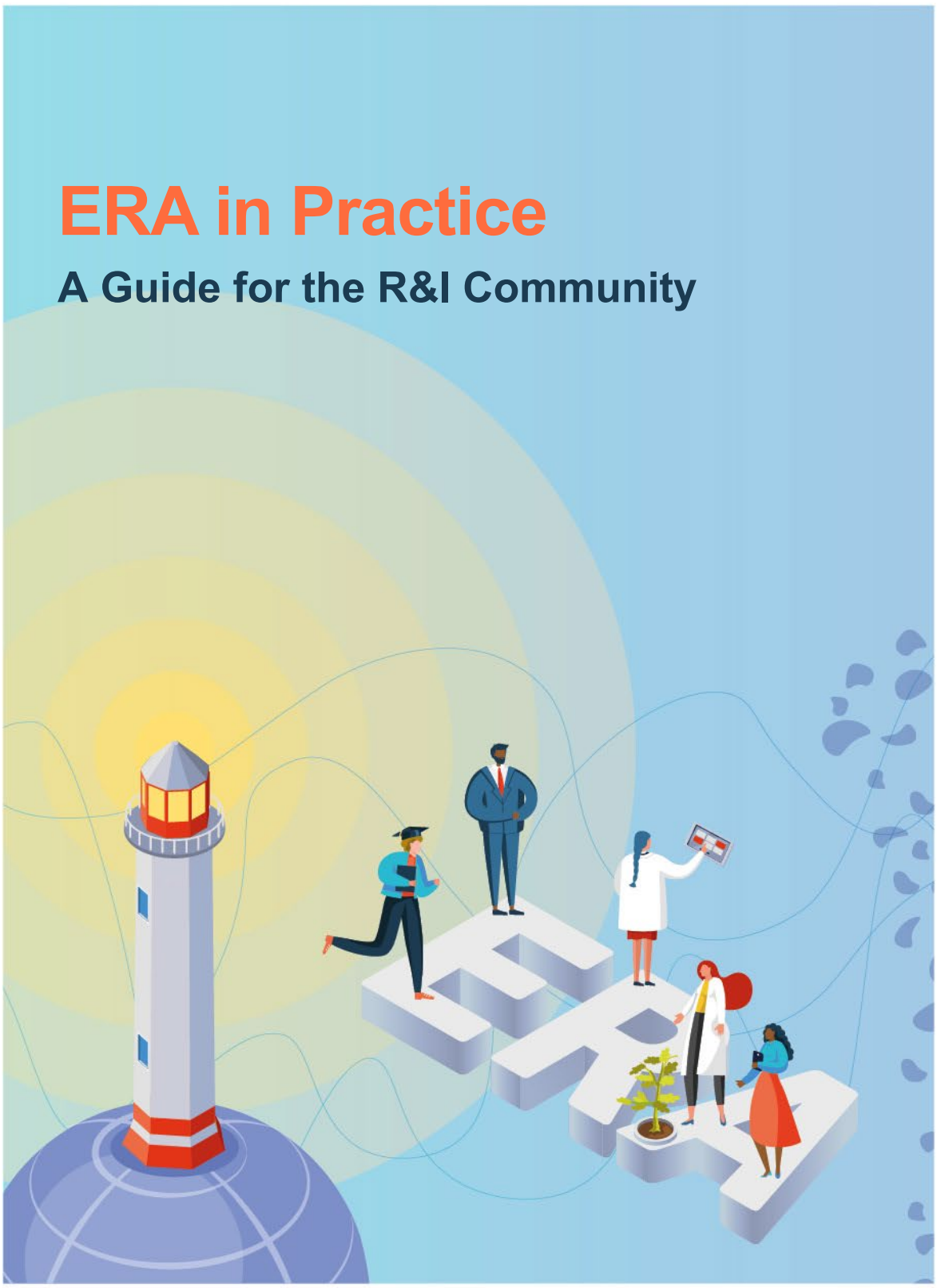
European Commission

Research and Innovation

ERA in Practice

A Guide for the R&I Community



ERA in Practice -A Guide for the R&I Community
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EUROPEAN COMMISSION

ERA in Practice

A Guide for the R&I Community

This guide was prepared by the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation with the support of the Horizon Europe project INSPIRING ERA.

Directorate-General for Research and Innovation
ERA
2026

Contents

The European Research Area in a nutshell 3

How to use this document 4

Priority Area 1: Deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge 5

1.1 Open science and copyright 5

1.2 Research careers 8

1.3 Research assessment 11

1.4 ERA values: Equality, inclusiveness & freedom of scientific research & ethics 14

1.5 Research infrastructures 18

1.6 Knowledge valorisation 21

1.7 International cooperation 24

Priority Area 2: Taking up together the green transition and digital transformation 27

2.1 Research for the twin transition 27

2.2 Public engagement in research and innovation 30

2.3 Artificial intelligence in science 33

2.4 Science for Policy 36

2.5 Higher education in the ERA 37

Priority Area 3: Enhancing access to research and innovation excellence across the Union 39

3.1 Access to excellence 39

3.2 Research management 43

Priority Area 4: Advancing concerted research and innovation investments and reforms 46

4.1 ERA monitoring 46

The European Research Area in a nutshell

What is the European Research Area (ERA)?

The European Research Area (ERA) is the ambition to ensure the free flow of research and scientific knowledge in Europe. Formally enshrined in Article 179 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), it is Europe's long-term effort to build an area without barriers to collaboration in research.

The ERA story dates to 2000, when the European Union set out a vision of a research area to address the fragmentation of efforts, to mobilise common resources and to create support for more alignment within research policy. In short, the idea to have a more genuine single market for research. The strategic objective of strengthening European integration and competitiveness through better coordination of research and innovation policies at both national and EU levels and the enhancement of Europe's attractiveness to top scientific talent worldwide remains as relevant today as it was at the initiative's inception.

What the ERA has delivered

Since its inception, the ERA has helped drive major advances in Europe's research landscape. Among the most visible examples are the development of European research infrastructures, the initiation of joint research initiatives, progress in removing barriers to researcher mobility including through EURAXESS, and stronger open and collaborative knowledge exchange.

The 'Revamped ERA' and the role of the ERA Policy Agendas

In recent years, the European Commission and EU Member States have revitalised the ERA through a realignment often referred to as the 'New ERA' and the introduction of a renewed governance framework, launched with the Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (2021). The Pact defines four overarching priorities for achieving a stronger, more cohesive ERA and provides the foundation for coordinated implementation.

This implementation is operationalised through the ERA Policy Agendas – three-year practical plans that translate shared priorities into joint work. The ERA Policy Agenda 2022–2024 and ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027 set the direction for coordinated efforts by the European Commission, Member States, Horizon Europe Associated Countries and stakeholders to advance research excellence and collaboration across Europe.

How to use this document

Both ERA Policy Agendas (2022–2024 and 2025–2027) are designed to implement the four priority areas for joint action of the Pact for Research and Innovation (2021):

1. Deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge;
2. Taking up together the green transition and digital transformation, and other challenges with impact on society, and increasing society's participation in the ERA;
3. Enhancing access to research and innovation excellence across the Union and enhancing interconnections between innovation ecosystems across the Union;
4. Advancing concerted research and innovation investments and reforms.

Taking the priority areas for joint action as a starting point, this document explores the broader themes that underpin their progress. It shows how these themes link to specific ERA actions and structural policies, highlights key achievements of the first ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024 and outlines the planned activities under the second ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027. It also showcases selected Horizon Europe projects and future funding opportunities. Finally, it illustrates how activities within each theme are designed to facilitate the work of different research and innovation actors. It was prepared with the support of the Horizon Europe project INSPIRING ERA, promoting the implementation of the ERA Policy Agendas.

For further reading on the ERA, you can use the following sources:

- **ERA Policy Platform:** Commission platform with the latest monitoring and implementation information on the ERA;
- **INSPIRING ERA:** A Horizon Europe project enabling research and innovation stakeholders to understand and put the outcomes of the ERA into practice;
- **ERA in Horizon Europe:** Brochure giving an overview on the funding in the work programme 'Widening Participation and Strengthening the ERA' (WIDERA) and its connection to the ERA.

Priority Area 1: Deepening a truly functioning internal market for knowledge

1.1 Open science and copyright

Open Science is a cornerstone of the ERA, promoting openness, transparency and reusability across the research lifecycle. By making publications, data and other outputs more accessible, it speeds up knowledge circulation, improves research quality and increases societal impact. To fully achieve this, it is necessary, among other things, to identify both existinge and new areas for measures and initiatives that can help establish an EU copyright and data framework fit for research thereby enabling the sharing, access and reuse of publications and data for scientific purposes. Europe is moving from 'closed by default' to 'as open as possible, as closed as necessary'. This transition is being accelerated by EU open science initatives, including those addressing copyright and data-related issues.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Enabling Open Science, including through the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) & Propose an EU copyright and data legislative framework for research

2025–2027: Enabling open science via sharing and re-use of data, including through the EOSC & Applying Equity in Open Science

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

Significant progress has been made in aligning open science ambitions with legal and operational frameworks:

- **EOSC EU Node launched:** The European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) EU Node offers easy-to-use tools and services to researchers and supports the interconnection of other EOSC Nodes into the EOSC Federation, a coherent and harmonised pan-European system integrating research data and services across scientific infrastructures and service providers from all over Europe.
- **Open access and FAIR data mainstreamed:** Open access to publications became the default expectation, while the FAIR principles for research data were embedded in funding requirements, data management plans and ERA-level monitoring tools.
- **Open science policies and practices effectively monitored**: through the EOSC Open Science Observatory, a pan-European monitoring mechanism with harmonised methodology and consistent data collection among more than 30 countries.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- AI4EOSC (2022-2025) – provides artificial intelligence tools for EOSC data services;
- FAIR-IMPACT (2022-2025) – implements FAIR data principles across the EOSC;
- DataGEMS (2025-2027) – explores data discovery and management platform to make datasets discoverable, combinable and explorable.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

Open Science and EOSC are consolidated as long-term structural policies, with the focus shifting decisively from pilots to implementation and sustainability. Key priorities include:

- Operationalising the EOSC Federation as a core ERA infrastructure through durable governance, deep integration of national and thematic EOSC nodes and strong uptake by researchers;
- Making lawful sharing, access and reuse the default via measures, better guidance, clearer licensing and interoperability of publications, data and software; identify areas for legislative and non-legislative measures to ensure an EU copyright and data framework fit for research;
- Professionalising data stewardship and supporting upskilling in open science and FAIR practices;
- Aligning EU and national strategies and funding to provide predictable conditions for institutional investment in repositories, services and skills;
- Introducing the new ERA action 'Applying Equity in Open Science'.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- AEGIS OA (2026-2028) – aiming to establish an equitable, transparent, sustainable, and high-quality open access scholarly publishing ecosystem in Europe by leveraging and expanding the services of the European Diamond Capacity Hub;
- EOSC-Focus (2022-2025) – supports the implementation and consolidation of the EOSC;
- EOSC Data Commons (2025-2028) – contribute to establishing EOSC as the European Research Commons;
- IP4OS (Intellectual Property for Open Science, 2025-2026) – foster a coordinated approach to agile intellectual property (IP) management and open science practices, the initiative will develop a Synergy Framework featuring best-practice recommendations, which will be shared through an awareness-raising campaign;

- HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-06-ERA-01: Pillar I: Accelerating open access and research assessment reforms in ERA. Area “Transition of scholarly societies to non-profit open access publishing models”;
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-06-ERA-01: Pillar I: Accelerating open access and research assessment reforms in ERA. Area “Quality, efficiency and equity in peer-review for scientific publishing”;
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-06-ERA-02: Pillar I: Building institutional capacities for ethical, equitable, open, and inclusive ERA. Area “Equity and inclusion in capacities for Open Science”.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- The EOSC EU Node provides cloud services - virtual machines, interactive notebooks, bulk data transfer - for data-intensive cross-border research. - FAIR principles, embedded in Horizon Europe data management plans, give researchers a stable European baseline for data sharing across project partners.	- Aligning institutional repositories with EOSC Federation standards lets universities participate in a shared European Open Science infrastructure. - The professionalisation of data stewardship under the 2025–2027 Agenda will give institutions a European reference for creating dedicated FAIR and Open Science staff roles.	- Mainstreamed FAIR and open access rules in Horizon Europe Grant Agreements give grant offices a single compliance baseline, while dedicated data steward roles take technical implementation off their desk. - A Mutual Learning Exercise on challenges and good practices in applying equity in open science provides for peer-learning and policy development.

1.2 Research careers

Research careers are a core component of a strong and competitive European research and innovation system. Spanning disciplines, sectors, and career stages, they underpin excellence, mobility, and the long-term sustainability of the ERA. Yet despite their value, research careers still face structural challenges: fragmented pathways, precarious employment conditions, limited mobility, and insufficient recognition of careers outside academia, and of diverse skillsets. Addressing these issues is essential to make research careers more attractive and sustainable, and to strengthen Europe's research and innovation potential.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Promote attractive research careers, talent circulation and mobility

2025–2027: Making research careers more attractive and sustainable, and support mobility

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

Concrete progress on research careers and talent circulation was achieved by combining a shared EU framework with practical support tools, stronger evidence, and mutual learning for national implementation:

- **Political commitment and direction affirmed:** The Council Recommendation on a European Framework to Attract and Retain Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurial Talents (18 December 2023), accompanied by a new European Charter for Researchers, sets an EU-wide framework to attract, support and retain talent.
- **The ERA Talent Platform (2024) launched:** The platform improves visibility, coherence and accessibility for researchers, employers and policymakers, as a single-entry point to key European instruments for research careers:
    - **EURAXESS** - web portal with information on jobs, funding, and career development for European research jobs, as well as practical support like visas, relocation, and family assistance;
    - **HR Excellence in Research** - The HR Excellence in Research award is given to institutions and funding organizations that work to make their policies for researchers match the principles of the European Charter for Researchers;
    - **RESAVER** - a Europe-wide pension scheme for research and innovation organizations and their staff. It helps mobile researchers safeguard their pension rights while supporting organizations in attracting and managing talent across Europe;
    - **ResearchComp** – As Europe's Competence Framework for Researchers, it helps researchers identify and develop transferable skills, opening up more career opportunities and supporting movement between different sectors.
- **Understanding trends in research careers across Europe:** The Research and Innovation Careers Observatory (RelCO) (2024) was jointly set-up by the

European Commission and the OECD with Horizon Europe resources. The observatory is a central hub for tracking trends in research talent, including researchers' careers, skills, and working conditions.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- DocTalent4EU (2023-2025) – leveraged the ESCO framework to create an innovative system for recognising the most sought-after transferable skills, and introduced a digital credentials system;
- SECURE (2022-2025) – developed and piloted the Research Career Framework (RCF), a practical toolbox for research-performing and research-funding organisations to reform research careers and reduce the precarity of researchers at their organisations;
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2024-ERA-02-03: Talent ecosystems for attractive early research careers – pilot – support consortia to create 'talent ecosystems' with a large pool of research and innovation positions operating under good training and working conditions, in line with the new Charter for Researchers and the Council recommendation on a European framework for research careers.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

The ERA action shifts from framework-setting to implementation and reform of research careers, focusing on a small number of high-impact priorities:

- Co-created guidelines for implementing the Council Recommendation on research careers;
- Establishment of a community of practice to strengthen research careers at European, national, regional, and organisational level;
- Recommendations for career development and progression, including tenure-track-like models;
- Co-created investment pathways to reduce precarity and support non-academic careers.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- ARCOE (2025-2028) – establish a virtual talent innovation ecosystem hub to offer training, networking, and career development opportunities;
- CROSS (Career Management Services for European Talents, 2025-2028) – mainstream principles designed to promote career interoperability and organisational change through tools, such as a mentoring handbook;
- NextTechTalents (2025-2027) – create integrated talent ecosystems to help early-stage researchers navigate diverse career path.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- ResearchComp gives researchers a shared vocabulary for transferable skills, supporting CV work, career transitions, and intersectoral moves. - The ERA Talent Platform provides researchers with a single-entry point for career, mobility and pension services.	- The revised European Charter for Researchers provides a reference for aligning institutional HR policies and recruitment standards. - The forthcoming tenure-track-like model recommendations will give institutions a European reference when redesigning early-career progression structures.	- ReICO provides EU-OECD career-trend data for HR planning, internal monitoring and institutional reporting. - The community of practice on research careers enables peer exchange on implementing reforms across European institutions.

1.3 Research assessment

Assessment frameworks influence what is valued and rewarded in research-performing and research-funding organisations. In many cases, reliance on a narrow set of quantitative indicators has raised concerns about misaligned incentives and the limited recognition of diverse research contributions. Reforming research assessment promotes more qualitative, transparent and context-sensitive approaches that better reflect the diversity of research activities and address challenges related to transparency, comparability and fairness. In doing so, research assessment reform plays a central role in strengthening the ERA.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Reform the assessment system for research, researchers and institutions

2025–2027: Reforming research assessment

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

The reform of research assessment has been driven forward through the following:

- **The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA) established:** It brings together more than 800 research-performing organisations, research funders and other stakeholders committed to change how research, researchers and research organisations are assessed. At the core of this work is the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA), which sets out shared principles and commitments for reform. A growing number of organisations from across Europe and beyond have endorsed the Agreement and developed over 250 institutional action plans aligned with its commitments.
- **Implemented through CoARA's bottom-up community structures:** Thematic working groups and national chapters provide the space for organisations to exchange experiences, address concrete implementation challenges and adapt reform approaches to disciplinary, institutional and national contexts.
- **Targeted cascade funding supporting implementation in practice:** Through the CoARA Boost project, organisations receive direct support to pilot and advance concrete changes to research assessment systems, helping to translate shared principles into operational reforms.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- **CoARA Boost** (2023-2026) – enhance CoARA's capacity, support innovative approaches to research assessment, generate a critical mass for reform, attract new members, and secure additional funding through a cascade funding programme;

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- OPUS (2022-2025) – develops approaches to reform research assessment systems.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

The focus will be on supporting the practical implementation and strengthening supportive consolidation across research systems:

- Activities focus on helping research-performing and research-funding organisations translate the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment into concrete changes in assessment criteria, tools and processes;
- CoARA continues to provide a platform for exchange across organisations and countries, while also supporting reflection on progress made, remaining challenges and gaps in implementation;
- Continued cascade funding in the context of CoARA Boost supports organisations in advancing and scaling concrete reform measures.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-01: Accelerating open access and research assessment reforms in ERA: Sustainable institutional reforms to improve research assessment systems.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- Reduced pressure to chase high-impact-factor venues lets researchers choose journals on substance, not citation metrics. - Qualitative assessment practices let researchers document mentoring,	- ARRA provides a ready-made reform framework, institutions can adapt peer action plans instead of designing assessment policies from scratch. - CoARA Boost cascade funding supports institutional reform	- CoARA working groups produce concrete tools for research assessment reform, such as assessment criteria, narrative CV formats, evaluator training, and monitoring indicators.

open science and societal engagement alongside traditional publications.	directly (grants of €30,000–€60,000 for pilot, teaming and change projects).	- CoARA national chapters connect institutions within a country, enabling coordinated reform and shared implementation practices.

1.4 ERA values: Equality, inclusiveness & freedom of scientific research & ethics

A research and innovation system people can trust is one where everyone can contribute and benefit - and where researchers can work freely and safely. In the ERA, progress on gender equality and broader inclusiveness goes hand in hand with safeguarding academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Together, these conditions help attract and retain talent, improve research quality, and protect the integrity of knowledge creation and international cooperation.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness & Protect academic freedom in Europe

2025–2027: Strengthening gender equality and inclusiveness in the ERA, notably with an intersectional approach & Enhancing research security & Developing a coherent and coordinated framework for a European approach to integrity and ethics in R&I in the face of emerging challenges

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

Concrete progress on equality, inclusiveness and freedom of scientific research was achieved through ERA-level cooperation, enabling countries and stakeholders to develop shared tools, common approaches:

- **Gender Equality Plans (GEP) uptake:** The GEPs are formalised policies that establish priorities, concrete objectives and measures on gender equality and inclusiveness in research institutions. Since 2022, they are a requirement to participate in most Horizon Europe calls. The project INSPIRE is a leading initiative providing practical guidance for inclusive gender-equality plans.
- **Addressing gender-based violence**: The Zero-Tolerance Code of Conduct developed with representatives of Member States, associated countries and stakeholders provides a common framework and guiding principles to help create a European research and innovation environment free from gender-based violence, grounded in equality, inclusiveness, respect and safety.
- **Shaping research and innovation outcomes relevant for the whole society:** A guidance document, designed for national authorities and research and innovation funding organisations, provides policy recommendations to ensure the effective implementation and evaluation of the integration of the gender dimension into research and innovation content, using an intersectional perspective.
- **Tackling foreign interference:** Member States participated in a mutual learning exercise on foreign interference in research and innovation. The practical guidance on risk mitigation was published by the Commission in 2022 to provide information on practices to mitigate foreign interference risks. In addition, the following study provides a first overview of the factors shaping researchers' autonomy and institutional independence. It highlights gaps between law and practice, identifies pressures that limit scientific freedom, as a first step toward developing further measures.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- UniSAFE (2021-2024) – provided EU-wide data about prevalence and developed tools to counteract the gender-based violence;
- GenderSAFE (2021-2024) – strengthens institutional policies to address gender-based violence;
- GENDERACTIONplus (2022-2025) – worked with national authorities and research funders to advance gender equality policy.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

Efforts to promote long-term, system-wide gender equality and inclusiveness will be reinforced. New ERA actions have been introduced to create a European framework for research integrity and ethics and to improve research security:

- **Gender equality and inclusiveness** becomes a structural policy, elevating it from a one-off ERA action to a long-term priority with the aim to drive sustained change across European research and innovation systems. The focus will be on:
    - Development of guidelines, principles and approaches;
    - Continuation of tasks with an emphasis on implementation, monitoring and evaluation, covering (1) inclusive gender equality plans, (2) gender dimension in research and innovation content, (3) gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, (4) mainstreaming gender and inclusiveness in other ERA activities;
    - New areas of focus include (1) intersectional policies in research and innovation, (2) budgeting and expenditures' tracking.
- The **research security action** aims to establish a European Centre of Expertise, to organise biennial conferences and monitoring, to offer peer learning and guidance on safeguards and due diligence (including foreign interference), and to enhance international collaboration. The Research Security Monitor 2025 provides a first baseline for further policy development.
- Work around developing a **coherent European approach to integrity and ethics in research and innovation** will focus on creating a European coordination structure to connect existing networks, developing a detailed roadmap of actions and performance indicators, practical guidelines and toolboxes, as well as a pilot joint training programs. Find out more previous Horizon Europe project results here.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-06-IBA: Policy Coordination to support gender equality and inclusiveness in the ERA;
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-06-ERA-08: Advancing Knowledge for ERA;
- HORIZON_HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-06-ERA-02: Pillar I: Building institutional capacities for ethical, equitable, open, and inclusive ERA.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- The Zero-Tolerance Code of Conduct sets a common European framework against gender-based violence, - Risk mitigation guidance on foreign interference helps researchers vet international partners and identify problematic collaborations early. - Guidance and training on ethics and integrity in research (definitions, concepts like ethics-by-design, academic integrity) and a revised European Code of Conduct will be developed. - Self-evaluation tools on academic integrity for students, teachers, researchers and managers support	- Gender Equality Plans are an eligibility requirement for most Horizon Europe calls, which makes an institutional gender strategy no longer optional. - The forthcoming European Centre of Expertise on Research Security gives institutions a coordinated reference for safeguards and due diligence. - Materials and technical support will give guidance in organising institutional training programmes on research ethics and integrity, including Train-the Trainer sessions - New operational tools to prevent and handle research integrity breach cases (for	- Common European approaches to gender equality and research security give grant offices a single set of evaluation criteria and compliance safeguards to apply across calls. - The INSPIRE project provides practical templates for designing, updating and monitoring inclusive Gender Equality Plans across institutional units. - A European coordination platform offers a (resourced) space for networking, dialogue, peer learning, exchange practices, among countries and stakeholders. - Updated guidance for ethics self-assessment of EU funded project

institutional quality assurance and continuous improvement.	example AI use and misuse cases, anonymised cases) are provided. - National registries of contact points, reporting channels/procedures for research integrity are developed.	proposals and guidance notes on key topics, for example, AI use in research, cybersecurity, fundamental rights and AI, environmental ethics, social sciences and humanities will be available.

1.5 Research infrastructures

Research infrastructures form the backbone of Europe's scientific endeavour, providing researchers with access to world-class facilities, resources, and services that enable excellence and collaboration across borders and disciplines. By supporting cutting-edge research, innovation, and evidence-based solutions to societal challenges, they play a central role in strengthening the ERA. Yet, despite their strategic importance, research infrastructures face ongoing challenges related to long-term sustainability, disparities in access, and the need to continuously adapt and upgrade their technical capabilities, growing demands on data, and evolving user needs.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Strengthen Research Infrastructure (ERA Action 8)

2025–2027: Strengthening sustainability, accessibility and resilience of research infrastructures in the ERA

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

Major achievements from the Commission, together with ESFRI include:

- ESFRI Landscape Analysis 2024 **published**: The Landscape Analysis provides an overview of the European research infrastructures ecosystem by identifying the main research infrastructures operating transnational access in Europe, in all fields of research, and major new or ongoing projects.
- Revised European Charter for Access to Research Infrastructures (2024) **adopted**: The updated Charter provides guiding principles for how research infrastructures should structure and implement access policies, with emphasis on open science, FAIR data principles, user-centric access, and research security considerations.
- ESFRI Activity & Funding reports **released**: The reports outline accomplishments, landscape insights, and engagement across Member States.
- **ESFRI's research infrastructure Landmark Monitoring Reports have been published (2022 - 2024)**: This is an ongoing exercise in ESFRI, in order to ensure the continuous excellence of the ESFRI Landmarks (research infrastructures that have started their operational phase and are actively providing services).
- Report on the ERIC framework **adopted:** This third report on the implementation of the ERIC Regulation provides an overview of the state of play of the ERICs, identifies key opportunities for the ERICs to provide social and economic benefits to Europe and its citizens and discusses remaining challenges and potential solutions for an effective financing and operation of the ERICs.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- ENVRINNOV (2024-2026) – aims to co-design, test, and validate a common innovation roadmap, including through analysing ENVRI (European network of

environmental research infrastructures) services, defining innovation strategies, and engaging with ESFRI and research and innovation ecosystems;

- ERIC Forum 2 (2023-2027) – enhances cooperation between the ERICs, ERA and ESFRI through four thematic pillars: (1) improving monitoring, (2) strengthening governance, (3) improving regulation implementation and (4) fostering international cooperation;
- INFRAPLUS (2024-2027) – enhances INFRAFRONTIER's capacity, refine its service portfolio, reduce animal usage and develop state-of-the-art in vitro models while maximising resource use efficiency;
- RITIFI (2023-2025) – enhanced the structure and integration of research infrastructures and technology infrastructures into European research and innovation, by developing innovative frameworks that improves end-user access, formulating plans for enhanced policies and investments.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

The now long-term, embedded policy approach in the form of a structural policy adds:

- Long-term EU strategy for research and technology infrastructures, adopted in September 2025. The strategy sets out a comprehensive approach to strengthen this ecosystem, ensuring that infrastructures remain world- class, more accessible, and better aligned with the needs of scientists, innovators and industry. This policy outcome also benefited from input from action 16;
- The ESFRI Roadmap 2026 is currently under development (concluding in December 2026), and preparation of key elements for the 2028 Landscape Analysis to steer future priorities;
- ESFRI impact assessment (2027) to critically reflect on the Forum's achievements and challenges through a comprehensive impact assessment;
- Report on Resilience and Greening of Research Infrastructure foreseen for 2027.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- PACRI (2025-2029) – aims to develop novel energy-efficient plasma accelerator systems with high repetition rate ultrafast laser components for compact research infrastructures;
- RE-MADE@ARI (2022-2027) – aims to serve as a central hub for the development of new materials for a circular economy and coordinate access to several dozen European analytical research infrastructures;
- RIFF (Research Infrastructures for the Future of Ukraine: Roadmap for Sustained Growth and Recovery, 2025-2028) – strengthens Ukraine's research and innovation system by developing a Ukrainian roadmap of research infrastructures;

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:
- TRICUSO (2025-2028) – advances sensing technologies on robotic floats and uncrewed vessels and improves data access for scientists.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- The ESFRI Roadmap helps prioritizing national investments in pan-European cutting-edge research infrastructures. This supports reinforcing the infrastructure ecosystem in creating world-class services for the researchers, ranging from university level laboratories to national facilities and pan-European facilities. - The European Strategy on Research and Technology Infrastructures sets key future directions for those working with research infrastructures, for example, on topics, such as (1) attracting and developing talent from managers and technical specialists to scientific leaders and innovators; (2) facilitating and improving access so that scientists, researchers, and innovative companies including startups and scaleups have more opportunities to use cutting-edge facilities and services across Europe; (3) reinforcing the ecosystem by investing in building critical new capacities; (4) strengthening international cooperation and resilience focused on critical research data.		
- **Trans-national and virtual access to research infrastructures:** List of ongoing projects funded that open research infrastructures to transnational/virtual researchers/users.	- **ERIC Forum Toolkit:** Answers practical questions relevant to ERICs and includes various documents and templates that can be used as inspiration or as an example of a best practice.	- **RItrain Learning Platform:** Training resources for research infrastructures managers.

1.6 Knowledge valorisation

Knowledge valorisation is central to a well-functioning internal market for knowledge. It turns research results into societal, economic, environmental and policy value through processes beyond traditional technology transfer, emphasising co-creation and collaboration among diverse research and innovation actors. The ERA Monitoring shows progress towards broader valorisation, but persistent gaps remain. These refer to the need to upscale capacities and activities in order to accelerate uptake of results by the market and society.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Upgrade EU guidance for better knowledge valorisation

2025–2027: Upscaling knowledge valorisation capacities and activities

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

Knowledge valorisation moved from a fragmented set of practices to a coherent approach across Member States, combining a shared policy framework with practical implementation guidance and targeted support:

- **A shared European framework for knowledge valorisation established:** Council Recommendation on the Guiding Principles for Knowledge Valorisation (December 2022) sets out a shared European framework for bridging the gap between research outputs and real-world use and supports a strategic approach through 4 Codes of Practice: (1) Intellectual Assets Management (2023), (2) Standardisation (2023), (3) Industry–Academia Co-creation (2024), and (4) Citizen Engagement for Knowledge Valorisation (2024).
- **Stakeholders across Europe connected:** The EU Knowledge Valorisation Platform serves a central hub for guidance, resources, tools, best practices. Knowledge Valorisation Talks on emerging trends and innovative ways to apply research findings and the annual Knowledge Valorisation Week (2021-2023) were held.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- **CO-VALUE** (2024-2026) – integrate citizen engagement into knowledge valorisation;
- **EU.FFICIENT** (2024-2026) – boost co-creation via structured training and networking for expert facilitators;
- **HSbooster.eu** (2022-2025) – offer automated, proactive and premium services that enhance standardisation results from European-led initiatives;
- **IAM4RE.eu** (2025-2027) – create flexible learning materials, including training packages, an online course (MOOC), and a train-the-trainer programme to help people across Europe improve their skills in using and sharing research effectively.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

There will be a shift from providing guidance towards supporting capacity building and activities to promote knowledge valorisation:

- The structural policy will aim at maximising the impact of research and innovation for market, society and policy through enhancing skills, strengthening intermediaries, and promoting socially responsible licensing;
- It will seek to bridge gaps between research, industry and society through multidisciplinary collaboration and fit-for-purpose monitoring frameworks to ensure Europe fully capitalises on its research and innovation investments;
- Innovative approaches and new pilot actions will test and refine methodologies for engaging academia, industry, end-users and societal actors, providing more effective ways to valorise research results to meet market demands and societal needs;
- BOOSTER targeted services to EU-funded projects to strengthen valorisation planning and increase the use and uptake of research results, the European IPR Helpdesk supporting IP management and valorisation and the Horizon Results Platform showcasing outcomes and connecting innovators with potential users.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- CL4-INDUSTRY-2025-01-HUMAN-63:- Value creation pilots for scaling up innovative solutions (CSA);
- WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-01 - Rolling out the ERA Policy Agenda results: Area 4 and 5 Establish a European network of knowledge valorisation intermediaries and Upgrade services of Knowledge and Technology Transfer professionals in universities and research performing organisations;
- CL4-2026-01-MAT-PROD-41 - enhance industry-academia knowledge exchange in Social Sciences and Humanities;
- CL4-2027-01 MATERIALS PRODUCTION-42 - Unlocking the potential of academic intellectual assets for industry, SMEs and startups (CSA).

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- BOOSTER services give project teams free expert support to	- The four Codes of Practice (intellectual property,	- The EU Knowledge Valorisation Platform consolidates tools,

move research results toward market and societal uptake. - Through IAM4RE training packages and open online courses on valorisation skills can be built up alongside ongoing research work. - The IP Helpdesk supports researchers and project teams in IP management and valorisation	standardisation, industry–academia co-creation, citizen engagement) provide ready-made frameworks for institutional valorisation strategies. - Support ecosystem (intermediaries such as NCP-IP and experienced actors) supporting knowledge valorisation implementation.	case studies and templates that were previously scattered across multiple sources. - Mutual Learning Exercises on valorisation provide grant offices with comparative national approaches that can be adapted to institutional procedures.

1.7 International cooperation

While the world has become more interconnected, conducting international research cooperation has become more complicated. Geopolitical tensions, trade restrictions, technology-transfer concerns and diverging regulations increasingly hinder the free flow of knowledge. The EU still champions open, reciprocal cooperation as key to competitiveness and tackling global challenges, but must balance this openness with protecting its values, strategic interests and research integrity. The European strategy 'Global Approach to R&I' promotes intelligent cooperation based on reciprocity, mutual benefit and shared values, under the principle of open strategic autonomy.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Promote international cooperation

2025–2027: Implementing the Global Approach to R&I

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

The EU fosters international cooperation based on reciprocity and promotes rules-based multilateralism through the following initiatives:

- **The Global Approach to Research and Innovation strategy (2021) adopted**: It sets common principles of openness, multilateralism, reciprocity and protection of EU strategic interests. It is a shared European position on research integrity, ethics, freedom to publish, Open Science practices, researcher mobility and security, while supporting dialogue with international partners.
- **Team Europe pilots launched:** Cooperation with China is pursued through EUKNOC 2.0, the EU R&I Knowledge Network on China, which has proven to be a valuable platform for Member States, stakeholders, and experts to exchange information and experiences and to promote a coordinated approach. For research and innovation cooperation with Africa, a drafting team was set up under the standing ERA Forum sub-group in 2022 and, as a first step, developed an operational framework for a potential Team Europe pilot.
- **Multilateral engagement and science diplomacy strengthened:** Through new global and European research networks such as EU Science Diplomacy WG, and through work towards a European Science Diplomacy Agenda to professionalise external engagement via research and innovation were intensified. The Global Gateway initiative linked research and innovation partnerships with development cooperation, supporting capacity building in low- and middle-income countries in response to global challenges.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- **ALMASI** (2025-2027) – aims to build a free, non-profit Diamond Open Access ecosystem across Europe, Africa and Latin America;
- **EuroHub4Sino** (2023-2026) – aims to bridge gaps of European expertise on contemporary China;

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- **MSCA4Ukraine** (2022-2027) – provides support to displaced researchers from Ukraine through dedicated fellowships;
- **WorldFAIR** (2022-2024) – promotes FAIR data principles and learning through selected case studies and global cooperation.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

The focus will lie on a more effective, coordinated approach in research and innovation with partner countries to avoid duplication, maximise impact and address global challenges:

- Completing the European Science Diplomacy Framework provided Member States and research organisations with coordinated approaches to international engagement by setting out the state of the art, mission, objectives, values and recommended strategic, operational and enabling instruments for more coherent and strategic EU action globally;
- Expanding strategic partnerships through Team Europe Initiatives scaled bilateral cooperation, cooperation with Associated Countries like Western Balkans or Turkey, and regional cooperation with Latin America or Africa;
- Promoting reciprocity and level playing field meant translating 'reciprocity' into practice by ensuring European researchers enjoyed equivalent access to partner countries' programmes and facilities, supported by compliance monitoring that advanced European interests and values in global cooperation while preserving the openness of science, guided by 'open strategic autonomy'.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- HORIZON-CL2-2025-01-DEMOCRACY-02 – Fostering the consolidation of European science diplomacy, establish a European Science Diplomacy Platform, develop mechanisms for training and capacity-building;
- HORIZON-CL2-2026-01-DEMOCRACY-06 – Governing global commons sustainably - develop multi- and interdisciplinary concepts and solutions for governing the global commons sustainbly, including through the use off science diplomacy.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- Under a secure, values based Global Approach, researchers and project leaders can partner with leading groups worldwide for complementary skills, infrastructures and perspectives. - Team Europe initiatives open structured cooperation channels in Africa, the Western Balkans and Latin America for joint projects.	- Institutional reputation can be built globally by engaging strategically through Team Europe and bilateral partnerships to raise visibility, attract talent and cohost international research hubs. - International partnerships can be utilized to strengthen research culture and competitiveness.	- Science diplomacy and bilateral frameworks create clear entry points to non-EU systems, enabling easier brokering of partnerships and joint grants. - Compliance monitoring on reciprocity will provide grant offices with a reference for vetting non-EU cooperation agreements.

Priority Area 2: Taking up together the green transition and digital transformation

2.1 Research for the twin transition

The green and digital transitions are two major shifts shaping the future. While the twin transitions can support each other, they may also conflict, for example, digital technologies can have significant environmental impacts. Research plays a key role in developing integrated approaches to manage the twin transition, in line with the European Green Deal's goal of a climate-neutral, sustainable, and competitive EU by 2050. Activities within the ERA build on the experiences of existing coordination initiatives, such as the Strategic Energy Technology Plan, and leverage Horizon Europe and its instruments, including Missions and European Partnerships.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Make EU research and innovation missions and partnerships key contributors to the ERA & An ERA for green transformation & Accelerate the green/digital transition of Europe's key industrial ecosystems

2025–2027: Making the SET plan a key thematic component of the ERA & Accelerating R&I investments for Europe's industrial transformation and competitive sustainability

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

By connecting policymakers, industry, and academia, ERA activities support Europe's transition to low-carbon energy and innovation leadership in research through:

- **A revised framework for clean energy innovation**: The Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan, a key instrument for accelerating clean energy technologies, aligns research and development with climate neutrality goals. It focuses on digitalisation, circularity, and skills development.
- **Setting common priorities in green hydrogen:** In the ERA Pilot on Green Hydrogen, countries cooperate to make energy systems more climate-friendly using Green Hydrogen. It also defined a new Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA).
- **Working towards the climate neutrality of cities:** The Mission NetZeroCities aims to deliver 100 climate-neutral and smart cities by 2030 and ensure they serve as innovation and experimentation hubs, enabling all European cities to follow by 2050. By funding research and demonstration projects, the mission promotes low-carbon solutions in energy, mobility, buildings, and digital infrastructure, fostering collaboration among cities, industry, researchers, and citizens to accelerate Europe's transition to a sustainable, climate-neutral future.
- **Bringing together European innovation ecosystem stakeholders**: The Industry 5.0 Community of Practice engages over 200 members to share best practices and create implementation actions.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- **Bridges 5.0** (2023-2026) – maps emerging Industry 5.0 jobs and skills, addresses skill gaps through training, and engaging stakeholders via a dedicated Industry 5.0 platform;
- **SEISMEC** (2024-2027) – supports a human-centric and ethical development of digital and industrial technologies in 17 pilots in 19 companies from 14 countries across 14 industrial ecosystems;
- **SET4H2** (2024-2026) – promotes integrated approaches and coordination to advance Europe's hydrogen future.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

Successfully shaping and managing the twin transition remains one of the European Commission's priorities for the ERA. Important outcomes include:

- The SET Plan as a key strategic component of the ERA through
  - Alignment of Strategic Research & Innovation Agendas and Common Implementation & Investment Plans;
  - Policy recommendations for integrating circularity, digitalisation, skills, and societal needs into the SET Plan;
  - Improved monitoring through the SET Plan Information System.
- Research and innovation investments for Europe's industrial transformation and competitive sustainability will be boosted through, for example:
  - Improved understanding of industrial research and innovation needs - have a look at the seven new factsheets, mapping decarbonisation pathways for steel, cement, ammonia, pulp & paper, aluminium, ceramics and glass);
  - Contributing to the European policy on Research and Technology Infrastructures;
  - Contributing to the European monitoring platform for technologies and industrial demonstrators.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- HORIZON-CL4-INDUSTRY-2025-01-HUMAN-64 – pilot initiatives on technology infrastructures (CSA);
- HORIZON-CL5-2027-02-D3-08 – co-funding Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan renewable fuel value chains at EU, national, regional, and local level;

- HORIZON-CL5-2027-02-D3-09 – Innovative technologies and solutions to improve wave and tidal energy systems.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- Real-world industrial pilots and test beds give research teams deployment environments for digital and clean-tech innovation (e.g. SEISMEC). - Mission NetZeroCities makes 100 European cities available as living labs for low-carbon mobility, energy and buildings research.	- Access to research, technology and innovation services for industrial users such as SMEs, startups, and scaleups will be facilitated through a Charter of Access to Research Infrastructures.	- The Industry 5.0 Community of Practice provides a platform for sharing best practices on Industry 5.0, co-creating implementation actions, and fostering collaborations to adapt organizational models to the ongoing green and digital transition.

2.2 Public engagement in research and innovation

Public engagement in research and innovation lies at the interface between research excellence and societal relevance. It helps research organisations connect scientific work with citizens' concerns, strengthens trust in science and improves the uptake of research results through co-creation and participation. Under the first ERA Policy Agenda, the focus was on piloting and scaling practical initiatives, notably youth-focused citizen science and city-scale engagement formats, and on consolidating lessons learned through mutual learning.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Bringing Science Closer to Citizens

2025–2027: Enhancing trust in science through citizen participation, engagement and science communication

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

Practical progress was delivered through a small set of concrete, visible initiatives and supporting policy learning. The purpose was to empower citizens and local communities, promote engagement and trust in science, and support co-creation to ensure societal uptake of scientific solutions. This included:

- **Plastic Pirates – Go Europe!:** A youth citizen science campaign, Plastic Pirates encourages students to collect samples on plastic pollution from streams, rivers and coastal areas to share their findings. The data was published openly so others can reuse it, and a short 12 lessons learned document summarised what helps (and what gets in the way) when scaling a citizen science campaign to the EU level.
- **Bringing science activities to the city:** In 2024 Katowice was the European City of Science, a continuous programme of '50 Weeks of Science for the Society'. Katowice also hosted the European Union Contest for Young Scientists (EUCYS), bringing together young scientists between 14 to 20 years old, and EU TalentOn, a competition for young researchers representing all disciplines.
- **Collaborative learning from national experiences:** Two Mutual Learning Exercises brought several countries to identify good practices and find lessons learned. One focused on citizen science: how to set up the basics, keep initiatives running, and plan for growth; and one on public engagement: how to make engagement part of normal research and innovation practice.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- COALESCE (2023-2027) – builds the European Competence Centre for Science Communication;
- IMPETUS (2022-2026) – runs an accelerator to fund and recognise high-impact citizen science;

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- ScienceUs (2024-2026) – upscales citizen-science best practices.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

The structural policy adds the following outcomes:

- EU-wide inclusive engagement guiding principles (standard-setting): There is a shift from showcasing initiatives to codifying common approaches for public engagement in research and innovation and science communication, intended to be reusable across countries and organisations (namely, a shared baseline for 'how to do it' inclusively);
- A move from 'projects' to 'local engagement ecosystems': The structural policy explicitly adds activities that connect and strengthen local research and innovation communities, supported by a European community of practice on trust in science, with multiple stakeholder groups and citizens around science and its role in society, and enhance scientific literacy - with an explicit inclusion goal (reaching young people and people not habitually involved in science);
- New mechanism and funding scheme to scale up best national citizen participation and engagement practices to the EU level, and a mutual learning exercise on trust in science to consolidate knowledge on how to build, measure and enhance trust through public engagement.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-05: Fostering citizen engagement for more responsible and democratic R&I;
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-07-ERA-07: Science Comes to Town 2028;
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-04-ERA-04: Promoting public engagement in R&I and scientific literacy.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- Tested EU-level engagement formats (Plastic Pirates, Katowice 50 Weeks of Science) provide project teams with reusable set-ups instead of designing new ones from scratch. - The forthcoming inclusive engagement guiding principles will give researchers a shared baseline for reaching under-represented audiences.	- The ERA shift from one-off engagement projects to local engagement ecosystems anchors stable partnerships with schools, city actors and civil society. - An EU funding scheme will scale national best practices to European level — opening a route for institutions to mainstream successful pilots.	- Mutual Learning Exercises on citizen science and public engagement deliver points to consider for setting up, sustaining and growing initiatives. - A Learning Exercise on trust in science will provide procedural references for measuring and managing engagement outcomes.

2.3 Artificial intelligence in science

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly shaping how research is conducted, from data analysis and modelling to discovery processes across scientific disciplines. In science, AI is both a powerful tool and a systemic challenge, raising questions about reliability, transparency, skills, infrastructure and responsible use. Successful adoption of AI in science requires more than technological uptake. It depends on appropriate research practices, access to high-quality data and computing resources, relevant skills and competences, and shared approaches that safeguard research integrity and scientific quality. Uptake of AI in science is being actively shaped at European level - so that speed and experimentation go hand in hand with responsibility, quality and trust.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: continuous topic discussed within the ERA governance

2025–2027: Facilitating and accelerating the responsible use of AI in science in the EU

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

Key European-level frameworks support the responsible use of AI in scientific research, offering expert guidance, practical tools, and shared learning to clarify conditions and provide concrete direction for the research community:

- **Input from independent scientific experts was incorporated:** The Scientific Advice Mechanism (SAM) published Recommendations on the responsible uptake of AI in science, setting out key enabling conditions for AI use in science, including skills, data availability, computing infrastructures and appropriate governance arrangements, with a strong focus on safeguarding scientific quality, integrity and trust.
- **Joint development of living guidelines:** The guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research were created together with the European Commission, ERA countries and stakeholders. The guidelines and accompanying factsheet provide practical, actionable recommendations for researchers, research organisations and research funding organisations on the responsible use of generative AI.
- **Collaborative learning from national experience:** The mutual learning exercise on national policies for AI in science has enabled exchange between Member States on approaches, challenges and policy responses related to the use of AI in scientific research.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

With the introduction of AI in science as a new ERA action for the period 2025–2027, the focus is on strengthening a coherent approach to the responsible use of AI in scientific research:

- Providing a shared European orientation for AI in science through the European AI in Science Strategy, clarifying how AI can support scientific discovery while addressing risks related to reliability, transparency and research integrity;

- Resource for AI Science in Europe (RAISE): identifying ways to pool resources to boost the potential of AI to support scientific discovery;
- Strengthening coordination and exchange across research communities, supporting cooperation and mutual learning across disciplines, institutions and countries to address shared challenges related to AI use in science.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- HORIZON-CL4-INDUSTRY-2025-01-DIGITAL-61 – AI Foundation models in science (GenAI4EU);
- HORIZON-CL4-INDUSTRY-2025-01-DIGITAL-62 – Facilitated cooperation for AI in Science (CSA);
- HORIZON-RAISE-2026-01-01 – Thematic Networks of Excellence for AI in Science (RAISE pilot) ;
- HORIZON-RAISE-2026-01-03 – RAISE Doctoral Networks for AI in Science (RAISE pilot);
- HORIZON-RAISE-2027-01-01 – Automated Scientific Discovery (RAISE pilot).

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- The living guidelines on generative AI in research provide key principles and recommendations for the responsible use of generative AI tools, including on accountability, transparency, privacy, intellectual property rights and reproducibility. - RAISE doctoral networks and thematic networks of excellence will open structured AI-in-science training	- The European AI in Science Strategy gives institutional leadership a coordinated reference for AI investment, infrastructure and governance decisions. - SAM recommendations on responsible AI uptake outline the enabling conditions (skills, data, computing, governance) that institutions should consider.	- The living guidelines provide a reference for handling generative AI use in funding applications and evaluation processes, as well as in own internal processes, with a focus to ensure accountability, integrity, and reduce risks.

and collaboration channels.	- The living guidelines provide recommendations on good practices to enable the responsible use of AI by the researchers.	

2.4 Science for Policy

Scientific knowledge and evidence are essential tools for policymakers as they help identify policy challenges, evaluate alternative interventions and design effective solutions. Yet the structures, skills and incentives to translate research into actionable policy advice remain unevenly developed across European countries. As policy challenges grow more complex, the demand for systematic, trusted science for policy processes, practices, and structures has increased.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:
2025–2027: Advancing the European Science for Policy (S4P) ecosystem

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

The ERA Policy Agenda 2025–2027 introduces Science for Policy as a dedicated ERA action with the aim of strengthening evidence-informed policymaking across the ERA:

- The agenda foresees the establishment of a Network of Science for Policy National Correspondents across Member States and associated countries to enable structured dialogue between national administrations, stakeholders and the European Commission;
- A peer-learning forum for Science for Policy practitioners (Community of Practice), fostering skills, competences and collaboration in Science for Policy work across governance levels and sectors, including peer learning on bridging the gap between research and policy advice;
- A structured stocktaking instrument in form of a European Science for Policy Observatory by 2027, compiling success factors, common challenges and good practices to provide an evidence base for future policy development on the science–policy interface.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-06-ERA-06 - Strengthening of the European Science for Policy Ecosystem.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- By aligning research with policy needs, scientists make sure their work addresses pressing societal or environmental problems and can increase their impact.	- Supporting science-for-policy initiatives strengthens the universities' strategic positioning, fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, and boosts the institution's reputation as a leader in evidence-based solutions to real-world challenges.	

2.5 Higher education in the ERA

Connecting higher education's core missions - education, research, innovation, and societal engagement - strengthens quality and impact across the board. The ERA actions have provided a European framework to better articulate research and education, share best practices, and boost collaboration for greater societal and scientific benefits. They aim to fully exploit potential of European Research & Innovation ecosystems by truly interconnecting Higher Education Institutions and research and innovation actors. In addition, they highlight the important role of European universities in driving the green and digital transition.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:
2022–2024: Empower Higher Education Institutions
2025–2027: Improving the articulation between R&I and higher education within the ERA and unleashing the full potential of European R&I ecosystems

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

- **Policy approach on future EU level support for higher education institutions developed:** The ERA Forum sub-group on 'Universities for ERA' guided the implementation of action 13 by developing an Action Plan with coordinated recommendations for EU and Member States. Its work has shaped funding and policy decisions, aligning Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ initiatives, with twelve projects selected in 2023 and activities starting in early 2024.
- European Universities Initiative **expanded:** An EU program launched to strengthen and integrate higher education across Europe. Its goal is to create transnational alliances of universities that work closely together on education, research, innovation, and societal engagement. In practice, universities form alliances of 3–10 institutions from different EU countries, share curricula, develop joint degrees, and collaborate on research and innovation projects.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ACCESS-03-01/European Excellence Initiative – to improve science and value creation by promoting diverse collaboration among higher education institutions, and with other actors in local ecosystems, as well as to boost Europe's universities by establishing a strong presence in key areas;
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2022-ERA-01-51/Acceleration Services in support of the institutional transformation of Higher Education Institutions – to help institutions successfully implement a strategy and roadmap for transformation, by creating a shared knowledge base, coaching services and virtual meeting place for them to connect with peers and other ecosystem actors, as well as with investors and public funders.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

The action continues to foster awareness and reinforce the articulation between research and education through thematic workshops, working on the following outcomes:

- Recommendations for designing and implementing strategies at institutional, regional, national and European level;
- Identification of principles for developing the "fifth freedom" and potential contribution by HEIs and Research Performing Organisations;
- Strategies and incentives to foster stronger partnerships between HEIs and R&I actors;
- Ambitious roadmap for strategic alignment between the ERA and the European Education Area.

Examples of relevant Horizon Europe projects:
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2025-01-ACCESS-01/European Excellence Initiative – raise excellence in science and in value creation through deeper and geographically inclusive cooperation in alliances of higher education institutions.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- Through better complementarity between research, innovation and higher education frameworks, researchers can access more diverse career pathways, including beyond academia with industry and regional innovation actors. - A better articulation should also translate into smoother cross-border collaboration and fewer institutional barriers to joint research activities.	- A governance framework and community of exchange for university leaders to engage with policymakers and research and innovation actors in shaping the mechanisms and incentives that determine how their institutions are positioned within national and European research and innovation systems.	- The expected policy recommendations and tools for cross-sectoral strategies should provide clearer guidance for navigating this landscape, while the emphasis on reducing fragmentation should simplify the funding environment within which support offices operate.

Priority Area 3: Enhancing access to research and innovation excellence across the Union

3.1 Access to excellence

Access to excellence helps level the playing field for researchers, universities and innovators across Europe, from established Western hubs to emerging ecosystems in Central and Eastern Europe. A persistent innovation divide still holds back talented institutions in some Member States because of underinvestment, weaker networks and research management, and limited links to EU programmes. Addressing it requires structural reforms and much closer alignment between funding instruments, particularly Horizon Europe and the European Regional Development Fund, , with synergies between funding streams as a core priority.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Improve EU-wide access to excellence

2025–2027: Improve EU access to excellence

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

In the ERA action 2022-2024, a comprehensive package of practical instruments and support mechanisms specifically designed to build capacity in widening countries and forge lasting European partnerships was designed:

- **Cooperation between national R&I authorities and R&I-supporting cohesion programmes (ERDF) strengthened:** A Research & Innovation and Cohesion Managing Authorities' Network (RIMA) was set up to bring together the research and innovation authorities and Managing Authorities dealing with research and innovation topics in cohesion policy. The report 'European Synergies of Funds', containing a mapping of synergies, a collection of good practices, challenges and recommendations.
- **New instruments for synergies created**: New tools strengthen funding by supporting interfaces ('Pathways to Synergies' call under WIDERA).
- **Widening flagship instruments further established**: Teaming, Twinning and Excellence Hubs are flagship instruments to build centres of excellence in widening countries, strengthening institutional capacity, international networking and regional innovation ecosystems through strategic partnerships, staff exchanges, joint research and place-based collaborations aligned with smart specialisation priorities.
- **Institutional networks supported:** The European Excellence Initiative (EEI) strengthens university research and innovation, especially in widening countries, by supporting institutional networks to deepen strategic cooperation, accelerate reforms and build critical mass for green and digital transitions, while advancing ERA priorities, research careers, assessment reform, knowledge valorisation and links with economic and industrial partners.

Example of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- Pathway to Synergies (2023 call) – to help move formerly single beneficiaries of regional funding programmes out of isolation via cross-border collaboration and prepare them for participation in Horizon Europe calls.
- Teaming for Excellence (2024 call) – create new or modernise existing centres of excellence in Widening countries through strategic partnerships with leading institutions abroad.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

A greater emphasis is put on how to promote best practices of cross-authority collaboration to strengthen EU innovation ecosystems, on the dissemination of information on Widening actions relevant for cohesion authorities as well as on Interregional Innovation Investment and Regional Innovation Valleys,on the use of dissemination and exploitation tools as well as recent developments in innovation procurement, and on discussing how linkages can be facilitated in the context of the future National and Regional Partnership Plans.

- There is a shift from piloting tools and structures to implementing, monitoring and mainstreaming access-to-excellence measures across programmes;
- Elevating access to excellence from a time-limited action to a long-term structural policy, recognising that barriers and synergies are systemic and need sustained attention;
- Deepening cooperation between funding authorities by expanding research and innovation cohesion collaboration into a structured RIMA platform, focused on recommendations, governance models and data-driven approaches;
- Strengthening regional and national initiatives by encouraging complementary measures, exchanges of good practices and better access to scientific and innovation networks, beyond the original Widening instruments;
- Linking directly to framework programme 10-design by tying access-to-excellence work to the design of the next Framework Programme, ensuring coherent, synergistic investment with Cohesion Policy from the outset.

Example of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-03-WIDENING-01: Hop-On Facility;
- HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-01-WIDENING-01: Teaming Synergies.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- Making use of the Seal of Excellence can avoid unnecessary duplication of work by beneficiaries and MAs when submitting, evaluating and selecting operations for ERDF support: - Member States, regions and beneficiaries can apply the HE categories, maximum amounts and methods of calculation of eligible costs benefiting from simplifications of applicable EU State aid rules (the GBER). - The HE technical/content evaluation is considered valid. This means that the MA of an ERDF programme does not need to perform a new one. MAs only need to check that those projects meet CPR and ERDF specific requirements not covered by the HE evaluation (i.e. special eligibility (SMEs in difficulty), contribution to alternative funding programme objectives, applicable enabling	- Teaming (with ERDF) modernises research centres into flagship hubs attracting talent and funding. - The Hop-on Facility enables institutions to join high-quality Pillar 2 and EIC Pathfinder consortia after projects start, helping overcome limited networks. - 'Pathway to Synergies' support helps move formerly single beneficiaries of regional funding programmes out of isolation via cross-border collaboration and prepare them for participation in Horizon Europe calls	- The Seal of Excellence helps highly rated but unfunded Horizon proposals secure ERDF or regional funding instead of being lost. - Making use of transfers can enable excellent HE proposals from a Member State/region to participate in HE when budgetary constraints would otherwise prevent them from being selected for HE support. Transfers can add value when they are directed towards research and innovation areas that have been identified as priorities in national and/or regional S3 and that are typically heavily over-subscribed in HE calls. A potential benefits is to strengthen participation in HE by beneficiaries from regions/Member States that have traditionally had a low participation and success rate in HE; - Combined funding under Teaming actions can become

conditions, and scope of the fund). - Twinning and Teaming connect researchers in widening countries with leading EU institutions for joint projects, expertise and infrastructure access. - NCP_WIDERA.NET strengthens applicant support through training, peer learning and brokerage travel grants for cross-border consortium-building.		an influential and meaningful bridge particularly between S3 and excellence in research and innovation.

3.2 Research management

Research management is a mutlifaceted field, driving the ability of both research-funding and research-performing organisations to design, implement and sustain high-quality research and innovation activities in an increasingly complex environment. Strong research management capacity is a key enabler of excellence, competitiveness and inclusiveness within the ERA. Yet, despite their significance, research managers frequently operate behind the scenes, often navigating barriers like limited professional recognition, uneven access to training and expertise across regions.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Enhance public research institutions' capacity

2025–2027: Empowering R&I: a new era in research management

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

Important groundwork has been laid by building a European-wide community of research managers and introducing the first tools at European level through the first ERA action (see factsheet).

- **A catalogue of best practices collected**: '75 success from the Research Management Community' (2025) showcases concrete examples of how research managers support research quality, international collaboration and innovation. A video series highlights the diversity and impact of research management roles.
- **Free-open access training resources provided:** CARDEA Academy gives access to free training resources for research managers at all career stages. It supports professional development and promotes greater convergence of standards for research management across Europe.
- **Rooted in the efforts of the bottom-up community**: Community-building played a central role throughout 2022-2024, including through the creation of a regional and national ambassador network as well as the co-creation of a future roadmap, setting a shared vision for the future development of the profession.

Example of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- CARDEA (2022-2026) – strengthens the recognition of research manager careers in Europe.
- RM Roadmap (2022-2025) – establishes a pan-European network of research managers to create a bottom-up consensus on the future of research management;
- RM Framework (2025-2027) – develops several research management training programmes in collaboration with various universities and stakeholders, including an RM Project Management Handbook and a future European quality label for research managers.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

Building on the past achievements, the focus in this period continues to be on recognition, upskilling, networking, and capacity building. Important outcomes include:

- The **Research Manager Competence Framework (RM Comp)** (2025) defines key skills and knowledge areas for research management, giving consistency across roles and institutions. It supports career development for professionals and helps organisations align their HR strategies and research support structures with European standards.
- Evidence-based awareness and information events in Member States showcase the results and added value of the first ERA Policy Agenda tools and strengthen the recognition of research management at leadership and policy levels.
- A centralised online hub to collect training and upskilling materials, improving visibility and accessibility of existing resources will be launched.

Example of relevant Horizon Europe projects:

- Research Management Facility (HORIZON-WIDERA-2026-05-WIDENING-01);
- ERA Research Managers (HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-02-WIDENING-02);
- ERA Chairs (HORIZON-WIDERA-2027-02-WIDENING-01).

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- Improvements in research management lets researchers focus on research rather than carrying proposal preparation, reporting and compliance themselves. - RM Comp can help identify competence gaps in research teams and help build	- RMComp gives institutions a European standard for embedding research management into HR strategies, career paths and governance. - Support for institutional reforms and evidence of impact through concrete examples (e.g. “75 Success Stories from the Research	- CARDEA Academy provides free training resources for research managers at every career stage, with consistent European-level standards. - The European community established under RM Roadmap, with regional and national ambassadors, connects managers across institutions for peer exchange.

organisational capacity.	Management Community.	- The RM Framework Handbook supports training providers in developing research management training programmes.

Priority Area 4: Advancing concerted research and innovation investments and reforms

4.1 ERA monitoring

Under the renewed ERA, the ERA Policy Agenda sets priorities for research and innovation. The ERA Monitoring Mechanism (EMM) is essential to track progress of ERA actions against the objectives and goals set, inform policy adjustments, promote accountability and transparency and support evidence-based decision-making. In short, monitoring ensures that ERA ambitions are measured, lessons are drawn from experience, and their impact is maximized.

The policy area relates to the following ERA activities:

2022–2024: Establish an ERA Monitoring system

Achievements under the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024

Through a co-creation process, the monitoring architecture was established, and the first complete set of monitoring outputs were produced.

- **Benchmark at EU-level established:** The first ERA EU-level Report 2023 provided an 18-month review of progress towards the four Pact priority areas at EU level, covering January 2022 to mid-2023, and was positioned as a baseline for subsequent EU-level monitoring.The second ERA EU-level Report covered the period from July 2023 to December 2024.
- **Progress at national level assessed:** The EU-level report is complemented by ERA Country Reports, produced for all EU Member States and for several Horizon Europe Associated Countries, documenting progress in implementing the ERA Policy Agenda.
- **Key indicators collected:** The ERA Scoreboard and ERA Dashboard were published. The monitoring design distinguishes an EU-level indicator set (Scoreboard) from a more detailed national-level indicator set (Dashboard).
- **Bringing it together in one place:** The ERA Policy Platform was launched in January 2024 as a repository of current ERA policies, activities, and achievements, with a public part, sharing the latest news and info, and a closed area, where Member States, stakeholders and the Commission can exchange information.

What is new in the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027?

The Council Recommendation on the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 reinforces that Member States should exchange information on ERA actions and progress, notably via the ERA Policy Platform, and reiterates a monitoring set-up centred on the ERA Scoreboard, regular ERA monitoring reports, ERA country reports, and the ERA Policy Platform. The Council Recommendation also emphasises the the European Semester policy coordination process, which provides in-depth analysis of national research and innovation systems and country-specific recommendations for research and innovation reforms and investments,

as well as the support given to Member States through the Horizon Policy Support Facility for improving research and innovation policy making and identifying reform pathways.

How does this help different actors in the research system?

For researchers and project leaders	For deans, institute directors and university leaders	For research managers and grant/funding support offices
- The ERA Scoreboard and Dashboard place national research and innovation trends in an EU comparative context across all ERA priorities. - The ERA Policy Platform consolidates policies, reports and updates into one searchable reference point. - Platform, including EU-level and country reporting products	- A stable indicator structure enables institutions to benchmark internal reforms and investment priorities against documented EU-level patterns. - EU-level reports and country reports provide shared references for institutional dialogue with ministries and funders.	- Reduces duplication by reusing existing data sources where possible (e.g., Eurostat, OECD and other monitoring frameworks), while highlighting where data gaps still affect reliability. - Supports structured reporting and internal briefing by combining quantitative monitoring (indicators) with qualitative information sources used in ERA reporting.

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The European Research Area (ERA) aims to create a Europe where researchers can collaborate freely across borders. The ERA Policy Agendas for 2022–2024 and 2025–2027 set out shared activities for the European Commission, Member States, Associated Countries and stakeholders to work on this ambitions together. This document brings these priorities and achievements together, highlights future goals, and showcases Horizon Europe projects supporting ERA in practice.

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