

Agenda point 3: “Exchange of views on the next ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027”

Why this topic in ERAC?

Following the adoption of the Pact for Research and Innovation (R&I) in Europe and the Council Conclusions on the future governance of the European Research Area (ERA) in November 2021, the implementation of our joint vision for a revitalised ERA was set up quickly: The values, principles and priorities for R&I in the Union were translated into the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024, outlining a list of concrete ERA actions. Their implementation, with both short- and long-term perspectives, started promptly and is regularly discussed and guided by the ERA Forum. In other words: ERA has picked up speed; the engine room works well.

Supported and coordinated by the engine room, considerable efforts are made and resources invested to implement the ERA Policy Agenda at European, national and regional levels. Stakeholders are involved in a comprehensive way at all levels to achieve substantial and tangible progress. The new ERA governance has created a momentum that deserves to be upheld.

The current ERA Policy Agenda will be followed-up by the next edition covering the years 2025-2027. The ERA Forum has already started its discussions about the concept of future ERA actions as well as the structure and content of the next ERA Policy Agenda, considering lessons learned from the current one. While the detailed examination of the ERA actions and the possible introduction of new ones will continue in the ERA Forum, it is now the moment for ERAC to assess if the on-going activities are fit for purpose to deliver on our overall ambitions set out in the Pact for R&I and to address the broader political context and global challenges Europe is confronted with.

What guidance would be needed?

1. Identifying the ERA actions for the next ERA Policy Agenda:

At this stage, ERAC is asked to provide its views on the following two issues: first, the approach for identifying the ERA actions in the next ERA Policy Agenda; second, the proposed introduction of a policy narrative.

Based on the experience of implementing the first ERA Policy Agenda, both the ERA Forum and ERAC share the assessment that the number and complexity of actions should be reduced. This would facilitate the implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda and help tackle the main obstacle of implementation at national level, i.e. lack of staff and resources (see st10029-rev01.en23;

Background note on the ‘National implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda 2022-2024: State of play with regard to national policy vehicles’, discussed at the ERAC meeting in Lund).

The Council Conclusions on the future ERA governance outline three criteria for ERA actions: relevance, viability and commitment. On 25 May 2023, the ERA Forum agreed on several characteristics of an ideal ERA action that could help to rationalise their number by complementing the first two criteria, relevance and viability. These characteristics include: (1) the need to bring a clear added value at national and European level; (2) to have a focus on results: succinct deliverables, tangible outcomes and time limitations; (3) to have self-standing actions with one main activity, which should not be made more complex through sub-actions; (4) constant co-creation between Member States, Commission and stakeholders; and (5) variable geometry.

The early start of the discussions about the next ERA Policy Agenda allows for time to identify and design the future ERA actions before the adoption of the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 in the Council. For this purpose, explanatory documents on each ERA action will be drafted in cooperation with the ERA Forum. This way, it can be ensured that the actions follow the criteria of relevance and viability as well as the additional characteristics mentioned above. The outcome of this co-creation will be that the concrete topics and envisaged implementation modalities of ERA actions are clarified well in advance of their adoption.

2. ERA policy narrative:

To elaborate on the linkages between the priorities enshrined in the Pact for R&I and the concrete ERA actions, a policy narrative could be introduced in the next ERA Policy Agenda. Such policy narrative could serve as a ‘compass’ for the implementation of the next ERA Policy Agenda. It will help policymakers and stakeholders steer the ERA actions into the intended direction. As discussed with the ERA Forum, the following elements are suggested for this policy narrative:

- **Addressing Political Context and Global Challenges:**
 - Focused on the next three years, the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 addresses the broader political context and global challenges Europe is confronted with. It recognizes newly evolved needs for research and innovation and fits well together with the EU Framework Programme (FP) for Research and Innovation.
 - The Pact for R&I identifies 16 broad priority areas to be implemented by the ERA Policy Agenda. The next ERA Policy Agenda needs to focus on a limited number of Pact priority areas that address the policy challenges that have been identified.
 - The ERA Policy Agenda 2025-27 acknowledges the interplay between research and innovation. It recognizes that the ERA Policy Agenda and the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA) should be complementary.

- **Continuation of Pact Priority Areas and link to ERA Policy Agenda 2022-24:**
 - The ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 builds upon the achievements of its predecessor, ensuring continuity and alignment with the priority areas of the Pact for R&I. Actions from the first Policy Agenda that are still ongoing are recognised, monitored and linked to the new agenda, in particular as many of these are about putting a solid foundation in place to achieve our ERA ambitions.
- **Achievements:**
 - Provide examples of achievements in the implementation of ERA actions that have already delivered: such as the adoption a Council recommendation on the guiding principles for knowledge valorisation (action 3); the proposal for a framework on research careers (action 4); or the establishment of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment – COARA (action 3).
 - Highlight the benefits of the new ERA governance and how its components interact:
 - ERA Forum: increased cooperation and co-creation between Member States, stakeholders, associated countries and the Commission through continuous dialogue in the ERA Forum and, where relevant, its subgroups;
 - ERAC: more room to provide guidance on issues of strategic relevance.
- **Lessons learned from the implementation of the current ERA Policy Agenda:**
 - The next ERA Policy Agenda needs to consider lessons learned so far, in order to have a clearer understanding of the dynamics and uptake of individual ERA actions, facilitating decisions on the continuation of exiting actions or the creation of new actions.
 - Elements of the ERA monitoring mechanism that are being put in place can be used for this purpose: EU-level reports, country reports, a scoreboard, a dashboard and a dedicated ERA Policy Platform. This monitoring system will be further developed during the implementation of the second ERA Policy Agenda.
- **Prioritising investment and reforms**
 - The ERA Policy Agenda 2025-27 recognises the importance of sufficient investment in research and innovation, at national and EU-level, to address the priorities set out in the Pact for R&I.
- **Links to other ERA governance bodies:**
 - The ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 should highlight the crucial role of the existing ERA governance bodies: the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI), the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC), and the Partnership Knowledge Hub (PKH).
- **Engagement of the broader community to successfully implement the ERA actions:**
 - Recognizing the importance of effective communication and expanding the circle of actors to a wider range of stakeholders and the broader ERA community to raise awareness of the ERA's objectives, achievements, and societal impact. This includes communication efforts at EU and national level and openness to relevant partners to contribute to the implementation of the ERA Actions in the Second ERA Policy Agenda.

Questions for the exchange of views:

1. Identifying the ERA actions for the next ERA Policy Agenda: Do you agree with the suggested approach?
2. ERA policy narrative:
 - a. Do you support the introduction of a policy narrative in the next ERA Policy Agenda? If so, which elements should be addressed in the narrative?
 - b. Should the policy narrative for the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 highlight certain global challenges or certain policy objectives, and if yes which ones?

Follow-up in ERAC

The outcomes of this exchange of views will be considered in the further preparatory work for the future ERA Policy Agenda. As regards the timeline, ERAC is invited to reflect on the next steps. The next debate in ERAC could be foreseen for the plenary meeting on 25-26 March 2024. An ERAC Opinion on the next ERA Policy Agenda could then be adopted by mid-2024. Subsequently, the Commission could table a proposal for a Council Recommendation on the next ERA Policy Agenda in early 2025.