



ROAD2EU WINTER SCHOOL 2025

EU Policy Architecture for Economic, Social and Territorial Synergy in Polish Higher Education

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Lecture 1



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What This Lecture Covers

01

Why this topic matters

02

Five EU policy layers shaping higher education

03

Polish higher education context

04

From EU priorities to institutional action

Universities Are Policy Actors, Not Just Educational Institutions

- Higher education is shaped by EU strategic frameworks, not only national legislation.
- Universities are expected to contribute to **innovation, inclusion, active citizenship**, and **regional development**.
- Alignment with EU policy is both a funding requirement and a strategic opportunity.



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KEY INSIGHT

Understanding the policy architecture is essential for institutional leadership, curriculum design, and project development.

A Multi-Level Governance System for Education



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- A **layered system** of frameworks, instruments, funding logics, and monitoring tools.
- EU, national, regional, and institutional levels interact **continuously and interdependently**.
- Policy architecture is an **analytical lens** for understanding how decisions are made and resources are allocated.



The Strategic Umbrella for EU Education Cooperation

- The EEA supports **resilient, inclusive, and future-oriented** education systems across member states.
- It links education with **employability, personal fulfilment**, and **active citizenship**.



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TARGET

A fully functioning European Education Area by 2025.

Key Instruments:

- Erasmus+
- European Universities Initiative
- Mutual recognition of qualifications

Digitalisation as System Transformation, Not Just Platform Use



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- DEAP 2021–2027 promotes **high-quality, inclusive, and accessible** digital education.
- Covers teaching practices, assessment methods, staff development, and learner support.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1

Fostering high-performing digital education ecosystems

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2

Enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation

EU DIGITAL DECADE BENCHMARK

70% of adults with at least basic digital skills by 2030.

Five Policy Objectives That Shape Educational Investment



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POLICY OBJECTIVE	FOCUS AREA
PO1 — Smarter Europe	Innovation, research, digitalisation
PO2 — Greener Europe	Climate transition, energy efficiency
PO3 — Connected Europe	Mobility, digital connectivity
PO4 — More Social Europe	Employment, education, social inclusion
PO5 — Europe Closer to Citizens	Local and regional development

Key point: Cohesion Policy provides the main investment logic for educational and regional development projects in Poland.

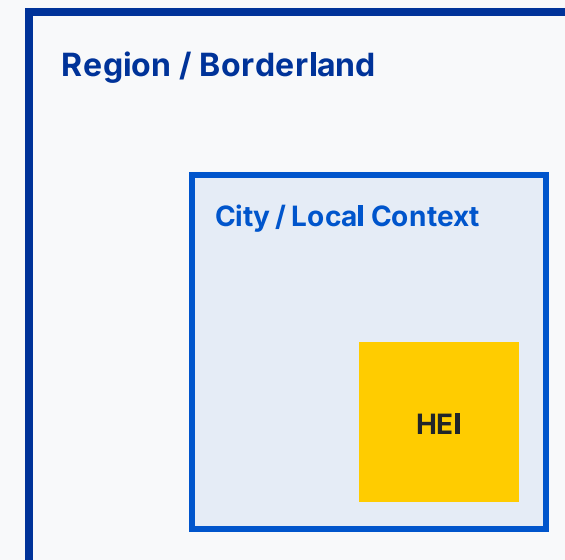
Source: European Commission, Cohesion Policy 2021–2027, 2021.

Layer 4: Territorial Agenda 2030 — Universities as Territorial Actors

- The territorial dimension matters for **all sectoral policies**, including education.
- Universities should be understood as actors embedded in **cities, regions, and borderlands**.
- The place-based approach emphasises **local context, regional ecosystems**, and cross-border cooperation.
- HEIs play a key role in reducing territorial disparities and fostering **smart specialisation**.



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Strategy Is Linked to Evidence and Reform Signals

European Semester

Provides annual economic and social policy coordination across EU member states.

Education and Training Monitor

Offers country-specific diagnosis and targeted reform recommendations for education systems.

Together, they identify **national gaps** that are directly relevant for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

Poland receives specific recommendations on: STEM participation, labour-market alignment, and digital skills.



Strong Attainment, Visible Structural Tensions



Poland has **strong tertiary attainment rates** (above EU average in some cohorts), but significant structural challenges persist across the higher education landscape.

STEM Participation

Underrepresentation of students and graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields.

Labour-Market Alignment

Persistent mismatch between graduate competency profiles and evolving employer needs.

Internationalisation

Growing numbers of international students and staff, but highly uneven distribution across institutions.

Territorial Imbalance

Heavy concentration of resources and talent in major cities versus peripheral and regional institutions.

Three Interconnected Dimensions of University Impact

ECONOMIC

- Skills development
- Innovation ecosystems
- Graduate employability

SOCIAL

- Inclusion and accessibility
- Active citizenship
- Well-being

TERRITORIAL

- Regional engagement
- Urban-rural balance
- Cross-border cooperation

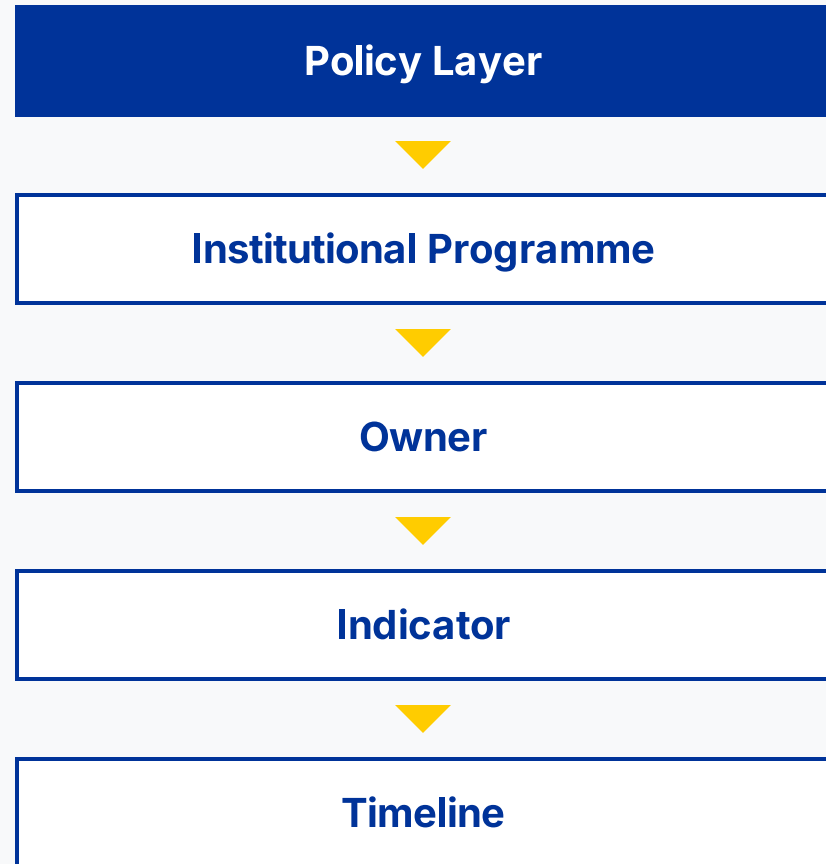


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Core message: These three dimensions must be treated as interconnected and mutually reinforcing, not as isolated policy silos.

Policy Alignment Is a Governance Task, Not a Rhetorical Exercise

- Map institutional programmes to **EEA, DEAP, Cohesion Policy, and Territorial Agenda** priorities.
- Assign **owners, timelines, indicators, and review points** to each alignment commitment.
- Embed policy literacy into **leadership training, curriculum design, and project development**.
- Build internal capacity for **monitoring, reporting, and adaptive management**.



Key EU Policy and Monitoring Sources

- ▶ **European Commission.** *European Education Area.* Brussels, 2021.
- ▶ **European Commission.** *Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027.* COM(2020) 624 final. Brussels, 2020.
- ▶ **European Commission.** *Cohesion Policy 2021–2027.* Brussels, 2021.
- ▶ **Territorial Agenda 2030.** *A Future for All Places.* Adopted by EU Ministers, 2020.
- ▶ **European Commission.** *Education and Training Monitor 2025: Poland.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the EU, 2025.



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Questions & Discussion

- ? How can these five policy layers be translated into **university strategy and curriculum design**?
- ? What institutional mechanisms are needed to ensure **genuine policy alignment**?
- ? How can Polish HEIs leverage **Cohesion Policy and Erasmus+** together for greater impact?

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