



Stakeholders' discussion about competitiveness and fragmentation of ERA

Informal meeting Hungarian Presidency of the EU, 26 August 2024

EU-LIFE written input

- What is your opinion about the relaunching of the ERA? Is it necessary or relevant to shape the directions chosen?

[EU-LIFE](#) **welcomes** the ERA Policy Agenda 2025-2027 **and congratulates** the European Commission and the Member States on the steps towards it and the constructive dialogue within the 'Expert group on the ERA Forum'.

EU-LIFE, as an active stakeholder contributing to the ERA Forum - where it co-represents research performing organizations - has **provided regular input** during the creation of the entire ERA policy Agenda 2025-2027 including on the majority of the (re)new(ed) actions proposed for the upcoming period; and has participated in the **co-creation** of two proposed ERA actions (Action 9. 'Fundamental research and scientific leadership' and Action 16. 'Non-animal approaches in biomedical research and testing of pharmaceuticals').

We provide below some recommendations on the direction and necessary fine tuning of the ERA agenda.

- How can the ERA be considered as a tool to contribute to competitiveness?

Research & Innovation is critical for Europe's competitiveness, for which a strong R&I ecosystem is key. The European Research Area is the **critical tool to strengthen Europe's R&I system**, where researchers, at its core, have a thriving environment in which they can develop ground-breaking science and transfer the knowledge created to society.

Other European policies focus in other sectors, but only the **ERA focuses on scientific research, researchers and their organisations and their contribution to competitiveness of Europe**. As such, the ERA agenda must **prioritise those ERA Actions and Structural Policies that focus on them**. In the currently proposed 2025-2027 agenda these are the following:

1. Enabling open science via sharing and re-use of data, including through the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC)

2. Equity in Open and Responsible Research and Innovation
3. Strengthen Sustainability, Accessibility and Resilience of Research Infrastructures in ERA
4. Strengthening inclusive and intersectional gender equality in the European Research Area
5. Attractive and sustainable research careers
6. Research Assessment
7. Knowledge Valorisation
8. Strengthening Freedom of Scientific Research in the EU
9. Fundamental research and scientific leadership
10. Supporting the uptake of science into policymaking through the establishment of a European Science for Policy (S4P) ecosystem
11. Facilitating and accelerating the use of AI in science in the EU
12. Global Approach to R&I
13. Research Security
15. Greening Research: First steps towards sustainable research practices
17. A framework for a European approach to integrity and ethics in R&I in the face of emerging challenges
20. Enhancing Trust in Science through Citizen Engagement and Science Communication
21. Improve EU-wide access to excellence
22. Empowering Research and Innovation: A New Era in Research Management

- *Do we have to redefine the role of universities and if yes, what could be the role of universities in the R&I ecosystem?*

Universities are a key player in the R&I ecosystem but they are not the only critical one. There is currently a worrying trend in focusing on universities as the sole driver of research and innovation, which is not true. For example, **independent research institutes** also contribute in unique ways to scientific production and fast routes to innovation, including transferring knowledge to other sectors¹. They host a very relevant fringe of excellent research and innovation in Europe and due to their

¹ [EU-LIFE Charter for independent research institutes](#) and references within

governance and scientific drive are agile in implementing necessary change for implementing the ERA.

Without considering all RPOs equally as key players, the full contributions of the ERA for European competitiveness will not be achieved. It is crucial that all RPOs continue to be recognised in the ERA Actions and Structural Policies, **avoiding the creation of silos** and **two-tier organisations** in the R&I ecosystem. Therefore, the ERA actions must include all RPOs and clearly avoid referring only to universities and their alliances as e.g. testbeds of ERA. This is a transversal aspect that needs to be addressed throughout the whole ERA Policy Agenda.

Especially in “Action 18. Unleashing the full R&I potential of Europe’s universities”, it is concerning that the current proposal excludes and forgets the role of RPOs such as research centres that host, train, provide cutting-edge technology, develop the career and support knowledge valorisation of the researchers across Europe¹. In close collaboration with universities and other key players, RPOs have an important role in reinforcing the synergies between education and research agendas. As such, the way forward is to **include all RPOs both as relevant actors to develop Action 18 and as recipients** of the capacity research building / transformative change derived from the action.

- *What do you think about the role of universities as innovation hubs? What kind of measures could improve their operation?*

RPOs, including univiersities, are important innovation hubs. Sustainable actions are essential to effectively foster the transition from scientific results to the innovation process. We provide here some recommendations²:

- Promote and build ‘valorisation ecosystems’ where **many actors** of the scientific and socio-economic landscape are joining forces to increase knowledge valorisation opportunities.
- At the organizational level, **Technology Transfer Offices (TTOs)** must continue to be **strengthened and empowered**; provide clear mandate for Technology Transfer Offices, which can be held responsible for the translation process of scientific results towards socio-economic value
- **Train** and promote the creation of a pool of ‘**bilingual**’ **valorisation experts** ideally in specialized topics of science. These experts can translate the language of the scientist (by holding a PhD in science) as well as the language of the

² For further information consult EU-LIFE position papers: [EULIFEpublicStatement_KVGUidingPrinciples_31March2022.pdf](#) and [Towards FP10: EU-LIFE’s vision for the EIC](#)

business/society (by being knowledgeable in socio-economic impact narratives). As such they stimulate and create an atmosphere of trust and play a central role in the co-creation process of knowledge valorisation with many partners around the table. Such training can be stimulated by mobility schemes inviting scientists to technology transfer offices (e.g. expand MSCA RISE/Widening opportunities).

- Analyse and **benchmark** successful knowledge valorisation organisations in Europe to identify the key principles & incentives
- Analyse and **identify the burdens** of current (R&I) policy measures on knowledge valorisation (e.g. GDPR, Biobank and clinical regulations) in order to mitigate them.
- Review usage of **potential metrics** for knowledge valorisation (less burden, meaningful) such as: Industry-academia collaboration in publications & research lines; Scholarly output cited in patents, contribution to New companies; use of Impact narratives
- *Do you see any improvements related to the creation of patents and startups recently? How could these processes be improved?*

The creation of patents and startups has gained weight as research outcomes in leading institutions. In the last two decades, we have registered in RPOs a higher awareness and delivery on the importance of developing a strong systemic capacity for knowledge transfer, also pushed by implementation of research assessment criteria that focus on innovation (for example, we see it in EU-LIFE internal benchmarking). Action is still needed at several levels, including supporting researchers, research projects and consortia and research performing organisations to build capacity and skills– some recommendations/proposals are mentioned in the reply above and position papers referred.

Most importantly, there is a strong need for an **overarching vision on how to enforce knowledge transfer in Europe**. We provide here some overarching recommendations (cited from the EU-LIFE statement on knowledge valorisation)³:

- In order to achieve its goals, Europe – and in particular the European Union - needs to **focus and enforce small (bio)technology companies** rather than on global big companies. Global big companies are mainly guided by their Head Quarters often located in the US. This often results in the fact that the products – developed with European funding - will become available in the US rather than in Europe first. The availability of a plethora of small (bio)technology companies will create a European Playground and Valorisation Ecosystem that allows for translation and product development in Europe and access to the European end user BEFORE the US.
- The **society as a whole must be knowledgeable and engaged** with technology transfer, including a broad understanding that it can only be generated through a stepwise process of value creation including financial return for those willing to take risk in this process. I.e. that financial return is a necessary result of a stepwise ‘driving’

process that moves research results into true benefit of patients, end users and society as a whole.

- There is an urgent need to improve the market-access of novel products. We need **one single European regulatory process** (and price setting process) to bring novel products to the market. Too much time, energy and money is lost in dealing with the regulatory processes and price setting discussions in each and every European country. To get access to the whole European market for a new product is far more costly and time-consuming as compared to getting access to the US market where only 1 FDA is hosting these regulatory processes.
- Without excellent research there is no future for innovation and transfer of technology. Currently excellent research is limited because of the demand for short-term, foreseeable impacts of research. Knowledge valorisation strategies must continuously **support a paradigm shift from pushing research with obvious but limited applicability to fostering efficient collaboration between excellent research and innovation**, thereby providing the means and support for a smooth transition from ideas and scientific results to the innovation process. Only by alleviating this pressure can research contribute to fuel innovation with disruptive ideas and blue-sky solutions for today and tomorrow's challenges.