

## The New European Research Area: Four Years On Science Europe Response to the Commission Consultation

### Introduction

In 2020, the European Commission initiated a new chapter in the European Research Area. Its 30 September Communication on 'A new European Research Area for Research and Innovation' laid down the framework for a new governance. The [Pact for Research and Innovation](#) and the Conclusions on the [future governance of the ERA](#), adopted by the EU Council on 26 November, cemented the political approach that would govern the new ERA.

These plans were put into practice by the creation of the ERA Forum. Co-chaired by the European Commission and Slovenia, it serves as the main body defining and overseeing the ERA. A Policy Agenda for the ERA was adopted in November 2021 for the period 2022–2024, with several sub-groups being created to implement certain ERA actions.

Science Europe participated in the previous ERA governance and has been very pleased to be able to participate in this new ERA as well. We remain strongly committed to realising the 5th freedom and providing constructive input to the development of European research policy, as demonstrated in our [Strategy Plan 2021–2026](#).

It is in this context that we would like to present our response to the European Commission's [public consultation](#) on the new European Research Area, four years on.

### A new and successful governance for the ERA

The updated approach to the European Research Area brought a substantially improved governance. In contrast to the previous period, which saw limited stakeholder involvement, the European Commission promoted the active participation of pan-European organisations in the ERA Forum from the start. This successfully implemented the call for the inclusion of relevant civil society organisations in the ERA, as made in the Pact for Research and Innovation.

The realisation of the ERA will only succeed if it is based on the needs of the research community. Science Europe therefore commends the Commission and Member States for enabling the genuine participation of stakeholders in the ERA Forum and its sub-groups. In particular, we recognise that active participation was not restricted and that all debates were open to the representatives of stakeholder groups. It is also worth noting that both the Commission and Member State co-chairs of the Forum actively encouraged inclusion and participation of our Member Organisations. Likewise, this approach was also reflected in the ERA Forum sub-groups.

Furthermore, Science Europe again commends the Commission and Member States for regularly re-assessing the inclusion of stakeholders to sustain improvements made on the governance, with some sub-groups adopting an even more inclusive approach.

## Substantial, but unequal improvements to the EU policy agenda

Overall, the ERA policies have been sensibly more successful than before. The quantity and quality of the resulting initiatives and concrete outcomes mark a welcome improvement. In this sense, the priorities and ambitions in the Pact remain valid and the essence of the work is to be undertaken in subsequent policy agendas and in their actions and related activities.

Specifically, the implementation of the ERA actions on the 'Global Approach to Research and Innovation' and 'Inclusive Gender Equality' provides strong examples of the new ERA governance steering EU research policy in the right direction. Initiatives related to the Team Europe Approach or knowledge security provide promising platforms. In addition, the Multilateral Dialogues on Principles and Values generated much-needed exchanges between the EU and its international partners. This value is recognised in the [Brussels Declaration](#), adopted on 16 February 2024.

The [Zero-Tolerance Code of Conduct on Gender-Based Violence](#), launched by the ERA Forum sub-group on Inclusive Gender Equality on 18 September, constitutes a major achievement for EU policy making and represents a milestone in the promotion of a safe, inclusive, and competitive European research ecosystem.

These examples demonstrate the added value of the updated governance and the success of the ERA Forum, along with many of its sub-groups. We also welcome the leadership of the Commission, Member State co-chairs, and sponsors of the ERA actions included in the 2022–2024 Policy Agenda. Science Europe would like to mention the Gender Sector of the Commission specifically, which demonstrated its essential role in EU policy and should be further consolidated as a Unit.

On the other hand, we regret that – despite its success – the ERA Policy Agenda failed to play any significant role in moving forward EU policy on important, transversal priority areas:

- It did not provide noticeable added value in areas such as Open Science and links with Research Assessment. Initiatives related to these topics were limited to activities that were already being implemented by existing structures, especially the Coalition on Reforming Research Assessment (CoARA) and the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC).
- Progress in some actions has been limited. Science Europe particularly regrets the limited progress that has been made towards implementing the ERA action on academic freedom – especially in the context of both a global and European backslide. In addition, where actions are being brought forward without a dedicated sub-group or informal structure, information sharing with the ERA Forum has been infrequent.

## Conclusion and recommendations

Science Europe strongly welcomes the new ERA and the more inclusive and successful governance. Overall, we consider the period 2021–2024 to be a major step forward for the European Research Area. However, some limitations remain, and we would encourage further reflections on making the ERA more relevant in certain key areas.

In this regard, we call on the Commission and Member States to:

- Maintain the current governance structure and approach, whilst continuing to discuss potential changes and improvements.

- Initiate within the ERA governance structures a reflection on improving the ERA's contribution to advancing EU policy in key areas – such as academic freedom, research assessment, mobility, and open science.
- Retain and further refine the division between structural policies and ERA actions to provide a clear framework.
- Work to improve information flow between the ERA Forum and existing actions.

Science Europe is grateful to be able to participate in the new governance. We remain fully committed to contributing to the implementation of the European Research Area and to ensuring its continued success, through both our involvement in the ERA Forum and through our own activities that align with the ambitions of the ERA. In this context, we have published a [briefing](#) that provides an overview of actions and advocacy points from Science Europe on the ERA Actions that it contributes to.