

## **The New European Research Area<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Policy document summary**

On 1 December 2020, the Council adopted conclusions that define goals of the “New ERA“, ERA action priorities and specify the next steps that the Commission and the Member States shall make to develop in 2021 an ERA policy agenda and a multi-level governance model to deliver on the “New ERA”.

### **Disclaimer**

This brief overview is intended to summarize the essential points from the EU institutions' policy document that are relevant for research performing and innovation institutions, without providing the full extent of information available in the original document. The focus of the overview is put on initiatives regarding circulation of highly qualified staff, especially researchers, relevant to the European Research Area. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission.

### **GOALS OF THE “NEW ERA”**

In the section outlining the objectives of the “New ERA,” the Council describes it as a researcher-focused, value-driven, excellence-oriented, and impact-driven environment that promotes the free movement of researchers, knowledge, and technology. According to the Council's conclusions, the “New ERA” relies on the collective responsibilities and involvement of researchers, innovators, research and innovation (R&I) stakeholders, and citizens throughout Europe, leveraging the diversity of European research and innovation ecosystems. The conclusions emphasize that knowledge generated through R&I activities is essential for tackling societal challenges and serves as the foundation for value-driven and evidence-based policymaking. Additionally, the Council underscores the importance of R&I policy in influencing business investments in research and innovation, enabling European companies to create new products and services and maintain global competitiveness. The need to strengthen the connection between R&I policies and other research domains, such as higher education and industrial policies, is also highlighted. The Council urges Member States and the Commission to prioritize investments in the “New ERA” and reaffirms the target of investing 3% of the EU's GDP in R&D.

### **ERA ACTION PRIORITIES**

To translate the objectives of the “New ERA” into specific actions, the Council's conclusions identify four priority areas:

- 1. Deepening the ERA – Framework Conditions**
- 2. R&I-Driven Joint Initiatives in a Global Context**
- 3. Visibility and Relevance of R&I for Society**
- 4. Broad Inclusiveness and Access to Excellence**

<sup>1</sup> You can access the original document here: [Council of the European Union. \(2020, December 1\). Council conclusions on the New European Research Area \(13567/20, RECH 483, COMPET 611\). General Secretariat of the Council.](#)

## **1. Deepening the ERA – Framework Conditions**

According to the Council's conclusions, “deepening the ERA” is a collaborative effort between the EU and its Member States aimed at reforming national R&I systems, institutions, and organizations to create better conditions for researchers. This includes making research environments more attractive, interoperable, inclusive, and competitive. The conclusions call for the Commission and Member States to agree on priority actions for the 2021 ERA policy agenda, focusing on areas such as research careers, synergies, academic freedom, linking the ERA with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), research infrastructure, and open science.

### **Research Careers**

The Council's conclusions:

- Urge the Commission and Member States to collaboratively develop an enhanced “European Competence Framework for Research Careers.”
- Emphasize that improving working and employment conditions to attract and retain talented researchers is vital for the success of the new ERA.

### **Synergies**

The Council's conclusions:

- Welcome new initiatives aimed at creating and leveraging synergies among European funding instruments, particularly between Horizon Europe, Erasmus+, the Cohesion Policy Funds, Next Generation EU, the Single Market Programme, EU external action instruments, EU4Health, and the Digital Europe Programme.
- Request that the Commission provide practical guidance and streamlined tools to Member States for effectively implementing these synergies at national and regional levels.

### **Freedom of Science/Academic Freedom**

The Council's conclusions:

- Recognize the Bologna Process's efforts to enhance and monitor academic freedom in the higher education sectors of the 49 countries participating in the EHEA.
- Welcome the Bonn Declaration on the freedom of scientific research, endorsed on October 20, 2020, and the Ministerial Communiqué on academic freedom adopted during the EHEA conference in Rome on November 19, 2020.
- Call on the Commission, Member States, and academic institutions to closely observe the Bologna Process and evaluate its implications for research, particularly regarding potential indicators, evaluation methods, and their relevance for strengthening scientific research freedom within the ERA.

## **Linking ERA and EHEA**

The Council's conclusions:

- Stress the importance of developing stronger synergies and connections between the ERA, the EHEA, and the higher education components of the European Education Area (EEA).
- Identify key areas for enhanced cooperation, including institutional transformations, research careers, science education, training, international collaboration, and knowledge exchange.
- Support the further development of “European University Alliances” as a model for modern and inclusive higher education institutions in Europe.
- Acknowledge the Commission's proposal to create a roadmap for fostering synergies between higher education and research.

## **Research Infrastructures**

The Council's conclusions:

- Emphasize the necessity of sustainable investment in national and European Research Infrastructures (RIs) throughout their lifecycle to ensure they can deliver excellent results in both fundamental and applied sciences and provide the comprehensive knowledge required to tackle current and future challenges.

## **Open Science**

The Council's conclusions:

- Highlight that open science, which includes promoting open access to publications and research data, plays a crucial role in enhancing the impact, quality, efficiency, transparency, and integrity of R&I. It also fosters closer ties between science and society while considering legal, security, and privacy concerns.

## **(2) Directionality: R&I-Driven Joint Initiatives with Other Policy Areas in a Global Context**

The Council's conclusions:

- Define "Directionality" as a process of strategic coordination between R&I and other relevant policy areas to strategically guide and prioritize R&I investments. This aims to prepare for the design and implementation of R&I-driven policy initiatives that contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across Europe and beyond.

- Recognize the "green" and "digital" twin transitions and a resilient recovery as the core directions for translating the "New ERA" into concrete policy and funding actions.
- Emphasize the importance of transnational R&I investments and joint programs at regional, national, and EU levels, calling on Member States to ensure ambitious contributions to ERA actions addressing these transitions.
- Call on the Commission and Member States to agree on priority actions for the 2021 ERA policy agenda, including initiatives in the following domains: European Resilience Initiative, Digital Transformation, European R&I Partnerships, Knowledge Circulation, EUREKA, and International Cooperation.

### **(3) Participation: Visibility and Relevance of R&I for Society**

The Council's conclusions:

- Define "Participation" as joint efforts by the EU and Member States to increase the visibility of the "New ERA" within the research community and enhance the visibility and relevance of R&I for society in the design, implementation, and knowledge exchange of R&I initiatives at project, program, and institutional levels.

### **(4) Broad Inclusiveness and Access to Excellence**

The Council's conclusions:

- Define "Inclusiveness" as broad, gender-balanced, and non-discriminatory participation of researchers, national and regional actors, and R&I stakeholders across Europe in ERA activities. This aims to fully activate and utilize the potential of the ERA to contribute to regional, national, and European policy objectives.
- Call on the Commission and Member States to develop EURAXESS into an ERA Talent Platform to address existing barriers to unbalanced mobility patterns. This platform should support researchers in their career development within the ERA, connect researchers and institutions, and improve employability, talent absorption, and mobility schemes.
- Call on the Commission and Member States to agree on priority actions for the 2021 ERA policy agenda, including initiatives in the following domains: Brain Circulation, Gender Equality, Science Management, and COST.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The Council's conclusions:

- Call on the Commission and Member States to develop an ERA policy agenda and a multi-level governance model in 2021 to deliver on the "New ERA," considering governance-related elements from the Commission's ERA communication, the 'Pact for Research and Innovation in Europe,' and the 'ERA Forum for Transition.'

- Underline that developing the new governance model should be guided by the following principles:
  - Inclusiveness: Involving all Member States, including regional authorities, the European Committee of the Regions, R&I stakeholders, and civil society, where appropriate.
  - Effectiveness: Defining lean governance processes to develop and implement ERA actions by setting common objectives and deciding on necessary steps, involving relevant sectoral policies.
  - Coherence: Promoting more exchange and cooperation between regional, national, and EU levels to address structural issues within and outside the remit of R&I policy.
  - Efficiency: Linking up with the proposed Horizon Europe strategic planning to enhance the alignment of R&I policies and measures at an early stage, thus broadening the scope and impact of national and EU R&I actions.
  - Evidence-informed approach: Fostering a review of the ERA monitoring system, including its indicators and reporting procedures, considering the Commission's proposal to establish a yearly ERA scoreboard.
  - Relevance: Policy-driven priority-setting involving the Council and policy debates through regular ERA ministerial conferences, including stakeholders and partners beyond the Member States, as appropriate.