

Background Paper on the Working Methods for the ERA Forum

The Expert Group “ERA Forum” is set up as a forum for coordination and implementation of the objectives of the European Research Area (ERA), particularly in implementing the ERA Policy Agenda. The Rules of Procedure set out the basic rules applicable to the group, in accordance with the European Commission’s guidelines on Expert Groups.

This note provides a short overview on the group, its proposed work plan and working methods.

1. About the group

In the context of the new ERA governance framework, Member States and the Commission will continue working jointly together. The Terms of Reference of the expert group “ERA Forum” and the rules of procedure give further background. The group’s mandate is the following:

- to provide the Commission with **advice and support in relation to the implementation, monitoring and revision of the ERA Policy Agenda** at EU and national level, including its list of joint actions
- to **support coordination and cooperation among the Commission, the Member States** - and as appropriate the countries associated to the Framework Programme (‘associated countries’), relevant third countries and stakeholders
- with the specific tasks to
 - (1) to assist the Commission in the preparation of initiatives with regard to **future updates of the ERA Policy Agenda and alignment with other EU policies**;
 - (2) to assist the Commission in coordinating the **implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda** with Member States and stakeholders as well as associated countries and relevant third countries on a case-by-case basis;
 - (3) to **examine the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda** through the ERA Scoreboard and the information provided through the ERA policy platform;
 - (4) to contribute to the Commission’s work to **draft a report for consideration by the Council on the state of play of the implementation** of the ERA Policy Agenda every 18 months;
 - (5) to facilitate the **preparation and implementation of additional ERA actions** in variable geometry, with support from the Union where appropriate, as well as the exchange of best practices on national ERA policies and measures.

2. Proposed work plan

As proposed in the last ERA Forum for Transition meeting in December, the work of the Forum is organised in several streams, which are as follows:

Work stream 1: ERA Policy Agenda (EPA)

This work stream comprises three dimensions:

- 1.1. **EPA.1: Preparation:** discussion and preparation of the implementation of ERA actions, on the basis of the explanatory documents provided by the Commission. Member States, the Commission, as well as associated countries and stakeholders, will clarify their respective roles in the implementation of each action before the first semester of 2022.
- 1.2. **EPA.2: Implementation:** examination of progress in the implementation of the actions, regular policy dialogues between the Member States and the Commission, in particular through the sharing of

best practices and mutual learning exercises, possible creation of time-limited sub-groups and discussion of additional candidate ERA actions.

- 1.3. **EPA.3: Revision:** advice regarding the revision of the future policy agenda. This discussion should only occur after the presentation of the 18-month report by the Commission, and will therefore not yet take place in 2022.

Work stream 2: Monitoring (MON)

The new ERA monitoring and evaluation mechanism will need to be co-designed with the ERA Forum and its framework presented to the Council by mid-2022. This work stream will entail the following elements:

- 2.1. **MON.1: Co-design** the monitoring and evaluation framework, with a view to the Commission presenting it to the Council by mid-2022.
- 2.2. **MON.2: Advice** to the Commission on the process of setting-up the monitoring and evaluation mechanism, which should last throughout the second semester of 2022.
- 2.3. **MON.3: Analysis** on a regular basis of the information to be provided by the Member States, the Commission and associated countries in the policy platform, as well as the quantitative data in the scoreboard and dashboard. This will depend upon the monitoring and evaluation mechanism being set up, and could begin only in 2023.

Work stream 3: Reporting (REP)

Several reporting exercises will take place regularly:

- 3.1. **REP.1: Annual reports:** the Commission is to provide annual reports to each Member State. The discussion on these reports could already take place at the end of 2022.
- 3.2. **REP.2: State of play:** the Commission is to present a report on the state of play of the implementation of the ERA policy agenda every 18 months to the Council. The discussion on this report will take place in the Forum in 2023.
- 3.3. **REP.3: ERA structures:** permanent structures (EOSC, ESFRI, PKH) and the standing sub-group on international cooperation, closely coordinate with and regularly inform the ERA Forum.

Work stream 4: Communication (COMM)

- 4.1. **COMM.1: Strategy** on communicating on the ERA: the group should provide advice on a communication strategy for the ERA, at the level of the Commission and Member States, involving stakeholders and other relevant actors, including possible actions, messages, events, branding, etc.
- 4.2. **COMM.2: Exchange** of best practices: members and observers of the group could share information and best practices on their communication activities on a regular basis.

Work stream 5: Additional ERA Actions (ADD)

- 5.1. **ADD.1: New actions:** the ERA Forum is to act as a facilitator for the preparation of additional candidate ERA Actions. It will need to take into account advice from ERAC on new policy demands.
- 5.2. **ADD.2: National actions:** the Forum may also exchange best practices on national ERA policies and measures.

According to the Council conclusions on the future governance of the ERA¹, the Member States and where applicable associated countries, should identify the actions in which they wish to participate within the first semester 2022. Thus, during the first half of the year, the main focus of the discussions in the group will be

¹ 14308/21.

on the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda. Based on the explanatory documents, there will be a first round of discussion on each action until April, when ERAC will discuss the ERA Policy Agenda.

A second round of discussions with possible revisions to the explanatory documents will take place after April and conclude in June by identifying the Member States' commitment to each action. More details can be found in the tentative calendar below.

Meetings	Work stream 1 (ERA Policy Agenda)	Work stream 2 (monitoring)	Work stream 3 (reporting)	Work stream 4 (communication)
14 February	Virtual kick-off meeting, with Member States only			
First round of ERA action discussions				
25 February tbc (virtual)	EPA.1 - Preparation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action 1: Enable Open Science including through the European Open Science Cloud - Action 5: Promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness - Action 7: Upgrade EU guidance for a better knowledge valorisation - Action 9: Promote international cooperation 			COMM.1 - Strategy
4 March tbc (virtual)	EPA.1 - Preparation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action 15: Build-up research and innovation ecosystems to improve excellence and competitiveness - Action 16: Improve EU-wide access to excellence - Action 20: Support research and innovation investments - Action 6: Protect academic freedom - Action 13: Empower Higher Education Institutions - Action 17: Enhance public research institutions' strategic capacity 			
18 March tbc (virtual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action 3: Reform the Assessment System for research, researchers and institutions - Action 4: Promote attractive research careers, talent circulation and mobility - Action 8: Strengthen research infrastructures - Action 14: Bring Science closer to citizens 	MON.1 - Co-design		
1 April tbc (hybrid meeting)	EPA.1 - Preparation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action 2: Propose an EU copyright and data legislative framework for research - Action 10: Make EU research and innovation missions and partnerships key contributors to the ERA - Action 11: An ERA for green transformation - Action 12: Accelerate the green/digital transition of Europe's key industrial ecosystems 	MON.1 - Co-design		
12-13 April ERAC Plenary Strategic Debate on the ERA Policy Agenda				
Second round of ERA action discussions				
5 May tbc	EPA.1 - Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action 1: Enable Open Science including through the European Open Science Cloud 	MON.1 - Co-design		COMM.2 - Exchange

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action 5: Promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness - Action 7: Upgrade EU guidance for a better knowledge valorisation - Action 9: Promote international cooperation - Action 16: Improve EU-wide access to excellence - Action 20: Support research and innovation investments - Action 6: Protect academic freedom - Action 10: Make EU research and innovation missions and partnerships key contributors to the ERA - Action 3: Reform the Assessment System for research, researchers and institutions - Action 13: Empower Higher Education Institutions 			
June tbc	EPA.1 - Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Action 14: Bring Science closer to citizens - Action 4: Promote attractive research careers, talent circulation and mobility - Action 8: Strengthen research infrastructures - Action 2: Propose an EU copyright and data legislative framework for research - Action 11: An ERA for green transformation - Action 12: Accelerate the green/digital transition of Europe's key industrial ecosystems - Action 15: Build-up research and innovation ecosystems to improve excellence and competitiveness - Action 17: Enhance public research institutions' strategic capacity 	MON.1 - Co-design	REP.3 - ERA structures	
10 June Competitiveness Council meeting				
Final commitment regarding actions on ERA Policy Agenda				
15 July	EPA.2 - Implementation	MON.2 - Advice		COMM.2 - Exchange
23 September	EPA.2 - Implementation	MON.2 - Advice		
21 October	EPA.2 - Implementation	MON.2 - Advice		COMM.2 - Exchange
18 November	EPA.2 - Implementation	MON.2 - Advice		
16 December	EPA.2 - Implementation	MON.2 - Advice	REP.1 - Annual reports REP.3 - ERA	COMM.2 - Exchange

3. Working methods

The group should adopt the Rules of Procedure that will formally define its main working modalities. The members of the group received a draft of these in advance of the meeting, together with the Terms of Reference. To complement these formal rules, the group should reflect on the following, more detailed working modalities to guide its work.

a) Explanatory documents

The explanatory documents requested by the Council on the actions in the ERA Policy Agenda, which will provide the basis for the discussions in the ERA Forum during the first semester 2022, are uploaded and available to Member States and observers.

b) Establishment of sub-groups

The Council conclusions on the new ERA governance foresee the creation of a standing sub-group on international cooperation (in order to continue the work done by SFIC) and of a Steering Committee, consisting of the Commission and the incumbent and subsequent Trio Presidencies (which will also be constituted as a sub-group).

Additional time-limited sub-groups may be set-up for the purpose of examining the implementation of specific actions within the ERA Forum. In view of keeping the amount of meetings and workload manageable, the possible creation of sub-groups should be discussed in the Forum, and be broadly supported by members. It is not foreseen that each action will have its own subgroup.

c) Involvement of observers

In contrast to the ERA Forum for Transition, the new ERA Forum will include additional observers. This includes countries associated to Horizon Europe, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and seven representatives from EU-level umbrella organisations. The EU-level umbrella organisations are registered in an online, voluntary stakeholder register and have each designated within their group a representative.

As the first six months will focus on the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda, it is suggested that the stakeholders should participate in all meetings that are currently scheduled. At the end of the first semester, a review of the participation of observers in the ERA Forum could take place. If there is a need to discuss a matter in a closed environment, this can be examined in advance by the Steering Committee.

d) Expression of Member States' commitment to participate in an ERA action

The Council requested Member States, and where applicable associated countries, to identify within the first semester 2022 the ERA actions in which they wish to participate. The ERA Forum will need to discuss in further detail how Member States express their commitment to participate in the actions, whether doing so in the Forum is enough or if a different process is necessary.

e) Other possible clarifications

- **Minutes and documents**

There will be no detailed minutes of the work of the group but their summary and main documents will be uploaded on the Commission Registry of expert groups. Member States' representatives are expected to provide informed views, and be able to quickly check them with their hierarchy. They should be in a position to contribute to co-creation both during the Forum meetings and in-between.

- **Tools for sharing information and documents**

The group secretariat will set out the means and tools for sharing information among the members through CIRCABC and TEAMS. For the latter, we ask you to indicate your full name and country abbreviation if you register your Microsoft Teams account for the first time.

- **Information on progress**

At the request of the Council Research Working Party or of another EU body, the Commission will provide information on the progress of the work. Similar on-demand updates could be provided to ERAC by any member of the Steering Committee.