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Joint Statement on the European Degree Mobility Model

A Call for the Recognition and Inclusion of Virtual Exchanges and Blended Mobility

The Council Recommendation on a European quality assurance and recognition system in higher education, adopted on 12 May 2025, represents a forward-looking initiative, building on well-established principles of quality, transnational cooperation, and mutual trust to further consolidate the European Education Area. It rightly acknowledges the importance of innovative learning modalities and flexible, high-quality provision, particularly to support transnational joint programmes and facilitate the mobility essential to Europe's competitiveness and social cohesion.

In this context, as the higher education landscape transforms in response to digitalization, demographic and territorial pressures, and persistent inequities in access to mobility opportunities, the implementation of the European Degree and its associated Label must reflect the diversity and innovation embedded in European and national policy frameworks. In particular:

- The Council has already recognized, in both the Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027) and the Council Recommendation on Learning Mobility (2024), that virtual exchanges and blended mobility constitute structural, not ancillary, elements of academic mobility.
- The Erasmus+ Regulation (2021/817) and the European Strategy for Universities further mandate inclusion and broad access, explicitly supporting digital and hybrid modes of mobility as a means to reach learners traditionally excluded from physical mobility - namely, part-time students, lifelong learners, and other underrepresented groups in higher education.

Despite these advances, the current criteria for the joint European degree label (annex II at C/2025/3006) risk falling short of these policy ambitions by setting physical mobility thresholds without sufficient, automatic recognition of virtual and blended formats as equivalent pathways for transnational experience (criterion A8. Flexible and embedded student mobility).

As mobility rates across the EU remain below policy targets—less than 15% of students in many countries participate, and only about 5% benefit from Erasmus+—inclusion of digital forms is not only a matter of fairness but of necessity.

The exclusion or secondary status of virtual exchanges and blended mobility in the Label framework would have several adverse consequences:

- It would contradict the EU's own legal and strategic commitments, undermining trust and coherence across mobility and quality assurance initiatives.
- It would perpetuate inequities in access to international experiences, particularly for non-traditional and disadvantaged learners, in contradiction to the Council Recommendation's inclusive aims.
- It would risk making the European Degree framework out of step with digital transformation trends and the evolving reality of higher education delivery in Europe.

THEREFORE, the OpenEU alliance calls for policymakers, in revising the operational guidelines for the European Degree label, to:

- **Explicitly recognize virtual exchanges and blended mobility as equally valid and strategically important forms of academic mobility within the Label framework,** in alignment with existing EU legal instruments and strategic policy directions.

- **Update Label assessment criteria** to remove or reframe restrictive mobility requirements, ensuring that all forms of meaningful, quality-assured transnational learning experiences are eligible pathways.

- **Facilitate monitoring, recognition, and quality assurance protocols** that are modality-neutral but outcome-focused, leveraging the robust quality systems described in the Council Recommendation to ensure parity of standards across all mobility types.

Virtual exchanges and blended mobility broaden access to international learning in higher education, fostering global, digital, and social skills, while enriching students' academic and professional profiles. Recognizing digital and blended mobility as central to the European Degree framework will more effectively advance the Council's ambition to foster an inclusive, innovative, and forward-looking European Education Area—one that equips all learners to thrive in a dynamic global context.

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