities to transform ideas into innovative projects, startups, or social initiatives. EC2U activities such as citizen science session, entrepreneurial week and think tanks may act as platforms for innovation and creativity.

How can EC2U universities, cities and student organisations encourage innovation and entrepreneurial mindsets among students? What support structures (e.g. incubators, mentorship, funding) are most effective? How can universities allow students to develop these skills alongside their academic journey? How can we effectively communicate on scientific innovations to a larger public?

7. Educating for peace and resilience

Description of the challenge: In a world marked by conflict, polarization, and rapid change, many young people lack the tools to deal with stress, disagreement, and social tensions. The challenge is to create educational spaces that promote peace, dialogue, and resilience at both personal and community levels. The challenge of educating for peace and resilience is preparing students to navigate conflict, uncertainty, and social change in constructive ways. Education must go beyond academic knowledge and help young people build emotional and psychological resilience and to encourage empathy, inclusion and the ability to work together despite differences.

How can education help young people build peace, overcome challenges, and stay resilient in times of uncertainty? How can education encourage towards empathy and cooperation? How can EC2U universities empower students to respond constructively to crises and change? How do we navigate in a polarised world?

8. Supporting employability and integration through education

Description of the challenge: International students bring diversity and talent to higher education but often face challenges related to employability, language, cultural adaptation, and integration into the local labor market and society. At the same time, the demographic situation in the countries of the EC2U Alliance is changing as the population is growing older and birthrates are declining. This can create a skills shortage in the labour market. There is therefore a need to both attract and retain international talents in different regions of the EC2U Alliance.

How can we find skilled workforce to address skills shortages in the labour market? How can we fight brain drain? What barriers do international students face when transitioning from study to employment? How can international students find their place in the labour market after graduation? How can EC2U cities/universities and their student organisations contribute to and support their integration? What role do employers, career services, and local communities play in this process? Do you know of any local initiatives, success stories? Students can also refer to the European Commission's Union of Skills for background information.

9. Multilingualism and intercultural learning

Description of the challenge: Multilingualism and intercultural learning mean developing language skills and cultural understanding that enable students to communicate, collaborate, and live respectfully in diverse societies.. In a globalized world, effective and succesful communication and collaboration are essential. While English is the most used lingua franca in international communication, the knowledge of different foreign languages is decreasing in some regions. EC2U universities play a vital role in fostering these skills among students, because many students have limited opportunities to develop language skills or meaningful intercultural experiences. The challenge is to create inclusive learning environments that promote multilingual competence, intercultural dialogue, and global citizenship.

How can EC2U universities contribute to both better linguistic and cultural understanding among their staff, students and society in general? Why are multilingual and intercultural skills important for students' academic and professional futures? Is English taking space from other languages? How can we support the linguistic rights of minority groups? Does everyone have the right to be educated in their native language? How does digitalisation affect multilingualism and intercultural learning? How can we encourage individuals to learn different languages? How can diversity in the student body be used as a learning resource?

10. Supporting mental health and wellbeing through education

Description of the challenge: The changes and demands of our everyday lives can sometimes take a toll on our mental health. The demands of student life, the labour market, hardening values, short-term work contracts, unemployability, news of wars and climate crisis can all contribute to feelings of anxiety and depression. This can especially be felt by young people who experience uncertainty about theír future and can reflect in how well students progress in their studies. Supporting mental health and wellbeing through education means creating learning environments that help students feel safe, supported, and able to thrive both academically and personally. EC2U universities should be ensuring that learning environments promote emotional balance, resilience, and a sense of belonging. Education should not only focus on academic success but also equip students with skills to manage stress, maintain wellbeing, and seek support when needed.

What are the main mental health challenges faced by students today? How can EC2U universities and student organisations tackle mental health challenges? With which structures and services can universities and student organisations support student wellbeing? How can teaching, assessment, and campus culture better support student wellbeing? How can sport services, wellbeing services, study psychologists and students themselves contribute to better mental health? For an example, students can refer to the On My Mind project from the University of Turku.