

Policy Brief

No.1 November 2022

The European Research Area Policy Agenda

This policy brief explains what the European Research Area (ERA) Policy Agenda is and provides information about the actions specified in the first ERA Policy Agenda (2022-2024). It explains why it is relevant for Horizon Europe WIDERA applicants as well as for National Contact Points.

In 2020, the European Commission and the Member States agreed on a new governance of the ERA. The ERA Policy Agenda forms an important pillar of the new ERA governance. It is a strategic

instrument that allows the Member States and the European Commission to join forces and align their efforts to achieve the ERA goals and ambitions, and Horizon Europe as the EU's most power- and impactful funding programme for research and innovation plays a key role in this. The ERA programme part in particular is expected to significantly contribute to further enhancing the ERA along the current policy priorities and the ERA Policy Agenda actions.

The **NCP_WIDERA.NET** is the network of National Contact Points (NCPs) for the Horizon Europe programme parts *Widening participation and spreading excellence* – the WIDENING part – and

Reforming and enhancing the European research and innovation system – the ERA part. Both programme parts together are called WIDERA for short.

Why this is relevant for WIDERA applicants and NCPs

The ERA policy priorities determine the goals and scope of the WIDERA call topics, and the ERA Policy Agenda defines the specific fields of action and the concrete objectives to realise this overarching ambition. The ERA Policy Agenda therefore directs the planning and designing of calls in this programme part, in particular the ERA part, which supports the various efforts to strengthen the ERA with its funding. The WIDENING part also contributes to achieving ERA ambitions in particular but not exclusively with regard to improving access to excellence as an ERA priority and as an action of the first ERA Policy Agenda.

The first [WIDERA work programme](#) to fully reflect the new ERA governance is the Work Programme 2023-2024.

Almost all topics are linked to one or several concrete ERA Policy Agenda actions, i.e. the results of projects funded under the WIDERA programme are expected to contribute to one or several ERA Policy Agenda actions. The ERA Policy Agenda will guide the actions over the next years, especially in the ERA part.

- Information about the concrete ERA Policy Agenda actions is relevant to guide and advise applicants as the ERA policy agenda provides context and background for expected outcomes and scopes of call topics.
- Applicants are well-advised to gather information on relevant ERA Policy Agenda actions to better understand the policy context of the call topic of interest.

The ERA Policy Agenda – background and development

Politics on regional, national and European level are striving to shape the ERA into a single borderless market for research, innovation and technology across the EU. From its launch in the year 2000, the central aim for the ERA was

the free movement of researchers, knowledge and innovation, to enable better cross-border cooperation, to build critical mass, and to enhance international competitiveness.

ERA priorities

The new ERA will

- prioritise investments and reforms in research and innovation,
- boost market uptake,
- strengthen the mobility of researchers and the free flow of knowledge and technology,
- improve access to excellence.

In the WIDERA work programme, the call topics of the ERA part are assigned to one of the four priorities of the new ERA.

A number of recent policy developments underline and renew these ambitions for the ERA, setting out new ERA goals and priorities. In 2020, the

European Commission adopted a [Communication on A New ERA for Research and Innovation](#) which outlined a new vision for the ERA, followed by

[Council Conclusions on the new ERA](#) in December 2020. By the end of 2021, the Council had adopted Recommendations on the [Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe](#), which calls on the Commission and the Member States to develop an ERA policy agenda and a multi-level governance model capable of delivering on the new ERA.

The Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe (2021) – a non-binding initiative – set out commonly agreed values and principles and

identified the areas where Member States jointly develop priority actions – from open science to knowledge valorisation. A common ERA policy agenda was proposed as a new coordination instrument in support of the common principles and ERA priorities set out in the Pact. The joint ERA Policy Agenda was meant to be clear and actionable, defining and describing each action with a view to its implementation.

The ERA Policy Agenda actions

The first [ERA Policy Agenda \(2022-2024\)](#) comprises 20 specific actions. The actions are implemented jointly by the Member States and the European Commission in cooperation with stakeholder organisations and with countries associated to Horizon Europe, where applicable.

To best coordinate the various efforts to achieve the shared ERA ambitions, a co-creation process on the agenda and the implementation planning was set up involving the European Commission and the

ERA Forum and also the Horizon Europe Programme Committee configuration on *Widening participation and strengthening the European Research Area*.

For all these 20 actions, outcomes and milestones have been defined to allow for the best possible coordination. Sub-groups under the ERA Forum as well as a ‘sponsorship’ approach with Member States shall help to ensure shared responsibility and ownership.

The ERA Forum

The group is tasked with supporting the implementation and monitoring of the ERA Policy Agenda and the further development of the agenda and its actions. The ERA Forum is an informal expert group of the European Commission that provides expertise and advice in the preparation, implementation, monitoring and further development of the ERA Policy Agenda.

The group is co-chaired by the European Commission and the Member States and comprises representatives from Member States’ authorities responsible for research and innovation. Representatives from countries associated to Horizon Europe, from the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee as well as from European Stakeholder Organisations are involved as observers, ensuring close coordination and cooperation between all actors.

In 2021, the preceding ERA Forum for Transition helped to bring the new ERA governance to life and kick-started the work on the ERA Policy Agenda.

Member States as well as stakeholders and associated countries have expressed their commitment to the actions of the first ERA Policy Agenda.

Planned activities related to all 20 ERA Policy Agenda actions will be implemented, among others, through ERA Calls.

The ERA Policy Online Platform, scheduled to launch in 2023, will provide information on the design and implementation of the concrete actions as well as on relevant activities of the Member States, the Commission, and the stakeholders, thereby tracking the progress towards achieving the new ERA goals and ambitions.

The 20 ERA Policy Agenda actions 2022-2024 and their expected outcomes:

1. Enable the open sharing of knowledge and the re-use of research outputs, including through the development of the European Open Science Cloud

- Deploy Open Science principles in synergy with other relevant ERA actions and identify Open Science best practices by the various communities to progressively make Open Science 'the new normal'
- Deploy the core components and services of EOSC, federate existing data infrastructures in Europe and develop community frameworks for interoperability of research data and quality control of EOSC resources
- Establish a mechanism to collect data and investments, policies, digital research outputs, open science skills and infrastructure capacities related to EOSC and link it to the ERA Monitoring Mechanism

2. Propose a EU copyright and data legislative and regulatory framework fit for research, with two main outcomes

- Identify barriers and challenges to access and reuse of publicly funded R&I results and publications and data for scientific purposes, and identify potential impacts on research, through an analysis of relevant provisions under EU copyright and data legislation and related regulatory frameworks, and of relevant institutional and national initiatives
- Propose legislative and non-legislative measures to improve the current EU copyright and data legislative and regulatory frameworks

3. Advance towards the reform of the Assessment System for research, researchers and institutions to improve their quality, performance and impact, with following expected outcomes

- The creation of a coalition of European research funders and research performers who agree on a new approach for research assessment, following wide and inclusive

consultations at European and international level

- An implementation plan of the coalition to roll-out the new approach, including pilots in different domains
- An analysis of legal and administrative barriers at national and trans-national level for a modern research assessment system

4. Promote attractive and sustainable research careers, balanced talent circulation and international, transdisciplinary and inter-sectoral mobility across the ERA, with three main sets of activities

- Development of a comprehensive European framework for research careers
- Exchange of best practices and mutual learning on the use of the European Competence Framework for Researchers, on inter-sectoral mobility as well as on balanced circulation of talents in Member States
- Support measures to improve attractiveness of research careers in academia and beyond, including an observatory on research careers, an ERA Talent Platform (reinforcing EURAXESS)

5. Promote gender equality and foster inclusiveness, with four interlinked outcomes

- Develop a policy coordination mechanism to support all aspects of gender equality through inclusive Gender Equality Plans and policies, and a dedicated EU network on their implementation
- Strategy to counteract gender-based violence including sexual harassment in the European R&I system and to assure gender equality in working environments through institutional change in any research funding or performing organisation
- A policy approach to strengthen gender equality, that addresses gender mainstreaming to advance the new ERA

- Develop principles for the integration and evaluation of the gender perspective in research and innovation content in cooperation with national Research Funding Organisations

6. Deepening the ERA through protecting academic freedom in Europe, with two main strands:

- Facilitate the development of a policy approach to safeguard academic freedom in Europe
- Support for recognising and tackling R&I foreign interference

7. Upgrade the EU guidance for a better knowledge valorisation

- Develop and endorse Guiding Principles for knowledge valorisation
- Development of a Code of Practice for smart use of IP together with stakeholders
- Development of a Code of Practice for researchers on standardisation

8. Strengthen sustainability, accessibility and resilience of research infrastructures in the ERA

- Strategic analysis of the European Research Infrastructure landscape
- Broader and more sustainable access for all countries to European research infrastructures and their services and revision of the European Charter of Access to Research Infrastructures
- Update of the ESFRI Roadmap and implementation of the research infrastructures performance monitoring framework
- Report on the ERIC Framework
- Increased cooperation between research infrastructures, e-infrastructures and stakeholders, including through European Open Science Cloud

9. Promote a positive environment and level playing field for international cooperation based on reciprocity, with a focus on four aspects

- Further develop the values and principles for

international cooperation to be promoted in multilateral dialogues with partner countries and international fora

- Launch pilot initiatives on the Team Europe approach for a specific world region
- Develop a European Science Diplomacy Agenda
- Promote a coordinated joint approach for engagement in multilateral initiatives with national Research Funding Organisations

10. Make EU Missions and partnerships key contributors to ERA

- Share information, create awareness and build ownership of EU R&I missions at national level, regional and community level
- Monitor the performance of partnerships and how they contribute to the new ERA and its set of values and principles

11. An ERA for Green Transformation

- Development of a green hydrogen R&I ERA pilot action
- Policy approach for a cooperation framework on R&I driven safe and sustainable low-carbon energy technologies
- ERA4FutureWork: a policy approach to address research and development funding for the Future of Work

12. Accelerate the green/digital transition of Europe's key industrial ecosystems

- Consultation process on R&I-related needs of industries, including skilling/upskilling needs, digitalisation, R&I driven standardisation, common technology roadmaps, and research and technology infrastructures
- Development of a policy approach to link industrial and R&I policies, notably on how to accelerate the industrial take-up of R&I results, and launch pilots in transport and energy industrial ecosystems

- Development of industrial technology roadmaps on low carbon technologies for energy-intensive industries and on circular industrial technologies
- Development of a coordination mechanism to provide industry with the technology infrastructures needed to test, validate and upscale innovations
- Develop a robust policy framework to better support industrial R&I from fundamental/low TRLs research at national and European levels to generate breakthrough knowledge and innovation for greener future industries
- Address the social adaptation of the green (and digital) transitions.

13. Empowering higher education institutions to develop in line with the ERA, and in synergy with the European Education Area, which lays out following objectives:

- Supporting more inclusive and deeper cooperation between higher education institutions across Europe to accelerate institutional reform
- Better aligning Member States' efforts to strengthen global competitiveness of their higher education sector

14. Bring Science closer to citizens

- Scale-up of the Plastic Pirates – Go Europe! Initiative
- Launch the European City for Science
- Feasibility analysis for a federated “EU Science Media Network” to ensure more factual journalistic reporting on science
- Propose a policy coordination mechanism on public engagement practices, including citizen involvement in scientific processes

15. Build-up research and innovation ecosystems to improve excellence and competitiveness

- Define and pilot ERA Hubs to enable the emergence of competitive R&I ecosystems across the EU, to fill territorial gaps and to ensure easier flow of talents and investments
- Consultation process on future bilateral R&I cooperation activities to strengthen and connect R&I excellence in the ERA

16. Improve EU-wide access to excellence, with the following key objectives:

- Establish a dedicated work stream in the ERA Forum to improve access to excellence
- Design and implementation of tailor-made support to individual Member States
- Policy approach on the potential of COST to improve access to excellence across the EU

17. Enhance public research institutions' strategic capacity

- Implementation of a Science Management Initiative, with at least 100 participating institutions across Europe

18. Support the development of EU countries' national processes for the ERA implementation

- Provide coordination between EU and Member States on the definition and implementation of national policy approaches supporting ERA

19. Establish an efficient and effective ERA Monitoring Mechanism, consisting of an ERA scoreboard at EU level, an ERA dashboard at national level and a policy platform

20. Support to the prioritisation, coordination and direction of R&I investments and reforms

- Develop and promote the adoption of a policy and investment approach, through bilateral and multilateral policy dialogues in order to support interested Member States in prioritising R&I investment, including synergies between EU and national programmes and apply structural reforms

The European Commission's view and advice

How would you describe the role and the expected overall impact of the ERA programme part with regard to the ERA Policy Agenda?

The “Reforming and Enhancing the European Union R&I System” part of the WIDERA programme plays an important role in implementing the revamped ERA. First, it continues to reflect the four strands of the Commission’s ERA Communication of September 2020, i.e. improving access to excellence, attracting and mobilising best talents, reforming and enhancing the European Union R&I system and transforming research results into the economy. Second, it underpins the ERA Policy Agenda, which sets out 20 concrete ERA actions for the period 2022-2024, with substantial funding, thereby contributing to the priority areas defined in the Pact for R&I in Europe of November 2021. In sum, we expect a major impact of the WIDERA programme on successfully driving the new ERA.

What would be your advice for applicants how to best plan a project given this ambitious and complex political context?

Implementation of the different actions of the ERA Policy Agenda relies on the strong commitment and contribution from Member States and stakeholders. Applicants are encouraged to ensure actions are designed in a way that allows broad involvement and participation, and use of results by their communities.

Indeed, there is a specific topic, “HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-05: Exploitation and valorisation of results relevant for the ERA Policy Agenda” for establishing a Coordination and Support Action (CSA). Such a CSA would boost the uptake of results stemming from the different ERA Policy Agenda actions, support mutual learning between different actors (both Member States and stakeholders), and build an ERA community, which would focus on setting recommendations for policy-makers and stakeholders on how to best implement institutional changes related to ERA policies.

Directorate-General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission.

The Horizon Europe ERA Programme Part – how it helps to implement the ERA Policy Agenda

Over the coming years, the ERA Policy Agenda will guide the Horizon Europe actions, in particular in the ERA part. The scope and expected outcomes of the different call topics are negotiated and designed in such a way as to best correspond to the jointly planned ERA Policy Agenda actions. Consequently, the ERA Policy Agenda is meant to guide the efforts of the consortia engaged in implementing the projects.

The links to the ERA Policy Agenda context makes it easier to understand the expected outcomes specified in the topic descriptions, as the ERA Policy Agenda provides information on policy goals, milestones of joint efforts as well as various further

planned activities to link the project with. Keeping this background in mind will facilitate specifying and detailing an ERA project in its planning stage.

The topic descriptions indicate to which concrete ERA Policy Agenda action the projects are expected to contribute. In the WIDERA work programme 2023-2024, there are topics that clearly refer to a single ERA Policy Agenda action. Depending on the scope of the respective ERA Policy Agenda action, project outcomes will deliver important milestones for achieving the ambitions of that action.

In some cases, call topics provide relevant links to further ERA Policy Agenda actions.

For example, the call topic *Support to reforms of*

research assessment in the European Research Area (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-07) is planned and designed to support the ERA Policy Agenda action 3 *Reform the Assessment System for research, researchers and institutions* but also refers to the ERA Policy Agenda action 1 *Enable Open Science* as the reform of research assessment will also contribute to achieving the open science goals for the ERA.

There are also call topics with a cross-cutting approach that contribute to several ERA Policy Agenda actions. The expected outcome of the topic

on *Exploitation and valorisation of results relevant for the ERA Policy Agenda* (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-05), for example, is to implement a dissemination and valorisation facility, which relates to a number of ERA Policy Agenda actions.

Only a few call topics are not assigned to a specific ERA Policy Agenda action. One such example is the topic *Development of new approaches to the macroeconomic modelling of research and innovation* (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-04) with its goal to improve the integration of Research and Innovation within macro-economic modelling.

Recommendations for applicants

– The ERA Policy Agenda as guidance

Applicants should take a link to a specific ERA Policy Agenda action as an invitation to gather further information on the broader political context and the overarching goals of the call topic. They should be aware that there is much movement regarding the Policy Agenda actions since work on implementing the actions has already begun.

As a result, the call descriptions do not necessarily reflect the state of the art in terms of implementation of the ERA Policy Agenda actions. It is therefore highly recommended to gather up-to-date information. From 2023 onwards, the ERA Policy Online Platform will provide a comprehensive overview of the goals and the implementation process as well as information on the ongoing activities of the Member States and stakeholders.

It is of utmost importance that applicants prepare their project in strict keeping with the expected outcomes and the specified scope of the topic. The scope and the expected outcomes precisely describe the expectations for the project design, with a view to adding the most value to the jointly planned ERA Policy Agenda actions. Proposals should therefore address the scope and all listed expected outcomes accordingly.

Applicants should bear in mind that the scope and the expected outcomes are most often the result of

extensive discussions and negotiations on political level and with stakeholders from across the EU.

Most call topic descriptions provide further information and links related to the specific policy area of the ERA Policy Agenda action. These links need to be taken into consideration when planning a project. The *Policy support to facilitate the implementation of a zero-tolerance approach towards gender-based violence in the ERA* (HORIZON-WIDERA-2023-ERA-01-09), for example, links an outcome to the [Ljubljana Declaration on gender equality in research and innovation](#) as a guiding policy document.

In this context, applicants should bear in mind that predecessor projects mentioned are meant to provide further background and guidance for new projects.

Should stakeholder organisations be mentioned in the topic description, approaching them should be part of proposal preparation. There are even call topics prescribing the involvement of key stakeholders in the field.

The discussions within the ERA Forum can be a useful source for information as well. The minutes of the meetings are available in the [Register of Commission expert groups](#). To summarise, gathering information on the relevant ERA Policy Agenda action should serve as guidance in project planning.

Get the support of your National Contact Point

The WIDERA National Contact Points provide advice on all questions related to the WIDERA programme parts and the application process. They can also help facilitating further support, if needed.

Furthermore, the transnational network of the WIDERA National Contact Points provides a broad range of support services.

Potential applicants will have the opportunity to participate in Knowledge Days and accompanying

Brokerage Events, organised in cooperation with the European Commission. These events will provide information and opportunities to meet partners for future projects. The events will be announced on the network's website.

In addition, the network also publishes factsheets and other publications which provide further information and background on the ERA part and the respective call topics.

Resources

Documents

- Commission's Communication on [A new ERA for Research and Innovation](#), September 2020
- [Council Conclusions on the new ERA](#), December 2020
- [Council Recommendation on "A Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe"](#), July 2021

Brochures

- [The New European Research Area](#)
- [Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe](#) (brief factsheet)

- [European Research Area Policy Agenda. Overview of actions for the period 2022 – 2024](#) (brochure)

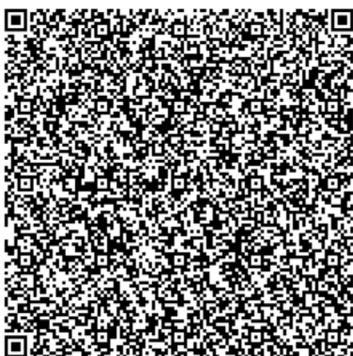
Websites/Platforms

- [European research area \(europa.eu\)](#)
- [ERA Portal Austria](#)
- [ERA Forum in the Register of Commission expert groups with ERA Forum meeting minutes](#)

WIDERA Work Programme

- [Work Programme 2023-2024](#)

The **WIDERA National Contact Points** provide free and confidential advice on all questions related to the ERA part and the application process. They also offer proposal checks. Early contact is recommended. Find the WIDERA NCP of your country in the [NCP database](#).



ERA call page in the
Funding & Tenders Portal

Task leader:



Task co-leader:



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Funded by
the European Union

NCP_WIDERA.NET project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under the grant agreement No 101055286.