

Deepening the European Research Area: Providing researchers with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions and making brain circulation a reality¹

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Policy document summary

On May 28, 2021, the Council adopted Conclusions on deepening the European Research Area (ERA), emphasizing the need for more coordinated action to develop an internal market for researchers with the free movement of research talents, knowledge, and technology. Through these Conclusions, the Council highlighted the significance of a balanced flow of researchers, acknowledging that brain circulation relies on appropriate framework conditions and interoperable, attractive research careers.

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.

In the Conclusions on Deepening the European Research Area (ERA), the Council emphasizes the need for more coordinated efforts to establish an internal market for research that allows for the free movement of researchers, knowledge, and technology.

Mobility, Brain Circulation, and Research and Innovation Systems

- The Council recognizes that the geographical, intersectoral, and interdisciplinary mobility of researchers is a fundamental aspect of the "New ERA," noting that effective brain circulation relies on suitable framework conditions.
- The Council urges the Commission to tackle the inadequate framework conditions that impede brain circulation by developing tools and measures, such as the ERA Hubs and ERA4You, Widening Actions, and support instruments to design and implement reforms in national research and innovation systems, with assistance from the Horizon Policy Support Facility.
- Additionally, the Council highlights the significance of incentive schemes at the European level (such as ERASMUS+, MSCA, ERC, and COST) to promote mobility and career advancement, as well as national programs for return and integration.

Open Labour Market for Researchers

- The Council stresses that an imbalance between institutional and project-based funding results in short-term contracts that fail to provide researchers with long-term career prospects.
- The Conclusions point out that early career paths in academia often lack adequate guidance mechanisms and involvement from other sectors in training and career development, leading to a mismatch between available skills and job opportunities in the labor market.

¹ You can access the original document here: [General Secretariat of the Council. \(2021, May 28\). Deepening the European Research Area: Providing researchers with attractive and sustainable careers and working conditions and making brain circulation a reality - Council conclusions \(adopted on 28/05/2021\) \(9009/21\).](#)

- The Council emphasizes the need to expand doctoral training programs, using the MSCA Doctoral Networks as a model, to include not only academic training but also transferable skills relevant to other sectors. This should involve other sectors from the beginning to improve alignment with skill requirements outside academia.

Attractive European Framework for Research Careers

- The Council specifies that a flexible European framework for research careers is crucial for creating conditions that attract and retain talent in Europe, facilitating interoperability, comparability, career breaks, and mobility.
- The Council appreciates the Commission's technical work on the 2021 update of the ESCO classification (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications, and Occupations) and the development of a European Competence Framework for researchers to enhance recognition of the profession at the European level.
- Furthermore, the Council requests the Commission to create a taxonomy of skills for researchers to enable statistical monitoring of brain circulation and to engage with Member States on relevant indicators, as well as propose a training scheme to enhance national expertise.
- The Conclusions highlight that the renewed "Charter & Code" should provide guidelines for improving recruitment, selection, reward, and assessment systems for researchers across Europe.
- The Council also supports the reform and expansion of the EURAXESS network, services, and portals into a talent management platform, linking it with EURES and EUROPASS, as well as other transnational networks. This initiative aims to connect researchers with institutions and facilitate talent absorption in various countries and regions while ensuring high-quality services throughout the network. The Council calls on the Commission and Member States to collaboratively design and develop the next phase of EURAXESS into an ERA Talent Platform.

Improving Working Conditions and Family Friendliness for Research Careers

- The Council emphasizes the importance of promoting a better work-life balance and a family-friendly environment as part of career development, including provisions for childcare, schooling, career breaks, parental leave, and dual-career opportunities.
- It acknowledges that social security and pension schemes fall under national jurisdiction and recognizes the progress made by the pan-European supplementary pension scheme RESAVER, highlighting the need for greater visibility and diversification of portfolios to encourage adoption by organizations, including foundations and businesses, while ensuring better integration with national systems.

Access to Excellence, Nurturing Talent, and Reducing Inequalities

To improve access to excellence, foster talent, and reduce inequalities, the Council emphasized the need to:

- Strengthen both public and private investment in research and development (R&D).

- Assist lower-performing research systems to enhance their appeal, thereby preventing brain drain and loss of competitiveness while promoting talent retention.
- Achieve the target of 3% of GDP for R&D investment.
- Support reforms in national research systems using tools such as the Technical Support Instrument and the Horizon Policy Support Facility.

Intersectoral, Interdisciplinary, Virtual, and International Mobility

In its Conclusions, the Council:

- Highlighted the significance of interdisciplinary research for advancing excellent science and the role of intersectoral mobility in enhancing scientific employment, improving knowledge exchange, acquiring a broader range of research-related skills, and better aligning these skills with needs beyond academia.
- Stressed that intersectoral mobility offers substantial employment and career development opportunities, particularly for early-career researchers.
- Emphasized that training and career development systems should create mobility opportunities and guidance mechanisms for STEM fields as well as for social sciences and humanities.
- Specified that the ERA4You initiative should be co-developed by the Commission and Member States to promote mobility and access to excellence, particularly for researchers in countries with low R&I performance, focusing on early-stage career researchers and preparing them for opportunities beyond academia.

Synergies between the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area

- The Council noted the importance of further developing stronger synergies and connections between the ERA, the higher education components of the European Economic Area (EEA), and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), as established by the Bologna Process. It suggested that synergies between the "New ERA" and the EEA could be achieved through a comprehensive Higher Education Transformation Agenda.
- To ensure full synergies among the ERA, EHEA, and EEA, the Council urged the Commission to assist Member States in creating policy measures that promote seamless and ambitious transnational cooperation among higher education institutions in Europe, particularly in academic and research careers, which are often interconnected. This cooperation should promote inclusiveness, leverage excellence, and enhance the international competitiveness of Europe's higher education sector.
- The Council identified the European Universities Initiative, supported by ERASMUS+ and complemented by Horizon 2020, as a key element for fostering synergies.
- It also recognized that alliances of European universities and their partnerships with local ecosystems provide suitable platforms for testing models that enhance the

interoperability of research careers, explore joint recruitment schemes, and develop training and career advancement systems that integrate both research and teaching aspects. Additionally, these platforms can be used to experiment with new reward and assessment systems, including those for research-based teaching.

- The Council highlighted the potential of the European Innovation Council (EIC) and the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) to support entrepreneurship among researchers and facilitate the creation and scaling of startups and SMEs in Europe.

Monitoring

- In its Conclusions, the Council proposed establishing an observatory to monitor research career trajectories, including the flow of doctoral and post-doctoral talent, geographical and sectoral mobility, and working conditions. This would enable the assessment of the sustainability and attractiveness of research careers and the evaluation of changes in inequalities.

ERA Priority Actions

- The Council urged Member States and the Commission to enhance skills and training for early-stage careers to improve recruitment and career advancement, while also promoting measures to reduce the precarity of research careers and intergenerational inequality. This includes providing early-career researchers with sustainable, predictable, and appealing research career paths.
- The Council invited the Commission to propose a roadmap for implementing the Observatory on Research Careers to provide reliable data on mobility, career paths, employment, and working conditions.
- The Council also encouraged collaboration among Member States, the Commission, higher education institutions (HEIs), research-performing organizations (RPOs), and research funding organizations (RFOs) to develop and apply modern assessment and reward practices that create appropriate incentives, including for open science initiatives.