ERA Monitoring 2024

Second EU-level Report

Independent Expert Report

Read the full publication
Second 18-months-review of the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 ('EU-level Report')

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*This **EU-level report is the second 18-months review of the progress towards the priority areas for joint action in the European Research Area (ERA)**, as laid down in the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe, **and of the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda**. It is part of the ERA Monitoring Mechanism (EMM), which also includes the ERA Policy Platform with the ERA Dashboard and ERA Scoreboard as well as ERA Country Reports. The EMM allows for evidence-informed policymaking within the ERA.*

1. Purpose of the report

Covering the period from July 2023 to December 2024, this report **asseses the implementation of the ERA actions as well as the progress toward the ERA's priorities** outlined in the Pact for Research and Innovation.

Building on the first EU-level Report of 2023, the second EU-level Report **analyses achievements, challenges, and gaps in implementation the ERA**, offering evidence-based insights to inform the evolution of the ERA Policy Agenda and underpin future policy-making.

2. Key achievements

Significant progress has been made in implementing the ERA Policy Agenda and thereby achieving the ERA priorities, laying a foundation for a more cohesive, inclusive, and competitive research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem in Europe.

ERA Priority 1 "Deepening a truly functional internal market for knowledge"

Under ERA Priority 1, various initiatives have advanced the circulation and open sharing of knowledge across the EU, promoting an inclusive and resilient knowledge ecosystem (**ERA Action 1**). Key milestones include the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), which launched the EU Node as its cornerstone and introduced the Federation Handbook and EOSC Observatory. However, challenges remain regarding the long-term sustainability and integration of national solutions. 2024 ERA Scoreboard data indicates an increase in open publication rates, though disparities among Member

States persist. A study under ERA Action 2 identified barriers related to EU legislation on copyright, data, and digitalisation, proposing policy solutions to improve access to research.

ERA Action 3 has focused on reforming research assessment frameworks, broadening recognition of contributions and promoting qualitative metrics. However, deeper cultural shifts are needed for diversity and inclusion. ERA Action 5 has worked to advance gender equality and address structural barriers, while supporting the adoption of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). Additionally, under ERA Action 8 specific initiatives have been put in place to strengthen the role of Research Infrastructures (RIs) in the EU R&I ecosystem supporting their sustainability and accessibility in the longer run.

ERA Action 7 has led to greater collaboration with the European Patent Office and the EU Intellectual Property Office, promoting innovative knowledge valorisation practices. Effective implementation could maximize the societal and economic impact of research outputs. Research careers and talent circulation, fostered by ERA Action 4, have been further strengthened through initiatives like the ERA Talent Platform, the launch of the Research & Innovation Careers' Observatory, as well as a Horizon Europe pilot call to create Talent Ecosystems.

ERA Action 9 has enhanced international cooperation and science diplomacy via multilateral dialogues, Team Europe initiatives, and the European Framework for Science Diplomacy, and ERA Action 6 has focused on protecting research and preserving academic freedom through measures such as a European digital one-stop-shop platform to counter foreign interference.

ERA Priority 2 "Taking up together the challenges posed by the twin green and digital transition, and increasing society's participation in the ERA"

Under ERA Priority 2, several activities have advanced the alignment of research and innovation with EU policy objectives, addressing the twin transition and promoting stakeholder engagement to meet green and digital challenges.

ERA Action 10 is on EU research and innovation Missions and European Partnerships. Initiatives like the Mutual Learning Exercise on Missions and the five EU Mission Implementation Platforms have strengthened stakeholder engagement and laid the foundation for effective Mission frameworks. Future efforts will focus on diversified funding, integrating governance, and enhancing public engagement to maximize Missions' impact by 2030. The Partnership Knowledge Hub and the 2024 Biennial Monitoring Report have provided steering towards improved portfolio coordination, leveraging public and private co-investments, and alignment with EU and national policies.

ERA Action 12 has worked on integrating R&I with industrial policies to tackle twin transition challenges. These initiatives include a Mutual Learning Exercises on Industrial Decarbonisation and the Whole-of-Government Approach in R&I, the dissemination of the technology roadmaps for low-carbon technologies as well as strengthening the Industry 5.0 Community of Practice. Additionally, ERA Action 11, with initiatives like the Green Hydrogen Pilot and revisions to the Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan, supports green energy transformation through collaboration between policymakers, industry, and academia. However, challenges like fragmented regulations and insufficient coordination hinder the scaling of innovative technologies.

ERA Action 13 has boosted cross-border academic collaboration through the European Universities Initiative, with 64 alliances involving 560 universities and 2,200 partners across 35 countries. Despite this, sustaining these alliances post-funding is a challenge. ERA Action 14 has engaged citizens through initiatives like Plastic Pirates and the European City of Science, raising awareness of societal challenges. To further strengthen the European R&I ecosystem and bridging it with the European Education Area, long-term support for university alliances and coordinated funding schemes is essential.

ERA Priority 3 "Amplifying access to Research and Innovation excellence across the Union"

Under ERA Priority 3, several actions have advanced access to R&I excellence across the EU, focusing on synergies between Cohesion policy instruments and Horizon Europe.

ERA Action 16, through the R&I and Cohesion Managing Authorities Network (RIMA), mapped synergy implementation and identified best practices across Member States. Efforts were also made through the Horizon Europe WIDERA Pathways to Synergies programme, Excellence Hubs, ERA

Chairs, Twinning, and the Dissemination and Exploitation Support Facility. The Regional Innovation Valleys initiative, involving 148 regions, fosters collaboration based on smart specialisations to reduce fragmentation. However, these initiatives remain small-scale, and – according to the ERA Scoreboard 2024 – collaboration networks are concentrated in a few countries, such as Greece and Portugal, leaving others underrepresented.

While the RIMA network has catalysed progress, its final report highlights challenges like insufficient programme alignment and limited capacity of managing authorities to align R&I and Cohesion policy programmes. Streamlining administrative processes and improving communication on synergies are critical for future success.

ERA Action 17, primarily through Horizon Europe projects RM ROADMAP and CARDEA, has promoted excellent research management by launching a mutual learning platform and creating a network of 116 Research Managers' Ambassadors. While research management professionalisation has gained momentum, outreach to Widening Countries is needed to strengthen capacity-building.

Moving forward, addressing disparities in R&D intensity, strengthening collaboration networks, professionalising research management, simplifying funding mechanisms, and increasing institutional capacity will be crucial to ensuring more inclusive access to R&I excellence across the EU.

ERA Priority 4 "Advancing concerted Research and Innovation investments and reforms"

Under ERA Priority 4, some efforts have been made to align and coordinate R&I investments across Europe, notably through whole-of-government dialogues that encourage broader policy integration.

Increased funding for R&D, reforms in research careers, and stronger research-industry linkages have all enhanced Europe's scientific and technological capacity. Yet, reaching the 3% R&D investment target still calls for bolder measures. Overcoming regulatory barriers, dedicating a larger share of national budgets to joint initiatives, and scaling innovation procurement as a driver for demand-driven solutions is deemed essential. Instruments such as the European Semester, Structural Funds, and Seal of Excellence projects can reinforce these efforts by boosting both public and private R&D spending.

In the future, accelerating structural reforms, developing ambitious national RD&I plans backed by Structural Funds, and ensuring a more attractive and competitive R&I environment should gain further attention. Strengthening the whole-of-government approach at both national and EU levels could be a means to reduce administrative fragmentation and foster deeper policy coordination.

3. Suggestions for future ERA policy initiatives

Strengthening co-creation: Maintaining the momentum of the renewed ERA governance structure by promoting transparency, collaboration, and active participation through the ERA Forum. Tailored approaches such as expert groups and Policy Support Facility Mutual Learning Exercises can address specific issues and focus engagement towards action implementation.

Scaling the impact of the ERA Policy Agenda: Focus ERA Actions on key objectives where ERA can have the most impact, improving communication, raising visibility, and engaging stakeholders. Long-term sustainability could be supported by shifting from mainly FP-funding for the implementation of actions to longer-term, self-sustaining initiatives.

Enhancing the scope and inclusivity of the ERA Policy Agenda: Expanding the ERA Policy Agenda to better reflect the challenges and opportunities within the European R&I ecosystem. Bridging the gap between basic research, technology development, industrial applications, and societal uptake is crucial. Strengthening stakeholder participation, including industry, research organizations, regional bodies, and civil society, is essential for a comprehensive approach.

Addressing disparities among Member States and associated countries: Prioritizing efforts to reduce inequalities among Member States and associated countries, especially those facing challenges in meeting R&I targets. Capacity-building initiatives and tailored actions for less R&I-intensive regions are needed to foster inclusivity, reduce disparities, and enhance cohesion across the EU and associated countries.

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