



EURASHE

Strategic Framework 2023-2025

Adopted by the EURASHE General Assembly on 10 November 2022



1. Objective

The main objective of this strategy is that EURASHE becomes **a reference point for a wide range of policy makers and higher education institutions**, who seek to harness the power of Professional Higher Education (PHE) to address the **green and digital transitions**.

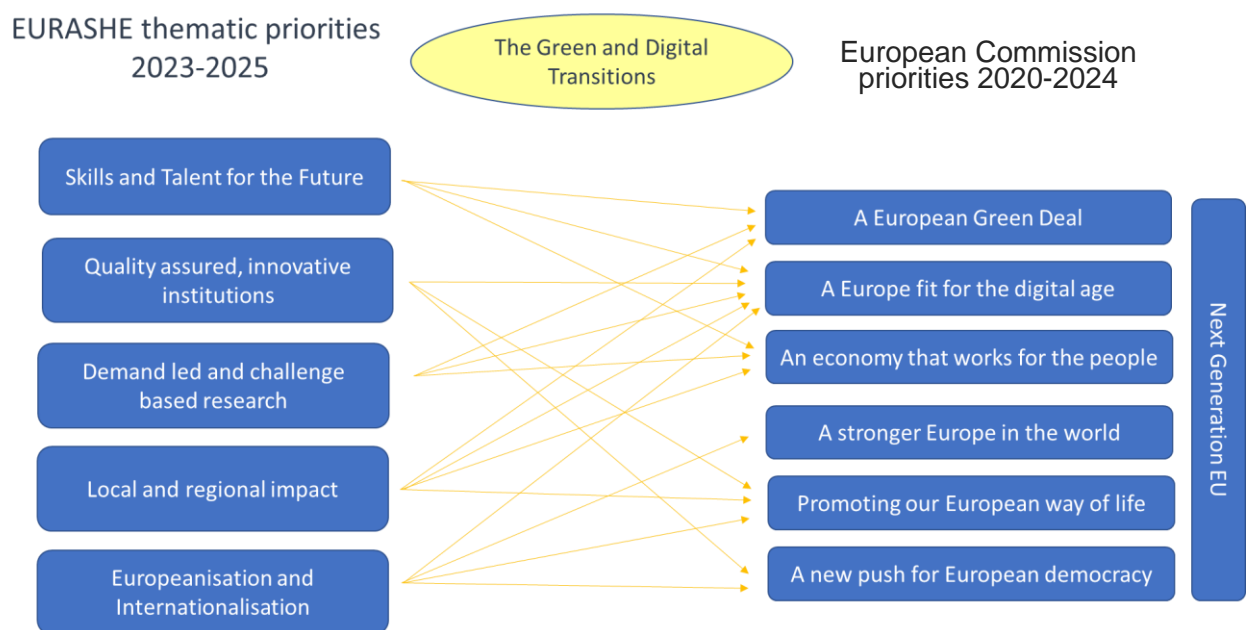


2. Thematic Priorities

The thematic priorities for the 2023-2025 period build on existing themes of interest to EURASHE and its members while linking them to the EU’s main policy agenda, which is embracing the ‘twin transitions’ to a more green and digital economy. The priorities are shown in Figure 1 and mapped onto the political priorities of the European Commission, which will run until the end of 2024. This shows that EURASHE will be contributing most to the priority ‘Europe fit for the digital age’, through its focus on skills and research for innovation.

Compared to EURASHE’s previous strategic framework, the new priorities give renewed focus on the relevance of PHE to the world of work and the EU’s Skills Agenda, as well as trends in the internationalisation of higher education. While not set in stone, they provide a reference for the engagement of EURASHE in policy debates and new project proposals. The priorities are the result of a ‘strategy hack’ with members that took place at the end of 2021, followed by further discussion within the EURASHE Board and the Committee on Strategic Advice.

Figure 1: Thematic priorities



2.1 Background

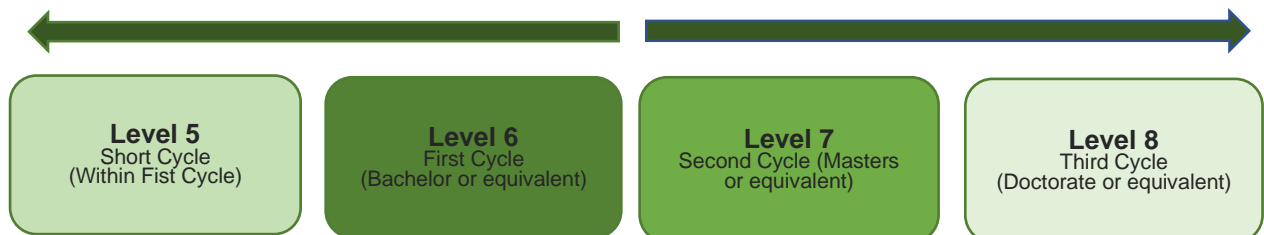
The Fourth Industrial Revolution requires education and training systems to adapt, both in terms of pedagogies and subject matter. The main mission of higher education, namely to train graduates for future employment and participation in economic and social life more broadly, should follow and respond to rapid technological changes. An increasing number of jobs will be knowledge and skill intensive, both at management and technician levels. At the same time, the delivery of education is becoming more digital, flexible and bespoke, responding to the needs of individuals and industry alike.

Students will be able to tailor their entry, exit, assessment and qualifications to their personal needs, rather than being required to fit a standardized model. Business is taking an increasing interest in how their employees are educated, before and during employment.

Demographic change is also having an impact. In Europe at least, this means an ageing population that will work for longer than previous generations. It is likely that people will change careers several times, and not just individual jobs. Along with technological changes, these demographic shifts will require a wider range of competences, and the workforce will need to be constantly upskilled and reskilled.

Trends in the economy and society is changing the higher education landscape. Applied and professionally orientated courses are increasing in demand, while differences between types of Higher Education Institution (HEI) are becoming more blurred. There is an increase in private education and governments are being challenged to rethink the governance and funding of higher education systems. Taxpayers are asking more from publicly funded HEIs, including a greater contribution to innovation and community development. These changes provide opportunities for EURASHE members. On the one hand, rapid changes require more flexibility, which can be provided by Short Cycle Higher Education at EQF level 5 (European Qualifications Framework) and the introduction of microcredentials at all levels. On the other hand, established degrees (bachelors, masters) are concerned more with practical application and employability. Even doctoral degrees can be designed that retain key elements of originality with applied research and innovation ('industrial PhDs'). This opportunity to expand into EQF levels 5 and 8 is illustrated below in Figure 3.

Figure 2: New opportunities for PHE within the European Qualifications Framework



EURASHE will prioritise activities that positively respond to these trends and opportunities. We will act as a conduit for policy makers, informing and advising of how PHE is changing and addressing the challenges. At the same time, we will interpret and respond to the demand of policy makers, who themselves are confronting the Fourth Industrial Revolution. As stated in the objectives, the relevance of PHE will be demonstrated to a wide range of policy makers, including but not limited to: (Higher) Education, Research & Innovation, Employment, Enterprise, and Regional Development / Cohesion.

2.2 Skills and talent for the future

The aim is to provide orientation to HEIs on the developments, models, and good practices in approaches to future skills and competences. EURASHE views future skills and competences as broad concepts that comprise technical, 21st Century and other transversal skills that enable institutions and people to shape the future in a sustainable way. EURASHE will strive to inspire dialogue involving researchers, educational professionals, policymakers, and the labour market to exchange experiences

on how to support institutions and member states to grow their future capabilities. This also comprises the development and implementation of useful instruments and concepts, for example, flexible study pathways, experiential learning.

At EU level the main policy framework is the European Skills Agenda, which includes 12 actions for upskilling and reskilling. Most of these actions are of direct relevance to EURASHE, in particular:

- Action 4: Council Recommendation on VET
- Action 5: The European Universities Initiative and upskilling scientists
- Action 10: A European Approach to microcredentials, which led to a Council Recommendation in June 2022, and about which EURASHE published a position paper in July 2021.

Through its Community of Practice on Future Skills EURASHE should develop a coherent narrative on how PHE helps to deliver the European Skills Agenda and link its different actions.

2.3 Demand led and challenge based research

HEIs can play a significant role in enhancing competitiveness and innovation capacity by acting as connectors with business and society. Many are striving to increase their level of applied research and innovation, encompassing problem-oriented research and development (R&D), and solutions to global societal changes. Furthermore, institutions that provide PHE tend to be more embedded in their regions, and therefore are better placed to help SMEs and develop local solutions to global challenges. Applied research activities are also a major factor in developing students' competences (entrepreneurship, critical and innovative thinking, sustainable development mindset etc.) and provide PHE graduates with the right skills for new labour markets. This issue should become a flagship of the EURASHE narrative around R&I, at a time when the Commission is trying to link education and research.

HEIs are at various stages of developing their R&I capabilities, and therefore EURASHE should adopt a diversified approach to support their growth, including to access funding. In particular, EURASHE should:

- Develop a broad platform of organisations at EU level to increase the visibility, and demonstrated value of applied R&I. This will help to increase the integration of EURASHE members into the European Research Area (ERA) and their participation in the Horizon Europe Programme. This was the main rationale for establishing UAS4Europe (of which EURASHE is a founding member), which participates in meetings to develop common positions for HEIs within the ERA Forum.
- Support members on elements of Horizon Europe in which they can have the highest impact, in particular its 'third pillar' (The European Innovation Council, European Innovation Ecosystems and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology).
- Continue to raise the profile of members in terms of their role in Smart Specialisation Strategies and building R&I capacities in less developed regions.

- Help members develop strategies for applied R&I, notably through its dedicated Community of Practice. EURASHE will apply for an Erasmus funded Cooperation Partnership project to develop this Community and support members.

2.4 Quality assured, innovative and digital PHE

This priority builds on the previous EURASHE Strategy, in particular its mission to strengthen the impact of innovative, high quality, professional teaching and learning. This is rooted in EURASHE's longstanding commitment to Quality Assurance, and status as a consultative member of the Bologna Follow Up Group. In the 2023-2025 strategy EURASHE will develop the following main elements:

- The specific characteristics of quality assurance for PHE – what makes PHE programmes different from theoretically based courses and how their quality should be assured.
- Quality assurance of institutions, linking their difference missions. Through the QA FIT project and the QA Community of Practice, EURASHE will explore how the European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs) can be adapted to better reflect the integrated nature and impact of PHE.
- Move beyond QA to understand how the specific contribution of PHE can be assessed and how institutions offering PHE may benchmark their performance with peers regarding their contribution to employability, innovation, and socio-economic outcomes.

In addition, this thematic priority will examine the impact of digitalisation on higher education and how PHE institutions can adapt to deliver high quality online teaching and learning. A possible subgroup within the QA Community of Practice may be created.

2.5 Local and regional impact

HEIs that provide PHE have a particular vocation to developing cities and regions, and in many cases were set up by governments with this specific objective in mind. This thematic priority will build on the results of the UASiMAP project that ends in June 2023, and which has helped to map and measure the regional impact of PHE and applied research. A key strategic aim is to work with European and International organisations to raise the profile of HEIs as regional development actors, as well as the need to better fund this mission. The EURASHE Secretariat will pursue a stronger engagement with DG Regional and Urban Policy of the European Commission, as well as its Joint Research Centre (JRC), in particular around the themes of Smart Specialisation and Industrial Transition.

2.6 Europeanisation & Internationalisation

Institutions offering mainly PHE courses are less inclined to cooperate internationally and engage in mobility schemes. This may be due to their relatively small size and their local profile. It is also more complicated to organise exchanges for work based learning modules. However, internationalisation can help improve the offer of PHE and create funding opportunities, from both the public and private sectors. At EU level one of the main policy developments in recent years is the European Universities Initiative, which has set up transnational alliances of HEIs. In the 2023-2025 strategy EURASHE will bring together alliances that offer PHE into an informal grouping while helping all its members develop internationalisation strategies.

3. Operational Goals

The thematic priorities cannot be fully addressed without a clear set of operational goals, which concern the functioning of EURASHE as an international association. The goals must also be measurable, and section five sets out a monitoring system to ensure the progress is being made. These goals are illustrated in Figure 3 which also shows that they are to a large extent dependent on each other. Expanding membership will increase resources (along with new and diversified activities), which in turn will help serve all members more effectively. A closer relationship between the Secretariat, Board and the members will in turn help the association demonstrate its relevance to a wider range of policy makers. Each operational goal is described below.

Figure 3: Operational Goals



Expand membership (and to different types of institutions): EURASHE’s mission is to strengthen and demonstrate the impact of innovative, high quality PHE and related user-oriented research in Europe. This mission is accomplished by representing all types of HEIs that offer professionally orientated courses and conduct applied research, and by facilitating multi-stakeholder cooperation and dialogue. This is especially important to emphasise at a time when the boundaries between different levels and types of education are becoming increasingly blurred. For example, institutions that offer both academic and professional higher education would be welcome within the Association. Furthermore, in order to reflect the proximity of EURASHE to the world of work and other stakeholders, the Board will propose to the General Assembly that the category of Associate Member should be expanded to include any organization with an interest in PHE. Associate members do not have the right to vote, ensuring that EURASHE remains an interest group representing HEIs, but an increased number of these types of members would provide more resources and ideas from different perspectives, and thus enrich the activities of the Association.

- *Increase resources:* In order to successfully implement this strategy and increase its impact, EURASHE has to grow, providing it with the financial and human resources to engage with a wider range of partners, and participate in more EU funded projects (which mostly require co-financing). Increasing membership fees above inflation could freeze out some members and deter others who may wish to join EURASHE in addition to another association. An increase in membership fees through expansion needs to be matched with innovative new sources of income, including consultancy services for institutions, business and European/International organisations.
- *Serve members more effectively:* As a membership based association, EURASHE relies on members for their fees and their input into policies and projects. This requires a constant effort to ensure that EURASHE provides them with value for money and reasons to engage in its activities. It is not enough to rely on their membership through a common interest in promoting PHE: EURASHE should become more service orientated.
- *Demonstrate relevance to a wide range of policy makers:* The strategy aims to increase the number and range of policy makers with which EURASHE regularly cooperates, without neglecting its 'core business'. This means that EURASHE will work more with DGs Employment, GROW, Research and Innovation, REGIO and others, while retaining high levels of cooperation with DG Education, as the lead DG in building the European Education Area. However, it must be noted that this operational goal is highly dependent on the others, notably an increase in resources through increased membership and other new sources of income. For this reason, the Secretariat and the Board must prioritise its representation activities, especially at the beginning of the implementation period.

4. Implementation

EURASHE will continue and improve ‘tried and tested’ activities including events (Annual Conference, Summer Cocktail), engagement with the EU and international policy communities (E4 Group, EC advisory groups, BFUG), and European funded projects. At the same time, it will experiment with new activities, in particular Communities of Practice, online networking, and strategic partnerships with other organisations.

The main function of an association like EURASHE is to link policy makers with members. On the one hand, policy makers are looking for data to make better informed decisions (as well as their duty as civil servants to engage with stakeholders), while on the other hand our institutions want to know more about policy trends and funding programmes. Therefore, involving members and partners in EURASHE activities is crucial for success. This role of intermediary, networker, and knowledge manager is the main basis on which performance is judged.

4.1 Statutory bodies

The General Assembly, Board, Secretariat and Committee for Strategic Advice provide an established and tested governance model, and no major changes are foreseen. However, the Secretariat must ensure that they are actively involved in the life of the association.

The General Assembly is the voice of the membership and makes important decisions, yet the link between the official representatives of the General Assembly and other staff in the members is not always clear. While the Secretariat cannot and should not interfere with the internal organisation and functioning of members, it will make a concerted effort to collect data on different types of people / functions.

One of the responsibilities of the General Assembly is to elect the Board and, in the future, more attention should be given to Board elections, and the ideas / proposals / commitments of candidates. The Board itself shall continue to meet monthly, since regular and shorter meetings are better to ensure its involvement in all activities and oversee the Secretariat. Board members will be encouraged to represent the association at events, in coordination with the President. In this respect, briefing support will be provided by the Secretariat.

The Committee for Strategic Advice should help the Association in a broader context than previously, not limiting itself to thematic priorities, but advising it on the implementation of this strategy.

4.2 Communities of Practice

EURASHE needs a new approach to involve members and partners in the main questions faced by PHE, in order to:

- Share experiences and learn from each other
- Contribute to positions and activities related to key issues and send to the EURASHE Board
- Develop new projects

Similar reasons were behind the establishment of working groups in 2015 but membership was more restricted. There were also some events labelled Communities of Practice, but there was no sustained effort to establish such ‘coalitions of the willing’. Furthermore, online platforms have provided more opportunities for larger participation in meetings. Therefore, the strategy proposes to establish three Communities of Practice to address thematic priorities, indicatively labelled:

- EURASHE Community of Practice on Quality Assurance in Professional Higher Education
- EURASHE Community of Practice on Future Skills for Future Jobs
- EURASHE Community of Practice on Applied Research & Innovation.

These Communities have already started being built in 2022, and discussions have also taken place on how they should be governed. Such communities are largely self-organising and self-governing but need support from the Secretariat. Furthermore, although participation should be self-rewarding, meeting physically does have a financial cost. Therefore, EURASHE will co-fund biannual meetings of the Communities. For financial and operational reasons these meetings will have to be limited in size and shall represent the ‘core group’ of the Communities. In order to be more responsive to how these Communities work, the EURASHE Board will be empowered by the bylaws to adopt and modify their rules of procedure.

4.3 Representation and advocacy

The Association is officially represented by its President, who may delegate such responsibilities to other Board members, notably the Vice-Presidents, as well as the Secretary General (who in turn asks Secretariat staff to attend meetings as appropriate). Given the large number of policy areas that impact on PHE (and to which it contributes to), and the strategic objective to become relevant to a wider range of policy makers, EURASHE should aim to increase its level of representation, within budgetary limits. Board members should inform the Secretariat when they take part in events for communications purposes.

However, despite our best efforts it will be impossible to cover all events, requests for input into policy proposals and other advocacy work. Therefore, we must continue to build partnerships with other EU level organisation that have similar aims. For example, EURASHE is a member of the Lifelong learning Platform and UAS4Europe. In fact, EURASHE helped to establish UAS4Europe in order to raise the profile of applied research and innovation. UAS4Europe coordinates with networks of HEIs to provide inputs into the ERA Forum, a consultative body of the European Commission to build the European Research Area, and thus the accompanying investments from the Horizon Europe Programme – see also 4.7 on Partnerships and Communication.

4.4 Events

Events serve as a means to bring members and non-members together to network, exchange, learn and develop new projects. Four main types of events are foreseen in the coming three years, as illustrated in Figure 4:

- The Annual Conference is usually the largest and most significant of EURASHE events, organised every year in partnership with a member. The last Conference held in Brussels gathered almost 200 people, the largest number of attendees in the history of EURASHE.
- Meetings of the Communities of Practice (online and in person – see 4.3), as well as the Leadership Forum, which brings together senior managers to exchange experience with peers in a similar position.
- A networking summer cocktail to update partners on developments in EURASHE, when the Annual Report will be published.
- An end of year webinar on EURASHE activities, mainly targeted at members.

Figure 4: Main EURASHE events



4.5 Communication

Communication will be managed by analysing the current situation through performance data from the previous year and establishing new goals and KPIs for the upcoming year. The goals are to engage more with our audience, **to create compelling messages, spread the purpose of EURASHE, to attract new members, and to build a community online.**

The main communication tools are:

- Website: With a new design in 2022 following rebranding, it should be cleaner and more user friendly, while being search engine optimized. The main goals are to increase traffic and reduce the bounce rate by July 2023. This will be achieved by uploading articles and using website hyperlinks on social media (SM) posts.
- Social Media: Aim to post five times a week, especially on Twitter and LinkedIn, to keep our audience updated with the latest EURASHE news, policy updates, events in the sector and members' news. The main goal is to increase followers and engagement in all channels.
- Newsletter: To provide stakeholders and members with a monthly overview of activities, on the last Tuesday of the month. Profiling of members should increase.
- A new members Bulletin, to be called 'Brussels Dispatch' is a new weekly email on Tuesday mornings, providing headlines on developments in policies and EURASHE activities.

Among the target audience of the strategy are:

- Policymakers at EU level: high expertise in various (HE-related) policies, impartial and interest in having partners for consulting policy issues with stakeholders
- Policymakers at a national level: similar to EU policymakers but less interested in consulting with European stakeholders, looking for inspiration and cross-country trends
- Members and potential members: national associations of PHE, PHE institutions, including managers and international officers with various experience in European policy
- Other European stakeholders, from business to other educational and youth networks
- Brussels-based country representatives
- Students

4.6 Membership

Members are the most important part of EURASHE. This strategy's primary goals are to keep existing members happy and to welcome new members. Increasing the membership will help provide EURASHE with the resources it needs to have a greater impact, and will also enrich the Association.

Existing members should be involved more in the association through improved communication, as set out in 4.5, including a new weekly email. A membership and communications officer has recently been recruited in the Secretariat to help deliver on this promise.

We would like to strengthen the EURASHE community where members interact and network, sharing experiences and good practices that can lead to future project partnerships. To be more effective and continuous throughout the year, physical events should be combined with online networking, means that have increased in importance and regularity in recent years. A Microsoft Teams environment has been set up and this strategy aims to facilitate its use, or if considered more effective, a different online platform. Its use will be measured as part of the monitoring (see part 5).

Members' opinion is also essential to help us improve. Therefore, we will undertake an annual survey of their opinions and levels of satisfaction, which will be reported on at the December webinar.

A list of potential new members will be maintained, particularly in countries where there are few or no members. The Secretariat, the Board and all members should be more pro-active in enlarging the Community, as this will make EURASHE stronger. For its part the Secretariat will reach out to potential new members within its project work and invite them to participate in EURASHE activities.

Once a month, a post on becoming a EURASHE member and its benefits will be posted on the EURASHE Social media channels, together with a campaign to all of our newsletter contacts four times a year.

New members will also receive an onboarding kit with all the benefits of becoming a member, an explanation of the structure, the most important EURASHE events and information about the relevant contact points at the organisation.

EURASHE members will continue to have priority access to events and webinars.

4.7 Partnerships and cooperation

Continued cooperation with Brussels based organizations should be complemented with new forms of cooperation. These should reflect the objectives and thematic priorities of the strategy.

For example, with regard to internationalization as well as quality assurance / assessment, EURASHE signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the 2022 Annual Conference with Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), the largest provider of applied education in the Middle East. A similar relationship is being built with Colleges and Institutions Canada, as well as the World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics.

As one of the strategic objectives is to increase the impact of PHE and the number of policy makers with which we interact, it will be necessary to partner with researchers who can help provide evidence for policy positions. These may be within the higher education sector, consultants, or international organizations such as the OECD, the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

4.8 Funded projects

EU funded projects are an important means to develop new ideas and address themes of interest to EURASHE. They also provide the financial resources to maintain a certain critical mass of human resources in the Secretariat. However, there are also disadvantages and risks involved, such as the time to submit applications, administrative burden in reporting, managing staff capacity, and co-financing requirements. The introduction of lump sums in the main programmes (Horizon Europe, Erasmus) should hopefully reduce these difficulties. The largest risk though is that unless potential partners are not properly considered, the results can be unsatisfactory with significant time lost.

In the coming three years new project proposals will be carefully considered to ensure that a) the content is closely in line and contributes to thematic priorities, and b) partners have the experiences and capabilities to successfully implement the activities.

4.9 Consultancy

EURASHE cannot rely on membership fees and EU funded projects to increase its budget, and therefore have a large impact. New income streams need to be found, including through consultancy. Clients may be found in the higher education sector but also in the public sector, such as through applying to tenders, individually or with partners. Training and project development services should also be considered. Along with input from the Committee on Strategic Advice, the Board and the Secretariat will come up with a strategy to increase the financial resources of the association by the end of 2022.

5. Monitoring

“However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results” (Winston Churchill)

In order to know whether the strategy is working, a monitoring system should be put in place. It will be as comprehensive as possible, while taking into account the capacity of the Secretariat. Monitoring is primarily a data collection and analyse exercise, but also a tool for management and accountability. Whether it is membership fees, operating grants from the European Commission, or the time voluntarily offered to the Association by the Board and members, the use of these resources should be justified. If indicators show that the strategy is not being implemented, its implementation or the strategy itself should change. Monitoring is also a tool for building trust and cohesion, and should therefore be considered an integral part of the association’s governance.

Figure 5: Strategy's monitoring system

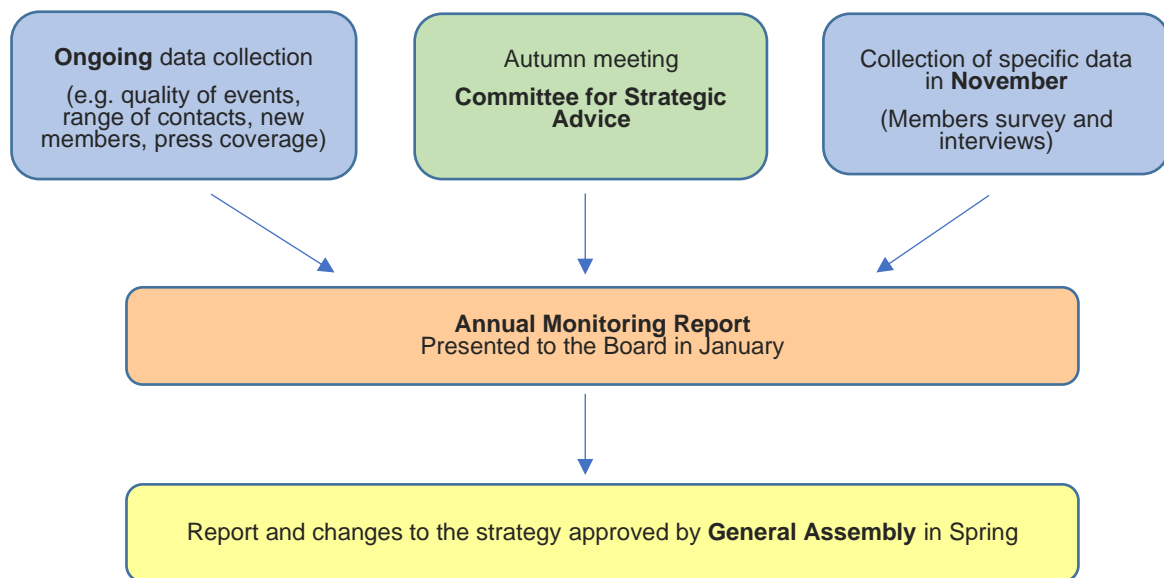


Figure 5 illustrates the planned system for monitoring the strategy. The Secretariat (blue) collects information on an ongoing basis but more intensively in the month of November when a survey of members is conducted, and interviews take place with key informants (policy makers, project partners and stakeholders). The most important part of the strategy to be monitored is the objectives (part 2), on which the data collection will be focused. This will include both qualitative and quantitative data, with a list of quantitative indicators to measure progress towards the objectives included in Annex 1. However, the thematic priorities (part 3) and the implementation measures (part 4) will also be monitored, mostly through qualitative but sometime quantitative methods (e.g. surveys following events, communication statistics).

A monitoring report will be presented to the EURASHE Board in its January meeting to analyse progress the previous year. If the Board believes any changes to the strategy are needed these will be considered and approved at the next General Assembly (the monitoring report will also be presented).