

# Universities and Higher Education Institutions: Key Actors in the Research & Innovation Ecosystem

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# 25 years of European Research Area (ERA)

## What is the ERA? – Art. 179 of the Treaty

**A single,  
borderless market for  
research, innovation  
and technology  
across the EU...**

**...where  
countries come  
together and improve  
their research policies  
and systems...**

**...and where there  
is free movement  
of researchers,  
knowledge and  
innovation.**

## 25th ERA Anniversary

**2000:** The ERA becomes a political projects addressing the fragmentation of EU R&I

**2007:** The ERA is recognized through Art. 179 of the Lisbon Treaty, setting out the free circulation of researchers, scientific knowledge and technology

**2019:** The European Commission and Member States initiate a process to renew the ERA to be able to respond to new challenges, such as the green and digital transitions

**2021:** Launch of the **revamped ERA** with the Pact for R&I and ERA Policy Agenda 2022-24

**2025:** Council Recommendation on the **European Research Area Policy Agenda 2025-2027**



# The broader policy framework of the ERA

## ERA Policy Agenda

- Non-binding instrument: Council Recommendation or Conclusions
- Encourages voluntary collaboration and commitments on ERA activities
- Politically endorsed in **May 2025**

## ERA Act

- Mission letter of Commissioner Zaharieva's
- Legal instrument to tackle enduring issues that are not solved through voluntary measures
- Propose measures to foster the free movement of research, knowledge and technology → "5th freedom"
- Internal/external reflection started, proposal **planned for 2026**

## WIDERA

- Grant-based funding framework
- WIDERA work programme specifically supports the implementation of ERA Policy Agendas

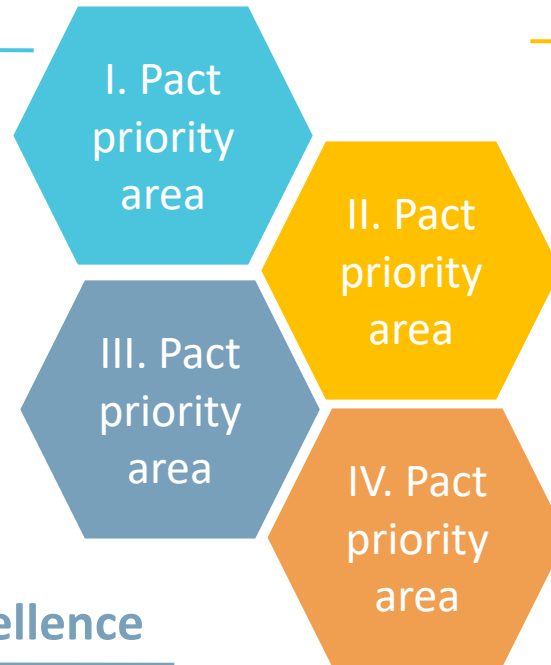
# ERA Policy Agenda 2022-24

## Deepening an internal market for knowledge

1. Open sharing of knowledge, incl. EOSC
2. Data legislation fit for research
3. Reform of research assessment
4. Strengthen research careers
5. Gender equality and inclusiveness
6. Protect academic freedom
7. Better Knowledge Valorisation
8. Research infrastructures
9. Global Approach

## Research and innovation excellence

15. Regional and national R&I ecosystems
16. EU-wide access to excellence
17. Strategic capacity of public RPOs



## Green and digital transition

10. R&I Missions and Partnerships for ERA
11. Green energy transformation
12. Transition of industrial ecosystems
13. **Empower higher education institutions**
14. Bring science closer to society

## Investments and reforms

18. Coordination national support for ERA, merged with other actions
19. ERA monitoring mechanism
20. Prioritisation and coordination of R&I investments and reforms

# Empower Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to develop in alignment with the ERA and in synergy with the European Education Area

*This action aims to **support universities in their efforts to transform and drive the ongoing green and digital transitions.** The action should be strengthened by the provisions in the **European strategy for universities**, with the aim to take a **holistic approach** – covering all missions of universities – in supporting **institutional transformation and mainstreaming a culture of excellence in research and business creation.***



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# ERA Policy Agenda 2022-24: Empower Higher Education Institutions

## 3 expected outcomes

Support universities in their **digital transition**, including through initiatives such as Connected Universities

Develop and adopt a policy approach to equip researchers with the **skills** needed for an interoperable career in academia and beyond

Policy approach on future EU level support for the further development of Horizon Europe institutions, including through a **European Excellence Initiative and the consolidation of the European Universities Initiative**

# Action 13 in WIDERA – European Excellence Initiative

**Policy Objective:** support the transformation of higher education sector and their surrounding ecosystems, including non-university research centres, mobilising local and regional governments' investments in the higher education sector (in its broadest sense).

**Scope:** the European Excellence Initiative in its widening dimension aims to raise excellence in science and in knowledge valorisation of Europe's universities through cooperation. The action aims to engage with universities and empower them further to be actors of change in R&I.

## ***How?***

- Consortium including at least three independent legal entities in three different EU Member States or Horizon Europe Associated Countries, **at least one of which established in a Widening Country.**
- Reinforcing the role of higher education institutions in innovation ecosystems.
- Expenditures for R&I activities cannot exceed a maximum of 20% of the total budget.
- The duration should not exceed 5 years.

# ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027: ERA Structural Policies & ERA Actions

## 11 ERA Structural policies

*Long-term ERA policies, which are not confined to individual policy agendas but still have a three-year workplan'*

- Enabling open science via sharing and re-use of data, including through the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC)
- Strengthening sustainability, accessibility and resilience of research infrastructures in the ERA
- Strengthening gender equality and inclusiveness in the ERA, notably with an intersectional approach
- Making research careers more attractive and sustainable, and support mobility
- Reforming research assessment
- Upscaling knowledge valorisation capacities and activities
- Making the strategic energy technology (SET) plan a key thematic component of the ERA
- **Improving the articulation between R&I and higher education within the ERA and unleashing the full potential of European R&I ecosystems**
- Enhancing trust in science through citizen participation, engagement and science communication
- Improve EU access to excellence

## 8 ERA actions

*New and to be completed within the three-year policy agenda*

- Applying equity in open science
- Advancing the European Science for Policy (S4P) ecosystem
- Facilitating and accelerating the responsible use of AI in science in the EU
- Enhancing research security
- Accelerating R&I investments for Europe's industrial transformation and competitive sustainability
- Accelerating new approach methodologies (NAMs) to advance biomedical research and testing of medicinal products and medical devices
- Developing a coherent and coordinated framework for a European approach to integrity and ethics in R&I in the face of emerging challenges
- Empowering R&I: A new era in research management

# Improving the articulation between R&I and Higher Education within the ERA and unleashing the potential of European R&I ecosystems

*This structural policy aims to create a **structured and focused exchange** within the community to promote a **more systematic approach**, including in terms of governance and support, and involving both research and higher education representatives. For establishing **robust partnerships** between education and research & innovation actors, working together to set up new mechanisms and incentives to **reduce fragmentation and bridge the regional divide**.*



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# ERA Policy Agenda 2025-27: Improving the Articulation between R&I and Higher Education

## 4 expected outcomes

Development of recommendations drawn up to **design and implement strategies** at institutional, regional, national and European level

The **identification of current legal obstacles** at regional, national, and European levels; of principles and main components necessary for the development of the legal framework for establishing the fifth freedom; recommendations for consolidating European HEIs at the forefront of global R&I

The **identification of policies, mechanisms and incentives** to foster more robust cooperation between HEIs and the other R&I actors;

Ambitions **roadmap adopted for ERA/EEA (higher education-related) strategic alignment**

# ERA WP 2026-2027: Architecture

Indicative  
Not adopted

|                        | Pillar I:<br>Institutional changes for ERA                                                                                                                                                                                     | Pillar II:<br>Ecosystems for ERA                                                                                                                                                                                       | Pillar III:<br>Citizens and Science for ERA                                                                                                       | Pillar IV:<br>New knowledge for ERA                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Type</b>            | CSA                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | CSA                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | CSA                                                                                                                                               | RIA                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Focus</b>           | Capacity building and support to foster adoption of ERA policies/practices within institutions.                                                                                                                                | Building and reinforcing networks and partnerships to foster broad uptake of ERA policies/practices.                                                                                                                   | Connecting R&I with citizens and other stakeholders.                                                                                              | Creating new knowledge that supports design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies & practices.                                                            |
| <b>Activity type</b>   | Tools, resources, training, services, policy advice.                                                                                                                                                                           | Exchange of knowledge and practice, networking and cooperative actions.                                                                                                                                                | Implementing and promoting participatory approaches, such as citizen engagement and citizen science.                                              | Conducting analyses, developing and testing new methods & practices.                                                                                                       |
| <b>Expected impact</b> | Effective and sustainable structural institutional changes aligned with ERA priorities.                                                                                                                                        | Sustainable ecosystems established around ERA priorities.                                                                                                                                                              | Increased trust in science and alignment of R&I with society's needs.                                                                             | Strengthened evidence base for advancing the implementation of the ERA.                                                                                                    |
| <b>Policy areas</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Equity in open science</li> <li>▪ Inclusive gender equality</li> <li>▪ Research assessment reform</li> <li>▪ Research ethics and integrity</li> <li>▪ Open access policies</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research ethics and integrity</li> <li>▪ Environmentally sustainable science</li> <li>▪ Knowledge valorisation</li> <li>▪ Open science</li> <li>▪ Research careers</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Trust in science</li> <li>▪ Knowledge valorisation</li> <li>▪ Citizen and societal engagement</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Open science</li> <li>▪ Research ethics and integrity</li> <li>▪ Inclusive gender equality</li> <li>▪ Research careers</li> </ul> |

ERA Policy  
Agenda 2025-2027

# ERA WP 2026-2027: Calls and topics

Indicative  
Not adopted

| Call year | Pillar I:<br>Institutional changes for ERA                                                                                                                                                                   | Pillar II:<br>Ecosystems for ERA                                                                                                                                                                    | Pillar III:<br>Citizens and Science for ERA                                                                                                                                                                    | Pillar IV:<br>New knowledge for ERA                                           |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2026      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accelerating open access and research assessment reforms in ERA</li> <li>Building institutional capacities for ethical, equitable, open, and inclusive ERA</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthening ecosystems for open, ethical, and sustainable ERA</li> <li>Piloting innovative approaches to support academic startups and spinoffs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fostering citizen engagement for more responsible and democratic R&amp;I</li> <li>European Citizens' Hackathon Championship</li> <li>Science comes town 2028</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advancing Knowledge for ERA</li> </ul> |
| 2027      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate development of institutional open access policies through the retention of intellectual property rights</li> </ul>                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Talent ecosystems for attractive early research careers</li> </ul>                                                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Science comes to town 2029</li> <li>Promoting public engagement in R&amp;I and scientific literacy</li> </ul>                                                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tbc</li> </ul>                         |

**Indicative opening dates:**  
2026 call: 10 December 2025  
2027 call: 8 December 2026

**ERA Info Day:**  
11 December 2025

# Universities participation under R&I Framework Programmes – Horizon 2020

- Horizon 2020 included over **1 million eligible proposals**:
  - Private for-profit organisations (40%)
  - Higher education institutions (36%)
  - Research organisations (17%)
- The average grant size in H2020 was EUR 2.3 million. **Higher education institutions received the highest share of EU contributions (39% or EUR 26.8 billion).**
- Around 10% of funding went to the **50 best-performing universities in Europe.**



# Universities participation under R&I Framework Programmes – Horizon Europe

- Between 2021 and 2023, **10 674 grants** were signed, with **EUR 30.8 billion** in EU contribution. Higher education establishments received the largest contribution (**EUR 10.5 billion**), followed by private for-profit entities (EUR 8.9 billion) and research organisations (EUR 8.2 billion)
- **62 485 applicants** by the end of 2023. Higher education applicants cover **3 918 entities**
- In WIDERA, the **largest share of unique beneficiary organisations are HEIs (30.1%)**, which receive **46.8% of the funding**
- Significant synergies between Erasmus+ European Universities Initiative and Horizon Europe



# THANK YOU!



## For more info:

- Council Recommendation for Research Careers  
[EUR-Lex - 32023H01640 - EN - EUR-Lex](#)
- The new European Research Area:  
[https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/our-digital-future/era\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/our-digital-future/era_en)
- ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027:  
<https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/documents/proposal-council-recommendation-european-research-area-policy-agenda-2025-2027>
- ERA Policy Platform:  
<https://european-research-area.ec.europa.eu/>
- Widera WP 2025 Info Day:  
<https://research-innovation-community.ec.europa.eu/events/01QHd1MW6tFfr16XBGbMyo/overview>
- Horizon Europe work programmes:  
[https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/horizon-europe-work-programmes\\_en#pre-publication-of-work-programme-2025](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/horizon-europe-work-programmes_en#pre-publication-of-work-programme-2025)

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